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**PACIFICATION AS PERMANENT CONFLICT
CONTESTING VISUAL POLICE PRACTICES IN RIO DE
JANEIRO**

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PACIFICATION AS PERMANENT CONFLICT**Contesting Visual Police Practices in Rio de Janeiro**

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ABSTRACT

In urban pacification in Rio de Janeiro visibility of the state's armed forces is as decisive as it is a contested issue. This visibility is here studied as a three-fold alignment of seeing (control), being-seen (accountability) and visual discourse. I assume that pacification in Rio de Janeiro is less a teleological process (leading to peace) but should rather be understood as a laboratory. In this laboratory, and on the stage of international attention (the visual discourse), policing strategies of seeing and being seen (the monitoring of police's controlling) are constantly tested. This paper particularly focuses on a smart policing project in Rio de Janeiro which currently tests body-worn cameras in a pacified favela. At the same time, there are several grass-roots initiatives that have gone ahead and begun to monitor police abuse of force and thus contested the very idea of the state's exclusive right to monitor police-civic interaction. The paper argues that visual methodologies can have an empowering effect in turning political agency to urban residents even in those areas that are, by visual discourse, framed as "precarious" (Butler 2009: 2) such as Rio's favelas. In order to empower, and contest this precarity, social movement actors must point to the structural forces that make these images possible, that is, frame a counter narrative against state violence and its postcolonial historical rootedness.

KEYWORDS: Visibility, Rio de Janeiro, pacification, conflict

PACIFICATION AS PERMANENT CONFLICT: CONTESTING VISUAL POLICE PRACTICES IN RIO DE JANEIRO

Introduction

On March 3, 1991, Rodney King became a victim of police violence. An amateur video documenting four policemen's exaggerated use of force served in the trial against the four one year later. Fuelled by the acquittal of all four, the video sparked daylong confrontations between the Afro-American community and the police in Los Angeles. It evidenced the intrinsic relation of racial inequality and state violence. The images that documented the treatment of Michael Brown over 20 years later provoked public unrest and protests in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, and beyond. Photos and video footage have become a social weapon for social movements actors to monitor police work. They can create awareness of police' abuse of force and empower groups that suffer from structural violence. At the same time, body-worn cameras of the police can support the adequateness of the use of force when documenting the policemen/women's need to defense him/herself in a specific situation.

What can social movement actors do with the images they record when witnessing police violence? If the witnessed incident shall not only be transmitted to a social media platform, images can be used as evidence in justice trials. What is problematic though, seems a structural problem of social inequality, or, in the words of Judith Butler, of the marginalized intensified "precarity":

"Precarity also characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized precariousness for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence who often have no other option than to appeal to the very state from which they need protection." (2009: 26)

In her essay collection "Frames of War", Butler presents a deconstructive reading of how images of war and war-like situations, like the one I'll draw from as a case in this paper, reiterate the precarity of marginalized populations, particularly as an articulation of structural inequality. What interests me here is, when do such images of war produce dissent? Which are the conditions by which we can frame these images to incentivize political and ethical opposition to precarity? When do images spark social mobilization against the structural violence of the state? When do images serve as evidence of the legitimacy of police acting?

Following Butler, I propose that the answer should be searched for in the social act of "framing" the images in times of their digital reproducibility. Analyzing such framing includes a tracing back of the purposes that guide the production and circulation of images that allows political empowerment. My interest lies in understanding images, and their socio-political framing, as media for empowerment, by asking (again with Butler), "what would it take not only to apprehend the precarious character of lives lost in war, but to have that apprehension coincide with an ethical and political opposition to the losses war entails?" (2009: 13)

As the case of the video showing Rodney King beaten up by the police suggests, images cannot be understood as power-neutral data (if this exists at all), nor do images allow for only one reading. The video served the jury, which was in its majority white and without a person of color, to reinforce the stigma of a potentially dangerous black male. It was thus conducive to their decision to vote in favor of the policemen's acquittal.¹

