Living without war? Local powers and gender relations in everyday popular life[1]

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we analyse the effects that the war promoted by the State against the Drug Traffic produces in terms of gender in the daily life of families inhabiting the peripheries of Rio de Janeiro. By emphasizing the narratives of women, we argue that the gender relations are 'made' at the same time as they make the war making. By accompanying situations involving physical and moral abuse, threats and murders faced by women, we argue how crime, territory and violence are embedded in family and neighbourhood relations. The temporality of war, already lasting forty years, is read as a past woven in the intimacy of the relations and as a present always updated in the experiences of gender relations framed by the constant war.

KEYWORDS
State, drug trafficking, family, gender relations, mistreatment, deaths, war on drugs.

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INTRODUCTION

Sueli, Cristina and Mariana, determined women with a long history in various urban peripheries, today, as they have now for some years, live in a vila popular, a cluster of low-income houses, in the city of Rio de Janeiro. This text is based on the histories that they told us and on the many everyday situations, 'moments'[2] and 'critical events' (Das 1995, 2007, Han 2012) in which we participated with the residents of this small community (Fernandes 2013, Birman, Fernandes & Pierobon 2014, Birman 2015; Pierobon 2018).

Quotidian violence forms part of an experience shared by inhabitants of the city's favelas and peripheries; a subject comprehensively studied by the social sciences. Our intention here is to follow the paths opened by research specifically focused on gender relations in war situations and the effects on everyday life and modalities of action, especially those of women.[3] We discuss various situations involving threats, physical aggression and deaths faced by these women during the period when the Vila where they lived – an abandoned factory site converted into houses – was under the sway of drug traffickers and threats of eviction. Listening to women over the years in which we accompanied daily life inside this Vila consolidated the approach developed by us in this text, namely, the production of gender relations as a correlate of the production of war.[4]

Whether experienced through the mass media or in person, the routinization of war in Rio de Janeiro forces its residents to cope daily with situations in which men – 'criminals' versus 'criminals' or 'police' versus 'criminals' – exchange gunfire, throw bombs, machine gun streets and houses, and cause death continuously. Presented as ideal types, they embody a never abandoned dualism between Good and Evil, city and periphery, State and Society, and what we call here the Great Divide.[5] In citing the regimes of power and the use of force employed to control peripheral territories, as well as the economic and political circuits involved in this deadly war, we primarily wish to analyse how gender relations participate in the gendering of war and the possible and acceptable constructions of women in this long process of devastation.[6]

MEMORIES AND RELATIONS

In 2010, around 30 families won a court case giving them the legal right to remain in the barracão or 'warehouse' (referring to the abandoned factory site) where they resided, going against the tide of removals and evictions increasingly taking place in the local area.[7] At that moment, the 'State' appeared as the 'adversary' to be defeated by residents in order for them to obtain land regularization: this adversary included the city council and state government responsible for planning the removals, the judge heading the trial, and the Caixa Econômica Federal, the government-owned

1 | For reading the article and their valuable comments, we thank Márcia Pereira Leite, members of the research group "Disturbance: dispositifs, urban plots, orders and resistances," members of the workgroup coordinated by Gabriel Feltran, members of CEBRAP's International Postdoctoral Program, and, finally, the reviewers of the text. Our thanks also for the support received from CNPq, from FAPERJ as part of the project "Managing poverty and its genders: public policies, entanglements and appropriations in Rio de Janeiro," and from FAPESP (process 2018/15928-2) via the project "Interstices: between the male violence of the state, drug traffickers and the family, a woman's body."

2 | Terms in italics are those used frequently by our interlocutors or specific remarks by people with whom we maintained contact during our research. Terms in quote marks are citations from official documents, problematizations, or quotations from texts and concepts, the latter accompanied by a bibliographic reference.

3 | Márcia Pereira Leite (2004) launched a pioneering discussion in Brazil of the theme of 'urban violence' when she foregrounded the figure of mothers who fight for 'justice' for their killed sons. The author argues that the 'mother' and her suffering in the quest for justice is closely related to the Christian tradition and the figure of Mary, mother of Jesus, who offered her own son in sacrifice. In the wake of Leite's work, various research projects have explored the experience of women seeking justice for their killed sons (Vianna 2015, Vianna & Farias 2011, Araújo 2014, Lacerda 2015, Farias, 2015). We can highlight the works of Adriana Vianna (Vianna 2015, Vianna & Farias 2011, Vianna & Lowenkron 2017) where the author discusses how gender grammars are embodied in the 'mother-son' dyad. In the author's analysis, 'mothers' are contrasted – as political, moral and affective subjects – with the 'State that kills,' in a battle pervaded by gender representations and relations. At the same time, this 'mother-son' figure obliterates other family and non-family connections present in these relations, an aspect that we foreground in this text. We also highlight the critical review by Shaylih Muehmann (2018) on gender relations in the war on drugs.

bank whose bureaucrats had blocked reform of the houses. In its 'lowercase' form, though, the state also appeared as an 'ally' in the land regularization process through the public defenders and various university academics who supported this small community. Nine months after regularization of the properties in March 2011, however, members of a drug trafficking gang invaded the Vila and installed a drug sales point at its entrance.

At this moment, a new local political regime was defined. The Vila acquired a dono, an 'owner,' leading the residents to realize that their small neighbourhood had transformed into a favela. For eleven years, the regime in force in the Vila had differed from other housing in the neighbourhood due to its political/collective character of self-management. Overnight, they shifted to a regime of strict obedience to the members of the drug gangs who installed themselves in the locality, as in the other favelas in the surrounding region.

If the Vila has a specificity, this derives from how long-term relations with owners form part of the memory of the lived experiences of almost all its residents. Histories about owners known in the past who died violently, who helped the local community, who protected someone, who mistreated and killed others, are shared narratives anchored in experiences accumulated over time that involved families, neighbours and acquaintances. With the new regime established, the past and present violations became integrated into complex practices and languages in which everyone recognized the potential dangers (Das 2007).

