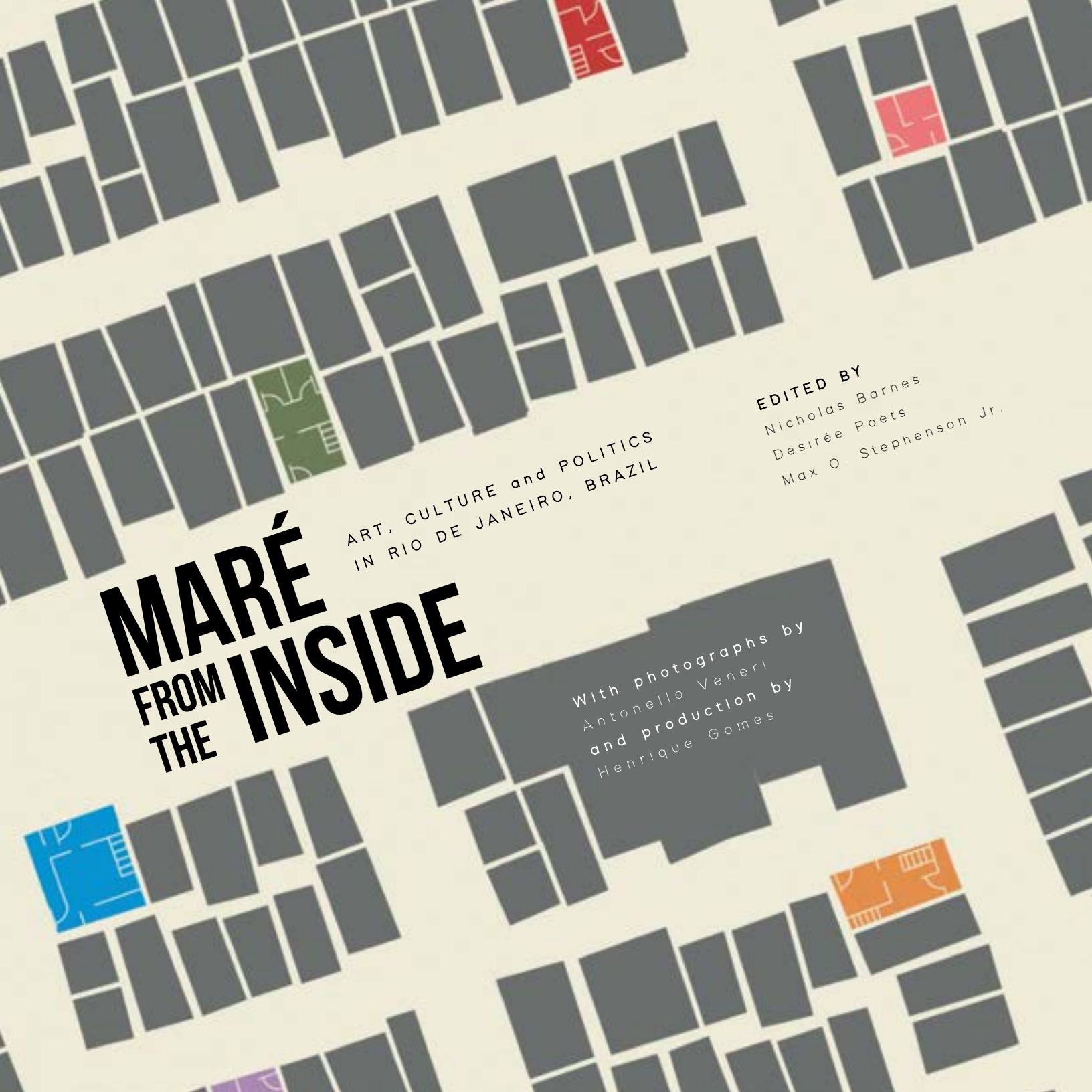

MARÉ FROM THE INSIDE

ART, CULTURE and POLITICS IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

EDITED BY
Nicholas Barnes
Desirée Poets
Max O. Stephenson Jr.

With photographs by
Antonello Veneri
and production by
Henrique Gomes

Complexo da Maré is a group of 16 contiguous favelas and housing projects in the northern zone of Rio de Janeiro. Home to an estimated 140,000 individuals, Maré is Brazil's largest agglomeration of favelas. Often depicted in a negative light, these favelas are in fact vibrant and diverse communities, as revealed in this remarkable book.

Maré from the Inside: Art, Culture and Politics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil is a companion to the exhibition of the same name (Portuguese: *Maré de Dentro*), which was developed by an international team of Brazilian and US academics, activists and artists. The exhibition documents the lives of residents of Complexo da Maré through family portraits, street photographs, documentary films and written works.