¹ Judith Butler gives a deconstructive reading of how the video became an evidence for Rodney King's danger (even when it showed him laying on the ground, bleeding and without a weapon), and of how this reading by the jury made

This paper proposes a visual methodology to “read” images of urban warfare and policing in historical framing. In order to analyze images in a power-sensitive way, we must consider the socio-historic space in which they are produced, who benefits from their use and which are the objectives of them being used. Therefore, I propose to study “policing’s new visibility” (Goldsmith, 2010) from a discursive and deconstructive perspective on precarity and media’s portrayal of armed conflict in Rio de Janeiro.

The first section discusses to the reemergence of counterinsurgency in urban pacification. The second section turns to pacification in Rio de Janeiro as a contested visual field. The visual discourse of urban warfare frames the favelas that underwent an occupation by the Brazilian military as warzones in which the targeting of the population as potentially dangerous and in need for a humanitarian intervention is legitimized. On this stage, the third section looks at the role that policing’s visibility has in urban pacification. Seeing (police control) and being seen (monitoring the police to cater to its accountability) are contested issues: Several grassroots initiatives are promoting apps and websites to document the abuse of force by the police. The question which this paper attempts to answer in the conclusion is whether this visual framing of war and pacification as a contested field contributes to a normalization of violence (reinforcing the status quo of police violence as characteristic of state-society interaction in precarious spaces) or effectively empowers agency.

The Reemergence of Counterinsurgency

The marginalized areas of Latin American metropolises (favelas in Brazil) can be understood as war zones that undergo a process of pacification. A rough definition of pacification understands it through,

1. that process that attempts to destabilize the conditions of contention while stabilizing those that leave no space for other authorities than the state;
2. those measures that make residents more likely to adhere to state’s forces (police and military).

Pacification, from a historical perspective, has been central to colonial, imperial projects of fighting insurgents in different parts of the globe, predominantly the South (el Machat 2014; Neocleous 2011). Pacification is central to a „new COIN-Era” (Ucko 2009) which is predominantly characterized by population-oriented approaches to urban warfare, becoming the new paradigm of western strategies of counterinsurgency in the context of pacification (Kienscherf 2015: 348). COIN, in this new paradigm is less oriented at killing the enemy and more at protecting the population from adverse, usually criminal subjects. COIN, therefore, has also been described as „armed social work“ in the context of US war waging in Iraq and Afghanistan (Kilcullen 2010: 43).

The dominant COIN approach has been defined by the US Army in three (not necessarily consecutive) steps, as “clear, hold, build”, aiming at, firstly, establishing a physically and psychologically safe environment, with the state, secondly, providing a stable control of a defined territory and population, which, thirdly, aims at winning “hearts and minds” of the population (Petraeus 2006). The population’s support is measurable by its participation in social programs by the host nation (FM 3-24a: 5-51).

visible the racist structure of the court and society more generally. She explains such reading in historical terms as she posits its function in the trial in a “racially saturated field of visibility” (1993: 15).

Counterinsurgency in the context of an urbanization-pacification nexus has its historical foundation in the colonial roots of the idea and strategy of pacification as permanent conflict. In contrast to regular warfare between two or more nation states' armies, insurgency refers to the unconventional use of force of oppressed groups against a political power whose rule is seen as illegitimate. Such definition of conflict has been historicized since the French Revolution (Fremont-Barnes 2015: 6ff.). In revolutionary conflicts of decolonization, along the centuries, counterinsurgency has been an important research issue (Popkin 2011) and reemerged in postcolonial conflicts, predominantly in rural areas (Galula 1964). The asymmetry of the opposed forces, in terms of strategies, capabilities and aims, and the multiple interdependencies of involved actors make the improvement of intelligence, and thus the receiving of detailed information from and on the population, the most important task in a successful COIN. The key question is "How to turn the key, how to win the support" by the population, and Galula continues, "this is where frustrations usually begin, as anyone can testify who, in a humble or in an exalted position, has been involved in a revolutionary war on the wrong—i.e., the arduous—side." (1964: xi). The success of counterinsurgency strongly depends on fighting the right opponent at the right moment, while avoiding collateral damage that may destabilize the loyalty (or at least neutrality) of the population under the counterinsurgent's protection.

