

Militias, Factions, and Precariousness: Notes on Living Conditions in the City of Rio de Janeiro Outskirts

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Abstract. This paper explores the dynamics of territorial control exercised by armed groups – factions and militias – in the outskirts and *favelas* of the city of Rio de Janeiro. The purpose was to investigate and describe the current dynamics of ‘siege’ produced by different armed groups, their effects on local sociability, and the production of precariousness to which residents of these locations are subjected. The research was conducted in six city territories and allowed the construction of a comparative matrix that cross-referenced the following information: type of armed group operating in the location; situation of the territory in terms of armed control; type of territorial presence; and relationship with the local population.

Key Words: militia, drug trafficking, violence, crime, Rio de Janeiro

Milice, frakcije in prekarnost: zapiski o življenjskih razmerah na obrobju mesta Rio de Janeiro

Povzetek. Članek raziskuje dinamiko teritorialnega nadzora, ki ga na obrobjih in v favelah mesta Rio de Janeiro izvajajo oborožene skupine, kot so frakcije in milice. Namen članka je raziskati in opisati trenutno dinamiko »obleganja«, ki jo ustvarjajo te različne oborožene skupine, vpliv te dinamike na lokalno družabnost ter ustvarjanje prekarnosti, ki ji prebivalci teh območij ne morejo ubežati. Raziskava, izvedena v šestih območjih mesta, je omogočila izgradnjo primerjalne matrice, ki

navzkrižno povezuje naslednje informacije: vrsto oborožene skupine, ki deluje na določenem območju; stopnjo nadzora nad teritorijem; tip teritorialne prisotnosti; odnos s tamkajšnjim prebivalstvom.

Ključne besede: milica, trgovina z drogami, nasilje, kriminal, Rio de Janeiro

Introduction

The city of Rio de Janeiro is the second largest municipality in Brazil in terms of population. Known worldwide for its natural beauty and vibrant culture, it has been nicknamed the 'marvellous city'. However, in addition to its beauty, Rio is also a city marked by profound social and economic contrasts, with luxury neighbourhoods coexisting alongside *favelas* and poor neighbourhoods where a large part of the working population lives, and it presents one of the most complex scenarios of urban violence in the country. Marked by the historical presence of drug trafficking and, more recently, by the growth of militias, the city offers fertile ground for analysing how territorial control by armed groups affects public safety and the daily lives of its residents.

Due to the presence of armed groups in their territories, the poor in Rio de Janeiro have been living under 'siege' for decades: subjected to various armed controls, forced to live with shootings, massacres, violent punishments, control of their routines and morals, segregation, and stigma. However, this configuration, represented in the image of the 'divided city' or 'city at war,' has taken on new contours based on the most recent dynamics. Of the spaces classified as 'dominated by armed groups,' 50% are occupied by militias, while the so-called factions divide the other portion of the controlled areas among themselves (Grupo de Estudos dos Novos Ilegalismos/UFF and Instituto Fogo Cruzado 2022). Although the effects of these different territorial controls are similar in many aspects, in the imagination of Rio de Janeiro, the experiences of living under such 'sieges' are seen as very different. Territories dominated by factions are usually represented as the scene of violent police operations and places where illicit drugs and weapons would be openly displayed, but with more flexible control over routines and moralities (Rocha 2013; Carvalho 2014; Machado da Silva 2008; Zaluar 1985). Areas dominated by militias are represented as places with much greater control over routines and moralities but with a much lower risk of confrontations and other episodes of daily violence (Da Motta 2020; Alves 2003; Cano and Duarte 2012).

Thus, the purpose of this paper was to investigate and describe the cur-

rent dynamics of ‘siege’ produced by different armed groups, their effects on local sociabilities, and the production of precariousness¹ to which the residents of these locations are subjected. We understand ‘siege’ in the terms formulated by sociologists Luiz Antonio Machado da Silva and Marcia Pereira Leite (2007), that is, as an understanding at the same time subjective and objective by the residents of *favelas* and outskirts, of their submission to a coercive and violent force, and the constant concern and fear of violent demonstrations, in many cases unpredictable, which prevent circulation and local routine. Thus, we seek to identify how the possible new modalities of ‘siege’ imply new constraints, risks, difficulties, uncertainties, and new types of resistance.

In this way, we seek to answer two specific questions: how do militias and factions occupy the territories where they operate, and what is the relationship between militias and factions and the residents of these locations?