The multiple experiences of violations that historically constituted the peripheries of Rio de Janeiro city are distinguished from others by the existence of an owner who controls the territory and its population, which, according to Daniel Hirata and Carolina Grillo (2017), does not occur in São Paulo.[8] Owners of favelas, subdivisions, popular condominiums, occupations and invaded lands form part of a specific configuration of the power relations established in popular areas of Rio de Janeiro. Well-known figures who dominate certain territories in the city and exert control over local relations, ultimately through death threats, physical aggression and also killings.

As Hirata and Grillo (2017) have analysed, the popular territories of Rio de Janeiro possess owners. The 'valiant' Zé da Barra, described in 1924 by the journalist Benjamin Costallat as "undisputed boss of the favela," was one of the first personalities to appear in the literature on Rio de Janeiro as "owner of the hill [morro]." According to the historian Romulo Mattos (2014), Zé da Barra and Annibal Ferreira "were the 'police chiefs' of Morro da Favela in the 1920s, each with his own zone of influence" (2014: 7). In 1922 there was a change in the security policies for the Favela, which involved "a strong repression of the 'criminals' of the morro, followed by a policy of alliance between the police and the main local leaders" (ibid: 1). This alliance meant that "on one hand, the police did not intervene ostensibly in the morro; on the

4 | On the use of the notion of war in relation to violence in Rio de Janeiro, see, first of all, Márcia Leite's work on the 'metaphor of war' (2012). We also highlight two collections of essays fundamental to any understanding of the problem of urban violence in Rio de Janeiro. The first is Vida sob cerco: violência e rotina nas favelas do Rio de Janeiro, edited by Luiz Antônio Machado da Silva (2008), followed by Militarização no Rio de Janeiro: da pacificação à intervenção, edited by Márcia Leite, Lia Rocha, Juliana Farias and Monique Carvalho (2018).

5 | When we use the term 'State' in uppercase, we refer to the idea of Abrams (2006) who differentiates between the 'state-idea' and the 'state-system.' The 'state-idea' concerns processes of abstraction in which the State appears as a cohesive unit of meaning. The 'state-system,' on the other hand, allows us to explore the agencies of the state in social life. In a work that dialogues with Abrams's proposal, Das and Poole (2004) write 'state' in lowercase precisely so that the analyses can show how the State appears as an abstraction and how the state appears in its practices. Thus, when we write the word State in uppercase, we refer to abstractions and when we write in lowercase, the focus is on everyday practices that enable the state to function. We employ the same rationale when using the term Drug Traffic (Tráfico) in uppercase and drug trafficking in lowercase. In Brazil, many authors have contributed to deepening these discussions on the state. On this theme, see the works of Antônio Carlos de Souza Lima, among which we highlight the text in which he discusses the relationship between Anthropology and the State in Brazil: Souza Lima and Dias 2020.

6 | The statistics on killings in Rio de Janeiro, especially those of black and impoverished youths, are alarming. Over the last thirty years, around 84,000 people have been killed in the city of Rio de Janeiro alone (ISP 2020), the majority in the peripheries and without trial. The figures are no more than an indication given the enormity of the problem in which "men, youths and blacks

other, the leaders of the locality had the obligation to maintain everyday life under control" (ibid: 5). In the 1920s, Mattos argues, a form of delegated power in control over the Favela was inaugurated by the state coercive apparatus itself. Historical and embedded, this form of exercising power in the control of certain spaces of the city precedes the existence of drug trafficking and indeed helped the latter develop. It is not enough to mention, as has become conventional, the web of relations that implicate drug trafficking with various state sectors. Returning to Hirata and Grillo, the owners of the morro emphasize the "relation of posse [possession/ownership/tenure] over the territory of the favelas" (2017: 81, authors' italics) which preceded drug trafficking and thus established the social and political conditions for engaging in this commercial activity in Rio de Janeiro. The experience of living with a local dono or 'owner' is widely shared among men and women living in the peripheries of Rio de Janeiro and has consequences for the day-to-day life of their inhabitants.

A strong interweaving between memories of past events and experiences of the present echoes the kind of context suggested by João Pacheco de Oliveira (2000) in his analysis of the narratives of a massacre lived by the Ticuna indigenous people in Amazonia. The threats, bodily aggressions and deaths that we discuss below "form part of a set of knowledge and a form of consensus shared" among the residents of Rio de Janeiro's peripheries, "which unites them within a single 'community of communication'" (Oliveira 2000: 295). We should also recall that the work of memory associates various temporalities related to lived experiences (Das 2007, Carsten 2007, Cho 2008, Han 2012).

A BRIEF SECRET HISTORY OF THE VILA

The history of Vila Carolina Maria de Jesus begins in 2000. The vision promulgated by its founders was based on a commitment for residents to pay no rent or other taxes and not to submit to drug gangs, militias or any other 'owner.' A popular housing initiative that set out to be egalitarian and democratic, whose 'self-management' model would derive from collective decisions made in assemblies. This vision was in opposition to the reality of the city's peripheries where coexistence with armed groups is entangled in everyday life (Fernandes 2013, Araujo 2014, Lobo 2015, Menezes 2016, Fernandes 2017, Araujo 2017, Pierobon 2018, Coutinho 2018).

In the process of transforming an abandoned warehouse (barracão) into a popular form of housing (moradia), the diversity of residents' experiences was largely pushed into the background in favour of a public and cohesive narrative of the social movement that coordinated the process. The division of tasks relating to the functioning of collective space and adherence to the rules were central to engagement in the egalitarian housing experience, however much relations were shaped by criticisms and accusations over the form in which this regime was realized in practice. Despite

are the main victims of killings and the mothers/spouses/sisters, black women, are those who end up having to inhabit the post-death world and deal with the everyday reality of suffering" (Pierobon 2018: 34-35). These killings also indicate the intersectional nature of the relations in which race, gender and territory are inseparable (see Efrem-Filho 2017, Fernandes 2017).

7 | Numerous works have covered the removals and evictions in Rio de Janeiro. See, for example, Fernandes 2013, Magalhães 2013, Gutterres 2014, Faulhaber and Azevedo 2015, and Lobo 2015.

