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The background image shows two police officers from behind, standing on a stone ledge with a blue metal railing. They are wearing light blue short-sleeved shirts and dark tactical vests. The vest on the left officer has a patch that reads 'POLÍCIA MILITAR'. The vest on the right officer has a patch that reads 'POLÍCIA'. They are looking out over a city and a large mountain range under a cloudy sky. The officer on the left is pointing towards the mountains.

# Policing the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro

Cosmologies of War and The Far-Right

Tomas Salem

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Tomas Salem

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The urban landscape seen through the officers' gaze

*To Javier, for everything*

# Preface

*...those advocating war always define it in terms of the highest applicable values, whether that involves the need to retaliate against witchcraft, defend the one true religion, or promote democracy. That is the way to sway the undecided and build emotional commitment. And always, it is the other side that somehow brought war on.*

*Brian Ferguson 2003*

When I arrived in Rio de Janeiro in December 2014, the far-right was still just a specter on the horizon. It has since grown to a matter of existential concern for the advocates of democracy. In the social sciences, new research on right-wing populism, authoritarianism, and illiberalism has grown at an exponential rate. In Brazil, in particular, there is a long and consolidated tradition of scholarship on state violence and the police's role in perpetuating hierarchies rooted in the country's past as a patriarchal plantation economy. This book has contributed to this debate by offering an ethnographic account of the daily practices of the men and women who work at what has become one of the world's most deadly police forces, Rio de Janeiro's Military Police.



Focusing on the entanglements between official and unofficial forms of police violence, legal and illegal practices within the police, negotiations of gender norms and sexuality, racialization, militarization, and police practices of extermination, I have explored the link between Rio's police forces, predatory economies, and the far-right. My fieldwork captured an important moment of recent Brazilian history. As Rio prepared for the 2016 Olympics, the economic growth that had Brazil vying to become a global power came to an abrupt halt, while the political class was engulfed by corruption scandals that had many Brazilians calling for a return to authoritarian rule. In Rio de Janeiro, these crises coincided with a territorial reordering of the urban landscape as power relations between police, drug gangs, and right-wing paramilitary groups were shifting. Importantly, I carried out my fieldwork at a moment of intense moral anxieties about the future of Brazil, expressed in concerns with police violence, corruption, family values, gender roles, security, and the desire for a strong leader that could restore the nation's moral order.

Doing fieldwork with police officers at the frontline of the state's war on drugs put me in a unique position to examine how modernizing and authoritarian forces were expressed and negotiated within one of the country's most controversial institutions, responsible centuries of extreme violence systematically targeting Brazil's black communities and culture. There, I followed men and women who mainly ascribed to the worldview and ideology that is interchangeably described through concepts such as illiberalism, right-wing populism, the far-right, or authoritarianism. In this book I have explored their worldview, arguing that it is shaped by different but entangled *cosmologies of war*: Of different theories of the world that understand social dynamics through the optics of warfare. I have seen it as my responsibility to represent the police officers, a group that is often demonized by the intellectual left, with nuance and complexity. Not to legitimize police violence but to further our understanding of far-right claims and positions that might contribute to a consolidation of democracy and justice.

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mother—have read and commented on early drafts of the manuscript—thank you. This project lay in a drawer for several years and was picked up again when I was included in the AGOPOL-project (Algorithmic Governance and Cultures of Policing) led by Christin Thea Wathne and Tereza Kuldova. I also owe thanks to the members of the research group: Ashwin Varghese, Dean Wilson, Ella Paneyakh, Jardar Østbø, Helene Gundhus, Kjetil Kletter Bøhler, Paulo Cruz Terra, Shivangi Narayan, Tessa Diphorn, and Veronika Nagy. In Brazil, I have received the help and support of several academics who have generously shared their knowledge. Thanks to Elisabete Albernaz, Marco Martinez-Moreno, and Omar Ribeiro Thomaz for reading and commenting on the manuscript and to Alcides Eduardo dos Reis Peron, Ary Azevedo, André Dumans Guedes, Bruno Cardoso, Daniel Edler, Michel Misse, Lenin dos Santos Pires, Letícia Simões-Gomes, Luciana Panke, Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte, Palloma Menezes, Susana Durão, Thallita G. Lopes Lima, Valentina Suárez Baldo, Åsne Håndlykken-Luz, and members of the InEAC (*Instituto de Estudos Comparados em Administração de Conflitos*, Institute of Comparative Studies in Conflict Administration at the Federal Fluminense University). Thank you Raúl Marquez Porras for allowing me to present the project at the University of Barcelona and to Maria Victoria Pita and Torkjell Leira for your insightful comments and suggestions. And finally, to Erika Robb Larkins for your friendship, for hosting me at the Behner Stiefel Center for Brazilian Studies at San Diego State University, reading and commenting on several versions of the manuscript, and providing moral support and guidance in the process of finishing this book.

# Competing Interests

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# 1

## Introduction

It is late in the afternoon. Thick clouds hover over the hill towering in front of us. Hundreds of houses and small buildings cascade down the hillside. They resemble Lego bricks carelessly stacked on top of each other—like a jigsaw puzzle of bricks and mortar. I am walking in a long row of about 40 black-clad police officers moving through the alleyways and stairs towards the heart of the favela with stealth. They have raised their guns and are ready to retaliate should we come under fire. Some of them whisper quiet orders at each other. They fear an ambush and do not want to announce their presence to the drug traffickers. There are many places for the traffickers to hide and many blind alleys where the police might get trapped. In some places the passages are so narrow you can touch the walls on both sides of the alley if you extend your arms, and so steep that the stairs have been built to scale the hillside cross-ways. The officers at the front-guard are armed with semi-automatic FAL machine guns. These are war-grade weapons and offer more power and precision than the usual police guns. But above all, the officers tell me, they warrant respect. As we make our way through the neighborhood, they aim their guns at the windows and terraces of the low buildings surrounding us, where the enemy might be hiding (Fig. 1.1).



Fig. 1.1 Police officers patrolling in Mangueira, April 2015

In the last few weeks, the situation in Mangueira has been tense. The favela complex is controlled by *Commando Vermelho* (CV, the Red Command), one of the three main gangs vying for control over Rio's favelas. The name is a nod to the socialist rhetoric that the group used to gain legitimacy among residents when they emerged in the 1980s. Initially, they presented themselves as a welfare state for the poor, offering handouts and help to favela residents in exchange for their support. Since then, *traficantes* (lit. "drug traffickers"; gang members) from different gangs have been fighting each other to gain control of the drug retail in the favelas. Meanwhile, the police have played an ambiguous role, staging spectacular "invasions" in the favelas, confronting the drug traffickers and recurring to torture, executions, and massacres in an all-out war on drugs, while simultaneously extorting fees from the gangs, funneling the money to local politicians, and establishing a symbiotic relation with the favela-based drug economy. This *modus operandi* has produced levels of armed violence and death that are normally only seen in warzones.

In 2009, the Rio's Military Police forces began to establish Pacifying Police Units (*Unidades da Polícia Pacificadora*, UPPs) within the favelas in an alleged attempt to “pacify” them: to assert police authority and force out armed drug traffickers. Through the pacification, the police sought to quell the armed violence and gunfights that periodically transformed entire neighborhoods into battlegrounds.<sup>1</sup> Officially, the pacification was also meant to signal the abandonment of war-oriented forms of policing and favor a democratic modernization of the police force inspired by the principles of community policing. Addressing security concerns ahead of the 2016 Olympics, the UPP at Mangueira was inaugurated in 2011, right across *Maracanã*, the football stadium where the games' opening and closing ceremonies would take place. In the first years of its existence, it seemed the police's efforts to repress armed violence had largely succeeded.

But in 2015, while I was doing fieldwork at Rio's UPPs, police officers were frequently involved in confrontations with traffickers. Increasingly, Mangueira as well as many of the other “pacified” favelas were becoming battlefields in the war between police and traffickers from different gangs. Following a wave of armed violence, police leaders promised to “re-occupy” Mangueira. The Commander in Chief at the UPP reorganized patrol to saturate the favela with police officers and assert territorial control. In areas where the risk of armed confrontations was high, several units patrolled together to offer each other tactical support in combat situations. The re-occupation involved the coordinated deployment of officers at strategic points in the favela, with all the patrol units—some 50 officers—leaving the base simultaneously in

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<sup>1</sup> Mirroring broader international trends towards humanitarian-centered approaches in warfare and policing (see, e.g. Fassin 2011; Lutz 2002), the UPPs were modeled on both UN peace-keeping forces and North American beat cops. Patrol officers trained in human rights would be the honest and upstanding face of a new, modernized force (Menezes 2013). They were presented to the public as a softer, gentler police force that included women (Saborio 2014; Salem and Larkins 2021; Savell 2016). Police authorities conceived them as a response to what was broadly perceived as an outdated, inefficient, and violent model of policing. UPPs were, therefore, frequently described as pacifying not only the favelas but also the police themselves (Henriques and Ramos 2011). Centered on notions of preventative action and collaboration with local communities, the UPP initiative was also thought to indicate a changing perception of acceptable levels of state violence among the Brazilian public, which has historically supported killings in the favelas (Caldeira 2001; French 2013; Larkins 2015).

a spectacular performance of police power that was meant to discourage attacks.

I walk at the back of the group, right behind the only female officer in a long row of men. We move quickly, and since I am wearing a bullet-proof vest with the police's insignia, I have hung my camera across my shoulder to signal that I am not a police officer. My hope is that by keeping my camera visible I will be seen as a journalist rather than an officer dressed in civilian clothes and that this will give me at least some protection as a non-combatant. But I also feel a slight discomfort at being associated with the Military Police by the people living in Mangueira. The institution is poorly viewed by many favela residents. On this day, the streets are empty and the few people we encounter silently step to the side as we pass. Most of them look down to the ground, pretending that we're not there. They are used to seeing their neighborhood transformed into scenes from a war movie and don't want to attract attention from the police. Some, however, gaze at us in defiance. I feel like an intruder or member of an invading force. We climb the stairs to a small open square at the top of the ridge. It is protected by a tall brick wall and a large water tank that services the community. The police consider it a safe place for a short break. They share a bottle of water to quell the thirst after the steep climb.

We continue down one of the main streets; a winding road that runs along the upper part of a narrow gorge covered by forest. To our left, the slope is too steep to accommodate any buildings, allowing for a panorama of the favela. The small brick homes roll over the edge on both sides of the gorge. In the eyes of the police, such open landscapes are dangerous. Deprived of shelter, we become vulnerable targets. Gang members can easily hide in the buildings across the gorge, making us easy targets with no chance to retaliate should we come under fire. To reduce risk, we cross the most exposed stretches of the road one at a time. The only female officer is ordered to escort me across the patch of open road. She tells me that the men see her as a liability for being a woman. One of the men gives me a quick order as we get ready to cross: "Don't stop moving!" The officers see me as a liability too, forced on them by their superiors. The female officer grabs the handle attached to the back of my bulletproof vest. It's meant to make it easier to pull wounded officers out

of combat situations. With a firm grip on the vest, she forces my head down as we crouch to make ourselves smaller and harder to hit. Then we run.

## Cosmologies of War

Arguably, the installment of the UPPs in Rio's favelas was supposed to end the logic of war that has characterized Rio's public security policies since the return of democracy in 1985. But rather than ending the war on drugs, the pacification resulted in intensified police presence and the perpetuation of war dynamics in Rio's favelas, especially from 2012 when the project expanded to the favelas of Rocinha, Complexo do Alemão, and Penha (see Menezes 2018). Coinciding with the multiplication of "old practices" of policing (i.e. repressive and truculent forms) at the UPPs, the prevalence of armed drug traffickers in Rio's pacified favelas produced a sense of crisis of the project that would eventually lead to its official dismantling in 2018.

The collapse of the UPPs (between 2012 and 2018) was accompanied by a similar unraveling of Brazilian democracy. A succession of corruption scandals, economic crises, political realignments, and moral panic targeted at the Worker Party, which had governed for four consecutive periods, led to the destitution of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and mock trial of Lula da Silva in 2018, paving the grounds for the Presidency of Jair Bolsonaro. Although most of the police officers I met during my fieldwork in Brazil in 2015 were arduous Bolsonaro supporters, at the time he was still a fringe figure in national politics. To me, the authoritarian worldview that he invoked seemed like a gust from the past, diverging from the image I had of Brazil as a liberal albeit "disjunctive" democracy (Holston 2007) that was going through a process of modernization of its institutions and society.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Since the 1980s Jair Bolsonaro had established himself as an outspoken supporter of hard-handed security policies and defender of the working conditions of police and military personnel. In 2018 his political constituency had grown beyond Brazil's military and security apparatuses to span various groups (including criminal organizations and private security providers) that could broadly be described as engaging in "violence work," members of the

In hindsight, my fieldwork took place at a moment of contestation over Brazil's future that is still unfolding. While Bolsonaro drew on a worldview with a long historical trajectory in Brazil, he must be seen as part of a global (re)emergence of the far right. In Brazil, this movement found its expression in the figure of a former army captain who had built his political career on his unwavering support of the police and military, and whose family has been tied to paramilitary groups—the *milicias* (militias) dominating Rio's suburbs. In the aftermath of Bolsonaro's presidency, academics have tried to understand how a far-right politician and outspoken defender of the military dictatorship could gain so much support among Brazilian voters. Explanations tend to follow four different avenues (Duarte and Martínez-Moreno 2023): some note the growth and strengthening of the paramilitaries and the reorganization of illicit markets in Rio, alongside a macroeconomic restructuring as an important prelude to Bolsonaro's bid for presidency (Menezes 2018; Grillo 2019; Manso 2020); others have focused on the political turmoil that followed the popular uprising in 2013, plunging Brazil's political class into a moral crisis from which it has not recovered (Neiburg and Thomaz 2020; Nobre 2020, 2022); a third analytical avenue emphasizes the surge of right-wing and religious discourses in conventional and social media, and the affective materiality of digital media that produces effects of its own (Cesarino 2020, 2022; Salem and Larkins, forthcoming)<sup>3</sup>; finally, some scholars point to a cosmological reordering largely shaped by conservative and religious moral crusades (de Almeida 2017; Messenberg 2019).

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evangelical churches, large populations from the urban peripheries of Brazilian big cities, and segments of Brazil's conservative elites. During Bolsonaro's time in office the worldview, values, and opinions I observed among police at the UPPs laid the foundations of a national politics that intensified the necropolitical modes of governance and police terror that have characterized the Brazilian social order since the onset of colonization. Understanding the dynamics of the war waged by the police in the favelas and the moral universe it is set within is therefore paramount to understanding ongoing state transformations in Brazil.

<sup>3</sup> In our analysis of Rio de Janeiro's Special Operations Unit's (BOPE) Instagram account, Erika Robb Larkins and I explore the algorithmic co-production of a militarization of the everyday and mundane, including family relations and infancy. We see this as a process that expresses the banality of evil (Arendt 2006 [1963]): An insidious militarization resulting from people's adoption of the social media logics of engagement.



Most analyses, while situating the emergence of Bolsonaro as part of a global resurgence of right-wing authoritarianism, emphasize the political power negotiations on a national level and the fact that he drew on a hardline approach to policing and security that resonates with many Brazilians. Political philosopher Marcos Nobre (2020) warns that calling Bolsonaro stupid or crazy immediately shuts down the possibility of understanding the political crisis that brought him to power. He argues that Bolsonaro's presidency must be understood as a war against the democratic system and his government, as a government of war, permeated by a military logic (see also Durão 2020). Bolsonaro's understanding of politics and the state differs from liberal political philosophy in its rejection of any notion of common good or social contract. He understands politics as a process whereby the will of one group—the true Brazilian people—is imposed on the rest (Feltran 2020b). In this sense, Bolsonaro's understanding of the state is rooted in a dialectic conflict, like that of Marxist philosophy. Similarly, anthropologists have problematized the bias that results when we refrain from studying the subjects that are often referred to as fundamentalist, authoritarian, or fascist—the “repugnant others” according to Susan Harding (1991). Harding shows how, in these cases, social scientists tend to retreat into binary thinking, where the non-modern other is associated with religion, magic thinking, and backwardness, while the modern us is attributed with rationality and civility. These scholars advocate the need to take this “other” seriously, rather than disregarding them as irrational and easily manipulated (Pasiëka 2017).

In this book I explore the relation between the cultural meanings and social practices that preceded conservative backlash in Brazil by looking at the exercise of police authority in Rio de Janeiro's favelas through the notion of *cosmologies of war: different theories of the world that understand social dynamics through the optics of warfare*. Rather than discussing whether Rio's police forces are really at war according to the conventional criteria of warfare, I approach war as a cognitive framework or cosmological force that shapes Brazilian social relations, subjectivities, landscapes, economies, and politics (see Grillo 2019). Acknowledging the long-standing configuration of policing as warfare against racialized territories and populations in Brazil, I unpack the moral universe and cosmological

order that is produced through the Military Police of Rio de Janeiro's war on crime and analyze its effects.<sup>4</sup> I situate my analysis in relation to some of the most recent and ambitious ethnographic attempts at theorizing police power and urban conflict in Brazil and suggest that the Deleuzian concept of war machine and state dynamics offer a powerful theoretical framework through which different but complementary perspectives can be synthesized. Finally, in my conclusion, I show how policing at Rio's pacified favelas can illuminate wider political currents in Brazil, especially the tension between modernizing projects and the resistance to these.

In the following sections, I will build on the ethnographic work of Jaime Amparo Alves, Graham Denyer Willis, and Gabriel Feltran to

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<sup>4</sup> Police power and war power are not as easily distinguishable as the normative framework that sets them apart would suggest. Instead, scholars note that policing and warfare conflate, especially so in colonial and postcolonial contexts, but also through the intensification of militarized policing in the last decades, making tangible the longstanding blurring of the boundaries between war power and police power (Hardt and Negri 2001; Mbembe 2003; Neocleous 2013). The normative divisions separating military war power and civilian policing do not reflect the historical entanglement of military and police practices and are discursive constructs that serve to legitimate state violence (Seigel 2018). In this vein, critical scholarship on policing is increasingly signaling how war has been “inseparable from the history of capitalist domination” (Neocleous 2013: 6). Recent global trends of securitization and militarization of society are paradigmatic examples of how violent state power is wed to the process of capitalist accumulation, especially in large urban areas (Davis 1995; Graham 2011). Often configured through notions of a war on crime or war on drugs, these trends have also been associated with the racial legacy of colonialism and with the emergence of neoliberalism, as violent solutions to the panoply of social problems brought on by neoliberal policies (Alves 2018; Fassin 2013; Arias and Goldstein 2010; Wacquant 2003, 2008). The multiplication of paradigms, technologies and practices of policing that has followed in the wake of securitization is radically reshaping the social fabric and political cultures of the societies in which they are embedded. “By thinking through the war power in conjunction with the police power, and the police power as dealing with a condition of disorder, the war power can more easily be read in the terms of the fabrication of order,” Mark Neocleous (2013: 13) writes. Analyzing the dynamics of militarized policing or the more expansive notion of policing as warfare and its entanglement with liberal as well as authoritarian state projects (Salem and Bertelsen 2020), is important to understand and challenge the weaponization of security discourses and re-emergence of the far-right. These critical approaches to policing challenge *a priori* assumptions of liberal democracies as less violent than that other state forms. They suggest that the violent potential of democratic states must be analyzed empirically: The kinds of violence that a particular state formation is likely to generate is contingent on the “methods and procedures whereby states achieve and legitimate the domains of their control and power” (Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009: 2). Brazil offers a case in point, as police lethality and armed violence by a multiplicity of agents exercising sovereignty has dramatically increased during the country's democratization period from 1985 and onwards and is a paradigmatic example of the violence carried out under the aegis of racial capitalism (see Seigel 2018).

show how the cosmologies of war that shape Brasil's urban conflicts draw on the notion of colonial war as a racialized process of resources extraction, organized around necropolitical forms of governance, and of cultural war as a particular way of understanding the relation between different values and meanings that draws on religious tropes and narratives. These authors have analyzed the dynamics of police violence and urban conflict in São Paulo, a context that differs from Rio de Janeiro in some important respects: Whereas Brazil's biggest city is characterized by the predominance of a single, centralized criminal organization (the PCC), the situation in Rio is more complex, with a multiplicity of armed groups vying for power (see Hirata and Grillo 2017). However, what concerns me here is to explore how the notions of colonial war and cultural war can be applied in a Brazilian context. I will return to the particularities of Rio de Janeiro in the last section of this chapter.

## The Racialized Necropolitics and Predation of Colonial Warfare

With some of the world's most violent police forces as well as levels of armed conflict that are often compared to recent wars in the Middle East, Brazilian big cities have garnered attention from social scientists that try to grapple with issues of securitization, militarization, urban conflict, state violence, and police terror.<sup>5</sup> Following in the tradition of Franz Fanon, Jaime Amparo Alves (2018: 12) suggests that Brazilian civil society is a fundamentally anti-black "political space for the heteronormative white male subject of rights." He reproaches that despite the "affirmative action policies and welfare policies that took millions of black families out of poverty during the Workers' Party's government" we still observe "genocidal proportions of violent black death during the same leftist administration." This, he argues, reveals "the limited impact

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Brazilian Forum of Public Security (*Forum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública*, FBSP), between January 2011 and December 2015, 279,567 violent deaths were registered in Brazil, against the registered 256,124 violent deaths in Syria as a result of the war. In 2015 alone, 58,467 were killed throughout Brazil, a 2% reduction compared to the preceding year (FBSP 2015).

of the politics of rights in challenging the black structural condition in Brazilian society” (Alves 2018: 14). How is it that despite decades of democratization, market liberalization, and economic growth, the Brazilian state has not managed to establish an egalitarian sociopolitical order in the ideal image of liberal democracy? Instead, the almost forty years of democratization has engendered a political project with a strong totalitarian thrust, emerging from the intestines of extractivism, religious fundamentalism, and militarism. The framework of liberal political philosophy, building on the idea that the urban conflict is the effect of an insufficiently developed democracy (implying that liberal democratic systems are anti-ethical to violence) is unable to offer plausible explanations (Alves 2018).

Challenging Foucauldian and Agambian approaches to sovereignty, the postcolonial scholarship of Jaime Amparo Alves and others who draw on Achille Mbembe’s notion of necropolitics have signaled how a racialized politics of death originating in the country’s colonial history is shaping the Brazilian social order (see, e.g. do Nascimento 2016 [1978]; Gonzalez 1988; Vargas 2012; Salem 2016; de Oliveira 2016; Alves 2018; Saborio 2018). In these analyses, the favelas appear as colonial spaces, embedded within the Brazilian state order.<sup>6</sup> As a necropolitical terror formation, colonies are places where disciplinary and biopolitical forms of governance converge with the administration of death, in such a way that “vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” (Mbembe 2003: 40). In the colonies, war becomes a mode of governance and is often associated with extractivism and predatory accumulation, such as the narcotics industry, that characterizes war-machine formations (see Bourgois 2018). Brazil’s urban violence, according to this perspective, must be understood as part of an ongoing process of colonization and of the production of an anti-black social order through the killing of black bodies and war within black

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<sup>6</sup> Mbembe (2003: 12ff.) argues that colonies are characterized by a permanent state of exception, where racism functions as the underlying logic that permits the exercise of extended powers by the state (see also Buck-Morss 2009). He writes that “the colonies are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended—the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of ‘civilization’” and that they are sites “where ‘peace’ is more likely to take on the face of a ‘war without end’” (Mbembe 2003: 22ff.).

spaces, but also as the production of spaces for different forms of capital accumulation centered around violence and predation.<sup>7</sup>

The argument put forth by Graham Denyer Willis in *The Killing Consensus* (2018) is amenable to such analyses. In his analysis of the dynamics of urban violence in São Paulo, where the exercise of sovereign power is shared between the criminal organization *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC) and the state's security forces, Willis suggests a shift in emphasis from the sovereign agents that exercise the right to kill, to "the existence of a 'disposable' population that states allow to be preyed on under an acknowledged definition and common denomination of deservedness" (Willis 2018: 40). If routine violence appears uncontrolled, he writes, "it is only because the definition of life and death is so expansive"—i.e. the violence that the state allows appears limitless because it encompasses a large segment of the population (Willis 2018: 12).<sup>8</sup>

According to this approach, state and crime are not antagonistic powers but "morally and practically nested, operating in mutually beneficial and symbiotic ways" (Willis 2018: 94). At first glance, this claim seems to be in line with Amparo Alves' (2018) proposition that the Brazilian urban order is structured around anti-blackness as an organizing principle. The killing consensus that Willis observes attributes a multiplicity of groups with the right to kill as long as those killed are black, poor, criminalized, and therefore imagined as deserving. However, the framework of a killing consensus suggests that criminal organizations such as the PCC are encompassed by or nested within the Brazilian

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<sup>7</sup> In modern Brazil, the favelas have continued to act as sources of cheap labor for the privileged living in the *asfalto*, and as sites where illicit economies, such as the drug trade, generate profit that is channeled into the city's formal economy through practices of collusion, bribes, and extortion that often involve the police (see Misse 2006; Hirata 2014; Penglase 2014; Larkins 2015; Hirata and Grillo 2017).

<sup>8</sup> The idea of a disposable population, contemplated in Agamben's notion of bare life and Mbembe's description of the living dead, allows Willis to develop the concept of "sovereignty by consensus," which "is contingent on the recognition and practice of boundaries for violence, which can occasionally be ruptured – and mended." The existence of boundaries for violence and of violent parties that concur on these boundaries most of the time produces moments of relative peace, interrupted by "periodic moments of crisis where a shared understanding and practice of appropriate and comparatively nonviolent behavior implodes into feud-like violence" (Willis 2018: 12–13).

state formation. In the words of Willis, it posits the existence of a single sovereign but a multiplicity of agents exercising the right to kill within a common, overarching framework. Here, Alves offers a radically different reading of the relationship between the PCC and the state. Understanding the war between the PCC and the police as a contest over territorial sovereignty, he argues that gang violence can be seen as the political expression of black criminal agency—i.e. as a strategy of black resistance that explicitly challenges society's moral norms (Alves 2016, 2018).

The idea of an expansive killing consensus offers a powerful analytic lens from where to gauze the racialized macro dynamics of urban violence. Similarly, the anti-black, necropolitics-perspective effectively underscores the historical continuities of the Brazilian state formation and points to a significant gap in traditional analyses of urban violence in Brazil, which have until recently avoided the issue of race (Vargas 2012). Following Alves' anti-black approach, the political emergence of the far-right does not appear as a radical break with a former, democratic state order, but should rather be interpreted as a weaponization of existing security discourses and intensification of necropolitical modes of governance that have been active throughout Brazilian history (Ystanes and Salem 2020: 54).

The notion of colonial warfare is good at capturing the historical continuity of anti-black state terror throughout Brazilian history and signals how racial capitalism (Seigel 2018) is organized around practices of predation and extractivism that are underpinned by a logic of extermination. However, the emphasis on the continuity of anti-black state terror shifts the focus from what is new or emergent in Bolsonarismo in relation to the (in important respects) socially inclusive politics of the Workers Party which extended political rights to new, individualized subjects.<sup>9</sup> In this book, I argue that the conflicts that I observed within the Military Police reflect the larger dynamics of Brazilian modernization processes and reactions to these that also draws on a notion of war—albeit a cultural one.

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<sup>9</sup> Here I am building on Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte's (1995, 2009) understanding of modernization processes as structured around the production of rights-bearing individual subjects (see also Martínez-Moreno 2023).

Furthermore, in Willis and Alves' different emphasis on the dynamics of criminal violence as consensus-driven on the one hand and a form of resistance on the other, we are alerted to a tension between transgressive and authorized forms of violence in a way that contemplates expressions of violent resistance towards the Brazilian state while simultaneously acknowledging the ways in which the state draws on and directs unauthorized forms of violence. Many Brazilian scholars have grappled with this tension (see Misse 2008; Machado da Silva 2004; Hirata and Grillo 2017; Albernaz 2020), and I suggest that a Deleuzian analytics organized around the notion of war machine and state dynamics can offer a lens that integrates different approaches.

## Cultural Warfare and the Religious Battle Between Good and Evil

With regards to the question of what is emergent or new in Brazilian right-wing populism, Gabriel Feltran's comprehensive analysis in *The Entangled City* (2020a) offers important insights. Noting how criminal organizations have become important security providers to the people living in São Paulo's favelas, Feltran examines the production of urban order through the notion of different normative regimes. He explicitly builds his analysis on the debates forwarded by a tradition of Brazilian scholars who have tended towards an interpretation of the armed violence of Brazilian urban contexts as a conflict "between subjects that do not share the same plausible parameters of action and [...] do not occupy different subject positions in a common urban order" (Feltran 2020a: Introduction, para. 15). In other words, as a conflict between subjects belonging to different cosmological orders, or as Feltran explains (I am paraphrasing): Within a shared normative regime subjects might disagree on how the state should go about in order to provide security and protection from crime to its population, but in the plural or disjunctive Brazilian order, there are subjects who see the world of organized crime as their main source of security rather than the state.

For these subjects, the liberal framework of citizenship, democracy, and the rule of law are neither useful as frames of analysis nor as universal

values to be reached. Rather, Feltran argues, “the notion of a war between sliced-up sub-sections of the population, which no longer make up a single moral or legal community, seems to make more and more sense for understanding contemporary conflicts.” He suggests that evaluating the Brazilian state in relation to a Eurocentric normative framework ignores the fact that for many Brazilians, the world of crime is an important security provider and that we need a theoretical toolkit that grapples with the co-production of social order between criminal organizations and the state.

Through the notion of normative regimes, Feltran argues that Brazilian liberal democracy has been unable to resolve the tension between the seemingly unsurmountable differences in how the state and organized crime have been perceived by different segments of the population. Following democratization in 1985, these differences have been mediated through money. However, Bolsonaro’s incendiary rhetoric has successfully synthesized the two positions in a new, fundamentalist, authoritarian, and, I would add, totalitarian political order. He achieves this through the promise of overcoming social divisions by appealing to moral values in a cosmological reordering of the world according to evangelical religious doctrine, which has appeared as an emergent force in the Brazilian social field.<sup>10</sup> In other words, what Feltran signals is the existence of at least two lines of conflict: One between those who rely on state and non-state providers of security (which are the “normative orders” of his analysis), and another between liberalism and its opposite, whether it is referred to as fundamentalism, authoritarianism, religion, or (a patriarchal) culture. Bolsonaro’s synthesis of the former is achieved by appealing to the latter. Feltran’s understanding of the role of Pentecostalism in producing this synthesis is consistent with Kristin Kobes du Mez’ (2023) understanding of U.S. evangelicalism “as a cultural and political movement rather than as a community defined chiefly by its theology” that must be understood as a larger cultural identity and urges us to examine how evangelicalism, conservatism, and militarism bleed into each other through the notion of cultural war.

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<sup>10</sup> In Brazil, Pentecostal churches are usually referred to as evangelical. In this chapter, I use the concepts interchangeably, except when I’m referring to the difference between Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism. In the rest of the book I usually rely on the emic term.



In the religious sphere, scholars have noted how Catholicism, with its multiple saints, has tended to counteract polarized understandings of the social while Pentecostalism reinstates “a dualism between good and evil in its wake,” dividing “the world in two, allowing for no middle ground” (Mafra and de Paula 2002: 61 cited in Vital da Cunha 2018: 5; see also de Pina Cabral 2007).<sup>11</sup> In this context, “‘War’ signifies the ever-present spiritual struggle of the church and its members with the devil and the forces of evil,” and the “sense of a forceful battle waged daily against the devil on behalf of the afflicted” (Kramer 2005: 106–109). In the world of policing such an understanding of human existence as a battle between forces of good and evil can strengthen antagonisms, with police officers distancing themselves from the people they are supposed to protect (Albernaz 2015: 531). For those who support Bolsonaro, “the crisis that is devastating Brazil is [...] fundamentally a crisis of values, where leftists, feminists, or gays are dangerous categories. It is the strategy of cultural [wars,] of the moralization of politics and the demonization of opponents transforming them into enemies” (Solano 2020: 216).

Influencing the urban culture of the peripheries of Brazilian big cities, evangelical churches emphasize meritocratic discourses, the strengthening of traditional family values and gender roles, and, importantly, promote the use of metaphors that refer to warfare and struggle between good and evil (Vital da Cunha 2018: 20). Some of these churches have taken it upon themselves to liberate Brazil from the influence of the Devil, for example, through the exorcism of demons but also through purifying violence (de Pina Cabral 2007: 499). In territories associated with drugs, crime, death, and indecency, violence is understood as a manifestation of divine fury, and the suffering it produces is seen to redeem or save people and areas that have been abandoned by God from the forces of evil. This understanding gives meaning to experiences of suffering as necessary stages in the transformation of thugs into

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<sup>11</sup> According to evangelical cosmology, humans are born sinners, and need to be saved from the influence of the Devil through the act of *libertação* [deliverance] (Corrêa 2020). In opposition to the evil present in all humans through the original sin, the existence of a “cosmic power,” understood as “a mana-like substance that flows through people, buildings, streets, and the Nation as a whole to make concrete distinctions between the ‘pure’ and the ‘impure’, friends and enemies, blessed and cursed” (Shapiro 2021: 13).

men of God (Birman 2012: 137–144). Patricia Birman (2019: 113) sees a connection between the secular warfare I have described with reference to Brazil's colonial history, and the spiritual warfare that evangelical churches preach. While secular warfare casts “the other” as an enemy to be eliminated, spiritual warfare sees the enemy as a subject to be saved and transformed. These are not incompatible paradigms but rather complementary ones: *Thugs* can either be transformed through redemptive suffering or eliminated (or, in a more instrumental understanding of the war, be maintained as useful devils).

The emergence of evangelical churches in national politics over the course of the last decades has replaced the *socio*-political imaginaries at the core of Brazilian national identity (such as the myth of racial democracy) with new “*cosmo*-political imaginaries of divine ontological power flowing through the nation, which is ‘released’ and put into motion by the enactment of certain neo-Pentecostal rituals and rhetoric acts” (Shapiro 2021: 1). According to Feltran (2020b: 95),

The mass movement that made Bolsonaro is driven by the redemptive promise of resolving Brazil's social conflicts and ending its social differences. As he sees things, at the end of the revolutionary war he is currently waging, the Brazilian people will be emancipated from oppression and will live in a community of equals in a Christian fatherland.

As in many other countries that have become infused with (neo-) Pentecostal ideational systems, the sociopolitical order—including styles of policing and the production of enemies—becomes sharper, divisive, and, sometimes, more violent (see, e.g. Rio et al. 2017). It should therefore not be a surprise that Bolsonaro's moralism, which was also present within the UPPs, draws on a neo-Pentecostal cosmology in his bid to reestablish, in a neocolonial fashion, traditional racial and gendered hierarchies in Brazil. Thus, expanding the logic of operation in the favelas onto wider Brazilian society, Bolsonaro employs the state's security apparatuses to do so, by sanctioning violence against populations that resist this hierarchical ordering of the world (Salem and Bertelsen 2020). Meanwhile, religious theology re-signifies the suffering of urban life as the everyday realities of war are cast as a battle between upstanding

citizens and bandits in a worldview that synthesizes evangelical, militaristic, and Old Testament values (an eye for an eye) (Feltran 2020b: 96). Importantly, the evangelical churches have gained a power base in neighborhood police stations, transforming the police into key players in the battle over Brazil's future. This is not just an issue of police officers congregating in evangelical churches, but also of these churches penetrating police institutions, offering divine legitimation for police terror in the favelas (see Albernaz 2015; Machado 2018; Oosterbaan and Machado 2019; Esperança 2022).<sup>12</sup>

Feltran argues that “the movement that sustains Bolsonaro seeks a central shift away from modern politics” with its categories of party mediation, law, representation, pluralism, and communicative reason, and towards an increased emphasis on the mass movement, male honor, identity, brotherhood, gospel, and raw violence. Noting the totalitarian thrust of this movement, Feltran writes:

The new nation will not have women taking a stand against men, blacks against whites, or employees against employers. The emphasis will be on unity. One God: the Christian one. One theology: the Pentecostal one, based on an Old Testament, eye for an eye, conception of justice. [...] In Brazil, mass movements of this nature, just as in the Germany of the 1930s, have been given progressively broader access to the resources of institutional violence. Factions of the police and the military, ideologically mobilized and acting as autonomous militias, are key protagonists of the popular movements. (Feltran 2020b: 97–98)

Now we are arriving at the tension between transgressive and authorized forms of violence, and the Brazilian state's reliance on unauthorized forms of violence. The key here is the notion of a multiplicity of violent agents that act autonomously but increasingly gain access to “the resources of institutional violence” (see also Hirata and Grillo 2017;

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<sup>12</sup> Crucial to understanding the impact of evangelical cosmology on police authority is the doctrine that postulates man as a “little God”—that is, which understands God and man as essentially identical in their constitution. According to this doctrine, men are the children of God, and by accepting the Holy Spirit to act through them and live in accordance with God's commandments, police officers can channel God's divine power and are constituted as little Gods (Corréa 2020).

Albernaz 2020). That is, the violent formations that I suggest should be analytically grasped through the Deleuzian notion of *war machine dynamics* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

## War Machine and State Dynamics

Deleuze and Guattari's notion of war machine and state dynamics is particularly well suited to the analysis of state processes and effects, and the resistance and opposition towards these processes. This conceptual pair "raise complex questions of agency and structure, intention and logic, command and leadership" (Hoffman 2011: introduction, 3rd paragraph), and highlight the tensions, contradictions, and often violent power struggles at the heart of most state formations. The framework is explicitly formulated for the analysis of processes of violent state power and its contestations and is increasingly being used "to think about the confluence between militarization, social movements, global capital, and the state" (Hoffman 2011: introduction, 3rd paragraph; see also Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009; Mbembe 2003).

In Deleuzian thought, state dynamics are understood as hierarchical, bounding, or *territorializing*, and oriented towards the conservation of organs of power. War-machine dynamics, on the other hand, are a-hierarchical, counter-systemic, boundless, or *detrterritorializing*, and oriented to the destruction of the structures and hierarchies created by the state (Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009). War machines, despite what their name suggests, do not have war as their primary objective. War is only a consequence or by-product of their exteriority to the state (Hoffman 2011). This exteriority is not necessarily geographical; it is also an exteriority to its rules and regulations. War machines are assemblages that link in illicit or illegitimate ways, often operating in the shadows of security and policing (see Nordstrom 2004; Durão and Argentin 2023). They engage in predatory and often violent forms of accumulation: the drug economy and arms trade in Rio are clear examples of this, and perhaps less evident, so are the logics of global capital which is continuously resisting and challenging the rules and regulations of national state orders (see Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009).

However, while war machines do not have war as their object, they can be *captured* by states who seek to harness their destructive potential: “It is precisely after the war machine has been appropriated by the State [...] that it tends to take war for its direct and primary object [...] and that war becomes subordinated to the aims of the state” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 418). The war machine dynamics of Bolsonarismo are glaring in Feltran’s description of the central place occupied by a multiplicity of armed agents within the movement. In an almost literal rendition of how Deleuze and Guattari imagine the fraught relations between war machine and state, Feltran (2020b: 107) notes that Brazilian elites “imagined that Bolsonaro’s violent character could serve as a way to corral the masses in the direction of the conservative project they had always defended. After all, in the past, the big slave-owners had always controlled their *jagunços*” (armed hands or bodyguards that sometimes took the form of private militias).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, militaries are war machines that have been captured by the state. Understanding military institutions as captured war machines has some important implications. First, it signals the coexistence of war machines and state dynamics within the repressive apparatus of the state. This observation is not trivial. Although war machines and state are conceptualized as antagonistic and, brought to their full potential, mutually annihilating forces, they are not dialectical forces of a Hegelian kind, but coexisting dynamics irreducible to each other (see also Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009).<sup>13</sup> The concepts of war machine and state allow us to move beyond notions of sovereignty as a centralized force, towards an understanding that emphasizes its decentralized, rhizomatically distributed relations. It also equips us with a powerful conceptual toolkit to analyze and describe violent contestations over power, particularly in contexts where “the agents and organs of state

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<sup>13</sup> The coexistence of these two forces within the apparatuses of the state signals the incapacity of the state to totally command and control the social forces operating within it. This incapacity is at the foundation of the enduring crisis of modern states, which has reached intensity as the legitimacy of the sovereign power of the state has increasingly been questioned (Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009: 5f).

power are effectively at war with the populations over whom they claim control” (Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009: 1).<sup>14</sup>

War machine and state *dynamics* can and do coexist within particular state formations and are best understood as modalities of power and can help us untangle the overlapping tension, symbiosis, and blurring between different agents of power. The concept should not be read as a normative framework that posits the superiority of the liberal state in relation to other expressions of violent power. Rather, it offers a framework to analyze how states organize, direct, channel, and instrumentalize the use of force, including unofficial forms of violence, through the logics of *capture* and *escape* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). These logics strike me as particularly useful in their ability to describe a field of policing that, in the words of Jauregui (2016: 10) is continually shifting and indeterminate, constituting “a social order of interconnected official governance and unofficial power relations that is not just continually in motion, but mutating in both content and form.” The concepts of capture and escape allow us to grapple with an empirical reality where the police are both enforcing law and order and operating outside of it; where police terror and massacres coexist with projects that seek to reduce police lethality; where the state engages in symbiotic relationships to agents and forces that challenge its sovereignty; and where a multiplicity of violent agents are given increasing access to the resources of institutional violence.

Such complex relations of hostility and symbiosis are not unique to Rio, and there are numerous historical and contemporary examples of states attempting to harness the potential of unruly adversaries to their own benefit. In Willis’ (2018: 153) theorization of sovereignty by consensus, he points to the relations that the English crown cultivated with pirates and privateers:

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<sup>14</sup> Here, an important observation is in place. The critical scholarship cited in this introduction has rightly noted that the liberal state order and the ideal of a rational, de-politicized police force remains a normative backdrop against which policing is generally evaluated, even when the violence inherent to liberalism is recognized and amidst growing popular demands to defund or dismantle the police state (Alves 2021; Jauregui 2016; Seigel 2018). That is, despite the acknowledgement that the police, in the best of cases, is tasked with violently enforcing a social order founded in heteropatriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism, the standard against which the police is generally measured is whether or not it lives up to its formal criteria, such as whether or not it acts within the rule of law. Such evaluations do not question the violence that is inherent to and inseparable from racial capitalism and liberal democracy.

The difference between a ‘privateer’ and a ‘pirate’ was based on whether they were seen to have acted under the mandate of the sovereign or not. But for many reasons, both purposeful and not, the boundary between these two was fuzzy. The English crown could claim moral, economic, and political distance from ‘pirates,’ who ostensibly acted outside of sovereign authority, even though it was generally accepted that the relationship between crown and pirates was mutually beneficial. And even while privateers expanded the influence of the crown in expected or coordinated ways, their private alter egos often destabilized the English imperial project, stepping into and out of the unclear realms of legitimate and illegitimate violence and plunder.

A parallel to the multiple sovereignties that operate in Rio seems in place, for while the paramilitary groups that operate under the umbrella of *milícia* are largely aligned with a sovereign consensus framed according to state interests, their actions clearly operate in the realm of illegality. Nonetheless, these groups have had the explicit sympathy of Bolsonaro both before and during his Presidency. At the same time, while drug gangs are cast as enemies of the state they exist in a symbiotic and mutually beneficial relation with the police, funneling drug money to the state and the formal economy. Furthermore, violent contestations for power between and within police institutions, frequently observed in Rio, add yet another layer to the complexity of the exercise of sovereignty in the city. Examining the logic of violence through the optics of war machine and state dynamics and the logics of capture and escape allows for a much more fluid, context-sensitive, and nuanced analysis capable of explaining the violence of a multiplicity of agents under a common conceptual framework.

## Multiple Sovereignties

In Rio de Janeiro, a multiplicity of different armed groups competes for control over the illicit economies territorially bound to the favelas, including at least three different drug gangs with well-established historical trajectories and several de-centered right-wing paramilitary vigilante

groups known under the umbrella of *militias* which exist in a symbiotic relationship to the state's security forces.<sup>15</sup> This complexity is by no means exclusive to Rio or Brazil, and Tessa Diphooorn and Erella Grassiani (2018: 2) have suggested that the concept of *security blurs* might account for the “multiple, overlapping set of actors, roles, motivations, values, materialities and power dynamics” in the inception and performance of security, as well as “the overlap and entanglement of the practices and discourses of state and non-state security providers.” In the Rio context, reading the urban conflict as the result of two clearly demarcated normative regimes, or as the product of a killing consensus established by a single sovereign but exercised by multiple agents, only partially accounts for the complex relationship between different violent agents operating across the urban landscape as well as the tensions that I observed *within* the police.

Ethnographic studies of policing and security from other parts of the world have highlighted the conditionality of police authority. For example, in Beatrice Jauregui's (2016: 8) study of Indian police, officers continually negotiated their authority to intervene with coercion in various situations, and were “forcefully doubted, and regularly defied among a variety of actors.” This seems better to reflect the situation in Rio de Janeiro where police officers continually negotiate their authority with different agents, including citizens (see, e.g. Misse 2006; Larkins 2015; Albernaz 2020). Accordingly, Jauregui (2016: 12) refutes the idea that there exists “a monopoly on rightful control of the means of coercion, by the state or by anyone else, at least for very long.” But more importantly, she argues that the concept of coercion has gained a monopoly on theorizations of police authority that is unwarranted.

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<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that in both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, private security providers compose an increasingly important segment of the urban security assemblages (see, i.e. Larkins 2023; Durão and Correia Paes 2021). With regards to the drug gangs, Daniel Hirata and Caroline Grillo (2017) note that they act as loose, horizontal associations, with each  *dono*  enjoying a relative independence from the gang leadership. As such, organizations like Comando Vermelho could be described as acephalous beyond their local territorial insertion—i.e. they lack the cartel structure observed in other contexts. The  *dono*  of a particular favela controls all the  *bocas*  of his territory, but does not respond to a superior. He can, however, call on gang members from other favelas for support when he needs to. This relative independence of the  *donos*  means that personal dynamics are important for how police-gang relations are structured and negotiated.



She suggests that police authority should be understood as “a relation and provision of sociocultural order making that is co-constituted with configurations of moral right and instrumental exchange,” and that “police authority [...] including but not limited to coercive authority, is a contextual and conditional social resource variously demanded, drawn upon, and deployed to help realize human needs and desires” (2016: 13).

I am sympathetic to Jauregui’s call for a multifaceted understanding of police authority, and in particular, her emphasis on “moral right and instrumental exchange” (both are central in my analysis of police authority in Rio’s favelas) but I want to hold on to coercion as a key concept while considering its often fraught and contested nature. In this regard, Michel Misse’s (2008: 379) understanding of the Brazilian social formation as characterized by processes of accusation and justification, criminalization and incrimination that are often autonomous in relation to codified law, and often in permanent tension with it, is instructive of the dynamics that I am discussing. When thinking of urban violence in Brazil, Misse urges us to also consider how the social construction of crime is co-produced by legal and extra-legal orders, signaling the existence of what some scholars have called “legal pluralism” but what Bjørn Enge Bertelsen (2009; 2016) in his research on popular justice in Mozambique suggests is better conceptualized as *multiple sovereignties*.

The idea that there can be more than one sovereign competing for power within the same national territory is particularly relevant to the analysis of situations where the logic of war is invoked. According to Bertelsen (2016: 255), “multiple sovereignties [...] are characterized as shifting, incomplete, and without necessarily corresponding to distinct social groups. Instead, they may be linked to social and cosmological ontologies of justice, rights, and evil or the many letters of state law – colonial, postcolonial, international.” That is, the exercise of sovereignty can emerge from multiple ideational sources and is not constrained within state orders. It is in this sense I wish to approach the analysis of Rio de Janeiro’s police forces and their operation across conceptual divides (peace/war; legality/illegality; security/democracy; state/crime; civil/military; private/public).

## Structure of the Book

In this book, I approach the cosmological order and moral universe that emerges from the police's war in the favelas from the point of view of the officers that were stationed at the UPPs. I understand the pacification project as part of a larger negotiation between different ideas about the future of Brazil and as a transformation of the city's geography of violence through the logic of war. While this strategy for urban reordering was centered around the 2014 World Cup, 2016 Olympics, and other mega-events, I suggest that it should first and foremost be understood as a process that forcefully asserts police authority across the urban landscape. By zooming in on the militarized practices of policing in Rio de Janeiro's favelas, I focus on social dynamics whereby Brazilian authoritarianism emerges as a political war machine.

Throughout the book, I raise a series of questions. In *Chapter 2: Favela/Asfalto*, I ask how the relation between multiple armed groups vying for territorial control in Rio de Janeiro and the state has been shaped by the history of colonialism and explore how stereotype representations of the favelas transform them and the people that live there into objects of interventions. In *Chapter 3: Policing in Rio de Janeiro*, I explore the racialized and militarized dynamics of policing in Brazil through the oral history of a former police officer and political advisor at the State Legislative Assembly in Rio de Janeiro. *Chapter 4: The Postcard and the Frontline* focuses on the two extremes of the pacification project: the UPP at Santa Marta, which at the time of research was considered a success story, and the UPP at Alemão, where the police engaged in daily battles with gang members. By looking at these places, I show how police authority is exercised through a logic of elimination on the one hand and transformation on the other. Next, in *Chapter 5: Police Masculinities*, I engage with analyses that note how traditional gender norms, and particularly an ethos of militant masculinity, shape the dynamics of violence in Rio. *Chapter 6: Violent Becomings* looks at the impacts of a militarized institutional hierarchy on police subjectivity and morals, while *Chapter 7: Modernizing Warriors* traces institutional reform attempts as these are implemented and resisted through training. In *Chapter 8: A World of Warfare* I analyze the predatory economies that

the war on drugs in the favelas renders possible, while *Chapter 9: The War-Machine* analyzes Bolsonaro's rise to power as the expression of war machine dynamics at the highest level of the state. Throughout the chapters, I am interested in describing what kind of world emerges when social conflicts and policing are conceived of as a war between good and evil forces. It is my hope that these questions I pose can contribute to a broader understanding of the emergent logic of twenty-first-century authoritarianism in Brazil and beyond.

## A Note on Ethics and Positionality

The men and women who participated in this research live their lives in contexts shaped by violence. In addition to the armed violence that police officers engage in on the streets, they are subject to an institutional hierarchy that punishes critique as well as institutional dynamics shaped by the blue code of silence. Ensuring the anonymity of the officers has therefore been a top priority. To this end, I have relied on different methods, splitting apart, and piecing together ethnographic observations and conversations to make sure that the persons that I describe cannot be identified even by people who know them well, since they only exist as reassembled fragments that nonetheless are true to the realities that I observed. This is done at the cost of following the same officers throughout the chapters, and the reader will note that most of them appear and disappear across scenes, and that some of them are empirically flat—i.e. they only figure as conversation partners that we know little about, while others characters have more depth. This also reflects the reality of my fieldwork, where I talked with hundreds of police officers, but followed a handful.

In the text, I am by and large letting the ethnographic material speak for itself. This is a stylistic and political decision that is meant to make the text available outside narrow academic circles, and an attempt to engage in what some scholars call a “public” anthropology (see, e.g. Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2021). The theoretical and analytical discussions are mostly reserved for the introduction and chapter conclusions, while the chapters are written in a literary style that follows

my journey from a perhaps little naïve outsider navigating the field of Brazilian policing to an insider. Like pieces in a puzzle, each chapter adds ethnographic nuance and complexity to a reality that is riddled with contradictions and challenges particular to the local context, history, and politics that make it difficult or even impossible to understand policing in Rio through European notions of what policing is or should be. In some places, I have added footnotes in the text with references to the vast body of literature on policing, state violence, and the far-right in Brazil and beyond. However, this is not an exhaustive analysis, and I hope that the ethnography I present can be interpreted in many ways by the readers.

There are some important limits to these stylistic choices and my methodology. First, since I did most of my fieldwork with the rank and file of the Military Police and my focus is mainly on the everyday practices of policing at some of Rio de Janeiro's most conflagrated UPPs, I realize that I run the risk of reproducing stereotypes and clichés about patrol officers while letting the upper echelons too easily off the hook. While I have tried to show how my observations fit within larger institutional, political, and economic structures, I acknowledge that my text can be somewhat biased in this sense. Second, while I do not assume a moral relativist position, I have tried to bring nuance and complexity to descriptions of people who are sometimes represented as unidimensional and "savage others." It has been a challenge to navigate dilemmas between my own political position and a nuanced anthropological analysis; between cognitive and emotional empathy as an analytical tool and the risk of being "seduced" by my research participants (c.f. Kapferer and Gold 2018; Robben and Hinton 2023). I realize that to some, humanizing police officers who have, in the extreme, "killed in the dozens" (as some officers have) is not a legitimate academic endeavor. Others might think that my moral judgements get in the way of an incisive analysis. This tension is present throughout the text and comes from a desire to address police violence and those responsible for it, while desisting from positioning the people I describe within a simplistic good and evil dichotomy, acknowledging that many officers navigate complex moral dilemmas in their profession.

I have tried to explain the processes that lead to the acceptance of and demand for the large-scale deployment of violence—of warfare—as a reasonable solution to social conflicts. My intention has been to show how this militarization also produces a polarization of positions and forces us to “pick a side” in ways that are often anti-ethical to the ethnographic endeavor of understanding the other’s point of view. While condemning police violence is important, we must avoid reproducing narratives that assume a strict division between good and evil: These can produce ethnographic accounts that can be analytically lazy and reifying. I believe that humanization—the portrayal of the men and women working in Rio’s Military Police as complex human beings, who can change their outlook and understandings of reality and are concerned with issues of justice, of right and wrong, of good and bad, and of existential meaning—is necessary if we want to develop efficient political strategies that can counter polarization and strengthen our democracies (see Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2021).

## “The Only Politician That Cares About Us!”

I have only been in Rio for a week. A group of a few hundred people have gathered at the end of Avenida Atlántica, just by the Military Museum and the old fort that lies between the beaches of Copacabana and Arpoador. Many of them are wearing T-shirts displaying a black hand and the word *basta* (enough). Other shirts have pictures of loved ones who have been killed, the date of their death, and the text *saudades eternas* (eternally missed). On the beach, someone has erected a mock cemetery with row upon row of crosses. At the front, near the sidewalk, there’s a large cross spattered with red paint that is supposed to resemble blood. The crowd is composed of friends, colleagues, and family members of police officers who have been killed in Rio. Some die in the line of duty but most are killed in confrontations off duty, in personal vendettas carried out by criminals, or as victims of assault. The crowd wants to bring attention to the increasing number of police deaths and demand the state to act. They are supported by the worker union of the Civil Police. Although most of the officers who have been killed are from

the Military Police, military police officers are not allowed to unionize and may be sanctioned if they protest in public (Fig. 1.2).

The protesters demand harsher punishments for assaults on police officers. Many want the government to introduce death sentences and lower the age of criminal responsibility from 18 to 14 years. Some are carrying large posters that they hold up so that media and passers-by can read their message. The texts are the patchwork of a worldview I do not yet understand. It espouses that the police officers are victims and scapegoats of a society marked by corruption, moral decay, and violence: “Human rights without the right to live—*Basta!*”; “The enemy is not the police but the government”; and “Victims of a hypocritical society and a government that does not care.” A woman speaks up: “There are too many thieves in this country! Everybody steals, everyone is corrupt. The crooks, the politicians, the people! But everyone hates the police! My daughter was a good person. She was on duty when she was shot in the back by a common coward—because that is what he was, a coward!” She has been given a microphone and shouts out to the masses, making an ambiguous



Fig. 1.2 Family members of killed police officers protesting in Copacabana, December 2014

appeal to the police, who are also known to be corrupt: “You have to make yourselves respected!” I do not understand if she is encouraging them to do their job in a professional manner, or if she wants the police to assert respect through force, but I’m inclined towards the latter. The group has grown since I arrived but is still just a drop in the ocean among the hordes of Sunday beachgoers enjoying the summer heat. Soon they flock around a man who has recently joined the protest. Many try to get a selfie: “It’s Bolsonaro!” one of them says. “The only politician who cares about us, the police!”

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# 2

## Favela/Asfalto

“Well, I reckon you will be living in a favela?” Bjørn, my supervisor, is half asking me, half telling me what he expects. “Yes, well, of course I will!” I stutter in response, though really, I never intended to live in a favela. As an Argentine, I feel a slight discomfort at the thought of traveling to Brazil to study inequality and violence. It feels normative and reifying. But perhaps I am also afraid of stepping outside my comfort zone. Maybe I feel a little knot in my stomach when I hear the word *favela*. To a part of me, steeped in prejudice, it sounds risky, uncomfortable, intense, and chaotic. And after all, I have reasoned, I am supposed to study the police. Is it safe to live in a favela while I am working with them? Aren’t they in conflict with the favela-based *traficantes*? I am hesitant but Bjørn’s question is leading, and I don’t want to disappoint him. And so, without much thought, I answer. “Of course I will!” (Fig. 2.1).

“Is it okay if we move into a favela?” I ask Javier, my partner, when I get home. “Are you serious?” That was never the plan. “Yes” I reply. “And I have kinda already promised we will,” I add with a nervous laugh. Javier hesitates but is also curious. He grins and concedes: So it is—we will be living in a favela. But first we must find one. How do you “find” a favela?



Fig. 2.1 The favela of Babilonia in Rio's Zona Sul

## The Outsiders Gaze

I search for *favela hostel* on the internet. After the pacification began, hotels, hostels, and AirBnB's have popped up everywhere in many of Rio's favelas. Most of them are found in those closest to the beaches of southern Rio. Babilonia Hostel is no exception. As the name indicates, it is situated in Babilonia: A small community clinging to the steep hillside behind Leme, a residential neighborhood just east of Copacabana. The place is owned and run by Hugo, a tall and slender man with a receding hairline, a pouty mouth, and a beard resembling Che Guevara's. When the taxi drops me off in the favela, he is having lunch at one of the small restaurants, or *botecos*, by the road that leads to the community. As I step out of the car and into the oppressive December heat, Hugo leans back in his chair and raises his hand to get my attention. It takes a little while before I see him, just long enough for me to feel a knot tying in my stomach. I'm nervous. The taxi driver did not want to take me there. He considered the favela a "risk zone" and seemed annoyed when he understood where I wanted to be dropped off.



As I see Hugo nonchalantly greeting me, I lower my shoulders and exhale. He is eating with a young French couple who are also staying at the hostel. When they finish their meal, I follow them up the web of alleys and staircases of the favela with faked calm. Past the lively little *botecos* at the bottom of the hill, where Americans in white linen shirts and Panama hats sit side by side with sweaty workers in stained, sleeveless shirts, eating rice and *feijão* (beans) with *farofa*. Past the heap of plastic bags overflowing the garbage container. Past the pile of building materials—bricks and sand—and the row of parked motorcycles. Then over the little bridge crossing the flood trench, where waste is floating and the smell from the open sewer tears at the nostrils. Up a narrow, colorful stair leading into the heart of the favela. The walls are painted in yellow and green pastels, faded colors of the Brazilian flag. The door into one of the homes is wide open and the smell of deep-fried food and freshly boiled rice seeps down the ally. A young couple is sitting on the staircase, wrapped in what I can only presume must be a hot embrace, judging from the sweltering heat and humidity. Next to them an old, scruffy dog is resting in the shade. We continue upwards, turning right at the corner where a group of young boys sell sluggish marijuana and furious cocaine, past construction workers, half-built annexes, bags of cement, rebars, and formwork. Shattered sewer-pipes run down along the side of the stairs, leading us up the last few steep steps to the verdant green door of Babilonia Hostel.

From the roof terrace, we see straight down to the tall buildings at Copacabana, the oil platforms of the Atlantic Ocean, and the surreal, mountainous landscapes that have made Rio one of the most recognizable and photographed cities in the world. The rocky hills seem like dark towers covered in lush jungle, protruding between the row of white brick buildings that face the beach. As most of the favelas in Rio's wealthy southern neighborhoods, Babilonia is built on a steep hillside, offering dazzling views of the city and sea. Below the hostel, Babilonia fans out. Seen from the top, it looks like the house has been built on top of the lower buildings—like a Jenga-game. The sound of children laughing, mothers shouting, couples arguing, and neighbors gossiping fades into the noise from the constant construction work.

In the evening, the workers lay down their tools, and the sound of buzz saws, shovels, and pounding hammers ebb out and is replaced by shouting young boys who gather on the rooftops to fly their kites. They are competing to see who can fly the highest while their fellow kite pilots try to cut each other's glass-fiber lines. Neighbors poke their heads out the windows or watch from their balconies. They cheer and shout rousing comments that I still can't grasp. As the sun goes down, the thick summer air fills with the pumping bass from loudspeakers conveniently placed on the terraces. It seems like the neighbors are trying to deafen each other with funk, the latest rhythmical innovation emerging in the favelas.

Hugo is young, white, and comes from Leme, the wealthy neighborhood of the asphalt right below Babilonia. There, luxurious residencies rise like a wave breaking against the beach. Prior to pacification he had, like many of his neighbors, never set his foot in the favela perched half a block above the building he grew up in. "I was terrified of the favela. I grew up with the discourse of fear" he explains.<sup>1</sup> Now he tells me that he feels at home here. Hugo studied psychology at the public university. When Babilonia was pacified, he started working for an organization that aimed to help children from the favela deal with trauma and experiences of violence. He does not like how the city is changing. It's becoming streamlined and has lost much of its character. "Take Maracanã," he says: "It used to be a stadium with room for 150.000 spectators. Most people could afford the cheap tickets. But prior to the World Cup, the stadium was renovated to match FIFA's standards. Now there's only room for 80.000 people and the tickets have become so expensive that it has become a stadium for the middle and upper classes."

