

# “All is Normal”: Sports Mega Events, Favela Territory, and the Afterlives of Public Security Interventions in Rio de Janeiro

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## Abstract

*This article discusses the changes in Visionário, a favela located near the affluent neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, to assess the effects of the Sports Mega Events (SMEs) on the political and economic conditions in the favela. Following Harvey’s (2005) description of “accumulation by dispossession,” several authors have highlighted that the UPP policing program, implemented before the SMEs, was part of neoliberal efforts to colonize favela territory with the prospect of future gain. Visionário has witnessed two consecutive policing programs (GPAE and UPP) in the past twenty years. Both were aimed at disarming the drugs-gang members who attempt to rule the favela by force. The ethnography in this article shows that both policing programs started ambitiously, yet gradually police officers withdrew and gang members reoccupied strategic positions in the favela. As a result, residents learnt to deal with ongoing territorial shifts in a highly dense urban space and with the liminal presence of police officers. In my analysis, I argue that in terms of neoliberal strategies to accumulate favela territory by dispossession, this case suggests a failure, and I analyze the struggle over favela territory as the outcome of contradictory forces connected to global neoliberalization.*

*[Public Security; Rio de Janeiro; UPP; Favelas; Neoliberalism]*

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## Introduction

In March 2019, I chatted online with two of my contacts who live in Visionário, a favela in the south side of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>1</sup> When I asked them how the situation was in Visionário, they both replied: “It is normal.” One added: “The *movimento* (gang rule) is the same. A *tiro* (gunshot) at times, but it passes.” In the weeks after our chat, I often thought about their responses as I tried to understand what they meant by “normal” in the context of Visionário. The favela had been the locus of a number of broadly publicized governmental interventions related to the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games, amongst those the “pacification police” program unrolled during the Games’ preparations. In practice, this pacification program had meant the installation of permanently manned police posts within the densely populated favela. Despite substantial investments and global attention, the pacification project had been declared dead only a couple of weeks before our chat in March

2019, and police posts had already been removed from several other favelas that were part of the program. I could not help wondering why my contacts in the favela described the situation as “normal” and what their description said about the aftermath of the Olympic Games.

Rio de Janeiro stands out in the global history of Sports Mega Events (SMEs) as the city that has witnessed the longest series of consecutive SMEs in one decade, leading to a grand finale with the Olympic Games and the Paralympics. The city has hosted: the Pan-American Games in 2007; the Military World Games in 2011; the FIFA Confederations Cup in 2013; the FIFA World Cup in 2014; and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2016. One of the major questions with regard to SMEs in the world, and to Rio de Janeiro in particular, is what these events produce and what are their *legacies*? Efforts to answer this question range from research focused on urban planning and evictions, to economic consequences and tourist movements, to name a few (Castro et al. 2015; Sánchez et al. 2014).

This article aims to contribute to this question by focusing on the security measures that were taken in Rio de Janeiro before, during, and after the Olympics, highlighting the experiences of inhabitants of one favela in the city. Though this article can be read as a contribution to SME legacy literature, it can also be read as an investigation of global urban security interventions that are not necessarily related to SMEs but entail large scale governmental initiatives and investments to regulate urban life. Urban policing models circulate between different cities on different continents and are employed to intervene in the urban configurations of territorial rule (Grassiani and Müller 2019; Hoelscher and Norheim-Martinsen 2014; Müller 2018). The short and long-term effects of these interventions are different and require analysis, not least of all because they are often presented as a panacea to intricately complex problems related to urban precarity.

A portion of the scholarly and journalistic accounts of Rio de Janeiro’s SMEs underline the security measures taken in the period leading up to the Olympics. These accounts include an analysis of the security of the venues and the circulation of people during the events (Gaffney 2015), but this article looks specifically at a policing program that was presented as an intervention to restructure the power relations in favelas near the Olympic sites, affluent neighborhoods, and key-transit areas. In the year 2008, the government of the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, started to install *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora* (Pacification Police Units, UPPs) in favelas near World Cup and Olympic sites and tourist areas (Livingstone 2014). Many of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro are governed by *comandos* – networks of drugs-trading gangs – or by *milícias*, mafia-like organizations that include police officers (Cano and Duarte 2012; Mesquita 2008; Zaluar and Conceição 2007). The majority of favela residents in the urban setting of Rio live under the rules of such in/formal sovereigns (Hansen and Stepputat 2006), which generally resort to violence to enforce their territorial reign (Hirata and Grillo 2017; Machado da Silva 2008).