This paper is therefore organized as follows: in addition to this introduction, a second section that briefly reviews the recent history of *favela* residents and their relations with the state and the armed groups that control their residential territories; a third section where we present the results of the research regarding the types of ‘sieges’ observed; a fourth section that delves deeper into the analysis regarding the effects of these ‘sieges’ on local sociability; and a fifth and concluding section, which presents the final considerations.

Living Under ‘Siege’ in Rio de Janeiro

Since the late 1970s, gangs of armed young people have controlled the retail sale of illicit drugs in the *favelas* and outskirts of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Their power is structured around the use of force as an element of coordination of social relations and daily life (Machado da Silva 1999), subordinating the populations living in the areas they control. The dispute over points of sale with other groups of illicit drug traffickers and the constant negotiation with the police over their actions – the conditions of which are often defined based on armed confrontations (Menezes 2018;

¹ The concept of precariousness has been extensively discussed by several authors (Bourdieu 2003; Butler 2004; Das and Randeria 2015, among others), which would not fit within the scope of this paper. In the sense used here, precariousness refers both to the difficult material conditions faced by *favela* residents and to the adverse political conditions to which they are subjected.

Misse 2018) – have led to permanent armed conflicts that have caused thousands of deaths over the years, as well as made the lives of Rio de Janeiro's *favela* residents unpredictable, marked by disruptions to routine, fear, apprehension, and silencing (Rocha 2013; 2018; Farias 2008b; Leite et al. 2018a; Machado da Silva 2008). Also, as a result of territorial disputes, the gangs began to organize themselves into factions, with disputes and alliances that alternate over the decades and with different relationships with criminal groups, both in Rio de Janeiro and in the rest of the country.

Around the same period, the first groups of what are conventionally called militias were formed. What we currently understand as 'militia' is a descendant of death squads, active mainly in Baixada Fluminense² (Alves 2003) and, in a more territorialized way, in the West region of Rio de Janeiro³ (Mesquita 2008; Misse 2011; Pope 2023a; Werneck 2015; Zaluvar and Conceição 2007). According to Alves (2003), these death squads become militias when they start to act in politics, electing members of parliament and creating an institutional arm for their activities. Such institutional relationships create networks of influence with police officers, politicians, community leaders, and state officials, which both guarantee access to resources and reduce conflicts and risks inherent to this type of activity (Arias 2013; Arias and Barnes 2017; Hirata et al. 2020; Pope 2023a; 2023b). Finally, militia members are known for commercializing various 'resources' and services, which they exploit in a monopolistic manner: security, extortion, housing, water supply, gas, internet, additional transportation, and cable television (*gatonet*), among others (Cano and Duarte 2012; Cano and Ioot 2008; Hirata et al. 2020; Zaluvar and Conceição 2007).

However, in the last fifteen years, several changes have been observed in this scenario. In 2008, the Favela Pacification Program was initiated to permanently install Pacification Police Units (UPP) in *favelas*. Its ef-

² Baixada Fluminense is an area of the Metropolitan Region of the state of Rio de Janeiro that brings together 13 municipalities.

³ The city of Rio de Janeiro is geographically divided into four zones: downtown, north, south, and west, and the city government classifies these zones into Planning Areas (APs). The west zone is located in APs 4 and 5. In this territorial division, AP 4 comprises 19 neighbourhoods and has two central areas: Jacarepaguá and Barra da Tijuca, and AP 5 has 21 neighborhoods with five central areas: Bangu, Realengo, Campo Grande, Santa Cruz, and Guaratiba. The two regions are separated by the Pedra Branca massif and represent more than 70% of the entire city's territory, where 2,945,963 inhabitants reside, according to the 2022 Census.

fects, although the project was terminated ten years later, are observed to this day: increased surveillance and control over residents' routines, reorganization of drug trafficking, increased commodification of territories in *favelas*, and increased militarization of life (Carvalho 2018; Rocha 2018; Leite et. al. 2018a; Menezes 2018; Miagusko 2018). In the same sense, the UPPs impacted the restructuring and expansion of militias (Arias and Barnes 2017; Da Motta 2020), especially since of the 38 UPPs installed, only one was in a militia area. Thus, there was no direct confrontation by state agents in militia areas, which contributed to militia members consolidating themselves in the territories already occupied and expanding their control to other areas of the city.