"The same goes for the UPPs" says Hugo. When the police established the UPP in Babilonia in 2010 the biggest changes experienced by the people living here were the formalization of services like electricity and cable TV. For those who used to have access to these things through

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<sup>1</sup> Several scholars have noted how urban violence has been constructed as a "favela problem" (see Misse 2006, 2008, 2010; Machado da Silva 2004), and how Brazilian social dynamics and urbanization patterns are shaped by the "talk of crime" (Caldeira 2001). These representations in large part legitimize "extraordinary" police interventions in favela territories, such as the UPPs.

illegal outlets, it meant a significant increase in costs of living: For the private companies providing these services, it meant more revenue (see, e.g. Freeman 2012). Apart from these changes, the biggest difference is that now, there are always police officers in the favela. “This isn’t pacification” Hugo says. “It’s intense control.” Hugo tells me that he likes it better here than down on the asphalt. “In the favela, it is impossible not to know your neighbors. You have very little privacy. Everybody is watching each other, looking out for each other, and telling each other what’s going on. This is a real community. The inhabitants here have a feeling of community that doesn’t exist among people on the asphalt.” A couple of years ago, Hugo had decided he’d open a hostel here. He bought the house we are standing in now, painted it in seventeen different pastel colors, and equipped the rooms with squeaky bunk beds.

I tell Hugo my intention to do research with the police officers of the UPPs. “Do you think it will be possible?” I ask him expectantly. He thinks it should be. “The police are the worst of Rio’s institutions. They are marked by corruption, violence, and power abuse. But there are good people there too,” he says. “People with good intentions who really want to do good. The female officer who used to be in command at Babilonia was good at her job and approachable.” “I need a place to live,” I say. “Do you know of anyone who rents out rooms in any of the pacified favelas?” Hugo nods. As a matter of fact, he owns the house next door. He is supposed to expand the hostel one day, but right now it stands empty. “You can check it out and see if you like it” he says. Alright, I think to myself. I’ve only been in Rio for a day, and I’ve already found a place to live. This is a promising start.

The house is big. It is three floors tall. The entrance is on the first floor, at the end of the narrow staircase that leads up to the hostel and to our neighbor Luca’s house. He has two dogs. Uva is an old, chocolate-colored Labrador who drags himself up the stairs and spends most of the day slumbering in the shade. Violeta is his opposite. She is just ten

months old and an authentic Brazilian *viralata* (mixed breed). Her fur is short and white, with specks of black and big pointy ears. She likes to bark in the hallway when Luca is at work—nonstop from six in the morning until eight in the evening, Monday to Saturday.

A frail barred door made of aluminum marks the point where the street ends, and the house begins. From outside you can look straight into the living room. It's sparsely furnished, with a red hammock and a cupboard placed beneath a window that faces the thick and verdant jungle behind the house. On the second floor there are two bedrooms. They are filled to the brim with the same rickety bunk beds that are in the hostel. There's space for ten people, should we decide to invite guests. The top floor is a big roof-covered terrace. It's enveloped by the lush jungle growing around the house like a huge wall of trees. To the south, the deep-blue meadow of the Atlantic Ocean fills the horizon. When we arrive, the terrace is a construction site, but once we have given it a little love, it becomes a home worthy of the favela. We find a couple of old window hatches behind the house that we use to build a big dinner table. Hugo's old folding staircase is equipped with wooden boards and transformed into a kitchen shelf. With a couple of layers of fresh paint, old aluminum cans are refurbished as benches and pots where we plant plants dug up from the jungle behind the house. Our sofa is an old, heavy bathtub, sawed in two and painted yellow, and our neighbor molds a discarded washing machine tumbler into a grill. When we hang the hammock from the roof beams our home is almost complete: The final touch is provided by Violeta, who moves in with us a few months into our stay in Rio and immediately stops barking. When my parents visit us from Norway my mother can't hide her surprise. "I this how people live in here?" she exclaims. "I guess I could live in a favela too!" (Fig. 2.2).

It is still too early in December for the big wave of tourists to arrive, and there are more empty beds than occupied ones in the little hostel. Pierre and Adele, the couple from France, have turned one of the shared bedrooms into a private room, while I share a room with an American Marine officer. He wants to experience life in the favelas before going



Fig. 2.2 Dinner at our roof terrace with neighbors and friends, February 2015

back to the United States. As a Marine, he isn't allowed to be here as it is considered too dangerous by the US government. He has spent the last year with the Brazilian Armed Forces on a military exchange, only seeing the favelas from BOPE's helicopters. "The soldiers from BOPE are crazy," he says. "They shoot first and ask later." We are eating lunch at one of the *botecos* in Babilonia. As we are about to order, four police officers come strolling out of the alley that leads to the open square in front of us. Three of the men carry semi-automatic guns hanging from their shoulders, fingers firmly placed on the trigger, barrels pointing to the ground. The last officer has holstered his gun but keeps a hand on the weapon. The group moves slowly across the square. They examine their surroundings, inspecting the area and people there. The conversations at the *boteco* turn silent. Though we don't want to be caught staring, our attention is focused on the armed men who are now standing in the middle of the square. They exude authority and aggression.

Rather than feeling safe, I feel alert and tense. My gaze is drawn to the face of one of the officers. He doesn't look like someone you want to rub the wrong way. He's tilting his head slightly backwards in an arrogant

posture that makes it seem like he's looking at everyone from above. His lips stretch down towards his jaw in a grumpy smile. I gently nudge at the American Marine, and nod towards the officers. He shakes his head in disapproval. "This does not invite to any form of co-operation" he says and explains how preoccupied his platoon was with building good relations with civilians when he was stationed in the Middle East. "I used to tell civilians that I was their best friend and their worst enemy—by which I meant that if they treated me well, I would do the same to them, but if they didn't, I would crush them." *Fair enough*, I think to myself. If this guy thinks the local police take it too far, I won't object. On our way back to the hostel, we meet two of the officers. One is just raising his gun, resting it against his jaw and shoulder, ready to fire as he turns the corner. The American Marine explains that this position is called *tactical entry*. He is surprised that the police use it during their patrol rounds in Babilonia.

Pierre is short and skinny but has a big mouth. He usually smiles and greets the neighbors loudly and unabashedly as he walks up the stairs. I've seen him bumming cigarettes from them, engaging in conversations in Portuguese—which he speaks fluently. Now he is laying out his political views—loudly, at a fast pace, and only interrupted by his own deep laugh. He is rolling a big joint of marijuana that he bought from one of the boys at the *boca do fumo* (lit. 'mouth of smoke'; local drug retail) earlier. He deliberates on European geopolitics: "France and the rest of Europe are becoming authoritarian" he affirms with confidence. "Soon, we will have no rights left!" He thinks that the legalization of gay marriage in particular signals the beginning of the end: "It's a part of the conspiracy to break down and destroy family-ties, so that the state can control us more easily." I am bewildered and smile sheepishly: "Are you kidding?" But Pierre is dead serious. He says he is very happy to have a girl from Russia here. She has just checked in at the hostel—Rio is the first stop on her backpacking trip through South America. Now she is drinking caipirinhas with us on the rooftop terrace. Pierre says that he has a lot of respect for Putin. If World War 3 begins, there is no place he would rather be than in Russia. The girl nods and smiles. She explains that she has nothing against gays: "I have a lot of gay friends," she says. But she *hates* lesbians. They make her sick. And she thinks gay

people should respect religion more. Pierre agrees, particularly with her last point. And he adds that anti-fascism is *at least* as fascist as fascism.

Brazilian anthropologists who have studied policing and urban violence in Rio de Janeiro, usually highlight the need to pay attention to the importance of understanding the local context—the social, cultural, historical, political, and institutional particularities—in analyses of the dynamics of power and policing in Brazil (see, e.g. Machado da Silva 2004; Kant de Lima 1995; Misse 2006; Soares 2023). In the remainder of this book, this is what I’ll do, but the conversation that I had with Pierre and the Russian girl in Babilonia that evening in December 2014 foreshadowed the political developments that we have seen in many countries across the world and reminds us of the importance of situating the re-emergence of Brazilian authoritarianism within a larger, global trend (see, e.g. Shoshan 2021).

## Favelado

Compared to other favelas, Babilonia is wealthy, small, and easy to navigate. Since it’s just a stone’s throw from the beach and is considered relatively safe, it is popular among foreign tourists searching for “authenticity” and among South American *bon vivants*. Some fall in love with Rio and end up taking odd jobs as receptionists, cleaners, or bartenders at one of the hostels in the favela. Following pacification, young and trendy *cariocas* from the asphalt, like Hugo, have “discovered” the laid-back lifestyle of Babilonia, and every now and then, Hugo’s university friends stop by to smoke *maconha* (marihuana) and watch the big ships slowly sail across the soft horizon where the sky meets the ocean (Fig. 2.3).

There are two roads leading up from the asphalt to the favela. Ladeira Ari Barroso is the main street and is always buzzing with people wearing singlets and Havaianas. Some drizzle with sweat as they walk up the hillside, others are shuttled up in white minibuses that run between the busy avenues of Copacabana and the meandering streets of the favela. There’s also a steady stream of *mototaxis* (motorcycle taxis)—a staple of the favela transport system—that howl their way up the hairpin turns. At the foot of Ladeira Ari Barroso, the Military Police have set up a control

post signaling that the favela has been pacified. It is guarded night and day by a patrol car and two officers. At night the red lights cast long shadows down the street. The other access is not as easy to find. It lies nested between two high-rise buildings and even an attentive pedestrian knowing what he or she is looking for, could easily walk straight past the entrance without realizing it. The gateway is about as broad as a doorstep, and from the sidewalk the tight alley between the two buildings is only visible when you are standing right in front of it. The buildings on each side of the alley are so tall and close to each other that only a narrow strip of the sky is visible when you look up.

It takes a little while for the eyes to adjust to the low light of the alley. If you meet someone walking in the opposite direction, you must lean sideways against the buildings to let the other one pass. On the dark walls, someone has painted the insignia of the traffickers controlling the favela in black paint: ADA, *Amigo dos Amigos*, or Friends of Friends. They control the retail sale of drugs in neighbouring Chapeu-Mangueira. Babilonia is dominated by *Commando Vermelho* (CV): The



Fig. 2.3 A narrow alley separates the favela from the asfalto, July 2015



Red Command. The proximity of the two gangs periodically leads to tension but normally these favelas are calm and quiet. Just above the gang symbol, someone has written a warning to the police: “You’re gonna die, UPP!”

At the end of the passage, a dizzyingly steep staircase has been cemented onto the hill, leading up towards the homes in the favela. They are just visible between the foliage of the tall trees growing in a small courtyard behind the buildings. They mark the invisible border between asphalt and favela, camouflaging the hardship and violence of inequality; hiding it from the wealthy families that occupy the apartments facing the messy favela architecture. The stairs are broad enough for people to pass each other, allowing the sweaty and breathless bodies that climb them a moment of rest on their way up. I have counted the steps from the street and up to our house many times to ease the climb to the top. There are exactly 300 steps from the pavement to our doorstep. Where the first stairs end, there’s a small balcony marking the lower boundary of the favela. The alley to the left follows a tall wall with a low bench cemented into the ground. I have been told that it used to be one of the most lucrative *bocas de fumo* in Rio prior to pacification. The narrow entrance and long flight of stairs made it easy for the traffickers to control who came in and out of the favela. For intruders and police alike, attempting to enter the favela through the alley would be a lethal strategic error. However, it allowed the rich *playboys* from the asphalt easy access to the *boca*. They could comfortably buy drugs without having to enter the favela’s complex meshwork of alleys. For me, accessing the favela through the narrow passage feels like an adventure. Our neighbors, however, don’t like to use this access—they feel exposed in the eventual case of a shootout and complain that there are no comfortable places to rest on their way up the hill.

Now the main *boca* is in the middle of the favela, just below Hugo’s hostel. Since he is not from Babilonia he hired João, a slim and strong black man, born and raised in Babilonia. João is Hugo’s right-hand man and lives in a small room at the hostel. The room’s only window was walled in when the neighbor added a new floor to their house. There is still a little gap of about 15 cm between the two houses—just enough to let in some fresh air. I have a hard time understanding what his role

here actually is. He doesn't speak English and communicates very little with the foreign guests. A few weeks after my arrival, the electrician who installed the fans in the hostel rooms came by. He was an older, slim man. João wouldn't open the door for him, and they started shouting to each other, João from the terrace and the electrician from the stairs outside the entrance one floor down, while the neighbors poked their heads out the windows to watch. I didn't understand much of what they were arguing about, but thought I picked up that the electrician threatened to go to the police. After some shouting back and forth, João jumped out the door and ran down to where the electrician was standing, smacking him at the back of his head. When he came back up, he was sweaty and agitated. He said they had been quarreling about money. The electrician said the work he had done cost 70 reals, and João had only paid him 60. The rest of the money, according to João, was for one of the workers who had helped him with the installations. "He's always trying to pull stuff like that," João said in an irritated voice. "Everybody knows how he is" I asked whether the electrician had threatened to go to the police. "No, he said he would go get his cousin. His cousin is a big, strong guy, and he always uses him to make threats. Luckily, he's an old man, so I instilled some fear of God in him" João explained.

That evening, João discussed what had happened with the neighbors. *Discussing* in this case means that one of the neighbors howled at João from his window, while João shouted back his version of events from the terrace at the hostel to anyone who happened to be in the vicinity. People here don't get together with a cup of coffee to share the newest gossip, they cry it out so that anyone who might be close enough can listen, ask questions, provide corrections, or chime in with opinions of their own, or so it seems. They don't knock on the door to see if the neighbor is home, they lean out from their balconies or shout through the windows. A couple of days later, I called on one of our neighbors from the hostel roof terrace. Hugo was there and burst out laughing. "You're already a *favelado*, Tomas!"

João has never met a gay couple without a feminine appearance, or at least so he claims. He seems to be incredibly curious about Javier and me and locks himself into our home at all times—as the dustpan that he uses for cleaning the hostel is placed in our house he has the keys to our

front door. Don't ask me why—Javier and I find it odd but shrug it off. Maybe that's just what it's like here? Zero privacy, like Hugo said. Later, Hugo confides that João had wanted to surprise us in the middle of the act. He had never seen two men having sex and didn't "get" us. Instead, he surprises Javier as he's stepping out of the shower. This apparently makes him ill at ease, and from that point on, he never fails to announce his visits. To us, João's curiosity is a reminder that just as we have been looking at the favela through an outsider's gaze, to many of the people who live here, we are the odd ones.

The first generations settled on the hillsides of the Babilonia ridge at the beginning of the 1900s. Their homes were simple, mostly built with wood and clay. They did not have sewage or electricity. Water had to be carried up the hill from a well at the foot of the favela. When it rained, the dirt roads turned into mud. When it rained a lot, there was a real risk of mudslides that could bury people and buildings. Like most favelas, Babilonia was mostly inhabited by black people or migrants from the Brazilian Northeast. Many had domestic animals like hens and pigs, and some also grew their own vegetables. At first, each house had a small courtyard but as families grew, the homes were expanded, first sideways, then upwards (see Valladares 2000).

Today, most houses are built with bricks and mortar. The community has a collectively built sewage system and is connected to the water and power grid. Most people have jobs and income, their children go to school, and in recent decades many more have accessed higher education. A growing proportion of favela dwellers are gaining middle-class status, and some favelas have a vibrant local commerce. In Babilonia, there are hostels, restaurants, bars, and kiosks. There are kindergartens, community houses, and a legion of motorcycle taxis and construction workers. Through many windows and doors big widescreen TVs cast a flickering blue glow. But at the top of Babilonia, just behind the first line of vegetation, a small clay hut defies any simple analysis of the favela's demographics. It serves as a quiet reminder of the history of struggle and resistance that has shaped the community and bears witness to the inequalities that characterize social relations between favela and asphalt as well as within the favela (see Valladares 2000, 2010). Maria, my Portuguese teacher, tells me that when she sees how some of her

neighbors live, she gets shivers down her spine. She was born and raised in Babilonia and once, a group of volunteers from the evangelical church she attends visited the clay hut at the top of the neighborhood. The group went to “see with their own eyes” how miserable the living conditions of some community members are. This was a different type of “favela tourism” than I had imagined before coming here.

Maria lives in the house that her father built when the family moved here from Mina Gerais, more than forty years ago. She was only a few months old when her parents decided to move to Rio, as her father hoped to find work as a public servant. Few families have lived here longer than them. Her parents have passed away, but the flock of siblings still lives in the family house. It has grown three stories tall, to accommodate a growing number of nieces and nephews. Maria’s flat is on the first floor. It’s humble and contains a small bedroom, a bathroom with just enough space for a toilet and shower, and a kitchenette with two cooking plates and a fridge. Her unmarried brother lives next door, her sister on the second floor, with her daughter, while a second brother occupies the top floor with his family.

I practice my Portuguese skills with Maria three times a week. Today, she is feeling tired. The heat has been intense. Yesterday the thermic sensation was 55 degrees Celsius. “Have you considered getting air condition?” I ask. Maria shakes her head. She says she can’t afford the power bill. She currently pays 30 reals, which is about 9 dollars and already finds it expensive. She used to be a cook at a *boteco* but now she works for a family in Lagoa, the wealthy neighborhood at the foot of Corvocado. “The family treats me well” she says. “With respect.” She does not have to be submissive when she is working for them, something she would never have accepted: “It’s about maintaining a sense of dignity,” she explains. Also, it beats working at the boteco where it was always too hot. After a day’s work there, she never had the energy to do anything but rest. The house in Lagoa has air-conditioning, which makes it easier to work in the sweltering summer heat, and her working hours are more flexible. She makes 1100 reals, which is about 330 dollars, and is annoyed at how easy it has become for some of her neighbours to receive social support through the *Bolsa Familia*-program.

This government-run welfare plan is central to the Worker's Party redistribution policies and partly attributed as one of the main drivers of the remarkable growth of Brazil's middle classes during the PT years. Importantly, *Bolsa família* has reshaped social hierarchies at a family level. Mothers have gained more power within households, as they were the formal recipients of funds. Maria, on the other hand, does not get support since she does not have children.

"You know, when I was young, we had to work really hard to make it. With Bolsa Família, a lot of people are getting paid without doing anything." As a member of an evangelical church, she believes in the value of hard work. But still, I am surprised by her critique. "Isn't it good that life in the favela is getting easier?" I ask. "I don't consider this a favela," she says. "When I think of a favela, I think about people having a really tough time. We're poor, but I don't think the difference between our everyday lives and that of the people in the city is that big. We have the same phones, the same TVs, and a lot of the same things as other people do. We had a dinner at the neighborhood association a while back. We prepared many kinds of food—canapés and a variety of local dishes. One of the men said that we eat the same food as the rich, and it was true. We really do eat the same food. We eat salmon, tenderloin—so I wouldn't call this a favela."

The fact, some argue, that many Brazilians were able to adopt consumption patterns that were previously reserved for the rich during the governments of the Workers Party, has led to a lot of resentment among the middle and upper classes. How can people from the favela afford the same commodities that the middle class has been working so hard to achieve? How are they able to go on vacations and travel by plane? How can they eat at the same restaurants? Changes in consumption patterns have challenged the class identity of the wealthy, who fear the loss of privilege (see, e.g. Dunker and Kupermann 2023). Housekeepers, like Maria, have been central to the construction of middle-class status in the country and are therefore also source of social anxiety with regard to class identity (see Resende 2020). There are few things that make Latin American middle classes more unsettled than having to carry out the work that has been reserved for the servants or meeting them in arenas where they are equal. To many, the idea of washing their own

bathrooms, ironing their clothes, or doing the dishes is inconceivable. The rights and work conditions of housekeepers have been one of the most controversial topics during the PT governments. Strengthening their rights has led to an increase in the cost of hire, making it difficult for the middle class to maintain this symbol of status. The next time I meet Maria, she is looking for work. The family that employed her could not afford a housekeeper any longer and the mistress had fired her on the day. “She could have given me a week’s notice,” Maria complains. Probably, we speculate, she did not want her to find a new job before she was certain that she did not need her, or she feared that Maria would not perform well once she knew that she was fired. A few days later, Maria tells me that the mistress has messaged her: She wants Maria to send her the recipe for the banana pie she used to make.

## Police and Thieves

I’m at the hostel practicing my Portuguese when two of the kids from the neighborhood stop by to say hello to Hugo. They are siblings—a boy and a girl—and appear to be around eight or nine years old. Hugo points at me and tells the boy that I am here to study the police. “What do you think of the police?” he asks. The boy quickly replies: “They’re corrupt.” “But there must be some good police officers as well?” Hugo suggests. “No” says the boy. “Nobody?” The boy shakes his head. Hugo insists: “So what do the police do, then?” The boy is adamant: “They oppress favela residents.” In earlier days, the kids used to play *thief and thief*, Hugo tells me. They pretended to be rivaling gangs, rolling make-belief joints, or dealing drugs. They don’t play those games anymore. After the favela was pacified, they’ve played *cops and thief*, only here, nobody wants to be the cop.

Today, Maria has promised that we will talk about the pacification. She asks me what I already know. “Well, I know that the state wasn’t very involved in the favelas before the pacification, only through occasional BOPE invasions where the police would enter the favela, kill a few drug traffickers, and apprehend some weapons and drugs,” I repeat the standard narrative that I have read and heard from others. “Well, that

is not quite right” Maria answers. “First of all, no two favelas are the same. The state has always been involved to some degree in Babilonia. There have always been schools and kindergartens here,” she explains. She argues that few things changed with the pacification but mentions the opening of a new center for professional training and improvements at the health post. “But there are a lot of police officers here now,” I try. “Oh yes, that’s true. But there are thugs here as well. They’re just not as visible as before.” I ask whether she talks with the local police officers or if she knows any of them. “I don’t. And I try not to. If people see you talking to the police, they can get distrustful. There might be rumors that you’re in love with one of them, and I try to avoid that.” For Maria, the pacification has meant a change for the better: “Before the pacification there was a lot of fear. People become slaves of fear.” She pauses. “Honestly, we felt like we were walking on eggshells.”<sup>2</sup>

Maria has lost two brothers who joined the drug traffickers. I want to know how she understands the violence in Rio: “There are many reasons why people are violent,” she says, “but poverty isn’t one. You can be poor, but an honest worker. Some people are of a violent nature. Police officers who are violent at work are also violent when they get home: They are of a violent nature. Their problem runs deep. Like the traffickers, they want to carry guns because it gives them power over life and death.” I object to the idea of a “violent nature” arguing that it seems like an explanation that can easily stigmatize certain populations as more violent than others. But for Maria it’s the other way around: “The violence exercised by the poor is visible, but the violence exercised by the rich is hidden. In Brazil, the history of violence dates to the colonial era. It is the violence exercised through the exploitation of black people, through repression and economic inequality. Black people are still subjected to these kinds of violence.”

I try to read the major local newspapers every day. They are mostly tabloid and conservative, but they give me an impression of what is on the public agenda. During my first few weeks in Brazil, situations of

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<sup>2</sup> The feeling of “walking on eggshells” is also noted by Machado da Silva and Menezes (2020) in their analysis of the impacts of the pacification. They document how the presence of different armed agents (police and traffickers) in pacified favelas, made local residents feel more exposed, since they could potentially get caught between two competing authorities.

armed violence or police action are addressed daily, producing the sensation of an ongoing emergency. If the papers can't find anything new to report on, they follow up on earlier cases, like this story from an event that occurred in March 2014:

The family of Claudia Silva Ferreira has started a new process against the federal administration in Rio de Janeiro following the murder of the public employee. The relatives demand lawful compensation for the moral harm incurred and the psychological treatment of Claudia's mother, sister, and brother—who was killed during a police operation in Morra da Congonha, in Madureira, and dragged after a police vehicle for at least 300 meters along the Estrada Intendente Magalhães, northern zone of Rio, before being rescued.

Claudia was black and from a favela. She was shot during a gunfight between traffickers and police officers who, following the shootout, hurled her body into the trunk of the patrol vehicle—allegedly to drive her to the hospital. While the vehicle was driving down the road, the trunk opened and Claudia, who according to the obduction report had already died, fell out. Claudia's clothes got stuck in the patrol vehicle and she was dragged along the asphalt behind the car. The macabre scene was filmed by the people in the vehicle right behind the police, and the video quickly reached the news. The two officers responsible were never charged. They continued to work as military police officers and had risen in the ranks. As of March 2018, they had killed a total of eight more people during police operations.

Beto often stops by to repair things at the hostel. Lately, he has been helping us make our apartment livable as well. He has modified our new cooking stove so that it works with bottled propane which is different from the propane delivered by grid on the asphalt; he also fixed the roof of our terrace, built our table, and mended our grill. Beto is handy and makes his living as a janitor/construction-worker/mechanic/blacksmith/inventor. He can repair most things that are broken and likes to recycle old materials. I always bump into him walking up and down the alleys with building materials. Sometimes he shows up with the assistant that he has hired to help him finish tasks he can't find time for himself. He has



printed a set of T-shirts that read “Beto’s Workshop” on the chest. “I was the one who gave Hugo the idea of using the old window frames for your table,” he tells me one day. “And the staircase shelves.” The bathtub sofa is also the work of Beto. He is not shy and repeatedly reminds me of his intellect. “I am smarter than most” he’ll say. “And had I been born somewhere else I would have been a professor!” I nod in agreement, although I find it difficult to imagine Beto buried behind books in a stuffed office.

Since our house does not have a doorbell, Beto usually announces his arrival by flipping our main power switch, which is placed out in the street, on and off. We have only known each other for a couple of days when he discreetly asks me whether Javier and I are a couple. He laughs with relief when I tell him that we are. “I’ve been wanting to ask you for a while, but I was afraid to be wrong! The only people who don’t accept different sexual orientations are those who were bullied as kids,” he says. If it was up to him, everybody would be free to do as they pleased. He invites me home, to show me the new apartment he is building above his house. Beto wants to rent it out—preferably to foreigners.

He tells me that he was 17 when his first daughter was born. He became a grandfather at 33. Now he has four children with four different women. We laugh at his impulsiveness, but Beto soon becomes somber. He tells me that he grew up without a father but that his mother was always there for him. She assumed the role of both parents and if Beto could start life anew he would still choose to live without a father. When he grew up, he lived in Paraíba, in Northeastern Brazil. He is what people from the south pejoratively call *nordestino*. Nordestinos, who often have mestizo or afro-Brazilian roots, are usually looked down upon by the *cariocas*—those born and raised in Rio. They see nordestinos as lazy and incompetent. Beto of course, is neither. When he came to Rio early in the 2000s he first settled in Cantagalo, a favela that sprawls across the homonymous hill that separates Copacabana from Ipanema. It’s a bigger favela than Babilonia and according to Beto, there is much more violence there: “Even now, with the police present, the drug traffickers still carry guns,” he says. “I didn’t know that things were that bad in Cantagalo” I reply. “That’s just because the police there have made a deal with the traffickers. It’s the police who own the *bocas* there.” He tells me that the police in Babilonia are not corrupt, but he advises me to watch out for

one of the patrol units. The residents refer to it as *Cabeça Branca* (White Head) due to the snow-white hair of the officer in command of the unit. I think of the intimidating officer I saw by the boteco a few weeks ago. Wasn't his hair white? (Fig. 2.4).

From time to time, the police unit breaks into people's homes and turns them upside down. "The way the police treat people here is not good, but it is still better than before. They used to shoot first and ask later." Beto claims that police officers often mistake him for a criminal because of the tattoos on his arms but says that he is no longer afraid to get shot. One of the officers who worked here before used to hang out with the traffickers. Occasionally, he'd smoke weed with them. The *boca* is located right next to Beto's home so he always knows what's going on. Once he filmed the officer smoking weed with the traffickers. For a while, he was tempted to share the video, but he eventually desisted: "It would only have backfired," he concludes. Despite this Beto does not mind the police. His brother works as a police officer in Maranhão and was one of the few persons who helped him when he was at his absolute lowest



**Fig. 2.4** Beto installing the lamps he made with old satellite dishes on a terrace in the favela

in life. For three years, he was addicted to crack. In contrast to cocaine, which cost between 6 and 20 dollars per gram depending on the quality and is often considered an elite drug, a user dose of crack can be bought for less than a dollar. Users often gather around local marketplaces called *crackolandias*. Beto was able to overcome his crack addiction and says that he can thank his mother and brother for that: “My brother lent me money, even if he knew I was an addict.”

In Paraíba, the police act differently from here, Beto says. There, they don't try to conceal the close bonds they cultivate with traffickers. The police of Paraíba might drive straight up to the bocas to demand their payment. Corruption in Rio's is less visible. “Do the people who live here in Babilonia want the police to be here?” I ask. Beto doesn't hesitate for a second: “You bet!” He tells me that BOPE recently arrested one of the most powerful traffickers in Babilonia. He's happy that they got him: “The guy thought he was better than everybody else just for being a gangster.” He doesn't like people with that kind of attitude. He is a *trabalhador* (worker); he goes to school; He is much better than that thug. Before the pacification, the traffickers carried weapons as big as themselves, waving them about, accidentally firing shots. “Under the drug rule, you wouldn't be here” he tells me. “Have you ever seen heavily armed people without training carry guns?” Although Beto prefers the police to the traffickers not everyone is of the same opinion. Many neighbors view the police as uniformed criminals. Personal dynamics are important: If the traffickers in charge are perceived as more or less reasonable, they can, according to the situation, be a preferred option to the officers from the Military Police (see Feltran 2020).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> There are several factors determining whether a pacified favela is violent or peaceful, and whether the inhabitants support the police or the traffickers. How many people live in the favela? What jobs are available? What about the police commander? What kind of experience does he have? Can he be bribed? Where did he work before? Does he have a temper or a calm personality? What about the officers at the base? Are they fresh from the academy or do they have experienced with the practices of extortion schemes that characterizes the police at the battalions? And the traffickers, are they from the Red Command, Friends of Friends, or the Third Command? Is the leader of the local gang a reasonable guy? Is he willing to pay off the police to keep the peace? Does he like to party? Does he enjoy confronting with the police? Is he young and eager to prove his worth? Does he have rivals? Do they sell marijuana, cocaine, or crack at the local bocas? All these factors play a part in determining the dynamics of violence in a favela. A neighborhood can be a quiet and peaceful place one day to a warzone

The *facções*, or factions (as Rio's different gangs are referred to), consists of networks of local gangs territorially anchored in the favelas. Every favela has a gang-leader or *dono do morro* (lit. owner of the hill). The *donos* act as chiefs in the areas they control. They run the drug retail and are loyal to the leaders of their faction, who manage the criminal network from the prison cells at Rio's high-security prison, Bangú. This might sound odd but is true to the history of Rio's drug factions, who emerged among inmates in the prison of *Ilha Grande* towards the end of the military dictatorship, when political prisoners served their sentences alongside common criminals. The political prisoners, who were experienced in guerrilla warfare, taught their fellow inmates how to get organized, and so the Red Command, Rio's largest faction, was born. To this day, prisons remain an important arena for the recruitment of gang members, socialization, and the administration of Rio's drug trade (see Penglase 2008).

The *donos* wield considerable power in the favelas. They act as legislators, judges, and executives, controlling anything that could disturb the local order and threaten their positions. As a rule, they are young men, some of them in their teens. Some *donos* are known to be moody, temperamental, and potentially dangerous. They assert their masculinity through violence and attacks on the police but also by assuming the role of benevolent providers through handouts to local populations. "When they're bored, they go like: *Ey, let's go shoot up the police!*" Beto says. He tells me that some of the toughest gangs initiate neophytes by making them kill police officers. Volatile and temperamental *donos* are feared and exercise their authority through chaos and violence. Others are business-minded. They are more concerned with keeping the peace and avoiding unnecessary confrontations that could attract attention from the police and negatively impact their "business."<sup>4</sup>

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almost overnight, especially if a particularly aggressive trafficker returns from jail, or if a new commander with a different style of policing is put in charge of the UPP.

<sup>4</sup> In Misha Glenny's (2016) book about Nêm, the *dono* of Rocinha in the early 2000s, the historically ambiguous border between the state's security forces and the traffickers is clearly shown. Glenny describes how, during Nêm's rule, there was peace in Rocinha. After several years under the tyranny of volatile and despotic traffickers, most of the locals were relieved to have a sober and composed *dono* like Lulu in power. But the leaders of the Red Command, Lulu's faction, wanted a bigger piece of the profit from the drug economy. Lulu on the other

Beto says that in Babilonia, people generally support the police. I am aware that for many favela residents, the drug gangs are perceived as more trustworthy providers of security than the police, and press Beto on this point: “Doesn’t anybody support the drug traffickers?” Beto hesitates. Well, yes, some people do, he answers. “Not even God can please everyone.” When the police behave like criminals, beating people up and exercising authority with violence, they earn less support. One of the officers who worked here was known to be particularly aggressive. He was unpopular, even among his colleagues. He ended up being shot in the back while patrolling in Alemão, Beto says. He didn’t die but was paralyzed from the waist down when a bullet hit his spine. I ask him how he knows this. “When a police officer is unpopular, everybody knows when something happens to them. Another officer who used to work here died in a car crash on the bridge to Niteroi. Everybody here got the news.” Beto’s description of the relation between police, traffickers, and favela residents is illustrative of what has by now been well-established

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hand, wanted out. At first, he managed to leave Rocinha. But in the power vacuum that followed, violence increased, threatening the peace in the wealthy neighborhoods next to the favela. According to Lulu, he was abducted from his mother’s home in Paraíba, two and a half thousand kilometers north of Rio, by four masked detectives from the Civil Police. Threatening to kill him if he disobeyed, they demanded Lulu’s return to Rio, to bring order back to Rocinha. Lulu was left with no choice. He was far too deeply involved in the networks of corruption and political horse-trading to retire. Eventually, he returned to Rocinha, re-establishing order. But the leaders of Lulu’s faction organized a coup against him. Led by a former *dono* with a reputation of being sadistic and a rapist, 60 traffickers from a neighbor favela attacked Rocinha in a battle dubbed as the War for Rocinha by the media. While Lulu won the battle many civilians from both the favela and asphalt lost their lives in the struggle, forcing a reaction from the police. In a show of force, 650 Special Unit officers and 350 conventional officers invaded Rocinha. During the invasion, one of the officers from the Special Units broke into the home of one of Lulu’s men. The trafficker wasn’t home, but the officer stumbled upon his wife and private collection of exotic animals, which included an alligator and a sloth. The officer let the animals loose and was assaulting the wife when the trafficker arrived and killed the police officer. Police officers from BOPE are known for cultivating a culture of honor and could not let this event go unpunished. They organized an operation which ended with the death of Lulu. According to the police, he was killed in a shootout while resisting arrest. Witnesses from Rocinha, on the other hand, claimed that he was executed, suspecting the murder to be an act of revenge, in response to the death of the BOPE soldier. Local authorities celebrated the murder of Lulu as a great victory in the war against the drug traffickers. Finally, the inhabitants in the areas surrounding Rocinha could breathe easy—or so they said. For Rocinha’s residents, this was a farce: Lulu was the only person guaranteeing peace, and with him gone, they knew a bloody fight for power would follow. In the year after the murder of Lulu, Rocinha was drowned in violence, with different alliances fighting for power.

by social scientists studying urban violence in Brazil: That policing is negotiated by a multiplicity of social actors and according to different normative orders (see, e.g. Albernaz 2020; Feltran 2020; Larkins 2015, 2023). Rather than assuming a simple and straightforward relation between police, crime, and population, nuanced ethnographic analyses allow us to disentangle the complex relationships and personal dynamics that shape people's understanding of policing and security.

## Neoliberal Militarization

Paulo has invited me for dinner with some of his friends in Santa Teresa, the sleepy, bohemian neighborhood on the hills between Rio's city center and Corcovado. Normally, the *bondinho* (tram) would transport tourists along the old tramline running across the viaduct in Lapa and up the cobble-stone streets where nineteenth-century villas and mango trees compete for attention. But like much of Rio's infrastructure the tram is temporarily closed for renovation ahead of the Olympics. Paulo's friends are intellectuals from the Brazilian middle class. One is a reporter, another a social geographer, and a few are social workers. Like Hugo, they are critical of the urban transformations that are being implemented ahead of the Olympic games, particularly of what they perceive as an increased privatization of the public sphere.<sup>5</sup>

Paulo is finishing his PhD in Social Anthropology at the UFRJ—The Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, one of the city's two largest public universities. His boyfriend, José, is also an anthropologist and curious about my fieldwork. “You're sticking your head into a beehive” he says. He is critical of the UPP project. It is a militarization of the favela, he says. This is a critique I have heard before (see, e.g. Saborio 2014). “Haven't things gotten better?” I ask. “Yes, well, the [overall] situation in the city has become better. Ten years ago, the situation in Rio was

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<sup>5</sup> The preparation for the World Cup and Olympics (as well as other mega-events organized in Rio in this period) produced a state of exception due to the urgency and prestige associated with these events, justifying massive public spending on infrastructure, channeling public funds to private contractors, often ignoring regular demands for public tenders and oversight (see Braathen 2013; Varrel and Kennedy 2011; Williamson 2016).

completely different,” José replies. There were often gunfights close to the university where he studied with a warlike events in the streets. He had lived in an apartment building in a gorge with favelas controlled by rivalling gangs flanking the narrow valley. At night, the sky was often lit up by red gleams of light as the gangs attacked each other. But he warns me about giving the UPPs too much credit for the changes: “All of Brazil has changed a lot in the last ten years but there is no doubt that many children in favelas like Babilonia have more options now than before.”<sup>6</sup>

José repeats critiques I’ve heard before: Most pacified favelas are either close to rich neighborhoods or next to installations built for the Olympics. In areas close to pacified favelas, rental and property prices have multiplied. Investments in urban infrastructure and social policies that were promised as part of the pacification project have been discontinued. Instead, the pacification has ushered in the formalization of services like electricity, internet, and cable TV, increasing the costs of living of many favela residents (Sørbøe 2013; Ost and Fleury 2013). The state has largely abandoned the developmental rhetoric used to legitimize the establishment of the first UPPs and is prioritizing policing activities. According to Paulo, the goal is not to improve the lives of the poor but to increase private profit and make the city attractive to international investments. The pacification is essentially a neoliberal project that first and foremost has contributed to a sense of security for tourists and wealthy inhabitants. The drug traffickers have been pushed out of the city center, relocating to Rio’s suburbs where there are neither tourists nor rich elites. Out of sight, out of mind—the problems are swept under the rug.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> There is broad consensus that the UPPs effectively reduced armed violence in Rio de Janeiro during the first years of the project’s existence, seeing a gradual increase to pre-pacification levels by 2017 (Menezes 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Menezes and Corrêa (2017) show how the pacification project, at the beginning, was not only effective in disarming the drug traffickers but also in creating a consensus around the UPPs, effectively disarming public critique towards the project. They signal 2011 as the year in which consensus around the project started to decline, with 2014/2015, when I did my fieldwork, as a moment doubts about the future of the project were raised at a broad, general level. The return of armed confrontations to pacified areas, lack of social programs, gentrification, multiplication of new forms of crime, and police misconduct and corruption all contributed to the sense that the UPPs were in crisis when I arrived in Rio in December 2014. In retrospect, studies have understood the pacification as a step in the gradual militarization of public security policies in

As traffickers that migrate to new favelas can no longer base their power on social networks they increasingly resort to violence. Many of Rio's suburbs have experienced an increase in violence following the pacification. "Very few people know what's actually going on in the suburbs of Northern Rio," Paulo says. That's where the true poverty is. He tells me that Complexo da Maré, which sprawls along the highway to the international airport, is often called "the Gaza strip" because of the frequent shootouts between the three different factions vying for control in the area. In March 2014 the Brazilian Armed Forces occupied Maré to suppress armed violence during the World Cup. I drove past the favelas a few days ago and saw roadblocks with sandbags, soldiers, and big tanks guarding the communities. It unmistakably looked like a warzone. José says that the name of the project is telling: In Brazil, *pacification* was the word that the Portuguese colonizers used to describe the violent efforts to "civilize" the native population. Present-day pacification could also be seen as a project of forced civilization, where the goal is to "tame" the "wild" inhabitants in the favelas, Paulo adds (see de Oliveira 2014; Neocleous 2013). At its core, it is a deeply racist project.<sup>8</sup> What José and Paulo are signalling is how the cultural production of the favelas as the locus of urban violence and places that needed to be civilized and tamed, legitimized the massive deployment of police power through the UPPs.

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Rio de Janeiro, leading up to the military intervention of 2018 (see, e.g. Farias et al. 2020; Machado da Silva and Menezes 2020; Esperança 2022).

<sup>8</sup> In colonial pacification, the military and the Catholic Church joined forces to resettle and "civilize" the groups they displaced through colonization. While the military used force to uproot and relocate indigenous communities to Catholic missions, the Church was tasked with their conversion to Christianity, preparing them to work in the newly established European towns and villages. Often, converted indigenous persons were enrolled in the military forces and thus made to participate in the colonization of their own people. The Europeans read resistance as a sign that the "savages" were particularly susceptible to the influence of the devil, and that they required strict control and supervision (Ystanes and Salem 2020; see Marinato 2008; de Oliveira 2016: 324; Schwarcz 2019).



## You Can't Call It Pacification If It Doesn't Bring Peace!

Rocinha claws itself up the hillside between the two slender peaks of Dois Irmãos and the ridges that split Rio in its three characteristic *zonas* (zones): *Sul*, *norte*, and *oeste* (south, north, and west). The favela is known as the biggest in Rio and some even suggest it's the biggest in Latin America. In truth, both claims are a little exaggerated. Even in Rio, several favelas are comparable to Rocinha in population and size, but most of these are “favela complexes” or “conglomerates” such as Complexo do Alemão or Complexo da Maré where the nesting of favelas compose neighborhoods with the population of medium-sized towns. It is hard to tell exactly how many people live in Rocinha, but some estimates suggest as much as 150,000 inhabitants. Rocinha and the rest of Rio's *favelas* are important to the city's economy—not just as areas for drug retail, but as home to a formidable workforce and with an important commercial sector of its own, which has grown during the Workers Party governments. In Rocinha, several recent infrastructural projects have improved access in the community (see Sørboe 2013). There have been public investments in a new road within the favela as well as a new metro line that connects Rocinha to the rest of the city. For a long time, there were plans to build a cable car that would ferry passengers up the steep hillside, like those built in Providencia and Complexo de Alemão. But the most significant official initiative during this period, at least in terms of the attention it garnered, was the pacification, which promised to put an end to the rule of Rocinha's drug gangs (Fig. 2.5).

Rocinha was pacified in November 2011. During the “occupation,” the police did not fire a single shot. Some consider this an achievement or at least a sign that police practices were changing. Most drug traffickers had been notified of the operation days in advance and evacuated the community. Soon the police established Rio's largest UPP in the favela, with a force of around 700 officers. This was an important symbolic event: Due to its size, location, and history, Rocinha occupies a special place in the public imagination. During the first year of pacification the police received a lot of support from Rocinha's residents. But it was also here, in Rocinha, that the tensions inherent in the pacification project



**Fig. 2.5** Mototaxi's passing in front of Rua 2, on the main road that runs through Rocinha

first became publicly visible. The event marking the turning point in the public perception of the UPPs was the disappearance of Amarildo de Souza following his detainment by UPP officers in June 2013. Coinciding with the wave of protests that swept the country, Amarildo is often referred to as *o estopim*—“the fuse” that made the bomb go off. It was later revealed that officers from the local UPP tortured him to death and that BOPE officers had assisted them in disappearing Amarildo's body, reproducing the practices of policing that had been institutionalized during the dictatorship (see Menezes 2013; Sørboe 2013).

It is Saturday and I am on my way to meet Larissa who lives Rocinha. I catch a bus that takes me through some of Rio's wealthiest neighborhoods. Ipanema, Lagoa, Leblon and Gávea. Save the shopping areas of Ipanema the streets are calm and quiet. In Gávea large walls face the street, and I can barely glimpse the big, exclusive villas, hidden behind them. A security guard sits in a tiny shed, controlling who is let in through the gates that limit access to the neighborhood. As we reach Rocinha, the contrast to the streetlife changes. Minibuses, mototaxis,

private cars and cabs, a police vehicle, and dozens of pedestrians are moving up the narrow and steep road that runs through the favela from east to west, over a pass with unbeatable views of most of Zona Sul. The road is lined by kiosks, hair dressing salons, motorcycle workshops, vegetable markets, street food vendors selling fried *coixinhas* dripping in oil, shops selling everything from cheap Chinese cell phones, beach towels, bathing shorts, and Hawaiianas. Rocinha seems like a city within the city—the streets here are stripped of snobbery and bustling with life.

The bus I'm in seems way too large for the hairpin curves but the driver knows what he's doing. At one turn, the traffic suddenly changes direction, and the bus switches to the left lane while cars drive past us to the right. This is the only way we can make the sharp turn without blocking the entire road. The traffic almost stops but instead of honking their horns and yelling insults at each other, the drivers trade jokes and greetings through their car windows before driving on. Suddenly, as we approach the hairpin-turn of *Rua 2* (2nd Street) the bus driver points out the frontshield, calling out to the passengers: "*Caveirão!*" A massive, black, armored truck is parked in the middle of the road ahead of us. It's the vehicle used by BOPE during special operations and a sign that something is going down. *Caveirão* means "big skull" and this is exactly what's painted on the side of the car: A big skull pierced by a battle knife on top of two crossed revolvers. One might mistake it for a pirate flag but in fact it's the emblem of the police's Special Unit. A group of officers, perhaps ten in total and armed with machine guns, are standing by the curb while a couple of their colleagues direct the traffic which has come to a complete halt. One officer is standing in the middle of the street, waving his gun at the people in the cars, like it's some sort of traffic sign. He has a massive gold watch on his right wrist and if it weren't for his black uniform, I could easily have confused him for a gangster.

When I exit the bus Larissa is waiting for me in the bustling street. She has been at the beach and is wearing a yellow bikini and denim shorts, exposing a big dragon tattoo on her back. Her sunglasses are placed on her sun-bleached hair which she has tied back in a bun. We greet each other, and she nods in the direction I just came. "*Vamos?*" She waves at me to follow her. The noise from the traffic and loud music pumping

out the doors and windows of the buildings around us makes it impossible to talk. Larissa leads me through a narrow alley at a quick pace, leaving the motorcycles and cars behind. Above us a jumble of electrical wires run down the alley, blocking much of the daylight out. Ahead of us children are playing in the shade between the tall buildings. The sun is about to set, and Larissa wants to take me to the top of the favela to look at the view before it gets dark, so we catch two *mototaxis* and head up the same road I've driven down. This time, it feels like we're in a motorcycle rally up the busy street. "What do you think of the pacification?" I ask her, sitting on top of the favela and looking out over the city. "The pacification?!" She scoffs. "You know, Rocinha hasn't been pacified. You can't call it pacification if it doesn't bring peace. The police have moved in, but the traffickers haven't moved out, so now it's worse than before." After Amarildo the situation has only worsened. The police can't keep the peace the way the traffickers were able to. Many neighbors feel nostalgia for the time before pacification. "Now even small children are getting raped here. That would *never* have happened under the rule of the traffickers." The police can't follow you everywhere, she explains, so the people who used to be too afraid to do things like that aren't afraid anymore.

In the middle of Rocinha, the government has built a multicolored and modern apartment complex. It's symmetrical and clean architecture stands out against the organic construction of the houses around it. The apartments were built to relocate neighbors who had to move when the new road was opened as a part of a recent state initiative to accelerate the urbanization of the favelas. From where we're standing, the new buildings look nice and orderly. Between them there is a spacious walkway with benches and palm trees. I ask Larissa whether the relocated families are happy with their new homes. "Well, some are, and some aren't. The ones who had bigger apartments before are not particularly happy." The area where Larissa lives is a lot safer than some of the alleys further up the hill, where confrontations between police and traffickers are frequent. I tell her that I saw the *caveirão* on my way here and ask if that's a common sight. "A *caveirão*? No, that's not common. Where did you see it? Further up in the favela?" I point and explain as we walk past the place where the armored car had been a moment earlier. "Oh... Yes, it happens,"

she says. Some areas are still prone to confrontations between police and gang-members.

Larissa explains that there is still a lot of prejudice towards the favelas and its residents: “People from the asfalto are afraid to come here. They think they’ll be robbed, but nobody gets robbed here. The favela is full of thieves, but they go other places to steal. To Copacabana, Ipanema, and Leme. Here, you’re just another face in the crowd.” Larissa stops. “Take a picture!” We are standing in the middle of *Rua Nova* (New Road). The music is pumping across the street which is brimming with life. Neighbors have planted trees and bushes along the road, and now they are sitting out in this urban garden chatting and sipping beer. In the horizon, looming over us as the last daylight fades, lies *Pedra da Gávea* with its unmistakable pancake-shaped mountain top casting its shade towards the Atlantic Ocean. Since my arrival in Rio, my own fears and preconceptions have been challenged. I recall how nervous I was when I first stepped out of the taxi in Babilonia. In hindsight, it was unwarranted, and it makes me reflect on how my first encounter with the city has been shaped by essentializing representations of the favela and the people who live there.

## Conclusion: Civilizing Violence

When I arrived in Rio in December 2014, I was forced to face my own prejudice and orientaling representations of the favelas. I soon realized that the images they evoked in me were based on outsider perspectives that cast favela residents as either dangerous or vulnerable—imaginarities that in both cases have a powerful othering effect: Justifying violent “interventions” by police or infantilizing treatment by other state institutions and NGO’s. In most of these instances, the favelas and their residents are framed as a series of “problems” that need to be solved by outsiders (see Valladares 2000; Machado da Silva 2002, 2010; Magalhães 2013; Larkins 2015). This outsiders’ gaze on the favelas shaped my initial interactions with the people I met. Reading between the lines of my first conversations with my new neighbors, it’s as if I am trying

to determine whether they are better off with or without the UPPs—regardless of whether policing is felt as a pressing issue by those who live there. Following the return of democracy in 1985, understandings of the “favela problem” as centered around violent crime and armed drug trade has shaped the design and implementation of “interventions” such as the UPPs, leaving many of the challenges perceived by the people living in the favelas unaddressed.<sup>9</sup>

Another characteristic of orientalism (Said 1979) is homogenization: A tendency to pin down the other in a fixed, essentialized identity. Are people living in the favelas supportive of the police or traffickers? Are they honest workers or thugs? Do they trust the formal justice system, or do they rely on popular justice? In all these questions, which conditioned my first encounters with the neighbors of Babilonia, they are treated as a homogeneous population, always identical to themselves (c.f. Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2021). My interactions with João, Maria, and Beto, as well as many other *favelados* (a derogatory term that is often used as a badge of honor among people from the favelas) showed me the heterogeneity and complexity of identities, values, dreams, practices, ways of life, and opinions that exist within the favelas—the same heterogeneity that exists on the *asfalto*. Like Beto’s answer when I pressed him on the favela residents’ stance on the police: *It depends*. Thus, in my ethnographic account of Babilonia and the other favelas I visited, I have tried to show the diversity of subjectivities, experiences, and positions that exist there; the changing socioeconomic status and demographic of its residents; and the different understandings of violence, conflict, and policing within pacified communities.

I have also touched on the impact and reception of the state-run welfare program Bolsa Familia which Maria, a evangelical devotee, rejected on the grounds that it made life “too easy” for young generations. It is likely that her opinion was shaped by a religious ethos of suffering as a way to redemption, but importantly, she shows us how the Workers

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<sup>9</sup> The configuration of the “favela problem” through the optics of urban violence is fairly recent (see Machado da Silva 2002, 2010). Historically, they have been associated with different “problems” such as social disorder and public health concerns (see Magalhães 2013; Ystanes and Salem 2020; Ystanes and Magalhães 2020).

Party welfare policies reshaped social hierarchies on a family level.<sup>10</sup> Not only did Bolsa Familia make it “easier” for younger generations but it also shifted the power dynamics between husband and wife as the program relied on direct cash transfers to mothers. Acknowledging how the politics of inclusion disturbed social hierarchies, especially those of the home and family, is important to understand the strong rejection of the Worker Party which Bolsonaro capitalized on (Duarte and Martínez-Moreno 2023; see Gregori, forthcoming; Martínez-Moreno 2023). Both Maria and the family that employed her were affected by these changes: For Maria, Bolsa Familia was perceived as undermining her hard work, while the rights that she had gained in relation to her employer challenged her mistress’ entitlement and taken-for-granted privilege—expressed in the casual way in which she laid Maria off, while still expecting her to attend to her whims.

The changing consumption patterns among favela residents that Maria describes are one of the most visible aspects of the increased quality of life for many of Brazil’s urban poor while the Worker’s Party ruled. During this period the urbanization of favelas accelerated as new schools, health centers, and libraries were built inside different communities. However, when people were asked to explain this increase in quality of life, they seldom gave the credit to the politicians: Rather, many had adopted a (protestant) work ethic that explained this as the fruits of their own hard work or the intervention of God (Meirelles and Athayde 2014).

A second conclusion to be drawn from the ethnography presented in this chapter relates to the changes that the pacification produced in the exercise and expression of what Machado da Silva (2004) has described as the grammar of “violent sociability”—i.e. social relations mediated through the language of force (see also Machado da Silva and Menezes 2020). While problematic in its assumption that violent sociability is a feature characteristic of the favelas (as it reproduces tropes of savagery;

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<sup>10</sup> In the evangelical churches, suffering, and especially the suffering of women, is configured as a redemptive quality and moral purification ritual that erases the stigma of being from the favela. According to the same logic, torture becomes socially acceptable, as part of the necessary process of redemption and conversion that drug traffickers and thugs need to go through in order to become “good citizens” (*cidadãos de bem*) (Birman 2019).

can easily be seen as the result of state absence rather than of state practices; and ignores the non-violent forms of sociality that shape these self-governed spaces), it captures the outsiders view of the favela quite well, and it certainly describes the kind of formation that was targeted for intervention at the UPPs. As a civilizing project, the pacification was meant to “tame” the violent sociability or “warrior ethos” (Zaluar 2010) of the favelas but also within the police, and has been analyzed as a “rationalization” of violent social scripts and “modernization” of illicit economies (Machado da Silva and Menezes 2020; Soares 2011).<sup>11</sup> I will return to this point in subsequent chapters.

In other words, the pacification project relied on the idea of the favelas as problematic territories that needed to be “civilized” through solutions designed by outsiders—saviors who could “bring peace” and “investments” to “pacified” communities. In this vein, scholars have noted how one of the immediate effects of the UPPs was the formalization of a larger part of the favela economy (in particular public services such as light and internet) (da Cunha and Mello 2011; Sørbøe 2013). Furthermore, the project produced a dramatic increase in the value of real estate in and close to pacified areas. It should be no surprise then, that with few exceptions, most UPPs were established close to future Olympic venues and developing urban areas. Thus, the dynamics of war and peace created business opportunities for entrepreneurs and investors through the fluctuations that it produced in the local real estate market and attracted foreign investments (see Braathen 2013; Freeman 2012; Nordstrom 2004; Williamson 2016). This points to another one of the “modernizing” elements of the pacification policy: The regularization and formalization of favela territories and economies clearly express what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as territorializing *state dynamics*—the implementation of a new set of rules in areas that had been perceived as lawless and ungoverned (Salem and Bertelsen 2020).

In my conversation with Paulo, I struggled to align his critique of the Brazilian government as deeply racist with the poverty alleviation and socially inclusive politics of the PT-government and the decreasing

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<sup>11</sup> In the sense of a gradual and partial abandonment of the logic of armed confrontations in favor of practices that were not grounded in armed territorial control, e.g. increasing surveillance and negotiations.



levels of inequality in Brazil in the decade prior to my arrival in Rio. Paulo reminded me that while the national government was left-leaning, the State government of Rio de Janeiro, who implemented the pacification policy, was ruled by the right. However, the tensions between inclusive social policies and racialized policing are difficult to grapple through the division of the political field in right and left. Intellectuals have offered different concepts to describe the sociopolitical realities of Brazil, from the notion of a “disjunctive democracy” (Holston 2007) which highlights the uneven application of democratic values and practices according to social hierarchies, or that of “violent pluralism” (Arias and Goldstein 2010) which places emphasis on the way violence is an inherent part of political mediation in Latin American democracies, to the work of Brazilian scholars like Roberto DaMatta (2020) and Lilia Moritz Schwarcz (2019) who have studied the history of Brazilian authoritarianism, and how it manifests in the present.

In Brazil, black intellectuals like Abdias do Nascimento (1978, 1989) and Leila Gonzalez (1988) have been especially critical of arguments that cast colonial projects as beneficial to the colonized, for example through development, and the pacification rhetoric of bringing peace and social inclusion to the favelas certainly corresponds with this kind of reasoning (Ystanes and Salem 2020). I have just shown how the UPPs represent an intensification of militarized policing in the favelas: As a strategy of policing that sought to solve public security challenges through the armed suppression of drug traffickers, it perpetuated the logic of war against territories and subjects symbolically coded as black. But the UPP project also expressed the tension between two different visions of Brazil—a liberal vision and an authoritarian one. These are complementary rather than mutually exclusive positions: Militarization and racialized warfare are not the purview of authoritarian systems but part and parcel of liberal states and in particular neoliberal regimes of governance, for example, through the exercise of civilizing violence (see, e.g. Mbembe 2003). However, authoritarian and liberal systems tend to organize and legitimize violence in different ways, and in the

following chapters, I will show how the war machine and state dynamics-framework might open for an analysis that can explain some of the apparent contradictions manifested at the UPPs.

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# 3

## Policing in Rio de Janeiro

A young black man stops me on the street. He appears to be around 20 and is only wearing a pair of worn Bermuda shorts. Can I buy him something to eat? He asks unabashed. I rummage through my pockets, where I have enough coins to buy him something from the kiosk at the corner. “Do you want a hot dog?” I ask. He does. He comes from Duque de Caxias, Rio’s northern suburbs. Usually, he sells caipirinhas on the beach, he tells me, as if to assert that he’s a *trabalhador*—an honest worker. Finishing his day’s work, he had sat down on the curb to smoke a joint. The police had stopped him, taking the weed, his money, and his cell phone. I’m surprised: “Oh, wow, is that common?” He nods and asks me what I do. “I am a social anthropologist. Do you know what that is?” He does not, so I explain. “Ah, so you’re a kind of detective?” I laugh. Yes, sure: I’m a detective. I like the sound of that (Fig. 3.1).





Fig. 3.1 A favela on a hillside above the asfalto in Copacabana, March 2023

## The Police and the Elites

I decide to reach out to Marcelo Freixo, deputy for the socialist party PSOL (*Partido Socialismo e Liberdade*) at Rio de Janeiro's Legislative Assembly (*Assambleia Legislativa do Estado de Rio de Janeiro*, ALERJ) and leader of the assembly's Human Rights Committee. He was elected in 2007 and rose to fame in 2008 after leading the parliamentary commission that mapped the growth of paramilitary groups in western Rio. The commission published a report that uncovered close bonds between paramilitary militias, the Military Police, and elected politicians. Freixo became known across Brazil and is despised by many officers within the police. He puts me in contact with one of the investigators of the report on the militias, Vinicius George.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Parliamentary Commission's Report on the militias was a turning point regarding the public awareness and attention to the growth and expansion of paramilitary groups in western Rio. It found, among other things, that the paramilitaries had links with members of the City Council as well as Rio's police forces (see Freixo et al. 2008). The blockbuster movie *Tropa de Elite II*

Vinicius is a parliamentary advisor at Freixo's office. He is a tall and slender man, and casually escorts me through the Legislative Assembly and into his cubicle. Before Vinicius got involved in politics, he worked as a police detective—not in the Military Police, but in the Civil Police. In Brazil, this is an important distinction: The Military Police is not a branch of the Armed Forces, but an independent police institution tasked with ostensive street patrol and reactive policing. It would perhaps be more accurate to call them a militarized police force. The Civil Police, on the other hand, is investigative and mainly centered around detective work. Although, ideally, the two forces complement each other, in practice there is significant institutional friction between them. Widespread corruption in both forces and unclear distinctions between areas of responsibility strain trust between the forces, if such a trust exists at all.<sup>2</sup>

When Vinicius started his career at the police in the 90s, violence reached record levels every week. Meanwhile the local police forces, both civil and military, were involved in a series of scandals of international proportions. In July 1993, for instance, officers from the Military Police executed eight homeless children and one adult sleeping on the sidewalk next to the Candelaria-cathedral in the city center. The execution was ordered by local business owners who felt that the presence of homeless

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draws on the findings of the Parliamentary Commission's Report on the militias (both Freixo and George were involved in the production of the movie).

<sup>2</sup> In Brazil, policing is divided between the Federal Police on a national level, in charge of investigating federal crimes, and the Civil Police and Military Police on a state level. While the Civil Police is in charge of investigations, the Military Police is in charge of day-to-day patrol. As a military institution, the Military Police is characterized by a hierarchical command structure and strict disciplinary code of conduct. The institutional hierarchy is based on the division between low-ranking *praças* and high-ranking *oficiais*. This produces tensions within the police and the multiplicity of police institutions, and their internal fragmentation challenges the attempt to translate the Portuguese terms that the police use on themselves. Furthermore, some terms were alternately used by the research participants to refer to the same concept. For instance, *o policial*, *o policial militar*, *o militar*, *o soldado*, *o oficial*, *o comandante*, and *a praça* were all different ways to refer to police officers. To distinguish between the different police forces and capture the details of the institutional hierarchy of the Military Police, I have chosen to adopt the following terminology in this book. *Policial* (police officer): in Brazil, the term generally refers to the Military Police, while Civil Police are called *delegados* (deputies or commissioners). *Oficial* (commanding officer): high-ranking officers that carry out commanding functions within the Military Police. *Praça* (patrol officer): low-ranking policemen that compose most of the staff at the Military Police and are responsible for patrol duties and administrative chores. Sometimes I also address police officers through their formal rank, as either Soldier, Corporal, or Colonel, etc. (Salem 2016).

children was bad for business. Later that year, another group of military police officers murdered 21 civilians in the favela Vigário Geral. This massacre was a spectacular performance of collective punishment in retribution for the murder of four police officers by the gang that controlled the favela two days earlier (see, e.g. Rodrigues 2014). Similar practices were common among Civil Police officers as well: In the 90s, detectives from the police's anti-kidnapping unit were responsible for a series of kidnappings, extorting family members for money through the crimes that they were supposed to investigate.