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Governmental institutions presented the UPP program as an effective means to break the local power of comandos and to regain control of the means of violence in favelas. The UPP intervention scheme was loosely modelled on an urban policing model implemented in Medellín, Colombia (Alves and Evanson 2011; Müller 2018), but in fact built on earlier police programs in Rio de Janeiro. Concretely, the installation of UPPs entailed the placement of police posts within favela territories to exercise permanent policing (Menezes 2015a). At the height of the program, thirty-eight UPP posts were manned, most at sites where the sports competitions would take place and around areas with high real-estate prices, such as the beach neighborhoods on the south side of the city. The UPPs were hotly debated during the SME years as they were recurrently presented as the means to a safer future for favela residents and those in surrounding areas. Nonetheless, the project ended relatively soon after the Olympics. In February 2019, the *Assembleia Legislativa do Rio de Janeiro* formally voted to shut it down.<sup>2</sup>

Much has been written about the pacification police model, about police conduct in the favelas, and about the expectations and evaluations of the UPP program (Alves and Evanson 2011; Fahlberg 2018; Magaloni et al. 2018; Menezes 2015a; Misse 2014; Müller 2018; Musumeci 2017; Rodrigues, Siqueira and Lissovsky 2012). One of the pertinent concerns is/was how the UPP program relates to longstanding efforts to eradicate favelas built on high-priced ground in the city, and one of the pressing questions is/was if the favelas near affluent neighborhoods will/would gentrify as a result of their ‘pacification’ (Gaffney 2016). Questions concerning such gentrification involve the possible disarmament of comando members and the decrease of armed confrontations, which possibly dissolve the socio-political boundaries between the *morros* (favelas) and the *asfalto* (neighborhood) and increase the attractiveness of favela property for investors. Lea Rekow is one of several authors who has written critically about the UPP program in relation to the Brazilian SMEs and favela territory, highlighting that UPPs are integral components of a “neoliberal political framework that is enacting rapid urbanization projects in and around strategically located favelas” (Rekow 2016, 4). One of Rekow’s arguments is that UPPs are part of public-private “strategies of ‘exceptionality urbanism’” (ibid., 23) that enable the recolonization of undervalued assets for future gain, following Harvey’s (2005) description of “accumulation by dispossession” (see also: Gaffney 2015; Freeman 2012).

Though I am sympathetic to the critical interrogations of the urban transformations during the SME years, I am skeptical about the actual effects of the neoliberal strategies described above and I want to preserve some analytic space to analyze the struggle in and over favela territory during the SMEs decade as the outcome of contradictory forces connected to global neoliberalization. Moreover, though I think the public security interventions during the SME years demonstrate well the urban politics at work in Rio de Janeiro, my worry is that we frame them

predominantly in terms of the impact that SMEs had on the city, while losing sight of the dynamics in place before and after the Games.

The ideology and practice to combine permanent police surveillance with favela upgrading programs was already in development before the SMEs arrived (Cavalcanti 2014). The UPP program was preceded by a police program called GPAAE – *Grupamento de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais* (Special Areas Policing Group), which started in 2000. Strikingly, two of Rekow’s three cases that focus on UPP installations had GPAAE police posts before UPPs arrived and the installment of GPAAE posts in these two favelas coincided with the unfolding of the *Favela-Bairro/Bairrinho* (Favela-Neighborhood) urban upgrading program that started in the 1990s (Samper 2016). The Favela-Bairro program envisioned the urbanization of favelas by means of better *saneamento* (sewer system and water supply) and a “democratization of access” to the favelas (Burgos 1998, 49). The GPAAE policing program did not carry the controversial emblem of ‘pacification’ (Müller 2018) and its scope was smaller, but it was also presented as a ground-breaking mode of permanent policing in favelas. It deteriorated not long after it started and it ended without much attention in 2006.

This article discusses the changes and residents’ experiences in Visionário, a favela located near the most affluent neighborhoods of the city. Visionário first had GPAAE police posts and later received UPP police posts. When the UPP forces arrived, inhabitants generally expressed approval and a sense of hope but *also* a lot of skepticism. This was related to their experiences with the GPAAE policing program that had promised similar improvements to the UPP program, yet ended without accomplishing the envisioned transformations. Moreover, during the GPAAE program, inhabitants of the favela experienced a gap between public discourses concerning police presence and the actual presence and performance in their neighborhood. In the beginning, when the GPAAE posts had recently been placed, police officers patrolled the entire favela, but gradually they withdrew and comando members reoccupied strategic positions in the favela. As a result, residents learnt to deal with ongoing territorial shifts in a highly dense urban space and with the liminal presence of police officers. This pattern was largely repeated when UPP officers arrived.

In my analysis, I argue that in terms of neoliberal strategies to accumulate favela territory by dispossession and a new policing apparatus, my case suggests a failure. This does not mean that theories on neoliberalism do not help us to understand urban transformations or that SMEs did not push certain urban interventions tightly related to neoliberalism. However, I take neoliberalism to be a distinct mode of governance under late modern capitalism (Wacquant 2012; Lemke 2001) wrought with internal tensions (Arias and Goldstein 2010; Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010). Neoliberal economic reforms in Brazil reproduce stark inequalities, which turn segments of the Brazilian population highly vulnerable. Rio de Janeiro in particular displays a characteristic spatial distribution of

poverty, armed violence, and commerce. Comandos consider the favelas located on the city's hills as strategic drug-selling points, and they offer young men who born in the favelas a chance to earn money and status by risking their life to defend these territories (Dowdney 2003; Willadino et al. 2018). Moreover, in many cases state functionaries, including police officers, form part of the il/legal networks that attempt to keep the system in place (cf. Arias 2006). Thus, as much as there are neoliberal forces at work that push toward the accumulation of favela territory by means of new forms of policing, there are also other neoliberal forces at work that aim to (re)occupy these territories for other (socio-economic) reasons.

