revista
PERIFERIAS

“In spite of you, tomorrow will be another day“

For the right to public security in the Maré favelas

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translated by Edmund Ruge

“Apesar de você, Amanhã há de ser outro dia”[1] Literally, “in spite of you, tomorrow will be another day,” borrowed from the Chico Buarque song “Apesar de você,” a resistance anthem composed amid Brazil’s military dictatorship**:**

The original title of the article in Portuguese is anything but casual: it speaks volumes on the dreams and potencies of those that live in the peripheries. It also alludes to how the subjects of these territories reinvent and build their daily lives to guarantee their rights and ensure that there will indeed be a tomorrow.

This text presents, succinctly, the experience of producing qualitative and quantitative data on public security in the favelas of Maré, located in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and reflects on the question of how knowledge production, springing from and working with this territory, can contribute to the overcoming of adversity and the construction of new days in the fight to guarantee the right to public security for the population of these streets and alleys.

In Brazil, and in Rio more specifically, there exists an image of favelas and the peripheries as territories characterized by fear, home to disorganized and violent people involved in illegal practices. This imaginary distorts the reality of these territories, reinforcing policies

of exclusion that consider their subjects incapable of producing knowledge or inventing solutions to historic and structural problems in their favelas.

On the contrary, these territories, more than just resisting, are (re)inventing their everyday life, producing forms of knowledge and action that, over the short, medium, and long term, have the potential to break with stereotypes of deprivation and stigmas of violence that surround the favelas and peripheries, thus contributing to the consolidation of rights. Here, we share some of the practices, knowledge, and actions that the NGO Redes da Maré has undertaken in its *Right to Public Security* and *Access to Justice* projects as well as its *Eyes on Maré* project.

According to Santos (2016), Vaz (1994), IPEA (1990), Farage (2006 and 2012), and Nobrega (2012), the first favela to be born into what would later become the grouping of favelas known as Maré in 1940 was Morro do Timbau (Timbau hill). Maré's 79-year history is one of resistance and the fight for rights. Maré is located between the principal lines of access to the downtown city center of Rio de Janeiro—the highways of Avenida Brasil, the Red Line, and the Yellow line. Maré is made up of 16 communities, nine of which were born of State intervention. It also contains, as a result of its social resistance, 45 public education centers, seven health posts, one olympic village, one cultural events tent, two department of transportation posts, one citizenship defense center, one Military Police Battalion, and dozens of civil society organizations. The achievement of these public facilities represents an important victory, but it does not mean that Maré enjoys access to full rights. That is, the fight for expanded public services and for improved quality of those services is an ongoing one. Among all of the existing public policies, the right to public security is, without a doubt, the farthest from being achieved. This issue arose as a major problem in the 1980s, according to Sousa (2010):

> […] A strong movement to encourage resident participation began to take hold, to make residents consider the importance of finding common solutions in changing the state of the precarious or inexistent urban public services in Nova Holanda,[2] such as the lack of an electricity network, of potable water, sewage networks, schools, daycare centers, health posts etc. Of all these issues, according to residents, one stood out as urgent: the question of violence, just as much on the part of armed criminal groups as on the part of the police […].(Sousa, 2010, p. 101).

The emergence of this theme, in favelas in general and in Maré, is connected to a policy that the State has progressively adopted since the early 1990s. On account of Maré being an area occupied by armed civil groups, the State has used a confrontational anti-drug policy, one in which the logic of armed confrontation and the use of abusive police force are treated as the principal means of combating criminality.

This policy, however, has not resulted in a guaranteed right to public security. In daily conversation, we recognize the difficulty of conceiving of public security as a right akin to education and health. In the life experiences of those who live here, public security refers to violence and violation rather than to any guaranteed right.

Residents, community leaders, and local organizations have begun to develop certain actions to change this reality, however. What, specifically, has Maré done, and what has it invented for short, medium, and long term scenarios, to guarantee that public security becomes a right for its 140 thousand residents?






MARCHA CONTRA A VIOLÊNCIA NA MARÉ
SOMOS DA MARÉ
TEMOS DIREITOS!