Vinicius pulls his chair out from behind the desk and sits down next to me. His face is marked by decades under the tropical sun, and he talks with a vigor that makes him sound a lot younger than his graying hair and receding hairline suggests. Speaking in an uninterrupted flow of words, his Socratic monologue is full of rhetorical questions. The history of the Brazilian police started here in Rio de Janeiro he begins. In 1807, when Napoleon invaded Portugal, the Portuguese king and court fled to Brazil: Fifteen thousand clergymen and aristocrats settled down in Rio! "The king was furious, but this was the only place they could come!" Vinicius laughs. The court needed a place to live, but the city was not prepared for such a rapid and immense increase in population. Many local aristocrats were thrown out of their houses to make room for the newly arrived Portuguese, making a less-than-optimal starting point for the relationship between the locals and the new foreign elite.

In those days, black slaves made out a third of the total number of the country's inhabitants, with Rio de Janeiro as one of the most important port cities of the Transatlantic slave trade. Just a couple of years prior to the arrival of the Portuguese crown, the slave revolt of Haiti had succeeded in expelling the French colonizers and logically, the Portuguese were afraid that the same would happen here. To calm their anxieties, one of the first state institutions to be established by the crown upon settling in Rio in 1808 was the police: The year after the crown's arrival, in 1809, the Royal Guard Order was created.<sup>3</sup> This was the predecessor

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Holloway's (1993) work *Policing Rio de Janeiro: Repression and Resistance in a 19th-Century City* offers one of the most comprehensive accounts of the origins of the Military Police. Holloway examines historical records from the first decades of the 1800s register no arrests of white Europeans, as Rio's police forces were conceived to protect the interests of the

of the Military Police: “And so begins the history of the Brazilian state,” Vinicius exclaims. “With the militarization of the state apparatus. Since then, the police and legal courts supported the King and Royal Court and controlled the rest of the people—first and foremost the poor, the beggars, the unemployed. They were all seen as worthless criminals. And that is the way it has been for 200 years. Instead of a King and court, we now have a Governor and the elites. The names have changed, but the logic remains the same: You have a state that serves a minority and controls the masses. But in order to control the masses... Ha! That is not easy! You must instill fear in the people.” Vinicius raises his voice, emphasizing each word: “Fear is a hammer of a tool for domination. People who live in fear can be controlled—you see?”

From its onset, the Brazilian state was developed in line with a military model of state, he explains. This has put its mark on the history of the country. The military dictatorship that lasted from 1964 to 1985 was the last expression of this militaristic model. “With such great inequality as there is here—such a terribly uneven distribution of resources—it follows from the military logic that one needs to maintain control, right? The state is at the *service* of two million people and *controls* two *hundred* million people. And it does this through a militarized logic.” He pauses to catch his breath. “What, then, is this militarized logic?” he asks rhetorically. “The militarized logic is the logic of war! The logic of battle! With enemies to be crushed, territories to be occupied or *pacified*. Do you understand?”<sup>4</sup>

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white, wealthy elite and to uphold a national order founded on slavery and racism. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, policing served to protect elite interests, repress public protests, and keep the dispossessed in check—also following the abolition of slavery in 1888 (Ystanes and Salem 2020; see Mingardi 2015).

<sup>4</sup> The social acceptance of the high levels of police violence in Rio have been analyzed by Michel Misse (2008), who notes how police, vigilante groups, and criminals have been locked in what can best be described as an arms race since the 1950s, when armed assaults became commonplace while police officers formed death squads that hunted down and killed criminals. While he refers to the effects of this arms race and the socioeconomic inequalities in Rio through the notion of the social accumulation of violence, scholars such as Márcia P. Leite (2000, 2012) and Caroline Grillo (2019) has analyzed how understanding policing through the optics of war has shaped the dynamics of armed violence in Rio in the decades following the return of democracy.

I ask him whether the term pacification does not imply a goal of making peace.<sup>5</sup> “Peace, yes!” he answers bluntly: “Great, everybody wants peace. Then we must stop inventing wars! Not provoking new wars! Isn’t that easier? If we don’t invent the war, we don’t need to pacify, you know? It may seem like a crazy sentence, but that’s what it is, right? Who invents the war? Why do we pacify? If we are going to pacify something it is because that thing is in a state of war, isn’t it?” I nod. “What war? What is the war? War against drugs? That’s it, it’s the local version of the famous war against drugs, isn’t it? And who is the traficante, [...] what is the locus of the war against drugs here?” I wait for him to reply to his own question: “The favelas!”

Vinicius allows the sentence to sink in. “It’s curious, right? There’s only drug trafficking in the favela, right? Is that it? Isn’t there in Zonal Sul? Isn’t there in Rio Branco?” he says, referring to Rio’s financial district. “*Ah, but there are weapons in the favela!*” Vinicius makes himself his own conversation partner and critic. “Are there weapons, is there ammunition? There is ammunition, it’s true, that’s a problem, right? [...] Now, the [real] question: Who is it that put those weapons, that ammunition in the hands of the [...] traficante favelado, right?” He briefly pauses as if he’s waiting for a response. “The corrupt military, the corrupt police!” He yells out the answer. “There are no weapons nor ammunition that gets in the hands of a trafficker in the favela, or of a car thief from the favela, or of a kidnapper from the favela, [...] that [haven’t gotten there] by the hand of the military—I am talking about the armed forces as well—or from corrupt police officers.<sup>6</sup> Are you getting why I’m

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<sup>5</sup> A somewhat naïve observation on my behalf. In Brazil, the concept of pacification has historically been used to describe the process whereby European colonizers violently subdued the indigenous populations. An idyllic interpretation of the concept suggests that this was a process of “civilizing” and “including” these populations into a nascent Brazilian society, while critical scholarship has documented the genocidal dynamics of the practices referred to as “pacification” (de Oliveira 2014; see also Neocleous 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Media coverage have created the impression that the weapons that are seized from criminal organizations in Rio de Janeiro originate from the state’s security forces (police and military), while different reports conclude that the vast majority of the nationally produced weapons seized from criminal groups are weapons that have been exported to neighboring countries and re-introduced to Brazil, although a huge proportion of these weapons are normally used by Brazil’s state security forces. Nonetheless, since the ammunition used by the Brazilian police and armed forces is marked, it is possible to verify that a significant proportion of the ammunition

saying what I'm saying? If we don't invent war, we don't need to pacify, right?" My Portuguese is still patchy, and I send a grateful glance at the voice-recorder. "It's better not to invent. [I've got] nothing against the pacification! *Pô*, reduce the lethality... So, we arm the *traficante* from the favela, we provide [him] with ammunition regularly, sometimes we go there to wage war with him, against him. Isn't it better not to arm [him], not to munition him?"

He laughs, before he changes his voice in objection to his own reasoning: "*Ah, but the traficante is the owner of the favela.* Is he the owner of the favela? The *owner* of the favela? He lives until he is maybe 24, at most, and then dies or goes to jail; he lives until he's 24 at the most, dies or is imprisoned. There you have Nêm, Nêm from Rocinha, then it's Dem, then comes Zem, and then comes Dum, Lum, Gum, right? Easily replaceable pieces. He is the owner. Short life: [...] Either he dies at the hand of the police, or he dies at the hand of the *traficante*, or he goes to jail. [...] He is the owner, ok, he is the owner, and he is obliged to pay *arrego*, right? You already know what *arrego* is, bribes to the police, weekly, every other week, right? Primarily for the MP (Military Police), right? If I'm the owner of something, do I have to pay someone else to stay in my place? How does that work, huh? [He] isn't the owner of anything! That's a lie, that's an invention of the police, of the media, of the politicians, to increase the value: The value of the *arrego*.<sup>7</sup> The drug trafficker is not the owner of anything. He is the tenant of the moment. He has rented that little spot, for as long as that lasts."

Vinicius leans forward, lowering his voice, as if he's about to let me in on a secret.

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used by criminal groups originates from the state's security forces, such as the bullets that were used to assassinate Marielle Franco and Anderson Gomes in March 2018 (Gonçalves and Kenkel 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Michel Misse (2008) describes the practice of *arrego* as extortion rather than bribes, signaling how the police administers the illegal markets of Rio's favelas rather than simply turning a blind eye. His uses the notion of "political merchandise" to account for the fact that the exchange, apart from money, usually involves a strategic negotiation which is political but not necessarily with the state. These negotiations, Misse (2008: 382) claims, span from practices that could be considered a form of clientelism, the protection of illegal markets, and extortion (see also Grillo 2013).

“But there I come: I invent the war, I arrange it, I arm, I bribe, I let myself be bribed, and afterwards...” He leaves the words hanging. “That’s why a lot of police officers go crazy. At some point they realize: *Wait a minute, I’m just standing here drying ice.* Have you heard that expression?” I nod. Drying ice, or *enxugando gelo* is a metaphor for useless work: As one layer of ice is dried up, the next layer is already melting. He senses my confusion and understands that he’s been rushing forward too quickly: “Listen, when you start working in the police, you are young and full of ideals. What do you want? You want to do good work: Investigate and solve crimes so that those responsible can be judged in the courts and punished according to the law. That’s how you create a safe society. But then you get inside the force and start to discover a lot of things you did not expect. You see that the people you work for answer to somebody higher up in the system, in the leadership of the police, in the State Secretary of Security, in the Governmental palace. Do you get me? Then it dawns on you that there is an established system for corruption that is controlled from the top, and if you try to step outside of that system, everything is blocked. You can’t do it: You will be persecuted [by your superiors]. At certain times, you *might* achieve it.” Then hell breaks loose: Your boss relocates you to another division, then another one. You lose access to the resources you need to do your work—they are taken away from you. With time, you start to understand how the system works, and your desire to change it grows.” Vinicius’ voice is serious.

“The people in the political system of course want things to stay the way they are. They just don’t say it. How else do you explain that the numbers of crime in the center of Barra da Tijuaca, Ipanema, Copacabana and Leblon,” he lists Rio’s wealthy districts, “are almost at Norwegian levels! Or Belgian, rather, because Norway is really an exception. But it’s like Belgia, right? If you look at the closed cases in the southern areas of Rio de Janeiro—Belgium—you see that most of them are solved.” There’s less crime and more solved cases there. But if you look at *Zona Oeste, Norte, Baixada Fluminense*—the poor suburbs—the crime rates rise to absurdly high levels, while the number of solved cases falls to absurdly low levels. “Why is it like that?” he asks rhetorically: “It’s very simple! Who lives there? One place is inhabited by us—mainly white, educated, middle and upper classes. Here, despite of how much

we complain and protest the lack of security, there is little crime and a high rate of resolution. But when we look to the other areas, the numbers are of opposite proportions. There you'll find inhabitants who haven't finished elementary school, they are black, *nordestinos*, right? The lower classes." Vinicius interrupts himself: "*Belindia!* Some use that term: *Belindia*, a mix of Belgium and India.<sup>8</sup> To the south of Rio, you have Belgium and to the north and west lies India. We have both extremes within the same city. Why does the system work in one place, and not in the other?"

"The guy who sits there in the Guanabara-palace—the governmental palace—he knows all this. The diagnosis, the analysis, is clear. He knows what it takes! But here in Brazil we have elections every second year—local elections, governmental elections, and national elections—so there is one election after the other. That has some positive dimensions but negative ones as well. The police are constantly used for campaigning: To disciplining voters, to finance campaigns through corruption, and so on. This is a very common use of the police in our state. Here in the capital, we see less of it, but if you travel outside Rio's city limits it becomes very obvious. In the suburbs, the power of the Commissioner (in the Civil Police) or Commander (in the Military Police) is very big. Of course: They control the guns and are used in politics and during elections, either to control the voters by force or to gather funds for the campaigns of the political parties. Do you understand?"

Vinicius stresses his point with an example: "Damn it, I remember one time—just so that you understand how this works in real life—one of the demands put forward by Hélio Luiz (the chief of the Civil Police during Marcelo Alencar's period as governor in the nineties). He told the governor: *Okay, I'll be your chief, but you'll have to keep your mayors and members of Parliament in check.* Why did he say this? Because the members of Parliament demanded to select the [civil] police Commissioners and [military police] Commanders of their respective areas!" "Why?" I ask with a puzzled look. "*Why?* To be able to control the voters by force! And to be able to use them as *caixa dois!*" *Caixa dois*

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<sup>8</sup> The name *Belindia* to describe the contrasting realities of Brazil was coined in 1974 by the economist Edmar Lisboa Bacha. He attributed the diverging conditions in living standards to the military dictatorship.



or second cashier, is a euphemism for the cash that has been collected through bribes or extortions.<sup>9</sup> “The governor had to gather all the Parliamentary deputies and all his mayors to tell them *forget about the police, forget about the apparatus of security*. Do you understand what this means, in practical terms? It means: *Get your funds elsewhere, use and abuse the teachers, doctors, schools, hospitals, traffic departments, but not the police. The police can no longer be used*. Am I explaining this in a way you can understand?” Vinicius ask. I nod slowly.

“Let me tell you another story,” he says. “When Anthony Garotinho was Governor (from 1999 to 2002) many cabinet members wanted me to have a role in his government. I said no, I don’t want to. *Muito obrigado*. Thanks for the invitation, but I’m going to the Legislative Assembly with Hélio Luiz”—the former chief of police had been elected by the people at that point. “So, then I stayed here for four years. Hélio Luiz didn’t want to keep on going. He quit, retired, and I returned to the police.” Garotinho’s government had been re-elected, but with Rosinha Garotinho, Anthony’s wife, behind the wheel. Once again, Vinicius was asked to work in the government: “Rosinha invited me to a meeting at the palace. I thought, *great, I’ll start working in the government, managing federal security politics, leading the police, the secretary of public security something like that*. Then I said: *Listen to me, it’s okay, I have nothing against that. I’ll work anywhere, because I’m a government employee in Rio de Janeiro, so I will do my work. But you know what you’re going to get: Everybody’s going to get a beating, whether they are crooks from the street or crooks wearing suits. It’s will not just be the traffickers from the favela who will get a beating. Oh no! We will give it to the traffickers in Zona Sul, we will give it to the bicheiros (people making money off illegal gambling) beatings to the militia, to corrupt mayors and members of the Legislative Assembly: We will hand out beatings to everyone. You know how I want it...* Damn it, this was a meeting I had been invited to at the governmental palace! And this is how Garotinho answered me: *Damn it, that won’t work! [...] Damn it, we must pay the bills from the election last year, and*

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<sup>9</sup> What Michel Misse (2006) refers to as “political merchandise” (I will return to these dynamics in Chapter 8: A World of Warfare).

*next year is the local election!* So I told Garotinho *then I wish you good luck, because I'm out.* Do you get it?"

Vinicius continues: "This means that a big part—maybe the biggest part—of the money from corruption within the police flows upwards in the system. It makes its way to the palaces, the political parties, to the campaigns. So, if this mechanism, in all honesty, works very efficiently, how can the police function so badly?" He raises his voice. "*Mentira!* Lies! The police functions damn well! The police were created to follow the *actual* orders being given, and they are *very good* at this." Vinicius asks me another question: "My friend, have a look and tell me if the police aren't offering protection to the Governor, to the elites? Tell me if they don't function as *caixa dois* during elections? Tell me if they aren't protecting the friends of 'the king' when they must, if they aren't biting the enemies of the king when they must. Do you understand what I'm saying? The police aren't doing a good job by the criteria of the Constitution and legal system, but all of that—even what's in the Constitution—is rhetoric. It's formalized rhetoric, but still very much rhetoric."<sup>10</sup>

"The police are like Rex!" I look at Vinicius with confusion. "Rex, you know that dog..." It dawns on me that he is referring to the old German TV show about Rex the police dog. Yes, I remember Rex. "The dog bites his enemies and protects his friends. If he is well behaved," Vinicius distorts his voice, "*here's another bone, some milk.* Is he behaving badly? If so, he'll be punished, won't he? The police have no autonomy."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This two-tire system permeates the Brazilian state apparatuses, from police to judiciary. It is what scholars like Roberto Kant de Lima (1995) have referred to as the difference between *doctrine* and *practice*, or what James Holston describes with his notion of *disjunctive democracy* (see also the distinction between theory and practice in Pires and Albernaz 2022). This separation of rhetoric, doctrine, or theory on the one hand, and practice on the other, signals the entanglement of social hierarchies and the law. While the figures of traditional (white patriarchal) authority are above the law, police officers "apply the law as a weapon against people at the lower ranks of the social hierarchy, such as favela residents" (Salem and Larkins 2021; see also Da Matta 1977).

<sup>11</sup> This "dog metaphor" (to paraphrase Marcia P. Leite) was frequently employed to describe the hierarchical relations between those who gave the order of attack and those who executed the violence. While Vinicius mentions the police dog Rex, the metaphor was usually evoked through the notion of a pitbull (crazy to bite, loyal to his owner). It was used not only by police officers to describe the relation to their commanders but also by Bolsonaro to describe the relation to his sons (see Chapter 6: Violent Becomings and Chapter 9: The War-Machine).

Everything depends on the government.” I’m still processing the information, it is far from how I have imagined the police’s role, and Vinicius can tell: “Listen, the police in Rio like to say that they are the ones who kill the most and die the most, right? This is true—there is research that shows it. But do you know why they are the ones that kill the most in the world? Because they are ordered to kill!” I have heard this before but have a hard time understanding that state politicians in a democracy are ordering the police to kill criminals. “How can they do that?” I ask. “I mean, how are they giving the orders?” “You won’t see a Governor on TV saying *kill all the bastards*. The orders are given in the corridors of the palace. How, you ask? Through whoever the governor elects when he is inaugurated. You can tell it by their names: *That Coronel kills, that Commissioner is corrupt*. Just by looking at the names you can tell what music you’re supposed to dance to. The police officers know how to read these messages. The soldiers on the frontlines know how to read this. By reading the chain of command they know when they are allowed to kill *more* or to kill *less*, when there’s permissiveness for corruption and when they must be honest. And when the Governor wants it he gives the orders in the palace corridors. But of course, nobody will state this publicly.”

“Take Sergio Cabral, for instance. He started his time as governor by sending the police out to kill: *Pá, pá, pá, pá!*” Vinicius imitates the sound of shooting. Cabral was instated as governor in 2007, and the first year he was in power was also the most violent year in the history of Rio’s police forces. “Today, he has implemented the UPPs, right? Isn’t that odd? Makes you ask yourself: *Why is he doing this?* It’s quite simply because the Governor palace asked for opinion polls to determine what most of society wants—what the opinion influencers want. Then they look at what the economic contributors to the election campaigns want, put it all together in a basket and decide what their response will be. Do you get it?” I nod. “So, what was the logic behind the UPPs?” I ask.

“I’ll tell you how the UPPs came to be: Cabral’s government was ruffling feathers [...] sending the police to cause havoc, according to the logic that first you have to stress [the situation] in order to calm it down later—a mode of action similar to what they did in Colombia, in Cali, Medellín—they went there and copied that model. Just that

here we had already been stressing [the situation] for decades: There's no room to continue stressing [it], right? There's over-stress here. What happened? The federal government, at the time Lula was President, had given all its support to Sergio Cabral (Governor in Rio from 2007 to 2014). The reason for this, honestly, was that they wanted to neutralize Garotinho, the former Governor, who was a threat to Lula on a national level." Garotinho ended up in third place during the elections in 2002, when Lula came to power and tried to run again in 2006. "The problem was that the security politics of Lula's national government were diametrically opposed to the politics of the State government of Rio de Janeiro. In the end, the Minister of Justice said that enough was enough: '*Listen here, damn it, this won't do. We have a program, we have a political platform, and you're doing the opposite! Damn it, the President supports you, we send you money! Either you change course, or we'll pull our support!*'"

"The police leadership also put pressure on the Governor. There were people in the police that were saying '*We can't keep on like this, there's no use in this, Governor!*' The Governor answered: '*Shut up, go to hell, kill the bastards!*'" I must have been looking confused because Vinicius quickly adds: "I'm not making this up—this is exactly how it went down. Of course, in closed meetings." He goes on: "Part of the civil society and the Human Rights-organizations were also putting pressure on them, right? But the real reason why Cabral's government finally bent to the pressure, even if only rhetorically, were election politics. It wasn't because he believed in the project, it was because he was forced to do it. And when he understood that he didn't have a choice, he thought: '*Now that I have to do this, I'll use it for my own gain among the media and the voters.*' And he did gain from it! He was re-elected because of the pacification, because of that banner..."

Even if the UPPs successfully reduce police violence, the project won't solve the public security challenges of Rio, Vinicius says: "Is the pacification a valid intervention?" he asks rhetorically. "Yes, but only in a limited time and space. And even then, it is only valid as a support while establishing other state and social institutions. We need kindergartens, schools, education for the youth, right? We must bring in health-clinics, civil society institutions, entrepreneurs, and so on. The police should only stay for as short as they possibly can, aiding the other institutions."

He stops: “None of this happened. And seeing as the politicians turned a legitimate, temporary, tactical police intervention into a permanent public security miracle solution which helped them win elections, the project ended up as an election campaign strategy. Everybody wanted the UPPs! And so, they had to establish new UPPs. Do we have enough police officers for that? Do we?” I have a guess at the answer. “No?” “We don’t!” Vinicius consents. “So, what do we do then? We make a furnace that spews out an endless supply of police officers. And thus, the training of the Military Police which was bad to begin with got even worse. The police training time was shortened, and the quality and content got worse. That makes for terrible police officers—like undercooked spaghetti, right?”

Vinicius’ words keep churning in my head. How can I make sense of all of this? The power play and political horse-trades he describes are far from what I have imagined, despite what I already know about the Brazilian police. They describe institutional dynamics that cannot be explained away as the doings of the *banda podre da policia* (the rotten group of the police)—of a few “rotten apples.” On the one hand, Brazil appears as a country undergoing a process of modernization. The pressure from the federal government, civil society, and leaders within the police attest to this. On the other, as an institution deeply entwined with a personalistic political culture, its practices generally respond to the private interests of the politicians in power. It seems like the UPPs are the hybrid result of various intersecting interests and that they cannot be defined according to a single logic.<sup>12</sup>

“This conversation that I’m having with you now, I also had ten years ago and twenty years ago,” Vinicius says. “Soon, I’ll retire. I’ve witnessed moments when things have gotten better and others when things have

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<sup>12</sup> Vinicius account is, of course, a simplification of the complex dynamics that contributed to the establishment of the UPPs, but it shows how the project was the result of a political horse-trade between modernizing forces within the Brazilian state apparatus (including reform oriented police leaders who recognized the complete failure of war-oriented forms of policing from a public security perspective) and forces that defended a continuation of a hard-handed and aggressive approach to crime as well as the patrimonial dynamics (i.e. the private interests or war machine dynamics) of the state. I discuss the complexities of the origins of the pacification project throughout the book, but in particular in Chapters 1, 4, 7, and 8 (see, e.g. Menezes 2015; Muniz and Albernaz 2015).

gotten worse. Normally, it gets worse rather than better. When things are really bad, the politicians are forced to alleviate some of the pressure and allow people to catch their breath. Then it gets a little better. Did things get a little better? Okay, back to how things were before... This is how it goes—we're stuck with this: Bad times that last a long time, interspersed with short moments where we can catch some breath. Let's put it like that. The police officers also understand this," Vinicius says. And this is where the militia enters the picture: "The police officer understands that he is there to try to handle a situation while the reasons that cause the situation are not being addressed. He can't understand all the connections we are discussing here, analyze them, draw historical continuities, see the whole, the different contributing factors, right? He can't. But *instinctively*, he understands that what he is doing doesn't serve PN. Have you heard what PN means?" I haven't. "*Porra nenhuma*—fuck all, absolutely nothing. It doesn't work at all. And then? What does the police officer do when he discovers that what he is trying to do doesn't work? He earns very little but is in the middle of it all and must keep on patrolling. Correct?" I nod. "Great, then that's his job. Then, suddenly, a pregnant woman walks up to him. She is about to give birth. Where does he take her? There is no delivery room where they are, and often he ends up helping her give birth on the street. You've heard about this, right? The policeman serving as midwife!" I have. Vinicius slaps his thighs laughing at the absurd image. "Then another woman, his grandmother, comes complaining: *The garbage is covering the streets, my son. Can't you help me getting the garbage removed?* And so, the police officer is solving problems with the garbage. The children don't have kindergartens to go to, so the officers organize activities to keep the children occupied while their mothers are at work... Do you get it?" I can see where Vinicius is going. "Then there is the problem of the power supply that must be solved. And this way, the guy ends up having to solve *everything*. He still only earns 2000 *reais* a month. What happens as time passes? *Well*, says the guy, *if everything goes through me, let's make it so that EVERYTHING goes through me*. And here, the militia enters the picture—do you get it? If he

must solve all the problems anyway, then everything will *damn well* go through him! Now *he* is the state there!”<sup>13</sup>

## Access

Gabriela works as a congressional reporter in Brasília. She is responsible for writing reports on the activities of 42 congressional deputies. That might sound like a lot, but then again, the Brazilian Congress has 513 members and around 20 parties (varying according to congressional periods). Does it sound like a lot to keep track of? To complicate matters further, new parties are continually formed as old parties split up and new constellations are negotiated. Voters vote for candidates rather than parties, which are often organized around regional family dynasties or constituted as loosely organized electoral alliances. It is common for elected deputies to switch parties following elections to better position themselves. This structure leads to fragmentation, making it difficult to build stable coalitions, but it is perfect for horse-trades and for buying allegiance with positions or money (see Nobre 2020; Leira 2022).<sup>14</sup> The fragmentation of politics leads to unlikely coalitions, like the one Vinicius described between Lula and Cabral, and state policies with many contradictions—like the pacification project.

Gabriela has come to Rio to visit her aunt, but she has only seen her a few times in the two weeks that she has been here, so I suspect the aunt is a pretext to spend some time alone at Rio’s beaches. She tells

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<sup>13</sup> For an overview of the emergence of paramilitary groups in Rio, and their connection to the city’s security forces, see the Parliamentary Commission’s Report on the militias (Freixo et al. 2008), Michel Misse’s (2008) work on the social accumulation of violence and Bruno Paes Manso’s (2020) book on the link between the paramilitaries and Bolsonaro.

<sup>14</sup> This is especially the case of the group that is referred to as the *centrão* (center). Emerging at the Constitutional Assembly at the return of democracy (1987–1988), the *centrão* is an alliance of conservative parties and politicians who traded political support in exchange for money, influence, and positions. While the *centrão* dissolved after the assembly (and reemerged in 2015 to contest Dilma’s government), its political logics defined the party alliances of the Brazilian Congress, and especially the *modus operandi* of the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, PMDB), which was a key supporter of Lula and Dilma’s governments, allowing conservative elites to always keep a hand on the wheel (see Nobre 2020).

me that Rio has the reputation of having the country's most corrupt and violent police forces but that it is the same all over Brazil, including Brasilia. The "work" that the police do is only a façade, she tells me. I ask her to explain. "For instance, if the police say they have confiscated 50 tons of drugs, they have in reality confiscated 100 tons, and sold half of it," she says.<sup>15</sup> "They do it for the money. The pay is bad, and the risk of being killed is high." Instead of acting as professionals, the police tend to insult, humiliate, beat up, and kill suspects, if it strikes them as the easiest solution. "I was stopped with a half-smoked joint once. The policeman who stopped me was high on something. Judging from his breath it might have been cocaine, but he was drunk as well. He threatened me and offered me more marihuana if I slept with him. Then his colleague came over. He was drunk too, but not as drunk as the guy who stopped me, and eventually they let me go. I was lucky, but what would they have done with a sex-worker? Beaten her up? Raped her? The police should support the citizens, not produce fear, like they're doing now." Her boyfriend lives in Brasilia. He is black and experiences a lot of racism. "One time we were sitting in our car outside the supermarket, discussing what to have for dinner. We were kissing when a lady drove up and parked next to us. When she saw us, she backed out and called the police. They arrived with the sirens wailing and ordered us to get out of the car. When they understood that we weren't doing anything wrong—that we weren't having sex on the parking lot or smoking marihuana, and that I wasn't being raped, they told us it was dangerous for us to be there [and asked us to leave]."

Gabriela thinks the event shows the high levels of racial prejudice in Brazil: "When a black man and a white woman are seen together, it's viewed as a reason to call the cops. Isn't that ridiculous?" she asks. I nod in agreement. "There is a lot of racism in society. Not just towards black people but towards the poor, the uneducated, the *nordestinos*, even towards the yellow-skinned." "Yellow?" I ask, wanting to know what she

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<sup>15</sup> In her research on the dynamics of policing and drug trafficking in Rocinha, Erika Robb Larkins (2013, 2015) describes how drug traffickers leave drugs and guns on the streets of the favela, so that the police can showcase the success of their war on drugs. She argues that police action in the favelas is part of a media spectacle to produce an otherwise beleaguered state as efficient and powerful.



means by that. “The difference between white and yellow skin is that white people turn red in the sun, whereas yellow people turn brown,” she says and adds: “I’m yellow.” “I turn red. Does that make me white?” I ask. “Yes, you are white.” I put my arm next to hers and protest: “But we are the same color!” “Well, yes, but now I’m not tan. You should see me when I’ve been in the sun. Then, I *almost* turn black.”

In the afternoon, Gabriela takes me to the beach. I’ve never been a beach enthusiast and still haven’t understood the appeal of the Rio beaches. To me, the beach is associated with the awful taste of seawater at the back of my throat, sandy ears, and itching salt drying on the skin. And of course, my white skin easily burns unless I apply sunscreen every time I’ve been in the water or sweated a little—which in Rio’s scorching heat means all the time. But Gabriela is in her element at the beach. Without a shred of shyness she calls out to the boys working at the beach stall: “*Oi!* I need two chairs and an umbrella!” We take one chair each and find a space close to the water. The beach is full of people. Some are lying on their towels getting tanned while others are swimming in the waves. A family has gathered around a cooler filled with snacks and cold beer. This part of the beach attracts a diverse crowd: Teenagers from the favelas, older couples, groups of gay men, and people of all colors; black, brown, yellow, and white. Rio might be segregated but the beach is perhaps the city’s most democratic space.

A group of boys are standing in a circle by the water. They are playing with a volleyball, using their feet, head, chest, and shoulders: All except their hands. They call it *futevoley*—footvolley. One of the guys stands out among the others. He is tall and black, built like a bodybuilder, and with the face of a model. He is the best-looking man at the beach by a long footvolley-kick. Gabriela and I occasionally glance at him while we drink beer and play a game of chess. Soon, the sun starts setting behind the mountains. “*Oi!*” Gabriela calls out to one of the boys and waves for him to come over, while she leans back in her folding chair with a newly opened bottle of beer in her hand. “I like your friend,” she says without blinking. Enough said. The guy gets the message and runs over to the model who’s been stealing our glances to pass it on. Moments later he is hunched down next to Gabriela, who still hasn’t left her chair. She clearly knows what she’s doing, and when she offers to help me get in touch with

the Military Police I am thrilled. At the hostel the next morning, we write a mail to the police's communication offices. Carefully formulated in Portuguese, it reads as follows:

Good morning,

I am a student of social anthropology and public security in Norway and have started a project here in Rio de Janeiro concerning the State's public security policies, with a special focus on the working conditions of the police officers, their rights and guarantees.

Several research projects have focused on surveying the perspective of the communities, the favelas, and the people who live there. My study seeks to focus on a different point of view: That of the police, focusing on their working conditions, their choice of profession, the challenges they face in the line of duty, and their views on the precarious and risky situations they are faced with to protect their fellow citizens. If possible, I would also like an opinion on the investments in the police made by Rio's government.

The demonstration carried out in Copacabana on December 14th aroused my interest and solidarity with this part of the story that no research project or news report this far have made available to the public.

I await your contact, thank you for your time.

The answer comes quickly, almost immediately. I am asked to contact the secretary of the Chief of Staff by phone. She wants me to meet the Commander in Chief who must authorize my fieldwork. In the evening, Gabriela has dinner with the guy she met at the beach. He introduces her to his entire family, and before her vacation in Rio has ended, he proposes to her. She politely declines and returns to her boyfriend in Brasilia.

I've bought new clothes for my meeting with the Chief of Staff. When I arrived in Rio I had only brought some T-shirts, shorts, and Havaianas, knowing that summer temperatures in Rio rarely fall below 30 °C. But now I'm dressed up like I'll be throughout all my fieldwork: In blue jeans and a simple, long-sleeved, formal shirt. Below the shirt, I wear a sleeveless undershirt, hoping it will absorb some of the sweat. I'd rather not walk around in a puddle. This excessive formality might be overdoing it, but the long-sleeved shirt is meant to hide a small peace sign that I

tattooed on my left wrist a few of years ago. Lady Gaga has an identical one in the same place but I got mine first. At the time, I wanted an uncontroversial tattoo since it would always be visible. *Who could react negatively to a peace sign?*, I thought then. Now I was paying for my decision: Six months in tropical weather wearing jeans and long-sleeved shirts. At least the police would not mistake me for a peace-loving, marihuana-smoking hippie the way I was dressed.

This orchestration makes me feel like an actor sacrificing everything to give a convincing performance and strengthens my commitment to the fieldwork: I'm ready to offer my blood, sweat, and tears! It might have been unnecessary to give so much importance to a tattoo, but the strategy works. Towards the end of my fieldwork, a police officer says that my clothing made me look like a Mormon. I can't help laughing and tell him that has been my intention—to look as straight as I possibly can. So, ahead of my first meeting with the police, I have discovered the Mormon in me, hoping to appear benign, and perhaps a little naïve. I puff my chest and walk straight up to the armed police officer guarding the entrance to the Military Police's headquarters in the city center. It's in a large, white, colonial building, with windowsills painted in the azure-blue of the police. The face of the officer is contorted in a grimace that I assume is meant to inspire fear and respect, but I'm learning to shake off the nervousness that the police instill as their faces generally dissolve into a friendly Brazilian smile when I, the Mormon, greet them.

I'm excited. My project hinges on this meeting. I don't know whether I'll gain access or what kind of access I'll be able to gain. I might have to tone down my ambitions and come prepared for a cross-examination, carefully planning my argument: I want to research the working conditions of the police, their motivation to work in the police, and their take on pacification. The uncertainty I'm feeling might be reasonable—it seems unlikely that an institution with such a poor reputation and so many challenges would welcome prying eyes. But my concerns evaporate with the warm welcome I receive from the Chief of Staff. After all that I have heard and read about the Military Police, he is everything I did *not* expect one of the leaders of the Military Police to be: Smiling, friendly, welcoming, and charismatic, with a master's degree in Anthropology from a public university. He greets me with warmth and attention

and after a short and polite conversation (Oh, so you are from Norway, huh? I know some police officers from the Norwegian police. I met them at a public security conference in Barcelona), he quickly assures me that he will personally facilitate access to whatever part of the institution I want to study. “By the way, what was it you wanted to study?” he asks after offering me his help. As it seems, those details were not forwarded to him. I am sitting in the middle of his huge office. On the walls there are large portraits of serious men, and in front of me a massive mahogany desk. The Colonel sitting behind it has just authorized me to do whatever I please. Have we misunderstood each other? I make it clear to the Colonel that I want to do *ethnographic* (I emphasize the word) fieldwork. That is, I want to follow the police *at work, over time*. Again, making sure to stress the particularities of participant observation. Six months, to be accurate. Yes, yes, he is, after all, trained in anthropology, he repeats, so he knows what fieldwork entails. It’s not a problem. “You can sort out the details with my secretary,” he says, before adding his condition: I must send him a copy of my finished work.

The secretary takes me into a separate room. Perplexed by the ease with which I have gained access I am expecting her to start listing the exceptions, but there are none. “What would you like to do?” she asks, repeating the Colonel’s question. What do I *want* to do? I have never thought about it that way. I have thought about what might be *feasible*, or what I might be *allowed* to do—where the police might allow an outsider in. I expected having to negotiate access. Police ethnographers often report long and cumbersome processes to gain institutional approval for their research (see, i.e. Fassin 2013). But the ease with which I gain the Colonel’s support is an example of how the different interests that permeate the police materialize. Apparently, the Chief of Staff *wants* me to write about the police and critically examine the institution. I look over at the secretary and discreetly test the terrain: “Well... what options do I have?” I had at best hoped that I would be allowed to follow police officers at Santa Marta, the first favela to be pacified, which is viewed as an unambiguous success.

“It would be good if you could compare the situation at different UPPs,” the secretary swiftly answers. She suggests that I might start with Santa Marta, where the police have successfully implemented the

paradigm of proximity policing that the UPPs rest on. Then I could look at Mangueira, where they have been partly successful but are facing increasing resistance from traffickers. Finally, she suggests that I could add Alemão to the list. The UPP at Alemão has experienced an explosive increase in violence during the last month and is the area where the police have been met with the most resistance. Alemão? I'm immediately filled with excitement. The favela lies in the vast northern area of Rio and is on everybody's lips. I recall Paulo's words—very few people know what is going on there: Of course, I'll do fieldwork in Alemão.

## Conclusion: Modernizing the Police

The Chief of Staff of Rio's Military Police is one of the conundrums that I tried to grapple with during my time in Rio. How could such a “modern” and seemingly progressive man lead an institution responsible for so many human rights violations and executions that some scholars have deemed as genocidal (Alves and Silva 2017; Cardoso 2018; Vargas 2023)? Why was he not worried that I might write something that could hurt the police? While I partly attribute my surprise to my own biases and blind spots concerning the violence that is perpetrated in the name of progress, I still believe that I stumbled across a fundamental tension within the institution. As my familiarity with the Military Police improved, I got a better grasp of the institutional politics that made my fieldwork at the UPPs possible. Again, I found the notion of war machine and state dynamics helpful in untangling these apparent contradictions, coming to understand the process of modernizing the police as an example of *capturing* or taming the war-machine dynamics within the institution (I will explore the micro-dynamics of this process in Chapter 7: Modernizing Warriors). That is, the pacification was both an attempt to tame the favelas, *and* an attempt to tame the police: An attack on the illiberal grammars of violent sociability and an attempt to forge a “new police”; a citizen police; a modern police force—respectful of human rights and operating according to the rule of law (see Henrique and Ramos 2011; Saborio 2015; Pires and Albernaz 2022).

While partial and simplifying, Vinicius George's account of the political backdrop to the pacification shows how the modernization was driven forwards by different agents across different levels. There were federal incentives to revise Rio's public security policies and Lula's government encouraged the reform (see D'Araujo 2014; Alves and Evanson 2013). There was also pressure from below: From human rights organizations and civil society leaders demanding the end of aggressive and confrontational practices of policing, characteristic of Brazil's democratic period (Magaloni et al. 2015). But importantly, there were also officers *within* the police who were critical of the state's public security policies. They saw existing practices of policing as producing more violence, not less. Some of these officers, like Coronel Robson, had been exposed to critical perspectives on policing through local university programs, they had traveled to international conferences; published in academic journals, or in other ways worked with the scientific community. Reform-oriented leaders like Robson were aware of the challenges within their institutions (in Chapter 7: Modernizing Warriors I also return to this point).

One of my central claims in this book is that by attending to the friction between attempts to modernize the police and the violent and informal police practices described by Vinicius George, we can get a better grasp of the ongoing state transformations in Brazil. By bringing attention to the tensions between liberalism and illiberalism within the police, we can gain a better understanding of how and why institutional processes of reform fail as well as the police's role in the emergence and formation of authoritarian or illiberal state projects. As I've already noted, modernization is not to be confused with demilitarization (although calls for demilitarization are generally "modern" in their approach to policing): Rather, the neoliberal militarization (see, e.g. Wacquant 2008) that the pacification can be encompassed within is characterized by political and institutional attempts to channel, control, and redirect violence according to specific aims and objectives that might not coincide with the aims and objectives of agents positioned at different levels of the institutional hierarchy. The extent to which agents within the police operate according to extra-official interests within the police is indicative of the war machine and state dynamics at play.

Here we arrive at an important characteristic of the Deleuzian framework that is necessarily lost when war machine and state dynamics are treated as two separate dynamics rather than an integrated and synchronic process: The transgression of one normative order simultaneously produces an alternative order—deterritorializations are followed by reterritorializations. Michel Misse (2010: 35) describes this process as one whereby “systemic illegitimacies” gain legitimacy in certain social segments until they are transformed into a legitimate order, parallel to the dominant order. In its original, reform-oriented form, pacification appeared as an expression of an ongoing transformation of the Brazilian state and an economic restructuring according to the logics of globalization, while resistance to the reform within the police can be seen as a kind of regionalism based on such a parallel order or divergent cosmology (see also Muñiz and Albernaz 2015). Eventually, the pacification would become engulfed by this resistance, but as a modernizing reform attempt, it drew on globally circulating ideas about democratic policing and human rights. In the following chapters, I will take a closer look at the normative orders in dispute, but I will primarily focus on what the police’s regionalism brings into being.

This is a partial approach. As Vinicius George’s account clearly showed, the pacification was many things. It was a complex public security initiative shaped by different interests and objectives across multiple levels of scale: Global, national, local (city and neighborhoods), and institutional levels shaped by divergent political interests and personal dynamics. It was also a racialized public security intervention targeting favela spaces and subjectivities, and an example of how the “civilizing dynamics” of colonization must be seen as ongoing, contemporary processes; the result of a political horse trade between local and national governments; part of an electoral campaign strategy due to its initially massive public support; an ad-hoc solution to failed security policies; a police intervention that sought to address security concerns ahead of the Olympics; an intensification of pre-existing dynamics of militarization of public security in Rio; and integral to the restructuring of (il)legal markets through the logics of neoliberal urbanism and predation (see, e.g. Fleury 2012; Freeman 2012; Alves and Evanson 2013; Menezes 2013; Saborio 2015; Steinbrink 2013; D’Araujo 2014; Hirata and Grillo

2017; Grillo 2019; Manso 2020). In this conclusion, however, I have focused on the pacification as an attempted capture of the war machine dynamics operating across Rio's urban landscape—that is, as a modernizing project that sought to expand bureaucratic state control both within the Military Police as well as in the favelas, in relation to the traffickers operating there (see Salem and Bertelsen 2020; Salem and Larkins 2021).

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# 4

## The Postcard and the Frontline

We are slowly descending the favela stairways. There are over 700 steps from top to bottom, Marcio says. He is the Corporal in command of one of the Tactical Patrol Units (*Grupamento Tático de Polícia de Proximidade*, GTPP) of the UPP at Santa Marta and has worked here since its establishment in early 2009. Thiago, Soldier in rank, leads the way. He raises his rifle to tactical position every time we round a corner, ready to shoot if needed, which I find odd, since the officers tell me that there have been no registered shooting episodes in Santa Marta following pacification. The third member of the unit, Igor, is also a Soldier. He is responsible for the rearguard and carries a standard service gun and a Tazer (electric shock gun). As part of the so-called “non-lethal” arsenal, Marcio has brought a shotgun with rubber bullets and four grenades with teargas in addition to his gun. The GTPP is armed for any event.<sup>1</sup> I walk

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<sup>1</sup> Resting on the assumption that these weapons are used instead of lethal arms, and that they favor a gradual use of force, police officers generally argued that less-lethal armament contributes to the reduction of police lethality. However, the use of these weapons has sparked international controversy. Despite what their name implies, they are perfectly capable of killing the victim: rubber bullets are lethal when fired at close range and Taser’s have caused a number of deaths internationally. Furthermore, rather than substituting lethal weapons and favoring the gradual use of force, “non-lethal” arms are critiqued for lowering the threshold for use of force



**Fig. 4.1** Weapons used by one of the patrol units at UPP Santa Marta, February 2015

in the middle, feeling like I have three bodyguards escorting me through the favela. After almost two months living in Babilonia, this show of force feels a little pointless from a tactical perspective. A few neighbors greet us as we pass. Marcio is humming a tune: “*Livre estou, livre estou...*” It takes me a while to recognize the song: It’s the one from that Disney movie—*Frozen!* A young girl, no more than three or four years old, smiles and greets us with a hello. The officers smile back. Marcio gently pats the girl on the head. If it weren’t for the massive display of weapons this could have been the scene of an advertisement for the pacification project (Fig. 4.1).

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by the police. Adding to the controversies, the UN Committee Against Torture declared that the use of Taser guns can be considered a form of torture in 2007. The proliferation of these kinds of weapons is related to a global trend towards increased reliance on militarized forms of policing, with the oxymoron this implies regarding the Military Police’s justification of the use of these weapons as a strategy to create a “citizen police” (Salem 2016b; see Mourão 2015 for a detailed discussion on the relation between non-lethal armament and police use of force).

## The Postcard

Santa Marta is the UPP postcard.<sup>2</sup> After the police moved in six years ago there has not been any incidents of gun violence in the small favela nested right below Corcovado. This might seem like an achievement but with about 4000 inhabitants and a total of 219 officers at the UPP, the police-resident ratio is 1:19, making it one of Rio's most heavily policed areas.<sup>3</sup> When the Military Police occupied the favela in a special operation dubbed "shock of order" in November 2008, the pacification had not yet been announced. BOPE officers stormed the favela, arresting several gang-members while the rest fled to other communities. When the special operation ended, the police remained in place to prevent the traffickers' return. A few months later, at the beginning of 2009, Rio's State Secretary of Security, Mariano Beltrame, announced that they would establish a permanent police station in Santa Marta and two other favelas: Cidade de Deus in Rio's western region, next to the area where the Olympic Park was being built, and Batán in northern Rio. The latter was controlled by militias and had been at the center of public attention in 2008 when the paramilitaries killed two journalists who were reporting on the expansion of militia-controlled areas.

With Beltrame's announcement, the pacification project and the first three UPPs were born. To strengthen the legitimacy of the project and gain trust among favela residents it was sold as a police reform inspired in community policing (see Muñiz and Albernaz 2015; Saborio 2014). The goal was that the police establish close ties to the neighborhood, offering spaces for debate concerning matters of public security. Closeness and trust would be accomplished through reliance on foot patrols (most favelas are impossible to patrol by vehicle), neighborhood councils, and "social projects" organized by the police (see e.g. Saborio 2014). Many of these projects aimed to create a stable environment for children (i.e. to create spaces that kept children away from the gangs), and would

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<sup>2</sup> Jaqueline Muñiz and Elisabete Albernaz (2015: 11–12) note how Santa Marta became politicized as the first favela to be pacified. It was the light at the end of the tunnel, a model for others to emulate, the posterchild of the pacification.

<sup>3</sup> Of the 219 police officers employed at the UPP at the time of research, an average of 21 officers were on duty at any time according to the sub-commander at the base.

typically include activities such as music lessons, martial arts, or after school homework assistance. The hope was that the police—rather than the traffickers—would become new role models for children growing up in the favela. These social projects had thus an important pedagogical component, with a goal of producing a generation of new and upstanding citizens who trusted and looked up to the police, following decades of mutual distrust between officers and favela residents. Furthermore, policing should focus on preventative rather than reactive measures and importantly, they should be lawful and in line with the human rights framework. The Military Police called this new vision *proximity policing*. While it was not explicitly framed as institutional reform, it must be understood within a larger context of modernization of the police force (Saborio 2014).

The patrol unit is moving down towards an open terrace in the middle of the favela, where Michael Jackson filmed the music video for his hit *They don't care about us* in the 90s. There's a mural and a statue of the popstar on the square, next to several kiosks selling souvenirs, chips, sodas, and Brazilian fast-food. Some of the stores feature hand-painted signs listing everything on sale: Cakes, coffee, pasties, fruit, legumes, vegetables, manicures, and haircuts. The view of Botafogo, the Guanabara-bay and the Sugarloaf-mountain from Santa Marta makes it one of the most picturesque favelas in the city. An elevator transports people and goods up the hill and garbage back down. The location, sights, easy access, and peacefulness attract tourism. "10.000 tourists visit Santa Marta every month," Marcio says. Just like in Babilonia, there are several hostels here and local tour operators offer guided tours of the community. Michael Jackson isn't the only popstar who has graced Santa Marta with a visit. In 2009, the year Rio won the bid for the Olympics, Madonna came on a highly mediatized visit. At the UPP there is a picture of the queen of pop surrounded by her bodyguards and local police officers. It hangs next to pictures of smiling children and is a reminder of one of the highlights in the history of the UPPs, symbolizing an optimism

and hope for the country's future that was shared by most Brazilians just a few years ago.<sup>4</sup>

We stop to rest in the shade and quell our thirst. "Look at that!" Corporal Marcio nods towards the roofs that cover the slope below us like a shiny blanket of corrugated iron and concrete. The favela looks calm, almost drowsy, in the scorching afternoon sun. "That's the neglect of *os governantes* (lit. 'the rulers')." Marcio's voice is firm. He shakes his head. "For years the state has abandoned a huge part of the population. First they let them build their homes on these hills, and then they leave them here to fend for themselves—without any sanitation system, without electricity, without water, and working for meager wages for the rich living in the *asfalto!*" He gestures with his arms while speaking. "And when the state is absent, others take charge: Generations of criminals, passing the torch from father to son, to grandson. Do you think all that can change in a couple of years?" He looks me in the eyes. "Now, I'm not saying the pacification is a bad project—it's a good project, but it's a failed project. The police are working here in vain, and the State has abandoned *us* as well." He emphasizes the word *us*—the police. "They've put us here to end drug trafficking, but they are never here for us! Did you know that we must buy our own guns?" Marcio isn't referring to the weapons they use when they are patrolling but the guns that most officers buy to keep when they're off duty. "*Our own guns!*" His voice reaches falsetto, and he shakes his head in contempt. "There is never any money for the police. However, there is plenty of money for corrupt politicians!" He can't find anything good to say about the country's leaders. Only a few politicians support the police, Marcio says—Jair and Flavio Bolsonaro. Father and son: They have built their political careers on the unconditional support of military and police officers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Erika Robb Larkins (2015) describes how favelas are commoditized and filtered for mass consumption, among other things, through "favela tours". While the favelas prior to pacification were marketed as dangerous and exotic through a spectacle of war, the pacification became an attraction in its initial years: a spectacular performance of Brazil's transformation into a modern, global power.

<sup>5</sup> In his book on the link between the Bolsonaro family and the militias, Bruno Paes Manso (2020) offers a detailed account of the Bolsonaro family's unwavering support for police officers. In cases of police misconduct, killings, and abuses of force, Jair Bolsonaro and his sons have consistently sided with the officers, earning them a reputation of fierce defenders of the police



The patrol unit moves in the direction of one of the local *bocas de fumo*. The officers explain that they try to follow different routes every time, in the hope that they will surprise the traffickers who still sell drugs here, although they now operate in a discrete manner and are normally not armed. Lately, they have heard rumors that weapons are being smuggled into Santa Marta and the police are combing the area searching for leads. During patrol, we break into buildings that look vacant, sneak into backyards, and inspect the narrow spaces in between buildings.<sup>6</sup> The organic architecture of the favela offers many places where drugs and guns can be hidden.

Every now and then, the officers stop to frisk favela residents. The people who get stopped by the patrol unit are mostly young, mostly black, and mostly men. In addition to this tripartite golden rule for what constitutes “suspicious appearance,” hairstyle, clothes, and posture also determine who gets stopped and who can move freely through the neighborhood with little risk of getting frisked. The “suspects” are thoroughly checked for small amounts of drugs. Today, the officers stop next to three teenage boys who are getting their hair cut at a small porch next to the alley. The officers gaze at the teenagers, surveying them before strictly ordering them to stand up so that they can be frisked. The boys are only wearing Bermudas, and the officers grope their genital areas, allegedly to check for drugs. It seems unfounded and degrading. We move on, and the officers explain that they normally don’t treat people this way but that they know that these kids are involved in the local gang. Marcio has worked here for six years and says that he knows who has “criminal connections”: These people they stop as often as possible.<sup>7</sup>

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and military. I return to the link between Bolsonaro and the police in Chapter 9: The War Machine.

<sup>6</sup> Palloma Menezes (2015, 2018) analyzes the changing patterns of surveillance, negotiations, and confrontations in Rio’s favelas, documenting how the co-existence of police, traffickers, and residents in pacified areas contributed to a multiplication of surveillance-related practices between different agents. The ways in which the police patrolled Santa Marta during my fieldwork shows the capillary nature of these forms of surveillance, that although they usually replaced confrontational forms, represent a much more intense form of control (like Hugo remarked in Chapter 2: Favela/Asfalto).

<sup>7</sup> Through the notion of “criminal subjection” Michel Misse (2008: 380) describes the extrajudicial process whereby certain subjectivities become identified with crime or potential crime in such a way that the distinction between subject and crime collapses: crime becomes a trait

With so many years spent patrolling the alleys in Santa Marta, Marcio knows the favela like the palm of his hand. He says that he can distinguish between boys who are only under bad influence from those who are truly bad. “How can you tell if someone is bad?” I ask. “Listen now,” he says, pausing to think. “Take you, for example. I can see that you are nicely dressed, probably from the middle class, and highly educated. But maybe a person dresses like you do but still smokes marihuana.” I get tense. Is he insinuating that he’s on to me? “Seeing as I’m an experienced officer, I can still tell if someone is a *maconheiro* (a marihuana smoker) from their quick gait and the fear in their eyes.” I relax once I understand he’s not insinuating that *I* am a *maconheiro*. I look down at my shirtsleeve. Is the tattoo visible? Will he think that I am a marihuana-smoking, peace-loving hippie if he sees it, or will my white skin and calm demeanor act as the protective shield of privilege that it usually is?

Marcio knows the people who live here and their backgrounds. “That guy over there, with the hammer, has a criminal record.” He nods at a young black man who is working on a small construction site a few steps up from where we’re standing. “Even if you have a criminal past you can be rehabilitated,” he adds. He knows that the guy with the hammer no longer is a criminal. He now congregates at an Evangelical church: “But that doesn’t mean he accepts the police.” He could still sympathize with the traffickers since he might have family members who are involved in “the business.” A tour-guide walks past us. He is guiding a couple of foreign tourists. “That guy right there used to be a trafficker.” He’s not anymore but Marcio says he’s still involved with the gang: “He *pretends* to sympathize with the police, but he warns the trafficker when we’re on patrol and spreads slander to tarnish our reputation.”

The officers start talking about a woman who made the news a while ago. The police had stopped her on the highway and approached her car with their guns raised and ready to fire. One of the officers had filmed the woman scolding them. The video shows her furiously shouting that she is an architect, that she is on her way home from work, and that she has worked on several architectural projects for the police. I’m aware of

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of the subject’s spirit. “It is not a coincidence that, in Brazil, the so-called ‘resocialization’ of criminal subjects is primarily carried out through religious conversion” (my translation).

the case and think that the video highlights Vinicius George's (the former civil police officer at the Legislative Assembly, see chapter 2) point rather well: The police can freely point their guns at people in the favela but not at the elites.<sup>8</sup> Marcio justifies the actions of the officers: The car model the woman was driving is one of the most stolen vehicles in Rio. She had spent an unusual amount of time to stop when she was pulled over. They had only been cautious. I recall another case that has received a lot of attention in the time I've been in Rio. A young woman got shot and killed by police officers on her way home from a party. The driver of the car, also the kind of vehicle often used by gang-members, had not slowed down on the police's request and the officers had opened fire at the vehicle, hitting the woman in her abdomen.

Despite the broad public criticism of the police Marcio enjoys his work: "I like being a police officer, fighting for good. The work helps you keep your integrity and earns you admiration." He says there are many good police officers at the UPPs. Of course, there are corrupt officers in the police as well, but they are a minority and at the UPPs there's no corruption he says.<sup>9</sup> The UPP officers come from good families. They are better trained and have higher salaries than regular police officers. That prevents corruption. Marcio is repeating arguments in defense of the UPPs from public officials and police leaders. Others, including Vinicius George, have noted that the inflation in patrol officers that the pacification required (at the time of research the UPPs employed 9500 officers) meant that the criteria of admission to the police academy had been lowered.

Thiago says that the biggest challenges the officers face are political: "The legal system doesn't allow us to do our job." I must look confused. "Let me give you an example," he says. "Let's say that one of the kids

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<sup>8</sup> Eilbaum and Medeiros (2015: 422) note how in Brazil the category of "police violence" only applies when the victim of violence is a moral subject that has not been defined as a threat to a particular representation of public order. In other words, police violence is defined according to the morality of the victim rather than by the actions of the police.

<sup>9</sup> Several scholars, including Palloma Menezes (2018), have documented that the establishment of the UPPs initially disturbed the institution of *arregos* between police and traffickers in pacified favelas, which is one of the reasons why many of the police officers I spoke with claimed that the UPPs were free of corruption. However, *arregos* were conditional on personal dynamics and local contexts and were re-instituted in many pacified favelas with time.

down the street [...] wants to play music out loud that vindicates crime and *libertinagem* (indecency): There is no law that allows me to order him to turn the music off. There is no law that forbids people from playing music about promiscuity and homosexuality. So, I must provoke a *desacato* (contempt of the law) in order to detain him. In the end society loses. They are talking about sex, but the police are not allowed to do its job. *Society is doing what is wrong believing that it's right.*" He nods towards a young couple who are walking up the stairs: "That over there makes me angry. That guy there, with that girl. She is too good for him." He neither works nor studies, Thiago explains, but he is still dating a beautiful girl. The boy is carrying several bags with groceries and as they walk past us the Corporal orders him to stop so that they can check what he carries in the bags. The young man does as he is told but the woman demonstratively looks at us and shakes her head as the officers scramble through their groceries. A few minutes later another young man walks past us. He carries a backpack, and I ask the officers why they didn't stop him. They tell me they know him: He's a *trabalhador* (worker) and they know that he's *gente de bem* (good people; decent folk) (Fig. 4.2).

While we are talking, I receive a call from the secretary at the UPP in Alemão. I've reached out to schedule a visit, and the female officer on the phone says that the commander can meet me next week. Thiago tells me that he used to work at Alemão before he came to Santa Marta. "It's a very good place to gather information for your project," he adds. The situation in Alemão is very complicated. There are a lot of confrontations between police and traffickers, and residents are not supportive of the police like they are here. That makes it very difficult for the officers to assert control in the favela. I ask them if they think it will be dangerous to do fieldwork there but they tell me not to be concerned. If the bullets start hailing through the air and I get scared I should just throw myself to the ground and stay there until the shooting ends without worrying about whether it will make me look stupid. "Fear is what keeps us alive," Thiago says. He tells me that he almost lost his life in Alemão. He was caught inside a container during a shootout and had to request fire-cover and crawl through the mud to escape. He raises his elbows to his shoulders drawing small circles in the air to demonstrate how he got away.

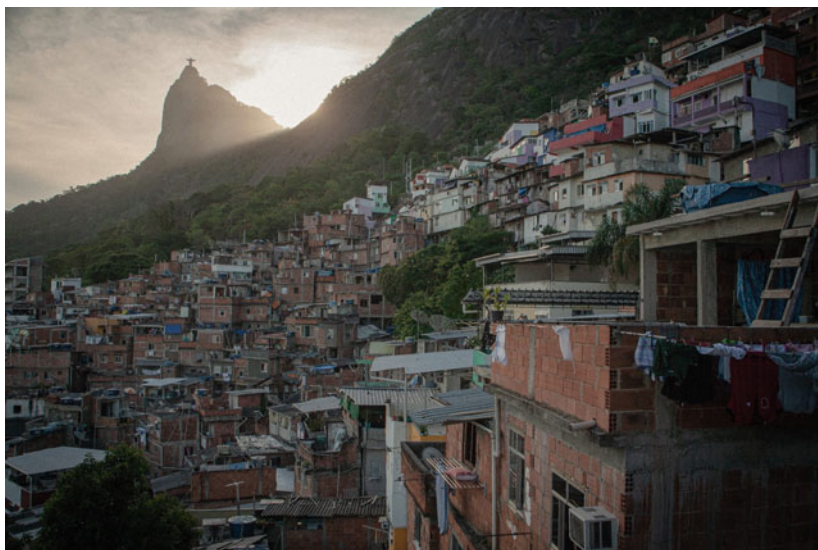


Fig. 4.2 Santa Marta perched beneath Corcovado and Christ the Redeemer

When we reach the foot of the favela it is already dark. We greet the officers who are stationed at the open square where the *asfalto* begins. Two patrol vehicles are parked in the middle of the lively street, where street vendors fight for attention from neighbors returning from work. Or maybe they are on their way out to enjoy the warm summer night now that the blazing sun is gone and it's possible to stay outside without melting? The curb line is packed with kiosks selling snacks, cold beer, or *açaí*—a tropical fruit-slush that is supposed to be full of antioxidants and would probably be healthy if it weren't for the vast amounts of sugar it contains. The taste is good, and the icy slush is cooling so we get a cup each. Marcio laughs when he sees how quickly I finish mine. “*É o aço*” he says. It's made of steel. He has used this expression several times today. “It's an expression we use in the Evangelical church where I go,” he says. “It means that something is very good, since steel is a strong metal.”

The square is dimly lit and the emergency lights from the patrol vehicles cast long shadows across the street and buildings, painting the surroundings in red. Marcio, Thiago, and Igor take the elevator back up to the base, and I decide to chat with the officers that are stationed

at the square. They look skeptical when I introduce myself. “You have already seen what our work is like, haven’t you?” one of them says defensively. “You should visit another UPP. Have you heard about Babilonia and Chapeu-Mangueira? I think those would be good places for your project. It’s quiet there.” I get a strong sense that he would rather have me gone for good. The female officer next to him doesn’t seem interested in talking to me either and I am about to give up when one of the officers, a Corporal gives me a friendly nod. “Well, I can tell you this,” he says with some frustration in his voice. “The system doesn’t work. If I told you the truth about the police... But I can’t tell you the truth.” He seems friendly and my courage returns: “Ah, come on! Tell me the truth, I want to hear it, it’s the truth I came here for!” I say it jokingly and he smiles and lets out a short laugh. “No, I can’t tell you the truth, but I can tell you this: The system *does* work for the politicians!”