Starting in 2015, another series of events reshaped the relationship between crime, the state, and *favela* residents. The Pacification Program entered a generalized crisis, driven by the crisis in the state government, causing the situated logic of 'militarized guardianship'⁴ (Pacheco de Oliveira 2014). Between 2016 and 2017, criminal factions broke their alliances, reorganizing the crime scene and resulting in an intensification of disputes between drug trafficking gangs, an increase in cargo theft, and a substantial increase in homicides in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Hirata and Grillo 2019; Machado da Silva and Menezes 2020). Since 2018, the year of the Federal Intervention in Public Security in Rio de Janeiro, a new season of mega police operations and massacres with record numbers of deaths⁵ has begun, which continues to the present day. Thus, this period can be read as a moment of consolidation of the management of *favela* and peripheral populations based on the deepening of state violence, where militarization spreads as an organizing element of social life (Leite et al. 2018b) and war establishes itself as the current way of governing and managing – in a colonial model (Mbembe 2003) – life in the city (Magalhães 2020).

⁴ Editor's note: All quotations originally published in languages other than English have been translated by the authors.

⁵ According to data from the Observatório da Intervenção [Intervention Observatory] (Ramos 2019), in the six months of intervention, the number of shootings in the city increased (from 3,477 in the six months before the intervention to 4,850 in the following six months), 31 massacres were recorded with 130 deaths, 742 deaths and 620 injured in shootings, 736 people killed by the police and 81 deaths recorded during the actions of the Army. The Government of Claudio Castro maintains and worsens this situation, reaching the number of 182 deaths in 40 massacres in its first year of government alone (Grupo de Estudos dos Novos Ilegalismos/UFF 2022).

It is in this new context of reorganization of urban violence dynamics, state action, and territorial control that we carried out this research.

The ‘Siege’ Today

To understand how armed control is presented in the territory, how it becomes visible or invisible (or under what circumstances), both for those who live in these locations⁶ and for those who are ‘outsiders,’ we also analysed the reports of interviewed residents, and the statements captured in the field about the ‘climate’ of the location at certain times (Menezes 2018; Miagusko 2018) – which in some cases manifested as ‘rumours’ (Magalhães 2019; Menezes 2020), as well as news published in conventional media and on social networks.

Thus, we classify the forms of territorial presence as ‘Clear,’ that is, with the presence of weapons and clearer identification of the members of the armed groups, and ‘Diffuse,’ without the presence of weapons and/or other indicators and in which the identification of who the members of the armed group are would be more difficult. From this original classification, we derived three typologies, which we present below.

Consolidated Militia Control and Diffuse Territorial Presence

One of the locations surveyed is characterized by the long-standing presence of militias and the absence of records of armed conflicts.⁷ In that location, a resident had to discreetly point out to our researcher the militia members who were guarding the street, because the researcher was unable to identify them on his own. However, after locating who the militia members were and where they were, the researcher reported that the local atmosphere became more tense due to this surveillance. According to the reports obtained on that occasion, everyone who frequents the area ‘learns’ who the militia members are over time. However, those who have economic ties to the armed groups – whether because they rent houses that belong to the group or because they use the transportation service controlled by them, among others – need to acquire this ability to read ‘who is who’ more accurately. Those who display disruptive behaviour, in

⁶ The fieldwork was carried out in six different locations in the city of Rio de Janeiro, which, due to their characteristics, allowed us to construct a typology that guided the analyses and resulted in the data presented. It is also worth noting that the locations were divided into areas under the control of militia groups, drug trafficking factions and disputed areas in the western (AP4 and AP5), northern (AP3) and downtown (AP1) regions.

⁷ Names and references have been removed to preserve the anonymity of the interlocutors.

disagreement with the rules imposed by the militia group, are more actively targeted by the surveillance that this group exercises and are more directly affected by this oppression: they are the ‘kids’ of the neighbourhood.

It is worth noting, however, that this knowledge is tacit, in the sense that it is sufficient for individuals to ‘navigate’ the space, avoiding unnecessary confrontations and activating the protection offered when necessary. When referring to the militia members who operate there, local residents use their first names more often than their membership in known groups – such as *ligas* (league) or *bondes* (gangs). The relationship between territory and armed control is more personalized and mentioned in private conversations or based on ‘rumour’ (Magalhães 2019; Menezes 2020), than something stated in public or acknowledged – closer to a ‘domestic’ record than a ‘public matter.’