Featured in this book is a selection of the exhibition's photographs by Italian photojournalist Antonello Veneri, who worked closely with Maré resident and activist Henrique Gomes over the period from 2013 to 2019, during which Rio was home to the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games. These photographs, simultaneously personal and deeply humane, counter long-standing and powerful stigmatizing narratives, demonstrating instead the diversity and resilience of these communities and exposing the barriers residents confront in their everyday lives.

Providing context to the photographs are essays by the exhibition's creators, curators and collaborators, including Maré resident and scholar Andreza Jorge, who asks what it is about the *Maré de Dentro* exhibition that has made it so compelling for so many people from very different parts of the world. The answer lies in the power of art to make us rethink prevailing social frames and, in turn, embrace fresh political and cultural strategies for integrating previously marginalized communities more fully into political and social life.

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For the Residents of Maré

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FIGURES

All figures except for the historic photographs (11-17) are published under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license. All maps (figs. 7-10) were created using ArcGIS® software by Esri. (For more information about Esri software, please visit www.esri.com.)

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INTRODUCTION
THE MAKING OF *MARÉ FROM THE INSIDE*

NICHOLAS BARNES AND PETER KLEIN

Maré from the Inside is an interactive visual and textual exhibit developed through a collaboration among Brazilian and U.S.-based artists, activists and academics. It focuses on the lives of residents in Complexo da Maré, a group of 16 contiguous favelas and housing projects in the Northern Zone of Rio de Janeiro. Situated just a short distance from Rio's international airport and at the confluence of the city's three major highways—Avenida Brasil, the Red Line and the Yellow Line—Maré is Brazil's largest agglomeration of favelas with an estimated population of 140,000 individuals. The community encompasses less than 2 square miles, making it one of the most densely populated places in all of the Americas. It is home to various Afro-descendant populations, migrants from Brazil's impoverished Northeast region and numerous religious and ethnic groups, as well as immigrants from more than 15 countries.

Maré is a vibrant and diverse set of neighborhoods that evidence a variety of forms of cultural and artistic production as well as powerful social movements. The Complexo and its various neighborhoods have also played an important role in the politics of Brazil, gaining international recognition as the birthplace of Marielle Franco, a beloved Rio city councilwoman tragically assassinated in March of 2018. Maré and its residents have also long been ignored by the City's social and political institutions and, thus, much of life in the community is marked by poverty and a lack of infrastructure and social services. Maré has also been subject to repressive policing practices since the community's formation in the early 20th century. This systemic marginalization and discrimination is not inherent to its residents. Rather, Maré is defined by the dynamism, resilience, and permanence of its population.

Why Maré from the Inside?

Maré from the Inside provides views into favela residents' lives that have rarely been captured previously. Its images challenge long-standing and powerful stigmatizing narratives, demonstrating instead the diversity and creativity of these communities and exposing the barriers residents confront in their everyday lives. In the end, the Exhibit profiled in these pages suggests the need for a rethinking of prevailing social frames and for a fresh set of political and cultural strategies capable of breaking the cycles of exclusion and marginalization experienced by favela communities in Brazilian social and political life.

The collective character of *Maré from the Inside* reflects an ongoing effort among those involved to develop more horizontal relations between favela communities in Rio and academic institutions and communities in the Global North. Ultimately, we view such projects as necessary to decolonize and democratize Northern academic institutions.

Who are Maré from the Inside's Creators?

Artists. Researchers. Scholars. Activists. Teachers. Organizers. Journalists. *Maré from the Inside* arose from a series of personal and professional relationships among people with very different identities, backgrounds and perspectives. Henrique Gomes and Andreza Jorge are lifelong residents of Maré. They are both Black activists, have worked for several nonprofit organizations, and are deeply committed to improving conditions in their community. Stephanie Savell, Nicholas Barnes, and Peter Klein are researchers based in the United States and Scotland who study security, local governance, and urban inequality in Brazil. The relationships among Gomes, Jorge, and these researchers began in 2008 with informal conversations between Jorge and Savell.

In 2012, Savell and Barnes were Ph.D. students engaged in long-term fieldwork in Maré and surrounding favelas. Gomes, a cultural producer, provided each with invaluable local knowledge and guidance for conducting ethical, safe, and culturally sensitive research in Maré. As the relationships among these individuals deepened, the character of Savell and Barnes' research projects evolved. The pair became more critical of existing inquiries concerning favelas and each sought to engage and incorporate Maré's residents more fully into their work. Ultimately, the research the three individuals carried out together and the friendship they developed during this period provided the foundation from which *Maré from the Inside* emerged.