I’m about to leave when I hear loud shouting coming from one of the alleys. The cheerful atmosphere of the square is suddenly interrupted by the scene playing out before us: A police officer has grabbed hold of a young, black man. He seems to be around 20 years old. The officer drags him forcefully towards the patrol vehicle while he keeps the guy’s arm locked behind his back. The officer looks stressed. Drops of sweat cover his forehead. He is followed by another officer and a group of maybe ten neighbors, most of whom seem to be in their teens. They shout for the police to release the young man. Several of them are filming the officers with their phones. The man—he looks more like a boy—looks confused, as if he’s still processing what’s happening. Judging by his clothes he’s a mailman or delivery boy. A crying woman howls in despair, tears running down her cheek. She barely seems able to stand upright and a couple of people from the group try to pull her away from the chaos surrounding the officers who are moving in our direction.

The Corporal I was just talking to runs to their aid. The situation appears to be on the verge of escalating into a mass brawl. The police officers in the square run into the crowd and start pushing people away. There is a lot of shouting back and forth. One officer grabs one of the guys from the crowd and tries to drag him towards the patrol vehicles. The guy manages to wrest his arms out of the officer’s grip and both men start shouting at each other at an arm’s length. The woman begs the

police to let the boy go. “He hasn’t done anything! He was just doing his work! Leave him alone!” The officers seem overwhelmed by the situation: The shouting from the crowd is deafening. They stay at just the right distance from the police, so that they are able to pull away in case the officers try to grab a hold of them. A female officer shouts at one of the boys that she will arrest him for contempt of the law, while she tries to push him down onto the hood of one of the patrol vehicles. It seems like an empty threat and show of force. She doesn’t seem very invested in arresting him and lets go of him a second later, after pushing him a bit around.

The police are outnumbered by the neighbors who are lighting up the officer’s faces with the flashlight of their phones. “We’re filming everything you do! Everyone will see this!” They keep shouting: “Why are you always repressing us?!” A group of officers have managed to corner the guy they detained between the two patrol vehicles where they are sheltered from the onlookers. They are in a loud argument about what to do next. The detained teenager looks small and scared. He is surrounded by officers who are all bigger than him. The group of neighbors, the men and women drinking beer by the kiosks, the people on their way home from work, and the kids who were just running across the square a little while ago all have their eyes fixed on the police. Some of them are shouting along with the crowd. A teenage boy approaches me and points at the notebook I am clutching in my hand. I stopped writing and closed it as soon as the brawl started. He says something in Portuguese but I’m not sure if he is telling me to write down what’s going on or to sod off. In either case, his tone of voice is not friendly. I realize that probably nobody wants me to be here right now. Not the crowd—they probably think I sympathize with the police, and certainly not the police. To avoid calling attention to myself I put the notebook back in my bag.

The crying woman has fallen to the ground. A group has gathered to assist her. A couple of kids and an older woman call for the police to help them. The woman has fainted and needs attention. The officers ignore them. They are busy keeping the crowd at bay. But eventually, the kids manage to capture the attention of one of the officers. “Do I look like a fire-fighter? It’s not my job to assist her!” The officer yells and turns his back to them. The situation is out of control. A couple of

officers tear off the shirt of the detained and take his backpack. Then, to my surprise, they let him go. The crowd starts cheering. They are mocking the police and celebrating the release of the young man. Now that he's free, he regains some of his courage and it seems like he wants to pick a fight with the officers, but two older women drag him away from the crowd, the patrol vehicles, and the police. He yells at them as he leaves: "I want my things back! Stop punishing me! Why are you punishing me?" But the two women are determined to remove him from the scene. "Go now, my boy, go! Don't be stupid. Get away." I guess they want him gone before the officers change their mind.

Still standing between the two patrol cars, I can see the officer who had made the arrest. He looks confused and frustrated, almost enraged: "Who let him go?" "I was the one who let him go," the Corporal says. The two officers start a loud argument. Finally the Soldier, lower in rank, yields. His face is red with anger as he shouts at one of his colleagues: "He let him go! He just let the guy go!" His authority has just been challenged in the presence of half of the neighborhood. The crowd dissolves, and soon things are back to normal. Then, out of nowhere, two patrol vehicles packed with eight officers, rifles pointing out of the window frames, comes skidding to the square. They park in the middle of the street, and the onlookers who have observed the whole scene ironically cheer them on as they step out of the vehicles (Fig. 4.3).

## The Frontline

The first time I visit Complexo do Alemão I've been in Rio for almost two months. In this time, without realizing it, I've incorporated one of the most important male codes in the favelas: *Don't show fear*. Though I might not yet be able to formulate this imperative explicitly, I know it intuitively—fear is a sign of weakness, and in the Darwinian world of the police, weakness leads to the loss of status and respect. The imperative to appear tough and strong is of course not limited to the favelas but takes on a different meaning in the context of armed conflict. Acting tough when you are surrounded by macho men with machine guns is not easy. A few weeks earlier our neighbor Luca had warned me: "Don't





**Fig. 4.3** The favelas of Alemão with the cable car running across the hills, January 2015

go to Alemão! It's a warzone!" When I tell him that I'm visiting the UPP there, he gets angry. "Damn it, Tomas! I told you not to go there! There are gunfights there every day!" He raises his voice. But I have heard so much about Alemão that I feel impelled to go there. Alemão is not a postcard like Santa Marta, this much I know. But also, I'm taking Luca's warning with a pinch of salt. I reason that he is being prejudiced, just like the people from the *asfalto* who are scared to visit Babilonia.

The favelas of Complexo de Alemão spread across the lush hillsides of *Serra da Misericórdia* like a thick brick carpet. To Brazilians, Alemão is known as the headquarters of the Red Command and has been a symbol and frontline of the state's war on drugs and crime. In 2010, state forces occupied Alemão and the neighboring area of Penha following a series of gang-related violent attacks in central Rio. The occupation was broadcast live on national TV in a media spectacle showing the Special Units and Brazilian Armed Forces storming the massive favela complex. Reporters wearing bulletproof vests contributed to the war aesthetics, along images of military tanks driving up the narrow streets of the favelas,

and aerial footage of armed traffickers fleeing the favela in a pick-up truck and by foot. Precarious walls of brick and cement, referred to as the “fortresses” of the traffickers were demolished with explosives by the police in front of the cameras. Since the police alone did not have the human resources they needed to assert territorial control in Alemão, the Armed Forces stayed in the favelas almost two years until eight new UPPs were established: Four in Complexo de Alemão and four in Complexo da Penha (Savell 2014).

Getting from Copacabana to Alemão takes time. I have to cross the city center where skyscrapers stretch towards the sky and continue north along the congested Avenida Brasil, one of Rio’s main thoroughfares. As the bus drives past the battered, working-class neighborhoods of northern Rio, once symbols of industrial expansion and progress, I can’t help but notice how the statue of Christ the Redeemer seems to turn its back on those residing here: The workers who keep the city running. Following the military occupation of Alemão, the government built a gondola that stretches from the asphalt in Bonsucesso and up to the highest points of the hills in the favela. The UPPs were erected next to the towering gondola stations. The concrete buildings are giant monuments to the state’s claim to control and power in Alemão. They are visible from miles away, like old European cathedrals that were also built to impress. From up close, the gondola is less imposing: The stations are empty as most residents rely on other means of transportation. However, for an outsider like me, the gondola is the most convenient, or at least the most spectacular way to reach the heart of Alemão, but on my first visit it is closed, and I end up hailing a taxi. When I tell the driver where I’m going, he refuses to drive me up the hill. “To the top? I won’t take you there. You know there is a war going on?” I brush off the warning, aware that taxi drivers also refuse to drive passengers to Babilonia since it’s a “risky area,” which makes no sense to me.

The driver drops me off at the foot of the hill. With neither a gondola nor a taxi at my disposal, I start walking up the winding road. The heat from the sun is relentless and the humidity suffocating, much worse than by the beaches of Zona Sul. It feels like being inside a sauna. The air is thick and I am still dressed like a Mormon, so I keep a slow pace to avoid being drenched in sweat when I meet the commander. But I am

still grateful to have dressed this way. It makes me look less like a tourist although I clearly don't "blend in." As I take in my surroundings, I'm struck by the eerie silence on the streets. In stark contrast with the vibrant street life I've witnessed in other favelas there are hardly any people here, shops are closed, steel curtains drawn down to the floor, and no noisy *mototaxis* transporting people up the hill, no vans, no one sipping cold beer by the sidewalk. Maybe people are busy at work?

But once I reach the police station the scene changes. The atmosphere at the station is frantic. The main hall is full of police officers barking at each other, hurrying up and down the stairs, slamming doors and looking busy. In the middle of the room, amidst the chaos, an officer is cleaning the floor: Looking down I see specks of blood dissolving under the mop. "I don't think the commander has time for you now." A police officer sitting behind an office desk at the back of the room looks at me dismissively. "He has to accompany the Soldier who was just shot to the hospital." He explains that there has been intense gunfire in the favela and that one of the officers was shot in the face. The bullet hit him while he was resting on the white plastic bench placed against the wall of the room I am standing in right now. I connect the dots: The closed gondola, the empty streets, the reluctant taxi driver, Luca's warnings. I should have known better. Suddenly, the commander comes rushing down the stairs. He skips the cordialities: "You'll have to come back tomorrow!" (Fig. 4.4).

The next day the gondola is running, and the base is calm. When I arrive, the commander is in a meeting, and I am told to take a seat and wait. There aren't many places to sit. The room is full of officers, and the only place to sit is at the broken end of the white plastic bench. Although it is long and easily fits three persons, the two police officers sprawling out across most of the bench make no effort to make room for me and I end up balancing my left buttock at the edge of the seat. In contrast with Santa Marta, there are no pictures on the information board hanging on the wall: No smiling officers, pop stars, or laughing children. None of the officers seem remotely interested in me, no one welcomes me or asks me who I am. Instead, they pretend I'm not there and give me the silent treatment. A few of them are chatting but most just stare at a Brazilian talk show that is running on the old TV placed on top of a shaky cabinet.



Fig. 4.4 The hallroom at Alemão, July 2015

An hour passes, and I am still waiting for the Commander. My buttocks are sweaty and sore following my balancing act on the edge of the bench, so I stand up to stretch my legs. I am apparently still invisible. What if I had stripped naked in the middle of the room? Would they have seen me then? I'm not sure. A female officer is sitting behind the office desk now and she appears to be the only person in the room who is actually working. "Is there water here?" I ask. In Santa Marta the officers had immediately offered a glass when I arrived. She looks up from her papers and says that there is water in the cooler just around the corner. I walk over to the cooler. There is water but no clean cups, only a few left-behind disposable plastic cups. I have a glass, leave the cup where I found it, and return to the bench. Another officer sits down next to me. I feel a bit nervous and wonder whether I should try to start a conversation. I finally summon the courage to ask if there is anything special going on at the station today. He looks at me with disdain and makes a small grunt, which I assume is supposed to mean that he didn't get a word of what I just said. "Eh?" Okay, at least I am visible! I repeat the question and add that I have seen a lot of offices come and go. The officer cannot

pretend that he didn't get me this time, and I finally get an answer: "No." Attention is back at the TV. It is almost as if I can hear him scold me: "There is nothing *special* going on today." Another half hour passes and there are still no signs of the commander. I tell the woman at the desk that I'm leaving for lunch and will be back shortly. She shrugs.

When I return to the base after lunch, the commander is still in his meeting, but soon a group of officers exit the meeting room. A few of them are smiling and poking fun at each other. The air is brimming with testosterone. One officer pinches a colleague in the butt. Then they all flock to the information board to examine a paper that must have been put up while they were away. It's a list of their shift assignments. Finally, the commander leaves the room. He is tall and robust, I guess in his forties or early fifties. He's a serious-looking man who greets me with a handshake before telling me to follow him to his office. It's not big—perhaps 3 or 4 square meters—but there is enough room for a desk and a few chairs. The desktop is overflowing with paper and office supplies. In between all the bureaucratic forms and formal letters there are some flyers from a shop that sells military equipment. The commander seems tired and asks me to have a seat. I step on something as I sit down. Rifle ammunition. I pick up the bullet and place it on the desk. "This was on the floor," I say. The commander ignores my comment. Instead, he shuffles around some stacks of documents. More bullets roll out from in between the papers. He turns toward me. "So, you said you were from the Netherlands?"

After our meeting, where we discuss the details of my research (I get the impression that the Commander assumes I will be gone as soon as I have gotten a guided tour of the station and done a couple of interviews) I am shown around the base by Francisco, a white, young, and slender Soldier who says that he has worked here since the UPP was inaugurated. The building is three stories tall and features a modern, slick facade that stands out against the organic favela architecture. Inside, though, it still feels cramped. There are 300 officers working at the base and around 80 of them are on guard at any given time.<sup>10</sup> Although the station is barely

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<sup>10</sup> Organization of patrol at the 38 UPPs varied according to the size, geography, and socio-historical characteristics of the areas they covered, including levels "operational risk" (pacified

two years old it has already fallen into disrepair. The toilets are messy with several of them out of order. The bathroom walls have yellow stains and are full of stains, as if they've been showered with a corrosive liquid. In one bathroom the mirror has been shattered and someone has "fixed" it by haphazardly taping it to the wall with packaging tape. The doors look like they're about to fall off the hinges—or maybe it's the hinges that are about to fall off the walls (Fig. 4.5).

In the wardrobe, there are metal lockers lined up along the walls and windows. The remaining floorspace accommodates more rows of lockers. A couple of worn-out, filthy mattresses lie on the floor between the lockers. This is where the officers rest when they are on their 24-hour

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areas were classified as green, yellow, and red). It also reflected the preferences of the officer in command at the base. In general, at most UPPs patrol responsibilities were divided between patrol by vehicle, foot-patrol, fixed-point patrol, and tactical patrol. In addition, roughly 10–15% of the officers at the base carried out administrative tasks, as civilians could not be employed at the Military Police—a fact testifying, again, to the overall framework of war. The number of officers at each UPP ranged between 100 and 700. While the administrative staff at the base generally worked normal office hours, most patrol officers worked either 12 or 24-hour schedules on a 1:3 ratio. Officers on 12-hour shifts had 24 and 48 hours off between each shift, while those working 24 hours generally had 72 hours off, or exceptionally 48 hours off between shifts. Additionally, they were assigned extra shifts through a system called the Additional Service Regime, which was mandatory when I started my fieldwork, but was gradually discontinued due to an intensifying fiscal crisis in the State of Rio during my research period. During 24-hour shifts, patrol officers were entitled to 4 hours of rest. However, the resting facilities were generally improvised or inadequate at best. According to one of the staff psychologists at Coordinating offices of the Pacifying Police (CPP), working long shifts at the UPPs was more demanding than at the battalions: "The guy from the UPP [...] spends all the time in the terrain, he is in danger the entire time." The team of psychologists received numerous complaints from officers that the time off between each shift was not sufficient to recover from the previous shift. Additionally, although it is illegal, many patrol officers moonlight in private security companies or do other odd jobs during their time off to make ends meet and are often tired when they start their shift at the UPP. At Alemão, where approximately 300 officers were employed, the shift arrangements meant that approximately 80–90 cops were on duty on any given day. The UPP was commanded by a Captain and two Sub-Commanders with shared responsibilities. Generally, at the UPPs the command was composed exclusively of commanding officers although exceptionally Sub-Lieutenants (high ranking patrol officers) could act as Sub-Commanders. A group of 8 Sergeants (also patrol officers) oversaw four different *alas de serviço* (24-hour shift teams) at Alemão: Alfa, Bravo, Charlie and Delta. Each of these shifts started at 6 a.m. and lasted for 24 hours. Roughly 95% of the patrol officers at the UPPs were Soldiers in rank while the remaining 5% were Corporals (Mourão 2015). At Alemão, some shift teams were known for having an aggressive style of patrolling and were frequently involved in armed gunfights, while other shifts strived to minimize these, avoiding situations held to result in violence. According to officers I interviewed, the personal style and preference of the supervising Sergeants determined the kind of policing that was carried out by each shift team (Salem 2016a).



**Fig. 4.5** A bullet hole in one of the cabinets at the police officers' resting quarters

duty, Francisco explains. He prefers to sleep on the roof of the building as the rooftop rails are made of brick and mortar. "It's safer up there," he explains, pointing to the bullet holes in the lockers. He shows me more bullet holes on the locker room walls. In fact, they are peppered with them. On one wall the light switch is dangling from its thin wires. A bullet has smashed the plastic that used to keep the switch in place, and even though it seems like someone has attempted to push the switch back into the hole where it belongs, it has not remained in place. Other bullet holes have small pieces of Styrofoam bubbling out from behind thin aluminum panels. Except for the armory, the building is built on a steel frame. The walls are dressed in thin aluminum plates and isolated with Styrofoam. They keep the heat out. The bullets, on the other hand, cut through them like butter.

A young officer wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt has just scrubbed the wardrobe floor. He rests on a pile of old mattresses when we enter the room. "You wanted to learn about our working conditions?" Francisco points at the Soldier. "This police officer was shot a couple of weeks ago

and yet here he is, mopping the floors.” I greet the officer who lifts his t-shirt to show me the scar from the wound where the bullet punctured his stomach. “Do you think he gets to stay at home and rest with his family until he recovers?” Francisco smiles ironically, his voice is full of sarcasm. “Maybe in Norway, but not here. Here, he must work like the rest of us...”<sup>11</sup>

Sub-lieutenant Santos is second in command at Alemão. Just 22 years old, he is the youngest officer with command responsibilities at any of the UPPs. He is calm and composed, and the officers seem to respect him, even if he is several years younger than most of them. He politely introduces himself and tells me that he is at my disposal. I explain that my project examines the everyday life of police officers at the UPPs and their view on the State. He likes it: “We are the pawns in a bigger game,” he says, asking me to wait while he gathers a group of officers whom I can interview. The Sub-lieutenant suggests I use the meeting room. It is spacious with daylight entering through a large, frosted glass window. When the air conditioner is on it almost feels as cold as a fridge.

I assume the role of the self-assured, “experienced” anthropologist, deepen the tone of my voice, and introduce myself to the six police officers seated around the table in the middle of the room. They are uniformed and wearing bulletproof vests. All carry guns in their belt and two of them are armed with machine guns placed casually between their legs. I pick up my notebook with the questions I scribbled down the day before. Just a few minutes have passed when Francisco, a slender, white man in his early thirties, points his index finger up into the air. “Hear that?” It sounds like someone is popping popcorn. “What is that? Is that gunfire?” I ask. “Yes, its gunfire. It’s close,” he says. Despite the chilling temperature in the room, a rush of blood makes me feel warm. *Don’t show fear*, I tell myself. “It must be the Tactical Patrol Unit that just left

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<sup>11</sup> The work conditions of the patrol officers at the Military Police have been described as being “analogous to slavery” (Soares 2015: 28). Long shifts, insufficient time to rest in between shifts, lack of equipment and resources, poor infrastructure, unpaid extra hours, low and delayed wages, laws against unionizing, a rigid institutional hierarchy, and an arcane disciplinary code of conduct are just some of the elements that add to the stress patrol officers experience as a result of the armed violence at the UPPs. The work conditions of police officers have been signaled as a significant challenge to democratic policing in Rio and Brazil (see Barros 2015; Soares 2015).



the base. “They said they were heading to Areal,” another officer notes. They tell me that the unit in question is particularly “tactical” or “fond of war” (*gostam da guerra*).

I try to remain as casual and unaffected by the shooting as the rest of the group and focus on our conversation. Working in Alemão is hard, they tell me: “Here we are with the enemy all the time. We are surrounded in all directions. We are on the enemy’s home turf.” The people living here are hostile towards the police, Francisco says. After forty, or fifty years of state absence and drug rule, the police took control and started to ban parties and keep drug trafficking in check but without accompanying social policies, he explains. The men say that the situation in Alemão is dire: The police has not been able to force out the traffickers like they did in Santa Marta, although they recognize that the first year of pacification was a lot “calmer” than the present moment. There was some occasional shooting, but lately, it has been impossible for them to do their patrol rounds without ending up in shootouts and gunfights. In the six to seven weeks since Christmas, there has been shooting every day. Many shootouts escalate into urban combats—like the one taking place as we are speaking. The gunfire continues in the valley below the UPP. In fact, the sound has been getting louder, suggesting that the conflict is moving closer to the police station. I have the bullet holes in the walls fresh in my mind. I’m tense, and suddenly become aware of a sharp back pain. Have I been hit by a bullet? Of course, I have not. But I cannot help wonder if I am the only one who is worried. The officers keep talking but suddenly one of them gets up and leaves the room. “It’s a reflex” Francisco explains. “He has been shot before and gets nervous, but that’s alright. He’s still a good police officer.” The men assure me that nobody thinks less of him for reacting to the shooting. *Don’t show fear.*

The remaining officers start discussing media portrayals of the police. There’s nobody writing about *their* experience, about *their* point of view—they are *always* criticized. “The media claims that the police officers are not doing their jobs, but they don’t report on the constant attacks on the police.” The officers are talking quickly, and I have a hard time jotting down all of their comments. “Can I tape-record our conversation?” The room goes quiet. Francisco looks uncomfortable. “Forget it,” I say, so that he won’t have to. He looks at me and says: “Look, sometimes

the Military Police is criticized by people who quote them on things that have been said..." He was 30 years old when he entered the force and used to have a different opinion about the police. "If anybody wants to listen to us, we'll happily talk, even if they're from Norway," Francisco continues. Contrary to what I have assumed, the officers here *want* to talk to me: They want to share their version of what's happening in Alemão. "We are the best police force in the country," one of the men chimes in. "We are the police who kill the most, die the most, and get paid the least." I get the feeling that they are quite proud of being the force that "kills the most"—as if it's a sign of their brutal efficiency in the war on crime.

The officers stop talking. Outside the shooting has intensified. "They are right by the base now," Francisco says. I stare down at the questions I have written in my notebook and read them out mechanically without paying attention to what I'm saying, and when the officers speak, I jot down their answers without really understanding what I'm writing. My mind is focused on the rhythmic sounds from the gunfight in the favela. From the meeting room, I can neither see nor judge the severity of the situation. Should I be throwing myself to the floor now, like the police officers in Santa Marta suggested? I decide to address the subject—I no longer care to hide my fear. "I think I would have felt safer in the houses in the favela than here," I say. "Are we safe?" They laugh. "Of course we're not. We're the target!" Francisco tries to reassure me: "It's normal" he says. Even if all the shooting can make them nervous too, he says that most of them enjoy the shootouts. "If you stay here until the tactical patrol unit returns, you will see them laughing and joking about what just happened. Everybody laughs because we still enjoy our work!" This morning, his unit had encountered a "problem" during the morning patrol and when they returned to the base they were already planning how to retaliate. They tell me that they are always eager to catch the criminals: "We like getting rid of them. After confrontations we end up talking about the excitement. We know we are going back out again because we want to get them, we want to rid (*tirar*) society of criminals." The other officers agree. I ask them who they think they are working for. "That we don't know," one of them says. They are *not*

doing it for the corrupt politicians in government. And the favela residents? “The residents (*moradores*) deserve to die,” one of them says so quickly that I’m confused as to whether he intended me to hear him. Francisco is more careful with his choice of words: “Well, the residents prefer the thugs (*vagabundos*) to the police. They support the criminals. The dream of the traffickers and residents in Alemão is for the traffickers to return [to power].”

The shooting has lasted for more than an hour but finally the sound is fading and eventually dies out. I’m eager to seize this opportunity to get away from the base and out of Alemão. Who knows when a new gunfight begins? I’m saved by the shift leader. He rushes into the room. “*Caralho!* What are you guys doing here?” His voice is severe. “Come on, you have to support your colleagues in Areal!” The officers get up and unholster their guns. Our conversation has ended. Outside it’s getting dark. I head over to the gondola which, to my surprise, is still running. I’m never coming back I think to myself as I enter the station. But I know that I have to: I *must* understand these men.

Once I’m home I open my laptop. I’ve joined several Facebook groups where favela residents report on what is happening in their neighborhoods. In one post, a woman from Alemão comments on the shootout:

I want to thank God for this immense deliverance. I was on my way to physical therapy. What a day today. Exhausting, painful, emotional. I had already mentioned earlier that I woke up feeling like this. As usual, I was walking down Joaquim de Queiroz (the main street in Alemão). When a huge confrontation broke out at 3:45 in the afternoon. Mind you, it was 3:45, and I was between Sabino and Areal, and thanks to God, there was a charitable soul on the road. Sandra, a friend of my daughter’s, shouted come back auntie, we entered the store and were trapped there for an hour. Along with two young women and three children, two teenagers and a boy. It hurt to see the despair of those children. Lacy went into a trance because her mother was crossing the street at that exact moment. I was there, desperate and calming those people down, as the cellphone signal wasn’t working. Trying to alert my companions... someone who could rescue us. And the gunshots... and more gunshots could be heard... and the despair too. Because the screams echoed through the deserted

street. There were times when I felt incapable, felt like nothing. I write this crying. But we are fine...!!! I'm narrating here the daily life of a *favelada* resident of a supposedly pacified Complex.

## Asserting Authority

### Residents and Police Officers from the UPP Clash in Santa Marta

Residents and police officers from the Pacifying Police Unit (UPP) of the Santa Marta favela in Botafogo, South Zone of Rio de Janeiro, clashed at around 11:30 pm on Sunday. The conflict reportedly began after an officer aggressively approached two residents. Rejecting this attitude, a group of protesters threw stones and bottles at a UPP patrol. The police officers responded with tear gas and pepper spray. "It was like a scene from a movie. I couldn't even leave my house. The police officers threw a lot of tear gas and pepper spray. They think everyone is a criminal. Many people, including children, had to leave the favela to be able to breathe," says a resident who preferred to remain anonymous. According to him, about 13 police cars arrived at the scene at the time of the confrontation. The UPP confirmed that the police presence was reinforced in the area and that the conflict began after two suspicious-looking men were approached by police officers. According to an officer, all of the non-lethal weapons in stock were used in the confrontation. The case was registered at the 10th Police District in Botafogo. (Newspaper report, February 2015)

There are no patrol vehicles parked in the square at Santa Marta when I return in late February, following the Carnival celebrations. The elevator leading to the UPP is out of order and I decide to climb the stairs to the top. I brace myself. It's 40 degrees and the sun is at its zenith. The jeans I'm wearing are glued to my thighs. I keep a slow pace, like a high-altitude alpinist economizing his energies. The last time I joined the officers at Santa Marta on patrol they were accompanied by two Google executives wanting to test a new body-cam technology that would allow the base commander to use GPS to track them, live-stream video during patrol, or document arrests. This way, they argued, the police would be able to prove they had followed the correct procedures if they should get into legal conflicts with residents. The commander hoped this measure

would help reduce police violence and lighten the workload of the officers who were allegedly afraid to act, as neighbors could film them and share the videos online. This, he claimed, often gave a wrong impression of events. If the police had a video recording of their own, it would give them confidence to carry out their work. At least, this was how the commander explained it. The officers of the patrol unit were less enthusiastic. “They are ending our privacy” Marcio dryly commented when I asked him what he thought. Not that what they were doing was illegal, he said, but it was already enough having other people’s cameras disturbing their work. “It’s not easy to keep a good relationship with the inhabitants here while we’re arresting their friends and family members” Marcio reasoned.

I am about halfway up the hill, climbing a narrow, colorful staircase. A little further ahead, a teenage boy wearing nothing but a flower-patterned pair of Bermudas, is sitting in the stairs. He smiles at me as I pass. That’s nice of him I think and smile back. “You’re not a gringo,” he says. Huh? I don’t understand why he makes this comment. “Me? Yes, I’m a gringo.” “No, you’re not. Lift your shirt.” A few steps further up I see a second guy, half-hidden in one of the doorways, with a walkie-talkie in his hand—the kind traffickers use. I lift my shirt, exposing the lining of my jeans. “Turn around” he orders in a calm and polite manner. I do as he says. He wants to check that I’m not carrying a gun. I guess he must have seen me patrol with the officers. “Are you with the group of gringos who just walked past here?” I tell him that I’m not. “Are you going to Michael Jackson?” He’s still smiling while he interrogates me. “No, I’m going to the top of the favela,” I say. I don’t want to tell him that I’m going to the police station. “Ah, well, then you’ll just have to keep walking upwards.”

At the base, Marcio comes to greet me. We’re not going on patrol today, he says. The patrol unit with Thiago and Igor has been split up. They were involved in the brawl that was reported by the media. Marcio says they spotted two young men near one of the *bocas*. One was carrying a backpack which Marcio suspected contained drugs. The two men had tried to escape when they saw the police. They had chased them down a blind alley and managed to detain one of them but the one carrying the backpack got away. As they were about to take the suspect to the

police station the neighbors had protested, throwing rocks and bottles at them. The patrol unit had retaliated with pepper spray and the arsenal of non-lethal weapons they carry on patrol. The situation had been chaotic. After the event, what Marcio described as “bad elements” from the local community had gathered with the leaders of the local Resident Association demanding that Marcio and Thiago be removed from patrol. They claimed that they had been violent with the detained suspect, which Marcio firmly denies: “He (the suspect) was wounded by the bottles they (the neighbors) threw at us.” But the Commander at Santa Marta gave in to the pressure from the Neighborhood Association, and dissolved the patrol unit, transferring Marcio to an administrative position at the UPP.

Today, Marcio and Thiago are driving to the headquarters of the riot police division (*Choque*) to tank up one of the patrol vehicles. We take the freeway to the city center. Thiago is driving. He turns on the emergency lights and hits the gas pedal, driving like we’re responding to an urgency or in the middle of a car chase. He speedily slams the car from one lane to the other zig-zagging through the traffic. When we’re about to get off the freeway he steps on the brakes. Tires screaming, he accelerates as we continue through the narrow city streets: Past a red light; up on the curbstone as we cut a corner; into the opposite lane. He seems used to driving like this, or maybe he is just showing off.

As we near the battalion, Thiago hits the brakes again, turning the emergency lights off. The officers say that the commander made a strategic mistake taking them off the street: “When the police give in to pressure like this, it makes our work in the favela harder. The bad elements of society understand that they have power over us. They think they can protest and get it their way! Now we must think twice before we act” Marcio complains. They comment on an operation in Alemão last night: A woman died as she was hit by a stray bullet in her apartment and two officers were wounded. The police had arrested eighteen drug traffickers but to Marcio’s disappointment, most of them were underage. “That means they’ll soon be out on the streets again” he explains. Thiago says the age of criminal responsibility should be lowered to twelve years. At present, it’s eighteen. Many of the traffickers are thirteen, fourteen. He says there are prisons for underaged delinquents as well, but when the kids get out again, they are often more dangerous than before: “The

prisons here do nothing to re-educate criminals, and every inmate cost society more than the salary of a police officer” Thiago protests. He tells me that he joined the police to kill traffickers, he sees no other solution: Criminals are ruthless, they have no heart.

Inside the battalion, Marcio wants me to photograph the buildings. “But don’t let them see you. You really need permission to take pictures here.” He points at the mural painted across the wall of one of the buildings. Against gray fatigue, Choque’s emblem is painted in yellow. It is the helmet of a spartan warrior (which looks confusingly like that of a medieval knight) and seems like an odd choice for the riot police. The emblem is accompanied by a text that reads:

*Courage comes from our BLOOD,*  
[A bravura provém do nosso SANGUE,]  
*Glory from our VICTORIES*  
[a glória de nossas VITÓRIAS]  
*BLOOD & VICTORY*  
[SANGUE & VITÓRIA]

Apart from the obvious reference to policing as warfare, I find the blood and glory symbolism and its religious undertones chilling.<sup>12</sup> If the officer’s courage comes from their blood, do the criminals carry evil in theirs?

We return to the UPP around lunch time. The officers at the base are just about to get lunch and the Commander invites me to eat with them. He is young, around my own age, and strikes me as friendly, educated, and “progressive”—in other words, as a modern man. I notice how it makes it easier for me to sympathize with him and see the pacification as more palatable. Today, he is wearing brand-new sportswear (which makes him even more relatable) and looks more like a fitness coach or personal trainer than a Military Police Commander spearheading a relentless war on drugs. He carefully recites the entire menu to me: Beef, fish, chicken,

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<sup>12</sup> In Portuguese *bravura* is both used to denote animal aggression and bravery in the face of challenges. Tellingly, in the Military Police it was used as an analogy for killing, rewarding police officers for *atos de bravura* (acts of bravery) through the *gratificação faroeste* (the wild west bonus) (1995–1998), a salary bonus given to officers who killed alleged criminals. The reward system duplicated the police death rate (see Chapter 5: Police Masculinities).

or deep-fried chicken, with feijão, rice, spaghetti, farofa, and a salad on the side. I can choose between a mayonnaise salad or a tomato salad.

I take a seat at the table and chat with the officers about Carnival as we wait for the food. I ask Marcio if he ever participates in the *blocos* (street celebrations). He shakes his head. He doesn't celebrate Carnival. He doesn't like it. Many "righteous" people attend but there are also thugs and thieves. Often, they are armed, and Marcio stays away from the blocos to be on the safe side. Furthermore, neither married people nor Evangelical Christians celebrate Carnival, and he is both. To Marcio, Carnival means extra work. As an officer, he must work extra shifts during the weeklong celebration, and all the partying makes it harder. "Alcohol consumption creates criminals in potential," he observes.

One of the female officers at the base is seated amidst with all the men. She has always seemed happy and is smiling whenever I see her. Relatively new to this game, she says that she had to cover a shift at one of the biggest *blocos*. Some of them have hundreds of thousands of attendants. Marcio has already worked during several Carnival celebrations and gives her suggestions on how to prepare for these events. "You must bring everything: Teargas, pepper spray, shock grenades. And for the love of God, secure your gun to your thigh with a string." The police officers chat about the different weapons that come in handy in these situations. The female officer chimes in: "It's always impossible to get hold of the Taser!"

After lunch, Thiago shows me the new gear that he has bought. It's a telescopic baton that extends when it's swung into the air. He gives the baton a forceful swing to demonstrate. Now it is my turn to try. The baton is black and made of hard plastic. It feels very light in my hand. The shaft is about twenty centimeters but extends to three times that length when in use. I give it a gentle swing. The telescopic element only emerges halfway from the shaft. Marcio giggles. "No, Tomas, you have to use *force* when you swing it!" I try one more time and this time I hear a soft click as the two elements are locked into place. I want to give the baton back to Marcio the way I got it and try to shove it back into the shaft, but it's stuck. "I think I swung it too hard" I say, feeling a little dumb. Marcio laughs again and grabs the baton, pushing it firmly against the concrete wall in front of us (Fig. 4.6).





**Fig. 4.6** Police officers in Santa Marta carrying “non-lethal” arms, February 2015

The commander is calm and thoughtful. We are sitting in a corner of the common room to have a chat while the officers are resting. He claims that the relationship between the police and the residents of Santa Marta is good, despite the clashes that may arise when the officers make arrests. When these situations occur, he must show the population that he is willing to listen to them, to dialogue. He says that the Residents Association had complained that Marcio and Thiago were harassing local teenagers, repeatedly subjecting them to frisks with no reason. I think about how they have approached people, especially young men, when I have joined them on patrol.

I tell the commander that the officers in Alemão complain that the population does not support the police. “That attitude is wrong” he says disparagingly. “The population doesn’t have to support the police. It’s the police that must win the population’s trust. Many police officers arrive [at the favelas] thinking that they will be seen as heroes for forcing the traffickers out but that’s not how it works. The police must reach out to the residents continuously. Those who live here are skeptical to the

police because of the long history of violence and corruption within the police force. The police have only been in Alemão for three years, while we have been in Santa Marta for six years. When the police are met with resistance, when the residents shout at them or throw rocks, we must work harder to improve our relations with the community. But many officers don't see it like this." The commander says that the problem is bad training and bad working conditions. It makes it harder to change the view of the officers and the relations between police and residents. "That whole discourse about the police not being accepted is wrong. The police must understand that they are in the home of the residents now. They must see the population as their clients and not as someone who has to accept them."

At Alemão, police officers also get into a brawl with the neighbors when they try to break up a Carnival celebration on a late Saturday evening in February. There, the officers don't use shock grenades and pepper spray. Instead, they shoot live ammunition into the air above the crowd, creating panic as the crowd evacuates the street. The message is clear: The party's over.

## Conclusion: Transformation and Elimination<sup>13</sup>

By comparing the two extremes of the pacification project, the dynamics of policing that underpinned the UPPs are brought to the fore. The police explained variations in the use of repressive and preventative strategies as stages in a process where the priority was to suppress armed resistance by traffickers, followed by a stage where the police would consolidate their authority in the favelas through cultural change: First eliminate, then transform (see Oliveira 2014; Muñoz and Albernaz 2015). Initially, these stages were divided between different police forces: The special operations units (mainly BOPE) would expel armed drug

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<sup>13</sup> The analysis in this chapter's conclusion, and especially the idea that police practices exist in a tension between transformation and elimination (which I understand as an operationalization of war machine and state dynamics), draws on conversations with Marco Martínez-Moreno and Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte in the context of a post-graduate course on far-right subjectivity at the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro.

traffickers from the favelas, while UPP officers would consolidate territorial control once armed resistance towards the police was no longer an issue. This division of labor was influenced by a belief that these two strategies of policing—elimination and transformation—were essentially incompatible.

However, in Complexo do Alemão, despite a military intervention that lasted two years (2010–2012), police repression had not successfully “eliminated” the drug traffickers and their “culture”—and police officers who were supposed to carry out preventative work, ended up doing mainly repressive tasks (I will return to this dynamic and its effects in Chapter 7: Modernizing Warriors). As Santa Marta’s opposite, Alemão became an important frontline or “state margin” (Das and Poole 2004) where the dynamics of elimination—war-machine dynamics—of the pacification came to the fore. Like an army invading a foreign country, the police officers in Alemão saw themselves as soldiers at war with traffickers locally anchored through kinship ties to the favela population. Seen as impossible to transform due to Alemão’s history as the stronghold of Comando Vermelho (the culture of trafficking was simply too “rooted” to be transformed), what remained was to apply the logic of elimination. As I will show in the following chapters, the urban landscape of Alemão was perceived as imbued with evil, a cosmivision that fit Pentecostal understandings of the relation between spirit and matter (see, e.g. Shapiro 2021).

The harsh realities of armed combat were fertile ground for narratives of police victimization (which Jair Bolsonaro has both tapped into and incentivized). Rather than discussing whether these narratives represent a lived reality or not, I am interested in how they legitimized violent retributions by the police. In Alemão, the logic of war was intimately linked to the logic of extermination to the extent that one officer ambiguously described his job as doing the devil’s work: kill, steal, and destroy (see Chapter 5: Police Masculinities). This was, ironically, justified with reference to the favelas as places of evil. Whereas Albernaz (2015) in her study of evangelical police officers observed that they adopted different strategies to avoid combat situations (mainly avoiding street patrol), which they saw as brutalizing, I was not able to observe a similar pattern in Alemão as I did not systematically register the religious views of

the officers I spoke with. I did, however, observe tropes and imaginaries that coincide with Catholic but particularly Pentecostal cosmology, and police officers addressing the cognitive dissonance it might produce to carry out the work of the devil in the name of God, so to speak, by appealing narratives of police victimization (see Alves 2021)—which were, at least to a certain degree, made plausible due to the high levels of armed violence in Alemão and were strengthened by their understanding of policing-as-warfare (and thus interpreted as a symmetrical relation between warring parties).<sup>14</sup>

Importantly, narratives of police victimization often produced feelings of resentment and fueled a desire for vengeance that has been associated with the far-right movements (Duarte and Martinez-Moreno 2023), and which dovetail with an emergent form of militant Pentecostalism which has “replaced the Jesus of the Gospels with a vengeful warrior Christ” (Kobes du Mez 2023).<sup>15</sup> It is possible to speculate that as this militarization of faith takes hold, there might simply not be a cognitive dissonance to speak for many officers, even religious ones (c.f. Albernaz 2015). Rather, the violence they deliver in the favelas could be a sign of virtue—of righteous officers delivering just retribution. Such an interpretation seems to be supported by the “writing on the wall” at Choque’s headquarters: Courage and glory; blood and victory. This jargon is telling of a police self-perception as warriors at war with a part of the population, their blood infused with courage, where violence can be seen as purifying as it offers a way to redemption through suffering and through

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<sup>14</sup> While perpetrator of violence are often uneffaced by feelings of guilt (since they think they are doing good) Hannah Arendt (2006 [1963]: 106) notes how the “animal pity” that all normal men experience in the presence of physical suffering is managed by turning empathy inwards, towards the self: “So that instead of saying: What horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders!” During the Cold War in Latin America, military rulers imposed the notion that they were embroiled in a “dirty war” with communist guerrilla groups to legitimize genocidal violence. In the aftermath of the dictatorships, civil rights movements and intellectuals have challenged the dirty war narrative showing how it was used to torture, mutilate, kill, and disappear political opponents. The notion of police victimization responds to a similar effort among critical scholars to challenge such narratives of “asymmetrical warfare” (see i.g. Feierstein 2007; Magalhães 2020).

<sup>15</sup> While this militarized version of Christianity is a characteristic of white Evangelicals in the US, it is a transnational movement and has been exported to Brazil as well (Kobes du Mez 2023).

the cleansing of the favelas by eliminating the evil that resides there (see Birman 2019).

In Santa Marta, where armed trafficking was successfully repressed, the logic of elimination had been supplanted by one of transformation through the inscription of a new set of rules, of a new moral code, imposed and policed by the officers at the UPPs (see Albernaz 2020). However, also here there were different models in tension: On the one hand a “modern” or globalist approach to militarized policing that emphasized dialogue and trust building, and on the other, a “regional” approach that continued to draw on the grammars of violent sociability (as “the only language criminals understand”)—as my lunch with the officers of Santa Marta suggested. At Santa Marta, the unapologetic observations of the officers in Alemão that the job of the police was to kill, was replaced by more insidious forms of militarization, for example through recourse to technologies that lower the threshold for the use of force and through the exercise of what Vinicius Esperança (2022) identifies as an expression of pastoral power: A power associated with self-sacrifice and the capacity of leading the people living in the favelas on the path to salvation (see Foucault 2007). While pastoral power is different from sovereign power in that it is centered around the sacrifice of the pastor to protect his flock, the way it was expressed in the police signals an overlap with a sovereign logic: If “society” kept “doing what was wrong thinking it was right” it was the police’s task to intervene, if necessary, by recourse to force.

According to the worldview of many police officers, people could generally be put in one of two opposing categories: Either they were good Christian workers or promiscuous and evil criminals. While confrontations tended to crystallize positions at the extremes (producing a strict division between absolute good and absolute evil), among the officers in Santa Marta I observed more room for nuance, for separating different degrees of good and evil. Their point of view included the possibility of moral and spiritual reform, for example through conversion to Pentecostal Christianity or by adopting the protestant ethos of work (see also Albernaz 2018; Birman 2019). The disapproval of carnival celebration by some officers on the grounds that it promoted promiscuity and created potential criminals reflects how the idea of a spiritual battle

could collapse distinctions between immoral acts and crime since both expressed the operation of evil forces within the subject, a weakness of character, and moral degradation. When police officers repressed the carnival celebrations in Alemão, they were asserting a moral order where the excesses of carnival were perceived as dangerous and not in line with the kind of “civilized” and ordered spaces that the favelas had to be transformed into under the tutelage of the police.

Likewise, the officers in Santa Marta understood their role in the community to go beyond the war on drugs, as well as the mere upholding of law and order. The pastoral dynamics of policing had them assume a paternalistic position as role models for the children and educators having to keep the youth in check, for example by deciding what music could be played or by enforcing an ethics of work. This moral policing was part of the attempt to transform favela subjectivities from what they perceived as conditions of vagrancy, indecency, and immorality, to civilized and hard-working subjects that showed deference and admiration for police authority—a transformation that often required the religious conversion on behalf of the subject (see Misse 2008: 308). The presence of patrol officers in pacified communities was meant to prevent the return of armed traffickers so that the “culture” could be gradually transformed through “social projects” that would sway a future generation of favela dwellers. However, the police officer’s effort to guide children down the “right path” had a clear limit, which was expressed in their desire to reduce the age of criminal responsibility. One officer told me that they believed that unless the respect for police authority had been impressed in children by the age of 8–9 years, they were usually lost.

The assumption that the neighbors from the favelas did not support the police was shaped by experiences such as the brawls I have described. They signal how police authority was constantly negotiated or provisional (Jauregui 2016). However, as the discussion in Chapter 2: Favela/Asfalto showed, it did not mean that favela residents “supported traffickers” as the police would often suggest. Rather, this belief was the result of the friend-enemy distinctions that war tends to produce, and an “either you are with us or against us” way of thinking.

In this chapter, I have examined how the pacification policy relied on a logic of elimination and transformation—practices that built on

notions of both colonial and cultural warfare. I have also shown how assertions of police authority that enforced religious ideas of good and evil, an ethics of work, patriarchal family values, traditional gender hierarchies, and sexual moralism, took different forms: From an insistence on not losing face and the harassment of persons considered “undeserving” to the policing of masculinity. But I have also shown that there were divergent understandings within the institution on how policing should be carried out, and how favela residents should be approached, a point I will return to in Chapter 7: Modernizing Warriors.

Esperança (2022: 25–26) observes that the new *cidadão de bem*—the ideal citizen according to what I have thus far referred to as “police regionalism” should not circulate without carrying its ID papers nor during the night, unless it’s on the way to or from work; young people should study or work, not idle around in the favela alleys, as this was assumed to indicate connivance with crime; not consume drugs since these lead to moral degradation; take care of their health and appearances; preferably be married, forming a stable, heteronormative family that inculcate in its children respect and admiration towards the police; and above all, it should be law-abiding and respectful of police authority, avoiding public expressions of resistance towards the order imposed through military power. In the next chapter, I will examine the dynamics of male authority and how they link with the figure of the warrior as well as that of the father and family provider.

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# 5

## Police Masculinities

### Bitches

Anderson sits on the bench in the common room in Alemão when I arrive. He holds his arm around one of his female colleagues but gets up the moment he sees me. “Get yourself a bulletproof vest,” he says. The rest of the patrol unit is waiting for us up by the container base. The base is exactly what its name indicates: A sparsely furnished shipping container that provides shelter and a toilet. It is placed further up the hill, where the officers can keep an eye on the people entering the favela through the forest-covered hills. We are accompanied by two other officers: Breno, and Marcia. Breno is a quiet officer who usually keeps a low profile. Marcia has just been stationed in Alemão. When I greet her, she seems nervous. Her hand shivers as she unholsters her gun. “This is my second shift,” she says. “Have you worked at another UPP before?” I ask her. Most of the officers at Alemão have. “No, I just finished my training. They sent me straight to the war,” she says nervously. I

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can understand why she is scared: She knows that this is the frontline (Fig. 5.1).

Anderson leads the way through the favela at a quick pace. Marcia pants nervously behind me, clenching so hard at her gun that her knuckles turn white. She seems unprepared, too scared to be patrolling with a loaded gun in her hand. By the time we reach the upper part of the favela she is exhausted. By the container base, a group of officers from the patrol unit are resting in the shade. They have taken off their bullet-proof vests and unbuttoned their uniform shirts. Next to the container, there's an older washing-machine-tumbler-come-grill with burning coal. It's Sunday and UPP commanders rarely work during weekends. When their bosses are away the officers spend most of the day chatting by the barbeque. The fat dripping from the meat hisses in the fire. Anderson offers me some chicken wings, and orders me to eat. He's in a good mood, and so are the other officers. Edilson, a sturdy guy with a big smile, pats his beer belly and says he has promised himself he will start



Fig. 5.1 Police officers with hyper-masculine bodies in Santa Marta, April 2015

exercising so that he can sign up for BOPE's challenging admission trials. The officers laugh.

Marcia tells us that she lives in Vila Kennedy, a pacified favela in western Rio. "Move out of there," Anderson says strictly. Now that she works for the police she can't keep living in the favela. "It's going to get worse there. The favela is controlled by the Red Command but surrounded by other gangs," he explains, suggesting that the epicenter of Rio's armed conflicts might shift as the police continues to push traffickers out of the city's central areas. Marcia nervously asks if the container base has ever been attacked. Her hands are shaking as she fiddles with the strap of her gun holster. When Anderson tells her that the container was attacked from the woods just behind us, she looks over her shoulder. I remember the feeling I had the first time I came to Alemão. I want to say something to calm her but Anderson doubles down on his bet: "Here it's cold, dark, and foggy—and the beginning of all bad things." The other officers laugh at his poetic skills. I'm not sure if they enjoy seeing Marcia scared or if this is some sort of admission test, in preparation for the harsh realities of Alemão. Either way, she is soon on her way back to the UPP with one of the men. Once they have left Edilson starts complaining. He didn't like her attitude. She had told him that she didn't want fixed-point patrol duty—having to stand guard at a specific place during a full shift. Of course, none of the officers do. If she's afraid and unprepared she'll be a burden to her colleagues. Her patrol unit will effectively be one man short. I ask Edilson if he's saying it because she is a woman, but he says that he doesn't. There are many female officers who are good at their job. He names one of them: "She's tougher than many of the men here."

A few days ago, I came to Alemão just to discover that the police officers that I was supposed to meet were off duty. The trip from Leme to Alemão took me an hour, so I decided to stay at the base and see if something came up. Nothing did, and so I sat in the hallway of the police station observing the officers. The favela was calm, and the atmosphere at the base was unusually relaxed, even sleepy. The officers were mostly fiddling with their phones. They seemed absorbed with the subject of naked women: Mostly pictures and videos sent to them by their lovers and mistresses, which I imagine were not meant to be openly shared with

their friends. One of them showed me the video of one of his girlfriends fingering herself. He had seen her in a soft porn magazine and contacted her online. “She has a fifteen-year-old son!” he laughed. Looking her up on Facebook, he had gone through her images and found one where she was with her son. Imagine the son finding out that his mother was a porn actress! The officer giggled and passed his phone with her pictures around while the other officers shared their conquests.

I felt that I had to provide proof of my own, non-existent heterosexuality, which was easier said than done. The absence of (heterosexual) porn on my phone is uncanny. I suddenly recalled a video sent to me by a friend a while back. It shows clips from different porn videos where the genitalia have been replaced by drawings of tools, groceries, or musical instruments and is meant to make you laugh, not to make you horny. After searching through my gallery, I finally found it and proudly showed it to one of the officers. I immediately realized that I hadn’t understood the game at all. It seemed like the officer almost felt a little sorry for me. He nodded, smiled, and said: “Ah... well, look at that.” A couple of other men gathered around my phone. They looked at the video for exactly three seconds before returning to the competitive comparison of their heterosexual achievements. I felt a little lame and embarrassed that I couldn’t provide anything that compared to the officer who was now showing a video of himself having sex with a voluptuous woman, or one of his colleague sharing a video he had received from a female police officer who used to work at the UPP.

While we are sitting by the barbeque, waiting for the next round of meat, Anderson wants to know whether I’ve been with a Brazilian woman. Somewhat naively, perhaps, I tell them that the only Brazilian girl I’ve gotten to know is my *cachorra*—bitch. The men howl with laughter. I try to explain that I’m talking about an *actual* bitch: Violeta, the dog we adopted from our neighbor. Even more laughter. Maybe I should not explain. They prefer the unintended joke to my boring stories. Anderson tells me I should avoid calling a woman a bitch when she can hear me. He tells me that his girlfriend drugged him with sleeping medicine a couple weeks ago, to keep him home. She thinks he is having an affair, so she mixed the medicine into a juice bottle that he unsuspectingly gulped down. I almost choke on my soda: “Does she

have a reason for suspicion?" I ask. "You bet she does!" Anderson laughs. He pulls out a phone from his pocket. "This phone right here, Tomas, I always leave at work! With this one, I keep track of all my mistresses. It's my *one* bad habit—this is my security vent."

Anderson first became a father when he was fifteen. He had five children. "They're all bastards," he tells me. We laugh. His eldest daughter is eighteen and already a mother herself. Anderson is a grandfather at 38! More laughter. "I think it's the curse of the officers. I see it like that. My job is very dangerous. Today I'm here, talking to you, tomorrow I might not be here anymore. I could be killed because of my job, right? So, I try to live my life to the fullest. And in that process of living life to the fullest, I ended up producing all those kids." Anderson says the most beautiful women in Brazil live in the south of the country. Here in Rio, the sun is so strong even white people turn black, he explains, pointing at his own face and laughing. Then he shifts to the topic of *nordestinos*: "To be honest, they ought to build a wall to keep them out," he says, and sends a teasing glance towards Edilson who is black and from the Brazilian northeast. Edilson laughs and I wonder if he thinks the joke is funny. Anderson is on a roll and elaborates on the uselessness and immorality of *nordestinos*. "But aren't there many *nordestinos* in the police?" I ask. "Oh, it's full of them," he says, pointing to Edilson again (Fig. 5.2).

I'm reminded of a conversation I had a while back with a Sergeant who had been born in Bahía, one of Brazil's northeastern provinces. His father had served in the Navy and had been transferred to Rio when the Sergeant was still young. They had moved to an apartment complex in a middle-class neighborhood in Rio provided by the military. He was one of the few black kids in his group of friends and told me that they often made racist jokes: "I was always afraid. I shut my mouth or laughed along with the others. Maybe that's why to this day I can't be with a black woman." Then he had smiled: "Ahhh, well, yes, I've had a few, dated a few, taken them home, messed around a bit. But I haven't ever had a serious relationship with a black woman. I've been thinking about my kids. Because... I don't want them to experience what I lived through. So, I try to mix up the color a little bit, to see if they get lighter skin than me. To see if they suffer a little less than I did." The Sergeant had



**Fig. 5.2** Sunday barbecue with the police officers at Alemão, April 2015

continued: “My mother always told me that we were living beyond our means, that we were the cuckoo in the nest, you know? I had friends who travelled to Disney World, who went to Europe, who had parents with big cars. And my father had no car, right? We didn’t travel. *I* went to a public school, *they* (his friends) went to parties, had nice clothes, the most expensive toys, and I was neither fish nor fowl: I wasn’t poor, but I wasn’t rich. And since we lived in a place that was beyond our economic means, I had to learn to suffer in silence.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Whiteness strategies like the interracial sexual practices described by the Sergeant have been pursued at a large-scale during centuries in Brazil alongside other whitening policies, in a state-driven attempt to produce a whiter and modern Brazilian nation. These included the policing of black sexuality, urban interventions expelled black populations from the city centers to the peripheries, and narratives of miscegenation (particularly the myth of “racial democracy”) that rendered invisible black cultural forms, structural economic inequalities, the exclusion of black people from the emergent Brazilian worker class, and the unequal application of the law according to social status (see, e.g., Cardoso 2014; DaMatta 1991; Gonzalez 1988; Holston 2009; Nascimento 1989). During the years of slavery, slaveholders assumed that the formation of families and kinship relations were not compatible with captivity and that affective and sexual relations among enslaved Africans, therefore, would not conform to acceptable norms. These assumptions were part of a dehumanizing narrative that contributed to legitimizing slavery even



In the afternoon, after licking our fingers clean of fat and salt and emptying the last bottle of Coke, we end up dozing in the shade. It's quiet, even for a Sunday. A young woman comes cycling past us accompanied by a girl in her teens. Edilson whistles at the girls: "*Oi gostozinha*"—Hey sexy—"I'll pay 10 reais!" The women ignore him and continue without looking at us. After a while, Edilson gets up. He walks over to the grove just above the favela. I see him throwing something in between the trees. Immediately, a loud explosion thunders through the forest and favela. "But for heaven's sake, Edilson!" Anderson is annoyed. "What was the point of firing a shock grenade?" Edilson comes over to me as we're heading back to the base. He wants to show me a video on his phone. It's from a security camera and shows a young woman being brutally murdered by a man who was apparently her lover. It is painful to watch. The man bashes the woman's head against the concrete floor, time after time, until her skull shatters. Then he pulls out a gun and fires a series of shots at the dead woman. I feel lightheaded and nauseous. "That man must be insane," I say. "I could have done the same to a criminal," says Edilson, "but not to my girlfriend."

## Guerilla Warriors

It's four in the morning. The sun won't be up for another two hours, but Felipe must leave his home, wife, and two-year-old daughter now, if he is to make it in time for his shift which starts at six. Unless anything unexpected happens, he'll be back tomorrow morning, as his wife is starting her day. Felipe gently kisses his daughter on the forehead. His satchel and uniform are tucked in a sports bag, which he hides in his car. Volta Redonda is a dirty industrial city built around a huge steel plant. Leaving

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as the process of turning captives into slaves took advantage of the captives' human need to form community and kinship ties with each other (Florentino and Góes 2017). In the present, the legacy of these processes is reflected in myths about black promiscuity and absent black fathers. The invisibility and silencing of black families, and in particular black fathers, must be understood against this backdrop (see Braathen 2020; Gilsing 2020). But importantly, Brazil's "public security" policies, policing and judicial practices have disproportionately criminalized and targeted the country's black population, as was also the case with the pacification project (Ystanes and Salem 2020).

before the morning rush begins, the 120 km drive to Rio takes about an hour and a half. Being late for work is not an option when you work for the Military Police. He served his first year in the police at the UPP of Cerro-Corá. Then he was transferred to Manguinhos where he stayed for 10 months. There was more conflict and violence there than at Cerro-Corá but it was still better than Alemão, where he is currently working, by a long shot. He's already tired of the tense atmosphere at the base; of the long drive to work and back; of the strict disciplinary codes of the police. While serving in Manguinhos he was sent to disciplinary detention because the commander had seen him eating his lunch in his car while uniformed.<sup>2</sup>

Felipe signed up for the public tender at the police academy hoping that maybe, after a few years, he would be transferred to a *batalhão* (lit. "battalion"), a conventional police station, closer to home. Now he's been working as an officer for almost three years and has little faith that he'll be transferred any time soon. In the meantime, he's stuck in Alemão. Felipe doesn't like it there. Even the name makes people shudder. The atmosphere is always tense, even though the officers do what they can to lighten the mood. When he comes home from work, the beer is waiting in the fridge. He knows that some of his colleagues smoke marijuana to relax and unwind after shifts, but he thinks that's deplorable. He joined the police to fight against drugs not to get high on them.

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<sup>2</sup> The institutional hierarchy of the Military Police is enforced through a strict disciplinary code of conduct, which has been criticized for being both arcane and principally oriented to the protection of the institutional image (Cano and Duarte 2012). Furthermore, the disciplinary code is often arbitrarily applied by the commanding officers at the battalions and UPPs, who wield extended discretionary powers over patrol officers. There are numerous reported cases of abuse of patrol officers by their superiors at the police academy, the battalions, and the UPPs—including physical abuse and torture (Barros 2015). Disciplinary regulations extend into the private sphere of police officers, prohibiting common actions of "moral character." Punishable acts include assuming debts and commitments beyond the capacity of the officer, compromising the reputation of the police; frequenting places incompatible with the social status and dignity of police officers; spreading rumors or tendentious news; moral offenses through acts, gestures and/or words; talking to or answering superiors in a disrespectful manner; and authorizing, promoting or participating in collective protests. These rules evoke a conservative moral order founded on values such as honor, deference to authority, and decorum, and were practically impossible to comply to as they presuppose the ideal of a non-existing moral superman (Cano and Duarte 2012).

By the time Felipe arrives at Alemão the sun is up. When he drives through the favela he's always on guard. The officers know that the traffickers control who comes and goes, and since he still hasn't bought a weapon, he worries that they might surprise him unarmed and defenseless. When he reaches the white and blue station building, he relaxes. He says hello to his colleagues at the base, paying particular attention to greet the ones he doesn't like—keep your friends close, but your enemies closer. In the wardrobe, he fishes the uniform out of his satchel, along with the new bulletproof vest that he bought with some of his savings. The vests they get here are stench with old sweat. He finds them disgusting. Soon, he thinks, he will have enough money to buy a gun as well. The guns they get here aren't safe: They often jam and sometimes the cocks are so worn out that the weapons fire by accident. He knows of one officer who was shot in the hip when the gun in his belt accidentally fired. It's almost six, and Felipe is ready for his shift. He fishes the name tag with his "war name" (*nome da guerra*) out of a pocket and attaches it to the bulletproof vest. Now he is not Felipe anymore, but *Soldado Barbosa*, a police officer at the Pacifying Police Units of the Military Police in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>3</sup>

I sit with Felipe on the little balcony at the base station facing the favela. From here we see vast parts of Rio's central and northern areas. Felipe is eating the lunch his wife prepared for him: Rice, beans, and a small piece of thinly sliced meat. He offers me some, but I politely refuse. "The constant violence used to get to me. Not here in Alemão, but when I worked in Manguinhos..." He interrupts himself. "You know, I've worked here for a while now. I've gone through this for a while, and it gets to a point where you get used to it. You know you're going to a place where you might die, where there will be gunfire, and you're not afraid anymore. You just go." He says it with a plain voice, as if he's talking about a task like any other. I think I understand what he means. As the weeks have passed, I've ceased to be scared by the shooting. I'm getting used to the gunfights, used to think of myself as a potential target for

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<sup>3</sup> Felipe's story is a fictive account that I have created based on interview material. I have chosen to reproduce this material in a narrative style even if I did not follow the police officers outside their professional setting.

the traffickers occasional attacks on the UPP. Like Felipe, I have normalized the violence in Alemão, becoming desensitized, at least to a certain extent.