Thus, in this location where the presence of the armed group is diffuse, knowledge about who is a militia member, who is a police officer, and what each of these individuals represents in the territory is fundamental for ‘navigating’ within this dynamic. The diffuse presence does not mean that the environment is considered less monitored by those who live there or visit it, only that such surveillance is exercised in a more subtle way – which requires a greater ability to read the environment and its dynamics.

In another large neighbourhood in the West Zone, also under the control of a traditional militia group that has been operating in the area since the mid-1990s, a similar situation occurs. At first glance, it is not easy to recognize who the militia members are, since there is no distinctive feature that identifies them as such. According to interlocutors, anyone can potentially be a militia member. However, despite it not being easy to identify them, the group exercises strong control over the territory; even if they do not know who they are, the residents know that they are there, ‘camouflaged.’ And it is this camouflage that guarantees the success of the monitoring and surveillance of the neighbourhood’s daily life, ensuring that the ‘security’ offered by the militia members is considered efficient by the residents. In general, there is a promise of security that is fulfilled in practice and that makes the residents feel safe, as shown in an excerpt from an interview:

For example, in [the place] they don’t carry weapons, but they carry walkie-talkies, so they communicate all the time. On the streets and such, there’s always someone [one of them]. I always say I used to

leave bars at dawn sometimes and there was no transportation. I would sometimes walk home drunk, from [the place] to my house, it's a 20-minute walk, so you fly by, you don't even notice. And then sometimes I would go back home drunk with money in my pocket, and a cell phone, and nothing would happen, and it still doesn't happen today. [...] even Uber, when I take an Uber from [girlfriend's name]'s house to my house, they [...] say 'Oh, I like to take passengers to [name of the place], because it's peaceful.' [Man, Black, 30 years old]

Thus, in these situations, we classify the presence of armed groups as diffuse, marked by not being easily perceptible, but strongly felt.

Consolidated Control of Trafficking, Clear Territorial Presence

Another location studied, in the central region of Rio, has been the scene of many disputes between rival factions for control of the sale of illicit drugs in the area. It is currently controlled by a specific faction, which can be considered consolidated, and, in the perception of residents, the location is under constant threat of invasion/confrontation by the rival faction, which controls neighbouring territories. On the border between these territories, it is possible to observe the ostentatious display of weapons, as well as the presence of the 'walkie-talkie' boys. Similarly, on access roads, it is possible to notice the presence of individuals controlling the circulation of cars and motorcycles, which is only allowed when the driver is identified as a resident. At this 'checkpoint,' motorcycle drivers are required to enter without helmets and cars must have their windows open and the interior lights on. Residents also stated that they do not use GPS equipment or cameras on the dashboard of their cars, so as not to be mistaken for 'enemies' recording the location.

Due to the local armed group's constant need to 'defend' its territory, the spatiality of this location is marked by physical features and records that are reminiscent of war scenarios. Barricades were recently placed at some entrances, according to local 'rumours,' to hinder a possible invasion, either by another faction or by the police. Some internal alleys were closed with gates and padlocks to prevent the circulation of members of the illicit drug trafficking group. Likewise, many houses in the location have high gates and walls with broken glass and barbed wire, among other evidence of the architecture of a 'city of walls' (Caldeira 2020). Thus, the very production of the local physical space refers to the constant appre-

hension and concern about armed confrontations, even if only as a possibility or latency, which would allow the concept of territorial ostensibility to also be expanded to the dimension of the material production of the local space.

Disputed Territorial Control, Clear Territorial Presence

In another neighbourhood in the West Zone, the fieldwork focused on three *favelas* that have different forms of presence: (1) one occupied by the militia 'since forever' or 'since when it was just the Minas Gerais police'; (2) one occupied by militia members from the aforementioned *favela* since the 2000s; and (3) one under the control of a drug faction known as the militia's 'historic enemy.' Due to this territorial configuration, which brings together expanding militia groups and a rival drug trafficking faction, the region has been the scene of intense armed conflicts between groups that take turns fighting for control of the *favelas*. Thus, although it is largely considered a 'militia area,' the neighbourhood is the scene of the clear presence of these armed groups.

