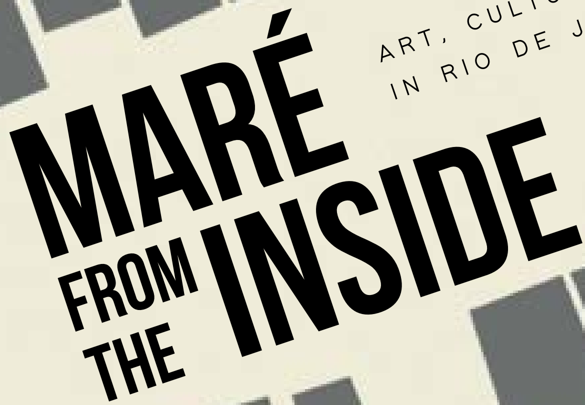

MARÉ FROM THE INSIDE

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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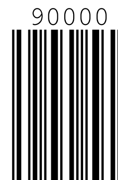

Maré from the Inside

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Art, Culture and Politics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Edited by
Nicholas Barnes, Desirée Poets and Max
O. Stephenson Jr., Eds.

With photographs by Antonello Veneri
and production by Henrique Gomes

Virginia Tech Institute for Policy
and Governance in association with

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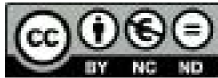

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For the Residents of Maré

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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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CHAPTER 2
POLICING RIO DE JANEIRO AND COMPLEXO DA MARÉ

NICHOLAS BARNES AND STEPHANIE SAVELL

The Brazilian government has targeted Rio de Janeiro's favelas with repression and violence since their formation. Over the years, the city's public security apparatus has destroyed hundreds of such communities and employed increasingly militarized policing tactics to control and contain their residents. This chapter traces the evolution of those practices to illuminate some of the extraordinary challenges that Maré and other favela residents face in their everyday lives.

Police Repression in Rio de Janeiro

Rio de Janeiro's police regularly extort, harass, imprison, and kill favela residents, who have little recourse to protect themselves from such abusive and corrupt behavior. This has been true since before the first favelas sprang up on the city's steep hillsides. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, Brazil developed police institutions to protect social elites while repressing Black, poor, and immigrant populations, including the persecution of the Black working-class tradition of *capoeira* (dance-like martial arts fighting) and practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions.[1] At the beginning of the twentieth century, Rio's police targeted urban Black and poor individuals as threats to the "moral, hygienic, and civilizational order" of the city.[2] During Brazil's military dictatorship (1964-1985), this trend intensified as the regime sought to remove favelas and their inhabitants from the city's landscape. From 1968 to 1975 alone, the city of Rio demolished 70 favelas, displacing more than 100,000 residents.[3]

Rio's war on drugs has provided the most recent rationale for repression of Black and working-class residents.[4] Illicit groups formed in most of the city's favelas before the end of the dictatorship; they robbed banks,

orchestrated kidnappings and trafficked in illegal drugs. The draconian regime and a deep economic recession that began in the early 1980s dramatically expanded those illegal groups.[5] At the same time, cocaine arrived on the scene, linking these entities to international markets of drugs and heavy weapons, which they acquired to protect their activities.[6] Gradually, as members of these groups were incarcerated, they became integrated into one of the emerging prison-based networks or "factions"—the Red Command (*Comando Vermelho*), the Third Command (*Terceiro Comando*) and, later, Friends of Friends (*Amigos dos Amigos*). These factions, born out of the terrible conditions in Rio's prisons,[7] expanded their power by taking control of numerous favelas, placing residents at the epicenter of a literal and symbolic war between the three factions as well as with state forces.

The militarization of policing in Rio has only intensified since Brazil's re-democratization in the mid-1980s. When police enter trafficker-controlled favelas, they behave like soldiers in enemy territory, seeking to capture or, more often, kill drug dealers, conducting raids on houses, and using armored vehicles and aircraft to support their efforts. Favela residents live in constant fear of the police and the gun battles in which they engage with faction members that all too often kill bystanders, including children.[8]

Notably, police largely ignore the violent and illegal behavior of militias, another set of favela-based armed groups mostly composed of retired and off-duty police and firefighters. Although militias are also violent and profit from extorting businesses and monopolizing illegal transportation, television, internet, and local property markets, Rio police have, for the most part, maintained collaborative and mutually beneficial relationships with them.[9] Today, militias control more favelas than all three drug factions combined.[10]

In 2009, the Rio state government launched an ambitious and controversial policing program, "Pacification," to reestablish state dominance in trafficker-controlled favelas. Couched in discourses of democratic police reform, Police Pacification Units (UPPs) were part of an effort to "clean up" favela neighborhoods in advance of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games. In the first stage of Pacification, police and federal soldiers conducted massive assaults on faction-controlled territories. They then occupied the neighborhoods, engaging in weeks or months of sweeps to find any remaining drugs, weapons and armed group members. This effort was supposed to be followed by the installation of permanent community policing units, UPPs, staffed by newly hired police trained in human rights protocols, to protect and engage favela residents through social programs.