“There are others who are more affected by it. The first time I got into a shooting episode, I felt...” Felipe hesitates.<sup>4</sup> “I froze for 40 seconds and thought, *what will happen, what do I do?* But that’s when you understand that you must do *something*, because if you don’t, you’ll die. So, with time, you get used to it. If there’s shooting, you get scared, but you don’t panic. You stay in control, right? That’s at least what it’s been like for me. I’ve become used to it.” As if to justify this, he quickly adds: “I don’t know whether it’s good or bad to get used to it. But I think it’s bad, because who would want to live a life like that, you know?” He pauses. “Getting used to seeing a man getting killed in front of you, without feeling anything at all. If it’s a colleague, you feel despair, and you want to help him, but if it’s a criminal who has been shot, you look at him without mercy. You don’t feel any guilt when you kill a criminal, because the criminal tried to kill you. You take someone’s life, and it means nothing, you see? It’s something you could only understand if you experienced it yourself.”<sup>5</sup>

Felipe says the officers have lost the fear of death. “Maybe it’s just what we are waiting for here in Alemão. We are waiting for our hour to come, doing what is expected of us, and waiting. This is what it all boils down to. You put up a fight so you won’t die, but at any moment the news of your death might arrive at your home. Everybody at home must be prepared, you know?” He talks about death with a pragmatism I’m not used to. “The Commander at the base once told us: *You have to prepare your family, you have to leave your debit card with your wife, so that if something happens to you, she won’t have to go through a hard time after*

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<sup>4</sup> In a survey published in 2015 a third of the police officers at the UPPs reported that they felt unsafe at work, while an additional third said that they neither felt safe nor unsafe. At UPPs classified as having “high operational risk” 44% of the officers had been involved in shooting episodes, compared to an overall average of 33% across all UPPs (Musumeci 2015).

<sup>5</sup> In her ethnographic research with evangelical officers of Rio’s Military Police, Elisabete Albernaz (2015: 534) found that street patrol, and especially situations that exposed the police officers to violence, armed conflict, and the risk of dying, was seen as brutalizing, as desensitizing, as nurturing cynicism and gradually rendering the officers less capable of showing empathy with the social dramas they encountered.

*your funeral until she's able to receive the pension that the police must pay her.*" He tells me about a colleague who was shot about a year ago. His widowed wife is still waiting for the pension that she is entitled to.

Felipe is disappointed with the police. He has stopped believing that the pacification project will change anything. "When I come to work here, I don't feel that I'm doing police work, I'm doing guerrilla work. I come here, get my rifle, holster my gun, head for my sector... Do you know where my patrol sector is? It's at the base by *Canitar*." The area lies at the bottom of the valley below us and is constantly under attack from the traffickers: "I stay in a trench, surrounded by sandbags and barrels, waiting for the attack, or attacking. I'm not there to do anything. You tell me: What kind of police officer can I be there? A proximity police? A pacifying police? In a battalion you attend to occurrences, to domestic disturbances. Here nobody is going to call for you if there is a fight between a husband and wife, they are going to call for the guys at the *boca*, they aren't going to call for the police. There are even places here we won't enter. So, my service is practically that of a guerrilla: I grab my rifle and I wait to see if the *vagabundos* (vagabonds, thugs) attack, you know? They attack us, we attack them, bullet against bullet and that's it. That's it, that's the service I carry out here. I know that that's my job: Come here to be shot at and shoot back, that's my service." Felipe shakes his head. "We are at war, this situation here is an urban war. I am a *guerrilheiro* (guerrilla soldier) of the State and this is an urban war."<sup>6</sup>

"They say Rio de Janeiro is the marvelous city. Marvelous for whom? For the gringos in Zona Sul? I'd like to see you in Zona Sul, Copacabana, trying to walk around with a gold-chain around your neck. The *pivetes* (homeless children who are sometimes involved in robberies and assaults) are turning into a nightmare for the government. Now that the UPPs have been installed they have stopped stealing close to the favela and

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<sup>6</sup> In this quote, the experience of war is highlighted. While earlier works have analyzed war as a metaphor for police work, what is clear from the situation that I observed in Alemão is that the practices of policing in these areas were largely geared towards asserting territorial control through armed confrontation and presence in places that were considered important from a military-strategic point of view. To the men and women working at the UPPs of Complexo do Alemão, the question of whether the context in which they was immersed in fit the juridical-theoretical description of war was of little importance to their experience of it as such (see also Grillo 2019; Magalhães 2021).

started stealing in the city center and in Zona Sul. The latest fashion seems to be stabbings. For them, for the *pivete*, it's normal to stab a knife in a person. It doesn't matter to them. In the past, when we had a different police, there was respect. Today there's not, you know? The respect that we enjoyed in the past was through authority, often with truculence, but it was what had to be done. Today you've got the Human Rights that only defend the bandit, you know? They don't defend the good citizens; they go to jail to defend the rapist, not the family of the person who was raped. The inversion of values in our society is very big, you know? I see it more and more."

## BOPE Light<sup>7</sup>

Lean and muscular, Sergeant Nazareth is half a head taller than most of his colleagues in Alemão. We're sitting inside one of the battered container bases in the middle of the favela. Outside the rain is beating on the dense green forest that grows along the outskirts of the neighborhood and up the ridge of Serra da Misericórdia, the Hills of Mercy. The name shows the importance of faith to the people that live in the narrow valleys and even narrower streets that wind down towards the asfalto and the rest of the world below us. The heavy rain has silenced the usual sounds that emanate from the neighborhood. All we can hear is the radio static from raindrops hitting the ground and the trickling streams running down the favela staircases. When it rains, people stay inside, the traffickers disappear from the street corners and the police officers retreat to their bases, engaging in locker-room talk or consumed with their phones. Days like these are good for police operations, Nazareth explains. With few people in the streets, chances are smaller that bystanders get caught in the cross-fire. But today there are no operations, and we are just going to sit here in the green, battered, and filthy container and talk about life.

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<sup>7</sup> The stories of individual officers presented in this chapter are composed through accounts given to me by different officers. I have intentionally mixed different accounts to protect the anonymity of patrol officers who work in environments where they are under constant threat not only from armed confrontations, but also disciplinary sanctions and retaliations for breaking what policing scholars refer to as the blue line—the code of silence among police.

Nazareth tells me that he's from Minas Gerais, a state lying just north of Rio. Large parts of the gold that adorn the old churches in Europe were mined there during the colonial era. His family were agricultural workers of Afro-Brazilian descent. He grew up in poverty: "I remember my first paid job" Nazareth says. His father brought him to the landowner, hoping to get him a job in the fields. "When the day was over, the landowner wanted to pay me." Nazareth leans back in the rickety chair, making the plastic bend. He tilts his head slightly backward to imitate how the landowner had looked down at him. Then he pretends to put a coin on the table in front of him, and arrogantly pushes the coin forwards with his index finger. "50 cent!" he exclaims. "He paid me 50 cents! I threw the coin back at him," he says with contempt. That was his first and last day working in the fields. The anger he felt that day had formed him. He was not afraid to work, but he was proud and refused to be humiliated. As a little boy, his mother had often reminded him that they were black and that they had to show to the world that not all black people are thieves: *Não todo preto é ladrão*.

"My life has always been marked by that, man: Discrimination. Since I was discriminated, I tried, through my actions, to prove to people that they were wrong about me, right?" He takes a moment to think. "My parents taught me what's right. Maybe that's how I developed my sense of justice, through always doing what was right." He was the responsible one among his friends. When they went out at night, he was in charge of the girls in the group. Their mothers trusted him to keep them safe. At eighteen, his father gave him a choice: Either start working in the fields or move out. He chose to move to Rio de Janeiro. But the laidback lifestyle and glossy postcards of Corcovado, Ipanema, and Copacabana were unattainable mirages for people like Nazareth. His first year in the city was tough. Knowing nobody here, he slept on the streets until he found work at a beach kiosk. It earned him the equivalent of 100 dollars a month, not a lot, but enough to rent a small room in a favela. "Now I'm a police officer. I didn't end up as a criminal. I didn't end up as a trafficker" he says with badly hidden pride.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Many police officers with humble backgrounds, or those who have grown up in a favela, sometimes spoke of their path to become police officers in a way that invoked the idea of

As a bachelor in Rio, Nazareth had lived hand-to-mouth. Later, once he was married and his wife got pregnant, he knew that he needed a stable and substantial income to raise his child. With no formal education, few jobs would provide these conditions. However, as a military, he would enjoy the benefits of state employment. After failing the Army's admission test, he passed the public tender of the Military Police. With his new salary, he and his wife were finally able to move out of the favela. They settled in Realengo, a working-class district in *Zona Oeste* where many police officers live. Even if the neighborhood was far from the beautiful beaches of Rio's wealthy *Zona Sul*, this was one of the proudest moments in Nazareth's life. He was finally able to provide for his own family.

"I wanted action," he explains. "My idea of the military was the officer that goes to *war* (distorts his voice), right? I wanted to be in the Air Force or the Army because, *pô*, I was always watching war movies and such, thinking *damn, that is cool, if it was me I would do it differently!*" He laughs, looking over at the machine gun leaned against the wall. "And I wanted to join BOPE since I thought that BOPE was the real police, *pô*." Nazareth distorts his voice again, recalling his thoughts on the special forces as a fresh recruit: "*Ah, the guys from BOPE are good, when you get in its 'tiro, porrada, e bomba'* [shooting, beating and bombs], right?" But even though Nazareth had been determined to join BOPE, he never made it through the challenging admission tests. Instead, he started working at a regular battalion, and with time he was transferred to Choque (the riot police).

The years in Choque were full of excitement. Around the turn of the millennium, Rio was experiencing a wave of violence. The traffickers stole vehicles that they used to form *bondes*—convoys with armed men. The convoys transported drugs and weapons, attacked the police,

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resisting the temptation of getting involved in criminal activities or groups. Such narratives resonate with the notion of spiritual warfare—a core element of evangelical cosmology—which posits existence as a continuous battle between the forces of good and those of evil. Resisting the forces of evil and its temptations is seen as a proof of character and suffering as a path to redemption (Birman 2019: 111). Thus, becoming a police officer was just as much a moral project as a utilitarian or economic decision, and the suffering and battles that they had to endure (in their private and professional lives) could be interpreted as rites of (spiritual) purification.



and terrorized the city's population. The Military Police answered by establishing their own *papa bondes*—police convoys that hunted trafficker convoys and other criminals across the city. Due to his high level of commitment, Nazareth was hand-picked to join one of these. One particular event from that period has stuck with him to this day. To his memory, it happened a night about thirteen or fourteen years ago, around 2001.

The row of patrol cars—four cars and sixteen men—is slowly driving down one of the roads that separate the favela from the asfalto. The first stars have just appeared on the darkening sky and the police officers are moving through an area where traffickers have recently orchestrated a series of attacks. The young men in the patrol vehicles are focused. They have circled in on this area for a few days now and are thirsty for some action and a story to tell their colleagues at the base. “Where do you think this way leads?” The officer driving the lead vehicle takes a turn to the left, up a road that leads them to the top of a small hill. The other cars follow. As they reach the top and start to drive down the other side of the hill they realize that they are in the middle of the favela. A group of traffickers have gathered in the street. They scatter when they see the police. Meanwhile, the convoy has stopped, and the officers exited the cars to seek cover behind the vehicles. One of them sees a trafficker fleeing. He opens fire. The instant he pulls the trigger the patrol vehicles are showered by a rain of bullets. Some of the men panic. The bullets are whistling through the air right above their heads, and the cars offer poor protection from the powerful weapons wielded by the traffickers: They are trapped. One of the vehicles is parked behind a building and the officers are able to give the rest of the group cover. “Get the hell out of there!” one of them yells. The shooting from the traffickers ceases just long enough to allow the convoy to make a U-turn and escape. The policemen are euphoric. This night will be talked about for years.

The story Nazareth tells is typical of the *modus operandi* of Rio's Military Police in the decades following the end of dictatorship. A few weeks after our conversation in Alemão, I assisted a public hearing in Rio de Janeiro's Legislative Assembly. Organized by the Human Rights Commission, it addressed the working conditions of the police. Former Chief in Command at the Military Police, Coronal Íbis Pereira, one of

the police leaders advocating the need for a broad police reform, spoke at the hearing: “We ended up where we are for a reason. [...] The Military Police was thrown into the war! We came from one war—during the military dictatorship—a war that had an enemy, the subversive: The young kids who wanted a different and more just society, who wanted a society based on different, more humane principles. So, the police, the judiciary, got thrown into that war in the fifties. We swallowed [the American] National Security doctrine [...] and the state’s security apparatus became involved in that political war [...]. The moment we left the dictatorship, we entered another war, we adopted this cursed *war on drugs*. [...] So, the enemy changed, the enemy isn’t [...] the subversive [anymore], now the enemy is the trafficker, and we have been waging war for thirty years now.”

Historians have noted how in Latin America, the Cold War manifested through US-supported military dictatorships that fought against political activists on the left and national guerrilla groups. Military strategists across the country saw cultural changes such as gender equality (the “feminization” of Western culture) and technological advances leading to a mechanization of warfare as a source of concern. They feared that these changes would weaken the military power of the West. New forms of warfare, (nuclear warfare, technological warfare, psychological warfare, and guerrilla war) were seen as a threat to the traditional masculinity of the military (Cowan 2014). What would happen to the manliness of soldiers now that the times of close combat on the battlefields seemed to be over? What would happen to the traditional art of war when physically strong and hardened soldiers were replaced by technicians and bureaucrats running the war by pushing buttons behind a screen?

The fearmongering in military circles took bizarre forms, including rumors of the development of a death ray, radar guns, death by ultrasound, and psycho-chemical weapons that would “instantaneously turn an entire army’s soldiers timid or cowardly” (Cowan 2014: 696). Guerrilla warriors were demonized like terrorists are today. They were imagined as lawless communists with no masculinity or honor. Ironically, it turned out to be among guerrilla warriors and their uncompromising

focus on the goal rather than the means, that the military found a solution to their concerns. To win the fight against the guerrillas, they would cultivate the same rawness and lust for combat in their own soldiers.

The doctrine of counterinsurgency gathered inspiration from irregular warfare and guerrilla tactics to reaffirm the soldier at the center of modern warfare. It was predicated on a new masculine ideal—that of the elite soldier unbound by physical or moral boundaries. This new form of military masculinity was characterized by resilience, rawness, the willingness to get your hands dirty and the recourse to unrestricted violence. It departed with traditional ideas of civilized warfare and meanings of honor, discipline, and moral integrity. This shift produced a dilemma: How could “western” (i.e. Christian) values be defended through the adoption of the ruthless methods of the enemy—the subversives trying to destroy these values? The solution for this paradox was the creation of an unconventional warrior—an *anti-communist New Man*—an efficient, physically strong, and hyper-masculine elite soldier with special training in the use of weapons and survival techniques. This *New Man* should have healthy social activities and be married, in order to secure sexual and emotional stability, avoid sexually transmitted diseases and protect the soldiers against the communist’s sexual propaganda (Cowan 2014: 705). The model was the Spartan warrior: A physically, mentally, and morally perfected killing machine who would rather sacrifice his life than let his fellow soldiers down—the kind of soldier embodied in movies such as Rambo.

The cultivation of this new type of soldier emerged from the tension between two ideas about gender: on the one hand, American militaries feared that the feminist fight for equality, sexual freedom, and comfort in modern society would lead to mental and physical decadence among warriors. In the American magazine *Military Review*, the fear of soldiers becoming *too intellectual*, turning into pale, powerless “book nerds” was discussed. Western men were becoming too sensitive, intellectual, and refined to defend themselves against the communists’ brutality. In Brazil, this fear was strengthened by conspiracy theories and propaganda spread by military leaders who claimed that communists were distributing medicines that made men sexually impotent. Meanwhile, fetishized ideas

about tough and masculine guerrilla warriors flourished among the military in the United States and Brazil. To win the war against communism, Western soldiers had to surpass the guerrilla warriors in every field, including brutality and mercilessness (Cowan 2014).

In Brazil, the ideal of a new anti-communist male materialized in the establishment of the Military Police's Special Forces. The best known are ROTA in São Paulo and BOPE in Rio de Janeiro. They drew inspiration from the American SWAT teams and are examples of how military doctrine moves across national borders. When dictatorship ended in 1985, BOPE became the spearhead of the state's war on drugs in Rio's favelas. They became infamous for their brutal efficiency and ruthlessness; for killing first and asking later; and for being incorruptible. Their warrior status was surrounded by myth. They spread terror in the favelas, but soon achieved a peculiar heroic status among many Brazilians as uncompromising warriors in the fight against drugs and criminality. Among "regular" police officers like Nazareth, BOPE officers were godlike figures who were revered and emulated. They admired their rough, hardened, and lethal manliness: One officer in Alemão once told me about a BOPE officer who had killed "more than a hundred thugs" before proudly adding that he had killed a few thugs as well.

At the Legislative Assembly, Íbis Pereira notes that the 90s was the worst decade for the Military Police when it comes to warfare.<sup>9</sup> "That was when we got the infamous Wild West-bonus (*gratificação faroeste*). That *madness* was the state's public security policy!" The reward that the Colonel refers to was established by Marcello Alencar, State Governor of Rio de Janeiro from 1995 to 1999. He had been elected on a promise to be tough on crime. Accumulative and given to police officers who engaged in "acts of bravery", the Wild West-bonus rewarded officers who

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<sup>9</sup> Colonel Íbis was one of the top leaders of the Military Police at the time of my fieldwork in 2015, alongside Colonel Robson (the Chief of Staff that authorized my fieldwork and whom I interview in Chapter 7: *Modernizing Warriors*) and Colonel Pinheiro Neto (General Commander of the Military Police). The three Colonels were the main drivers for institutional reform within the police while I was in Rio, but they also requested a more comprehensive legal reform in order to address Rio's public security challenges, including the legalization of drugs. Under the command of Colonel Pinheiro Neto, the Military Police acknowledged the practices of extrajudicial executions, and proposed a revision of protocols to limit the police's recurrence to force. As I show in Chapter 7: *Modernizing Warriors*, these attempts to modernize the institution failed spectacularly.

killed alleged criminals (see also Chapter 4: *The Postcard and the Front-line*). For every person they killed they received a modest raise on top of their normal salary. The officers at Alemão tell stories of police killing in the dozens. Those still in service have kept their accumulated pay-rise until this day. The most obvious result of this so-called “security policy” was, logically, a dramatic increase in the number of people killed by the police. But another, maybe more unexpected consequence of the arrangement was that it made it less attractive for police officers to accept bribes. As deals between police and criminals collapsed and older crime leaders were killed or arrested, they were replaced by younger traffickers who would recur to violence as a way of asserting their authority to larger extent. The result was an overall increase in violence and unrest across the city (Penglase 2014).

Íbis Pereira’s critique of the system is harsh: “You reap what you sow! What we’re reaping now, is the chaos from the madness we called security politics. It’s necessary to mend this. It’s necessary to modernize the police, to do what we should have done in the 90s, when the democratic institutions were developing and adapting to the new constitution from 1988. But then we started handing out machine guns to 25-year-old kids, throwing them into the favelas to kill and to die. All this time, we have been pushing men and women—government employees—into the favelas to kill and die in vain! Because this is not a war you can win with guns. Since the 30s, when the United States declared the war on drugs, they haven’t succeeded in defeating drugs with bullets, and it will not be here in Brazil that we will make *that* happen!”

As a result of the police’s war on drugs and the war between the drug gangs, violence in Rio increased dramatically through the 90s. In 1995, murder rates reached 62 murders per 100,000 inhabitants—among the world’s highest registered murder rates (Rodrigues 2014). Between 1987 and 2001, the number of youth murdered by guns was nine times higher in Rio than in the conflict between Israel and Palestine (Dowdney 2003: 116). The police contributed to the high death tolls and were increasingly also the target of the traffickers, with a large number of police officers dying both on and off duty. BOPE’s violent operations in the favelas became normalized. During these, suspects were often killed, many of them in ways indicating they had been tortured

and executed by the police. This was not the doings of individual police officers, but an institutional practice: Torture techniques were on the curriculum of BOPE's training courses as late as 2006 (Barros 2015). But whereas BOPE's practices de-legitimized the police among favela residents, they were broadly supported by people from the *asfalto*, a result of widespread prejudice towards the favelas and a growing feeling of insecurity. Conservative media outlets roused fear among the Brazilian middle classes (Caldeira 2001). Expressions like "human rights for righteous people" and "a good criminal is a dead criminal" circulated broadly. Surveys carried out by the polling institute *Datafolha* have found that more than half of the Brazilian population agree with these expressions, showing the pervasiveness of ideologies that see violence as central to the production of social order in Brazil.

But to a lot of people, this rhetoric is seen as dangerous. It is criticized for not being in line with the principles of the democratic rule of law, for reproducing violence, or both. "Security politics can't be built around confrontations, around warfare," says Íbis Pereira. "It only produces people who have had their dignity violated. How can you wage war without brutalizing? Do you think it's easy to place a thirty-year-old boy in an armored truck, open the doors, and throw him into battle? That's what we do in a war. What can come from that? How could those who emerge out of that not have their sense of humanity violated, mutilated, beaten? We must stop this insane war on drugs! There must be a more rational way to address this problem. Why aren't we working on prevention? Why aren't we fighting to save the kids that we lose to drug trafficking instead of reducing the age of criminal responsibility? Instead of giving them up?"

Some leaders in the military police saw a new public security policy as urgent. To them, the UPPs and their emphasis on proximity policing offered a possible solution; an alternative to security policies built around warfare. But they were a minority, and Nazareth and many of his fellow officers across the institutional hierarchy saw the project as their chance to finally confront the traffickers: "Knowing that the dealers were up there in the hillsides and not being able to get them has always bothered the police. So, when the project of occupation began, we started to enjoy [our job] more." Nazareth recalls the expectations he held at the onset of

the project: “We were motivated because we always wanted that, quote, ‘direct combat’ with those *marginais* (lit. ‘marginals’; criminals), to really show them the force of the police.” He is searching for the right words: “At the beginning it was very cool. We saw the change in the faces of the residents, right? The calm within the community, the children out on the streets until the early hours of the morning—they started feeling the [pleasures of the good life]. Up until then they were living with the uncertainty, with the lack of security [that came from living with] the drug gangs. Suddenly another [drug] faction would invade; you’d have shootouts and such. Not to mention that they lived under the rules of the drug traffickers, the laws of the drug traffickers.”

Nazareth and the other policemen who worked at the UPPs gradually lost faith in the project. The focus on dialogue, preventive work, and cooperation with local communities bore little resemblance to their vision of police work: “You know, because of the human rights, we aren’t able to do our jobs anymore. Criminals have lost respect for the police, and so have the favela residents.” He tells me about a time when a neighbor had asked him to call the *real* police. The UPPs, he argues, have no authority. Anderson, who has been listening to Nazareth, joins in: “If we had respect, do you think the bastards would dare turning their back to us and run when they see us?” He snorts. Anderson compares it to the situation in the poor suburbs of Rio, where the UPP project hasn’t been implemented: “The thugs there don’t turn their back to the police! They know that if they do, they’ll get two bullets in their back. *Bang bang!*” He holds his hand up like it’s a gun and points at me while pretending to fire. Before being transferred to Alemão, Anderson worked in Rocinha under the command of Major Edson, incarcerated following Amarildo’s disappearance. Among police officers, Major Edson has earned a reputation as a brutal and “professional” commander: A trained BOPE officer, Anderson describes him as a man with a strong sense of justice. Edson grew up in a favela and speaks a language that is understood by residents and criminals alike: The language of brute force.<sup>10</sup> “BOPE is good.” Anderson says. “They have excellent training and do *real* police work.” I hesitate: “What’s *real* police work? What’s

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<sup>10</sup> What Luiz Antonio Machado da Silva (2004) refers to as violent sociability.

the job of the police?” Anderson answers without hesitation. “The job of the police is to kill, steal, and destroy.” I must look abashed, because he quickly corrects himself: “To kill the *vagabundo* (lit. ‘vagrant’; criminal) who steals and destroys.”<sup>11</sup>

“In Rocinha [Major Edson] was fearless,” Anderson says. “He made it clear to everyone there who was the new boss and didn’t hesitate to hand out beatings in front of an audience, in broad daylight. He did it to establish authority. He had fucking *morals!*” Among the residents, opinions diverged. After a while, it became clear that Edson ran the police like a mob. Under the Major’s leadership, the police extorted money from local businesses, following patterns of the militias. But Anderson is full of admiration for Edson: “The Major used to go jogging through the favela in the shorts and T-shirt of the military police, unarmed! Imagine that! A commander of the Military Police, jogging through Rio’s biggest favela!”

The Amarildo case became the nail in the coffin for the Major. It was soon clear that he had pressured witnesses from the favela into silence. Nobody believed that Amarildo was still alive, but the question of what had happened to him and his body remained unanswered. The investigation pointed to the involvement of police officers beyond the local UPP. Video files recorded by surveillance cameras in Rocinha on the evening of Amarildo’s disappearance were deleted but then reappeared. They revealed that a group of police officers from BOPE had been at the UPP that night. It had been a calm evening in the favela, and there was no apparent reason for them to be there, but the recordings give the impression that when the officers left, they were transporting something

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<sup>11</sup> Anderson is citing a biblical reference, specifically John 10.10, where Jesus—the good shepherd—contrasts himself with the thief who he describes as the one who kills, steals, and destroys. Many interpretations see the thief as a metaphor of the devil. It was never clear to me whether Anderson saw the police as doing the devil’s work in the favelas, or if he was equating the police to Jesus. In John 10, Jesus does not, however, kill the thief, but such an interpretation would certainly fit with the notion of a vindictive God that Kristin Kobes du Mez (2023) claims is a characteristic of militant masculinity. Nonetheless, the ambiguity in Anderson’s comment is not only characteristic of many of the conversations that I had with the officers (which often left me wondering what they had really meant), but also of how many police officers view their institution, when they’re not defending themselves from critical outsiders.



the size of a body in the back of their truck. The GPS tracker of the patrol vehicle they used was turned off that evening.

## Conclusion: Militant Masculinity

In this chapter, I have explored the violent dynamics of masculinity in the police. I have described how it is expressed in a devaluing of women as well as in the homosocial relations between men and the hierarchies that emerge in the context of macho bravado. The notions of manhood that emerge from the war in the neighborhoods and streets of Rio de Janeiro are sometimes described as rooted in a violently virile “warrior ethos” (Zaluar 2010; Cano and Duarte 2012; Mourão 2013; Gripp and Zaluar 2017; Sørboe 2020), other times as expressions of Machado da Silva’s violent sociability. Focusing on the pacification policy as an attempt to direct and control disruptive and transgressive forms of male aggression in accordance with a certain bureaucratic state rationality (for example, through the establishment of legal codes and protocols for action), I have previously analyzed the prevalence of this formation as an expression of the war machine and state dynamics of male violence (see Salem and Larkins 2021: 67).

In Felipe’s story, which is an attempt to reflect the police officer’s view of themselves as fighting the little man’s fight against the system, the heroization of the officer is not related to his sexual prowess or displays of aggression, but in his capacity as family father, husband, provider, and protector. In his study of men who have been sentenced for domestic violence, Marco Martínez-Moreno (2023) notes how certain forms of traditional manhood have become objects of judicial intervention and psychological reform. Martínez-Moreno is preoccupied with understanding why institutional attempts to produce “modern” men fail and locates this failure in the powerful othering effects of “expert knowledge” about subjective formations that do not ascribe to a modern understanding of individual agency. Highlighting how processes of modernization are also gendered, Martínez-Moreno is critical of a lack of reflexivity within anthropology concerning how our discipline is part

of a civilizing process that imposes a liberal view of the subject in empirical contexts where personhood is understood differently—in contexts that from a liberal viewpoint are described as patriarchal. He suggests that what is at stake are different understandings of the relation between the (traditional) family and a (modern) rights-bearing individual. While liberalism is characterized by the primacy of the individual, the “illiberal” forms that are scrutinized attribute a primordial role to the family, conceived as a whole formed by the complementary forces of masculine protection and feminine care (see Duarte 1995, 2009). Within this universe, men are expected to show emotional strength (i.e. they are only allowed to express their vulnerability under specific circumstances) and adhere to faith as a path to economic success and moral progress.

As I have shown in this and preceding chapters, while many police officers draw on notions of manhood structured around ideals of strength and virility, others expressed vulnerability and frustration with a social hierarchy (racialized and gendered) that produces a “permanent tension and contention, sometimes verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances” (Bourdieu 2001: 50).<sup>12</sup> The demand that is placed on men to hide their vulnerabilities, even in conjugal relations, means that many of them rely on romantic relations outside their family as spaces where they can express their emotions more freely, since showing vulnerability is perceived to put them at risk to possible manipulation by their spouses (Martínez-Moreno 2023). In the ethnography I’ve presented in this chapter, this ambiguity is brought to the fore in the way some of the police officers spoke about their wives.

The proximity between understandings of manhood structured around strength and faith, and an evangelical gospel of prosperity is not a coincidence. It connects notions of manhood among the Brazilian police to the militant masculinity that Kristin Kobes du Mez (2023) observes among white evangelicals in the US, where “It is linked to opposition

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<sup>12</sup> In *Masculine Domination* Bourdieu (2001) notes that patriarchal social structures often produce violence as a result of men trying to live up to the dominant representations of manliness, elsewhere referred to as hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995). He notes that “men are also prisoners, and insidiously victims, of the dominant representation” of what it means to be a man (Bourdieu 2001: 49).

to gay rights and gun control, to support for harsher punishments for criminals, to justifications for the use of excessive force against black Americans in law enforcement situations, and to traditionalist gender ideology.” Similar to the way masculine formations traveled across Americas militaries during the Cold War, today’s religious and conservative notions of manhood are part of a transnational cultural movement connected to the emergence of the far-right.

According to Kobes du Mez, “[white] evangelicals have pieced together this patchwork of issues, and a nostalgic commitment to rugged, aggressive, militant white masculinity serves as the thread binding them together into a coherent whole. A father’s rule in the home is inextricably linked to heroic leadership on the national stage, and the fate of the nation hinges on both.” Militant masculinity, she writes, “resides at the heart of a larger evangelical identity” and is both personal and politic: “In learning how to be Christian men, evangelicals also learned how to think about sex, guns, war, borders, Muslims, immigrants, the military, foreign policy, and the nation itself.” However, caution should be taken in seeing these masculine formations as the purview of the far-right. In Brazil, Rosana Pinheiro-Machado and Lucia Scalco (2021) have noted how “apparently contradictory political view represented a very coherent worldview that perceived the need for a patriarchal national saviour, and this could be either Lula or Bolsonaro.” This observation brings nuance to a debate around gender that tends to polarize and radicalize positions, even producing the sharp divisions between liberal and authoritarian subjectivities that it claims to describe (cf. Bobbio 2001).

In Brazil, the state has on repeated occasions expressed itself as a religiously anchored police state, and as the ethnography I have presented this far is starting to make redundantly clear is that a militant masculinity has been at the center of these transformations. However, pinning this masculine formation down as a fixed and stable identity would necessarily lead to a simplification and in the following chapter I will look at the violent processes through which gender is produced and reformulated, as well as some of its expressions and effects.

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# 6

## Violent Becomings

### Military Hierarchy

The last time I was in Alemão I talked to Caio and Raphael about the relationship between the Commanding Officers (*oficiais*) and the Patrol Officers (*praças*) of the Military Police. I wanted to understand where their built-up anger towards the institution comes from. Caio explains: “The Colonels (the highest ranking *oficiais*) of the Military Police think they’re Gods, you see?” I nod. When I visited the Police Academy, I saw how the Colonel in command was treated by the police officers. In the lunchroom everybody had greeted him with a military salute: Before they sat down to eat and as they left the table. It was a strange display of deference, as if the Colonel was an old chief or medieval king (Fig. 6.1).

“I’m forced to do what I’m told,” Raphael says. “If not, I’ll be arrested for breaking the disciplinary code or expelled, thrown out of the police. If the leadership complains, *abbbb*, *the police officer did this and that*, I’ll be expelled. What do I do then? Do you know how hard it is for an expelled officer to find work? Nobody will hire you. The only possibility you have, is to become a *miliciano* (militia; paramilitary)!” For expelled police, the militia-groups are potential employers, a fallback when others





**Fig. 6.1** Police officer in Alemão watching a war movie during his shift, May 2015

fail.<sup>1</sup> Raphael is pointing to a sense of being trapped in a double-bind that many officers experience: They are trained and expected to do irregular and illegal “dirty work” but know that if something goes wrong (e.g. if they kill the “wrong” subject, are exposed by the media, or get caught in institutional power dynamics), they risk punishment. For Raphael, this constant possibility of being sanctioned by his superiors, even as he is doing their bidding, is experienced as hypocrisy: “We’re the scapegoats... We are the only group that can never afford to be wrong!”

The Military Police’s disciplinary code of conduct hasn’t changed since the dictatorship (Cano and Duarte 2012). The archaic rules are an amusing read if you don’t have to follow them yourself: They make the

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<sup>1</sup> Attempts to reform the police institution led to an increase in disciplinary expulsions during the years of implementation of the UPPs according to media reports. Interestingly, this coincided with the growth and expansion of the militias. While there is not a direct causal link between attempts to control and contain war machine dynamics, i.e. unruly officers, within the police, and the multiplication of militia groups in Rio, Caio’s comments suggests that these processes might be related: that there might be a connection between attempts to modernize the police and the expansion of militias.

police resemble a nineteenth-century boarding school. Even the minutia of the officer's private life is regulated in detail. Punishable actions include taking loans beyond their means, frequenting establishments that are not compatible with the status and dignity of their profession, spreading gossip or tendentious news, making immoral gestures or actions, and of course, supporting or participating in collective petitions and protests. "The problem with the military structure in the police is that the orders sometimes come from incompetent people," Raphael explains. "[The commanding officers] give the order, sometimes because they want it to be followed in a certain way, and they don't care if you live or die. They call us, the patrol officers, *massa de manobra*" (lit. "maneuvering mass")—people who can be used according to the interests of others. "Like we're a group that they can place wherever they find pertinent, or where it might be necessary. [When] one or two die, they simply grab a new one—two new ones, three more, four more—at the academy as replacement. The commander turns a blank page. To them it means nothing. [...] We're only good for obeying orders."

Raphael complains about the working conditions at the police: "The way the shifts work give us little time to rest," he says. "Often, we must cover extra shifts. We get stationed in the worst places, where the risk of dying is constant. If I'm punished for something, or forced to do something just because my commander wants me to do it like that, I can get so angry you wouldn't believe it." Caio interrupts him. "You can get stationed places where rules are followed to absurd degrees, and you have to be completely within the limits of what they call *the standard*: Polished boots, spotless uniform. Once, I was arrested for four days because I was caught without my beret in the scorching sun. Forty degrees, and I have to wear a leather hat! Jesus Christ, come on! Do you get it? I know I'm in the military, but this is the problem with the police: We have no rights, we have no human rights, we have no human worth. The police officers have to act humanely towards people, but the Military Police shows no empathy towards the officers!" Raphael agrees: "The Commanders don't care if the Soldier is having a hard time or if he's doing okay."

He mentions a promotion test recently held at the academy: "It was a disgrace. The Colonel wanted to force the officers to complete the tests out in the sun. They were placed in the middle of an open square, with

36–37 degrees [Celsius] and had to sit there from eleven [am] to one [pm] just waiting to start. Then they had to complete the test between one [pm] and five [pm]—all this in the scorching sun!” The test was reported in the news as an example of the inhumane treatment officers are subjected to by their superiors. “Wasn’t there room for them in the shade?” I ask. “Yes! But the Commander didn’t want them there. That’s exactly what I’m saying: Many officers just don’t give a shit.” Caio nods and adds: “At the academy they used to say that *quem gosta de praça e pombo* (lit. ‘the [only] one who likes a patrol officer, *praça* means both square and patrol officer, is a pigeon’). I heard the Commanders say it about the patrol officers as a way of making fun of us. Who cares about the Soldiers? Only the pigeons. We’re treated like trash” (Fig. 6.2).

It’s not just the police officers from Rio who complain about the working conditions at the police. There are regular reports of abuse and psychological torture of recruits across Brazilian police academies. Almost forty percent of the patrol officers in the country’s Military Police forces report having experienced torture during training or in other



Fig. 6.2 The Police Academy in Realengo, July 2015

professional contexts (Lima et al. 2014). An officer from the north-western province of Ceará recalls how he was treated at the academy: “Sometimes during lunchtime the superiors would scream in my ear that I was a monster, a parasite. It seemed like they were training a dog. The patrol officers are trained to fear their commanding officers, just that. The training was just messing with your emotions, so that the guy would leave the quartel like a pitbull, crazy to bite people. Today, when police officers are trained it seems like they’re training a dog for a streetfight” (Barros 2015).

## Eduardo Ferreira

March 2015. In the months since I started working here the frequency and intensity of shooting episodes and resistance towards police presence at Alemão and other UPPs have increased ceaselessly. The situation in the pacified favelas makes the front pages every day. Headlines are printed in bold. **THE UPPs ARE RETREATING: MILITARY POLICE PRESSURED TO LEAVE BASE IN ALEMÃO; VIOLENCE EXPLODES IN ALEMÃO; AFTER THE RETREAT, A NEW OCCUPATION.** A calendar counts the consecutive days with shooting episodes in Alemão: 90, 91, 92, 93. The officers at Alemão tell me that they engage in shooting episodes that evolve into urban battles. At first, these last 3, 4, and 5 hours but soon they extend from the evening through the night and well into the next morning. Battles are concentrated in the area around Canitar where the police have placed containers that are used as “advanced bases in the terrain.” When the traffickers attack the metal containers, the officers are forced to abandon the base and seek refuge in a nearby garage. Gang members torch the containers. The police insist on holding their ground, refusing to retreat: If they give up Canitar, they fear they will be perceived as weak by their enemies. They reason that traffickers will gain self-confidence if they manage to push the police back with violence, making the situation even more challenging. Thus, police leaders decide to establish a curfew in Alemão: After 21.00 there can be no one on the streets.

At the end of the month the offensive starts. On April 1<sup>st</sup> the police kill two young men they identify as traffickers and wound a fifteen-year-old boy. A stray bullet kills a woman as officers shoot at a suspect fleeing across the roof of her house. The bullets also wound her fourteen-year-old daughter. On April 2<sup>nd</sup> the “Battle for Alemão” (so dubbed by the media) is on its fourth consecutive day. The Special Forces, mainly BOPE and Choque, are contributing with tactical support. Several Tactical Patrol Units comb the favela for enemies. There! Fire! It happens so fast. On the ground lies the lifeless body of Eduardo Jesus Ferreira. The alley floor is tainted red. The scream of a woman cuts through the air: “Eduardo! My son!” She storms towards the police officer who fired at her son. He raises his gun and points it at her. “You can just go ahead and kill me, you have already taken my life!” She shouts at the officer. Neighbors flock around the scene. They witness the police collect the empty shells from the ground.<sup>2</sup>

In TV news, images of Eduardo and his crying mother are shown repeatedly. Headlines inform us that the police have killed a 10-year-old boy. The officer who fired the shot is arrested while awaiting investigation. According to the papers, he has had a mental breakdown. The case is broadcast internationally. Rio de Janeiro’s Governor promises to “retake” Alemão. Favela activists are in rage: The state’s solution is always *more* police; more special forces; more BOPE officers. Choque, the riot police, is also summoned. They drive through the streets in armored trucks and build barricades in Canitar. Sandbags and barrels to give cover to the police. The traffickers retreat. They know the rules of the game: This is not the time to fight. Not now, with the whole country watching and the special forces stationed in the favela. There is too much at stake. It’s time for the state’s ritual performance of security through a spectacular show of force, to sustain the illusion that they are addressing the problems in Alemão (see Larkins 2013, 2015) (Fig. 6.3).

The day after Eduardo is killed, I visit Alemão. I arrive at six in the morning but the gondola doesn’t run until eight. At first, the taxi driver agrees to drive me to the UPP, but he changes his mind halfway up the hill and refuses to continue. He suggests that I walk to the top but there’s

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<sup>2</sup> I have drawn on witness accounts published in the media to reconstruct the event.



**Fig. 6.3** Sandbags and barrels at a police post outside a cultural center in Alemão, April 2015

no way I'm walking through Alemão alone, so I stay in the car until we are back down on the main road, raising my arm against the window to hide my face. There are always police officers at the corner by the road that leads into the favela, and I already know one of the officers stationed there today. He is about to start his shift at the station and is waiting to be picked up by a patrol vehicle that drives us up the hill. Neither one of us feel free to walk through the favela alone. Are we being paranoid, or is the risk real? I realize that I'm starting to think like the officers.

When we get to the station it's unusually crowded. We have arrived just as one shift gets off, and the other one on. In addition, there are officers from the Special Forces here. They have parked a Caiverão further down the street, and two Choque officers are standing outside the entrance of the UPP. They're wearing black balaclavas to cover their faces, although by law they must be identifiable. In practice, however, officers frequently hide their identities behind these masks. With some exceptions, I still don't feel like I'm on friendly terms with the officers in Alemão. Most of them ignore me. Right now, I can't see any

familiar faces, which makes me feel uncomfortable and out of place, but I have gotten used to patiently ignoring those feelings. I scan the base for one of the shift leaders to ask for permission to join one of the patrol units. The Sub-Commander is napping after a long night. Meanwhile, the Sergeant in charge offers me a cup of coffee. He's welcoming and friendly and invites me to his quarters. There's a group of officers there already. They're standing in a circle, sipping coffee, and chatting. I don't know any of them and since I'm tired of being ignored and don't want to feel that I'm imposing myself, I grab my tiny plastic cup with the black sticky syrup that Latin Americans confuse for coffee and wait in the hallway. After a little while, the Sergeant walks past me again: "*Poxa* (damn)! Are you standing out here in the hallway alone? Go join the Soldiers!" He introduces me to the group of men. "This is our moment to unwind and relax a little," he says as he pours me a second cup. The officers are making jokes and laughing. One of them looks at me. "It's a cancer!" He is talking about the traffickers: They keep getting stronger every day. The officers start talking about a colleague who got killed in a shooting episode a few years ago. His family is still waiting for his pension due to the slow bureaucratic process. If you're married your wife gets everything, one of the men says. He knows about a widow who used all the money on herself and left nothing for the officer's kids, but it is not clear to me if they were her own, or from a different partner. "I'm leaving everything I own to my dad," he says. He trusts his father more than his wife.

The police officers get ready to leave for patrol and I ask the Sergeant if I can join the patrol unit. He laughs at my request: "What do you want to see? Do you want to see the shootouts?" He tells me to wait for the Lieutenant to wake up.

When he finally wakes, the Lieutenant is less dismissive: "Yes sure," I'm free to join one of the units. He says that the situation has calmed now that the Special Forces are here. But I need equipment. The police officer at the weaponry greets us with a smile and a handshake. "Find a bulletproof vest for our friend here," the Lieutenant orders. "*Beleza!* Are you going out on patrol?" I nod. "Let's see. I'll see if I can find a vest that hasn't been drenched in sweat," he says while searching for one of the new vests that have just arrived at the base. The vest I get is still wrapped

in plastic from the factory. I know that I am getting special treatment: The officers can forget this level of consideration. The Lieutenant asks me if I'm wearing anything underneath my long-sleeved shirt. "A tank-top" I reply. "Wear the vest under your shirt, so that you're not confused for an officer," he says.

I receive the keys to an empty room where I can get dressed. A big mirror covers one of the walls, and I can feel my blood rushing with excitement when I look at my reflection. I didn't object to the Lieutenant's suggestion, but I would rather have kept the vest over my shirt. I notice that I *want* it to be visible. Despite everything I've learned about the Military Police and am well aware that many see them as an extermination squad, wearing a bulletproof vests makes me feel tough and important. It makes me look bigger and bulkier. I feel special, powerful even. It's intoxicating. Is this how the officers feel when they put on their uniform? When they carry their guns?

I join two officers, a man and a woman, in one of the patrol vehicles. The male officer is somber, I assume that my presence makes him uncomfortable, but the female officer, she tells me her name is Vanessa, is enthusiastic and chatty. She has bleached her hair, her lipstick is fluorescent pink, and her nails are painted purple. When she smiles, which is often, a set of braces sparkle in the sunlight. While most of her female colleagues work in the administration, she prefers to work out on the streets. Vanessa has only worked at Alemão a few months. "Don't you get scared?" I ask, but she shakes her head and says she likes it here. She is Evangelical. Whatever happens, happens because God wants it to. When I ask her why she joined the police, she immediately replies: "Blue blood runs in the veins" (*Sangue azul corre nas veias*). Jokingly, I ask her whether that means that she's royal. Vanessa tells me that she's from a family of police officers. Her grandfather, father, brothers, and now her. She has three sons, the oldest is eleven. They know that she works in Alemão and Vanessa says that they *love* having a mother who works in the police. She *loves* it too, despite not getting any "respect" here in Alemão: "We have no value but I love my work all the same. I don't know why but I like it." She's happy they don't have to use the light blue uniform shirt they use at other UPPs. "It looks like a bus-drivers uniform!" With the dark gray uniform that "regular" police officers wear, the difference between



the UPPs and the rest of the police is not as visible. People respect them more when they wear the gray uniform: It gives them more authority

We park by a small market at the end of Rua Joaquim de Queiroz, the street that runs through the narrow valley that forms between the hills of Serra da Misericórdia. The officers point down the street, towards Areal and Canitar, where most of the fighting take place. “That’s the entrance to hell” the male officer says.<sup>3</sup> It distinctly does *not* look like hell, but like a humble and lively neighborhood with small fruit and vegetable stands and an incessant stream of people coming and going. Soon, a police officer approaches our vehicle: “You have to move” he says, nodding at a TV crew filming us from a distance. I immediately feel invaded by a sensation of fear and anger: What if someone in Babilonia sees me sitting inside a patrol vehicle? Don’t the reporters understand that they are putting me in danger? Again, I’m struck by how I am starting to see the world through the eyes of the police officers.

In the afternoon, after I have left Alemão, a group of neighbors gather where we had parked a few hours earlier. They are protesting the UPPs, the death of Eduardo, and the recent increase in violence in the favelas. WE DESERVE TO LIVE WITHOUT THE FEAR OF DYING, one banner reads in big, white letters, painted across black cardboard. The protesters are blocking the traffic on the streets, giving the police the perfect excuse to show them who runs Alemão. They push the protesters back with teargas, pepper spray, and shock grenades. More headlines: “Military Police break up peaceful protest in Complexo do Alemão”. One of the leading commanders of the UPPs is interviewed by the press. Watching him on the TV-screen at the base, the officers at Alemão applaud him when he rhetorically asks: “When will the residents organize a protest against the traffickers?”

The next time I’m in Alemão, Anderson approaches me: “You should have been there, Tomas!” he says enthusiastically. “You really missed something!” He is referring to how the police had repressed and

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<sup>3</sup> In Pentecostal cosmology, biblical references like the one made by the officer, are not just metaphors, but signal the presence of spiritual forces (of good or evil) which influence the people who are in contact with them. Thus, when religious officers describe a place as “hell” they are also signaling the presence of demonic forces in that area (see, e.g. Shapiro 2021).

dispersed the crowd. He shows me a picture that was printed in the newspapers. In it, he is him seeking cover behind a street corner while firing teargas at the neighbors. He seems proud and laughs when he shows me another picture of one of his colleagues, showering the crowd with pepper spray. It feels vindictive, like he's letting me in on a prank.

## The Last Slaves of Brazil

I try to digest the impressions from Alemão. In Santa Marta, the situation has also been tense after the brawl between Marcio's patrol unit and the neighbors during Carnival. I visit the UPP a few days after Eduardo's murder. The papers are still reporting on "the crisis at the UPPs." Sergeant Wagner has just been transferred to Santa Marta after thirteen years in the police and has been assigned patrol duty at the entrance of the favela with Lucio, whom I have met a few times before. The police officers guarding the access road are stationed there to signal police presence and keep check on the people moving in and out of the community. Since hardly anything happens, such fixed-point patrol duties are characterized by boredom. Time stands still when you have to remain in the same place for 12 hours, under the scorching tropical sun. Wagner is frustrated and starts venting his anger. As a Sergeant, he would normally have earned the right to a more comfortable position, perhaps as a middle-manager at the police station. Annoyed with the leadership at Santa Marta, he accuses the commander of charging bribes from the traffickers in the favela.

When I tell him that I'm studying the working conditions at the police he gets excited. He compares the police forces of Brazil with those of other countries. One of his friends have been to London and has told him the police there only fire 10 shots per year. "Now, that's a place where they have proper laws! If you steal, you get 30 years in jail, and if you're caught stealing again, you're in for life!" He is beyond himself with enthusiasm for the imagined draconian legal system of the UK. "Why don't we just copy that model? The only things we copy from the developed countries are gay parades and drug consumption!" I'm tempted to correct him, or at least let him know that the British police

force is normally unarmed, but I desist. I'm more interested in letting Wagner express his worldview without my interruptions. He continues with an impressive display of "alternative facts": "I've heard that more people have died in Alemão than in Iraq." While this is factually wrong, the homicide numbers in Brazil are often compared to those of Middle Eastern warfare (as we saw in Chapter 1: *Introduction*), to the effect of situating urban violence in Brazil within a broader framework of global war (see Salem and Larkins, forthcoming). Wagner's remark might just be an exaggeration of a well known comparison.

He gets particularly agitated when talking about a Brazilian citizen who was recently sentenced to death by an Indonesian court for smuggling drugs. The Brazilian government had intervened on his behalf. "And now Dilma wants him to be pardoned!?" While Wagner sees this as an example of how PT politicians side with criminals, I also see some irony in the government pleading for a convicted Brazilian in Indonesia when alleged criminals are being executed by Brazilian security forces every day—but that's not what bothers Wagner. He is signaling what he perceives as the moral degradation of Brazilian society, especially during the Workers Party governments and has more examples: He tells me about a woman from São Paulo who killed her family. "In jail, she became a lesbian. *Sapatão*. A woman who is like a man," he explains, in case I don't know what "lesbian" means. She was allowed to get married in prison and now she's sharing a cell with her wife. "Things like that can only happen in Brazil. Absurd things like that, you only see it in Brazil. Absurd!" Wagner and I have distinctly different understandings of what is absurd and what is not. For Wagner, it is inconceivable that the state continues to condone practices that he sees as being at the root of the problem: The loss of family values, traditional gender norms, codes of respectability, and an ethics of work (cf. Bobbio 2001; Messenberg 2019). I recall one of the things Francisco, the police officer from Volta Redonda, had told me during our talk in Alemão a few weeks ago. To him, society—i.e. *modern* society—is characterized by the "inversion of values" where what is right is wrong and what is wrong is right.

Wagner adds me to a WhatsApp group he administrates where the police officers share information, reporting events, sending jokes, images, and memes. He shows me a picture that he says was taken during the

“gay parade” in São Paulo. It shows half-naked men re-enacting the crucifixion of Christ. Wagner finds it shameful. Someone has shared videos from ISIS executions in the Middle East. It shows a prisoner getting blown to pieces with a grenade launcher. I’m not sure if it’s supposed to represent the diabolic cruelty of terrorists or if it is an example of what it means to *really* be tough on crime. Below the video, Wagner has shared a picture of a police officer in chains. The caption reads “The last slaves of Brazil”. To me, this is certainly a bizarre role-inversion but to the officers, it resonates with their experience of the military hierarchy and draconian disciplinary codes that give the Commanding Officers the possibility to always enforce their power.<sup>4</sup>

Wagner is indignant about “the noise” around the death of Eduardo Ferreira: “His parents gave the media a picture where he looks like an innocent six-year-old! Not like a ten-year-old!” Wagner pulls his phone out of his pocket again, to emphasize what he perceives as hypocrisy in the debate about Ferreira’s death: “Look, these pictures are gathered from his Facebook profile,” he says, and shows me pictures sent to him through WhatsApp. Some of them *could* pass as real pictures of Ferreira but they show him looking older and with darker skin than the pictures published by the media. Under one of the images, the letters CV are written (short for *Commando Vermelho*). “This is something else, huh?” the Sergeant says with satisfaction, as if the older-looking ten-year-old with possible ties to the gangs in Rio deserved to die. He scrolls down the screen and shows me more “proof” that Eduardo was not an innocent victim. It’s a picture of a young, black boy who does not resemble Eduardo in any other way than the color of his skin and age. He has a joint in his mouth. The caption says: *Here in CV, we enjoy the best weed*. “Look at this!” Wagner says enthusiastically. “Ten years old, and he already smokes marihuana. Huh?” He is determined to convince me that the media coverage of his death has been farcical and shows me one last image, allegedly also from Facebook. It shows a boy with a cap pulled down over his face. He is holding a rifle in one hand and a revolver in the other. “Well, you can’t see his face in this picture but

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<sup>4</sup> It also speaks to the narrative of police victimization that is often evoked by police departments to legitimize police violence and is a trait of far-right ideologies, supporting feelings of resentment and anger (see Arendt 2006 [1963]; Alves 2021).

look at the profile picture on Facebook. It's the same in all the images," Wagner says, pointing to the tiny square in the corner of what looks like a screenshot. For Wagner, this proves that Eduardo Ferreira was probably a trafficker and thus deserved to be killed. While he is unwilling to admit that the police killed an innocent boy, he has a last argument that while it does not exonerate the police, shifts the blame through a racialized logic: "Eduardo's family came from the Northeast" he says: "What are they even doing here [in Rio]?"<sup>5</sup>

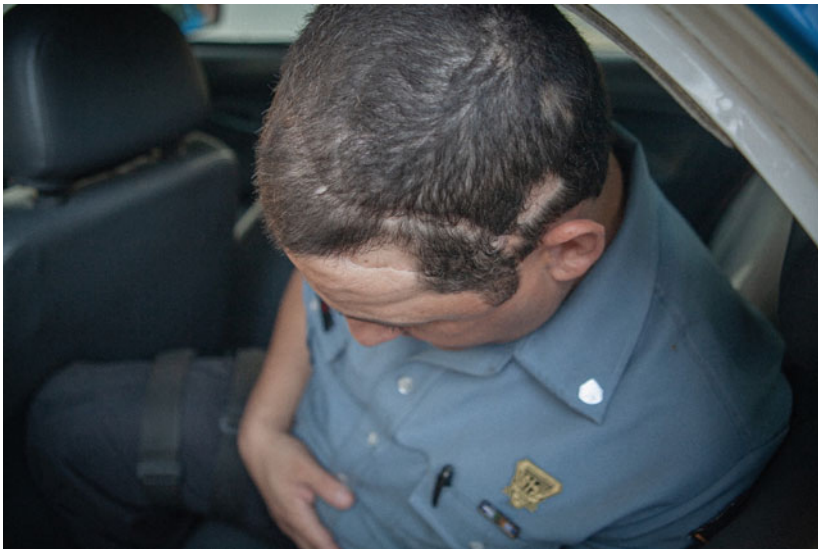
The conversation with Wagner makes me feel uncomfortable. My first impulse is to see his reasoning as flawed, cruel, and lacking in empathy. Some of the officers in Alemão have also suggested that Eduardo was a trafficker. But not all of them agree. When I ask Anderson whether he thinks that these claims are justified, he is categorical: "No, that's not true. As far as we know, he was just a ten-year-old boy." As the days and weeks pass, and new information makes claims about the deservedness of his death untenable, the narrative starts to change. Instead of blaming Eduardo, some officers start arguing that he had accidentally been caught in the middle of a gunfight between traffickers and police. Talking to the mother of one of the police officers at Alemão—I meet her when we stop by the family-run store where she sells military equipment—another rationalization is brought to the fore: How was it that Eduardo's parents had let their son play outside in the alleys of the favela? Didn't they know that they were living in a war zone? She tells me that they are supporting the officer under investigation with legal counseling and a lawyer. Eventually, the investigation (carried out by the police) concludes that it was not the police who shot him—he was hit by a bullet from a trafficker.

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<sup>5</sup> Social media has proven key to the mobilization of far-right narratives, producing a hyper-reality that collapses distinctions between the virtual and the real (see Baudrillard 1994). In Brazil, the far-right use of social media to spread "fake news" has been understood as central to explain Bolsonaro's electoral success (Cesarino 2019, 2020). In our analysis of BOPE's Instagram account, Erika Larkins and I have argued that while the visual content that is shared by the police's Special Operations Unit resonates with a Christian-conservative ideational universe, the militarisation of the everyday and mundane through social media is co-produced by Instagram's algorithm, as the social media logic of engagement encourages the publication of certain kinds of content (see Salem and Larkins, forthcoming; Cesarino 2022).

After showing me the pictures, Wagner asks me: “Don’t you find it infuriating?” He is referring to the perceived injustice committed against the police. I nod. “Then try imagining what it would feel like if you had been hit by a bullet in the head.” He removes his dark blue beret, revealing a long scar that starts just behind his left ear, runs across his head, and ends just above his right eyebrow. The upper part of his forehead has a sunken cavity where only a few strands of hair are left. It looks like someone has bashed his head with a sledgehammer. “The doings of a boy from the Red Command” he says. He was shot during patrol in Manguinhos and spent three months in a coma, barely surviving. Pieces of his skull are missing and he shows me a small scar at the back of his head, where the surgeon had drained blood from his brain to relieve the pressure. “Guess how many stitches I have.” I take a wild guess. “Fifty?” Wagner looks over at Lucio who has heard the story before. “Three hundred,” Lucio says (Fig. 6.4).

Wagner spent nine months at the hospital. “I’ve been shot many times. This was two years earlier.” He points at his left arm and right foot.



**Fig. 6.4** Wagner shows the scars from the wounds he sustained when he was shot, April 2015

“And you still work at the police? What does your wife say? Do you have a wife?” “Wife and two children,” he replies. She doesn’t like it but after so many years in the force he does not feel like he has many other alternatives: “The police is like a prison.” The working hours make it impossible for him to study. I asked if he could not retire and receive a pension after nearly dying at work. “Ha! While I was at the hospital, they pulled my risk bonus, which is part of my pay. Just when I needed more money to cover the expenses for medicines.” Officers who patrol in “risky areas” earn a monthly extra of 350 reais, around 10% of their salary. Since Wagner was not patrolling but at the hospital, he was not “at risk” and therefore, not entitled to the extra pay.

While we are chatting, a police officer approaches us. Ignoring me, he greets Wagner and Lucio and asks them for directions to the local battalion. Wagner nudges at me with his elbow and points to the seal that is sewn onto the uniform shoulder. “He’s from Alemão,” he says, and asks the officer how the situation is there. The police have killed six people there in the last week, he says. He killed a criminal too, and now the leadership has stripped him of his gun. “There you go,” Wagner says to me, he has just complained about the cumbersome bureaucracy surrounding gun use. The officer from Alemão is eager to tell us how he killed the trafficker: “Normally, the traffickers send out neighbors to see if the coast is clear, but that day we were hiding in a narrow side-alley.” They had managed to remain hidden and when two armed traffickers came walking down the street a little later, they killed one of them while the other one got away. From his account, it sounds like an execution rather than “death following resistance” (which was the legal frame of reference that attributes the police the right to kill in 2015).<sup>6</sup> He explains that while they were at the hospital to get the death certificate the victim’s family had arrived. They wanted to talk to the police officer who had shot their son. “I had no interest in talking to them!” the officer says.

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<sup>6</sup> While there is not a good literal translation of the Portuguese term *autos de resistencia*, the emphasis on “resistance” has been criticized for presuming the guilt of victims of police violence (Misse 2010). In 2016, the legal category was replaced by “corporal injury resulting from opposition to police intervention” or “homicide resulting from opposition to police action.” However, this change arguably does not challenge the assumption of guilt, nor has it affected police practices of execution in any meaningful way (see Villenave 2019).

“I’m a target for retaliations now!” He says that he was shot in Alemão once, in February. The bullet had hit his finger and then his face, right above the lip. It stopped in the bone of his upper jaw and the doctor had stitched the wound together from the inside of his upper lip so that it didn’t leave a scar. I realize that he’s the officer who was shot on my first visit to Alemão.

In narratives of police victimization, the morale is that experiences with the traficantes as well as the police bureaucracy justify the police officers’ rage. In other words, Wagner’s call for harsher sentences, the death penalty, or the legitimization of the police’s killing of Eduardo Ferreira relied on the construction of police officers as a vulnerable subject exposed to multiple injustices—as heroes fighting ruthless (albeit teenage) criminals *and* a Kafkaesque bureaucratic system. Therefore, the officer who had killed the trafficker in Alemão and the one who killed Eduardo were the *real* victims: Suffering the sentencing of society; of institutional bureaucracy; and finally, of the courts—after risking their lives in the fight for good. None of these beliefs were warranted, considering the substantial support for hard-handed security policies among the Brazilian public, an institution that generally rewards or protect officers who kill, and a judicial system that hardly ever convicts police officers for misconduct or unlawful executions (see Misse et al. 2015).

A small group of people in their twenties cross the street and come towards us. They are holding posters above their heads with ABRAÇOS GRATIS (free hugs) written on them. I look over at Wagner and our eyes meet. In a split second, I get the hunch that what I should be thinking right now is *Oh my god, what a bunch of hippies and gays*. The group skids around the plaza where we’re standing, handing out hugs and small pieces of chocolate to the people around us. One of the girls looks at us. It seems like she hesitates but then she approaches us with a few of the persons from the group. They give us a piece of chocolate each and two of the girls hug us and wish us a Happy Easter. A third girl is carrying a small basket with paper strips, and we’re encouraged to take one each. They have short inspirational quotes written on them. I look at Wagner and Lucio. They’re smiling. I think they enjoy this small act of kindness. Lucio wants to know what’s on my paper strip. He complains that the quote on his strip was too short, but he likes it anyway. “I’ll keep this”



he says and puts it in his shirt pocket. The chocolate makes me thirsty. Or maybe it's the heat? "Do you want something to drink?" I ask the officers and buy us a big bottle of cold water from the street vendor on the corner. I've also got some fruit in my backpack that I bought on the way here. Wagner seems pleased: "Look at this guy!" he says to Lucio, and nods at me. "This is a good man. Offering us a drink; some fruit! You know, we're standing here all day, but can you believe it, nobody offers us anything. Not even a glass of water."