Due to their socio-material and –political density, "megacities" provide complex battlefields. Although there is no consistent body of literature, and a lot less a common definition of what COIN actually refers to (Rich and Duyvesteyn 2012: 2) (military) academic debates continue to apply and reframe classic approaches to COIN for actual conflicts especially in urban terrain (Gventer et al. 2014, Tucker 2013, Kilcullen 2012). Here, classic guerrilla or insurgents, militias and criminal gangs act simultaneously and, despite their supposedly differing objectives, constitute the "object" upon which urban COIN is enacted. For what constitutes a similarity of these "enemies" and thus characterizes modern approaches to counterinsurgency, their primary objective is not to take over power, but rather to secure the condition for illicit and thus economic activities (Burgoyne 2011, Bertetto 2012, Glenn 2015, Dewar 1992). In the density of urban social environments, especially in those areas where state's legal authority is and has long been absent, heterogeneous actors profit from kinship and loyalty, providing a certain stability and even financial and infrastructural services. COIN thus, if it were to proliferate to pacification, depends on the population's support for the counterinsurgent initiative. Knowledge on the human terrain, increasingly provided by "embedded social scientists" (Vine 2007, McFate and Lawrence 2015) is thus "key" to population's confidentiality (Glenn 2016: 5).

It makes no wonder thus, that COIN is often coterminous with community policing (Zambri 2014). The intensification of social bonds with the "pacified" population aims at driving off support to criminal gangs and leaders from the population. The experience of Brazil's urban military police in fighting criminal gangs, dates back to the initial years of the formation of urban police forces in the 19th century in the context of disciplining and repressing slaves. Urban policing, from the beginning, was founded on a repressive racial structure (Holloway 1993). Extensive use of force was widely regarded as being justified in order to protect order and the elite's accumulation of landed property (Pereira 2000: 220-222). As Pinheiro shows, the urban police forces have ever since been acting with a high degree of institutionalized impunity whenever the use of force led to personal damage against Afro-descendant populations in Brazil's metropolises, injuries or death (Pinheiro 2000: 126). The Brazilian military not only imported strategies from colonial counterinsurgencies in Indochina and the French "pacification" campaign of Algeria (Nabuco de Araujo 2010), but also reinvented these strategies: Counterinsurgency

converted the military police into a violent and racist institution that survived the transition to democracy. In this survival lies the key to understand the strategy of Brazil's armed forces in the international community of peacekeepers. This "learning" from armed confrontations in the domestic realm provided the Brazilian military and police forces with "an important comparative advantage over Northern troops without such experience" (Kenkel 2010: 653).

Pacification in Rio de Janeiro as a Visual Field

Let's turn to today's Rio de Janeiro. There are, first, intense similarities between Rio de Janeiro's pacification strategy, including the approach to community policing as developed by the Pacification Police Program, and ongoing counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan (Muggah and Souza Mulli, 2014: 62; Harig, 2015), there is, second, a transnational exchange of policing practices between domestic pacification and foreign missions, first and foremost in Port-au-Prince, in the context of MINUSTAH. The reiteration of imageries of successful pacification missions (at home or abroad) of Brazil's armed forces is thus part of Brazil's geopolitical strategy to prove their extraordinary capacities.