In the first *favela*, which is 'consolidated' by a militia group, residents reported that it is easy to identify who the militia members are because they are 'in the same place every day' – so 'everyone knows' who they are. This presence, however, is not accompanied by a permanent display of weapons, which are kept out of sight of residents, unless there is 'some problem': then they appear. In the second, considered a 'disputed' territory, the militia group behaves notoriously and violently: weapons are visible and they are very aggressive towards residents, especially when it is time to collect the security fee. According to reports, they enter the alleys weekly, shouting 'Security!', indicating that it is time to pay the fee. And in the third, with a consolidated occupation by a faction of illicit drug traffickers, but with recurring attempts at invasion by militia groups (so far unsuccessful), the presence is clear, with the drug-dealing spots set up at the entrance to the *favela*, just a few metres from the military police vehicle. In this sense, in the case of this neighbourhood, the territorial presence of armed groups combines different modalities: more diffuse in the places where militia members are consolidated, clearer in the places where drug trafficking factions are active, and in the 'disputed' location.

The relationship between territorial dispute and clear presence can also be observed in the case of a *favela* in the West Zone, also researched. The site of one of the first UPPs inaugurated, the *favela* lived for years with the discreet presence of drug traffickers, according to its residents. However,

after the closure of the UPP activities, drug trafficking became more visible in the area, although only in specific areas. The area is currently the scene of clashes between factions that take turns controlling the local illicit drug trade, which has gradually expanded the presence of armed individuals to the rest of the *favela*.

Reports gathered during fieldwork also indicate that there is a ‘residual’ militia in the *favela*, remnants of an armed group that operated there during the years when the territory was an area of militia activity. However, the members of this group were no longer interested in operating in the area and exerting strong moral control over the routine and sociability of residents, as the militia did previously (Da Motta 2020; Mendonça 2014). Thus, a kind of ‘joint operation’ between drug trafficking and militia has taken shape in the area, in which the former exercises territorial control – essential for the continuation of the illicit drug trade – while the latter economically exploits certain local resources (charging fees and exercising a monopoly over the provision of services such as gas, cable TV, and water supply, among others). In this way, drug trafficking presents itself and ensures the management of order in the territory, thus exercising political control, while the militia is configured as an almost invisible organization, but present in the exploitation of services and collection of fees. The coexistence of the two groups in the same space would have the purpose of guaranteeing economic benefits for both.

The same correlation between territorial disputes and ostentation was observed in territory currently controlled by a group of drug traffickers. Since 2019, the neighbourhood located in the North Zone has been the scene of numerous police operations as well as clashes between factions. Recently, the streets of the area have become a battle scene, with barricades on the main roads, chases, and operations, which have been carried out for several days in a row and simultaneous locations. For several consecutive mornings, the population awoke to the sound of gunshots in areas identified as ‘outside the *favela*,’ something that was unusual not long ago. Due to these confrontations, barricades on the streets that give access to the *favelas* are now part of the scene, as is the practice of approaching drivers. A ride-hailing driver reported that a colleague had been approached ‘by the guys,’ arriving at the passenger’s destination ‘all pissed with fear.’ Another ride-hailing driver said that it was forbidden to get in with the phone attached to the car window (to make it easier for the GPS equipment to see), as the drug traffickers might think that it was being filmed. The ‘siege’ observed in this location (as in the neighbour-

hood in the central region) directly affects the movement of residents and makes the presence of the local armed group obvious and unavoidable.

Therefore, the various confrontations with the police forces and the changes in the hierarchy of command of the factions operating in the area have changed the type of territorial presence: if before the drug traffickers sought to cover up their presence more, to avoid conflicts and not to disrupt their highly lucrative businesses, nowadays the experience of daily violence has increased, even spreading to other territories. When the main group of drug traffickers operating in the neighbourhood was led by an authority figure – known for his violence, but also for his charisma – the neighbourhood enjoyed a reputation for being ‘peaceful.’ Now, however, the relations between drug traffickers, police, and residents have become unstable, dubious, and vulnerable, undermining the feeling of security of those who live there.⁸

The feeling of insecurity experienced by residents and the desire for a calmer and more stable routine was expressed, in one of the reports collected, in the statement of the difference in treatment of the population by the different armed groups:

Researcher: Going into this subject more, there is drug trafficking, which we have a better idea of what it is, and there is what appears to be a militia. What is the difference between these two groups in your perception? Is there a specific activity that one does that the other does not? Or is it more in the way they act?