## Police Moralism

It's early in the morning. Babilonia is about to come back to life. An elderly, black woman with gray hair tied in a tight knot slowly walks down the main alley. She uses a stick and drags an aluminum shopping cart behind her. By the corner, where the traffickers usually sell drugs, a group of eight police officers who have just started their shift have gathered. As the woman passes them, she greets them: "You're new here, aren't you? Welcome to you all. We want you to be here so that this unease can end soon." The officers gather around the woman. I can tell that they are flattered.

In the weeks following the death of Eduardo a strange calm settles in Alemão. The State Secretary of Public Security has promised to increase support to the UPPs. The drug traffickers have pulled out and the Special Forces are stationed in the favela, allegedly until the situation is brought under control, whatever that means. The governor has promised that Alemão will be "re-occupied." The police are building bulletproof checkpoints—small towers with tiny slits, broad enough for the muzzle of a gun, like those found in old castles. The officers at the base are scheduled for a week of "recycling": Training with the Special Forces. At the three UPPs with the highest conflict levels of Complexo do Alemão more than 900 officers are stationed. They will be trained in groups of 70–80 officers, and it will take a few months to get everyone through the recycling.

The officers blow off these efforts as a show for the gallery. Daví doesn't leave room for any doubt about his opinion: "Everything will continue

as before. People will continue to get killed. If you look at our history... Two hundred years of history, and so much blood spilt. And now we're going to spend millions on the Olympic Games! They should invest the money in healthcare and education. Not waste it on sports." Daví is a big man. He's built like a bodybuilder and wears a uniform shirt that seems at least one size too small for him. It's tight in all the right places. His broad jaw and muscular neck, the way he carries his body—nonchalantly, always leaning slightly backwards—reminds me of Sylvester Stallone. His hair is trimmed short in a buzz-cut, like a soccer star. A big tattoo covers his left upper arm. It shows the guardian saint of the military, São Jorge, riding a horse and sticking a spear into a fire-breathing dragon. I've seen Daví prowl around at the base on many occasions but have always thought of him as unapproachable and maybe not that bright. But now that we're talking I find him to be sharp and witty.

Daví is indignant with the incompetence and corruption in politics. "I'm no sociologist. I'm just a police officer, but a country that's led by big landowners can never work!" The other officers nod in agreement. Brazil's biggest problem is the nepotism of those in power. Daví nods in the direction of the container base. "The company that rents us that container is owned by the wife of the State Secretary of Security." He snorts. The military, on the other hand, are honest! "When there's money left from military construction projects, they transfer it back to the state," Daví says, as proof of the moral integrity of the Armed Forces.

"Here in Alemão, the politicians built a white elephant: A big building that's unused and half-finished. Millions thrown out the window." Daví and the officers want to take me there, so that I too can be appalled by the monumental waste of public funds. On our way we pass by an overgrown motocross court. Daví points at an old and decayed concrete table. "This is where Tim Lopes was executed." The journalist Tim Lopes had been working on a case about the traffickers in Alemão. They executed him when they discovered that he was recording them with a hidden camera. The officers say he only had himself to blame. From the motocross court we continue towards the white elephant. It's a huge, lifeless concrete structure, surrounded by forest. In a corner of the building, a horse is chewing some hay. We walk past the structure and into the forest. "Think of all the bodies that are buried here," Daví says, painting

a brutal image of the rule of terror imposed by the drug traffickers in Alemão. He shows me a couple of big boulders at a rocky outcrop with views to the surrounding neighborhoods. “This is where the traffickers used to throw their victims in the microwave.” The microwave is the name of one of the most macabre execution methods employed by the factions. The victim’s body, dead or alive, is placed inside several car tires and burned. Faint black marks are still visible between the boulders—a testament to the evil that inhabits the geography of Alemão according to the worldview of some officers (Fig. 6.5).

Daví knows that the residents of Alemão are skeptical of the police despite the brutality of the traffickers. “Some people hate us, and of course they do: Our job is mainly repressive. Nobody likes being stopped and searched by the police.” Evandro interrupts him: “When I first came here I wanted to help out, I wanted to make a change. But now I have given up. I’m tired of the favela and of the *favelado*.” He scoffs: “To be honest, I don’t understand why so many tourists come here to see the favela. I swear, when I leave the police, I will never set my foot in a favela



**Fig. 6.5** Police officers by the “white elephant” in Alemão. On the light post, the initials of Comando Vermelho in red

again in my life!” Daví agrees: “The *favelado* has no reason to complain. He chooses to live in a pile of rubbish because it’s cheap. He decides to live in the middle of the shootouts.” He raises his voice. “Afterwards everybody complains when a child is killed. Damn, it’s a war! People are going to get killed!” Evandro interrupts him “I don’t understand what is going through the head of the people that live in this favela. [...] The people that live here prefer the *sacanada* (indecency)” “People? I don’t know if they can be called people...” Daví rebuts.

“The majority of society sees us as wrongdoers,” Evandro explains. “If the police stop and search a guy on a motorbike, the neighbors will immediately start to yell: *He lives here, he lives here—he’s a worker!*” Evandro makes a mocking voice when he imitates the neighbors from the favelas. “*Worker, worker!*” Daví interrupts him: “I am a worker as well! But society doesn’t see me as a worker, but as a *prejudicador* (wrongdoer; someone harmful who injures or impedes)! I get up early in the morning while most people are still sleeping to protect their families, so that they can walk these streets in peace and quiet. My family is left back at home, while I risk my life to protect the families of others. Do you think I expect their recognition? I don’t. Because the policeman has no value in the eyes of society, you see? I don’t expect their recognition. The only ones who see my worth are my family. My wife, who wakes up thinking *my husband is at work guaranteeing the safety of many families.*” Evandro says that his father used to work in the police. “When he was an officer, the police enjoyed more respect. Now, the politicians have given the criminals human rights, but they don’t understand that the police officer is also a human being. We are also a part of society. Human rights were promoted to reduce lethality. Now the number of killed criminals have been reduced, while the number of killed policemen have increased!”<sup>7</sup>

Evandro’s wife works as a street sweeper. I’ve been told that they are among the most respected workers in Rio as their job is to keep the public spaces clean, but Evandro disagrees. “The only time people notice the street sweepers is when the streets are dirty.” His wife tells him that

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, and counter to Evandro’s claim, one of the most notable effects of the pacification policy during the first years of its implementation was a marked reduction in both police lethality and police victimization (Cano et al. 2012).

she feels insignificant at work. The orange uniform they wear makes her feel invisible. He compares it to the police uniform, which makes you very visible. But even if the police are visible people don't like having them around, apart from when they need them: "People only remember God and the police in times of need."

I ask the officers what they think it would take for the resident's attitude towards the police to change. Davi answers without hesitation: "The [social] projects, you know? Just that it's very complicated, you know? The terrain doesn't help, and then you have the decades of repression by drug trafficking and the culture where the trafficker is the hero.<sup>8</sup> You see that the music in Brazil is permissive with what we call the *MC's* [funk rappers], the *funkeros*, letting them sing funk vindicating drug trafficking, vindicating crime, vindicating violence, presenting the traffickers as heroes. Within the communities many of them are considered heroes. So as long as they, the residents here and the *MC's*, as long as all of them keep spreading the idea that the trafficker is the hero I will be the villain in the eyes of everybody here, and nobody will help me catch those guys. Nobody. That's it."

I remember something I read in the papers. The leaders of the police have said they'll allow the inhabitants of the favela to organize funk parties again. The parties are forbidden in pacified favelas—they're seen as celebrations of the culture of trafficking. Prior to pacification the funk parties were important arenas where traffickers asserted their power and status. They would often appear heavily armed at the parties, selling drugs and offering free alcohol. But the parties weren't just arenas for drug use and the display of weapons, they were also expressions of the rich cultural and musical life of the favelas. "Are you going to allow funk parties in Alemão?" I ask Davi. "They say that in the newspapers, but we are the ones who decide here. Not even Jesus can go against us." Evandro is even more explicit: "The new *dono do morro* (owner of the hill) is the UPP!"<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Muniz and Albernaz (2015: 36–37) also note how police officers use the idea that the people living in the favelas have a differentiated culture following years of abandonment by the state to legitimize their exercise of power as a necessary means to produce order in these communities.

<sup>9</sup> Similar to the nineteenth-century repression of black cultural expressions such as capoeira (Holloway 1989), the police prohibited funk parties in pacified favelas. Being one of the most

The sun has gone down, and we're drinking warm Coke from thin plastic cups. A couple of neighbors walk by. They greet Evandro as they pass. "That is nice! Saying good evening to people." Davi disagrees. "I think it's dangerous. You get too mixed up with the residents." He nods in the direction of the soccer field further down the hill. "That over there is the limit between those who support the police and those who support the *gansos* [thugs]." Then he points to the other side. "Over here people are sausage water." I ask him what he means. Davi laughs. "Sausage water? That they're useless. We throw the sausage water out. It means that they can't be used for a damn shit!"

On our way back to the base, Leonardo, one of the soldiers who had remained silent during the conversation with Davi and Evandro approaches me: "To be honest with you, not all people here are bad, there are a lot of people that don't support the traffickers." Leonardo is black and tells me he grew up in a favela. He has lost many friends to drug trafficking. Seventeen, to be precise. Some of them were killed by the police, many were killed by other gang members. But he assures me that most of the people who live here are *cidadãos de bem*—good citizens. "They want the police to succeed, and the reason they don't talk to us is because they don't trust us and are afraid that they will be punished by the traffickers. Sometimes people whisper to me when I pass: *For heaven's sake, don't leave us alone!*" I ask him how he relates to the residents here. "There are good people and bad people. The good people I treat well" he says and adds: "Favela residents don't want to live with young kids firing their guns around, imposing their will! They don't want to have bullets flying through the air. They want to invite their friends and family home without them being scared [to come] because they live in a favela."

Like Leonardo, many police officers have a nuanced image of the people living in the favelas but might still adhere to a conservative worldview concerned with a perceived loss of family values and gender norms:

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contested ordinances at the UPPs, many residents saw funk parties as a nuisance, while others viewed them as an idiosyncratic expression of favela sociality (Gilsing 2020; Soares da Silva 2014). The police justified the prohibition by claiming these violated noise regulations, while most officers stressed that they were arenas for debauchery, illegal drug consumption, and the assertion of trafficker authority through the ostentatious display of weapons (Ystanes and Salem 2020; see Grillo 2013).

“The problem is not the favelas. The problem is the moral decay of society,” Leonardo says. He uses laws against discrimination based on sexual identity as an example: “The law must treat everyone equally! I don’t demand special treatment for being straight. Neither should homosexuals!” He finds it deplorable that the government wants to teach little children that men sleeping with men are just as normal as men sleeping with women. In this context, Leonardo and many of his colleagues see it as their responsibility to reaffirm an ethics of gender and sexual decency. These moralizing pretensions on behalf of the police must be understood in relation to the historical role of the militaries of Latin America, who have traditionally seen themselves as the repositories of a Christian-conservative moral order of their nations (see *Chapter 5: Police Masculinities*).

The police officers have gathered around the little kitchenette in the common room—that is, if you could call the run-down refrigerator and microwave a kitchenette. The news are on and the officer’s attention is focused on a short clip of two policemen sitting in a patrol car. They are filming each other while caressing their machine guns, making jokes about how they will soon get a chance to kill criminals. The reporter is harsh in his critique of the police, and the officers start jeering at the screen. I feel like observed and try to look as appalled as the rest. Daví shouts at me from the other side of the room: “Don’t believe a word they’re saying!” He is laughing, and I laugh along. Then I turn away from the TV, pretending that I’m already bored by the lies and public battering of the police. The next segment is also about the police, but this time, they are portrayed as victims: A police officer in civilian clothes has been shot at a bar in Rio’s suburbs when a gang member identified him as an officer. The room turns quiet when the reporter explains that the he was a regular at the bar and had left his gun in the car at the time of the attack. “He forgot that he’s a police officer!” Daví exclaims, shaking his head. “Fuck! You must *always* carry your gun with you!”

## Emotions

There's a Brazilian TV show on at the police station in Alemão. Two neatly groomed hosts interview a group of teenagers. The boys and girls are part of a dance company from one of the favelas in Rio. They are performing a choreographed dance and are excellent dancers. I don't want to show too much interest, and try to remain expressionless, maybe even a bit contemptuous of the sensual movements of the young girls and effeminate boys performing on the screen. It's challenging to keep up the angry and disgusted look for a long time.

The peace in Alemão gradually ends and a new wave of violence begins. It starts quietly. We hear a few shots fired in the distance. Pop pop pop. Days pass without much more happening. Then somebody fires at the UPP. Just two, maybe three shots—likely from a handheld gun, seeing as the bullets apparently don't pierce the walls like the bullets from the machine guns do, but ricochet off the aluminum blinds that cover the facade. The sound is loud, sharp, close—like that of a shattering window or metal slamming against metal. We put our bulletproof vests on even though we are indoors.

One morning I arrive to find three Civil Police vehicles parked outside the base. It's the first time I've seen police detectives from Rio's investigative police in Alemão. Something out of the ordinary must have happened. I sneak past the cars blocking the main entrance. Inside the common room things are quiet. I greet a few officers and find Felipe and Anderson sitting out on the balcony. "Has something happened?" I ask. "Yes." Anderson looks somber. Then Felipe turns towards me and explains that one of the officers at the UPP was shot a few days ago. He had worn his bulletproof vest, but the bullet entered from the side. It destroyed his organs, from the hip to the chest. For the last couple of days, he has been in intensive care at the hospital. The officers have just been told that he has passed. I feel out of place and don't want to be intrusive, so I ask the officers if I should return another day. But Anderson tells me to stay. It's the second Soldier who has been killed on patrol in Alemão since he came here but other colleagues have been killed off duty. "Just in the group that took the diploma with me five



people have died. It's a terrible feeling," Anderson says. "Where do you see something like that? Only in a war!"

The feeling of being constantly under siege—from criminals, neighbors, media, and higher-ranking officers makes the police feel a strong sense of community and belonging. They describe themselves as a family—the blue family. "What happens to your colleagues, affects you a lot" Anderson says. "It's like it's happening to you." Felipe nods: "When a colleague dies, it's like a family member has died. When a colleague is treated unfairly, you feel like it's happening to you as well. You end up with a lot of anger." "Being a police officer in Brazil is hard. Nobody likes us. The Military Police has a violent and corrupt history," Anderson explains. When you work in the police force, people will see you in that light, even if you are different: "I've never stolen, I've never taken money from anyone, ever... What do I know, I've never done anything bad to anyone, I've never been involved with drug traffickers. *Nada*—nothing," he adds. But the people who see you on the street might think you're a crook, that you're corrupt. The police can't do wonders when the rest of society won't contribute." The officers say that it's not just the Military Police that has to change for things to get better in Brazil: "The politicians must change our legal system." "How?" I ask. "We should have lifetime [sentences], we should have the death penalty," Felipe ventures. "And castration of rapists, and lowering the criminal age," Anderson adds. "Right now, minors can do as they please." The men have a long list of suggestions: Stricter punishments, more money to the police, better guns, and better training of recruits. The officers mention Bolsonaro. Again, I'm told that he's the only politician who supports them. "And racial equality! Today, there is no race equality" Felipe exclaims. I nod. Finally, something I can agree with. But racial equality means something else to Felipe: "As things are now, there are people who get special treatment for being black or homosexual" (Fig. 6.6).

In Babilonia, the atmosphere is tense. Some nights we are awakened by gunshots, or maybe firecrackers—it's hard to tell which is which. During the day, police officers are increasingly patrolling the alleys in tactical formation. It's strange to experience the patrols from "the other side" for a change. I thought I had rid myself of the fear of guns—I've seen so many of them and I have normalized the presence of heavily armed



**Fig. 6.6** Pictures of colleagues that have been killed hang on the wall at the UPP in Mangueira

police officers in the neighborhood. But one evening when I'm walking Violeta I suddenly find myself facing the barrel of a machine gun as I round a corner. The officer is pointing his gun directly at my chest. I get an adrenaline rush and gasp for air but keep my cool, act like nothing, and continue down the street at a firm pace, eyes on the ground. I'm still shaky when I get home to Javier. He told me that the police had walked across the small square at the entrance of the favela with their weapons pointing everywhere. He had seen them aim a machine guns at a woman standing in the window of her apartment: "I'm a citizen!" she had shouted at the police. "I pay my taxes like everyone else!"

## Conclusion: The Slave–Soldier

There is both a deterritorialization and a becoming proper to the war machine; the special body, in particular the slave-infidel-foreigner, is the one who becomes a soldier and believer while remaining deterritorialized

in relation to the lineages and the State. You have to be born an infidel to become a believer; you have to be born a slave to become a soldier. Specific schools or institutions are needed for this purpose: The special body is an invention proper to the war machine, which States always utilize, adapting it so totally to their own ends that it becomes unrecognizable, or restituting it in bureaucratic staff form, or in the technocratic form of very special bodies, or in “esprit de corps” that serve the State as much as they resist it, or among the commissars who double the State as much as they serve it. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 [1980]: 393)

In this chapter, I have explored how violence is reproduced and legitimized through processes of subjective formation within the Military Police’s institutional hierarchy as well as the logic of war that characterize policing in Rio’s favelas. Elsewhere, I have described these processes through the Deleuzian notion of *becoming*, a notion that troubles the victim-victimizer category by highlighting the open-endedness and indeterminacy of subjective formations, including police identities (see Salem 2016). Deleuze and Guattari argue that a process of *violent becoming* is characteristic of both war machines and the state’s tentative appropriations. War machines require a *special body*, they write, namely the body of the slave-infidel-foreigner, which is a body that has been violated, is external to the state order and deterritorialized. Violent deterritorializations and reterritorializations, exercised upon these bodies, forcibly codes and transforms them into subjects of the state.<sup>10</sup> This understanding of military identity as a subjective formation both external and integral to the state, might also explain the shared logics across group boundaries (i.e. traffickers, paramilitaries, and police). As we saw in the conversation between Caio and Raphael at the beginning of the chapter, the boundaries between police and militias are characterized by a porous boundary, and so are those between the police and the traffickers, who albeit their relation of animosity are shaped by the logics of violent sociability.

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<sup>10</sup> I have elsewhere (Salem 2016) described the deterritorializations that police officers experience once they joined the police academy as a series of violent processes with de-subjectifying effects that are captured by Goffman’s (1961) *mortifications of self*. Mortifications are a form of *moral violence* (Fassin 2013), and include a series of humiliations, degradations, and profanations of the self. According to Goffman they produce radical shifts in the beliefs that someone has concerning themselves and their significant others—i.e. in their moral careers.

It has been puzzling to me how the police officer's disdain for elites seldom translates to solidarity with the poor, who are often described with similar contempt. Most of the officers I have talked to reject social and economic explanations for crime and poverty in favor of moralizing narratives that stress the personal responsibility of the poor for their predicaments. Crime and poverty are almost without exception understood as a product of the lack of ethics and self-discipline among the black and poor, even when the legacy of Brazil's racial history is acknowledged. Often, the officers at the UPPs describe themselves as *lixeiros sociais* (social garbage collectors). They claim that they must deal with everything bad and rotten in society (see Albernaz 2015): Drug dealing, theft, assault, domestic problems, child abuse—often in contexts marked by poverty and violence. One of the psychologists of the police explained their line of thinking: “The police officers see citizens as rotten and violent. When they can, they try to bribe the police, but when the police make a mistake, they want the officers to be punished and they don't want to understand the context the policemen are operating within. But the policeman sees himself as separate from all that, right? He sees the entire social structure as a terrible thing, and himself as the guy who is forced to live in the middle of it, without being responsible for any of it. He doesn't take much responsibility for the social structure he is part of.”

In psychological terms, the police's contempt of favela residents could also be seen as a “narcissism of small differences” whereby groups that are sociologically proximate develop strong sentiments of antipathy towards each other (see Freud 2014 [1921]). If we take the officers' worldview into account, we find that the fact that many of the officers themselves share a similar socioeconomic background as the people living in the communities they patrol is often used to support understandings of poverty and crime as the result of a weakness of character; as a moral flaw. There are clear religious undertones to these interpretations, which draw on an ethos of individual responsibility advocated by the evangelical churches (Birman 2019).

We have seen how the militarised hierarchy and approach to policing, i.e. the understanding of policing as warfare, produces a polarized worldview where social differences between military police and civilians are

exaggerated—what Bateson 2006 refers to as schismogenesis—categorizing people as either friends or enemies. There is a constructed divide between military and civilian, and within this military universe, civilians are “the others” against which the police officers’ structure their identity (Castro and Leirener 2009; Cano and Duarte 2012).<sup>11</sup> This is the “us and them” of nationalism, political opposition, and xenophobia—characterized by the gratifying euphoria of belonging to a “superior” group and the disdain towards “the others” as a fundamental relational dynamic (Elias and Scotson 1994 [1965]). Among police officers, feelings of anger and resentment for not being recognized as heroes translate into hate towards a broadly defined public, nurturing and nurtured by far-right political opportunists—like Bolsonaro and his sons (see Shoshan 2014). Throughout the chapter, I have also highlighted some of the feelings and emotions that structure the police officers’ everyday experiences of war: Fear, paranoia, anger, and frustration, but also intoxicating feelings of excitement, power, and belonging—often referred to as *esprit du corps*, and of a sense of moral superiority in relation to the civilian population (see Castro and Leirener 2009; Cano and Duarte 2012). These are common characteristics of military identity and show the generative dimension of the simultaneously de-subjectifying and identity-producing effect of the institutional hierarchy (see Salem 2016: 50–51). On a cognitive level, this *militarization of the mind* prepares the police officer to exercise state violence on a massive scale—as just, necessary, or acceptable.

The salience of war machine dynamics at the UPPs was brought to the fore in the murder of Eduardo Ferreira. The changing narrative around his death can, on the one hand, be understood as attempts to address the cognitive dissonance that results when world-shattering events, like the death of a 10-year-old boy, occur—especially within the institution.

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<sup>11</sup> In Brazil and Latin America, this feeling was clearly expressed during the Cold War. The military dictators that seized power saw it as their role to guard the nation against the moral decay they attributed to communist ideology and the growth of progressive ideas about sexual liberation and gender equality. Supported by conservative factions of the catholic church, the military took upon themselves the task of “re-establishing” moral order in their respective countries. In their eyes, this civilizing mission justified the use of violence. In this way, the dictators could continue seeing themselves as sensitive, good, and righteous men, surrounded by a society in moral decay—just like the police officers in Rio did.

In these cases, where the narrative of a professional and brutally efficient police fighting a heroic battle against evil becomes impossible to sustain, blaming the victim (i.e. he shouldn't be playing on the streets of a warzone) is a way to evade the crisis that can follow when the world can no longer be organized around the dichotomy of absolute good and absolute evil. On the other hand, on a larger scale it is an attempt to protect the institutional image and a corporate identity, where the mistakes of one officer reflect poorly on the police, and importantly, where events like Eduardo's death or Amarildo's disappearance challenge the state's legitimacy in the eyes of the population, and especially the favela population. The protest against the UPPs in Alemão and the police's violent response is also indicative of this dynamic, which is reproduced through a series of institutionalized practices of the police and judiciary that have made the conviction of police officers who kill an extremely rare event (see Misse et al. 2015).

While many officers, like Evandro, claim that attempts to reduce police lethality will expose them to more violence, hard-handed policing practices, and especially those organized around the logics of warfare and elimination (Deleuzian deterritorializations), also tend to increase the rate of police deaths and victimization (cf. Cano et al. 2012). Nonetheless, and as I will show in Chapters 6 and 7, in contexts characterized by the prevalence of armed confrontation, aggression is understood as imperative. The relation between the use of violence, the assertion of authority, and the demand for respect characteristic of Machado da Silva's violent sociability, or the warrior ethos (Zaluar 2010), was expressed in a saying among police officers that *the police is only respected for the harm it can do*. They claimed that with the UPPs, gang members and residents alike had lost their former respect for the police—an understanding reflected in the rejection of the blue “bus-driver's” uniform (see Chapter 5: *Police Masculinities*). Most police officers claimed that the only way to fight crime was with “*pau no lombo, sem massagem*” (physical violence; lit. “rod to the back, with no massage”): Only through the sovereign logic of pure force could the police achieve respect from criminals and residents.

As both gay and intellectual I have, for obvious reasons, been particularly sensitive to the deep contempt officers express towards homosexuals,

intellectual elites, politicians, businessmen, and journalists, whom they claim oppose the police and defend criminals every time they problematize police violence and corruption, which is often. I have wondered why they have such strong feelings of anger, disgust, and fear towards the so-called “gender ideology.” One explanation would be to signal how queer subjectivities trouble traditional gender hierarchies, de-naturalizing heteropatriarchy. This would not be entirely wrong. However, the police officers do not seem to feel that their manhood is threatened by the existence of queer subjectivities. Rather, they argue that “gender ideology” is being imposed on them by a patronizing elite of intellectuals and see it as an attack on a “natural and harmonic social order” structured around the nuclear family and “guaranteed by virile family fathers responsible for the sustenance of obedient wives and children” (Lynch and Cassimiro 2022: 155).<sup>12</sup> Their articulation of the critique around the notion of family values should lead us to ask why the potential dissolution of the nuclear family is seen as such a threat.

Without the family, what is left is just an atomized, individual subject. Such a subject is at a greater risk of being influenced by forces of evil. Thus, the family is seen as stabilizing and anchoring the subject in Christian morality. If the family is dissolved, the subjects that rely on the guidance that family fathers provide might get lost: They might become drug traffickers or give in to excesses in various forms (drugs, sex, alcohol) that corrupt the soul and creates addictions. Likewise, Brazilian hedonism (which comes into full fruition during Carnival celebrations), articulated in the notion of *sacanagem* is also perceived as a threat and potential corruption of the soul. The family, and particularly the family father as an example of the Foucauldian pastoral power, is responsible for instilling the right values in their children. Nothing less than the Nation’s moral order is at stake in the proper disciplining and education of children within stable and hierarchical nuclear families (see Duarte

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<sup>12</sup> “This original society stems from a primordial judeo-christian civilization conceived in opposition to modern liberal values such as pluralism, tolerance, state of law and secularism. This natural order is under attack from leftist forces pretending to dissolve traditional family bonds, and impose scientism, atheism, feminism, homosexuality and racial hatred. They (the leftists) are financed and supported by a cosmopolitan communist elite with representatives embedded in the media and state; in the areas of human rights, environmental protection, education, culture, and international relations” (Lynch and Cassimiro 2022: 155).

1995). Children who lack proper guidance are referred to as “seeds of evil” (*semente do mal*) by the police. These are subjects without discipline and morals and a threat to the social order and must therefore be guided down the right path from an early age. In the eyes of the police, the presence of police officers in marginalized communities will give the children growing up there healthy role models to follow.

Through the conversations that the police officers had about the people who lived in the favelas, we see the contours of an emergent moral order—a police order—centered around respect for police authority, family values, and religion (see Albernaz 2020). The social projects at the UPPs were perceived as key to the implementation of this order. They should be seen as territorializations that sought to transform favela subjectivities through practices of care that sometimes included sports and leisure activities such as jiu-jitsu lessons, gymnastics, excursions and debutant balls; handing out food baskets to community members; the provision of services such as free dental treatments or student tuitions; conflict mediation to settle minor disputes between residents; and community events like block parties and Christmas and Easter celebrations organized by the police. These were effective ways of enrolling people within a state order where the police’s role is not just repressive, but where they also act as benefactors, and reflects how patriarchal authority in Brazil is exercised around practices of care as well as force (I will return to the ways in which the social projects were also insidious forms of militarization that sought to gather intelligence and gain allies in the war on drugs in the next chapter) (Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2021). The continuity or complementarity between force and care is also brought together in popular notions of the traditional family and expresses a notion of personhood that diverges from that of the individualized rights-bearing subject of Western modernity (see Duarte 1995, 2009; Martínez-Moreno 2023). At the UPPs (which I have described as a modernization of the police), it produced an ambiguity, dilemma, or contradiction that is at the center of Bruce Kapferer and Bjørn Enge Bertelsen’s (2009) analysis of state violence and of what they refer to as the enduring crisis of the modern state: How can modern states exercise violent power without challenging their own legitimacy? In the following chapter, I will explore the micro dynamics through which the



reformists within the institution tried to address this dilemma through the transformation of officers into a modern police force respectful of human rights, and the resistance to these attempts.

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# 7

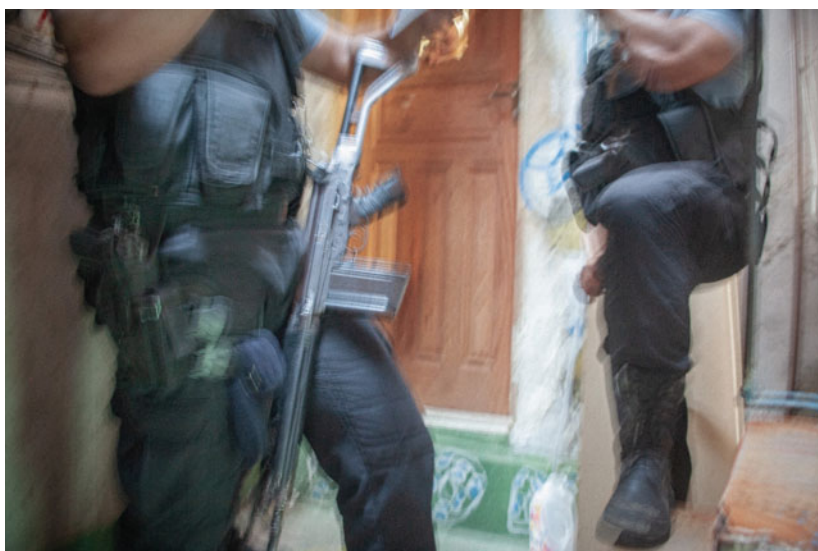
## Modernizing Warriors

### Tactical Training

“Stops and frisks must be carried out vigorously!” I have joined a group of police officers from Alemão on their weeklong recycling: The training course that the institutional leadership has prescribed in response to the “crisis” at the UPPs. The police’s Special Forces oversee the first five days of the course, which are mainly centered around urban warfare and patrol techniques, while a sixth day at the UPPs command and control center focuses on theoretical lessons focused on practices of “proximity policing.” Right now, an officer from BOPE is explaining how to search suspects during patrol. The officers must not leave any room for doubt—it can be taken as a sign of weakness. He shows them the correct procedure. Gun raised, he points the weapon at a police officer playing the suspect and orders: “Resident! Place your hands on the wall!” His voice is loud, deep, and firm. It emanates authority and force. The officers are reminded to be careful not to hurt the suspect during the search, or else they might get in trouble with the judge: “The treatment that you give your client depends on what the client is asking for. If you make a

mess [the judges] will give you a hard time.” To emphasize the importance of proper conduct, he tells them an anecdote of a suspect who was released by the judge due to bruising and encourages the officers to moderate their use of force to avoid similar situations. It should be applied progressively—the public might accuse them of abuse of force if they go straight for the gun (Fig. 7.1).

Even if people in Rio consider June to be a winter month, the sunshine is hot enough to make the group of police officers flock together under the shade of a big, solitary Acacia tree. There’s no other shelter from the sun. We’re standing in the middle of an open, dusty field surrounded by the ramshackle ruins of an old military base that looks like it has been out of use for decades. Now it functions as the headquarters and training grounds of the Military Police’s Special Units. I’ve been shown some sexy images of the modern building complex that will be built here in the future but the only building that has been erected is by no means as attractive as the renders. It’s built in the same light materials as the UPPs of Complexo do Alemão—prefabricated walls made of aluminum



**Fig. 7.1** Police officers on patrol with machine guns in Santa Marta, April 2015

and Styrofoam; thin saggy doors that leave open gaps in the doorways when they, against all odds, manage to close; windows that appear to be falling out of their frames.

A few weeks ago, I was at the Coordinating Offices of the Pacifying Police (CPP), which oversees the UPPs, to speak with the Major in charge of the *operational* (strategic and tactical) dimensions of the pacification. The Major was running late, and I was invited to join the police's Easter celebrations while I waited. The UPP Commanders, around a hundred officers or so, had gathered for mass in the CPP's meeting hall. The service was held by two ministers: One catholic and one evangelical. They blessed the police's efforts to bring peace to the favelas. After the sermon ended, a musical band with police officers played a few songs of praise while the congregation nibbled at the sweets, coffee, and soda that had been set out on a table at the back of the room.

"Today, the situation is as follows: At several UPPs there are places where the police can't patrol without getting into gunfights." The Major is a former officer from BOPE, as most of the officers at the CPP. "We see that the policemen don't know how to act in critical situations, when they're under attack. They don't know how to handle these situations; they don't know how to hold their positions." The Major's voice is low and calm. He is well known among the officers at Alemão, who have told me that "he has killed over a hundred criminals" and is connected to the militias. Sitting in his office he strikes me as a quite normal, even nice, likable, and polite guy. I find it hard to imagine him as a ruthless killer.<sup>1</sup>

He is talking about how the leadership of the pacification project evaluated the challenges at the UPPs: "[We found that] when the police

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<sup>1</sup> The apparent "normality" of people responsible for practices of extermination like those observed in Brazil's favelas is something that many scholars studying perpetrators of state violence—even those who have "killed in the hundreds"—have noted (see Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Robben and Hinton 2023). This normality was part of what lead Hannah Arendt (2006 [1963]) to highlight the banality of evil in her reports from the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem following WWII. However, Arendt's work was a reflection of the responsibility of the bureaucrats who had participated in the Holocaust—the Major who had allegedly "killed over a hundred criminals" (according to the officers I spoke to) was not a detached bureaucrat. He signals the violence beneath the surface of what Sergio Buarque de Holanda (1936) referred to as the *cordial man*: A cultural archetype characterized by a veneer of cordiality covering extreme forms of unofficial violence—an idiosyncratic war machine formation that the state has drawn upon throughout Brazilian history (see Souza 2007).



officers got into armed combat, they retreated to the base. [When that happens,] you lose the area,” the Major explains: “Having [identified these challenges] we created a product that we call the *strategic realignment*.” The goal of the realignment, he says, is to identify the strategic areas of each community and use advanced bases—armored or entrenched posts—to occupy these areas. Meanwhile, UPP officers are taken off the street to receive tactical training at the headquarters of the Special Operation’s Units, while officers from Choque and BOPE remain in place in the favelas. “Today our objective is to maintain the occupation but in a safer manner for our patrol officers. At the moment that is our biggest goal: To guarantee the security of our officers—to keep them at strategic points in the community in a safe manner.” When the officers feel threatened, they become stressed and vulnerable, and make poor decisions.

Back at the training grounds of the Special Forces, the crisp sound of shattering dry leaves blends with the steady rhythm of the group of police officers jogging along the cobbled streets that crisscross the military base. They wear bulletproof vests and are armed with machine guns, a heavy piece of equipment to carry while running. I trot along with them. I’m not armed but wear a bulky and sweaty vest like the officers. The overgrown and abandoned buildings act as barriers we must overcome, pulling ourselves through tall windows or crawling beneath low walls. A Sub-Lieutenant from BOPE is leading the exercise. “You just stay in my shadow,” he says looking me straight in the eyes. Then he faces the officers: “Control what he writes before he finishes his work. Make sure he doesn’t write about the terrible physical condition of the troop. Everybody knows that the police beats up women and children, but they have no idea how bad shape we’re in!” We laugh. The Sub-Lieutenant is not exaggerating. The pace is steady but slow, still we can’t have run more than 500 meters before the first officer is falling behind. Daví, one of the most athletic Soldiers at Alemão (most of them sport voluminous beer bellies) starts to chant a *grito de guerra* (lit. ‘war cry’; cadence call) to lift the *morale* of the group:

There are people that criticize because they don't know how to act  
 [*Tem gente que critica porque não sabe fazer*]  
 There are many that admire and even stop to look  
 [*Tem muitos que admiram e até param para ver*]  
 Those of you who criticize me come do what I am doing  
 [*Você que me critica vem fazer o que eu faço*]  
 Halfway down the road you are going to feel tired  
 [*No meio do caminho você vai sentir cansaço*]

The officers yell back in unison. Once the troop starts chanting, something happens. A rush, a special feeling of unity runs through the group.<sup>2</sup> It's like we have all changed: I'm no longer an anthropologist, I'm a war reporter in a Hollywood movie. The police officers are no longer insignificant men from Rio's suburbs and favelas, they are action heroes going to war to fight a heroic battle against evil. It feels like we are one. One team, one troop, one unit, one family—the blue family. I haven't shared this experience with the officers before, this feeling of being a part of their community. Yes, they are carrying guns and I'm not, but I'm running by their side, chanting along with them. To the police officers, I'm no longer a nerd on intellectual pedestal—a person who criticizes them but doesn't have any solutions to offer; a person without the courage to do what they are doing. I'm there with them every morning at seven, day after day, and I stay until the end. The commanding officers from the Special Forces are suspicious of me, they don't want me here. The patrol officers from Alemão see that too. I'm not siding with their superiors; I'm siding with them.

About sixty of the officers from Alemão are at the training camp this week. I know many of them already—Nazareth is here, and so is Anderson, Felipe, and Daví. But many of them I've only briefly seen

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<sup>2</sup> In the militaries, this strong feeling of belonging is usually referred to as *esprit de corps* and is not necessarily associated with fascist movements. However, the manipulation of such feelings of unity can also emerge when people are constituted as masses and has been analyzed as a psychosocial characteristic of fascism. According to Wilhelm Reich (2013 [1933]), the National Socialists in Germany were successful because they operated on emotions, avoiding relevant arguments as much as possible. However, Reich notes how such emotional manipulation of the masses can only be successful when the personality of the leader resonates with the average structure of a broad category of individuals—which suggests that among police officers, much of Bolsonaro's appeal was in their identification with him on a visceral and emotional level.

at the base. The officers who ignored me when I first arrived at the UPP are warming up to me. They call me their base mascot. I've been given a nickname: *Noruga*—the Norwegian. “Hey, *Noruga*, when will you join the force?” one of them asks. “Ha! For the love of God, *don't* become a police officer!” Anderson exclaims. “Our job is hell.”

Eventually, we arrive at the open field in front of the shooting range where a group of instructors are waiting. They give us no time to think. The officers are told to load their rifles quickly, and then the instructors grab each of us by the handle at the neck of our vests and drag us onto the shooting range. The ammunition chamber of one of the officers falls out of his rifle as the instructor seizes him. He is reprimanded in front of his colleagues. I'm forced to the ground behind the group and told to cover my ears. Each officer is placed behind a barrel, fifty meters ahead of seven cardboard figures. They represent possible targets, some holding a gun, others a microphone or a pair of glasses, and some are dressed as police. The officers are ordered to identify and shoot the targets they consider to be a threat as quickly as possible. The gunfire thunders across the shooting range. It must be heard in the favela lying right next to the military complex.

Afterwards, I inspect the results along with one of the instructors. “You killed them all!” I say jokingly to one of the officers, trying to lighten the mood. He has an embarrassed look on his face. The instructors jot down the results. Then they tell us to gather at the end of the shooting range while they remain at the opposite side. They have distributed several teargas canisters among them and throw them onto the field between us. The air is filled with thick, white smoke. “Run, run, run, run!” I look over at Anderson, who's standing next to me. He grins: “You should have seen us at the Police Academy!” As recruits they were showered with pepper spray and teargas to toughen up. I grit my teeth and run into the cloud of gas alongside the rest of the soldiers. It stings in the eyes and burns in the lungs. Many of the men are coughing. I feel the burning run through my body.

After the exercise, a senior BOPE officer with a large combat knife in his uniform belt gathers the group. He stresses the importance of being able to act quickly and efficiently under stress: “The ideal is that you

*destroy* the enemy and return to your homes!” He pauses: “We aren’t training you to be *cowards*, we are training you to be *combatants*!”

The week with the Special Units is intense. The days start early and last until dusk. There’s a lot of content to cover: The police officers practice picking their weapons apart and putting them back together; they are taught how to carry their machine guns when they round corners or storm buildings—so that the muzzles can’t be seen by their enemies before the officers can see *them*, and are able to shoot; they practice evacuating vehicles while under fire—the instructors shoot at them with softguns so that they can sense if they are hit.

We are also taught how to act to impose fear and respect. One of the instructors explains the importance of “the psychological factor.” A police officer who carries good equipment and knows how to use it warrants respect. “If you see a group of bandits, who do you kill? You kill the one that looks the weakest! You don’t pick the one that looks strongest and toughest. The thugs also think that way.” He exemplifies his point referring to the American Army’s use of *Tomahawks* (battle axes) in Iraq and compares it to the choice of armament on patrol in the favela: “Just imagine a tactical patrol unit armed with handguns and one carrying machine guns and see what difference it makes!”

A plump, panting senior officer from Choque gives a class on the use of so-called “non-lethal” armament. There is a selection of various weapons lined up in a row in front of us so the officers can get familiarized with the different tools at their disposal: Various cans and grenades with pepper spray, teargas, and pyrotechnics. There are two kinds of shock grenades (the police call them *bomba de efeito moral* or “moral effect bomb” since they are supposed to scare and “demoralize” the victim): One just makes a loud explosion, and the other lights up as well. The weapons serve different purposes. For example, while pepper spray canisters can be used both to incapacitate and disperse a crowd, canisters with foam or gel are generally used to incapacitate a single individual. The officer highlights the difference with an example: Gel and foam can be used on a driver who doesn’t want to exit his vehicle if his wife and children are inside. Spraying would target everyone indiscriminately, while foam only targets the driver. “If used the wrong way, non-lethal armament can kill,” he says, and tells us about an officer from Choque

who killed a 14-year-old boy with a pepper spray canister. One of the officers laughs. To stress the gravity, the instructor adds: “The mother of the child pressed charges against the police officer when she found out [what had happened].”

The week of training ends with a guest lecture about the “history of the machine gun” and a pep talk held by the Colonel in command of the Special Units to boost the officers’ morale. He concludes the motivational speech with a reminder to the group of officers: “We aren’t here to play heroes; we are professionals that work within the framework of the law.” The shooting exercise was intended to make them reflect on the results, rather than evaluating their shooting skills. Above all, they wanted to remind the officers of how easy it is to make mistakes. “Remember, bullets don’t just disappear, every bullet stops somewhere,” the Colonel says, and asks the officers to be patient, despite the recent spur of violence: “The pacification is an eighteen-year project. [It succeeded] when a new generation of youth has grown up in a stable environment, without having to hide under their beds, without having to live with the police entering their homes with frequency!”

## Human Rights

“Research shows that young people are often hostile to the police because they are used to shootings, beatings and bombs.” The female psychologist is tall and slim. She is elegantly dressed, wearing a knee-long skirt and high-heeled shoes. Her blonde hair falls softly over her shoulders. “Does that make sense?” The question is directed at the men sitting in the lecture hall of the CPP. They are here to undergo a psychological evaluation and receive training in non-violent communication strategies and human rights, before returning to Alemão following last week’s tactical course. “No!” The officers protest. It’s because they are used to partying, smoking marihuana, and that kind of lifestyle, one of them objects. “People are stupid and ignorant, and Alemão still hasn’t been pacified. The people there are wrong. To them what’s right is wrong.”

Following the lesson, the psychologist approaches me for a talk. We sit down and she suggests I turn on the tape-recorder so that I don’t

have to write while she speaks. “It’s hard for the men to admit that they are scared to death when they have to spend time in places where they can be hurt,” she says. “The guys can’t admit certain things, for example that they are getting [mentally] ill. The guy who gets ill is looked down on by his colleagues, he gets mocked. [...] The officers assume the role of the fearless guy, sometimes even trying to gain respect in the areas where they live. So, when they are off duty, they want to take control of their neighborhood.” Understood this way, the militias could also be seen as an expression of the same macho bravado which I’ve seen among police officers. The psychologist continues: “The macho culture is very strong [within our institution]. And proximity policing [...] requires approximation, it requires dialogue, it requires listening to the other, things that [...] we still associate a lot more with the women than with the men. [...] I think it makes it harder for them to put themselves in that position. They would much rather be the guy who is skilled, who gets into a gunfire and is fearless, than the guy who listens, who helps. [...] The guy is a warrior. He *likes* being a warrior. He likes being the guy who makes things happen, who shoots, who kills. [...] It’s a very strong driving force, that warrior thing.” The psychologist describes it as if the police is running in circles, always ending up in the same place: “The war on drugs, that’s what they call it, right? *The war on drugs*,” she emphasizes each word. “The war on drug trafficking. They talk a lot about that: *Abh, Alemão, is at war!* They use that word all the time, don’t they?” But war has a price, she says. “You’re not getting out of that unscarred. You don’t get out of that saying *abhh, I’m great, I went to war, I killed, I almost died, I’m great*. No. We, notice that they like to say so, they banalize it, they think *okay, so I was in a shooting episode, that’s normal*. At first, [the police officer] thinks that it doesn’t affect him. But then he gets home and starts quarreling with his wife. He gets more aggressive, irritated by nothing. And then he starts connecting the dots. [...] Finally, he might admit that, *yes, I’ve really become more aggressive. Sometimes, I can’t let go of all the aggression from work, and it surfaces at home*. Then they come to us saying, *yes, I drink more, I don’t sleep well...* The alcohol consumption among officers is astonishing. They drink a lot. Sometimes it’s a form of

self-medication—to sleep or to relax. Other times they get tranquilizers or sleep medicine, either illegally or through a psychiatrist.”<sup>3</sup>

The psychologist explains that many police officers choose to withdraw from their duties. “It’s very common to hear them say: *I can’t fight the system, so I let it be. I try to hide as well as I can.* Recently, I heard an officer talking about that: *Listen, I’ve worked at the internal affairs [of the police], and I saw so many horrible things... And when I tried to fight it, I almost ended up harming myself, so I found it’s better if I don’t do anything.*” At the other end of the scale, you have the policemen who fully embrace the war no matter the cost: “They’ll say *no, this is my mission, and I’ll go all in.*” Due to the lack of institutional support, the police officer who is out on the street doing his work sees two possible outcomes, she explains: “Either death, the guy ends up dying or wounded during his service—or being jailed, for getting involved in a situation where he kills someone, hurts someone, he makes a mistake and gets arrested.” These prospects demotivate the officers: “He’ll say *damn it, the future of those of us who want to act, who come with a desire to do police work, is either prison or death.*”

Since they are at the bottom of the military hierarchy, at the bottom of the pyramid, the Soldiers feel powerless. “The military structure works according to the following logic: The Soldier follow the rules or orders of their superiors, and there is no room for questions, right? He is just the guy who executes [the order], that obeys.” Meanwhile, the Soldiers are held responsible for their actions. The psychologist says that this distorts the meaning of hierarchy. Hierarchy isn’t giving orders and making the guy who carries them out responsible. Hierarchy is supposed to attribute responsibility at the highest level. “[The Soldier] is left with the worst part: Both the blame and the responsibility, right?” When the men are forced to follow orders that they don’t see the use of and can’t talk to their superiors about their experience, it’s incredibly harmful: “It leads to [mental] health problems. Even if he is the one taking orders, he is also a thinking individual, right? He’s not just a machine.”

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<sup>3</sup> According to the psychologist, officers relatively fresh out of the academy were dealing with problems that were normally only observed after many years in service, and many of them struggled with alcohol abuse, depression, and suicide thoughts (see also Magaloni et al. 2015).

“Humans have three brains,” the psychologist tells the police officers when we gather in the lecture hall again. The first acts by reflex, the second according to emotions, and the third, the neo-cortex, is related to conscious and rational decisions making and common sense. The action of police officers must be governed by the neo-cortex. “Do you want to be frogs or men? Do you want to be frogs or princes?” She asks rhetorically. If the police treat people correctly, they will be able to avoid unnecessary discussions, easing their job. One of the men at the back of the room is nodding his head but not in agreement—he is about to fall asleep. The psychologist wakes him with a soft and tender joke, as a mother carefully waking a child: “Are you sitting there praying for me?” The officer blushes and straightens up in his chair. Then she turns toward the rest of the men. “Communication is an incredibly powerful tool. Those who dominate the techniques of communication have power: *Communication is power!*” If the police officers are able to understand the needs and feelings of others they will also be able to control and manipulate them. One of the strategies of communication that they could use is to express their own vulnerability as a way to resolve conflicts. That helps them “humanize the uniform.” Expressing frustration with a situation elicits sympathy from the residents. “You must conquer allies. If the community is your partner, you have a chance at winning [the] battle.” Above all, the police must avoid fighting with residents. “I don’t want you entering [heated] arguments with residents from the communities. There are people filming everything these days.” True pacification is more than territorial control and occupation and involves building good relations with the local community. The police must leave the process of occupation behind and start engaging with the neighbors. That’s the way to “paint the favela blue” she says, referencing the emblematic color of the police. But there are of course limits to what she’s teaching them: “I’m not talking about *vagabundos* (thugs). We’re talking about residents!”<sup>4</sup>

“What can be harder than talking about human rights to the Soldiers from Alemão?” The police officer at the front of the room smiles nervously. A few of the men laugh at his feeble attempt to lighten the

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<sup>4</sup> The psychologist’s distinction between the treatment the police should give to citizens and thugs shows how the dynamic of transformation and elimination was also expressed in the “soft” and human rights-oriented curriculum of proximity policing.



mood with a joke. Do they find it funny or are they being polite? The lecturer measures each word. He says something about how important it is for the police to “demystify” the human rights, and that he wants the officers to understand the historical context in which the concept emerged. “In the Middle-Ages, society was regulated by strict moral rules,” he begins. “People were afraid of insulting God. But the fear of God has decreased. Today, we must protect society because the moral laws are no longer effective—and there are also international laws that control the power of states.” Human rights, he says, appeared in 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Religious persons carry this codex with them already: They are foundational, natural rights that every person have. But who is relying on the human rights today, the officer asks rhetorically. “The political left,” he says. Like the Socialist Party and Marcelo Freixo—the archnemesis of the police officers. But human rights were not born as left-wing discourse. On the contrary, they emerged as a reaction to communism and the Soviet Union (“who didn’t sign the treaty,” he adds): The countries that the Socialist Party supports! It’s important that the officers understand that the problem is that now *everything* has become a matter of human rights: “The question of abortion, the right to do all kinds of *besteiras* (bullshit)!” The police officers should know that human rights are not what the left-wing claims. Their interpretation of human rights is that the police are not allowed to do this and that, the officer says, before concluding: “We have to create our own discourse of human rights!”

The men in the room have long lost interest in what the officer is saying. They are chatting and making jokes and show no intent to redefine human rights. A few police officers at the back of the room are sleeping, one of them even snores. The officer in charge seems nervous. He tries to catch the attention of his audience with an example: The tactical training they’ve just received is also about human rights! The state can’t hand out guns to people who haven’t been trained in the use of weapons. Human rights means that the police must receive more training so that they don’t kill innocent people or harm their colleagues. He has derailed and tries to get the lecture back on track. “Human rights,” he says, now with a shrill voice, “have been politicized by the left-wing to win votes. They have forced upon us their own interpretations and taken

control over human rights! Yes,” he adds, “even our own—even among the Military Police there are Colonels who have been polluted by this discourse!” Yet another bold rhetorical move to gain the police officer’s attention: “Since we have been polluted by the ideological discourse of the left, we believe that the police officer who defends human rights is the one who teaches music to kids—and it isn’t. It’s the *operational* police officer who guarantees human rights.” One of the men in the room protests, his voice is loud and angry: “Why don’t human rights count when police officers are killed?” The other officers agree: “The police are not treated as human beings!”

## Winning Allies

Christine Lagarde is in Complexo do Alemão. She is accompanied by the Brazilian Minister of Development. They take the gondola from Bonsucesso to Alemão, which seems like quite a big risk considering that while they are in the cart they are sitting ducks. But targeting the Director of the IMF and a Brazilian minister would bring mayhem upon the culprits. Lagarde wants to learn more about the Bolsa família-program, she says to the reporters covering her visit. With their cameras pointed at her, she listens attentively to the testimonies from recipients living in Alemão. Lagarde praises the program and congratulates Dilma’s government with the budget cuts they’ve made this year: “Budgetary discipline is necessary to finance programs like this,” she says. “They go together, hand in hand. In the end, the people who suffer the most from the lack of budgetary discipline are usually the poor.”

I read an interview with Colonel Robson, the Chief of Staff who authorized my fieldwork. He claims that there are two different cultures in the Military Police that are in permanent conflict, trying to *destroy* one another. One culture is built around the idea that the police are at war, while the other is built around attempts to apply the notion of a citizen police. “When I entered the Military Police and did the [training] course, we were rarely encouraged to dialogue. There was very little interaction,” he says. The “other” was always diffuse: A pole or a doll—some sort of punching bag. He emphasizes the importance of stimulating dialogue

between police and citizens. Officers must be encouraged to listen more to the population: “BOPE was an exaggerated and unnecessary reference,” the Colonel says. He argues that the police are mistaken if they think that the war-logic is the only way to do police work. “Often, the officers reproduce representations [of policing] that are already prevalent in society. When the officer is out on the street, he sees that [war practices] are supported by a large part of society. Everything that we teach in classes is abandoned in practice.” He adds: “Everybody wants to be BOPE. Everybody should want to be the UPP.”<sup>5</sup>

Colonel Robson has previously stated that the UPP project is also a pacification of the police. When I meet him again in his offices in central Rio, towards the end of my fieldwork, I ask him what he meant by that. “The practice of proximity [policing] is an opportunity to deconstruct [symbolic representations]. [It’s] an opportunity we have to practice and respect human rights in a mutual way.” He is referring to the relation of distrust between police and young favela residents. “[Proximity policing] is about doing what the police must do in a democratic society in an intelligent way, by creating an environment conducive to efficient police action. It’s about gaining legitimacy, and that will not be achieved with violence—although the peculiarities of Rio de Janeiro create opportunities for the use of violence; although the police have been instrumentalized by a political [and economic] elite during all its existence—and we have fallen like ducklings into that trap.”

Robson led the UPPs during the first years of their implementation and says that, after his retirement, the project went in a direction that he does not support. In 2014, following a corruption scandal in the Military Police that involved several Colonels, the State Secretary of Security requested a group of reform-oriented leaders to take charge and get the local police reform and UPPs on the right track. Colonel Robson assumed as part of the new leadership at the beginning of 2015, right before I reached out to his office. Compared to Colonel Íbis Pereira’s

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<sup>5</sup> This difference between doctrine and practice is a pervasive feature of the Brazilian policing and judicial apparatuses and cannot be understood through the logic of “failure” of democracy (i.e. the failed state-paradigm). Rather, what Robson points to is a dynamic contradiction that permeates the Brazilian state institutions (see Pires and Albernaz 2022 for a fuller discussion on the tensions between theory and practice withing the police).

ethical and philosophical reflections at the Legislative Assembly (see Chapter 6: *Violent Becomings*), Robson talks like a pragmatic: “There has to be a moment when the police must rethink itself. It must become aware of its own role within this scenario.” He’s referring to the armed violence in Rio. “[The pacification of the police is] first a pacification in practice. We have verified that with statistics [showing] reduced police lethality. The previous model was based on invasions, so it was a strained model, of confrontations. It produced police lethality when suspects opposed arrest, it produced death, and it also produced the death of police officers.” He explains that with the pacification, they have shown that there are alternatives to this model that are less harsh, less harmful. He says that the UPPs are like a *laboratory* that allows them to observe *good practices* (see also Muñiz and Albernaz 2015: 14f).<sup>6</sup> The lessons learned from the UPPs could be used to change the entire institution and transform the police.

But the Colonel says that it’s hard to create a citizen police. The representation of policing as warfare is deeply rooted in society: “It is consolidated and confirmed every day.” First, through the media-focus on action-filled events rather than preventative policing. “People are hungry—it’s incredible—our population is hungry, despite all the suffering, it’s hungry for those events.” In particular among the youth, he says. Their hunt for excitement feeds the spiral of violence. “This happens everywhere, right? The police officer is young, he enters [the force] with that [almost universal representation] constructed in movies about the police. [...] The [idealization of the] warrior isn’t specific [to Rio], it’s a part of the collective imaginary of what it means to be a police officer across the world.” Most places, reality can’t match the expectation—police work isn’t as action-filled as it looks on TV. But Rio provides plenty of opportunities to act out these imaginaries, Robson says: “No matter how good our curriculum is, no matter how in tune we are with the democratic rule of law, with the philosophy of human rights, the

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<sup>6</sup> Jaqueline Muniz and Elisabete Albernaz (2015: 14–15) have noted how the idea of the pacification as an experiment where different strategies of governance could be tested out, developing a series of *good practices* of policing, contributed to the legitimation of the UPPs *after the facts*—i.e. after they had already been implemented.

practices of policing, the culture of the police, ends up producing other representations.”

I get into the patrol car with the policemen from the UPP at Mangureira. It’s been a couple of weeks since the last time I was here, after the police’s attempt to “reconquer” the favela (see Chapter 1: *Introduction*). That time it felt like being in a war movie. I have never seen so many armed police officers in action at the same time. Today I’m here at the commander’s request. He told me that he wanted me to see this. In response to the unrest of past months he has established three teams that will focus on strengthening dialogue with the local community. I’m a little hesitant. I’ve joined the proximity policing teams of Mangureira before and feel that I have a fair understanding of what they’re about. They spend a few hours inspecting and solving various problems that require the involvement of other public agencies. Sometimes it might be a clogged sewer or a broken water pipe, other times they might carry out community outreach activities, offering free dental care for neighbors, after-school activities for the kids, or gymnastics for the elderly. They document their work with a few pictures that can be uploaded on Facebook or published on the website of the UPPs and write a short report that is filed alongside other “social projects.” Mimicking practices of patronage typical of the wielding of political power in the favelas, they sometimes hand out groceries or candy for the neighborhood kids.

“This is something else,” the commander says, while one of the officers from the teams suggests that their work “goes beyond” former efforts. Each new proximity team consist of three officers. Their task is to “build trust.” I’m introduced to a team that will take me to a quiet part of the favela and show me how they do this in practice. The people who live there are “good people” (*gente de bem*), workers (*trabalhadores*). Maybe that’s why I haven’t been there before, as I’ve mostly joined the Tactical Patrol Units in Mangureira. None of the officers are wearing the standard, dark uniforms of their colleagues. Instead, they sport white T-shirts with details in different bright colors. “White symbolizes peace,” the Sergeant in charge explains. The standard uniform is seen as more aggressive. Although they have only been in the team for a week, he says that the experience has changed him and his idea of what policework can be.

He used to “like war” (*gostar da guerra*) but now he’s fully devoted to proximity policing (Fig. 7.2).

The President of one of Mangueira’s Resident Associations and one of his partners are waiting for us when we arrive. We leave the patrol vehicle parked in the street and greet them with a handshake. The Sergeant is in a good mood: “This is our colleague from Norway. He’s here to document our work.” The way he says it makes us sound important. The President and Sergeant lead the way through the favela. One of the officers, a young woman, takes a picture of the group with her phone and posts it on social media. I also pull out my camera to “document” our excursion. We arrive at an open square in the middle of the community where some kids are running around with their kites. By the looks of it, the square is used as a landfill and parking lot, but from the conversation between the officers and two resident representatives, I understand that they plan to move the cars, clean the landfill, and build a playground here. While the officers discuss how the playground should look like, a middle-aged woman approaches us. She says that the property belongs



**Fig. 7.2** The proximity team inspecting the areas of a future playground, July 2015

to her mother who is sick with Alzheimer. Now she co-administers the land with her six siblings, she explains and starts sermoning us about her family: One of her brothers has disappeared and nobody knows where he is, and another brother is a monster, because he doesn't take care of his mother and in *her* opinion, if you have a family, either a sibling, child, or parent—and you don't take care of them when they are sick, then you are a piece of *S!* She asks us to pardon her—she doesn't want to use bad language—but you're a *piece of shit*, and there she said it anyways but we must forgive her, because that kind of person is nothing less than a monster. She talks fast and incessantly, like she's ill. But the Sergeant is determined to see his plan through. He politely explains that he and the other officers are from the proximity team at the UPP and that they are here to attend to the needs of the community and help them “make improvements.” He tells the women that the clearing will be of much better use if it is cleaned of the rubble and the cars are parked along the fringes of the lot, so that the neighborhood kids can play here. After a short conversation the woman eventually agrees that indeed, the area will be of much better use as a playground, and we head back to the Resident Association.

When we get there, a group of neighbors have gathered outside the building. A woman is sitting on a plastic chair in the middle of the street. The woman's body—her throat and arms—is covered by scar tissue. It looks like she has been severely burned. Her son is hanging onto her neck. He is mentally disabled and his face lights up when he sees the police arrive. The Sergeant says that he helped the woman take her son to the doctor last week. He greets them with enthusiasm. Later, as we are heading back to the police station, the Sergeant explains that the key is to make the President of the Resident Association *depend* on the police and not the other way around.<sup>7</sup> He is very pleased with the visit. “Did you see that?” He sounds exited. “Did you see, Tomas? That's how things

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<sup>7</sup> Analyzing one of the precursors to the UPPs—the GPAE (*Grupamento de Policiamento em Areas Especiais*), a community oriented policing project implemented in a handful of favelas in the early 2000s, Elisabete Albernaz, Haydée Caruso, and Luciane Patrício (2007) argue that rather than replacing repressive policing techniques with preventive ones, the project combined repressive policing with social handouts, creating a police tutelage over favela residents and establishing clientelistic relations that mirrored traditional patterns of domination. I have previously argued that a similar pattern emerged at the UPPs (Salem 2016b: 39).

ought to be done! I've already told them that I'll organize a *forró* (musical genre from the northeast) street-party, and I swear I will! *That's how you win allies!*" We have hardly been here for more than an hour and the group has decided to call it a day. In the car, on our way back to the base, the Sergeant tells me that what matters is not the time they spend out on the streets, but the *quality* of the interaction with the people they meet.