8 | In addition to the work of Hirata and Grillo (2017), Birman and Leite (2018) compare the differences in public policies directed towards the 'war on drugs' and its effects on the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Also see the dossier "Crimes, territórios e sociabilidades: comparações entre Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo" organized by Vera Telles (2019).

the common vision, the dynamics of everyday life immersed the residents in constant confrontations and allegations. Concrete problems like switching on and off the pump that distributed water in the warehouse, collecting money to pay the water bill, and the frequent short-circuits caused by people's uses of electricity generated a series of conflicts and eroded the sense of conviviality among residents. As the years passed, accusations of skewed applications of the rules and disrespect for moral principles led to a disqualification of the egalitarian regime as the dominant principle, assimilating it instead to the well-known regime of authority, imposed by 'owners' in the territories of the periphery. In sum, the problems that pervade daily life in a popular housing collective highlighted family dynamics and the social and moral implications that enveloped them, indicating the ambivalent desire for someone to be able to exert a degree of authority and resolve the problems that were proving so difficult solve through direct decisions.

From the beginning of the Vila, the Drug Traffic (Tráfico) was a shared point of reference. Many residents came from places where this experience had been a constitutive part of their lives. Memories of these lived situations meant that any sign of close proximity between a resident of the Vila and a person linked to the Drug Traffic would generate rumours and suspicions, reconfiguring local sociability. Some youths involved in drug trafficking, while the Vila was still in its self-management period, invaded and took possession of one of the houses. After many hesitations and conversations, the residents decided to contact an activist who knew a "mother of a victim of police violence" who, in turn, could ask for help from the mother of the gerente (manager) of the morro (favela) to which the youths belonged and, finally, the 'manager' himself. This sequence of female mediations enabled a letter written by the residents to reach the upper hierarchy of the drug gang without the police, always lurking, acting against the Vila, accusing them of colluding with crime and thus making success in the land regularization process impossible.

Fear of intervention by the police and other state actors reinforced the perception of young drug traffickers as figures of power, capable of completely undermining the project developed by the residents. These youths became thus assimilated with the many faces of the state pursuing this same goal – the police, the city council, the judge, the office of land affairs – and anchored in experiences with the state in the past: forced evictions, killings without trial, or the absolving of police officers. At that moment, the 'manager' agreed to remove the youths, freeing the residents of the dangers over both the seizure of the house by the Drug Traffic and the possible denunciations to the State. There was a 'general manager' (gerente geral) of drug trafficking in the region who, on being contacted via a female family network, decided in favour of the residents and removed the youths from the warehouse site.

Conflicts within the Vila did not impede continuation of the political fight for land regularization, however, despite the many obstacles. It so happened that regularization

coincided with the invasion and domination by drug traffickers (in 2010 and 2011 respectively). From that moment, two parallel and intersecting orders came into force and the relationship between the two increased the feeling of risk and insecurity among residents. Firstly, they could lose the right to stay at the converted warehouse since, in the Assignment of Right of Use Agreement for the site, it was stated that the Rio de Janeiro state government could "suspend land regularization" in the case of "illegal and criminal activities in the locality." Secondly, the residents found themselves gravely affected by the threats that made it difficult to inhabit this space, now controlled by an armed group of men. Regularization became threated by the situation of illegality, strongly associated with criminal gangs, which subjected them to death threats and demands for their submission. This period in the Vila strongly affected the residents, provoking desperate situations and the search for improbable solutions, driven by anguish and fear.

The reconfiguration of power relations changed local sociability. A silence took root in the face of threats from the new donos (owners) were the situations that occurred there to become known to the press or members of the police hierarchy. The retaliations threatened were the drug traffickers to be denounced would not be forgotten. On the contrary, they combined with the anger, humiliations and desires to escape from there and the entanglements that the situations of each family engendered. While confronting the drug traffickers individually was difficult and dangerous, the attempt was made for denunciations to come from outside the Vila, a solution that would liberate the warehouse site without provoking a retaliation against the residents from the 'owners,' or a reprisal from the police, or indeed the loss of the houses were the residents to be accused of complicity with drug trafficking. The threats issuing from this field of forces indicate the process of installation of drug trafficking as a war in Rio de Janeiro over the last forty years. This created a particular dynamic in the city and its peripheries, as analysed by Luiz Antônio Machado and Marcia Leite (2008), as well as other authors. As Leite (2008: 119) suggests:

> *It is within this configuration that Rio's favelas are constituted as spaces that, via different mediums and relations, find themselves linked to violence. Constituted in the social imaginary as a territory of violence within the city, the favelas are inhabited by a population who, in their day-to-day life, must cope with this designation that encompasses them and that essentializes a difference vis-à-vis the rest of Rio's population and the urban territory, delimiting their place in the city and their possibilities for access to the benefits of citizenship and to public institutions and services. At the same time, they also need to cope with the different modalities of presence and action of violent organized crime and the police in their places of residence. Both dimensions construct and reconstruct the boundaries between the asfalto ['tarmac,' the regularized area of the city] and the favela in Rio de Janeiro as distinct physical*

7 | Since August 2017, Bort Jr. and Henrique are divided into monthly fieldwork, respectively, in the Xucuru-Kariri and kiriri villages. Although it was the initial idea, it has not been prudent to carry out joint entries in the villages due to the configuration of relationships between peoples. This reflection that we publish is a result sharing data, impressions, readings and situations.

8 | We will keep the indigenous names always in anonymity. Eventually, we will make explicit those that anthropological literature has made public.

and moral urban territories.

The description of this field of war ordering the city always seems to project one actor as the 'figure' while another is simultaneously minimized or rendered invisible as its counterpoint or 'ground.' In this figure/ground reification, sometimes the Drug Traffic is presented as the self-referential and autonomous power, sometimes the State. This ideology of the State along with the long-standing construction of the Drug Traffic as the Enemy of Society to be fought by the former, dominant in the media and valorised at the level of political intervention in the city, always seeks to erase and silence those discourses that denounce the extent to which each of these figures, apparently singular, are relationally produced. It should be stressed, however, that they in fact contain a multiplicity of aspects, even though in particular contexts they may be seen through just one of its momentarily more visible faces.