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The recent work of Glück and Low (2017) helps us to understand the shifts in territorial domination of favelas in Visionário in terms of a spatialization of the power struggles taking place both in the favela and at other scales simultaneously. In their work, Glück and Low (2017, 291) argue that: “a sociospatial framework attuned to a scalar analysis allows anthropologists to grapple more directly and substantively with the contradictions, complexities, and power relations at the heart of contemporary security formations.” In this case, such a sociospatial framework helps us to understand the presence of police officers and comando members in Visionário, without categorizing UPP presence as the outcome of global economic forces and comando resistance as a local/municipal phenomenon. It also helps us to understand that GPAE and UPP presence in the favela, first and foremost made life in the favela more complex as residents needed to learn to deal with a fragile balance between the different armed actors in the favela. In concluding, I argue that legacy research is important but we should also be open to see urban transformations in times of SMEs as continuations of particular spatial dynamics that were in place before the SMEs took place.

The material for this article stems from research in a favela where I have been doing ethnographic fieldwork since 2000. This favela, which I call Visionário, is located on the south side of Rio de Janeiro, near the city's beaches. I lived 12 months in Visionário between 2002 and 2003 and I returned to the favela for shorter research intervals in 2009, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2019. The data for this article stems from participant observation in the favela and from conversations with a group of residents whose lives I have accompanied since I first arrived in Visionário. At the core of this group stands a family whose residency in the favela dates back five generations. One of the households of this family was an important entry point for my research about life in the favela in 2000 and remains an important locus of ethnographic research till today. With the help of *Dona* Maria and her two sons and seven daughters, over the years I became acquainted with many people in Visionário. When I started my research in 2000, Maria's oldest child was 30 and her youngest was 15, and during the writing of this article Maria had 13 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren whose friends and acquaintances have also since become important interlocutors. Beyond the family members, their friends, and neighbors, I interviewed pastors and members of several

Pentecostal churches, leaders of the resident association (*associação de moradores*), and various other community leaders.

Besides my research in Visionário, I did exploratory research in a number of favelas with UPP presence in the years preceding the Olympics, including a vast complex of favelas known as *Complexo do Alemão*. After the Olympics, in July 2018, I did interviews with several residents in another favela where a UPP had been installed and in October 2019 when the UPP program had formally ended I held interviews in two additional favelas that had UPPs installed, and in one complex of favelas known as *Complexo da Maré* where a UPP was supposed to come but never did. In all those instances, I chose not to interview police officers since that generally obstructs the building of rapport with residents.

## Visionário

Visionário borders another favela, located on an adjacent hill. According to the municipal registry of favelas in Rio de Janeiro, the first inhabitants of Visionário arrived in the beginning of the twentieth century, and the first settlements of wooden shacks materialized in the 1930s. The favela also borders some of the richest areas of the city and is not far removed from the famous city-beaches that attract tourists and elite urbanites. To outsiders Visionário can seem a labyrinth. Like many other favelas in the south side of Rio de Janeiro it consists of many small alleys and narrow stairs leading to houses built atop each other. A cobblestone road – broad enough for cars and vans – forms the border between the tall residential buildings common to the south side of the city and the favelas. The road eventually leads into the favela with a steep climb.

Since the 1980s, Visionário has been under the influence of criminal organizations who use the favela as a bastion from which to sell marijuana and cocaine to residents and buyers from outside the favela. Outsiders regularly describe members of these organizations as *bandidos* (bandits) or *traficantes* (drug traffickers), while residents often use the term *movimento* (movement) or *comando* (commando). The presence of the comando has had and still has an enormous impact on all the people and organizations in Visionário. As in many other favelas, the comando attempts to maintain a monopoly of violence within the favela and upholds rudimentary “laws” and settles residents’ disputes (Penglase 2009). In the past decades, different police forces have regularly carried out “operations” in the favela, engaging in armed conflict with comando members. Like many other favelas, Visionário has a limited number of gateways that lead from the surrounding neighborhoods into the favela, which effectively makes the favela a stronghold. Due to the maze-like structure and density of the neighborhood, armed confrontations are extremely dangerous for the residents.