Since 2008, 40 favelas have been occupied by Pacifying Police Units (UPP) that pertain to the military police. In some areas, like the "Complexo do Alemão" and the "Complexo da Maré" these installations are preceded by military invasions of the areas (yet in the latter case of the Maré UPPs were never installed). Here, from April 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015 in total 23500 troops of the infantry, the marine and the air force (3,000 troops, being exchanged every 2 months) patrolled in the „Operação São Francisco“. This area has been under control by three different fractions of drug cartels which are heavily armed and in some areas provide their form of security and social and infrastructural services. Besides the patrolling, the troops constructed strongholds at strategically relevant points (entrances) to the area, where around 123,000 residents live. On June 30, 2015 the soldiers were replaced by a regular police force of around 400 men and women (O Dia 30. 6. 2015).

Both the Alemão (2010/2011) and the Maré missions applied the legal framework of the *Garantia de Lei e Orden* (GLO), the reestablishing of rule of law. This is a classic COIN-like three-fold strategy of demobilizing adverse actors, establishing a durable presence of state's armed forces and providing humanitarian aid (from education, to health), practices, legitimized partly by a visual discourse that reiterates a historical inequality.

Foregoing to a more stabile presence of the state by the military police, these interventions, and the imagery that depicted it, can be read as taking part in framing the population's and territory's precarity. The application of Butler's methodological perspective allows to question the framing of images of war as acts of structural power and the state as being declined to reiterate colonial inequalities (2009: 1ff.).

The visual field of a fragile territory in need of pacification is constituted by the circulation of images. War imagery dominates the way the public eye gets to see these spaces, as spaces of destruction, misery, loss of life. The images that circulate "educate" our ways of seeing, they are part of the very precarity they claim to depict.

"The senses are the first target of war. Similarly, the implicit or explicit framing of a population as a war target is the initial action of destruction. It is not just preparation for a destruction to come, but the initiating sequence of the process of destruction." (2009: xvi)

The circulation of images constitutes a visual field and reiterates the representation of those "fragile" (Muggah 2014) or "feral cities" (Norton 2003) of the Global South. They

participate in the normalization of a social reality of precarious order in those “ungovernable spaces” (Shunk 2008). A critical perspective to this debate could argue that they should be studied as spaces from where the idea of the state as neutral authority of imagery, due to its deeply involvement in the production of violence, must be rethought.

To open the circulation of images as a privileged space to bolster the formation of new political subjects I propose the following: To read the images starting from the frame, which I call a deconstructive reading of imagery. The task is, in the words of Butler: “to show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible, recognizable [...]”

This methodology is based on the assumptions that the frame divides, separates an ongoing social reality from a representative act, the image-making, yet without ever fully accomplishing a separation. Reading an image from its frame – towards the inside (content of the image) and towards the outside (reflecting on ourselves being immersed into a social reality) – means to distrust the very



representative power of the image and to assume that “something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things.”

This photo was circulated in the daily newspaper O Globo on the day of the military occupation of the Maré, on April 1, 2014. It shows a scene from the occupation of Nova Holanda, favela in Rio, an act to demonstrate the attempt to regain territorial power.

It normalizes the military’s presence as a controlled taking-over of the area, thereby attempting to reiterate the assumption of these spaces as being lost in violence due to the state’s absence. The three civilians seem to be hardly affected by the soldier and the tank in their back. The picture suggests the civilians’ general trust in the military and, framed in media reports on the promise to chase out criminals and establish peace in these communities, presents state’s armed forces as a reliable source of neutral force. Yet, from a



historical perspective, this latest intervention only seems to reiterate a form of state presence as characterized above, a colonial form of militarized policing.

In place of a regular police force which, on an egalitarian basis, would provide the conditions for a life conforming to the law, the state’s presence is heroic, war-like and portraying a situation of exception. In this regard, the Brazilian military

intelligence circulates images like this, showing the heroic posture of a sniper. He stands in front of psalm written on a wall, somewhere in the Maré. The sniper targets his possible victim from a distance, while being physically hidden, and supported not only by a wall, but, as the picture’s semiotic suggests, by his religious linkage. His acting gains transcendental validity: The Psalm 46 written behind him speaks of the army’s of god who fight the pagan in a just war.