Talal Asad (2018) suggests an interesting reading of the exercise of surveillance and control in public space. Rather than our proposal of a figure/ground reversal, Asad invokes the notion of a mask in opposition to the notion of the self, as formulated by Marcel Mauss. The opposition between mask and self, Asad argues, was fundamental to the human and social sciences to institute forms of knowledge and technologies that would allow them to uncover the masks to attain the true nature of the self, as well as to think about the differences between public and private spaces. Masks and selves would become inseparable in the knowledge and practices relating to social spaces and their normative models. The exercise of surveillance and the security powers of the State require us to recognize the occult faces of each where the coercion of the self, shaped in its public behaviours, is the other side of its authenticity fated to be monitored: "The thought here is that convention coerces a real self into behaving inauthentically" (2018: 102). However, the opposition between mask and self – or between figure and ground, as in our suggestion – is still insufficient insofar as it presumes two opposite sides: front and back. Would it not be more appropriate to think of multiple fronts and backs that mutually feed off one another? Are persons not a composite of relations whose presentations and unmaskings, at once visible and invisible, potentialize certain positions and forms of circulation of power, however unstable they may be? What we are suggesting is that both the figure of the State and its pair, the Drug Traffic, may be embodied through one aspect, thus eclipsing what makes them multiple and related to one another at many different levels.

We can observe, then, that this image of figure and ground also relates to the perception of multiple personas in a heterogenic composite. Multiple figures of the State, embodied in people who also bring diverse aspects as a 'ground,' in the same way that the personas of the Drug Traffic are all the more potent the more they contain within themselves various 'others' who compose them in their varied

performances. Potencies that are constructed and constituted by many 'other' forces, interlinked in a constant game of erasure and revelation as practices commonplace among those involved in these power relations.

SUELI AND THE COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

Sueli and her former partner Douglas were the residents with the strongest connections to members of social movements. Together they mobilized their trusted networks in the attempt to construct various denunciation strategies aimed at expelling the 'owners' of the warehouse site. There were weeks of meetings and discussions, some of which we were able to participate in. The decision was reached to write a letter of denunciation that would be sent by email anonymously. It is worth mentioning the precautions taken: Sueli, who remained in the Vila, wrote the latter pretending to be a local trader. A member of a recognized social movement provided the list of email addresses with the names of politicians, journalists, public defenders, and civil and federal police who might ally with the cause of the popular housing collective. We were responsible for locating a public computer, creating an email account, sending the written text and finally destroying the list of email addresses. Sections of the letter make clear the objectives they wanted to achieve:

> *I am a resident and trader from the [blanked] region of Rio de Janeiro, I was born in the suburb and came to live here in [blanked] at the age of 15 with my parents who inherited a business from my grandfather and a small house in [blanked] street and I have lived here ever since. Today I am 54 years old and live with my son and grandson. I am writing here to relate what has become of this region over the last few years. I miss the time when you could walk the streets, even though they were dirty, at any time, day or night, without seeing what I see now. What I see now are human scraps and boys buying and selling drugs. These same drug trafficking boys are extremely violent, but this violence exceeds the limits and affects the local traders, workers and residents. With the arrival of the UPP [Police Pacification Unit] everything worsened, since the police, who should be defending us, defend the traffickers instead. The entire region knows that they take arrego [bribes] with the youths to let them work in the asfalto [the non-favela area of the city]. The neighbourhood's crackland is like an open-air market. They yell for customers to buy their merchandise […]. As a citizen, I find it impossible to believe that the authorities are unaware of what is happening here. On one side is the Military Command, further on the Security Subdivision, the Military Police Battalion and the UPP too. How can they fail to see what's happening? […] What I see is almost a dead end. Am I, my friends and neighbours going to see out our days trapped at home, too afraid to go out and die or be beaten and abused by the gangsters? The local traders, residents*

> *and workers are bewildered, but one thing is certain, one way or another we're going to make ourselves heard and seen. The Brazilian people have demonstrated that they are not stupid. Those of us who live and earn our living here, we built this neighbourhood and we're not going to let them destroy it.*
> *Rio de Janeiro, 25 June 2013.*

The indignation of the trader persona sought to instil a feeling of solidarity among the agents of the State, the "good men," one that would resonate with other potential recipients too. It was no accident that the persona constructed as the letter writer, implicitly white, is cast as a member of a traditional middle-class family of merchants, horrified by the sight of the "small human scraps selling and consuming drugs" and by the 'gangsters' who outraged the society of the asfalto. It was an attempt designed to mobilize the social grouping that shares the same violent attitude of the State towards the 'gangsters,' mobilizing the Great Divide essentialized between Drug Traffic and State that so heavily stigmatizes the residents of the Vila. Despite the attempt at identity inversion, there was no response from its recipients. The letter sought to play the game like it is supposedly played: in favour of the "good men and women," disturbed by the "dirty and dangerous." They appealed to the police powers who served the interests of the "big people" against "the small human scraps" who perturb them. In sum, they gambled that the State, as a unity category of homogenous action, would defend good society from its enemies, consubstantiated in the Drug Traffic, and maintained the hope – albeit not the conviction – that some possibility existed that they would be helped so long as they did not show who they were: those who the State would never help, indeed would be more likely to accuse of being pernicious enemies allied with the Drug Traffic.

Hence, the pairing that orders the perception and the social and political management of the inhabitants of the peripheries, the Drug Traffic and the State, does not facilitate an understanding of the relational plots of everyday life that unfold in neither an abstract nor a homogenous or totalizing way either inside or outside the Vila. In the first case, when they turned to the 'manager' or gerente, they took a route with many hidden trails, through the shadows, mobilizing families and friends of people connected to the drug traffickers who could allow them to communicate with the owner or dona without being denounced and punished by the state actors responsible for the land regularization process. In the second case, they invented a modest conservative middle-class identity to be heard by the State without being punished by the donos of the local drug trafficking gang. We took part in the construction of this image of the 'good' trader who the State would protect from the Drug Traffic and also helped elaborate the denunciation. The clever use of subterfuge to enable the letter to reach its recipients without the true senders being discovered indicates the wish for the State to act as the figure displayed in its public performances and catch

the dirty and disturbing 'gangsters' who threaten the peace and tranquillity of 'good men.' In this way, we ignored just how much we actually doubted the homogeneity and coherence of this ideal pair. After all, the schemes used indicate how much the experiences of the residents led them to adopt ruses and manoeuvres to oblige the 'side' of the State to act as it claims to act – as an 'enemy' of the Drug Traffic. But what was left clear to everyone was the indifference of the police and political hierarchies to intervening to tranquilize a population on the margin of poverty, albeit outside the favelas.