Gomes has since supported dozens of researchers and journalists as they sought to conduct studies in Maré. Not only has his assistance improved their work, but he has, in most cases, been crucial in making their projects possible. Antonello Veneri was one such person with whom Gomes has collaborated. Veneri is an Italian photojournalist who has lived and worked in Brazil since 2011. Veneri was engaged in a long-term photography project in 2013 when he partnered with Gomes. Their initial idea was to take family portraits of Maré residents "inside" their homes to show a side of favela life rarely captured for external audiences and also to revive a tradition of portraiture that many of Maré's residents brought with them as migrants from the Northeast of Brazil. During the course of two years, Gomes and Veneri worked with more than 30 families to create intimate and accurate portraits that present their subjects in a respectful and non-fetishized way while also capturing Maré's remarkable diversity.

Most of the family portraits were taken during a particularly turbulent period in the community's history. Beginning in April 2014, just before the start of the World Cup, as outlined in chapter 2, Maré was occupied by 2,500 soldiers as part of a public security program called "Pacification" designed to retake control of Rio's militia and drug gang-dominated favelas. Barnes was conducting ethnographic research in Maré during this period and was able to participate in the photography project as Veneri and Gomes worked with families across Maré. By traveling to every corner of the Complexo, the artists simultaneously documented daily life on the streets, the reality of occupation and the stresses placed on community relations and identities during this significant and difficult period. The juxtaposition of the two sets of photographs—from inside and outside the homes of Maré's residents—offer complementary perspectives from which to view favela life and identity.

During the same period, Gomes also worked with Nadia Sussman, an American video journalist based in Brazil from 2013 to 2017. Sussman and Gomes, along with several other local artists, produced three short documentary films featured in the Exhibit: *Occupation*,[1] *Girl's Life*,[2] and *Headbanging in the House of God*.[3] Like their photographic counterparts, these films depict daily life on the streets of Maré and wrestle with questions related to race, religion, and violence. Finally, the Exhibit includes essays by Jorge, Savell, and Barnes.

How has this Collaborative Project Evolved?

The idea for *Maré from the Inside* came to life after much of the research comprising it was complete, the photographs taken, and the videos produced. The team raised funds to print a selection of the photographs professionally (see fig. 1) so they could be exhibited. To date, the opening or closing of *Maré from the Inside* at each hosting institution has been accompanied by a series of events featuring both the U.S. and Brazilian-based collaborators. The team adopted this approach with great success at Bard College, Brown University, and Grinnell College.

The first public sharing of the Exhibit opened to the public on January 31, 2019 at Bard College's Bertelsmann Campus Center (see fig. 2). Several hundred students were able to interact with the collaborators when they visited Bard for a series of public presentations, panels, and workshops at the end of February, 2019 (see fig. 3). *Maré from the Inside* then moved to Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, where the team once again had the opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives with hundreds of Brown students and staff as well as members of the larger Providence community (see fig. 4). The most recent public showing of *Maré from the Inside* occurred at Grinnell College's Burling Library from November of 2019 to February of 2020 (see fig. 5). At all three institutions, the collaborators spoke to classes on Latin American politics and history, urban planning and development,

Figure 1. Photograph production at *iolabs* in Providence, RI, 2019 (Emma Sampson pictured).

Figure 2. *Maré from the Inside* Exhibit on display at Bertelsmann Campus Center, Bard College, 2019.

Figure 3. ***Maré from the Inside*** **panel at Bertelsmann Campus Center, Bard College, 2019. Pictured (from left) are Klein, Gomes, Jorge, Veneri and Savell.**

Figure 5. ***Maré from the Inside*** **exhibit on display at Burling Library, Grinnell College, 2020.**

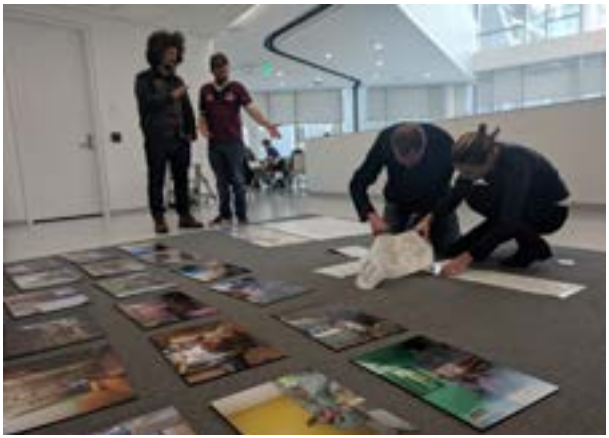

Figure 4. ***Maré from the Inside*** **collaborators set up the exhibit at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University, 2019. Pictured (from left) are Gomes, Veneri, Carl Smith and Sarah Baldwin.**

Figure 6. ***Maré from the Inside*** **collaborators (Gomes and Jorge) recording the "Trustees Without Borders" podcast at the VTIPG Community Change Collaborative Virginia Tech, 2020.**

colonialism, race and the arts, as well as to students interested in public security and informal economies. The group also ate meals with students, met with faculty, and attended other events on each campus.