Interlocutor: It’s more about the way they act. What they do is practically the same thing, which is taking money. Charging fees, that kind of thing. Vans, motorcycles ... it’s the same thing for both. But the way they deal is different.

Researcher: Do you mean with the residents or among themselves?

Interlocutor: With the residents, because the criminals treat them one way and the militia treats them another. Militias have stricter rules compared to criminals. Criminals have more freedom, in this case. But, it’s that. It’s that freedom that, if you break something or

⁸ A frequent rumour identified in the field – and also mentioned in Rio de Janeiro newspapers – reported a ‘partnership’ relationship between a local drug trafficking group and a militia member, who was allegedly teaching the group tactics and practices of extortion and territorial control. This possibility of combining the two types of territorial control greatly concerned the research interlocutors. However, it has not yet been possible to investigate this issue in greater depth.

do something wrong, you'll pay a price too. It doesn't matter to both.
[Man, Black, 25 years old]

Correlations between Types of Territorial Control and Modes of the Presence of Groups in Localities: Variations in 'Sieges'

From the data collected, we observed a correlation between armed control in the area being consolidated or a 'disputed' territory, the presence of the armed group in the territory being diffuse or ostensive, and the 'siege' experienced by the residents.⁹ The absence of confrontations in territories of consolidated armed occupation produces a diffuse presence of group members throughout the territory, probably because, without the threat of confrontations, they do not need to display their weapons to signal their military power to potential rivals and the police forces. The groups that operate in these territories thus enjoy the 'political advantages' mentioned by Daniel Hirata et al. (2020) – less frequent or even absent police operations, and privileged events where confrontations erupt in the territory, altering routines and bringing terror to residents. As highlighted in the aforementioned study, it is militia groups that benefit from these advantages. In territories controlled by drug trafficking gangs, on the other hand, whether or not they are 'in dispute' matters less – being 'in the hands of drug traffickers' explains the ostentatious territorial presence. However, we observed that when the territory is under militia control but is 'in dispute', the presence becomes more ostentatious, especially due to the display of weapons as a signal to rival groups – thus bringing the type of 'siege' imposed on residents closer to the experience of those who live in areas where drug trafficking groups operate.

As a consequence, we observed that the notoriously territorial presence also directly influences the type of relationship that the armed group establishes with the population under its control. The frequency of con-

⁹ Throughout the text, we have indicated how in all areas, regardless of whether they are under armed control of drug traffickers or militia members, the practice of extortion has expanded, with the increasingly intense use of threats and physical violence. This practice has been responsible for several episodes of violence, both actual and potential, reported by our research interlocutors. This mode of action, which confuses traditional distinctions between the practices of militia members and drug traffickers, is called 'parasitic entrepreneurship'; due to the intensity of the exploitation practiced against populations that have already been historically impoverished, and more intensely so in recent times. Due to the scope of this paper, we will not be able to explore this dimension in more detail.

frontations or their constant threat of outbreak produces more conflictual local sociability, with high levels of surveillance and monitoring and constant complaints from residents about the absence of the ‘peace’ that existed in previous moments, whether by militia groups or drug trafficking factions. From these connections, we produced a typology of experienced ‘sieges’: whereas residents of ‘disputed’ territories experience a ‘siege by terror,’ or whereas residents of territories under consolidated control experience a ‘panoptic siege.’ We argue that it is this distinction that produces the most profound effects on local sociability and the daily lives of residents. Therefore, it is these effects that we explore in the next section.

‘Siege’ Typologies and Their Effects on Local Sociability

‘Disputed’ Territorial Control: Siege ‘By Terror’

In the neighbourhood of the North Zone, a ‘disputed’ territory controlled by drug trafficking groups, the former ‘boss’ of the largest *favela* in the area adopted a welfare policy, aiming to gain support from residents. However, this ‘good neighbour policy’ was also built on the use of a network of lookouts, many weapons, and agreements with the officers of the Military Police Battalion responsible for the area, paying them large bribes. In addition, he also avoided confrontations with the police so as not to attract attention, especially from the media. With the current ‘boss,’ however, the number of confrontations and police operations has increased, leading to criticism from residents. According to one of the interviewees in the survey, ‘the former boss had more control over the neighbourhoods and avoided exposure.’ Thus, for many of the residents interviewed in the survey, the current drug trafficking leadership is considered ‘weak,’ as it has no control over the daily disorders, such as the increase in the number of assaults and robberies – something that was rare under the previous ‘boss.’