Here lies the critical potential for a deconstructive reading in the age of digital reproducibility of imagery. In order to construct an intended visual field, images must be transmitted and placed in different media in order to reach, to educate, the specter. In counterinsurgency, in consequence, they must convince the population of the legitimacy of the applied violence, and the presence of the armed forces. To deconstruct the image means, in Butler's terms, to show how "the frame brakes with itself" which means that "a taken-for-granted reality is called into question, exposing the orchestrating designs of the authority who sought to control the frame." (Butler 2009: 12). A critical reading of this image must point to the way it narrates the connection of the soldier as fulfilling a righteous mission in the name of god by enforcing god's power against crime and moral decay. And it is this postcolonial form of "othering" (Spivak 1985) that gives continuity to

the current pacification program in the conquest of savage territory.



This image was also taken by the Brazilian army in the context of the occupation of Nova Holanda and circulated via the army's own journal "Operacional". It depicts, what literature on urban pacification calls the second step of urban counterinsurgency (Field Manual 3.24, Kienscherf 2015, Müller and Müller 2016) the "hold approach":

After first entering with a massive military compound a delimited area that is ruled by several, fragmented armed non-state actors (gangs) this step establishes a routinely military presence by regular patrols, in order to provide security for the "friendly" part of the population and to get its support and confidence.

We can question behind the frame – while the military seems to have taken control of the situation, their presence in the area, limited to 18 months, leading to xxx residents shot and effectively missing the primary aim, some have argued that the occupation primarily served the army to test and to refine their practices of urban warfare which, in the context of the Brazilian military's increasing role and presence in international peacekeeping missions (MINUSTAH in Haiti, MONUSCO in Congo, UNIFIL in Libanon) serves as prove to their specific capacity to take leading role in the community of urban peacekeepers, as it is also confirmed by a high-ranked military who served both in Port-au-Prince and the occupation of the Alemão, Major Herbert Lemos:

"The Alemão is like a small Haiti. In both missions we entered into a territory which initially was highly conflagrant. When I commanded in the Alemão, I, and most of my men, already had made the experience in Haiti which helped them in tense confrontations." (Interview May 19, 2016).



In short, this framing of pacification takes part in reiterating these spaces as being in extraordinary need for state intervention – as if they weren't suffering from state violence or illegitimate approaches against citizens ever since. While this picture was circulated via the right-wing daily newspaper

"O Globo" as showing the effective taking over of power by the police and from drug

traffickers, we can also brake from this frame and read it as showing life in a state of intensified “precariousness”, the quasi-naked body of a suspect as a signifier for the young male as being constantly exposed to existential threats.

What interests me in the remainder of this paper, though, is the politically motivated framing of the precarious other in times of increasing availability of technical devices and in particular, the use and circulation of digitalized images in civic-military interaction. Why do images of military and police intervention provoke support rather than resistance against the reiteration of extraordinariness, precarity and state violence?

Policing’s Visibility

The images presented so far reiterate the precarity of these areas by educating our senses: They suggest a normality that frames these spaces as being immersed in permanent violent conflict in which the state – instead of being the source of violence – seems to come as its solution.

On the stage of this visual field on which the military takes over police tasks and provides the conditions for the police to establish strongholds, that is, UPPs, the police lack confidence and are not accepted by large portions of the population. The installation of UPPs, besides lowering the chance of violent confrontations between police and gangs with collateral damage to the population, also envision the pacification of the police.²

Gaining confidence is essential for a successful pacification: As long as favela residents do not trust police officers they are less inclined to offer cooperation, including giving information to the police about suspects and violent criminals in the community, the assumption holds.