SOMOS DA MARÉ
SOMOS DO RIO DE JANEIRO
SOMOS CIDADÃOS E CIDADÃS
EXIGIMOS RESPEITO!
TEMOS DIREITOS!


SOMOS DA MARÉ
A MARÉ É CIDADE
EXIGIMOS RESPEITO
DIREITOS DA INFÂNCIA E DA JUVENTUDE
DIREITO À VIDA
TEMOS DIREITOS

The fight for the right to public security and access to justice in Maré

The Maré Census, undertaken by Redes da Maré and the Favelas Observatory, indicates a population of approximately 140 thousand residents distributed in 47 thousand households, with a radius of 4.3 km squared, making Maré the ninth most populous neighborhood in the city of Rio, and with more inhabitants than 96% of Brazilian cities.

Beyond the condition of public services in this territory, Maré has seen at least three decades of extreme vulnerability in the context of armed violence. Currently, the 16 favelas are occupied by three different armed groups: two tied to drug sales and the third a paramilitary group. These groups maintain a warlike grip on the territory, as well as control of social norms and rules for those that live and circulate within Maré. Although Maré has a Police Battalion and two community policing posts, it is uncommon to see police circulating through its favelas. When police forces need to enter the favelas, they do so by conducting large-scale police operations, typically with a large number of police officers and militarized security equipment.

As in other Rio favelas, when operations take place, dynamics within the favela change completely. Entire streets empty; sounds turn to silence, interrupted by periodic outbreaks of gunfire and the loud engines of armored personnel carriers or the low swooping of armored helicopters, the nicknamed *caveirão voador*.[3] When these operations begin in the early morning, with police movement through back alleys and side streets, public services and activities are suspended. When these operations begin in the middle of the day, thousands of students, educators, and health professionals, among others, are trapped inside their buildings.

The caretakers of those children trapped at school find themselves in a desperate situation: despite the risk of being hit in the crossfire between police and armed groups, parents and guardians often leave shelter in search of information on their kids. In sum, police operations result in a series of violations of fundamental rights—everything from home invasions without warrants, to physical and psychological violence, threats, and even

murder.

Knowing well what happens in Maré during these police operations, it is painful for us to hear reports on the news, on tv, and in print and online media measuring the success or failure of police operations based on the quantity of drugs and weapons seized by the police, or by the number of arrests made. We that live the daily reality of these operations know just know ineffective these operations are in achieving the goal of making people feel safer here in Maré.

It was with these concerns that Redes began in 2016 the Eyes on Maré project (*De Olho na Maré),* with the objective of monitoring the impact of armed confrontations in Maré. Beyond just measuring the number of seizures and arrests on days with police operations—and later the confrontations between armed groups—the project seeks to measure, from the point of view of the favela and its residents, the real impact of these actions. Media discourse combined with the absence of data on the impact of these police operations drove us to develop a database of qualitative and quantitative data that would allow for the identification of and reflection on the violence here presented.

Currently, the Eyes on Maré project has based its data collection methodology in four principle actions: 1) maintaining a specific working team on days involving armed conflict, in which residents are received at Redes to report rights violations and in order to denounce cases of abuse, either by police forces or by members of armed groups; 2) the creation of a network of collaborators that, via a messaging application, send information in real-time about cases of violations and violence; 4) maintaining direct consultation with the Secretariats of the Civil Police and Military Police on the motivations of and battalions involved in the police action, as well as with the Secretariats of Health and Education, with the goal of receiving updates on the status of public services; 4) conducting research on social media and mainstream media; 5) publishing our Maré Public Security Bulletin. 48 hours after the end of confrontations, our project team goes into the field to confirm received information, and only following confirmation do we include it in our database.