The lack of control over local violence, in the words of the interlocutors, contrasts with the increasing control over the moral lives of residents. One of the main drug dealers in the area converted to the evangelical religion¹⁰ and began to prohibit manifestations of African-based religion within the *favela* (threatening the death and expulsion of practicing residents). He prohibited the use of white clothing and sacred bead

¹⁰ The reports from the interlocutors did not indicate which religious denomination the drug trafficker had joined, nor whether this conversion had implied joining a specific movement.

necklaces [sacred artefacts] and attacked and destroyed religious temples – forcing the religious residents themselves to tear down the places designated for practices, break their sacred bead necklaces, and break statues and other artefacts used in their activities. Even after his assassination, these practices remain in force.

In the West Zone neighbourhood, also classified as ‘in dispute’ but under militia control, many interlocutors mentioned that the biggest problem they are currently facing is the armed conflicts between groups for control of the *favelas*. Some interlocutors also pointed out that, during the period when a traditional militia group operated in the area and controlled most of the *favelas*, the neighbourhood enjoyed order and security. The current group, however, only serves to collect security fees but does not effectively guarantee them.

The case of the *favela* in the West Zone, in turn, is characterized by the territorial dispute between different factions for control of the illicit drug trade in the area, which intensified after the departure of the UPP in 2018, and the ‘joint operation’ between drug trafficking and militia, which is still in operation. However, in terms of the type of ‘siege’ experienced, it is the armed confrontations resulting from the disputes that characterize the routine in the area and that bring insecurity and unpredictability to the residents. Thus, although the local militia is not involved in the episodes of armed violence that occur there, this ‘political advantage’ is not extended to the residents, who live with ‘the worst of both worlds’: extortion practiced by the militia and the risk of shootings involving drug trafficking.

The locations in this group therefore have in common the experience of living in a situation of open armed conflict, a violence that can erupt at any moment and transform the streets of the locations into ‘war scenarios.’ Thus, although they are territories under the control of armed groups of different categories (drug trafficking gangs and militias), what brings them together is the experience of the ‘siege by terror,’ which subjects residents to living conditions marked by fear, insecurity, and unpredictability.

Consolidated territorial control: ‘Panoptic’ Siege

In the neighbourhood in the central region, under the consolidated control of a group of drug traffickers, violence is latent, especially as a threat. Thus, surveillance and monitoring of residents are constant and felt very strongly by them. The fear of having trouble with a drug trafficker, of being mistaken for an informant, or of breaking some implicit rule deter-

mined by them affects the residents' entire routine. In addition to restrictions on coming and going and the concern of always having to 'ask for permission' – whether to build a house, open a business, carry out a public activity, etc. – residents also feel prevented from accessing rights and guarantees, especially when these involve justice and/or security agencies. In the field, we observed a situation where members of the residents' association assisted a woman in a situation of domestic violence. They advised her to find another house in the *favela* to escape her abusive husband, but without going to the Women's Police Station – so as not to break the prohibition imposed by the drug traffickers themselves on 'bringing the police to the *favela*.' Thus, such 'control devices' are already incorporated by the residents themselves, guiding their conduct (Farias 2008a, 175).

Also in the West Zone *favela*, which is under consolidated control by militia groups, the feeling of surveillance and monitoring is repeated, albeit in a more diffuse form – in line with the type of territorial presence exercised by the local armed group. However, the moments of encounter between residents and militia members are restricted to commercial transactions – these are moments when bills are collected, or services offered by the latter are used. Thus, those residents who depend most on the services offered by the latter – such as those who rent their homes, for example – are more exposed to a possible violent encounter with the militia members.¹¹ Those who depend most on the services of the militia would, consequently, be more exposed to extortion by it. However, as we observed in the field, all residents seek to know what the expectations are regarding their conduct on the part of the militia members – since meeting them is a condition for avoiding being victimized by retaliation. Thus, tacit knowledge about who the militia members are, who, as previously mentioned, are not easily identified, and what types of practices are prohibited¹² is essential to survive in these conditions.

¹¹ It is worth noting that services – such as alternative transportation, cable tv and internet, among others – are offered in a monopolistic manner. Therefore, when we refer to the provision of services, we know that residents do not have the option of contracting services from other providers. However, some interlocutors made a point of emphasizing that, when possible, they choose not to access such services so as not to have to deal with the militia members.