As many people have described (Perlman 2010; Robb Larkins 2015; Machado da Silva 2008), favela inhabitants suffer from widespread stigmatization, which is entangled with the unequal distribution of security in the city. The socioeconomic and spatial distinctions between favelas and the surrounding neighborhoods, which can be traced back to the economic exploitation of (formerly) enslaved persons and, later, of migrants from the Northeast of Brazil, are reproduced by means of commonly shared pejorative narratives that picture favelas as centers of organized crime and favela inhabitants as suspects until proven otherwise. Following Judith Butler's (2004) work on precariousness, I described (Oosterbaan 2017) how such descriptions reproduce highly unequal appraisals of state violence, constituting the injuring of favela residents by police officers as lamentable but "acceptable" byproducts of the fight against crime and the killing of supposed criminals as necessary and benevolent acts to restore the social order (Misse et al. 2013). This is not to say that the precarity of favela residents should only or predominantly be analyzed through the lens of security (see also Millar 2014 and 2017), but rather that Brazilian socioeconomic structures, which also profoundly influence the labor conditions of favela residents, are enmeshed with racial distinctions (Roth-Gordon 2017) and with cultures of violence (Goldstein 2003), reproducing stark differentiations in vulnerability within the city.

In the mid-1990s there were several periods of intense armed conflict between different comandos in Visionário, and residents also experienced a number of cases of extraordinary police violence with high death tolls as a consequence. In the beginning of the new millennium, the favela became part of the GPAE program that envisioned the permanent presence of police officers in the favela who would patrol the territory and enforce the disarmament of faction members. This policing program, implemented during the administration of State Governor Anthony Garotinho (1999-2002), was itself a continuation of a smaller policing program called *Mutirão pela Paz* (Collective for Peace) that was developed under the heading of anthropologist Luiz Eduardo Soares (MacDowell Couto 2016). Between 2000 and 2006, the GPAE program was frequently presented as a radical new mode of policing in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, not much unlike the UPP later. The main goal of the GPAE program was to develop permanent, interactive, and preventive policing in favelas (Albernaz, Caruso and Patrício 2007). It was implemented in a smaller number of favelas than the UPP program but at the time received much attention in the press. From 2000 until the formal ending of the GPAE program, the favelas Formiga/Chácara do Céu/Casa Branca, Babilônia/Chapéu Mangueira, Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho, Providência, Gardênia Azul e Rio das Pedras, and Vila Cruzeiro received a GPAE base. According to Oliveira (2014), the GPAE force in Visionário counted approximately 40 GPAE officers. Due to financial and political obstacles and many cases of police misconduct, the GPAE program formally ended in 2006 (Bennet 2010).

The UPP program, which officially started in 2009, was spearheaded by the Secretary of Public Security of the State of Rio de Janeiro, José Mariano Beltrame, and the State Governor Sérgio Cabral. While the program is frequently presented as a coherent and innovative program whose architects had learned from the mistakes of the past (World Bank 2012), in fact the program copied much of the basic ideas of GPAA and it developed in pragmatic fashion (Álvarez 2014; Cano and Ribeiro 2014). Cabral's administration only started to use the term "pacification" after large scale police operations in the favelas *Santa Marta* and *Cidade de Deus* in 2008 and 2009, and the government itself never developed a coherent ideology of what "pacification" was supposed to mean exactly (Álvarez 2014; Rodrigues and Siqueira 2012). Nevertheless, a routine tactic was developed that gave form to the program and meaning to the term. In subsequent steps, authorities would: First, take hold of the favela territory by means of the special operations police force *BOPE* (*Batalhão de Operações Especiais*); Second, consolidate territorial control; Third, establish a UPP base; Fourth, exercise permanent policing in the community (Misse 2014; World Bank 2012).

Though the UPP program was not so different from the GPAA program, the former received much more funding – including private (Gaffney 2015) – and it was implemented in more favelas than the latter. According to Oliveira (2014), the UPP force in *Visionário* counted approximately 200 UPP officers. Nevertheless, the installment of particular UPPs in favelas took place gradually through the years, and in several cases local GPAA bases were transformed into UPP bases. Arrivals of UPP forces were generally characterized by the placement of UPP buildings, containers, and police posts that materially and symbolically marked the permanent presence of UPP officers in the favelas. Inaugurations of local UPPs were regularly accompanied by media campaigns. Photos of UPP buildings and containers frequently appeared in news-media and governmental propaganda as signs of the new type of police presence and security in the city.

## Permanent Police Presence/Absence in *Visionário*

Though on paper it might seem that *Visionário* experienced a relatively smooth transition from one police program (GPAA 2000-2006) to the next (UPP 2009-2019), one should not take the formal years of the two programs at face value. As will become clear, both programs demonstrated similar phases of decay after an efficient start. In specific, during both programs favela territory was gradually carved up into police and comando areas, according to the routes and bases of both parties. Permanent police presence/absence alludes to Goldstein's (2012, 82-85) notion of the "phantom state" – a state that produces its own absence and its own margins (see also Agier 2012). However, I want to add that during the UPP operations, which were supposedly "bringing



the state back into the favelas” (World Bank 2012), police forces were geographically present in Visionário yet quickly became absent in terms of their promised functioning.