Savell, Barnes, and Klein shared some of the insights from their research at events, but primarily served as interpreters for Jorge and Gomes. The group used consecutive interpretation, which meant that Gomes and Jorge spoke a few sentences in Portuguese before pausing to allow another member of the team to translate their thoughts into English. This approach proved effective. Audience members not only heard the perceptions and thoughts of lifelong Maré residents, but also gained a better sense of the speakers' emotions and intentions. Those attending these events also had an opportunity to reflect on powerful statements, such as when Gomes remarked, "I have been in the United States for 21 days and that means it has been 21 days without hearing gunshots," or when Jorge stated, "It is important to recognize that this project is not just about giving voice to communities, because everyone has a voice. This project is an opportunity to listen. We must open spaces and pathways for favela residents to be truly heard."

That same year, Gomes and Jorge visited Virginia Tech, where they were part of several well-attended gatherings, a podcast interview, and a roundtable on "Placing Appalachia and Rio de Janeiro in Dialogue: Arts, Public Health, and Community Organizing" (see fig. 6). This visit took place at the invitation of Desirée Poets, who had met Gomes while conducting fieldwork in Maré the year before, and with the support and collaboration of Max Stephenson Jr. and the Institute for Policy and Governance's Community Change Collaborative. The group decided to bring the Exhibit to Virginia Tech and so, its next stop will be Virginia Tech's Newman Library, which, responding to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, will not only mount *Maré from the Inside* physically, but also share it in a virtual format. The present volume arose from these latest efforts. Its development illustrates how, as the Exhibit has traveled to new locations, it has assumed new forms, deepened and expanded the links that initially formed it, and connected Maré to new places and populations.

In the end, *Maré from the Inside* shares its story in a different way than most Americans are used to experiencing. Each component of the project—its photographs, films, texts, related events, and now, this book—disrupts expected ways of sharing knowledge, particularly in the academy. This effort showcases the voices of those who have always been speaking and writing, as subjects of their own stories and histories, but who are typically

the subjects of study, at best, and often the target of disdain and discrimination, at worst.

How is the Book Organized?

This book is divided into two sections. The first addresses the evolution of Complexo da Maré to contextualize *Maré from the Inside*. Barnes traces the historical trajectory of Rio de Janeiro's favelas and Complexo da Maré in chapter 1 by describing their origins and development. Chapter 2, by Barnes and Savell, describes the highly repressive and increasingly militarized policing practices the Brazilian government has employed in its efforts to contain and eradicate these communities and the various criminal groups that operate within them. Gomes details the process by which he and Veneri worked with several dozen families to produce the Exhibits' portraits in chapter 3.

The second section of the volume explores the meaning making processes embedded in this collaborative project. chapter 4, authored by Jorge and Poets, examines four family portraits and analyzes how they challenge hegemonic discourses of gender, sexuality, race, class, family, and affection. In chapter 5, Molly Todd reflects on several conversations she had with Jorge, who was also photographed for the Exhibit, to highlight the universal themes revealed by the lived experience of a Maré resident. Such themes, she shows, challenge stereotypical and Othering representations of favela communities and their residents. Max Stephenson Jr. then considers what the Exhibit conveys concerning the daily lived realities of Maré residents and what those portend for their capacities to challenge and promote change in the dominant and oppressive social imaginary they confront in chapter 6. The book concludes with Max Stephenson Jr. highlighting the vibrancy and ongoing efforts of Maré residents to address the Othering and oppression with which they live to create purpose-filled lives.

Why is the Book in English and Portuguese?

We have chosen to present companion English and Portuguese texts because doing so reflects our collaborative process in this project which, we hope, speaks not only to U.S. audiences, but also to Brazilian ones. All translations are our own, but we stress that neither of the volumes is the "original text" and the other the "translation." Some chapters were written first in English, some in Portuguese, and others simultaneously in both languages. When translating, we followed a "fidelity to the reader" approach, adapting the original text whenever necessary to ensure its intelligibility. We also understand the process of translation as not simply transforming text into another language, but also as a political

act that requires us constantly to reevaluate our assumptions concerning social relations, ideologies, and power. The Exhibit and this book were made possible by the distinct—albeit shifting—institutional, professional, socio-economic, geographical, linguistic, and cultural locations of the collaborators, as described above. We hope the present volume both reflects and adequately conveys that layered reality.