It's gotten dark, the Cup final between Botafogo and Vasco has just ended, and Vasco has been crowned champion. I'm back at Mangueira, which is right next to Maracanã, Rio's main stadium where the final was held. The officers in the Tactical Patrol Unit that I'm with seem bothered by my presence. They ask me when I'll leave and eventually, they tell me that they'll drive me back to the UPP. As we walk down towards the road that runs along the narrow valley dividing Mangueira from the neighbouring favela of Tuitui the police officers make sure to keep me out of the line of fire from the alley above us. They seem tense. I think they see me as a liability. As I get into the patrol vehicle with two of the officers—a Sergeant and a Soldier—a second vehicle drives down our street, at full speed and with lights blazing and sirens howling. The car stops next to us, and the officers tell us that they have received reports of a bus incident nearby.

We drive down the road for what seems like just a few seconds, when suddenly, we come across a chaotic scene. A bus has stopped in the middle of the road, smoke rolling out of the windows. There's commotion on the street, and a group of 20 or 30 persons are yelling at someone—but it's hard to tell who. The police officers from the second patrol vehicle force two young men to the ground. Both are wiggling and shouting, trying to break free, and the officers deliver a few well-placed kicks to keep them quiet. The bus is still full of people. They are yelling something about a baby. Soon, however, the bus leaves—I assume the driver wants to get away from the disturbance. We follow suit and catch up with it a few blocks ahead. It has stopped in the middle of an intersection, and a crowd has gathered around it. There are a few other police vehicles there but in the chaos it's difficult to tell the police and crowd apart. We are parked and have just left the vehicle when a man storms past us. The moment he starts to run, the crowd goes crazy.



Yelling, screaming, pulling at the guy's t-shirt, handing out beatings—it all happens so fast and the scene is so confusing that at one point I'm not sure if the man who tried to escape is a police officer or a thug. The Sergeant opens the trunk of the patrol vehicle, grabbing a couple of shock grenades in case he needs to disperse the mob. Later, he explains that in these situations you must move fast: If the police officers don't intervene, they can easily end up lynching the thug.

Eventually, the runner is cuffed and placed in the other vehicle. I can see that he's bleeding from a wound on his forehead. We follow suit. I share the back seat with a young couple who tell me that they had been on their way home when suddenly, four assailants had entered, setting off fireworks inside the bus full of passengers. The driver had abandoned ship, leaving them trapped inside. The woman is still shaking. She tells me that she's pregnant, and that the situation had terrified her. The Sergeant asks her boyfriend if he'd be able to identify the guy that the police just apprehended. He would. "Now you say the same thing when we ask you to identify him at the station! Your woman had a bad time. He's not going to see you, so you have to identify him!" The Sergeant insists. He knows that the couple could easily get cold feet since they both live in Mangueira. After we have dropped them off at the Civil Police station the Sergeant tells me that one of the patrol vehicles had seen the bus drive by and heard shooting inside. The whole event had been very confusing. The officers don't even know if there were two buses or just one. According to the Sergeant, they apprehended two guys and a gun. One of the guys had insisted that the 365 belonged to the other suspect. "Now how did he know the calibre of the gun?" he asks rhetorically.

## Eliminating the Enemy

"What are you doing? Get out of there guys!" The Sergeant is waving at us to get out of the road that passes in front of the UPP where I'm talking with a couple of officers. Here, in the line of fire between the favela and the police station we are easy targets. It's been a couple of days since the recycling with the Special Forces ended. I'm back in Alemão to

do a final round of interviews before leaving Brazil. But first I want to catch up with the Sergeant supervising today's shift. He is an effusive guy, has a reputation of being "crazy" and loves to joke about my research. Today he asks me when I'll join in on the action: "Why don't you give him a machine gun as well," he tells the officer at the armory as I grab a bulletproof vest. Then he gets serious: "You're in the most dangerous place of all of Brazil," he says. "Everybody fears Alemão, even BOPE [officers] are scared when they come here." It would have been better if I could take the officers with me to Norway, he suggests and laughs. "I'd be happy to work without a gun on my hip. Imagine the officers from Alemão on patrol in Norway! Imagine Daví there! He wouldn't last a day out of jail!" His Soldiers can't work any other place, he says. "They've gotten used to combat situations; they aren't prepared for regular police work." They would all get arrested, the Sergeant jokes, well aware that what they do is not in line with the principles of modern democracies nor the rule of law.<sup>8</sup>

He brags about his love for war. He's the second-last officer to have killed a *ganso* (lit. goose; thug) in Alemão. "The problem is that every time we kill someone, instead of getting a pat on the back we get harassed by the judges!" The Sergeant tells me about the time he arrested a minor and the judge wanted to prosecute *him* instead. "But we were prepared," he says. "We had thought of an answer to all the judge's questions!" He has tons of these stories he says, as he pulls out his phone from his pocket. "Look at this!" He opens the image gallery and shows me an album with media images of police officers. He appears in many of them, machine gun raised while he makes his way through the favela. The Sergeant proudly tells me that he's one of the most *operational* officers at the base. He shows me another picture, this one has definitely *not* been published by the press. "This was my lucky day!" He laughs and makes a funny gesture at the image which shows him inside a patrol vehicle, grinning and with wads of cash on his lap—the kind you see in movie heists. He puts his phone away and gets somber. "Honestly, the pacification doesn't exist. The only real thing is the occupation. It's

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<sup>8</sup> Many police are aware that what they do is not in line with the practices of modern and democratic states, nor do they see themselves as carrying out "God's work" in the favelas. They are, as Anderson suggests, unscrupulous opportunists who seek money and power.

very easy to trick people with no education. What we're doing here isn't pacification, it's execution."<sup>9</sup>

Far from what was insinuated by the Sergeant, it was not the "poorly educated" who confused execution with pacification—rather, the rhetoric of pacification had a relatively well-educated, international public in mind, and was often referred to as *para ingles ver* (lit. "for the Englishmen to see") by favela residents (see Sørboe 2013). Among those living under the occupation and tutelage of the pacifying police forces there was little doubt about the role of the police as exterminators. Thus, support for the police among favela residents was often (not always) also an expression of support for the police's extermination practices and an authoritarian world view.

In the desk at the common room in Alemão someone has left the latest edition of *EXTRA*. Newspapers are a rare sight at the station, so I assume that this edition must have captured their attention. The entire front page is black. At the top of the page there is an illustration from the sixteenth or seventeenth century. It shows a slave being whipped in public. Below, a recent picture of the maimed body of a man who was tied to a streetlight and lynched after robbing a bar. The paper argues that Brazil is returning to the generalized barbarism of slavery: People are thirsty for revenge rather than justice.

I interview Felipe in the meeting room at the base which, for all practical purposes, is now my office. In the middle of the conversation, Celso rushes into the room. He starts rummaging through a locker and barks an order at Felipe. We stop the recording and follow him out to the hall. Fifteen minutes earlier it was lively and full of officers. Now it's almost empty. I ask Felipe what happened. "The police killed a goose." He chuckles. A teenage boy opened fire against one of the Tactical Patrol Units. The officers retaliated and managed to kill him. Felipe gets an old, flowery tablecloth from the kitchenette. The officers need something

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<sup>9</sup> Far from what is insinuated by the Sergeant in this quote, it is not the poorly educated who confuse execution from pacification—rather, the rhetoric of pacification had a relatively well-educated, international public in mind, and was often referred to as *para ingles ver* (lit. "for the Englishmen to see") by favela residents (see Sørboe 2013). Among those living under the occupation and tutelage of the pacifying police forces there was little doubt about the role of the police as exterminators. Thus, support for the police among favela residents was often an expression of support for the police's extermination practices and an authoritarian world view.

to carry the body out of the favela in. Every moment spent waiting in the alley increases the risk of a retaliation. Felipe packs the tablecloth into Celso's backpack and they get ready to assist the patrol unit. As he leaves the base, Celso turns to me, grins, and says: "Last week's training is already producing results!"

The atmosphere at the base remains eerie, tense. The officers warn me that there might be a revenge attack on the UPP. We are told to put our bulletproof vests on. Felipe explains that since the boy must be declared dead by a doctor the officers must take his body to the nearest hospital.<sup>10</sup> "How do they do that?" I ask, although I already know the answer: "In the trunk of the patrol vehicle." Soon, the officers who killed the trafficker arrive triumphantly at the base. We flock around the unit to hear them recount the event: They had taken three traffickers by surprise in one of the alleys just below the UPP. One had fired at the police who retaliated, managing to kill the shooter while the other kids escaped. "We had nothing to carry the body in," one of them says between giggles. They had asked one of the neighbors for a bedsheet: "Citizen! Would you bring me a bed sheet? *Oh, do you want this one or this?*" The police officer mimics the person who had brought them the sheets, pretending that he is holding a sheet in each hand. "Fuck, it's for carrying a body!" He cracks up. They had to haul the body through the favela, tugging at the bed sheet with one hand while they pointed their machine guns at the rooftop terraces with the other. He show us how they had moved down the alleys. "It was just like being in Afghanistan!"

The officers brought the trafficker's gun back to the base. They pass it around, letting us inspect the trophy. They assume that the boy they killed must be *Paulista*, from São Paulo, since this type of gun is usually employed by the PCC (*Primeiro Commando da Capital*), the criminal organization controlling São Paulo's favelas. Suddenly I'm handed the gun, *the evidence*, I think to myself and quickly pass it on. One of the men empties the chamber to see how many bullets are left. He counts six: "He couldn't have done too much with this!" "Did you take a picture of the guy?" one of them asks. "Sandro was there, nagging

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<sup>10</sup> Researchers have documented how the practice of transporting the victims of police violence dead at the hospital is one of the mechanisms to ensure the impunity of police killings, as it evades the formal requirement of preserving the scene of the killing (Misse et al. 2015).

about how we couldn't take pictures because the guy was underage," his colleague complains. "How did he know he was underage?" The Sergeant I spoke to earlier enters the room and interrupts the conversation: "That underage-stuff is bullshit. When they shoot the bullets are all the same, whether the shooter is an adult or a child." The officers nod at their supervisor's comment. "That area is always heavy. There are always traffickers there. I bet that if we stop patrolling the area they'll be back in a few hours," another officer remarks. He says that the area is close to *Beco do Flipper*, where their colleague, Vito, was shot a few weeks ago (see Chapter 6: *Violent Becomings*). "What if you got the guy who killed Vito!" he exclaims. "I don't know if that would be compensation," one of them answers. An eye for an eye is not vengeance. "What do you think the commander will say?" The officers start speculating. "He never appreciates our work. He'll only ask why we didn't kill the rest of them. He's impossible to please." One of the men nudges me from the side, nods at the Sergeant and says in a hushed voice, so that the Sergeant won't hear him: "He's a fantastic Sergeant. He has killed fifty-five thugs!" The other officers laugh, and I ask them if it's a joke. "You bet it isn't! Once, he killed *two* criminals while we were patrolling together!" (Fig. 7.3)

## War and Sex

In the following days, the event is reported in the news. Neighbors have reacted to how the body was carried out of the alley in a piece of cloth. They also claim that the police had taken selfies next to the body. The papers publish a blurry picture of one of the officers with an arm raised in the air in front of him as proof. At the station, they're annoyed by the media reporting. Instead of being praised they're met with criticism. The Sub-commander explains that the media always twist everything to put the police in a bad light. He says that the officer in the picture was just trying to get a signal on his phone.

A few days later, the Sub-commander invites me to a barbeque in Penha, a residential neighborhood just north of Alemão and Serra da Misericórdia. They are celebrating the four-year anniversary of UPP



Fig. 7.3 The gun of a teenage boy killed by officers on patrol, June 2015

Chatuba with a party at an outdoor gymnastics hall. Large grills brimming with meat and chicken line one of the walls next to tables set with bowls of potato salad, soda bottles, beer, and cake. A DJ is playing pop music at a deafening volume. Several of the commanding officers at the UPPs and Military Police headquarters are attending. I see many familiar faces—Colonels, Majors, and Captains that I’ve interviewed over the course of the last months—but find a place to sit next to a group of Soldiers from Alemão. It’s the patrol unit that killed the drug trafficker last week. The officer who shot the teenager is proud. They explain how big this was for them: These things don’t happen that often. A bit confused, I ask if killing traffickers isn’t quite common in Alemão. “Yes, it is, but not like *this*.” I get the impression that they perceive it as a kind of rite of passage: As the moment they become *real* police officers. *Real* men. This killing had all the elements of what the officers considered an honorable killing, rather than just a “regular” execution: They had used their wit and cunning to surprise the traffickers; they showed courage, highlighted by how they retaliated after being shot at; and finally, they succeeded in *eliminating* the enemy, dragging the body out of the favela,

*just like in Afghanistan*. Now they were *real* warriors. As if to underline how strongly killing is associated with manhood, one of them jokes that the jubilant celebration I witnessed at the station had continued in bed once they got home to their wives.<sup>11</sup>

What does war do to us? How does war resignify meanings? How does it change our understanding of what's right and wrong, blurring the border between the brutal and the thrilling? In a book about police violence in Brazil Íbis Pereira (one of the reform-oriented Colonels at the Military Police) cites the French philosopher Frédéric Gros:

Belonging to a band of armed men is constituting. Being under the constant possibility of armed conflict presents itself as a mode of being. The everyday realities of war transforms the human soul to stone, produces a kind of suffering capable of altering the framework of reference that banalizes the sense of morality, because it modifies the relation with death and, at the extreme, leads to excess and crime. In those circumstances, when it is possible to make [someone] suffer without condemnation, brutality imposes itself as an axiom. Here we have the manifestation of a terrible power: That of reifying both the victim and the butcher. (Frederic Gros in Pereira 2015: 42. Translated from the Portuguese)

A controversial news-story from 2010 comes to mind. It was a report on the Norwegian soldiers participating in the war in Afghanistan. The title was printed in bold and read **WAR IS BETTER THAN SEX**. Below, there was a picture of a Norwegian soldier looking through his gunsight. The soldiers in Afghanistan were quoted: "Being in combat is worth the three months without getting laid. It might sound stupid, but it's better than fucking. When you're on the battlefield, it's you or the enemy, and when you get 'red mist' in your sight... (indicating a mortal hit) It's indescribable. *That's why we're here*" (my emphasis).

The report has repercussions. A different newspaper prints an interview with a military psychologist: "Norwegian soldiers aren't chosen for

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<sup>11</sup> In her doctoral dissertation *Coisas na vida do crime: Tráfico e roubo em favelas cariocas* [Things of the life of crime: Trafficking and theft in Rio's favelas] Caroline Grillo (2013: 207–211) explores the phallic connotations of gun-ownership, noting the longstanding association between guns and sex.

their lust for war. They are a group of fine young men who are willing to sacrifice their lives and health to change the world. But of course, they aren't beyond influence. War does something to people. It always has." The journalist objects: "But we like to think that Norwegian soldiers are more decent?" "The common denominator is that they're all human beings. When we are subjected to hatred, grotesque acts, and injustice, we start questioning what's right and wrong in the world. Soldiers start looking for revenge, and killing more than they need to. But they haven't been selected for being that way. We have sent out our best ambassadors. Sadly, a development like this is historically the rule rather than the exception."

Clearly, when war is evoked, the dividing lines between liberal and illiberal state practices become blurry, and the presence of Norwegian soldiers in Afghanistan shows us how liberal democracies legitimize imperialist warfare in the name of (national) security. It also emphasizes the banalization of morality signaled by Gros—what Hannah Arendt (2006 [1963]) describes as a *total moral collapse*: The perpetrators of Holocaust did not have to silence their consciousness because they thought that they were doing good. After all, they counted on the support of *respectable society*. The Norwegian soldiers haven't been selected for their thirst for blood, the military psychologist says. But these are people who signed up for war; they deliberately chose a path that took them to Afghanistan, not due to a lack of alternatives but because they wanted to become soldiers. Police officers also choose—but *what* remains unclear to me. A secure income? A job that gives them authority? A family tradition? Or action-packed war? To change the world, ridding it of evil? The answer is necessarily complex but Anderson is crystal clear when I ask him what motivates recruits that join the Military Police: "Guns, power, money, and cars."

## Conclusion: The Politics of Violence

Who are we talking about when we talk about "the police?" Are we talking about the police officers that moonlight as paramilitaries or the institutional structures that produce, direct, and legitimize violence?



About the officers who execute black youth in the favelas “in the hundreds”? Or about those who understand that a modernization of the institution is pressing? Often, analyses of police violence presuppose a coherent institutional identity to which all or mostly all police officers ascribe to. In this book I have highlighted the challenges of such a homogenizing understanding of the police. By focusing on the complexity and many layers of institutional and private interests that intersect in everyday practices of policing I have shown how dichotomies such as private and public—official and unofficial—are often difficult or even impossible to untangle. In this chapter, I have also shown how forms of authority structured around force and care holds tensions and dilemmas that are not easily resolved (see also *Chapter 6: Violent becomings*).

Attempts at modernizing the police were fraught with these contradictions. On an institutional level, these attempts failed due to personal dynamics and conflicting interests among police leaders and between officers at different levels of the police hierarchy but importantly, due to the prevalence of a militarized institutional culture (see i.g. Soares 2011). This institutional culture rested on understandings of policing as warfare and of the population in the favelas as potential enemies, reproducing the necropolitical patterns of colonial occupation (see Mbembe 2003). Policing practices centred around the logics of elimination and transformation, i.e. of a *deterritorialization* of the “culture of trafficking” followed by *(re)territorializations* of an emergent police order, shaped the continued predominance of urban warfare strategies and armed violence at the UPPs. With regards to this last point, Jaqueline Muniz and Elisabete Albernaz (2015) have noted how the routinization of police operations (as opposed to regular street patrol) in pacified favelas lead to an arms race and the subsequent strengthening of a “culture of war” within the institution, producing sentiments of mutual distrust between the police and the communities they patrolled. Thus, rather than encouraging proximity, the pacification project deepened pre-existing divisions, the product of a long history of authoritarian politics in Brazil (Salem 2016a, 2016b).

However, even if attempts to modernize the institution (bringing the police’s practices in line with a liberal order centered around a rhetoric

of human rights and citizen policing) had been successful, the tactical training of police officers I have just described shows how institutional attempts to control the police through protocols and guidelines for action were also centered around urban warfare tactics and techniques that sought to reduce the “collateral damage” of police violence, evoking ideas of surgical war or armed peace (see Saborio 2013). Within the institution, the continued emphasis on policing as warfare was perceived as an inevitable response to the violence of drug traffickers. In the context of divergent understandings of policing within the institution, patrol officers received mixed messages from their superiors. On the one hand, they were told not to be cowards but combatants, on the other, that they should not be heroes but act as professionals, within the framework of the law. Despite the recognition among reform-oriented leaders that the logic of confrontation needed to be abandoned, political leaders, state officials, and officers across the institutional hierarchy insisted on the need to suppress armed traffickers first. From this point of view, the goal of training was to apply violence in a “rational” manner, i.e. to apply a bureaucratic logic to the use of force. In other words, to assert the state’s monopoly on violence *within* its institutions; to *capture*, direct, and control the “private interests” or war machine dynamics that characterizes policing in Rio.<sup>12</sup>

The human rights lesson that the officers attended shows how attempts to modernize the police and adopt a liberal albeit militarized framework of policing was subverted even by those who were supposed to put it into practice. The officer who held the lesson had been given a difficult task. In Brazil the fight for human rights has generally been voiced by minoritarian groups and monopolized by the political left (see Eilbaum and Medeiros 2015). Among police officers, this meant that the appeal to human rights was usually interpreted as a defense of criminals and as part of the cultural war of the “communist” left—a sentiment that is broadly shared by the Brazilian public (see Caldeira 1991). In a worldview where people were either friends or enemies, the defense of human rights was seen as an attack on police authority by criminals,

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<sup>12</sup> This idea, that police violence can be unofficial and thus sometimes challenges the state’s monopoly of violence, is one of the main takeaways that a Deleuzian analysis affords. This argument is controversial and I will return to this point in the final conclusion.

their alleged supporters, and people ascribing to a communist ideology, seen as being at the root of evil.

Thus, the emphasis on how the Human Rights Declaration had been a reaction to totalitarianism like that of the Soviet Union was an attempt to show officers that it is not “originally” a leftist discourse. For the liberal reader, it might be easy to disregard the instructor’s idea of creating a “police discourse” on human rights as nonsensical but his suggestion brings the cosmological dimensions of the tension within the police to the fore, and highlight how notions of cultural warfare (in addition to colonial warfare) shaped policing at the UPPs. If we follow calls to take the illiberal other seriously, we might even argue that the officer was leveraging a critique that has also been raised by anthropologists (see Asad 2000; Fassin 2011): That appeals to human rights have often been used to promote particular political agendas through the universalization of western liberal values.

Thus, the officers’ rejection of human rights as a valid paradigm that they should relate to highlights a worldview held by many officers that places them outside of and in opposition to a liberal framework structured around the modern, rights-bearing individual (see Martinez-Moreno 2023). Their adherence to a different normative order is brought to the fore in the affirmation that the police must protect a morally degraded society that has lost its fear of God, signaling how the cosmological order that the police ascribe to places emphasis on divine authority and the military (characterized by their moral superiority) as stewards of the Nation’s moral order (see Larkins and Durão 2022). Analyzed on these terms, the resistance towards human rights among the officers acquires meaning as the expression of an opposition between universalism and regionalism; between humanism and religion that characterizes the emergence of authoritarian formations elsewhere (see Pasiëka 2017). It expresses the tension and negotiation between different cosmological orders in the institutional attempts to modernize the Military Police.

Colonel Robson explained the institutional challenges partly as the result of cultural representations of policing as warfare.<sup>13</sup> Similar to Kristin Kobes du Mez' (2023) understanding of militant masculinity and Ben Cowan's (2016) analysis of the gendered and sexual dimensions of military manhood, he claimed that while these representations are part of a global, gendered phenomenon, they are especially prone to the dynamics of urban violence in Rio de Janeiro. The gendered connotations of warfare and killing that I examined in *Chapter 5: Police masculinities*, is also brought to the fore in this chapter, where I have stressed how manhood and killing were often equated. This link between warfare, manhood, and sexual prowess is also prevalent in studies on protofascism (e.g., Reich 2013 [1933]; Theweleit 1989). Among patrol officers at the UPPs, killing criminals was perceived not only as the real task of the police but also as the epitome of manhood (Salem and Larkins 2021). Particularly killing in battle was cast as a heroic achievement, in which police put their lives at risk for the greater good. This, more so than the straightforward executions that characterize most police killings, was a way for the officer to powerfully enact himself as a *real* police officer and a *real* man.

However, the political instrumentalization of the police is not lost on me nor on Colonel Robson: Reducing police violence to a “cultural problem” caused by adrenaline-seeking young men that must be kept in check is too simplistic. On the one hand, it can be seen as patronizing—at least by police officers and the people who support their practices. On the other, it downplays the responsibility of political leaders and institutional structures (i.g. a judicial system lenient towards police killings; a public security policy organized around the logics of confrontation; the institutional legacy of slavery and militarism) that serve to uphold police violence and practices of extermination, and the broad social acceptance for violence as an appropriate response to crime, as practices of lynching indicate. This popular demand for vengeance and extermination as a response to crime is often emphasized by intellectuals who note

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<sup>13</sup> Robson explains the prevalence of policing as warfare as the result of the context of armed violence; the instrumentalization of the police by Rio's political elites; and the prevalence of an illiberal “police culture” that needs to be “modernised” (see also Salem 2016a; Paiva and Karakida 2015).

the broad adherence to the saying *bandido bom e bandido morto*: a good thug is a dead thug.<sup>14</sup> Put simply, the racialized and political violence of Brazilian police forces cannot be reduced to the expression of violent masculinity within the institution—the desire to exercise power through violence among the rank and file of the police—even when we acknowledge that a violent masculine ethos and patriarchal culture are important elements to the dynamics of police violence. Rather, it should be seen as shaped by popular demands for a hard-handed policing approach, political opportunism, institutional structures that create a virtual impunity for police officers, and large-scale dynamics of necropolitical governance and economic predation—an ongoing process of colonization—a point I will return to in the next chapter.

In the ethnography I have presented this far, I have shown that the production of police officers as warriors is part of an institutional logic that must be contextualized within a wider political framework of governance of poverty, structured around a punitive and militarized response to urban crime (see also Graham 2011; Wacquant 2008). I have also shown, in this and former chapters, that one of the effects that the logic of war produces is a strategy of policing where the “solution” to urban violence is the elimination of the enemy. When policing is articulated through the logics of conquest and territorial control, failure to confront is seen as a retreat, or worse, as a dangerous concession to the enemy. The problem, in the mind of the police warrior, is not the inefficiency of militarized policing in addressing crime but the limits imposed on anything but total war: To solve the problem of crime, the police must go further; kill more; and defeat their enemies.

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<sup>14</sup> The 2015 Annual Report of the Brazilian Forum of Public Security (Forum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública) shows that one in two Brazilians agree with this statement.

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# 8

## A World of Warfare

It's Saturday night. I've been out drinking beer with a group of friends. It's about an hour past midnight when I walk home through the favela alleys. The guys from the "business" are gathered by the *boca*. Some of them are sitting in the stairs, others stand in the alley. To get past them I must walk through the group. I lower my gaze in submission, taking care to avoid looking them in the eyes. As I pass, one of the guys points at me. "He's a Civil Police." I let out a short laugh and feign calm, as if what he's saying is ridiculous. Shaking my index finger from side to side, I reply. "No, I'm not." The guys speak in fast paced slang. Did I misunderstand him? But then I hear one of them mention Alemão. Maybe they have seen me there? A friend once warned me: "If you've been with the police in Alemão the traffickers will definitely have taken your picture." Was he right? Is there a picture of me circulating on some drug trafficker WhatsApp group? João is there as well. He's standing a few steps further up the stairs and is talking to one of the teenagers. I've rarely been happier to see him and greet him effusively, making it clear to the rest that we are *good* friends. The next morning, I ask him if he had heard any mention of my relation to the police. Both him and Hugo



**Fig. 8.1** A building in shambles in Alemão, April 2015

laugh it off. “I think you’re getting paranoid” Hugo says, making me doubt myself even more. I’m certain I heard the words *Civil Police* and *Alemão* but maybe they were talking about something else?<sup>1</sup>(Fig. 8.1).

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<sup>1</sup> Menezes (2015) has noted how one of the most palpable effects of the UPPs in the daily lives of favela residents as well as on the dynamics of drug trafficking was the multiplication of different forms of surveillance, including the use of camera phones to control who entered the favelas. A friend working at an NGO in Complexo do Alemão had warned me early on in my fieldwork: “You know that the traffickers have pictures of you now that you have visited the police in Alemão, right?” Presumably, I was surveilled by the police as well. When I accompanied the officers during their recycling, a police officer from the Special Forces had approached me: “You live in Babilonia,” he had said. “How do you know?” I answered, relieved that I had been upfront with the officers at the UPP that I was living in a favela. “I’ve seen you there,” the officer replied. For a moment I got nervous—had he seen me with Javier? Did he know that I was gay? While not impossible, I doubt that this was the full truth of the story. At the time, Babilonia was full of foreign tourists, and it would be odd for the officer to recall having seen me there months earlier. But I was never able to confirm the extent to which I was subject to surveillance by either police or traffickers.

## Security Entrepreneurs

For some reason, I have always reckoned that Diogo was older than me, but as it turns out, we are both in our late twenties. He tells me that he used to be a math teacher before signing up for the police. “As a teacher, I could have made 5000 reais, but then I would have had to work double shifts: Sixteen hours a day. As a police officer, I make almost as much.” Prior to being a teacher, he worked at his father’s bakery. The pay was good, but they argued a lot. He has saved up enough money to buy a piece of land in Campo Grande in Zona Oeste, Rio’s militia-dominated region. Many police officers live there. The militias form protection rackets, charging residents and local business monthly fees, and monopolize the distribution of basic services, such as the gas bottles people run their kitchens on. Another lucrative business controlled by the militias is illegal real estate development. The sale, development, and rental of property is one of the main income sources for the *milicianos* (Manso 2020).

Diogo says that he is building two small apartments on his property. He says he will rent them out for 400 reais a month. He tells me that he plans to build a total of nine apartments. He draws a row of small square boxes on a white sheet of paper, some stacked on top of the others. 400 times 9, that’s 3600 reais a month. In addition, he wants to buy a popcorn stand. He has talked to a tinsmith in Campo Grande who charges him 800 reais to build the stand, including material costs. Felipe plans to rent out the stand for 30 reais a day. If it turns out to be a good business, he’ll expand, and buy 10 popcorn stands! He wants to rent them out to street vendors who will have to equip and manage the stands. If he rents out a stand for 30 days a month, that’s 900 reais but he only needs to rent out 10 stands for 20 days a month to make 6000 reais. At this point in his explanation, he tells me he worked all of this out while correcting math assignments at the school where he used to work. I try to imagine him coming up with the assignments: “If Diogo builds 9 flats and 10 popcorn stands, how many *reais* will he make each month?”

Diogo leans towards me. He says he hasn’t told anyone else about this plan but me. He doesn’t want anyone to steal his idea. I get the implicit

message: *Don't tell anyone about this*. His “mother” (at this point I’m having a hard time believing that she is his real source of inspiration) is already renting out 20 flats. The income is sufficient for her to live on, he says. If he can see his plan through, he will quit his job at the police or make a deal with the commander at the UPP so that he is “freed” from his shifts in exchange for a part of his salary. “Anything is possible with money here,” he says, rubbing his index finger against his thumb. He dreams about studying medicine someday. In Brazil, doctors are well paid, maybe 20–30 000 reais a month. “I view this job as a trampoline towards a better future. I don’t want to be in the police tomorrow. It’s a tough job. Police officers must deal with all kinds of things. We see people die, children die. The risk that we’re taking for the government and the rest of society is in vain. We have colleagues who get wounded in gunfights and the media doesn’t say a word about it.”<sup>2</sup>

## Spoils of War

“Were you part of the occupation of Alemão?” I’m talking with Gabriel, Celso, and Felipe. We are standing below the balcony of the UPP in Alemão. It’s Sunday morning and officers have lit the grill and filled it to the brim with big cuts of juicy meat. The group of twenty-something officers are scattered in smaller groups, chatting, making jokes, enjoying each others company. Here, beneath the balcony, we’re hidden from view. The officers take care to avoid being photographed. Neighbors might share pictures of them online and claim that they’re not doing their job. The atmosphere is lively mood. The favela is calm today, probably because the officers are not patrolling but at the base chunking down tender pieces of beef. The men take extra care to make sure my plate is never empty. I’m their guest, they tell me. And guests are supposed to be looked after.

Celso looks at me with eyes wide open and an expression that reveals how absurd my question is: “Do you think we would be standing here

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<sup>2</sup> An example of how narratives of police victimization can contribute to the legitimization of violent entrepreneurialism (see Alves 2021).

today, if we had been a part of that?" The officers laugh. I don't understand what they find amusing and ask for explanation. They look at each other, as if they're agreeing whether this is something they should share with me or not. Gabriel nods. He's a Sergeant, and Celso's superior. *It's ok.* "The men who participated in the occupation of Alemão never had to work another day in their lives!" Celso says that the officers had kept the money, gold, and weapons that the drug traffickers left behind when they escaped. Felipe also wants to chip in on the account: "They say that during the invasion the streets were full of weapons. Everybody who had a gun in their house threw them out on the streets. Many Soldiers, I'm not saying all, but many Soldiers kept the weapons. Some handed them in but some..." I can tell that he's weighing his words carefully: "I'm not saying it's right, but what would *you* do if you found a bag of money on the street?" Felipe measures my reaction. "Well, you're Norwegian..." "I'm Argentinean as well" I joke so as not to appear judgmental. The officers laugh. "Norwegian, but not stupid, eh?" Celso grins.

Gabriel says that while he wasn't a part of the *invasion* of Alemão he participated in the *siege*. After the invasion, he was stationed in Complexo do Alemão: "I had the chance to exchange fire with some traffickers," he says, as to emphasize the legitimacy of his claim to have been in the war. "We had to run across the streets because they were shooting at us. I even made it into a news report. I was carrying a Maxim machine gun, and the reporters filmed me firing at the bastards." Gabriel smiles as he recalls the gunfight. Stories like these are trophies that raise your group status within the troop. But then he becomes serious: "Truth be told, the pacification of Alemão was a mess, it was a generalized mess. [...] I remember seeing people that were not supposed to be there, I saw police officers from other units that had nothing to do in this region, right? I saw people (officers) that were off duty arrive in their private cars. I heard about Soldiers that entered the homes of residents and traffickers alike and emptied them. They took TV's, they took electrical appliances, put them in their cars and brought them home, they stole..."

Gabriel says the planning of the police operation was bad. The Special Forces were supported by the Navy, and the coordination between different forces and police units was poor. "There wasn't an effective control of that occupation." Celso nods: "We hear stories of [the police]

assisting escaping [drug traffickers], of people that entered in an armored truck, picked up traffickers and left the favela with the traffickers inside the truck. We hear those stories. Now, I can't say if they are true or not, but that the stories exist... They exist. Of traffickers paying a million, two million, three million [reais] in order to leave this place. And there were people that left here rich, that found bags with money. We ended up finding out all of that."

Gabriel was also a part of the invasion of Rocinha two years later. "In Rocinha, the planning was better." He was working with Choque (the riot unit) at the time. "In Rocinha the planning was better. The Choque Battalion was in charge of access roads, and only BOPE entered [the favela]; only them. It was much easier to control. I remember that police officers from the 23rd Battalion were arrested for giving fire cover to the traffickers. [...] I remember that there were three police officers on motorbikes that were spotted by one of our commanding officers, Lieutenant Roque at the time, now he's a Captain." The Lieutenant had seen three patrol officers from the 23rd battalion coming down the hill. He had stopped them and asked what they were doing there." Gabriel laughs as he recounts the conversation between the Lieutenant from Choque and the three Soldiers:

*Pô, what are you doing here?*

*No, pô, This is our patrol sector.*

*Your sector? But who authorized you to enter [the favela]? Don't you know that there's a closed perimeter?*

*No, pô, it's the sector...*

*Ahh, the sector! Then it's all right! Wait a little, stay here.*

At that point, the lieutenant had contacted the supervisor at the 23rd battalion, asking if he could come to identify the officers. When he arrived, he'd given them a quick glance:

*What are you doing here? Pô, you're off duty!*

“*Pô*, what were the police officers doing there off duty?” Gabriel asks rhetorically, making Celso and Felipe laugh. I laugh along. Gabriel gleefully repeats the words of the supervisor while shaking his head: “*Pô, you’re off duty, what are you doing here?*” “They were screwed, right?” I ask. “*Pô*, literally,” Gabriel answers, adding: “Another thing that was noted was that that year, specifically that year, at the 23rd Battalion there was no New Year’s party. [...] Every year, *every year* their party was a blast. The year of the occupation of Rocinha there was no party. Why [do you think that is]?”

I return his question: “Why?” Gabriel smiles. “Noooo,” he says, dragging out the word. “What could it be? Could it be that Santa Claus didn’t send the little present for the guys there at the 23rd [battalion]?” he says, rubbing his index finger and thumb together. The New Year’s parties at the 23rd battalion had always been financed with the money the drug traffickers in Rocinha paid the police so that they could carry on with their business in peace.

According to Gabriel, at Rocinha the Military Police enforced a stricter supervision of the officers to prevent the mistakes from Alemão and the police had even managed to detain Nêm, the *dono* of Rocinha. Even though he was considered a quiet, business-minded type, known to avoid “unnecessary” violence at all costs, he was one of the most wanted men in Brazil. “[Nêm] believed, at least that’s what I think, that he would be able to escape the same way that the guys were able to here in Alemão, paying and leaving...” Gabriel says. There was an attempt to smuggle Nêm out of Rocinha in the back of a car. On the way down the hairpin turns that meander through the hills in Gávea, a couple of Gabriel’s colleagues—officers from Choque—had stopped the car. “Out of it came Nêm’s lawyer. He identified himself as the Congolese consul of Brazil!” Gabriel grins. The police officers had refused to let the car drive on:

- *Oh really, the consul? No, we have to search the car.*
- *No, you can’t search this car, it belongs to the consulate, and I have diplomatic immunity.*

“Ok, fine, but he didn’t show any ID. So, they contacted their supervisor who asked Lieutenant Roque for assistance,” Gabriel explains. The Lieutenant came over at once:

- *Ahh, o senhor is the consul? You won’t allow us to carry out the search? Then let’s go to the [civil] police station.*

“I think the lawyer thought that he would be taken to the local police station next to Rocinha, and when he realized that they were heading the other way he began to despair.” The lawyer had stopped the car and offered Lieutenant Roque money. But he dismissed it immediately and ordered the lawyer to drive on. As they came to Lagoa (one of Rio’s wealthiest neighborhoods) they stopped, and were met by policemen from the Civil Police, a Detective and an Inspector, who said they would take care of the situation. Then Roque had replied:

- *No, listen to me, we’re headed to the station of the Federal Police.*
- *Ahhh, no, but I’ll take care of it and whatnot....*

“They started discussing, and one of the detectives from the Civil Police grabbed the car-keys and said, *Doctor, listen, can we take the car? We are going to take the car!* [...] Lieutenant Roque took a knife he was carrying and cut the tires of the car. He said: *I want to see you take the car now! Try taking it now!*” The officers laugh, Gabriel continues: “That same detective said *Doctor, we can take it like it is, we don’t have any problems at all, we can do it.* Then the Lieutenant went *Really? You there, take the patrol vehicle and park it here.* He parked the vehicle here,” Gabriel signals with his hand how the vehicle was parked in front of the car so that it would not be possible for the car to leave. He says that they had called some contacts in the press. “*We’ve stopped a car here, damn, I think it’s Nêm,*” the officers had said. “When we mentioned Nêm, *pô*, I don’t know where they came from...” he laughs. “The guys from the press seemed like they came out of the manholes; of the bushes. They arrived very fast. When they came with the cameras, when they turned the light on and such, that was when the guys from the Civil Police Station started to disappear. After the press arrived, they vanished. That was when the trunk of



the car was opened, and out came Nêm...” Gabriel says that Nêm had offered the group of police officers one million *reais* each if they let him go, but they had declined. The way he says it makes it sound like a heroic act: The police officers resisting temptation. “The moment we handed Nêm over to the authorities was the proudest moment of my career. I had an incredible sensation of having fulfilled my duty,” Gabriel says. The people that were present had greeted them with standing ovations. I ask him what happened with the men from the Civil Police. “We never heard from them again. I don’t know if they were there to help Nêm, or to claim the honor of arresting him.”

It might have been a given that Nêm would be arrested. He probably wouldn’t have managed to evade the police after fleeing Rocinha where he had been protected by a small army of drug traffickers. If one reads between the lines in Misha Glenny’s book about Nêm, the story of his arrest diverges from the one retold by Gabriel. Glenny gives us the impression that the *dono’s* challenge was to get out of the situation alive. If he gave himself into the police, it would lead to suspicion and the traffickers from the favela could view it as a betrayal. If he chose to oppose the arrest, he would most likely have ended up in a bodybag, like other *dono’s* before him. The book lets us assume that Nêm was afraid of being executed if he had been found by the Military Police first. When traffickers and police meet, murder or corruption seem to be equally expectable outcomes as an arrest.

## Warzones

There are signs of unrest in Babilonia. One night we are awakened by shooting and lately João has walked around the hostel with a worried look. He tells me that one of the *mototaxistas* was sequestered by the drug traffickers. They took him into the jungle where they tortured and beat him. When they released him 24 hours later, he could not stand on his feet, João says. He is upset. But this was not random violence, it had been the guy who woke us a few nights ago. He had been drunk or high or both and started shooting rounds into the air. The traffickers do not take lightly on that kind of behavior. It attracts unnecessary attention



**Fig. 8.2** Scenes from the everyday war in Mangueira, April 2015

from the police and might provoke an operation, João says.<sup>3</sup> I've been invited to a dialogue between the commanding officers from all the UPPs and leaders of the Resident Association in the pacified favelas. But they are meeting here in Babilonia and I choose not to go. Right now, the last thing I want is to be seen talking to the police in my own neighborhood. I don't know if it's because of the meeting or due to rising tensions during the last weeks, but the favela is full of police officers (Fig. 8.2).

In the following days, I don't get to spend much time with the police. The situation at the UPPs is tense again, making it hard to join the officers on patrol. Different gangs have been orchestrating attacks in attempts to gain control of pacified favelas in Santa Teresa and Catumbí, near the city center. There are reports of several deaths and of armed violence in the city's streets. Gang members have torched a bus on one of Rio's main avenues. Today, I'm going to Mangueira in the morning

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<sup>3</sup> In her ethnographic research on a police unit in a Niterói-favela, Elisabete Albernaz (2020: 121) writes that during her time in Palácio (the favela where she did fieldwork), she noted that violence had been so normalized by the neighbors that they sometimes even blamed the victim, arguing that their deaths were the result of the person stirring up trouble.

and Alemão in the afternoon, where Anderson has agreed to meet me. At Mangureira, the Sergeant in charge tells me that the officers are carrying out a “special operation” in the community. It’s not possible for me to join them on patrol but we can still have a chat. The Sergeant says that the wave of violence is due to a power struggle between two gangs. The *dono* in Mangureira was killed a while back, leaving no successor. In the power vacuum that ensued, rivaling gangs tried to invade Mangureira. First the Pure Third Command, then Friends of Friends. He tells me that the police at the UPP have prevented the other gangs from taking over. The Red Command is still controlling the drug trade in Mangureira. I’m puzzled. Why does the police protect the turf of the Red Command?

On my way to Alemão I get a text from Anderson. He suggests we postpone our interview due to “intense shooting” in the favela. I’ve taken the confrontations for granted—normalized them even, but from the dramatic headlines in the newspapers I understand that recent events escape the norm. Judging from media reports, the increasing unrest seems more like a somber reminder of how things were in the years before the UPPs were installed. In Babilonia I’m accused of being a police officer again. This time, when the guys at the *boca* signal me out, there is no room for doubt. Luckily, João is there again, and now he hears them as well: “Have you lost it? He’s not a police officer! He’s a gringo!”

I am lying in the hammock of our living room with Violeta spread across my lap when the calm is broken by thundering gunshots. They’re not little “pops” in the distance this time, but ear-shattering explosions that make me fall to the floor and seek cover under the staircase, where the cement walls are at their thickest. From the sound of it, the shooter could be standing right by our window. I call out to Javier. He’s at the rooftop terrace. “Get down here!” I yell. He says that he just saw a group of people walking through the forest behind our house. They were armed, so he assumed they were police. Officers from the UPP tend to sneak past our house from time to time. We stay under the stairs until the shooting ends. I’ve lost track of time. Has it been 30 seconds or 30 minutes? When we are certain that the gunfire has ended I rush to the hostel to check on the guests. João is not there and I only find a single guest relaxing in one of the armchairs on the terrace, as if nothing has

happened. “Didn’t you hear the shooting?” I ask. Yes, he had seen a few red lights shoot across the sky and assumed that it was fireworks.

News start spreading through the favela. One of our neighbors stops by the hostel. She says it’s a gang war (*guerra de facções*) and that a group of fifteen drug traffickers from another favela invaded Babilonia. Soon, police are swarming through the alleys below the hostel. It looks like the entire UPP has been mobilized. From the terrace, we see a long row of officers pass by the *boca* with their machine guns raised and ready. An eerie silence spreads through the neighborhood. The streets are empty. No music. No shouting. No friendly chit-chat from the windows. After a few hours João arrives. He is shaken. Eyes red and struggling not to break into tears, he tells me that a rivaling gang executed one of the boys from the *boca* in a bar just down the street, in front of a group of neighbors who were sipping beer when the traffickers arrived. It has never happened here before. João says they were the guys who had tortured the mototaxista. “Why?” João shrugs: “Well, one descends, and another one must rise.”

Next time I visit Alemão the officers at the base have already heard about the gang war in Babilonia through extensive coverage in the news. “You know what it means, right? It’s proof that the pacification has failed.” I’m sitting on the balcony at the UPP next to Daví. He lives in Costa Barros, a neighborhood in northern Rio located between two large favela complexes: *Chapadão* and *Morro da Pedreira*. They are not pacified, and the officers tell me that many drug traffickers migrated to Chapadão following the occupation of Alemão, making it the new headquarters of the Red Command. A few days ago, officers from the local police battalion carried out a police operation there. Daví tells me that they killed seven traffickers. I can’t remember reading anything about that in the papers. “Well,” Daví says, “when it’s just criminals dying, it never reaches the news.” In Rio’s northern neighborhoods the police kill at much higher rates. “Do you think the situation will calm down after the police operation?” Daví isn’t optimistic: “You kill seven, but ten new ones appear.”

A few days ago, his unit had been patrolling the area surrounding Areal when they saw a thug wave at them with a gun in his hand. In hindsight he sees that it was stupid of them to think that a trafficker

would wave at them like that, but the officers had been looking for action and chased him down the street. Then another trafficker, armed with a machine gun, crossed the street just ahead of them. One of the officers in his unit, Breno, had opened fire, and the trafficker retaliated. At that moment a third gang member had attacked them from a rooftop. “Breno hadn’t see him,” Daví says. The two of them were cut off from the rest of their patrol unit, who were seeking cover behind a corner. “I was just behind Breno, providing cover.” He had fired fourteen shots before his gun had jammed. But it had been enough to force the rooftop shooter to pull back, giving Daví and Breno time to seek shelter. They had shot open a door, taking cover inside a home. As they entered all hell broke loose: “The traffickers were peppering the street with bullets! *Ratatatatata!* We saw the concrete on the street shatter as the bullets hit the ground just outside the doorstep.” The family who lived in the house—a father and his child—fled through one of the windows facing the back yard in panic. “In the heat of the moment Breno wanted us to shoot the family in case they would tell the traffickers where we were hiding. *Forget about it, I said. You’re crazy!*” We laugh at Breno’s terrifying idea. *Why am I laughing?* I wonder. “That just shows how far a man can go when his life is at stake,” Daví says, aware of the absurdity of the situation. Daví wonders how Breno’s suggestion will be interpreted in Norway when I publish my research. *It also shows how normalized police killings have become*, I think to myself but chose not to say anything—I don’t want Daví to feel that I’m judgmental.

Daví and Breno remained trapped inside the house for three hours. They smashed all the lightbulbs to make it harder to be seen from the street. The traffickers were shooting at them through the windows, bullets sizzling through the rooms. “The walls looked like a Swiss cheese,” Daví says. From time to time, they had fired a few shots to deter the traffickers from entering but they lacked ammunition to retaliate. At one point, they had panicked: The traffickers had thrown a shock grenade into the building and the police officers had thought it was hand-grenade. Eventually, their colleagues came to their aid. They killed one of the traffickers and wounded another, providing cover while they fled the scene in an armored truck, sent by the 16th battalion as “tactical



**Fig. 8.3** Tactical entry during a routine patrol in Alemão, July 2015

support”. Daví recorded the gunfire on his phone. He plays the audio file. It sounds like an intense battle scene from a war movie (Fig. 8.3).

In the days following the invasion, Babilonia is uncommonly quiet. Many of the hostels and *botecos* close. They don't want to risk receiving tourists before knowing how the situation will evolve. The neighborhood is suspended in a state of limbo, no longer at peace but neither at war. At the entrance of one of the alleys someone has hung up a big, black piece of cloth. Many neighbors wear T-shirts with *saudades eternas*—forever missed—written beneath a picture of the kid who was executed. I'm out walking Violeta one evening, around eleven. The streets are empty. The air is cool with a drizzle hanging in the air, so light it that it could be mistaken for fog. As we approach the *boca* I see the dark contour of a young boy wearing a big raincoat. I don't recognize him as being part of the group that normally hangs out by the *boca*. I have never seen any of them armed. In the front pocket of his coat there's a crackling walkie-talkie. A black strap crosses his chest. It supports a rifle that is almost as long as the boy is tall. He stands in the middle of the staircase, talking with two other guys. Violeta, impervious to the scene, has already

snuck past them and I politely greet the three boys with a short and firm good evening to acknowledge their presence, avoiding eye-contact as a chill runs down my spine.

## Monkey Hands

I meet Alef in the hallroom at Alemão. He was recently transferred here from Mangueira, where armed confrontations have become everyday occurrences. His version of the events that led to the ongoing gang war differs from the explanation given to me by the Sergeant who suggested that the police had protected the Red Command at Mangueira. “Mangueira was ‘depacified’ when the command at the UPP changed,” Alef says. The new commander came from a UPP where there was much more violence. He brought with him a team of patrol officers who he knew were loyal to him and who were used to confront the traffickers. They had brought the war to Mangueira. Alef doesn’t like the Commander there. I get the impression that he might hold a grudge—being transferred to Alemão is sometimes used as a form of punishment for unruly officers. “The [old] Major who commanded Mangueira before had monkey hands. That’s why the favela was peaceful,” he says. “Monkey hands?” “You know...” Alef gesticulates with his arms, pretending to snatch something out of the pocket of one of the other officers.

The gang war in Mangueira started when the new Commander took charge. He had wanted to show his strength: “You know, we are only respected for the damage we’re able to inflict.” Alef says that violence is a way of “increasing the value of the players.” I’ve heard the expression before. It refers to the way violence is used to broker power. For example, by police officers who want to increase the fees they charge from traffickers to let them do their business in peace. I ask him for details and clarifications, but Alef refuses. He has nothing to say that would be “politically correct.” But his comments suggest that the new Major wanted a bigger slice of the pie: “The Tactical Patrol Units are the Commander’s pit bulls. The Commander lets them loose when he

wants to put pressure on the traffickers.”<sup>4</sup> But since the traffickers hadn’t given in to the extortion, the Major had arranged a takeover of the drug trade in Mangueira by a gang that was “friendlier” to his demands. That’s when things had gotten out of hands, Alef suggests. I’m struggling to accept this explanation—the Major in Mangueira doesn’t strike me as the type who would orchestrate a clash between gangs to enrich himself. The few times I’ve met him he has seemed like a reasonable, even progressive Commander. But then again, the practices of policing I have observed in Mangueira have been far from progressive. Is this a peak into the “shadow of policing” or the smear-campaign of a resentful patrol officer (see Nordstrom 2004; Durão and Argentin 2023)? I ask one of the officers who has listened to Alef’s account what *he* thinks. He knows the Major at Mangueira and shakes his head. No, he doesn’t think so either. But what if?

Both among police, politicians, and social scientists, there is disagreement about how the violence in Rio can best be described. The officers at Alemão have no doubt. Time after time, I’ve heard them repeat the same thing. “This is a war! Rio de Janeiro is a city in war.” Sometimes they ask me what I’ll write when I return to Norway. One day, one of them corners me: “Will you write good things about us?” I hesitate, trying to think of what to answer. One of his colleagues comes to my aid: “He’ll write the truth. He’ll write that we are at war!” But what kind of war is it where there is no tangible separation between the different warring factions? Where black men from the favela kill black men from the favela? Where one brother joins the traffickers and the other the police? Where men wage war for the police one day and for the militia the next day? Where the police help traffickers defend some territories and invade others? And were money flows between groups that are allegedly opposed?

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<sup>4</sup> This constellation that Alef describes, of Commanders selecting a team of “loyal” police officers, forming Tactical Patrol Units, is also highlighted in Albernaz’ (2020: 117–118) description of what she calls “police productivity” (which she also refers to as “spoils of war”). There’s a “market” for allocations, structured around loyalty, reputation, and money—as some officers pay to form part of the “Commanders Tactical Patrol Units”. Getting allocated to one of the “productive” police units, she writes, is coveted among the officers due to their high profitability and prestige, which also render the officers of these units subject to friendly fire (i.e. attacks from their colleagues) or internal justice.



## Past My Expiration Date

“We should have military rule again. Then things would get settled!” The words are shouted out in the air in passing. Not by a police officer, but by Miriam, a black woman in her twenties who lives in Babilonia and works as a waitress at the *boteco* where Javier and I eat lunch.

Apart from the people who live near the stations, few residents make use of the gondolas that were built in Alemão when the favelas were occupied. Normally, the carts are empty, and I get to spend the ride looking at the rolling landscape below. Today, for a change, I’m sharing cart with a white middle-aged woman and black young man. For no other reason than his age and skin color, I catch myself thinking that he might be a drug trafficker. We are far above the rooftops and the woman looks nervous. “We’re moving pretty slow, aren’t we?” She is worried there might be a problem with the gondola. The man is also concerned. He says that he’s afraid of heights and hates taking the gondola when it’s windy: “I worry that the wire will break. One time the gondola was moving so much that I vomited” he says. Both fear getting stuck in the cart during shooting episodes. When these are long the gondola closes, and lately this has happened with frequency. “Often, you don’t even hear that there is shooting if you’re in the cart,” the woman says.

A few weeks ago, she rode the gondola with her three-year-old daughter. When they got off at the station, the cable car employees told her to hurry home. There had just been an intense shootout in the neighborhood. Arriving at her mother’s house a young man’s dead body was lying in front of the entrance. “But I like it here,” she says. She grew up in *Grota* (one of the favelas of Complexo do Alemão) and spent 30 years of her life there. She moved to *São Gonçalo* (one of Rio’s northern suburbs) a few years ago. “São Gonçalo has become much more dangerous now that this area has been pacified.” The man gives her a surprised look. “Do you think that this area has been pacified?” The question almost sounds like an accusation. The woman lets out a soft hum: “No. No, it hasn’t.” She points in the direction of her mother’s house. It lies just above one of the areas most affected by urban combat. Her apartment has been hit by bullets twice. I ask them if they feel that something has improved after the UPPs were installed. The woman says that there is more shooting

now. Before, they would know in advance when the police were going to invade the favela and had time to prepare. Now, with the permanent police presence, it's impossible to tell when there will be confrontations, and residents often get caught in the crossfire. The boy agrees: "There is no law anymore." The drug traffickers are a lot more violent now, he adds. There used to *one* dono, but now the traffickers are constantly fighting for power. They don't respect people from the community the way they used to.

As we reach the station building, we see police officers lying on the rooftop of the police station. They are pointing their machine guns at the rooftops below. "*Nossa!* How dangerous!" the woman exclaims. I ask her if she thinks the police are abusing their power. "No, they're not abusing their power, they are doing their job. But when somebody shoots at them, they must shoot back: It's not easy to tell where the bullets will end up down there in the favela." She tells me she's an evangelical, and that her church has taught her respect for authorities: She is a person who respects the law. Although she supports the police, she does not talk with them. Maybe a short "good morning" or "good evening." She doesn't want to attract negative attention from the drug traffickers. "Do the traffickers forbid people from talking to the police?" I ask, since I've been told by other social scientists that the traffickers in Alemão have imposed a ban on communication with the police. "Forbid? Nobody forbids me anything! I can talk to whomever I want," she says, adding that she *chooses* not to talk to the police to protect herself.<sup>5</sup>

When we reach the station, they both get off the gondola. After all the prying I don't want them to see me walk into the police station, so instead of getting off with them I stay in the cart one more stop, before I jump off and head back in the opposite direction. The cart is already occupied by three middle-aged men. They're discussing the massive public spending on the Olympic Games. "They should be using

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<sup>5</sup> Whether silence is imposed by decree or whether the implicit threat of violence was what kept the neighbors of Alemão from speaking to the police was of little importance to the communication between police and residents, which was indeed very limited according to the police officers and from what I could observe during patrol. In Santa Marta and Cidade de Deus, Menezes (2018: 207) noted a generalized lack of trust in police officers, since residents had no way of distinguishing between officers acting according to the law, those collaborating with the traffickers, with rivaling gangs, or even militias.

that money for health care, for security,” one of them says, but immediately corrects himself: “No, not security. [When we] get more security the violence increases.” One of the other men agrees: “There’s only one way [to stop the violence]. You must make harsher laws!” The first man continues: “When I came here eighteen years ago, we didn’t have this: Eighteen-year-old brats making a mess.” He complains about the violence and brutality of the young men in the favela: “They should kill all of that pest!” (Fig. 8.4).

I’m sitting outside the UPP in Alemão talking to one of the officers. The sun is shining but the shade is cool. It’s winter in Rio and my fieldwork is coming to an end. My notepad lies open in my lap: While we speak, I jot down keywords so that I’ll be able to write out our conversation once I’m home. Like many of his colleagues, the officer has lost faith that anything will ever change in Rio. He’s disappointed with the police, sick and tired of all the corruption. He just wants to get out: “To be honest, the police here are extremely corrupt.” He used to work at a battalion before being transferred to Alemão. There, the Colonel



**Fig. 8.4** The UPP at Alemão, July 2015

in command charged 20.000 reais a month to keep two patrol vehicles stationed by a large shopping mall. “The real problem of the police is the corruption among commanding officers,” he says. Patrol officers only follow orders: They have few opportunities to act on their own initiative; they collect the money and pass it on to the Colonels.

Usually, there is less corruption at the UPPs, he says. There are few opportunities for that here, but he has heard rumors of UPPs near the city center striking deals with the traffickers. They’re allowed to sell drugs if the police get their share of the profits. He has talked to a Soldier at one UPP who told him that they are paid a fixed amount every month besides their regular pay to look the other way. This is, of course, old news. This is the way things used to be in Rio. The novelty, in any case, is that the UPPs were meant to change all that.<sup>6</sup>

The officer asks me whether our talk is confidential. I nod and explain that I’m ethically bound to anonymize the material I collect. “Ah, I like anthropology,” he says. Police officers are not allowed to criticize the institution. They can get punished with disciplinary detention if they do. He asks me to close my notepad. “Don’t write what I’m about to tell you.” I put the notepad away. “Do you know that police officers from Alemão shot at the Commander’s car?” “No,” I say, “but I’ve heard of other instances of friendly fire.” “This was something else,” he says. “It wasn’t a misunderstanding. It was on purpose.” He lowers his voice, looking around to make sure that there is no one around to hear us. “Most of the Soldiers at the base dislike the Commander. He has made many strategic mistakes.” He says that the situation in Alemão had gradually deteriorated when the commander took charge, but that he was disliked from day one. Just after he assumed, two Soldiers had dressed up as drug traffickers and shot at his car to scare him away from the base. It didn’t work—he didn’t quit, but neither did he know that it was his own officers who had attacked him.

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<sup>6</sup> In the favela where Albernaz (2020) did her fieldwork, she noted how the location of the police station in the middle of the community impeded practices of “police productivity” since the police had less opportunities to “free” certain areas for the sale of drugs. Menezes (2018) has also noted how the practices of *arrego* were initially interrupted by the UPPs, however, as the officers I spoke to in Alemão also indicated, these practices were gradually reestablished.

While the logics of violence in Rio de Janeiro are complex, some ground principles are quite easy to grasp. There is a distinction between persons that can be killed without generating much public attention (generally young, socioeconomically marginalized black men) and persons who can only be harmed or killed at the cost of generating a lot of attention (see i.g. Willis 2018; Alves 2018). If you are a white foreigner, you are fairly safe, independently of whether you are in a favela or in the asfalto. If you get hurt, murdered, or disappear, it will lead to a lot of attention. This is usually bad for business and might force a reaction by the state and the police, who will be expected to investigate and punish the perpetrators, and is therefore usually avoided. Vinicius George referred to Brazil as *Belindia*, because this logic is seen in the form of enormous geographical contrasts in the relationship between crime rates and the numbers of solved cases. Inhabiting a white, Norwegian body in Alemão is (probably) still safer than inhabiting a poor, black body in Copacabana. My body is not one that can be preyed upon with no consequence. My whiteness and status as a foreigner have acted as a door-opener to spaces of power, and as a shield that protected me during fieldwork—both from perceived and hidden threats. When I first got to Brazil, it was the fear of the drug traffickers that made me look over my shoulder. It's not anymore. The stories I've heard, make me reason that it's okay that I'll soon be leaving. This is another privilege I have as a foreign ethnographer—being able to leave when I find it suitable. But still, I have worried that the police might perceive me as a threat if I know too much. Therefore, I have not asked police officers about corruption in the police or pried into “the shadow” of policing. I trust the police officers that have participated in my research not to hurt me, but there are 300 patrol officers at Alemão, and many of them I do not trust. The officers I've spoken with also feel that way, and for good reason: They do have killable bodies.

I recall the public hearing at the Legislative Assembly. It had been chaired by Marcelo Freixo from the Human Rights Commission. Several leaders from Rio's police institutions were seated at Freixo's table, on a scene at the front of the auditorium. A group of veterans from the Military Police were seated at the back of the room. One of them had lost a leg, another was in a wheelchair. They claimed that they hadn't been

paid the pensions they were due, and that their medicinal expenses were not being covered. They were attending in the hope that they would be heard. But they hadn't written their names on the list of speakers and were denied speaking time.

One of the persons who *had* written her name on the list was the mother of an officer who had been killed during a police operation. She claimed that her son had been murdered by his colleagues after refusing to be part of a corruption scheme and accused one of the police leaders that were present of silencing the case. While she talked, she had waved the obduction and investigation reports furiously above her head. The accusations she was putting forth were serious. They were directed towards the leaders that were in the room. Marcelo Freixo had interrupted her, taking the police in defense. They were there at his invitation, and he said that he knew her and her son's case well. According to the police, the investigation was thorough. The case was closed.

The situation at the hearing has made me reflect on my own privilege and the ease and taken-for-grantedness with which I move from spaces of power to Rio's marginalized suburbs. How I, as a foreigner and academic (and of course, as a white man), am used to be taken seriously and to be heard. It's unusual to think about the police as subjects that are not allowed in spaces of power, that do not manage the cultural grammars of power, and therefore, are not heard. But clearly, social hierarchies are contextual, dynamic, and relational: The police officers are powerful in some spaces and less so in others. This feeling of not being heard by those in power, of not being able to voice their grievances, fuels resentment towards democratic institutions within the police.