¹² Another field report states that the violent death of a young man who was selling hot dogs in the area, attributed to the militia group, was due to the fact that he had 'shown off' signs of 'having money,' such as jewellery and clothes of a certain brand. For the

In turn, in the neighbourhood in the West Zone under consolidated militia control, the interviewees reported that they are often unable to identify who the militia members are in their daily lives since they often do not display specific distinctive signs. However, this invisibility gives the members of the armed group a ‘camouflage,’ which would be favourable to more effective surveillance. If ‘anyone can be a militia member,’ then how do you know when you are being watched? One interviewee reported that he was in a bar with friends, most of them young Black people, after participating in a political demonstration in another neighbourhood, and that when they were discussing episodes of racism, they were approached by an older Black man who entered the conversation and questioned what those present were saying. According to the report, he said: ‘And then people get into this racism thing, but everyone I know here who has money is Black. Like the police chief at [police station number], who is Black.’ For our interlocutor, the man, without directly identifying himself as a militia member, was indicating his membership in the group by mentioning a close relationship with a police officer and was also embarrassing the young people, who did not respond to the supposed provocation and ended up leaving the place.

The reports presented in this section therefore express an experience of ‘siege’ that is not exactly that of the ‘terror’ described above but is characterized by a feeling of constant vigilance and the resulting need for self-control, seeking to avoid breaking any rule imposed by the local armed group – whether explicit or understood as possible. In this sense, we classify this type of ‘siege’ as a panoptic siege, referring to Michel Foucault’s (1977) concept, which describes the feeling of potential continuous surveillance, which leads people to behave according to shared norms and expectations, shaping their behaviour in a disciplined manner. Although this form of ‘siege’ appears to be less violent than the ‘siege of terror,’ Juliana Farias reinforces that this experience can be described as a form of ‘suffocation,’ the effects of which can be felt more gradually, but which, in the end, also cause the impossibility of breathing (2008a, 189).

Whether as an experience of terror or as a ‘suffocation,’ the lives of *favela* residents in Rio de Janeiro remain ‘under siege,’ albeit in different

interlocutors, he thus demonstrated that he had other incomes besides selling hot dogs, which attracted the attention and consequently the retaliation of the armed group. He would therefore have been reckless in not obeying this implicit rule, although considered obvious by the residents.

ways. The perpetuation of this condition, therefore, marks the lives of Rio de Janeiro citizens living in *favelas* and the outskirts.

Final Considerations

In this paper, based on ethnographic fieldwork in six areas of the city of Rio de Janeiro, we identified diverse territorial control dynamics practiced by armed groups in Rio de Janeiro that we described as the current dynamics of 'siege' (Machado da Silva 2008) produced by different armed groups, their effects on local sociabilities, and the production of precariousness to which the residents of these locations are subjected.

Thus, we argue that 'living under siege' by armed groups in Rio de Janeiro today is determined less by the type of group that controls the territory and more by the practices that these groups adopt in managing territories and populations – practices that can be exercised in a multitude of combinations. By relating to qualifications or denominators as 'type of armed group operating in the location' (drug trafficking or militia) and 'type of territorial control' (consolidated or disputed), we identify that these produce two different modalities of territorial presence: clear and diffuse. These, in turn, when recombined with the previous variables, produce different forms of 'siege': the 'siege by terror,' experienced by residents of territories where the dispute for territorial control prevents any predictability in routine and sense of security, and the 'panoptic siege,' experienced by those who live in territories less subject to daily armed confrontations, but where surveillance by armed groups and self-surveillance determine sociability.

The results of our research point to experiences of 'siege' that combine different configurations of relationships between armed groups, state forces, and residents of the outskirts. Notwithstanding these combinations, the portrait we draw is that of Rio de Janeiro as a 'city under siege' (Graham 2011), whereas armed groups 'govern' the population in a violent and abusive manner, varying only in the dosage between control and the exercise of the power to kill (Leite 2018). In this portrait, the state is highlighted in its role as co-producer and co-manager of this armed government, whether through its repressive policy or through the intentional absence of public policies that guarantee this population their rights to public services, economic development, and security. In our city, armed violence, restricted sociability, and precariousness are reproduced continuously and historically, limiting the population's possibilities of living and surviving.

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