VOLATIVE POSITIONS

The positions internal to Vila Clementina Maria de Jesus were never constituted as though the residents were convinced, even after signing the term authorizing 'tenure of the property' for 99 years, that this achievement was stable. We, much more than them, believed in this. We failed to consider, though, that living in a precarious everyday situation, surrounded by diverse threats, did not afford the same certainties to the world around them, nor a solid ground for stability within the parameters that, in modern history, established respect for property and its sacred character. It would be unreasonable for them to see themselves as 'proprietors' in a middle-class neighbourhood. Rather, any benefits achieved are always provisional, since the dominant order for poor populations is guided by the Drug Traffic/State pair. Constant threats, such as losing one's house, the trust of one's neighbours, the relative neutrality of the drug traffickers, the indifference of the police, the integrity of one's body and life and/or those of family members shape everyday life. Drug Traffic and State mould the memories and acts of their inhabitants in the present, reiterating the limits of the possible.

We turn now to analyse what composes this precariousness, particularly through the positions of Cristina, Sueli and Mariana, of the narratives that reached us in a fragmented form and the situations in which we participated.

MORAL RESPECTIBILITY AS CONSTITUTIVE OF GENDER AND WAR RELATIONS

Cristina moved to the Vila at its very beginning and three of her four children grew up there. Today more than sixty years old, she lives with her sick mother and basically devotes her time to providing the care she needs. Cristina carries with her in the present the situations of conflict provoked when her teenage children became linked to the local drug trafficking. Two of her children who worked for the drug traffickers were threatened, imprisoned and tortured either by the drug traffickers themselves or by the police. A third died shortly before she moved to the warehouse site. She recounts his death as a murder committed by his own brother. Cristina

describes her family relations as conflictual, destructive and even deadly. When Camila Pierobon first met her, she began to provide support, helping her in various difficult situations, which included accompanying Cristina in the day-to-day care for her mother, the problems caused by the relationship between her children and the drug traffickers and police, and her problems with neighbours in the Vila. Cristina describes herself as a single woman, striving night and day against adversity.

Sueli, a mother to four children, resident of the Vila from its outset, also saw her sons become involved in drug trafficking for a time. They formed part of the group of adolescents who grew up with various other youths inside the community, among them Mariana and Cristina's children. Sueli's older son spent a year in prison for trafficking during the period when the Vila was still considered 'self-managing.' After the invasion by the Drug Traffic, her daughter had a brief love affair with one of the new 'owners.' Her other two male children, contrary to the wishes of their activist parents, joined the Pentecostal church in attempted opposition to the relations with drug trafficking in which their brothers were embroiled.

The consequences for mothers of having a son involved in drug trafficking depended on the positions that they established with other residents. Having children involved in drug trafficking affected the reputation of these two women with different consequences. Although the target of accusations, Sueli was not exposed to moral judgments as much as Cristina. A black woman, critical of racism and always ready to respond to discrimination of every kind, a militant of the movement that constructed the Vila, university-educated and the former partner of Douglas, with whom she shared organization of the warehouse site and care of the children, she was always seen as a person of respect. The couple, although they lived separately, constituted a solid pair and both assumed responsibility for the children. She possessed a respectability that derived to a certain extent from the outside relations that she had cultivated over time. The couple had the largest network of contacts with unions, student bodies, the public defenders office, university professors, landless and homeless movements, and so on. Although the conflicts took place as though they were 'equal' to everyone, their persons were integrated through connections with these diverse significant 'others' in the small power games within the Vila. Finally, Sueli also marked her position on concerning her son's participation in drug trafficking, making clear she was opposed and refusing to visit him in prison.

The position of Sueli and Douglas's nuclear family within the Vila contrasted with the positions of Cristina and other women resident there. Compared to Mariana, a young woman, Cristina was not stigmatized and accused with the same rigour as the former: the lack of care for her children and home, the failure to collaborate with others, and being a puta ('whore') were among the accusations against her that circulated in the Vila (see Fernandes 2013, Fernandes 2017, Birman 2015). The presence of Cristina's drug trafficker (traficantes) sons in her diminished the trust that the residents placed in

her, as well as eliciting threatening attitudes towards her from both the drug traffickers and the police.

The differences between the women in terms of the responsibility shown in caring for themselves, their children and others are starkly apparent. At the beginning of the Vila, the women took charge of the collective kitchen, as well as agreeing to clean the common bathrooms to protect themselves and their children, among other tasks. Sueli told us how it was difficult to lead a communal life when she first arrived in the Vila. Among the everyday problems that weighed on the women more heavily was the monthly cycle of the water supply, including consumption, billing and payment. The warehouse site had just one metre which registered the use of water by all the residents. The total amount of the water bill was divided equally among the houses. Although it was a long-term problem that marked the Vila's history, it worsened with the presence of the drug traffickers who began to compete for this vital service, generating constant anxieties and a general atmosphere of uncertainty. By turning their home into their place of work, it was the women who had to deal with the destabilization of daily life caused by the absence of water or by the supply of contaminated water to the region. It was left to them, therefore, to solve the conflicts surrounding payment of the water bill, which became entangled with various other problems.

Some male residents came to an understanding with these 'owners,' neutralizing the threat and allowing them to gain access to a supply of water that was not provided to the women asking for the water or to the other residents. Among the latter was Silvio, Cristina's oldest son who, moreover, engaged in sports at the Military Police Battalion close to their home. The 'owner' in this case was seen as someone whose most visible face in day-to-day life was primarily defined by his masculinity: among men, they could chat about football and perhaps have a beer, as well as do each other small favours. The power of accusation, life and death possessed by the 'owners,' assured by the nearby police station, was downplayed in favour of their generalized conduct, concealing the use of force involved in having the neighbourhood police as an important source of assistance. Since the invasion of the warehouse site by the drug gang, the new 'owners' had occupied some of the houses with their female companions, expelling former residents, in some cases, without paying for the consumption of the water used through more or less threatening behaviour.