I'm standing with a group of officers by the container base at Alemão. Following the rearrangement of shifts at the UPP, the patrol units have also been reorganized, and several of the police officers present I have never met before. But Diogo is here. He is one of the officers who has worked here the longest and is trying to impress me with his detailed knowledge of the inner world of policing. "There is no corruption at the base now, he says. But with the previous Commander..." Diogo tells me about a senior police officer who was transferred to Mangueira after getting caught extorting money from residents in Alemão. "He wanted a

piece of the pie,” Diogo laughs. The Commander was furious when he found out, but the officer knew too much and could neither be fired nor arrested. “In the end, they transferred him to a different police station,” he says. I see that some of the officers are getting restless. I feel uncomfortable too. *Are you telling me this NOW, with your colleagues watching*, I think, and pretend that I don’t understand what he’s saying. One of the men interrupts Diogo. “Don’t listen to him! He’s a *miliciano!*” It turns out to be an embarrassing reminder for Diogo, whose face turns red. He has crossed a line that all police officers know: *You don’t sell out colleagues to outsiders!* Diogo tries to excuse himself by saying that they should know all the things Wesley has told me. I get even more nervous. “You’re not a journalist, are you?” one of them says teasingly. It’s a tense joke, meant to laugh off the potentially dangerous situation. I use the same tactic later, as I’m leaving. I ask if one of the officers can escort me back to the base. “No, you can just go on your own,” they laugh. I laugh more. “Please!” I beg, ironically distorting my voice, pretending to be scared. More laughter. As I put on the bulletproof vest, one of the men asks if I got anything out of the day. “Oh, yes, absolutely,” I reply. “Now I’m going home to write an article for the papers!”

In a documentary about the police violence in Rio, a former police informant shares his experiences. It’s dangerous to be an informant, he says. You soon end up knowing so many of the police’s secrets that you become a liability. Suddenly, you’re past the expiry date and getting rid of you is worth the potential cost. I’ve started feeling that way lately. Past my expiry date. Like the officers, I have started chugging down beer when I get home from to ease the tension I’ve accumulated through the day. The excitement I felt when I came to Rio is gone. I tell a friend that I feel like I have climbed Mount Everest. I’m tired. The alertness that is always there, right beneath the surface, when you live in a neighborhood where you might walk into the muzzle of a gun when you round a corner, or where a wrong move can cause you trouble with the traffickers is affecting my mood and energy. So are the hundreds of staircases

that I must climb following a long day of work, or just a trip to the supermarket, or beach, or anywhere. I recall Maria's words when I first came here: "We're constantly walking on eggshells."<sup>7</sup>

Javier, Violeta, and I are at Ipanema. It's a late afternoon of the Brazilian winter, and the beach is almost empty of people. The sun is hiding behind big clouds. Soon, the sky will turn scarlet, but there is still some daylight left. We watch the waves crashing on the beach, tall and frothy. The red flag is raised as a warning: It's not safe to swim. But I like big waves. I like floating in the moving water, getting low enough to touch on the sandy seabed in the trough, and then carried up by the water when the crest passes. I put my beer down in the sand and turn around to give Javier a teasing glance. Come on, let's go for a swim! He shakes his head. He'll stay here with Violeta. I guess I'll have to go alone, I say, and walk onto the wet sand.

My legs are embraced by froth. I run into the ocean and dive into a wall of water moving towards me. Fresh saltwater envelopes my body. I take a couple of strokes, far enough out to get between the breaking waves. I get into a vertical position, wanting to use my feet to push myself up above a wave but I'm in too deep, and the sand is out of reach. The waves are bigger than I thought, far too big to just float atop. The only way I can cross them is diving through. As the next wave engulfs me, I'm pulled down and then up, back and forth and around. I've underestimated the force of the ocean.

It's dark beneath the surface and for a second, I get disoriented. Small bubbles of air, pulled into the depths by the wave render the water opaque and make it impossible to see underwater. Maybe I should swim back to the shore? I take a few powerful strokes towards the surface and take a deep breath, filling my lungs with fresh air. I look around. There's the beach, and there's the next wave. With quick strokes I swim towards the shore before the next wave crashes, but to no avail. The sea is pulling me away from the beach with a force I've never felt before. It feels like swimming in a powerful stream. And now the next wave is breaking

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<sup>7</sup> In Menezes ethnographic research on the pacification, she notes that the feeling of living in a minefield or of constantly walking on eggshells is characteristic of everyday life in favela communities post-pacification. Neighbors must anticipate every move they make, as one wrong step might imply a risk to their lives or to their physical integrity (Menezes 2018: 212).



above me, sucking me underwater. Down and up, back and forth and around.

Once more, I push my head through the surface and gasp for air. I breathe again, telling myself that I will be okay. I must just put more determination in each stroke. Yes! The beach is getting closer. But there it is again: The surge that won't let go. I swim as fast as I can, applying more power in every movement, but the effort demands oxygen as my pulse rises. Another wave. Down and up, back and forth and around.

When I get to the surface this time, I'm heaving for air. I am short of breath and can already see the next crest breaking above me. I throw myself towards land with all the force I can muster but barely move at all. Is Javier seeing me struggle? Should I call for help? I can't make myself shout. That would mean accepting that I'm drowning. And I can't possibly be drowning. The wave crashes over me. I'm getting dizzy. Down and up, back and forth and around.

But suddenly I feel something. The bottom! When I stretch my legs downwards, in a straight line, my toes touch the sand. I feel the current pull me sideways along the beach, but feeling the sandy bottom against my feet gives me hope. I know I'm getting close to the shore now. Just a few more strokes. Another wave hits me. But instead of pushing me down and up and back and forth, it hurls me towards the beach, as if the ocean has decided to spit me back onto land. Now my feet are firmly planted in the sand. My legs are shaky, my body tumbles to the shore. I collapse, I have no force left but drag myself up with my hands. I'm lightheaded, so dizzy I can barely stand up. A feeling of nausea runs through my body as I crawl up on the dry sand and collapse on the beach blanket. I made it.

## **Conclusion: Entrepreneurialism and Predation**

Philippe Bourgois (2018: 385) draws on the notion of predation to account for contemporary accumulation processes whereby “the trafficking of industrially produced euphoric substances across the globe have wreaked havoc among vulnerable populations while extracting

profit for the powerful.” He describes it as a pattern of destructive profiteering that “highlights contradictory, nonlinear relationships between the artificially high profits of illegal drug sales, repressive governmentality and corporate greed.” Although scholars like Luiz Antonio Machado da Silva (2004: 76) are weary of referring to the illicit economies of Rio’s urban formations as “counter-powers” or forms of “adventure capitalism” since this assumes the existence of a “sober bourgeoisie capitalism,” I find it useful to distinguish between the forms of accumulation that rely on the production of certain spaces as colonial, necropolitical, smooth or “ungoverned” and those forms that, while they can be equally (or more) destructive, operate within the rule of law, even when we acknowledge that these practices coexist as mutually dependent forms, also within the Brazilian state apparatus. Specifically, I am interested in how the notion of predation allows us to analyze the colonial dynamics of the war on drugs and the economic opportunities it produces (see Nordstrom 2004). As the ethnographic descriptions of this chapter shows, warfare produces zones where the blurring of legal and illegal practices creates opportunities for a violent entrepreneurialism that cuts across group and class divides.

The notion of “security blurs” (Diphorn and Grassiani 2018) draws attention to formations composed by a multiplicity of agents that can be referred to as “violence workers” (Seigel 2018), as well as the field of security’s capacity to blur the distinction between private and public. In Rio, the policing and production of illicit economies is shaped by violent agents that move across such divisions. The testimonies from police officers presented in this and previous chapters highlights the entanglement of police, paramilitaries, drug traffickers, state bureaucracies, and private enterprise within the field of policing. The common thread that runs across the practices of this militarized entrepreneurialism is the recourse to physical violence, not to uphold legally codified rules, but to support practices of profiteering (see also Volkov 2016). While this chapter has not explored the cultural values underpinning militarized entrepreneurialism, it is clear that it resonates with a neoliberal ethos of individual responsibility which dovetails with the evangelical gospel of prosperity (see, i.g. Bartel 2021), indicating an insidious entanglement of notions of colonial and spiritual warfare that, although it

is not made explicit in the ethnography, informs the field of policing. Often, the networks that form are structured around kinship relations, or at least, referred to in these terms. Thus, drug trafficking is sometimes understood as a family business; police identity as belonging to the blue family; and politics organized around family dynasties and nepotism.

In the ethnographic accounts of this chapter, the appropriation of a war-chests or bounty during police operations (often referred to as *invasions* or *occupations*), i.e. of material recourses such as money, guns, drugs, or other material objects acquired through looting or apprehensions, as well as extortion fees, bribes and the “political merchandise” that is part of everyday policing, composes the gamut of predatory practices that were made possible by the war (Misse 2007; see also Penglase 2014; Larkins 2015).<sup>8</sup> Attempts to contain these practices were evident in the difference between the “occupation” of Complexo do Alemão and Rocinha, as leaders within the Military Police enforced a much stricter control during the pacification of Rocinha, according to Gabriel. Approaching the shifting practices of policing in the favelas through the lens of colonial war, i.e. understanding how the favelas have been produced as warzones and sites for “resource extraction”, is consistent with research that sees them as territories of exception characterized by a suspension of civil rights and governed through a logic of war (see, i.g. Grillo 2019; Magalhães 2021). It is also consistent with Mbembe’s (2003: 22ff) typification of colonial warfare (characterized by the suspension of the controls and guarantees of the judicial order) and of the colonies as sites “where ‘peace’ is more likely to take on the face of a ‘war without end.’”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In Chapters 2 and 3 I also described how the militarization of the favelas through the pacification was closely associated with neoliberal accumulation strategies (see Neocleus 2013; Freeman 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, I have argued that conceptualizing the favelas as colonial spaces accentuates the historical continuity between the Brazil’s past as a colonial slave state and the current configurations of its urban landscape, characterized by highly segregated areas inhabited by the dispossessed and policed by a Military Police formerly dedicated to the repression of slave revolts. The relation between the modern Brazilian state and these areas is still mediated by the historical constellations of colonizer and colonized; of masters and slaves: In modern Brazil, the favelas have continued to act as sources of cheap labor for the privileged living in the *asfalto* and as sites where predatory forms of accumulation take place (Salem 2016a).

The gang war in Mangueira is a clear example of how, even in pacified favelas, Rio's multiple sovereignties compete for access to the profits that result from predation. Linking back to *Chapter 1: Introduction*, the ethnography of this chapter shows that while drug traffickers and militias in principle are defined by a difference in relations to the state and the rule of law, their practices bleed into each other, signaling how money or profit acts as an overarching logic that cuts across normative, ideological, or cosmological divides (see Feltran 2020). There is, indeed, a unified and blurry security universe that spans across group boundaries and shares a basic set of principles as Graham Denyer Willis (2018) suggests, but despite this shared opportunism and practices of collusion the relations between different groups and agents are often characterized by animosity and mutual distrust (see Hirata 2014; Hirata and Grillo 2017; Alves 2018; Feltran 2020). One might paraphrase Diphorn and Grassiani (2018) and say that “money blurs” and that the glue that binds Rio's multiple sovereignties together is a militarized and opportunistic entrepreneurialism that makes creative use of a rather plastic understanding of “morals” to build legitimacy and garner support.<sup>10</sup>

Within this context the UPPs imply, on the one hand, a reorganization of illegal markets, “civilizing” the violent sociability of the favelas by suppressing the logic of confrontation through sheer military force and placing the population under a Military Police tutelage that seeks

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Misse's (2006) work on the exchange of “political merchandise” informs political scientist Benjamin Lessing (2015) analysis of the urban violence in Rio as a “war of constraint,” where armed groups violently negotiate how the profit from the illegal economy should be distributed (see also Hirata and Grillo 2017). War is here understood as an ongoing negotiation over the access to resources, and violence as a way to assert power and resolve disputes (Menezes 2018: 209–210). Armed groups and men are rational actors constantly weighing the costs and benefits of their actions: The cost of violence (political and economic) is weighed against the potential profit one can reap through predation and illicit economies. Palloma Menezes (2018: 209–210) writes suggests “that we can organize the modes of operation of the governance of illegalisms in carioca favelas according to three pretty broad dynamics that point to a continual process of experimentation where police and youth operating in retail in the illegal drug-business test and measure their force and that of their enemy. These dynamics include: (a) negotiations, which often involve the exploration of ‘political merchandise’ [...]—as well as bribes, blackmailing, extortions and protection rackets; (b) effective demonstrations of potency and power, which often involves armed confrontations; (c) finally, the use of various surveillance devices to monitor the flows of circulation in favela territories.”

to assert its authority through the implementation of a new set of moral rules “on the ground.” On the other hand, they coincide with the expansion of militias in those areas that were not selected for pacification in such a way as to extend a militarized and authoritarian understanding of the world—a police cosmology—across most of Rio de Janeiro’s favelas (see Manso 2020).

If we look at policing in Rio through the lens of militarized entrepreneurialism, it raises the question of whether part of Bolsonaro’s appeal lies in his promise to de-regulate—to reaffirm a colonial dynamic, a frontier capitalism organized around old and new practices of predation, thought to speed up economic accumulation? Both for the low-income, individual entrepreneur, as well as for big corporations and industries? The production of certain spaces as warzones, frontlines, or (internal) colonies seems to have been at the core of Bolsonaro’s political project, which articulated war machine dynamics at the highest level of the state.

The articulation of the interests of large corporations and individual entrepreneurs in the carving out of new (colonial) spaces for capitalist expansion and predatory accumulation, i.g. through the creation of warzones in Rio’s urban landscape or the dismantling of the institutions for environmental protection in the Amazon, might help us understand the economic logics of the far-right’s alliance with evangelical congregations whose emphasis on the discourse of entrepreneurship dovetails with the call for deregulation. There seems to be much potential in further exploring the material dimensions of this alliance in Brazil and beyond. The war-machine dynamics that I have described here, are fuelled by rage, but also by ambition, excitement, and thirst for money and power. Nested within the Brazilian state throughout its history, the territories where war machines operate have diffuse borders that expand and contract according to the logics of political and economic opportunism and must be understood as productive economic zones that produce and are produced by competing normative orders.

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# 9

## The War Machine

Policing (conceived as the different activities involved in the maintenance and production of order—urban, social, moral, or even cosmological) in Rio is sometimes carried out by drug gangs, paramilitaries, vigilante groups, regular citizens, mobs, private security, and a broad range of state officials (Military, Civil, and Federal Police, Armed Forces, Municipal Guards) that maintain relations of collaboration, complicity, suspicion and animosity towards each other. In this context of multiple groups vying for control, the authority of the Military Police is constantly challenged but also employed in ways that defy different normative orders, including officially sanctioned orders, and produce emergent orders of their own. In this book, I have described situations where the police released suspects due to pressure from neighbors, where they prevented angry mobs from lynching assailants, or where they negotiated complex relations of collusion, conflict, and animosity with competing drug factions. I have also recounted situations where police officers thwart institutional hierarchies, acting according to their own interests, and described dynamics whereby the institutional hierarchy is mobilized in favor of economic, corporate, and political interests that do not respond to official institutional goals. To complicate matters even



**Fig. 9.1** Police officers patrolling in Mangueira, May 2015

more, intra-group tensions along and across group hierarchies exist (for example when superiors try to establish or assert authority), and some subjects act across group divisions (for example when Military Police officers moonlight as private security guards, join militias, or act as vigilantes in their home neighborhoods). In all these situations, law, custom, morality, interest, and identity are mobilized to produce certain outcomes, accumulate capital, and assert or negotiate authority. Most officers understand and talk about these situations as urban battles, confrontations, invasions, occupations, sieges, and war. They see themselves as police officers, but also military, combatants, soldiers, warriors, or even guerilla fighters (Fig. 9.1).

I have explored the worldviews and practices that support and cohere around these understandings of policing as warfare through the notion of *cosmologies of war*. In this final chapter, I will analyze the normative framework that underpins the police's exercise of authority in Rio's favelas and show how it produces and is produced by an emergent far-right discourse that prefigured the political agenda of Jair Bolsonaro. While I do not pretend that a police moral order can or should be

uncritically mapped onto Brazilian national politics under Bolsonaro, I understand the political project of the far-right as an attempt to transform Brazil into a police state (Durão 2019, 2020), shaped by the emergence of war machine dynamics at the highest levels of government. The intensification of these dynamics and their destructive practices rely on the worldview that coheres around different cosmologies—colonial and cultural—of war. Cultivating close relationships both to the state's security forces (military and police) as well as criminal paramilitary groups, the Brazilian state, under Bolsonaro, transformed itself into a war machine where practices of elimination and destruction that have been operative throughout Brazilian history were intensified and harnessed to attack the liberal democratic values and institutions of Brazilian modernity, unleash and accelerate predatory forms of accumulation, but also, to attack and resist policies that have sought to expand rights and promote social inclusion, and restore traditional hierarchies centered around the heteropatriarchal family, a militarized national order, and a conservative understanding of religion (see, i.g. Messenberg 2019; Pinheiro-Machado and Freitas 2019; Perry 2019; Ystanes and Salem 2020). In this last chapter I will focus on the events that led up to the election and Presidency of Bolsonaro, to show how the moral universe and national politics of the Brazilian far-right movement mirrors many of the observations I made through my ethnographic encounters with the police.

## The Coup

The light-green Fiat follows the even stream of traffic along Avenida Brasil. Cars, trucks, buses and trailers whip up a light layer of dust that hovers in the thick air. The traffic flows past the favelas, the suburbs, and the satellite towns of northern Rio. Here, the different parts of the city bleed into each other. It's not easy to separate *favela* from *asfalto*. The entire region is characterized by a similar collection of worn and terracotta-red brick houses. They seem to stretch endlessly to the west, past *Complexo da Maré*, the favela complex that was occupied by the military before the World Cup in 2014; past the low ridges where the

gondola that leads to *Complexo do Alemão* is barely visible in the distance; past *Vigário Geral*, where officers from the Military Police murdered nineteen arbitrary victims in an act of collective punishment in 1993; past the massive *favela* complex of *Chapadão*, the new headquarters of the Red Command; the new Olympic venues in *Deodoro*; the military bases and Police Academy in *Realengo*; and then through *Bangú*, generally thought of as Rio's hottest region, where the city's infamous high-security prison is located. The command central and recruiting grounds for new generations of drug traffickers.

The Fiat continues westward. Soon, the valley landscape opens as the freeway cuts through surrounding neighborhoods and towards Campo Grande, part of the expanding territory of the militias. Luís drives into the parking lot of the school where he works as a history teacher. It's in an area controlled by paramilitaries. Smoking marihuana, skipping school, hanging around the school entrance after school hours, and talking back to teachers is forbidden. If the students show attitude or bad behavior the teacher can report them to the militias who willingly punish anyone they see fit. If you are caught smoking weed, you are lucky if you get a "warning": A solid beating. The less lucky or repeating offenders are simply executed. When the schoolyear starts following the summer holidays, there's always a handful of pupils who never show up. Nobody says it out loud, but everybody knows that they have become victims of the strict code of justice of the militias. In the back window of his car, Luís has placed a big sticker with Marcelo Freixo's name and the symbol of the socialist party. Freixo's 2008 Parliamentary Commission Report on the expansion of the militias (see Chapter 3) turned him into their enemy number one. Police and militia alike despise him. As Luís exits his car another teacher passes by. He glances at the sticker: "I'd remove that if I were you," he says. It takes a while before Luís gets the message. Coming home that evening, the risk he took dawns on him. He shudders: As if his long cornrows and dark skin weren't enough of a call for attention. The next day, when he arrives at the school, the sticker is gone.

Javier and I leave Babilona, Rio, and Brazil at the end of July 2015. In the following months, the country is thrown into a deep economic crisis. Rio de Janeiro is especially affected. The local government is bankrupt, a year before the Olympic flame is lit. The city's finances crumble under

the weight of monumental, half-finished infrastructural projects. The nation and city have invested its prestige in the games. Public funds are diverted from the payment of government employees—nurses, teachers, police officers—and into the costly projects. Salaries for public employees are frozen.<sup>1</sup> My friends in Babilonia tell me that the police officers at the UPP have struck a deal with the drug traffickers. Violence increases as the rivaling gangs in Babilonia and Chapeu-Mangueira enter into a war against each other. The Military Police sends its Special Forces to invade the favela. Young neighbors disappear. Dead bodies wash up on a nearby beach.

After the presidential elections in 2014 the right-wing mobilizes against Dilma Rousseff. They are terrified by the Workers Party fourth consecutive electoral victory. The party seems unbeatable. Meanwhile, the biggest corruption scandal in Brazil, *Lava Jato*, gathers momentum. It incriminates politicians from across the political spectrum in the diversion of funds from the national oil company *Petrobras*. The judiciary is processing an increasing number of federal deputies as the lions share of Brazil's elected officials are mired in what seems like an existential crisis. A small number of federal judges lead the moral crusade against the political class in a judicial process that is shaped by political interests and power schemes. In Congress and in the streets, the opposition against Dilma grows as the economy tumbles and the scope and scale of *Lava Jato* becomes clear. The protesters support a conservative political agenda and many call for a military intervention. Among a growing number of congressional deputies the impeachment of Dilma is openly discussed, but they need a reason, a majority, and the support of the parliamentary president. In December 2015, the leader of Congress Eduardo Cunha initiates the process of impeachment. He approves the trial within days after being dragged into the maelstrom, accused of embezzling public

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<sup>1</sup> Much in the same way that the war on drugs creates spaces of exception, Christopher Gaffney (2010) has documented how the Olympics in Rio accelerated public spending, channeling funds to private contractors. He understands mega-events such as the World Cup and Olympics as imposing “a neo-liberal ‘shock-doctrine’, installing temporary regimes of extra-legal governance” that permanently transform the city (see also Gaffney 2010; Vainer 2011; Ystanes and Salem 2020). The processes he describes shows how war machine dynamics are integral to capitalism, especially in the kind of contexts that Bruce Kapferer (2010) refers to as corporate state formations.

funds. Dilma is relieved of her presidency in May 2016 with her Vice President Michel Temer taking office. He forms a cabinet consisting exclusively of older, white men, and slashes public budgets. Among the first policy proposals of Temer's government is a law that impedes the increase of public expenses in the next twenty-five years. The rights to exploit many of Brazil's natural resources are sold to foreign companies.

Rio hosts the Olympics as planned but by that time many of the city's residents have lost their enthusiasm for the games. The Olympic dream has become a nightmare. As Temer opens the games he is booed off the stadium. The security during the games is a mess. Half of the metal detectors used at the entrance to the Olympic Park don't work. The security guards make the alarms beep from time to time to create the illusion of control (Larkins 2023). In the favelas the blood keeps flowing. Between the 5th and 21st of August 2016, during the two weeks of the games, 31 people are killed and 51 are wounded in shooting episodes in *Complexo do Alemão* and other favelas in *Zona Norte*.<sup>2</sup> But to the international spectators, Rio manages to pull it off. The Olympic belly flop comes a few weeks after the flame has been extinguished. Dilma is impeached and irrevocably removed from power. Allegedly in response to soaring violence, Michel Temer orders the military intervention of Rio's security apparatuses in February 2018. Military officers from the Armed Forces are put in charge of the State Secretary of Security. Tanks roll through the city while the Armed Forces are set to patrol the streets. The state's war apparatus is fully deployed and operational in Rio de Janeiro.

March 14th, 2018. A group of young, black women are gathered to discuss strategies for political activism in Rio's city center, a stone's throw away from Lapa's bustling nightlife and landmark viaduct. One of the women is easily distinguished from the rest: She has bright purple lips, big earrings in matching color, bleached curls, and a broad smile that seems on the verge of bursting into laughter. She is young, but her eyes have small smile wrinkles around a focused gaze. When she talks to the people who have gathered, her voice is strong and clear. Marielle Franco

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<sup>2</sup> These numbers correspond to data from *Fogo Cruzado* (an app launched by Amnesty International in July 2016 to track shootings in Rio via user-contributed reports) and were published in *Rio on Watch* on August 30th 2016. Accessed electronically at <https://rioonwatch.org/?p=32349> on the 10th of September 2023.

has used it to fight for justice and against police violence in a country where many members of the rich white elite are upset by black women from the favela who lift their gaze and raise their voices. Tonight, Marielle leads the conversation. As a black, bisexual woman from one of Rio's largest favela complexes and member of Rio's City Council, she represents hope and change for many people who have been marginalized and excluded from spaces and positions of power and symbolizes the challenges to traditional hierarchies in Brazil (see Perry 2019). She has used her political position to criticize the military intervention in Rio and the pacification project as a militarization of the favelas (Cardoso and Ystanes 2018; Franco 2018).

The discussion lasts for an hour and a half. At nine p.m., Marielle gets into the backseat of a white Chevrolet that will take her home. In addition to the driver, she is accompanied by one of her assistants. The car leaves the venue and heads west, towards Maré. Later, witnesses confirm that another vehicle had left the place at the same time. Half an hour later, a car drives up next to the Chevrolet, firing thirteen shots at Marielle and her driver, Anderson Gomes. The aim is precise, these shots are fired by professionals. Three of them hit Marielle in the head. One hits her throat. At least three shots hit Anderson's back. Both die immediately. Marielle's assistant manages to evade the shots and only receives minor injuries. The assassinations of Marielle and Anderson lead to a public uproar, sending shockwaves internationally. Among politicians and activists in Brazil people demand answers: Who killed Marielle Franco?

In the aftermath of the murder, the country prepares to elect a new president. Michel Temer, tarnished by several corruption scandals and a symbol of Brazil's traditional elites, is one of the least popular Presidents in the country's history. Under Temer's government, the economy has gone from bad to worse. In Rio, violence keeps increasing as the pacification policy derails. 1530 people are killed by Rio's police forces in 2018 alone, dethroning 2007 as the year with the highest police lethality (when 1330 persons were killed by the police). Many Brazilians look to Lula for hope. The assumption is that despite the Workers Party implication in *Lava Jato*, the successes of his former Presidency will secure him the ballot if he runs for office. However, months prior to the election,



Lula is put on trial and sentenced to twelve years in prison. The federal judge Sergio Moro bases the sentence on his conviction that Lula must be guilty despite the lack of conclusive evidence.<sup>3</sup> Bolsonaro capitalizes on the sense of chaos and moral bankruptcy of the political class that has ruled Brazil since the return of democracy. Allied with the evangelical groups in Congress, he manages to garner 20% support in early polls, emerging as the only candidate positioned to challenge the Workers Party candidate, Fernando Haddad.

Nonetheless, the consensus among liberal political analysts is that his views are too extreme, his political discourse too nonsensical, and his values too anachronistic to secure the 50% of votes that he needs to win a second round against Haddad. The dismissal of Bolsonaro as a war-mongering buffoon proves to be a high-risk gamble. A few weeks prior to the election, an apparently lone perpetrator stabs Jair Bolsonaro with a knife during a campaign rally. The attack galvanizes support for his candidacy and contributes to a remarkable victory with 55% of the votes in the second round (in the first round, he receives 46% against Haddad's 29%). Brazil has chosen a new President: One who has promised to dismantle Congress and reinstate military rule. How is it that Brazilians across racial, class, and gendered divisions have united behind an openly authoritarian leader? (Fig. 9.2).

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<sup>3</sup> Sergio Moro is later appointed Minister of Justice by Bolsonaro. Lula's imprisonment paved the way for Bolsonaro's presidency, who gained the support of Brazil's conservative political class. In 2019 Lula's conviction is revoked as the supreme court rules that his incarceration is illegal. The political class that impeached Dilma in 2016 support Lula's candidacy against Bolsonaro in the 2022 elections. Once Bolsonaro has churned away the institutional structures built during the rule of the Workers Party, they align behind Lula (see Nobre 2020). Their "pitbull" has finished the job—it is time to tighten the leash.



Fig. 9.2 Flyers demanding justice for Marielle on the two-year anniversary of her assassination, February 2023

## The Chief of the Warrior Clan

With the election of Bolsonaro, I became attuned to how my fieldwork exposed me to the moral universe and worldview that he maneuvers. His name appeared again and again in conversations with the police, and so did many of the values that he defended. Importantly, Jair Bolsonaro and his sons had built their political careers around the unconditional support of police officers and the military (see Manso 2020). Once elected, most officers felt that they had *their guy* in the Presidential Palace. Increasingly, opinions that had previously been voiced in private set the tone of the public debate. The police's contribution to the Brazilian far-right is significant, and while not all police officers are far-right supporters, the relation between the police and Bolsonarismo is one of mutual constitution: Bolsonaro is shaped by the values and worldview that circulate among Brazilian police and military forces and

has also been one of the main ideological influences of many of the officers that I met. Understanding the police, the far-right, and Bolsonaro are interrelated projects.<sup>4</sup>

Jair Bolsonaro grew up in São Paulo's rural countryside. His father was a dentist without formal education. His mother raised a family of six siblings. During Jair's childhood, the family moved from place to place until they ended up in Eldorado. The small, sleepy town in the State of São Paulo's rural interior now has around four to five thousand inhabitants and lies by the banks of the river Ribeira da Iguapé, in the middle of a sloping farmland with forest-clad hills. In 1970, when Jair is fifteen, Eldorado becomes the scene of a drama that makes a deep impression on him. In May that year, Carlos Lamarca, a guerrilla warrior and one of the most sought-after men by the Military dictatorship is stopped at a checkpoint. A shooting episode where two police officers and a civilian are wounded ensues, and while Lamarca manages to evade the authorities, the military establishes control posts at the access roads and ransack the town and its residents in search for the guerrilla warrior. After witnessing these events, Jair decides that he will join the Army.

Jair starts his education at the Military Academy *Agulhas Negras* in the State of Rio de Janeiro in the middle of the seventies, at the height of the dictatorship. He fails to impress his superiors, earning descriptions as a man with overblown economic and financial ambitions in military documents. One of the officers he served under later says that Bolsonaro had ambitions to lead. This was constantly rejected by the higher ranks, both because of the aggressive attitude he showed towards his colleagues, and due to a "lack of logical thinking, rationality, and balance in his lines of argument" (Leira 2022). However, in 1986, just after the end of the dictatorship, Bolsonaro wrote a piece in the national magazine *Veja* that earned him broad support among military officers across the country. There, he decries the low wages of the army, ignoring the ban on public critique of the institution stipulated in the disciplinary code of conduct.

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<sup>4</sup> The biography of Bolsonaro that I present in the following is based on the text *Retrato de un ultra: El hombre que conquistó Brasil* published the news outlet *El País* (2018) 21st October 2018; on Torkjell Leira's (2022) portrait of Jair Bolsonaro in *Kunsten å drepe et demokrati* [The art of killing a democracy]; as well as reports published in NACLA Report on the Americas (NACLA 2018; Green 2018).

Bolsonaro spends fifteen days in detainment but the support he receives from his colleagues lays the groundwork for the next step in his career. The following year, in 1987, his fight for higher military wages continues through “Operation Blind Alley”: Bolsonaro and a group of officers plan to set off grenades in military academies across Brazil. But the operation ends where the name suggests it would and is never put into action. The case is discretely handled by a military court in 1988 who exonerates Bolsonaro of the charges of disloyalty and disciplinary offenses. While he denies having anything to do with the case it marks the end of his military career and distances him from the Army’s commanding officers. He withdraws from his position as Army Captain and devotes himself to politics.

His fight for increased salaries secures him the support of the rank and file in the Armed Forces and Military Police. In 1988 he is elected Deputy of Rio’s Legislative Assembly and two years later he is elected for Congress, stepping into the national political arena where he remains a relatively peripheral figure for decades. During this time, he and his sons build a family dynasty and a small fortune (Leira 2022). First and foremost, they become known for a string of “politically incorrect” or illiberal statements at a moment of broad democratic consensus. In the 90s, Bolsonaro gives a TV interview that has later been widely quoted. There, he defends the dictatorship in front of a perplexed interviewer. “If you were the President of Brazil today, would you have shut down Congress?” the reporter asks. “Without any doubt. I’d shut it down on the first day.” Then he launches a tirade of the kind that has become one of his hallmarks: “I’m sorry to say it, but we won’t be able to change anything in this country through elections—nothing at all. When it all comes down to it: Nothing! Brazil will sadly only change when we see a civil war here. We must do the job that the military dictatorship didn’t do: Kill 30 000 people, starting with FHC” (Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the President at the time).

This isn’t the only controversial statement Bolsonaro has made in his time as a member of Congress. He has also been an outspoken defender of the capital punishment, of lowering the age of criminal responsibility, and of the use of torture. These positions all point in the direction of strengthening the necropolitical dynamics of the Brazilian State. In the

impeachment case against Dilma in 2016, he votes “against communism, for freedom, and for the memory of Coronel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, Dilma Rousseff’s worst nightmare!” Ustra has been convicted for overseeing the torture of political prisoners, including Dilma, during the dictatorship. The gay and queer movement is also targeted by Bolsonaro’s incendiary rhetoric: “If your son starts becoming a little *gayzinho*, give him a round of beating, and he’ll change his behavior” he says during a TV-debate. “Listen, on my way here, someone said to me: *It’s a good thing I was beaten a little, my father taught me to be a man.*” In these comments, which must be understood as a continuation of the military dictators’ war on communism, the notion of *cultural war*, of a fight against “cultural marxism” and “gender ideology” is crucial. The idea that the left has gained cultural hegemony among intellectual and political elites was central during Bolsonaro’s campaign and has been pushed by Olavo de Carvalho, Bolsonaro’s far-right ideologue following his victory in the Presidential elections (Castro Rocha 2021; Leira 2022).

One of the key features of Bolsonaro’s political career has been his capacity to present himself as a family man. He has built a political dynasty around his sons, whom he refers to as his *pit bulls*—like the Military Police Commanders do with their most aggressive and loyal officers. His three eldest sons have all been elected for office and if anything, as a father he has managed to induce in them a fierce loyalty: There is no opposition to their father’s worldview, statements, or politics to be traced in their political careers. Rather, father and sons have built their project as a family enterprise.<sup>5</sup> Like their father, Bolsonaro’s sons have made several controversial statements that draw on the notion of cultural war against so-called gender ideology.<sup>6</sup> Consider for example his son Eduardo, who has declared a war against the LGBTQI + community; stated that feminism is a disease; and been sued for harassment after calling his ex-girlfriend a “whore” and “bitch” who should have “fucked more to learn how to shut up.” In the well-known style of his father, he

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<sup>5</sup> There is a broad body of literature on the patrimonial dynamics of Brazilian politics and its tendency to be organized around family dynasties (see W. Pereira 2016; Leira 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Principally, the notion of cultural war has served to invoke enemy images like the feminist and queer, figures associated with the left’s conspiracy for world domination (see, i.g. Perry 2019; Castro Rocha 2021).

has also claimed that homosexuals are conspiring to turn themselves into a super-race and are seeking privileges disguised as rights. While such statements would send shivers down the spine of most liberal democratic subjects, many of those who support Bolsonaro see Eduardo's ideological proximity to his father as proof of a tightly knit family and a strong bond between father and son (see Leira 2022).

As a lawmaker, Bolsonaro has a meager track-record to show for prior to his Presidency. In his three decades in Congress, he only passes two bills: A tax change for industrial products and a law to authorize a pill for cancer treatment. Of the 190 bills that he has proposed, a third pertain to military issues and a fourth to matters of public or national security. This lack of interest in other issues has not affected Bolsonaro's popularity among his core voters. He has built his political career as an arduous defender of the Armed Forces and Military Police. But his appeal reaches beyond these institutional constraints, and includes violent entrepreneurs who gradually cohere around the identity of the *militar* (Nobre 2020). A hallmark of his family enterprise is to hand out state honors to hundreds of police and military officers as well as people who have later been tied to the militias (Manso 2020).<sup>7</sup> Perhaps due to his affinity with the grammars of violent sociability, with the language of brute force, Bolsonaro even gains adepts among some drug traffickers, the subjects whom he has signaled out for extermination.<sup>8</sup> His capacity to garner support among the groups that he attacks shows the power of the anti-elitist sentiments that right-wing populism mobilizes. Among the police officers I spoke to, there was no doubt: There was only one politician they didn't despise. His name is Bolsonaro.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In his book *República de Milícias* Bruno Paes Manso (2020) documents the link between the Bolsonaro family clan and the militia-groups operating in Rio's western region.

<sup>8</sup> Reflecting on the legacy of the UPPs prior to Bolsonaro's office, Palloma Menezes (2018: 208) writes that both among police and drug traffickers, there has been a gradual return to old practices that operate according to the logic of what Machado da Silva refers to as "violent sociability"—i.e. the logic of war. This is reflected in better armed traffickers, more willing to enter confrontations, as well as a more aggressive approach by the police.

<sup>9</sup> While the police officers certainly expressed this sentiment during my fieldwork, there are several politicians who shared Bolsonaro's support for extermination policies as a solution to crime and moral disorder in Brazil (see Misse 2008). In the State of Rio de Janeiro, Wilson Witzel was elected Governor in 2018 after several controversial statements in the tone of Bolsonaro and the Brazilian far right. Thus, although Bolsonaro contributed to an increased

Let us, for a moment, return to the political developments that preceded the 2018 elections. The June uprisings in 2013 are broadly thought to signal a turning point in Brazil's public opinion, with broad implications for the consolidation of an ultra-conservative caucus in the national elections of 2014. Brazilians know this caucus as the BBB-lobby (bullet, beef, and bible), referencing the interests it defends: The weapon's lobby, the industrial farming sector, and the evangelical churches. The caucus has championed legislation to liberalize gun ownership and lower the age of criminal responsibility. They have started a moral crusade in defense of "traditional" family values and against abortion, same-sex marriage, and anti-discrimination laws that they see as "special rights" for minorities (see i.g. Cowan 2016; Green 2018).

While the weapon lobby has always been close to Bolsonaro's heart, his alliance with the evangelical churches developed gradually over the years. In 2006, following the passing of anti-discrimination laws aimed to protect LGBTQI + people, he approaches the evangelicals in Congress to discuss the idea of a future presidential candidacy. The slogan is clear from the onset: "Brazil before everything, God before everyone." Eventually, Bolsonaro converts from Catholicism to Evangelism. He later joins the Social Christian Party (*Partido Social Cristiano*) and is baptized in the Jordan river in Israel (Shapiro 2021). At the time, the evangelical movement controls one-fifth of the representatives of Congress and makes up the better part of Bolsonaro's electoral base. With the moral bankruptcy of the traditional political class, Brazil's conservatives turn to the only candidate who seems able to stop a new Workers Party government. Bolsonaro promises that when he gets to power the "red communists" will have to choose between prison or exile and states that he won't accept the results if he loses the election. His son Eduardo also hints at the possibility of a military coup: If the federal electoral court does not give them the result they want, all they will need is a Soldier and a Corporal to shut the court down.

During the election, Bolsonaro receives support by leaders from the world of business and finance and the conservative Christian TV

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acceptance for the voicing of authoritarian and "politically incorrect" illiberal views (especially during his time in office), the sentiments he expressed are broadly shared by the Brazilian public and many politicians who piggy-backed on his success.

channel Record. But he is also helped by Steve Bannon, Trump's election campaign guru. Like Trump, he bases a lot of his campaign on propaganda and *fake news* spread through social media, particularly through WhatsApp, the biggest communication platform in Brazil. The social network is so popular that phone companies sell subscriptions with unlimited use of WhatsApp, but without Internet.<sup>10</sup> To many voters, the lack of internet makes it harder to fact check the information that is shared in the platform's group-chats. Social media becomes an important battleground in the cultural war against "the left". Bolsonaro's inner circle of advisors, dubbed "The Cabinet of Hate" (*Gabinete do Odio*), spread a panoply of deceitful accusations against the Workers Party through false accounts. For example, Bolsonaro claims that his rival Fernando Haddad, Minister of Education during Lula's first government, had tried to pervert school children with a "gay-kit" allegedly distributed in public schools. These accusations are accompanied by waves of other fake news, like a video that shows a baby feeding bottle shaped like a penis—attributed to be the work of communists (Leira 2022) (Fig. 9.3).

In January 2019, a few weeks after Bolsonaro is sworn in as President, Brazilian media reveals that his son and senator, Flavio Bolsonaro, has employed Adriano Magalhães da Nóbrega, a former BOPE officer and leader of a militia group called the "Office of Crime" (*Escritorio do Crime*). At the time, the paramilitary group is under investigation for the murder of Marielle Franco. It turns out that Flavio has also given distinctions of honor to two police officers with ties to the group. A picture shows Jair and Flavio smiling next to Nóbrega (Manso 2020). "I've taken pictures with thousands of police officers," the President replies when he is confronted. The same week as the ties between Flavio Bolsonaro and the militia in Rio are revealed, another case is broadly reported: Jean Wyllis, the only openly gay congressional deputy and party colleague of Marielle Franco and Marcelo Freixo resigns. He has decided to move from Brazil after repeated death threats. The decision is made after a year living under police protection.

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<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the impact of social media on the emergence of right-wing populism in Brazil, see the work of Leticia Cesarino (2020, 2022).





**Fig. 9.3** Police officers from Mangueira fiddling with their phones to make time, May 2015

Two months later, in March 2019—a year after the murder of Marielle Franco and Anderson Gomes, Civil Police officers finally arrest two suspects. The investigation has been stalled repeatedly by police detectives who are suspected of accepting bribes from the militias involved in the assassination. It turns out that the shooter, Ronnie Lessa, is a neighbor of Jair Bolsonaro, and that Bolsonaro's youngest son has dated Lessa's daughter. The man the police claims was behind the wheel, Élcio Vieira de Queiroz, appears in two different pictures with Jair Bolsonaro. As part of the investigation, the Civil Police search the house of one of Lessa's childhood friends. They find an arsenal consisting of 117 M16 machine guns. It's the biggest gun apprehension that Rio's police forces have ever made. Six years after the murder, the ideational authors behind the murder of Marielle Franco remain unidentified, but the close ties between Bolsonaro and the militias have been thoroughly documented (Manso 2020).

## The War Machine and State Dynamics of Right-Wing Populism

The failure of the UPPs came at a moment of political instability on a national level, with the Lava Jato corruption scandal garnering much of the public's attention. The uncovering of widespread corruption across the political spectrum coincided with economic stagnation and increasing insecurity across Rio's urban landscape. Calls for hard-handed security politics were accompanied by a moralization of politics. The political debate was increasingly structured around ideas of purity and pollution, of good and bad, corrupt, and clean—rather than political solutions to the country's grievances. The evangelicals in national politics thrived on this moralization, which drew on interpretations of Brazilian sociopolitical dynamics as a cultural and spiritual war between good and evil forces (see Kramer 2005; Vital da Cunha 2018).<sup>11</sup> The polarizing logic of war and its easy ordering of the world along the categories of friends and enemies, good and evil, resonated among the militarized subjectivities and churchgoers who became the founding pillars of the movement that brought Bolsonaro to power.

While Bolsonaro lost his bid for reelection in 2022, the cosmologies of war that he actively drew on and nurtured remain an active force that will continue to shape Brazilian politics and social relations in the foreseeable future. It espouses a worldview where the Brazilian motto of order and progress is achieved through the exercise of “civilizing” violence and where the state is territorialized through the imposition of police authority and moralism in the “savage” spaces of the favelas. The protestant ethos of the evangelical churches bestows this worldview with a strong emphasis on individual autonomy and responsibility which is very much in line with a neoliberal ethos of entrepreneurialism (see i.g. Bartel 2021). Within a Brazilian urban context, the individuating cosmology of the protestant churches can be seen as an emergent phenomenon but has an important antecedent in the historical figure of the *bandeirante*

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<sup>11</sup> There are many evangelical churches in Brazil, and not all support the worldviews and opinions of the far-right. Among Bolsonaro's most vocal supporters were the religious leaders Edir Macedo from *Igreja Universal Reino de Deus*, Silas Malafaia from *Assamblea de Deus*, and Jonas Abib from *Comunidade Canção Nova* (Bonfim 2020).

or *sertanista*—autonomous frontline of colonizers that penetrated the Brazilian interior in search for gold, precious metals, and indigenous people whom they enslaved or exterminated during the colonization of Brazil (see i.g. Evans and Doutra e Silva 2017).<sup>12</sup>

As idiosyncratic war machines, the militia's connections to the Bolsonaro-clan are indicative of the configuration of power that Jair Bolsonaro represents. The analysis of Bolsonaro's presidency by Brazilian political philosopher Marcos Nobre (2020) is instructive. He argues that Bolsonaro has imposed the logic of war at the highest level of the Brazilian state, expressed among other things in the continuing dismantling and destruction of the state's democratic institutions. This permanent attack on the state apparatus, characteristic of war machines, was connected to the way Bolsonaro built his legitimacy around an anti-system rhetoric: He could not, Nobre writes, govern through the state's institutional structures because these were the targets of his critique. Another, equally important example of how Bolsonaro unleashed war machine dynamics through his presidency, was his outspoken support of the logics of extermination of the police and militias, creating a general atmosphere of impunity that gave police officers and paramilitaries ample room to maneuver; so was the dismantling of environmental protection in the Amazon, the attack on rights-based movements, and aggressive policies of market liberalization (see i.g. Rojas et al. 2019; Barretto Filho 2020; Manso 2020; Nobre 2020; Perry 2019). In all these instances, war machine dynamics—the destruction of the

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<sup>12</sup> These notions of cultural and colonial war can be observed throughout Brazilian history. They are visible in the ways in which church, military, and extractive industries such as the plantation system fueled the colonization process: Imposing a slave economy and reproducing the hierarchies of the Portuguese royal order; a society stratified through estates; an elite that sees itself as separate from the rest of society; and a populace that pays reverence to authority. The colonizing practices of the plantation system were characterized by the institution of *coronelismo*, i.e. the attribution of military rank to plantation owners. This practice contributed to the integration of military, industry, and religion in the colonization process, as landowners with military rank upheld the feudal system by doling out favors or recurring to force while the church would “civilize” the natives and instill in them the new moral order of the colonial powers (see Freyre 1933; Schwartz 2019). Here we observe a historical continuity in the way Brazilian state power operates. The practices of the bandeirante differ from those of *coronelismo* as the bandeirante is first and foremost characterized by its autonomy, and can be understood as an early expression of the war machine dynamics theorized by Deleuze and Guattari (1987 [1980]).



**Fig. 9.4** A group of young boys from the favela as the police would like to see them: Behind bars

state's institutional structures—were at the core of Bolsonaro's political project (Fig. 9.4).

## Conclusion: (Dis)order and Progress

The notion of cosmologies of war that I have developed in this book emphasizes how the capitalist expansion in Brazil relies on the continued production of a state at war with a part of its own population. I have suggested that by tracing the genealogies of colonial and cultural war and how they map out in the policing of Rio's favelas, we can understand the material and ideational dimensions of competing and seemingly contradictory political projects within the Brazilian state apparatus. Order and progress; tradition and modernity; authority and freedom; hierarchy and equality: The competing normative orders that so many scholars have noticed in studies of policing in Brazil are inscribed in the national motto.

Thinking with the notion of *cosmologies of war* challenges the emic distinction in the study of war since it becomes less important to determine if practices correspond to traditional definitions of warfare and more important to understand the social dynamics that are mobilized when war is evoked (see Grillo 2019). The concept signals the entanglement of cultural and colonial warfare in Rio's pacification project, highlighting historical trajectories and emergent forces of war machine dynamics that were intensified by Bolsonaro's war on Brazilian democracy (see Nobre 2020). These cosmologies of war have legitimized continued practices of predation, extractivism, and necropolitical forms of governance, while territorializing a set of moral relations in the spaces that are upended by the destructive dynamics of the war machine. Throughout Brazilian history, governments have relied on these dynamics to facilitate colonial forms of resource extraction: From the installment of the plantation system to the practices of the *bandeirantes*. In the country's current democratic period, militarized policing has ensured the conditions for what some scholars refer to as accumulation by dispossession or predatory accumulation (Harvey 2003; Hoffman 2011; Bourgois 2018). This has also been a militarization of everyday practices, social identities, and relations—what Erika Robb Larkins and I refer to as the “militarization of everything everywhere”: Of the spectacular and the mundane, of family life, childhood and religion (Salem and Larkins, forthcoming). This process is what is implied in the notion of cosmologies of war.

What does it mean when *war* is mobilized in popular or political discourses? What enemy-images are evoked? Who or what needs to be deterritorialized, eliminated, or transformed? What characterizes the new social orders that emerge from the rubble? What worldviews and values are these orders structured around? How are relations of power re-configured? What kind of alliances or assemblages are formed—what machines connect? How is power legitimized and exercised? In this book, I have drawn on the notion of *cultural war* to highlight the ideational dimensions of an emergent social order at the UPPs, organized as a patriarchal police state which fused anti-communism, entrepreneurialism, conservative family values, an ethics of sex and gender, and religious motifs of a spiritual battle between good and evil (see i.g. Birman 2019;

Pinheiro-Machado and Freitas 2019; Shapiro 2021; Perry 2019). I have also drawn on the notion of *colonial war* to highlight the material dimensions and racialized dynamics of police practices organized around elimination and transformation, as well as extractivism and predation as modes of producing profit within colonial spaces (see Nordstrom 2004; Misse 2007; Hirata 2014; Albernaz 2015; Salem 2016a; Grillo 2019; Salem and Bertelsen 2020).

The Brazilian far-right's political project and its manifestation in the figure of Bolsonaro, seems to exist in the tension between an idea of national unity and national fragmentation: On the one hand, the invocation of the "Brazilian People"; of homeland; of God. On the other, the attack on institutional structures that ensure national sovereignty and the stimulation of *multiple sovereignties* territorially nested within the nation (Bertelsen 2016). Like many scholars have noted before me, in this fragmented national landscape, some spaces work according to authoritarian values and principles, others are governed according to liberal democratic values, and yet others, it seems, act as frontiers where the destructive dynamics of war machines are given free reign. Throughout Brazilian history differentiated spaces have coexisted in a symbiotic relationship. However, during Bolsonaro's government the frontiers—colonial spaces where war becomes a permanent logic of governance—expanded and multiplied. We have yet to see what will emerge from the rubble.

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# Epilogue

I wanted Javier to see Complexo do Alemão before we left, so on my last visit to the UPP he joined me on a gondola-ride to the end station at Fazendinha. The favela was full of police officers from the Special Units. We saw officers from BOPE, Choque, and BAC—the dog patrol unit. When we arrived at Fazendinha, Choque officers were scouting the valley through the viewfinders of their machine guns. Nazareth later told me that there had been a police operation in the favela that had lasted through the night, and that two Special Unit officers had been shot. Although I did not introduce him to the officers at the UPP (I never told them I was gay) it was still nice to show Javier the place that he had heard so many stories from. The vastness of Alemão impressed him: So much struggle hidden from view and so many people who do not have to relate to it at all. His reflections make me realize how I've stopped seeing the favelas as places of misery and crime, like people from the asfalto often do. Watching the favela fade away for the last time as the gondola entered the end station, I felt nostalgia. It felt strange to suddenly realize that I don't know if and when I'm coming back (Fig. A.1).



**Fig. A.1** Complexo de Alemão seen from the end stop of the now dismantled gondola-line, May 2015

I had a nice farewell with the officers. Nazareth was there, and Celso, Felipe, Gabriel, Evandro, and Leonardo. They all approached me and wished me a good journey home. Leonardo asked me to forgive his colleagues: If anybody had treated me badly it was only because they didn't get the chance to know me well. Nazareth nodded in agreement: At the base, everybody likes me because of the way I've been, because of my "friendly demeanor." I could say the same of Nazareth: He's always smiling. I have never seen him angry and find it difficult to imagine him as a ruthless perpetrator, although I know that he and his colleagues engage in and condone practices of state violence that send shivers down my spine. I brought a gift to the squad, to thank them for participating in my research. They laughed when they saw what it was: A cutting board and barbecue-knife. The Sub-commander at the base had ordered a uniform shirt with "Professor Tomás" embroidered on the chest. When the officers saw the shirt, they scrambled through their pockets and gave me some of their uniform tags: A tag that read *UPP Alemão*, another one

from *Choque*, and one that the police had designed themselves. It was a skull with the text *God will judge, let's organize the trial*.

I have gained a strange sense of understanding of a group of people that I disliked when I arrived. I've come to see how they perceive the world—their reality. This does not make me a moral relativist. I do not share their view that they are powerless pawns, victims of a system that robs them of their agency and responsibility. They are part of an institution responsible for centuries of extreme violence and oppression, systematically targeting Rio's black and disenfranchised. However, criticizing them from my safe and distanced position is easy and might feel good, but taking them seriously, understanding how they think and why they act the way they do, desisting from positioning them within a simplistic good and evil dichotomy, and acknowledging that many of them navigate complex moral dilemmas of their own is important if we want to develop efficient political strategies to address the re-emergence of the far right. This implies staying with the trouble: Neither assuming quick fixes to the cosmological divides that I have described in this book, nor adopting the cynical assumption that these can never be resolved (Haraway 2016). It implies dwelling in contradiction and ambiguity, asking why people choose to support authoritarianism despite the existence of democratic alternatives and why they still see war and violence as a solution to their problems, even as their lives are destroyed by the perpetuation of violence. These are hard questions that we can only grasp if we are willing to step into the shoes of the other for whom we might initially reserve nothing but contempt.

I am convinced that understanding the other's point of view—not sharing their values nor condoning their practices—is the first step towards a more robust, less violent, and more just democracy. Hopefully, by offering others a look into the world of the police officers that I have depicted in this book, I can contribute to furthering the same implicit understanding of the cosmologies of war that feed far-right projects that I feel I have attained. And hopefully, from the accounts I have presented, I have shown that the world of warfare that emerged at the UPPs in Rio's favelas challenges the fantasy that democratic peace can be imposed through violence. Before I left, Celso approached me. “Mark my words,” he said. “You're going to write a book about your time here in Alemão.”

## Post-War Brazil

Rio de Janeiro, March 2023. I am back in Brazil, eight years after seeing the rolling hillsides of Complexo do Alemão fade from view. A lot has happened in the meantime. A few weeks after leaving Rio, Javier was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He spent five years in treatment and passed away in June 2020 during the corona-lockdown. Throughout these years, the time we spent in Rio remained an idealized moment in our minds, as the world around us suffered one systemic shock after the other. We were living in Argentina when the right-wing government of Mauricio Macri came to power, dismantling the fragile Argentine economy and assuming a multi-billion-dollar foreign debt with the IMF conditioned on structural economic reforms. We reacted with incredulity when Donald Trump was elected President of the United States, but the biggest shock to both of us came when Jair Bolsonaro was elected in 2017. Returning to Rio de Janeiro alone, on the eve of Lula's re-institution at the end of December 2022, was symbolic. If not the end, it marked a turning point after a decade of turmoil in Brazil and the world. But it also marked a new beginning (Fig. A.2).

I came to Brazil to get a sense of the atmosphere in the country: To see what had changed in the eight years since I had last been here. Already in the taxi on my way from the airport, Bolsonaro was the topic of conversation. The driver, a young man from one of Rio's northern suburbs, complained: he was disappointed with Lula's return to power. Things had gotten a lot better during Bolsonaro's years in office. All Lula wanted was to tax honest workers and hand out social assistance to the poor. He feared it would be impossible for him to make a living on his income and that crime and violence would soon start rising again. His concerns were later supported by a motorcycle taxi driver in Rocinha, Rio's biggest favela. Bolsonaro still had support among many people from the popular, low-income classes living in the urban peripheries.

It should be no surprise that Brazil's intellectual elites do not share this sentiment. For some reason, I met a lot of gay anthropologists. Go figure. Most of them seemed hopeful, which at first surprised me. One friend argued that had Bolsonaro won, he would have consolidated his power, remaining in office indefinitely. Now, the nightmare was over. I found



**Fig. A.2** Javier and Violeta at our rooftop terrace in Babilonia, July 2015

his optimism unwarranted at first. While Bolsonaro's time in office had ended, the movement he has led seemed to have grown even stronger during his presidency; the understanding of "normality" expanded to include authoritarian, even fascist values and worldviews; while the influence and power of the Evangelical churches rest on a territorial anchoring that makes it seem unlikely that this is, in any way, the end of the far right as a considerable political force in Brazil.

Indeed, a few days after Lula was sworn in as President, a group of armed Bolsonaro supporters stormed the Presidential palace in Brasilia, in a revolt that mimicked Trump-supporters' storming of Congress in January 2022. Lula's cabinet attributed part of the responsibility to the inaction of Brasilia's Military Police forces, whom they said had given the agitators license to storm the governmental building. However, polls showed an almost unanimous rejection of what some commentators described as an attempted coup. Support for democracy appears to be strong.

During the week of Carnival in February I was in São Paulo. There, I met an anthropologist who invited me to his home, where he lived

with one of his boyfriends while his husband was abroad. The years with Bolsonaro had been tough, he said. It felt like society was poisoned. In São Paulo, the idea that Bolsonaro had been good for the Brazilian working class and micro-entrepreneurs seemed untenable to me. Since the zenith of Brazil's economic expansion in 2013, the number of people living on the streets had increased manifold. But whereas the brutality of homelessness is normally attenuated by some sort of impromptu sleeping arrangements—cardboard walls, the entrance of a building, an old mattress, or a minimum of personal belongings—the people I saw sleeping on the streets of São Paulo had absolutely nothing but the clothes they were wearing. Often, they were not sleeping in a doorway or against the wall of a building, but lying stretched out across the sidewalk, or in the middle of the street, covered with nothing. Walking through the downtown area felt like walking through a recently shelled city: There were people lying everywhere, and hard to tell whether they were alive or dead.

On the last Sunday of Carnival, I attended a *bloco* in downtown São Paulo. The street was, as per usual, full of people: Gay, straight, black, brown, red, and white. Many had painted their bodies with glitter. People were kissing. First one, then two, then three, then four random persons whom they had just met. The lead singer, Daniela Mercury, sang music from the Brazilian Northeast. Between the songs she celebrated the diversity of the Brazilian people: “We are a democracy! We are not authoritarian!” she shouted to an ecstatic crowd. The celebration was an unmistakably cathartic moment for the thousands of people who were accompanying the Carnival procession. I have read a lot of anthropological literature on the hierarchical inversions and sense of togetherness that characterize the Brazilian carnival, but for the first time, I could *feel* what it was all about.

One of the first thing I did when I arrived in Rio was to walk up to the house in Babilonia where Javier and I had lived. Patrol vehicles from the UPPs were still guarding the favela entrance but the officers were busy playing Candy Crush on their phones when I passed them. A few blocks up the favela's alleyways the guys on the corner were still there, only now they were armed with machine guns, standing around a suitcase filled to the brink with what I assume was large bags of cocaine. I



walked straight past them and up the stairway that led to our old home. The favela looked worn down and in a state of abandon compared to how I recalled it. The hallway of our old entrance was dark and dog feces littered the floor. I didn't stay long. When I came past the traffickers going down, one of the armed teenagers stopped me. Hadn't I just passed them on my way up? "You're not from here" he said, asking me to lift my t-shirt so he could check if I was armed. I did as I was told and explained that I had lived here a while ago and was looking for a friend. "What's in your bag?" the guy asked. I told him I had a camera there. As he took the camera out of my bag, a paper napkin fell to the ground. The trafficker, after verifying that I was not carrying weapons or anything suspicious, handed me the camera and politely picked the paper napkin up from the floor. I was free to continue.

Although I was aware that the likelihood of getting into trouble with the traffickers was small, it was still uncomfortable to be checked by a group of armed teenagers. Maria, who was still living in Babilonia, told me that the situation in the favela was tense. One of her brothers had moved to a different favela, closer to the city center, where the situation was calmer. In Babilonia she felt imprisoned, scared of leaving her home due to frequent shootouts. While the pacification project was discontinued by the military intervention in 2018, the UPPs still remain in place. In most favelas, the practice of *arrego* has been reinstated, which means that police and traffickers coexist along different degrees of tension. Some favelas have less armed violence than during the years of pacification, others have more. In Rocinha, traffickers had remained armed throughout the pacification. When I visit the favela, they have hung large signposts next to the *bocas*. Titled *Commando Vermelho*, they list a menu of drugs that can be bought at set prices. Several bank-terminals lie next to the bags of drugs that are on display. A small sign reads "We accept PIX"—the Brazilian app for money transfers.

During Bolsonaro's presidency, the militias expanded their sphere of influence to include increasingly larger areas of Rio. In the months following the election, they seemed to be retreating from some of these, with the drug cartels again on the rise. In Vila Kennedy, a friend tells me that BOPE invaded the favela to protect *Commando Vermelho* from a rivalling gang. According to colleagues at the Federal Fluminense

University, the power dynamics in the favelas are fragmented and largely dependent on personal dynamics among the armed actors vying for control over the favela economy. Some militias have joined the traffickers, while members from the same drug gangs cultivate different kinds of relations (of collusion and animosity) with the police. Even within the state security apparatus, there seems to be a lack of coordination and direction, I am told. Some of the researchers studying the dynamics of urban violence speculate that the recent handover of militia territories to the gangs might be a strategy to induce moral panic in the population, with renewed demands for hard-handed security policies.

On March 13th I participated in an event organized to mark the five-year anniversary of Marielle Franco's assassination. A group of black female deputies and former deputies of Rio's Legislative assembly speak about the challenges ahead, as Lula's new government works to rebuild Brazil's democratic institutions. While they supported Lula during the campaign, their current concern is what kind of politics he will advocate as President. The fight for justice and equality is not over. Some of the women live under permanent police protection, on secret addresses. They receive death threats and know that they are being monitored. Still, they refuse to be shut up, and importantly, they do not want to be "the black woman" of politics—the exception that confirms the rule. They talk about the favela's capacity to resignify the ongoing tragedy that shapes their everyday experiences. Through my time in Rio, I have been humbled by the commitment of Brazilian scholars and activists in their fight for social justice. The favelas are complex communities. They cannot be reduced to orientalist fantasies of a simple life of struggle in tightly knit communities, or places of crime and misery. Still, it is here, to the favelas and its people, that I look for hope that a better future is possible (Fig. A.3).



Fig. A.3 The author and Violeta at the beach in Leme, July 2015

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