Filming and monitoring police work has become a contested means in reforming police work in this sense (Newell 2015). To the end of increasing police’ credibility, and effectively reduce police’ abuse of force, body-worn cameras, which grab the sight of police during routinely police-civic interaction, and apps, which transmit these pictures to a commanding officer, are in use in the US and will be in the UK by the end of this year. Several, highly mediatized events have fueled the discussion worldwide (Maatescu, 2015). In tense situation of constantly reported cases of police violence and these killings and torture have been “tipping points” (Moser 2012) to social unrest. Police violence can be a spark to uprisings in tense urban environments, body-worn cameras shall produce a visual layer to prevent police officers from exaggerating use of force or, in case of accusation, i.e. by a citizen, to serve as evidence to prove the adequateness of the officer’s acting.

However, the very question of how the “convergence of word and picture produce[s] evidence” (Butler 2013: 15) complicates the easy equation of visibility and accountability. While watching the police watching neighborhoods may increase police accountability it is questionable in how far policing’s visibility reproduces the conditions of precarity or can be turned into a medium in which the more general police-civic relation is discussed.

Highly counter-productive to the attempt of creating more confidential ties with the population was the beating to death of Douglas Rafael da Silva Pereira by members of the “Pacifying Police Units” in the favela Pavão-Pavãozinho in Rio’s Southern Zone on April 22, 2014. The body found dead sparked protests in the streets of Copacabana which themselves led to two more residents being killed by police bullets.

² Brazil’s police, as it is widely known and often stated, is the world’s most violent, having killed 11,000 people of the 50,000 victims of violence in Brazil between 2009 and 2013.

On this background, a group of social scientists from Stanford Universities has started a test project in Rocinha and provided 350 policemen and –women with body-worn cameras (compared to the 50,000 police´ officers staffed with cameras in the US as reaction to the mediatized cases of police brutality still relatively little). In a press release the scientists conclude: „The introduction of miniature cameras to tape interactions between UPP officers and Rocinha residents could be a step in the right direction to constrain police misbehavior and build trust among the community.“³

As said, part of the UPP program is to “pacify” police itself and thereby to promote the police as a more legitimate power than criminal gangs. In order to augment legitimacy, the “smart policing” program is tested (Willis et al. 2013, Bruce 2015). Police visibility seems promising as “[p]eople often far removed from particular settings could be made aware of policing activities and thus be able to enter into a moral assessment of those actions” (Goldsmith 2010: 914). At the same time, social movements that make use of a more widespread accessibility to cameras and broadband internet to monitor police arbitrariness in marginalized areas produce what I call a counter-visibility. I argue that smart urbanism as a globally competed label does rather provide a laboratory for an internationally exportable, and medially representable, securitization strategy. In this laboratory, the production of images and the creation of narratives, that is, policing’s visibility, are a contested, competed tool.

Visibility then becomes a matter and a medium of agency. In my understanding of agency, it means to speak and act consciously in regard of the own social position, its limitations and of the possibilities to name and destabilize structures of inequality. Employing a counter narrative to the dominant forces that centralize visibility forms a central part of empowering agency through technology.

Policing’s visibility – the circulation of images of the police – changes as cities become “smart”. The “smart city” is no longer only “data-informed”, but “data-driven” (Kitchin 2014b). While the first provides information on what people and physical environment do, where and when – the classic approach using statistic and geo-referenced data – the latter foresees cities becoming cost-effective, sustainable entities with improved resilience to crisis, incentivizing citizens to participation in all dimensions of urban steering. As a consequence, some argue, Smart Cities are the privileged locus for political empowerment, as technology gives the power to the people to govern themselves on the basis of a “datafication of everyday life” and the information that they themselves provide (Chandler 2015: 4). More critical voices object that there is then a tendency to replace politics by a management of technology, handing over the evaluation of interactions among citizens and state institutions to private corporation (Datta 2015). To place technology center stage does not only de-politicize urbanization, i.e. social and class struggles (Greenfield 2013), but also implies the danger of “expertization” of knowledge production capabilities: Critiques emphasize that expertization draws decisive steps of decision making regarding the protection of cities from crime and terrorism from public authorities and into the hands of public-private corporations and their particular knowledge (Google, Microsoft, IBM, Cisco).