Given the importance of water in the rhythms of everyday life, women assumed responsibility for the job of charging the residents, paying the bill and thus ensuring the supply of water in the Vila. Sueli worked for years as the water bill collector. Today it is Mariana, responsible for going from house to house to get the water money. But for part of the time in which the Vila was under the control of the drug traffickers, it was Cristina who performed this function. Although controversial due to her assertive stances, many residents who avoided any contact with Cristina

in day-to-day life supported her in the work of water bill collector due to the history she had constructed in the Vila as an honest woman. It took her years of struggle to acquire this position of honesty, which does not mean kindness or even cordiality, which was shaken when her son Rafael came back to live with her and began to work for the drug traffickers.

A CRITICAL MOMENT

Unexpectedly, Rafael left the state of Espírito Santo to spend Christmas with Cristina, whom he had not seen for 7 years ever since he had left prison for drug trafficking. Living with his mother, it was not long before Rafael resumed his drug trafficking activities, this time at the door of her house. From this moment, many of Cristina's supporters in the Vila began to see her as a potential threat as the mother of a trafficker.

While Rafael's position protected Cristina from the threats of the 'owner' and favoured her position as the water bill collector, it simultaneously weakened her image as an honest person who did not collude with the drug traffickers. Her house began to be kept under surveillance by military police. As shown in the work of Rosa (2015) and Feltran (2011, 2020), the local police mapped which house to raid and, with a young man living with her, Cristina's house became a target of police operations. In one of the operations, the military police pounded on her door. In dark camouflage clothing, armed with rifles and ninja hoods that prevented them from being identified, the police officers wanted to search the rooms. With her son sleeping in the back room and foreseeing them beating him up, Cristina decided, in a split second, to pretend she was startled so as to protect Rafael. A white elderly woman, Cristina yelled out, deliberately allowed her towel to drop and stood naked in front of the young military police officers. Playing with the relations of race, gender and generation, her strategy worked. The police were embarrassed and left her house, at least this time.

Relations within drug trafficking are volatile and uncertain, though. In less than a year, the 'owners' who had protected Rafael began threatening to kill him. Keeping an eye on her son's relations with the drug traffickers while also monitoring the actions of the military police took precedence over everything else in her day-to-day life. Watching Rafael asleep one time, she analysed his agitation, his nightmares, the phrases that he spoke while sleeping, and concluded: my son is in danger.

It was December 2017, the time of year when civil and military police 'burst' (estouram) drug sales points to grab money and boost the budget for the Christmas and New Year festivities with their families. This time, the military police 'burst' the 'drug joint' (boca-de-fumo) where Rafael was working.

The police took around 14,000 reais in money, illegal substances and guns

from him and his colleague Carlos. Each of the youths was left owing 7,000 reais to the 'manager' responsible for the drug sales point where he worked. Cristina discovered what had happened when Rafael returned with his injured friend. During the operation, the police beat Carlos's face with their rifles. As she was tending the wounds on the young man's face, Cristina learnt that both would be working for the drug traffickers without receiving anything until the debt was repaid. Rafael's situation was better given that he lived with his mother and the money from the work went exclusively to him. But Carlos's only source of income was the drug sales point, and he used the money for the upkeep of his wife and small child. Cristina's comfort as a 'mother' dissolved, albeit momentarily, his condition of 'trafficker' to that of 'son' receiving care and empathy in the intimate space of Cristina's house.

Through the gossip and rumours that circulated in the neighbourhood, Cristina was informed that the manager of the local drug gang distrusted Carlos and Rafael, insinuating that they had both lied when they blamed the military police for the loss of the goods, money and weapons. The rumours also said that the local 'owner' had summoned the gang's killer (matador do tráfico) to give a lesson (corretivo) to Rafael and Carlos. The information that reached Cristina's house was that Rafael had been beaten up by this man and that he was sentenced to death. Rafael fled. The 'owner' threatened to seize Cristina's house as payment for her son's debt. Fortunately, she managed to 'unravel' the situation through agreements (which everyone knew about, but nobody ever mentioned) between certain residents and the drug traffickers. The fact of being an elderly woman and the care that she gave to her own ever older and sick mother, helped her resolve the conflict.

"DEATH KILLED", ACCUSED MOTHER AND CHILD

> "I think kids know many things about death and dying."
> *Veena Das (2009)*

A white man, single, with few friends. Josué was one of the oldest residents of the Vila. He had arrived at the warehouse through the mediation of supporters and activists at the moment when they were looking for people in the streets of Rio de Janeiro to live there. His experience on the streets had left his body covered with the marks of the assaults suffered, giving him his nickname: Queimado, Burned. Camila had a few experiences in Josué's company. Some of these were on the visits to state agencies when, along with the more combative residents, they attempted to denounce the action of the drug traffickers in the Vila or when they tried to obtain public funding for structural reform of the site. We received the news of his death through the following mobile message, sent by Cristina:

> *Around 1.50 am they beat Josué to death. Thank God I didn't wake up. They say it was horrible. They carried his body away in a tricycle. They say that he showed his dick to a seven-year-old girl. Well, there had been various complaints about him from girls here in the Vila. Joana and other girls were afraid of him. Today it's strange here. They say that they closed the street, the police arrived and let nobody past, not one car or motorbike.*

It was an early morning in March 2018, Josué was returning from work when he was jumped by local drug traffickers. Accused of showing his dick and jerking off to a seven-year-old child, the drug traffickers surrounded Josué and beat him to death with wooden bats. Although it was early morning, the streets of Rio de Janeiro's centre are always full of workers, prostitutes, immigrants, Bohemians, pastors, homeless people and also military police. As this case was seen as a crime particularly subject to punishment – a case of child sexual abuse, hence paedophilia – the penalty was death by beating. The beating, then, took place in public, in the street, in front of the Vila, in the presence of the mother, who had accused Josué, and the child who had allegedly been abused. Unable to bear what she witnessed, the child's mother fainted. Josué's body was taken to a nearby public hospital using a tricycle. The use of wheelbarrows, tricycles or trash carts to remove bodies forms part of the repertoire of conducts of police officers and drug traffickers, which very often provokes outrage and disgust among residents of the peripheries.