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As residents told me, the arrival of GPAE forces in Visionário changed the favela-scape considerably. In 2019, Claudia – Marias’ oldest daughter – remembered the violent period: “Many people died when the GPAE arrived. At one point, the police killed six bandits who were hiding in a house.” After setting up permanent police posts in different areas of the favela police officers started to patrol the area intensively. As I learned from interviews, before their arrival armed comando members sat near strategically located *bocas de fumo* (drug selling points) and would walk in the favela with their firearms in plain sight, but that changed with the arrival of the GPAE officers.

When I first arrived in Visionário in 2000, residents said they experienced the favela as calm but they were very apprehensive about the permanent police presence. One of the first things a befriended resident told me was to never speak with the police officers that occupied the police posts in the favela and he advised me to ignore them completely and to act as if they were not there. Residents shared the fear to be recognized as a possible traitor (X-9) who could tell police officers about comando hideouts in the favela, something that would surely be punished severely (see also Penglase 2009).

During my fieldwork between 2000 and 2003 I lived for one year in the favela and I witnessed the gradual impoverishment of the police program. After the ambitious occupation of the favela territory, police officers gradually gave ground to the comando, leaving particular favela areas to their rule. As a result, inhabitants had to deal with invisible but very palpable frontiers within the favela between areas dominated by GPAE and areas dominated by the faction. Moreover, the division of areas between the groups left the inhabitants with a limbo of governmental dynamics. The question of where to go to in case of a conflict with a neighboring resident, for instance, became more complex. In the past, local comando leaders would settle favela disputes and the arrival of the GPAE force was meant to break with this practice, but residents would rather not bring their case to the GPAE officers and continued to turn to the comando leaders to ask for a verdict (see also: Carvalho 2013; Robb Larkins 2015; Oosterbaan 2017).

Concretely, the permanent police presence in Visionário meant that different armed forces divided small, controlled territories within the favela. Some residents suspected that police officers and the movimento had made a deal to secure the *status quo* so that drug trade and its revenue could continue. This fragile balance meant less fear of confrontations between different comandos, but it did not entirely erase the dangers of shootouts. At times, police officers performed large scale operations in search of suspects and patrolled the favela with fingers on the trigger. One afternoon, during the time I lived in a favela, I returned home to my small house and only seconds after I had closed the door I heard a

salvo of gunshots in the alley leading up to my house. Upon asking what happened, I learned that a GPAE officer caught a glimpse of an armed comando member – they regularly walked through the alley with automatic rifles – and started firing. I remember my shock when I realized I had passed through the alley only seconds before.

The gradual decrease of police patrols went hand in hand with the police abandonment of strategic spots in the favela. When the GPAE forces arrived, they had built a small police surveillance post located alongside one of the favela paths higher up the hill. Residents told me that GPAE officers used this watch-post when the program had just started, but the post was never occupied during and after my fieldwork in 2002. Throughout the day, GPAE officers drove their police cars up and down the main road that cuts through Visionário but they would no longer leave the car, and gradually I saw armed comando members taking up positions at the bocas de fumo near the gateways to the favela.

Before the GPAE program formally ended in 2006, the program had been withering away gradually. While I did not have the chance to do fieldwork in the period in which the program was on its last legs, during my research in the favela in 2009, months before UPP posts were set up in Visionário, I saw and heard about the transformations. All entrances leading from the *asfalto* (surrounding neighborhood) into the favela were now guarded by comando members. An important police post between Visionário and an adjacent favela occupied by GPAE officers had been transformed into a small kiosk. Several residents told me life was okay and Dona Maria's oldest daughter said that nobody had to fear anything as long as one did not interfere with the business of the movimento. Her youngest brother added: "they continue killing each other." Dona Maria, however, was more upset than I had ever seen her before. In November 2008, police officers had killed her nephew – a relatively young man – during an operation in the favela during which they had killed four men. She was filled with grief, particularly because the gunshot wounds had left him unrecognizable. By the end of 2009, Visionário became part of the UPP program and a UPP base was set up in the favela.

During my fieldwork in 2011, I could see and hear how the UPP presence affected the favela and its residents. UPP commanders had forbidden the regular *baile funk* parties (open-air dance party) common to Rio's favelas. According to João, Dona Maria's neighbor, they hardly saw weapons anymore, which made him happy. Later, Ramona, one of Dona Maria's other daughters, told me somewhat cynically that the bandits were also very happy with the UPPs. Now that the police were defending the place, there was no need to invest in weaponry, less people were killed, and all revenue could be kept in their pockets. Strikingly, her analysis mirrored the words of politicians who had criticized the GPAE program a decade earlier, stating that effectively GPAE forces functioned as extra security layers that protected comando business in the favelas of the GPAE program. According to Claudia, UPP did resemble GPAE,

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but fortunately less residents were beaten up by the police than in the GPAE era.