Douglas Lopes / Redes da Maré

As is usually the case in the history of the oppressed, you learn as you go

The construction of the Eyes on Maré project is an ongoing process with many hands involved. With each conversation with residents, professionals, and community leaders in Maré, we tighten our data collection methodology and consider new possible uses. Currently, the systematization of data is published annually in our bulletin, but the data is also used to support the construction and monitoring of Maré's Public Civil Action suit (explained below). We have also developed parallel actions to draw media attention and public opinion within this project. For example, after a police helicopter fired from above during a 2018 operation in Maré, we identified and counted, together with residents, bullet marks in the ground over a multi-block radius in Maré.

We counted 90 police operations undertaken over the last three years in Maré, with the highest number recorded in 2017. On examining these numbers, it shocked us to realize that one in every nine days in 2017, the police conducted an operation. And, though we do not have information on the confrontations between civil armed groups in 2016, it is terrifying to note that, in 2017, for example, Maré experienced the same number of days involving conflict between civil groups as days with police operations. Equally shocking is the fact that in the same year, confrontations between civil armed groups and between the police and civil armed groups resulted in the death of 42 people.

Life in Maré, with all of its hopes and dreams, has grown increasingly repressed. Between 2016 and 2018, 83 people were killed by firearms. Mirroring national averages, of these 83 people, 42 were between 15 and 29 years old, and 23 of them were brown or black—demonstrating once again that generations of black youth are being lost to the logic of confrontation with criminality, which, more and more, targets black populations.

According to our bulletin data, in 2018, the average age of firearm victims was 24. Comparing this with Maré's average life expectancy, 74 years, we see that these youth lost on average 50 years of hopes and dreams, brutally interrupted. Brazil's Youth Statute contains a section on the right to public security and access to justice. See Article 37: "All

youth have the right to live in a safe environment, without violence, with a guarantee of their physical and mental well-being, assuring their equality of opportunities and facilities for their intellectual, cultural, and social betterment" (Estatuto da Juventude, 2013, p.14). There thus exists a permanent breach of this law by the state government itself, which does not promote actions to ensure that youth, especially in urban peripheries, live fully.

Health unit data indicates 76 instances of suspended services between 2016 and 2018. Limiting access to health means impeding residents from taking care of themselves and preventing harm. This is a population that, due to its make up as primarily poor, black, and peripheral—has always had its access care and health promotion denied.

We also gathered data on education: schools in Maré serve some 15 thousand students, who, between 2016 and 2018 had their classes suspended for 65 days.

Once again, 2017 stands out.

> In 2017, there were 35 days without class in Maré schools, corresponding to 17.5% less than the 200 obligatory school days per year. This data reveals a grave disparity in the guarantee of the right to education for youth and adolescents in Maré. It follows then, that if this dynamic of school closures on account of armed conflict were to continue for a full 14 years of school (preschool, middle school, high school), students in Maré will have lost 490 school days, corresponding to approximately two and a half years of schooling.
>
> (2nd Boletim do Direito à Segurança Pública na Maré, 2018, p. 8)

(...)**If this dynamic of school closures on account of armed conflict were to continue for a full 14 years of school (preschool, middle school, high school), students in Maré will have lost 490 school days, corresponding to approximately two and a half years of schooling**.

This alarming data indicates that not only does public policy not serve to guarantee the right to public security for Maré residents, it also violates several other rights.

PHOTO ROSILENI / REDES DA MARÉ

Elisângela Leite / Redes da Maré

Experience is the best teacher

The question that the reader likely asks herself at this point is: isn't it offensive to title this article *"apesar de você amanhã há de ser outro dia..."?* How can one believe in the right to public security at all in the face of such catastrophic statistics? We firmly believe, however, that despite the larger part of successive governments and media discourse emphasizing warlike confrontation as the only option for public security, that collective resident organization via social mobilization and knowledge production demonstrates that another Maré is possible.

Experiences such as that of Eyes on Maré, a collective construction by residents and organizations in Maré engaged in producing data and disputing public narratives on the access to rights in Rio favelas, demonstrate potency and inventivity. These subjects are more than capable of constructing possibilities and solutions in overcoming the limits in the field of public security for the favelas and peripheries.