³ <http://cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu/research/randomized-control-evaluation-use-body-worn-cameras>

In collaboration with the Brazil based Think Tank Igarapé, Google Ideas and a South-African partner, some police units are testing a mobile-phone run app to increase the



accountability of state actors. Confidence forms an essential column of counter-insurgent doctrine, as it is assumed, by military strategists that pacification can prevail only with the willingness of inhabitants to support police instead of perceiving them as alien from the own community.⁴ Visibility shall increase credibility in police work. Independence of state security actors can be doubted. It is a matter of who is in charge of processing the images and turn to evaluate the behavior of



the police. As Badran, project responsible at the IGARAPE stated, the recorded images and audio files are transferred to the commanding police officer for evaluation. In equivocal cases, however, police and neighborhood leaders conjointly analyze the data (Interview May 2, 2016). While with this app the Military Police employs a narrative of confronting arbitrariness, fostering accountability, and transparency of police work, it is questionable, in how far the filming respects inhabitants' privacy. It rather participates in the further stigmatization of territories and inhabitants as possibly dangerous and suspicious. Moreover, access to the recorded data and the production of knowledge related to crime in form of statistics and narratives remains centralized in the hands of the police. The images are sent to the

Command and Control Center, and the commanding officer of the local UPP of Santa Marta does not get to see the images, not to speak of the residents.

In this situation groups like Papo Reto and Midia Ninja found ways to create counter-visibility to the usually non-reported acts of police arbitrariness.⁵ The collective *Forum de Juventude* has programmed an Android and IOS-App, called Nós-por-Nós⁶ that facilitates, via the geo-referenced mapping of photos, video and audio, a live publication of whatever is to be recorded on internet-based social media platforms.

The app works on the platform "Inventor", provided by the Massachusetts Institute for Technology. It is open source (appinventor.mit.edu/). A user, predominantly youth in favelas, reports an incident of (military) police aggression. Via the app, a report is sent to appnosporunos@gmail.com. The photos and videos are encrypted for privacy reasons. The collective's voluntaries check the complaint, get back to local intermediaries and relate to similar News in commercial media. All this done, the collective sends out a report on the incident to the supporting network consisting of Human Rights Organizations, the Public

⁴ Ironically, the private think tank's cooperative partner in the military police and heading the UPP in Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro, Vanessa Coimbra was involved in the case of Amarildo. Amarildo, an inhabitant of the Rocinha disappeared during police raids in the community in July 2013. He was tortured to death. Coimbra was accused of being culpable by omission, but finally absolved from guilt in February 2016. While this may be a singular story it nevertheless makes it clear that technology is not per-se a contribution to more accountability

⁵ <http://rioonwatch.org.br/?p=13547>

⁶ <http://www.psafe.com/blog/nos-por-nos-app-criado-contr-violencia-policia-e-arma-para-denuncias/>

Prosecutor's Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro and to public defenders to support the petitioners in formally filing a complaint.

The idea was born when the collective *Forum de Juventudes* invited to a workshop in 14



favelas, creating a social cartography on cases of violence and abuse by police and military. The participants brought photos and stories to document these cases. In order to confront this ongoing and everyday violence the idea came up to provide a tool of documentation. Among the 70 reported cases since the start of the app on March 21, 2016, the most reported ones were abuse of force, invasion of private space by the

police, torture and physical aggression.

The app has received quite broad media attention, in community media and commercial media as well as initiated dialogue between academics, NGOs and other (media) collectives in Rio de Janeiro. This way the app allows for creating more consciousness on the social inequalities in the favelas. In their view, the militarization of favelas in the Olympic City Rio de Janeiro intensifies a racial, that is structural exclusion (Interview with Fransérgio Goulart, 11.5.2016). The frontlines of struggle are clearly stated in the app's slogan: "Report police violence! The black, poor and marginalized youth wants to live."