Despite some positive appraisals, residents also expressed skepticism during my research in 2011. When I asked several of my contacts how they felt about the UPP presence, they responded that they were happy but their worry was that the entire UPP program was mounted specifically for the SMEs and that it would cease to exist after the Olympics. Moreover, relations between police officers and residents remained tense at times. Claudia had seen UPP officers using drugs and harassing girls and the president of the *associação de moradores* admitted to me that there were some agitated UPP officers at work. When I asked Claudia what to do when things were stolen from the residents or conflicts amongst residents occurred, her daughter answered one could still go to the boys (*meninos*) of the *comando*. According to her, bringing a case before the UPP officers required one to present a witness and that was commonly very difficult.

When I returned in 2014, a couple of months before the FIFA World Cup in Brazil, the situation seemed settled. People in *Visionário* told me *comando* members were still present but it was calm and I saw no armed boys in the alleys of the favela or at the entrances. Residents mostly talked about the rising real estate prices and high rents. Jorge, one of my old neighbors, expressed his worry that life in the favela would change drastically if everyone started selling their houses to outsiders. Nevertheless, there were still occasional *tirroteios* (shoot-outs/cross-fire), he said.

As far as I was able to reconstruct, things started to change substantively in the Olympic year 2016. During fieldwork in February and March 2016, Angela, who ran a *cooperativa* told me that the *comando* had once again taken control of the favela, despite UPP presence. Later, Jorge corroborated this fact and told me *comando* members had set up a *boca de fumo* inside a building near one of the entrances of the favela. During my walks in the favela, I encountered no police officers, whereas I did encounter an armed *comando* member. Later that year, during the Olympic Games in August, I still did not encounter armed *comando* members at the entrances of the favela, but the atmosphere had changed. According to Dona Maria, the *baile funk* parties occurred regularly now. When I asked her if the *movimento* organized these parties, her granddaughter (a frequent visitor of the *bailes*) answered: “Yes, when they know the UPP is weak.” Later that week, I learned UPP officers had shot two young men in the early morning – one of whom had died immediately. According to Pedro, Maria’s grandson, one of the men was shot in the back while trying to run from the police. When I talked to Jorge, he expressed his fear that *comando* members would expel all outsiders who had bought houses in the years before and he told me rent in the favela had been declining.

In the summer of 2018, two years after the Olympics, the situation in *Visionário* had changed even more. When I entered the favela, I

encountered a group of armed boys, some with machine guns, at the boca de fumo. They seemed agitated. When I reached Maria's house, she told me that, at night, police officers had entered the favela and approached the area of the baile funk at 5 am, which had led to a shoot-out. After the confrontation, during sunrise, police officers began roaming the favela and without a legal warrant had entered Dona Maria's house in search of the boys who were supposedly involved in the armed confrontation. I was stunned as this was precisely the *modus operandi* of the police at a time when there was no UPP (or GPAE) base, when police officers would regularly violate basic civil rights of favela residents, entering houses aggressively in search of comando members. I heard no more talks about foreigners who were hiring or buying houses in the favela and the real estate prices in the surrounding neighborhoods had decreased considerably.<sup>3</sup>

During my last round of fieldwork in October 2019, the UPP program had formally been terminated but UPP officers still operated the base in Visionário. When I arrived to visit Dona Maria, a young comando member stopped me on the way to ask me where I was going, something that had not happened to me for a decade or more. When I asked friends and acquaintances how life in the favela had been between 2018 and 2019, they told me that UPP officers still drove up and down the favela but since a year or more they no longer left their cars to patrol in the favela. As João told me, UPP presence actually led to dangerous situations for the residents. When UPP officers drove by an alley that leads to a boca de fumo, they spotted an armed faction member and without hesitation started shooting. The alley also houses one of the major Pentecostal churches of the favela and one of its church members – an older woman who was sitting in front of the church – was hit when the officers opened fire. Luckily, she was not lethally injured. “She only survived it because it was not her time,” João exclaimed.

João and his wife Nilda added that it had been calm, except for when there had been so called *operações* (police operations). Generally, these operations involve special tactics or special operations police forces of which BOPE is the best known and most feared. According to the “pacification” scheme, BOPE or military forces would often enter favelas first to “pacify” the territory, after which the UPP officers would set up base. However, BOPE officers also perform operations frequently to retaliate when comandos engage with regular police officers of the *Polícia Militar do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* – so called PMs. The last operation in Visionário had taken place when the UPP program was formally still in place. For this operation, the police had used a helicopter, which had scared João and Nilda considerably. When I said goodbye, João said: “Thank God it is calm now. We of the *morro* (hill) know that it can be calm but that can also change in a heartbeat and become dangerous. You have to pay attention always.”

## Permanent Police Presence/Absence in other Favelas

This description of the arrival, presence, and absence of the GPAE and UPP officers mirrors residents' accounts of life in other favelas that were part of the UPP program (Musumeci 2017; World Bank 2012; Burgos et al. 2011; MacDowell Couto 2016; Leite 2014; Menezes 2015b; Rodrigues and Siqueira 2012; Willadino et al. 2018). These works by and large demonstrate the same appraisals: when UPPs arrived, residents were satisfied with the relative calmness and the decrease of armed confrontations, yet many people were apprehensive what would happen in the long run and specifically after the Olympics. Moreover, as Rodrigues and Siqueira (2012) describe, residents of those favelas that had a GPAE presence before the arrival of the UPPs related their expectations to the functioning and decay of the GPAE program.