Other messages arrived in fragmented form: they say that he had been jerking off and calling the 7-year-old girl; Laura [the child's mother] fainted there; God protect us from ever seeing this; here people aren't talking about anything else. In this "not talking about anything else," as well as discussing the cruelty of what had happened to Josué, the residents were split between those who thought it possible for Josué to have molested the girl and others who believed that the local traffickers used the child as an excuse to eliminate Josué and take his house. The fact is that it was never proven that Josué harassed the child. His case disappeared with his death. But it did not go unnoticed. It was an event that reorganized some of the relational dynamics in the Vila. A collective sharing of the power of death of the local 'owner' was backed by the presence, this time amply visible, of the military police, who rather than preventing the beating, helped it by stopping the traffic in the street until Josué was physically dead.

Josué's body was left in front of a nearby hospital and from there was taken to the Institute of Forensic Medicine (Instituto Médico Legal: IML). The few friends that Josué had in the Vila sought for a way to bury him. In order to exercise this supposed right to bury a body, a difficult obstacle presented itself to be resolved by the deceased's friends and close neighbours. Going to the IML and recognizing the body would signify becoming a witness to a murder committed by the drug gang,

given that the act of recognition in criminal circumstances entails replying to a series of questions relating to the police inquiry. Furthermore, there were the real threats made by the local 'owner' who warned the residents not to go to the hospital because anyone who went to recognize the body would face the consequences later. None of his friends went to recognize him in the hospital or in the IML, though they wished to do so, due to the threats. But without recognition of the body, the common rule is for 'unidentified' bodies (Ferreira 2015) to be buried as indigents, which outraged his friends and acquaintances. The recognition was lived as a condition to be fulfilled to recuperate Josué's humanity by being buried as an identified person. Mariana, therefore, contacted an old supporter of the Vila, a human rights activist, who agreed to identify Josué's body. He would be able to respond to the police questions: he was not an eyewitness, he had not been present, he did not have much to say. Moreover, he could not be mistaken for a resident of the Vila. To the relief of Mariana and other friends, the activist obtained the release of the body and Josué was interred in one of the city's public cemeteries (see Medeiros 2016, Azevedo 2019).

In the days following Josué's death, his house was invaded by the local 'manager' who assigned it to a new family. The fact that the house was rapidly occupied by a family through the mediation of the drug gang generated more distrust with the networks of gossip, rumours and surveillance formed by residents and neighbours in the Vila. This action led to more residents having doubts about the narrative accusing Josué of molesting the child. As the months went by, the accusation of sexual abuse weakened as another narrative solidified: the sexual abuse accusation had been a strategy by the local 'owners' to kill Josué and take possession of a new house. Along with this version, however, other people were held responsible for what happened: the girl and her mother.

In a conversation we witnessed on the killing of Josué, the idea was shared that his death had been an injustice. The new consensus that attributed responsibility for the event to the child and mother was apparent in a few comments: she [the child] lied to the drug gang on purpose; she [the child] would go in the street just in her knickers; she [the mother] couldn't have cared less about the girl, so that's what happens. And who paid the price was Josué! Tadeu asked to his explain his reasoning and argued as follows: he himself, a man, young and black, lived alone in the Vila, so his house too could become an easy target: who would complain if he died? One time when he was returning from work, he spotted a child at the door to his house. Anticipating an accusation were he to open the door to his house and the girl entered, after all children lie, Tadeu phoned Mariana and asked for help: imagine if I open the door and the child enters my house, how am I going to explain that? The seven-year-old girl also started to be avoided by mothers living in the Vila who excluded her from playing with other children and banned her from entering their homes.

Mariana, the woman who ensured Josué's burial, explained: that girl is dangerous, I don't want my daughter with her. After asking her about this claim, saying that the 'girl' was just a child, Mariana replied assertively: I learnt from an early age that it isn't the stork that brings us babies. Since I was five, I know how children are made and I've raised my daughter knowing how to dress and sit properly.

Mariana's requirement that her daughter learn 'how to sit' from an early age indicates a discourse positioned and related to the circumstances. Women could put men 'in danger.' In the case in question, it allowed a worker (Josué) to be confused with a rapist and thus permitted the 'owners' (donos) and warlords to kill a long-standing resident of the Vila. From the viewpoint of the women, they found themselves standing in the middle of the Great Divide that separates police and gangsters in the war to which they are subjected. From this standpoint, the respectability that they acquired would protect them from threatening one 'side' of the war or becoming in turn one of its debris. Gender relations are thus constitutive of war relations. On the level of shared moral values, the women in principle should not have a 'side.' The place 'between' these two poles, though unreal, is a necessary recourse for the cunning practices and manoeuvres that seek to ensure life under threat and also, as we have seen, a certain respectability.[9]

Josué's death and the way in which the consensus about it became consolidated meant that the "critical event" (Das 1995) was inhabited by residents of the Vila in terms recognized as possible. It was indeed difficult to compare the neighbour Josué to those who killed him in such a cruel form, maintaining that he had perpetrated the crime of paedophilia and thus a 'monstrosity' (Lowenkron 2015). Thus, the moral accusations against female bodies that assigned 'blame' for the killing to the mother-daughter dyad allowed the reconstruction of Josué's male 'honour' and, in sum, the reconstruction of the established order (see Das 2008).

This critical event, on being re-inhabited through blame and female danger, was erased the surface of everyday conversations. But it exists in the memory of those who lived this event. Today, its gestures continue to construct the relations with care, death and torture. The delicate relations that the women are tasked with managing will not be abandoned, nor the surveillance and control of their every step. A constant dynamic of accusation and solidarity help ensure the precarious balance in which respectability as a displayed value always takes part.

9 | See the analyses of Machado and Leite (2008) and others on the narratives of the residents who live simultaneously under this double mode of subordination constructed through the mechanisms of fighting 'violence.'