In the early years of pacification, violence across the city dropped sharply, leading many Rio residents to hope that the program might meet its official goals. Yet as the number of UPPs expanded, the Rio police abandoned or never fully implemented rights-based community policing. In 2013, UPP police tortured and executed Amarildo de Souza, a bricklayer in the favela of Rocinha. This shocking event and a subsequent cover-up attempt, sparked massive protests throughout Rio and revealed that the UPP's were continuing to engage in abuse with impunity. Public confidence in Pacification quickly deteriorated following this episode. Then, following the conclusion of the 2016 Olympics, Rio teetered on the edge of bankruptcy and required massive federal bailouts to pay its employees, including police. The Rio government all but abandoned the UPP program thereafter.

The city has since experienced a fresh wave of violence in the last several years. In 2018, Rio police killed 1,534 citizens (a record), only to surpass that number in 2019 by killing 1,814 residents.[11] By comparison, in the entire United States, police killed 992 citizens in 2018 and 999 in 2019.[12] Mounting evidence suggests that local police extra-judicially execute many young Black men they suspect of being drug traffickers, acting on the basis of a virulent racism.[13] Brazil's current president, Jair Bolsonaro, sworn in at the beginning of 2019, along with Rio's governor, Wilson Witzel, have each argued that "criminals" do not deserve the same rights as other citizens and have encouraged even more violent and repressive policing practices in favelas.[14] As a result, police killings have continued to escalate.

Policing Maré

From its earliest days, Maré's relationship to Rio de Janeiro's police and the nation's military has been fraught. As we noted above, the area's first settlers faced almost continuous threats of removal and were regularly harassed and extorted by elements of both of these entities.[15] From the 1940s to the 1960s, some soldiers from an adjacent military base illegally charged residents of *Morro do Timbau* a fee for living in the area and destroyed any homes that were constructed without their approval.[16] Police also had nearly complete discretion concerning the continued existence of these communities. Indeed, local police units engaged in periodic removals of local residents from the 1950s to 1980s (see fig. 17), even razing several entire communities in and around Maré, including Praia de Inhaúma, Maria Angu, Moreninha, and Favela Avenida Brasil.[17] After their homes were demolished or burned, many families fled to surrounding areas to rebuild.

As we highlighted above, repressive police behavior increased markedly during

Figure 17. Residents pose in front of their homes. In the foreground, notice the remnants of another house, demolished by police. Baixa do Sapateiro, Complexo da Maré, 1981.

Brazil's military dictatorship. The regime implemented Institutional Act number 5 in 1968, which suspended some civil and political rights, including *habeas corpus*. Thereafter, police posts located in several areas of Maré began to engage in ever more arbitrary and indiscriminate violence against favela populations. Residents recall many young men being arrested, imprisoned, and in some cases tortured, for supposed "vagrancy" or unemployment. As Eliana Sousa Silva, a local NGO director and community leader has recalled:

> Back then, I saw a lot of young men—even young women—being imprisoned and, sometimes, beaten. There were so many screams and swear words that at times they didn't let us sleep. I

> didn't understand, at that time, why they were imprisoned, why they were arrested, and why there was so much misunderstanding and disrespect between the police and the residents.[18]

Like many other favelas across the city, Maré's first drug trafficking and criminal groups formed during the dictatorship. Initially, they were small bands of young men engaged in marijuana sales or armed robbery. With the arrival of cocaine in the 1980s, however, they expanded their organizations and activities, recruiting new members, purchasing more weapons, and competing with one another for control of Maré's valuable turf. In the 1980s and 1990s, Maré's traffickers engaged in frequent shootouts in and amongst homes and businesses as they consolidated their control in those neighborhoods. Eventually, the more successful local groups were incorporated into the Red and Third Command factions. One of Maré's local groups would later shift their allegiance to the third faction, Friends of Friends, in the early 2000s. Finally, a militia took control of the Roquete Pinto and Praia de Ramos neighborhoods in the mid-2000s. Competition among these groups continues to foment local violence to this day.

While Maré's criminal groups are a danger to residents, many of the community's citizens are ambivalent about their presence and role in favela life. Even as they engage in violence and deal in illegal goods, the factions and the militia support local businesses, settle disputes among residents, and implement a relatively stable, if coercive, form of social order by punishing theft, interpersonal violence, and other criminal acts. While most residents disapprove of these groups' violent and illegal activities, they have limited options to resist their presence. Traffickers and militia members alike threaten retribution against residents who report their activities. At the same time, and for obvious reasons, community members have little faith in Rio's violent and corrupt police force.