The inhabitants of the favelas are thereby directly involved into the production of knowledge regarding militarization and racial exclusion. The app does not only allow for recording what happened where and when with whom involved, but is also an empowering tool for those populations that suffer from repressive treatment by state representatives, both police and military, in marginalized territories of Rio de Janeiro. As the application also offers very specific information on citizen's rights and on workshops for learning about rights and technology and informs about local events and relevant incidents, it creates moments of agency.

A quite similar app, "Defezap" was launched at the same time, about 2 months ago. Anyone can download the app from a platform, install it on the mobile phone, and when witnessing an incident, grab video and audio and submit, together with a written report, to the webpage of "Meu Rio", an NGO that runs the app. GPS data is also submitted. The group also contains of lawyers, the information is evaluated and information from other sources is added, if applicable, used to initiate a trial.

Despite its short life in virtual space, the app has already been used to report on 300 cases of police abuse in Rio's favelas, mainly in the Alemão. For instance, this video (click on the image below) was recorded by a resident of a favela in Rio's north. The police "arrested" this person after a shooting between a gang and the police. The policeman is holding the gun to perform as if the man was still alive. According to the police report they brought the person to the hospital providing first aid. Yet, contrary to the police narration, the man was not medically attended nor brought to a hospital, but already dead when laid on the truck, as can be seen in this video. This suggests that the police effectively altered the crime scene and covered the tracks.

The media-activists of *Meu Rio* submitted the video to a public attorney, who opened the case against the police for its failure to render assistance. Moreover, the case made it clear that the police, in this case the civil police, did not act accordingly to the norms of conduct.

Recognizing the body as dead would have obliged the police to close off the crime scene and call for a technical police team to safe evidence of the occurrence. That they did not speaks of the precarity of this area, considered as exceptionally drawn in war: Fearing the possibly violent reaction and the continuous shooting, the police left the Maré as fast as they could. The video, in turn, depicts not only the police' arbitrary operation, but also brings to the fore where affected communities' agency starts:

“We collect information on these incidents with two objectives, first, to bring cases of police abuse of force to court. But beyond this individualizing search for justice, we are more interested in collecting evidence that allows us to contest the structural conditions of state violence.” (Guilherme Braga, Meu Rio, Interview, May 24, 2016)

Frames of Pacification: Reinforcing violence or promoting empowerment?

Coming back to the interest presented initially. Under which conditions can this visual framing of war and pacification as a contested field contribute to effectively empower agency, rather than to a normalization of violence (reinforcing the status quo of police violence as characteristic of state-society interaction in precarious spaces)?

This question concerns the critical task of breaking with the frame instead of reiterating and reinforcing the structures of violence. A power-critical visual methodology needs to frame the images in a historicizing narrative and thus has to show the deep rootedness of police violence, and visual discourse that stages urban peripheries as potentially dangerous and violent.

The alignment of three layers of visibility (seeing, being seen and visual discourse) is not detached from the materiality of urban warfare (“pacification”). On the contrary, the very production of images partakes in the reiteration of precarity. To the extent that the military frames and circulates an imagery of an exceptional space in need for military-humanitarian intervention, it also frames the conditions under which residents can perform a political subjectivity. Framing an area like the Alemão or the Maré as war spaces reiterates the precarity which has characterized these spaces as illegal (lacking formal recognition in urban planning) and suffering from a repressive police force.

Yet it is precisely here, where agency and mediatized forms of empowerment can break with this historical continuity of framing. A visual methodology that opposes to the reproduction of frames of war (and “pacification”) can be a critical intervention, by asking:

- * Who has access to (the evaluation of) images?
- * Under which circumstances an image becomes a legitimate source of knowledge, and/or evidence in trials?
- * How can images of urban warfare be related to narratives that counter territorial stigmatization and racialized violence?

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