ENDLESS WAR: FINAL NOTES

In her discussion on violence and social suffering, Veena Das (2007) analyses how two of the major events that marked Indian history – the Partition of India and Pakistan (1947) and the riots following the assassination of Indira Gandhi (1984) – infiltrated the daily lives of families. In the fieldwork with those who lived the experience of Partition,

Das analyses how this event occurs in the present, not only through memory but in intimate and slow connection with the processes of making a family. In the second case, Das encounters in fieldwork the rapid violence of the events and the potency of the minute gestures made by women to remake their life after the murder of sons and husbands. Here we analyse some of the powerful gestures that occur amid everyday cares: Cristina's falling towel, Sueli's astuteness in writing a letter distancing herself from the stigmas faced by favela dwellers, Mariana's endeavour to bury Josué, and finally a limit situation in which the destructive potency of war makes a child's gestures a dangerous threat of the power of a sexuality that does not conform to the women themselves, subject to gender relations that conform with war relations.

However much we know about the limits of the experiences that we had involving the Drug Traffic and the State in favelas, it is difficult to comprehend its pervasiveness. It was a shock for Camila to discover what was not directly mentioned about children and their experiences with death. Fourteen children raised their hand when they were asked whether they had known someone who had been killed or had disappeared over the last month in the favela where they lived. The shock for Camila was, in truth, perceiving that children who happily wanted to watch a film in a cultural centre in the Acari favela, in 2012, already carried with them repeated everyday experiences of death and disappearances, as shown by the gesture of raising a hand.[10]

When interacting with adults today in this and other peripheral territories, we are not always able to appreciate how children and adults construct a shared consensus, as Oliveira (2000) suggests, on modes of acting and thinking, taking into account the real and heterogenic figures of the always present pair of Drug Traffic and State.

Although Das's concern is to comprehend the continuity of these events in quotidian life, the events that we analyse in this text are distinct in nature. Partition and the riots 'officially' had a beginning and an end, while the war in Rio de Janeiro has become a mode of existence and conviviality involving different territorialized, racialized and generalized populations in the city. Despite the despair provoked and the active resistance to assimilating it as the narrow horizon of the possible, the hegemonic political configurations do not signal any end in sight... This war has already lasted forty years and shows no sign of concluding. Much the opposite, the war is produced as a permanent ground. An 'endless war' (Mbembe 2003), lived as a memory that seeps into family and neighbourhood relations, at the same time as it is actualized daily through the control of bodies and territories and the power to harm, threaten and kill. A war that exists in the everyday as a past woven into the intimacy of relations and as an always actualized present in which families and women in particular are necessarily entangled in relations of power that include the actors from drug trafficking and the state. The temporal framework of war is lived simultaneously as past, present and projection of the future.

10 | In 2020 the 'Acari Massacre' completed 30 years without any resolution. The mothers and sisters continue the search for the 11 youths who vanished, those accused of the crime being military police officers, members of a death squad.

Although different, the analyses of Veena Das of both events help us reflect on the generalized effects that the Great Divide produces in the everyday life of the families inhabiting Rio de Janeiro's peripheries. In this management of life in war, it is the men, young and black, who are likely to kill and die and the women, mothers/sisters/wives, most of them black, who have to deal with the everyday suffering, with the modes of remaking their own lives, and, very often, with the responsibility for rebuilding the lives of those around them. Hence, we also wish to highlight the female agency contained in the actions that we described above and the potency of their gestures in maintaining the shared life that is shattered everyday by this infinite war. Sueli, who writes a letter and mobilizes her broad network of activists in the attempt to remove the drug traffickers from the Vila and prevent her everyday life transforming into a territorial control marked by routine deaths. Sueli, who seeks to reject any 'side' offered to her in the field of ongoing battles, makes her position clear to her children and neighbours through the management of her close relations when she refuses to visit a son in imprison for drug trafficking, also reaffirming her history as an activist in housing movements. Cristina, with all her strength and with subtler ruses, secured the life of her son in response to threats from drug traffickers and police and maintained her active role in the collective government of the Vila. The tiny gesture of letting her towel fall to protect her son, or the act of providing maternal refuge to a young trafficker assaulted by police officers shows us the bonds of affect and solidarity provoked by this war. Mariana recuperated the humanity of her friend Josué by enabling his burial, silently confronting the power of the drug traffickers and the state. All these women, at some point in the history of the Vila, guaranteed communal life by battling for the maintenance of the water supply. Far from constructing these women as 'heroines,' our endeavour has been to make visible and valorise the potency of the tiny gestures that enable the reconstruction of life in the face of situations that shatter relations, and that can be repeated in the present.

To finish, we wish to point out the concrete nature of the threats, physical aggressions and deaths that occurred in everyday life and their sharing among adults and children. At the level of broader discussions, deaths caused by firearms have entered the political debate because they indeed make up the majority. However, when we regard the threats, physical aggressions and deaths that we recorded, these are very close and viscerally affect the bodies of those whom they help. Killing through beating has a nature and sense of proximity different to killing with guns from a certain distance, sometimes even a helicopter, for instance, as has become a practice in Rio de Janeiro more recently.[11] The carnal proximity of the production of death by torture, the sounds made by yells and cries for help, form part of a knowledge shared by residents of the peripheries, inhabiting their subjectivities and involving all the bodily senses. These are deaths that are soaked into everyday relations, subjectivities and moralities, and forms of governing life. Moreover, they do not exclude children.

10 | Although operations using military helicopters and snipers already occurred in the city, the governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro has publicly authorized the killings committed by state agents. We can recall the infamous phrase of Wilson Witzel: "The right thing is to kill gangsters armed with rifles. The police will do the right thing: they will aim at the head and… fire! So there's no mistake," pronounced in November 2018, soon after his election. In another episode, which occurred in May 2019, the governor was in a military helicopter and authorized shots against a supposed 'gangster encampment.' However, the target was actually a tent used by a religious group. Following campaigning by residents of favelas and peripheries, in August 2020 the Federal Supreme Court approved an injunction that restricts the use of helicopters in military operations.

For this reason, we consider it important to gain a better understanding of how deaths under torture and alongside physical and moral abuses shape life, generalize its most intimate aspects, and forge the subjective meanings of war as an experience of proximity with the Drug Traffic/State that conducts it.

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