While the work of Rodrigues and Siqueira (2012), written and published at a moment in which UPPs appeared to be able to fulfill the hopeful expectations that police presence would diminish the occurrence of armed confrontations, Menezes (2015b) describes minutely how in the favelas Santa Marta and Cidade de Deus – two favelas with UPPs – the movimento gradually took control of specific areas in the favelas after 2011–2012. The process that Menezes describes shows many similarities with the changes in Visionário during the GPAE and UPP programs but also reflects the decay of UPP policing in other favelas. When I visited the favela São Carlos after the formal ending of the UPP program in 2019, all the UPP containers were removed and all UPP police officers had left.<sup>4</sup> Yet, when I spoke to one of the inhabitants, she said: “To be honest, I did not experience much difference between the moment the UPP was still there and when they left. In the beginning, when the UPP arrived there was unrest but later the [comando members] returned, even while the UPP was here.”

In another favela that I visited after the formal ending of the program, UPP officers and buildings were still present. When I asked inhabitants what this presence meant, they explained that in reality the officers had stopped patrolling the favela a long time ago. According to them, officers nowadays arrived daily at the UPP building by police car and remained in the building. Some stood guard at a post up the hill until their watch was over. One inhabitant cried out: “They just sit there all day, doing nothing!” And he explained that, over time, faction members had retaken favela spaces and reopened the bocas de fumo, which effectively meant that favelas spaces were largely dominated by armed faction members. Both during the formal years of the UPP program and after, other police forces occasionally executed highly violent operations in the favela. When we interviewed another inhabitant, she recounted an operation during which BOPE officers entered her house when a faction member had sought refuge there. BOPE officers started to torture the

young man in front of her and her children, probing him for information about comando members in the favela. This violent episode occurred at a time when UPP officers were still stationed in the favela, even though the program had formally ended. At the end of the interview, her neighbor, who had joined us, told us he had experienced the same ordeal some years before when the UPP program had still been up and running.

The literature, my fieldwork, and my anecdotal reports and observations confirm that the decay of the UPP project during and after the Olympics meant that many favela territories were split up between UPP officers and comando members, and that residents who witnessed the unfolding of these policing programs in fact had to deal with shifting territorial control of the favela spaces during the process. Moreover, these reports also confirm that residents in several favelas were witnessing similar gaps between the formal ending of the UPP project and the factual continuing presence of UPP posts and officers in their neighborhood, as occurring in Visionário at the time of writing.

## Analysis and Conclusion

In the course of the preparation for and occurrence of the SMEs in Rio de Janeiro in the past decade, scholars, journalists, and residents speculated on the possible outcomes of the governmental interventions on the cityscape. One of the scenarios that was presented concerned the effects of the UPP policing program on socioeconomic life in and around favelas in the southern part of the city. These areas have high real estate prices compared to the rest of the city, and they attract many tourists and elite *flâneurs*. One of the theoretical frameworks employed to analyze the urban interventions builds on the important work of Harvey (2005) who argued that the dominant neoliberal mode of governing supports accumulation by dispossession (cf. Rekow 2016; Gaffney 2015; Freeman 2012). In this framework, the UPP program is portrayed as an extension of public-private interests to open up favela spaces for the flow and accumulation of capital. Whereas I am not doubting that such forces are at work, this is not the only kind of entanglement between capital and governmental technology at work in the city.

The work of urban geographers, anthropologists, and sociologists who study Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian cities suggests that we should be mindful not to map juridical dichotomies onto the cityscape. Descriptions that tend to equate favela spaces with informality/illegality and the urban spaces surrounding them with formality/legality miss the fact that the formal and informal are entangled with one another (Misse 2006). Research on the city suggests that goods and capital flow between formal and informal markets and that these flows are regulated by hybrid (il/legal) constellations of political actors that frequently rely on the use of violence (Arias 2006; Grillo 2013; Feltran 2020; Misse

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2019). Concretely, a substantial number of police officers in Rio de Janeiro were and are involved in criminal activity and structurally extort comando members in the city to receive a share of the profit of the drugs trade (Gay 2009; Misse 2018). In favelas where the comandos have been expelled, *milícias* – made up of (ex) police officers – have taken over the areas and have introduced illegal “taxation” of commerce, transport, gas, and cable television (Cano and Duarte 2012; Zaluar and Conceição 2007).