This three-part system—mobilization, knowledge production, and political engagement—has allowed for this territory, beginning in 2016, to file a Public Civil Action. This action, begun by the Rio Public Defenders Office in response to demands from residents and organizations in Maré, was issued as an injunction in June 2018. It was then that the judiciary determined a series of measures that should be adopted by the State, namely 1) the prohibition of police operations intended to fulfill warrants at night; 2) a gradual installation of video cameras and GPS systems in police vehicles that circulate through Maré; 3) a gradual installation of audio recording systems in police vehicles that circulate through Maré; 4) the provision of ambulances on days of police operations; 5) the development of a violence reduction plan for police operations. Since the Public Civil Action took effect, violence in Maré has changed. In order to better illustrate our assertion that there do indeed exist alternatives, see the data below comparing scenarios before and after.

Source: 3rd Maré Public Security Bulletin / Redes da Maré

Note the fall in all indicators. Comparing 2017 and 2018, we see that the number of police operations decreased by 61%; that confrontations between civil armed groups fell by 43%; that there were 71% fewer days with school canceled; and 76% fewer days with health post closures. It is worth highlighting however, that despite near uniform reductions, the number of deaths during police operations did not experience a significant decline: while the number of police operations fell, in 2018 they became more lethal. In order to better understand the data here, see the following table.



Source: 3rd Maré Public Security Bulletin / Redes da Maré

It is worth remembering that the government declared a Federal Intervention into Rio in 2018, in which command and administration of all public security policy for the state were given to the armed forces. The Intervention Observatory, a monitoring body hosted at the Center for Citizenship and Security Studies (CESeC) at Candido Mendes University, pointed to an increase in violence indicators in the state of Rio during this time, with an all time record of 1532 people killed by state security agents during this period—36% more than in 2017.

In contrast, Maré's numbers fell in the same period. Though far from conclusive, it is important to use this data and contemplate what strategies allowed us to come to this result. Every mobilization and community organization process in Maré involves residents as protagonists in the fight for rights, and this can be seen as one way of explaining these changes. In addition, the work undertaken by Redes da Maré over the years in public security and access to justice also indicates a number of options. The favelas and peripheries are spaces of rigorous knowledge production, just as rigorous as at public universities. Producing knowledge from and with this territory serves to break with historic subjugations, just as it breaks with the perpetuation of the perception of favelas and peripheries as "social cancers." This gives legitimacy to these territories in their belonging to the city, showing that the experiences of their residents are forms of knowledge just as legitimate as others. And as there is no such thing as neutral knowledge, that which is

produced in the favelas and the peripheries bring with them a radicality and emergence of knowledge production that directly intervenes in the process of inequalities present in our society.

These territories have been working for ages to appropriate and create knowledge to engage with their own reality. In the case of Eyes on Maré and the security bulletin, beyond just knowledge production, these projects also claim legitimacy for Maré, allowing residents to dispute reigning public security narratives, establishing what we want and need for these territories. This is knowledge that stands in contrast to media discourse, and even if gradually at first, has begun to change the way in which police operations in the peripheries are reported in the news. Currently, we have perceived a broadening in the dispute of this narrative in big media between what is formally issued by official state organs and what is produced and reported by the residents of these territories, be it on social media networks or through other mobilization tools.

Considering the potency of these creations, and recognizing the protagonism of favela residents in the construction of alternatives for the issues that affect their daily lives, it becomes clear that solutions for the problems faced in these territories need to undergo a process of collective construction by those who live and experience these issues day after day. Whatever the strategy, be it in the realm of public security or otherwise, it must involve the subjects of these territories. Invite them to the table, clarify the issues at hand, and strengthen the diverse protagonism present in the favelas and peripheries. That is the mission for all of us that believe that tomorrow will be another day.

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[1] Literally, “in spite of you, tomorrow will be another day,” borrowed from the Chico Buarque song “Apesar de você,” a resistance anthem composed amid Brazil’s military dictatorship.
[2] One of Maré’s favelas, also home to Redes da Maré headquarters
[3] Armored personnel carriers have garnered the nickname *caveirão*,or big skull. Armored helicopters have thus come to be known as *caveirão voador*, or flying big skull.