Maré is a notable example of the militarization of Rio's police that has occurred since the transition to democracy. In the 1990s, police began using armored vehicles to conduct anti-trafficking operations during which they would sometimes engage in violent gun battles with members of the factions, threatening the lives of residents. In 2003, the state installed the 22nd Police Battalion in Nova Holanda, which could rapidly deploy into Maré's other neighborhoods. The Battalion's presence, however, did little to quell the violence among the factions or reduce their power or authority. Then, in 2011, a special forces battalion, BOPE (akin to a Special Weapons and Tactics team, SWAT, in the United States) moved its headquarters to an abandoned military base just outside Maré. For the next several years, BOPE engaged in

Figure 18. Residents and soldiers watching a Brazil World Cup game during military occupation. Nova Holanda, Complexo da Maré, 2014.

frequent operations throughout Maré. In one such effort in June 2013, police confronted a group of traffickers in a brief shootout that resulted in the death of a sergeant. BOPE responded by invading and occupying several of Maré's neighborhoods for the next 24 hours. Police went from house to house searching for faction members, shouting threats from the streets, and eventually killed nine residents, some of whom had little or no connection with drug trafficking.[19] Local NGOs, social movements, and hundreds of Maré residents protested these killings by stopping traffic on Avenida Brasil and demanding accountability. Despite such public outcry, the government did not change its policing practice, nor did it impose any penalties for the abuses that had been committed.

Figure 19. A soldier hides behind a car during a military operation. Parque Rubens Vaz, Complexo da Maré, 2014.

Military Occupation

Complexo da Maré was slated to be the last area of the city "pacified," but the state government never formally implemented community policing or installed a UPP there. Instead, then Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff authorized the occupation of Maré by 2,500 Brazilian military troops from April 2014 to July 2015.[20] Following months of intensive raids intended to weaken Maré's factions, the military stormed the community at dawn on April 5, 2014. The short film, *Occupation*, part of the *Maré from the Inside* exhibit, documents life in Maré on the eve of the military's arrival. It questions the unspoken assumption of favelas as inherently violent spaces that require the Brazilian military's presence. One of the film's most poignant moments occurs during a samba show, when the DJ remarks:

Figure 20. Military patrol at dawn on one of Maré's main thoroughfares. Nova Holanda, Complexo da Maré, 2014.

> We are here to show that Maré is not only what they show on the TV. They only show drugs and violence, man. They only show strange things. This place has so many good things and yet that is all they show. We are here to show the good things. ...We are here to show our culture, our art.[21]

The military installed numerous checkpoints at which soldiers stopped and searched residents, especially young Black men. For the duration of the ensuing 16-month occupation, troops conducted 24-hour mobile patrols in which trucks and jeeps monitored the major thoroughfares while soldiers on foot pursued suspicious individuals down Maré's labyrinth of alleyways and narrow side streets (see figs. 18, 19). At night, the military replaced trucks and jeeps with tanks (see fig. 20). While the homicide rate decreased during occupation, due to fewer violent confrontations between the factions and with police, residents nevertheless accused the military of committing a range of abuses.

Troops unlawfully invaded homes and verbally and physically assaulted residents.[22] Soldiers also shot and killed several residents (see fig. 21) who had no known involvement with illegal groups.[23]

Meanwhile, the military engaged in a “hearts and minds” campaign to gain the support of Maré's residents in their efforts to uproot the factions. They allowed municipal workers and construction teams access to Maré for infrastructure upgrading, they organized worship services with local congregations and taught classes addressing maternal health, painting, music, and Jiu-jitsu. Troops offered job training and skills workshops, gave presentations on hygiene and health at local schools, and even organized music concerts. Despite these efforts, by the end of the occupation, less than 25% of 1,000 residents surveyed by Redes da Maré, a local NGO, said the military had behaved well while occupying the community.[24] According to one community leader at a public meeting:

> The “Pacification” of Maré was a lie and an abstract term that doesn't reflect the reality. ... They [the military] haven't implemented more responsive institutions and although they have sought out civil society to develop relationships, this is more in theory and serves as a subterfuge for them to control the space. (Author field notes from November 5, 2014)

When the last of the soldiers left on July 31, 2015, Maré's various armed groups immediately re-established control of the community's streets. They have continued to occupy Maré's neighborhoods, as they had prior to the military's campaign. And municipal police, too, have returned to their violent operations and tactics. Indeed, in the last few years, Rio police have resorted to shooting into the community from helicopters, killing dozens, including innocent bystanders. Between 2016 and 2019, Rio police engaged in 129 operations that directly led to the deaths of 90 residents.[25] The violent status quo that has now persisted for several decades is a continuing source of frustration and trauma for Maré's residents. By focusing on citizens' lives and experiences and not the violence or

Figure 21. Spent shell casings discharged by soldiers and collected by a resident. Parque Rubens Vaz, Complexo da Maré, 2014.

crime that occurs around them, *Maré from the Inside* challenges the dominant and sensational narratives regarding policing and crime in Rio de Janeiro. It also offers a deeper appreciation of how residents have managed to survive amid these difficult circumstances.