As Arias (2010) has argued, the growth and influence of the cocaine trade in and through Latin America is itself the product of neoliberal reforms that have made involvement in the cocaine trade one of the few viable options to secure a livelihood, even in the face of global criminalization and penalization of the urban poor, which has exacerbated the individual risks for those confined to the margins (Corva 2008). Moreover, the violence involved is tightly entangled with the production and illicit distribution of guns (Gay 2010), which belong to a different but related market that also promises high financial gain. The point is that neoliberal globalization is not confined to legal trade and markets (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Galemba 2008; Nordstrom 2007) but involves translocal networks in which the legal and the illegal are entangled in complex ways (Telles 2010; Feltran 2019). Not for nothing, Misse (2018) has proposed the term “political merchandise” for goods that circulate in the interstices of the legal and the illegal in Rio de Janeiro. In simplified terms, these goods are what allow criminal organizations to continue their business. They are political in the sense that they involve exchanges with public agents and economic in the sense that they involve a “calculation of power and the correlation of forces” (Misse 2018, 143).

Rather than singling out the UPPs as exponents of neoliberal strategies it is in my opinion better to analyze the struggles over favela territory that involved UPP officers, regular PM officers, comando members, and BOPE agents as instances of the internal contradictions of neoliberal strategies to accumulate capital. To make it concrete: as much as the installment of the GPAE and UPP posts might have been part of the schemes to appropriate favela territory for real estate developers, comando efforts to retake favela areas are entangled with transnational narco-markets and il/legal governmental constellations. Moreover, as the corruption cases exemplify, GPAE and UPP officers themselves regularly became part of these il/legal constellations.

Glück and Low (2017) have proposed a theoretical framework that helps to analyze how the (in)security in Visionário is reproduced without categorizing comando presence as a local phenomenon that is “blocking the development of a *robust* economy that is not related to the drugs-trade” (emphasis and translation mine; Gaffney 2015, 149) and UPP presence as the outcome of national and global economic forces that push toward such a robust economy. According to Glück and Low (2017, 289):

Struggles  
over favela  
territory that  
involved UPP  
officers, reg-  
ular PM offi-  
cers, comando  
members, and  
BOPE agents  
were instances  
of the internal  
contradictions  
of neoliberal  
strategies

[T]he urban scale is always inextricably linked to national and global scales of security, capital, and governance and, as such, offers an important analytical entry point for understanding the multi-scalar manifestations of security- power relations, militarization, neoliberalism, and strategies of mobility/immobility.

The socio-spatial framework that Glück and Low propose allows us to see that struggles over favela territory in Visionário are enmeshed with different socioeconomic forces at different scales, intermediated by governmental actors. Whereas my observations and interviews cannot describe in detail how the armed actors involved (UPP and GPAE officers and comando members) are tied to socioeconomic networks because I did not interview or follow local comando members or police officers, it is clear that the territorial struggles within the favela are related to different networks of power that are all under the influence of neoliberal globalization, be it in different and sometimes opposing ways.

My descriptions of the arrival and demise of the two policing programs (GPAE and UPP) suggest that SMEs might have given a (big) boost to the entrepreneurial-governmental nexus that pushes toward dispossession by means of “pacification,” this nexus itself had been in formation before the SMEs were awarded to Rio de Janeiro (Cavalcanti 2014). Favela upgrading programs that envisioned the integration between bairros and favelas had been in operation since the early 1990s. More importantly, the case study of Visionário, a favela located at one of the most lucrative real estate spots in Rio de Janeiro shows that this particular strategy for accumulation was not very successful.

How then can I answer the question of what my contacts meant when they replied: “All is normal...a gunshot at times, but it passes”? By no means do I want to suggest that nothing has changed in Rio de Janeiro in twenty years. The growth and expansion of milícias has altered the political domain in the city substantially and Visionário residents at times have voiced their concern that a milícia would take control of the morro. Nevertheless, so far, comando members and UPP officers are still armed and present in the morro. Based on my interviews and observations, I suggest that many Visionário residents have learned to deal with the fragmented territories and routes within the favela over the past twenty years. During these two decades, the comando had retreated but never entirely left. At times, residents were hopeful that the favela would remain calm and peaceful permanently, but no one forgot to be vigilant and pay attention to the signs of imminent danger.

*The case study of Visionário shows that this particular strategy for accumulation was not very successful*

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Visionário is not the real name of the favela. I have altered the name of the favela so as to minimize the possibility to identify and trace the people that feature in the article. I use the term favela interchangeably with *morro* (hill). Following the detailed description of Perlman (2010), the word favela has negative connotations but all the alternatives suggested (in English and Portuguese) pose similar if not more problems and, in many cases, fail to conjure the typical urban, material, and political characteristics of the neighborhoods. My interlocutors often used the term *morro* but did not object to the use of the term favela when used in a respectful manner. They also regularly used the term *comunidade* (community), but such terminology also has its drawbacks (see Birman 2008).

<sup>2</sup> <https://revisitaescuta.wordpress.com/2017/06/22/sobre-o-fim-das-upps/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.secovirio.com.br/noticias/crise-upps-e-queda-preco-de-imoveis/>

<sup>4</sup> See the article: “PM desativa base da UPP São Carlos, no Centro do Rio”. <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2018/08/28/pm-desative-base-da-upp-sao-carlos-no-centro-do-rio.ghtml/>

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