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Interrogating peace in a violent democracy: a global south critique

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This article examines the complex and often conflicting forms of ‘peace’ in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, using a postcolonial critique to challenge the state’s top-down imposition of realist and neoliberal peace models. It begins by interrogating the concept of ‘peace’ in the context of the Brazilian State’s historical racialization and criminalization of favelas. The article develops four key arguments. First, it considers how militarized public security policies in the “War on Drugs” translate into ‘peace as war’ in the favelas. Second, it considers criminal governance as ‘peace as order’. Third, it critiques the Pacifying Police Program (UPP) as part of a neoliberal ‘tourist peace,’ prioritizing the safety of international visitors during significant events in 2014 and 2016. Finally, it highlights non-violent peace processes within the favelas, which aim to achieve a ‘positive peace.’ The article argues that different actors, including organized criminal groups, can produce various forms of peace, raising critical questions about whose peace is being pursued and at what cost.

KEYWORDS

global south, urban violence and drug trafficking, favela, peace, violence – prevention and control, postcolonial critique, Rio de Janeiro, police – community relations

1 Introduction

In 2021 and 2022, Rio de Janeiro experienced three of the four most deadly police operations in history in three different favelas. In May 2021, a record 28 people were killed in Jacarezinho. In May 2022, 25 people were killed in Vila Cruzeiro. In July 2022, 17 were killed in Complexo do Alemão (G1 Rio, 2022). In 2019, 1814 people were killed in police interventions in Rio de Janeiro, and 86% of these victims were black or brown (Ramos, 2020). In 2022, the police were responsible for almost one-third of all violent deaths in Rio (Ramos, 2022; Pacheco and Marques, 2023).

From a peace and conflict perspective, Rio de Janeiro increasingly presents itself as a highly intricate conflict context where the boundaries between supposedly conflicting organized crime groups and public security apparatus are blurry, causing a wildly confusing network of crime and violence whose insecurity is felt in the everyday lives of many favela residents. The militias, organized criminal groups (partly) composed of former and current public security forces officials, are increasingly competing and cooperating with the drug trafficking gangs such as Comando Vermelho – CV (Red Command), Terceiro Comando Puro – TCP (Pure Third Command) and Amigos de Amigos – AdA (Friends of Friends) for armed control over the favelas and the favela population in Rio de Janeiro (Costa and Adorno, 2018). While militias and drug cartels control vast geographical areas of Rio de Janeiro – including neighborhoods and favelas, their power is significantly limited to drug trafficking and offering essential services such as gas, local transportation and broadband. At the same time, the favelas are the main targets of violent police operations. In this violent context, social

movements and activists fight for the favela residents to be treated as citizens fully deserving of human rights and security.

The peace and conflict literature has only in recent years started to consider peace and conflict in the Brazilian context of urban violence (Ferreira and Richmond, 2021; Ferreira, 2022; Maschietto and Ferreira, 2024). In Brazil, the “War on Drugs,” although lethal, does not follow a standard definition of civil war as the drug cartels and militias do not directly pose a threat to overthrow the government. The “War on Drugs” in Rio de Janeiro instead presents a hyper-militarized conflict between public security operations and organized criminal groups, where, through highly militarized police operations, favela residents suffer the most insecurity and violence. This article considers how the state’s public security policies compare to organized criminal groups and favela community projects’ attempts to reduce violence in the favelas.

To curb the actions of militias and drug cartels, the Pacifying Police Program (UPP) has been regarded as one of Brazil’s most important public security developments in recent decades. It was implemented at the end of 2008 in Rio de Janeiro and would supposedly reinvent the role of the police force in the country (Gaffney, 2012; Vargas, 2013; Denyer Willis and Mota Prado, 2014). It follows the proposition of a permanent form of community policing inspired by Colombia’s experience (Denyer Willis and Mota Prado, 2014) as opposed to massive police-military operations conducted by the Special Operations Battalion (BOPE). Under the frame of community policing, pacification operations occurred through police-military intervention to reclaim urban areas from the control of drug cartels (Gaffney, 2012; Vargas, 2013; Denyer Willis and Mota Prado, 2014) to replace them with resident-friendly police units known as UPPs (UPP, 2014).

In this article, we map out the various forms of violence, security and ‘peace’ in Rio de Janeiro. Inspired by Galtung’s positive and negative peace, we see peace as a broad spectrum with negative peace as order, control, and absence of direct violence – leading to stability in one end, and positive peace focusing on social justice and addressing structural and cultural forms of violence in the other. This broader definition of peace allows us to consider the UPPs as domestic peace operations since they were portrayed as bringing peace, stability, and social programs to the favelas, mirroring the blue berets of UN peacekeeping operations. Studying the UPPs in retrospect, at a time when this domestic peace project had eroded, allows us to analyse the state’s attempts and framings of ‘peace’ in the favelas from a critical perspective, showing how they remained entangled in the criminalizing narratives of the War on Drugs, where the state ‘peace’ becomes more a ‘peace as domination’ over the ‘dangerous’ favelas.

Ferreira and Richmond (2021) have briefly looked at the chances for positive peace through peace formation in Latin America and found that these local, non-violent peace processes originating in civil society are severely blocked by criminal governance in marginalized communities. They find that criminal governance undermines peace formation processes by maintaining levels of violence, exploiting structural and cultural violence, and, secondly, pushing the state away from its citizens (Ferreira and Richmond, 2021, p. 162). By adopting a postcolonial perspective, this article shows that the state itself, through its militarized public security policies and history of state violence against the favelas, is a significant producer and reproducer of violence. In this regard, we argue that both criminal and state governance perform actions that build violence while, in the best case

scenario, sustaining negative peace. We argue that to change this scenario, the state needs to take seriously the demands of grassroots peace processes in the favela communities that live under a violent entanglement of police operations and organized criminal groups.

Theoretically, this article presents a postcolonial critique of peacebuilding operations and security by studying the effects of various forms of top-down ‘peace’ and ‘pacification’ on favela residents’ everyday life (Amar, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2014). The postcolonial critique here is rooted in a historical review of public security to understand how a colonial legacy impacts state-favela relations today, how this affects peace and security in the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, and how favela residents experience this in their everyday. To contextualize our discussion, we start with a short review of the concept of ‘peace’ and then present a historical view on the criminalization and racialization of the favela as both a space and subjectivity and how this still today supports an increased militarization of public security instead of investing in social development in these neighborhoods. We then consider the following forms of ‘peace’ as acted by different actors in the favelas in Rio de Janeiro: Firstly, a violent, negative peace as ‘order’ through criminal governance both by drug cartels and militias; Secondly, during the World Cup and Olympic Games in 2014 and 2016, the UPP pacification project as ‘tourist peace’ meant to bring security to tourists visiting the city; and; Thirdly, favela peace formation as a positive peace surging from the favelas themselves. Finally, we consider how these forms of ‘peace’ are experienced in the favela and look at how these different types of ‘peace’ might interact, contradict and even ‘spoil’ each other.

In epistemological terms, the article is deeply rooted in a feminist perspective in which knowledge is situated (Cockburn, 2001; Wibben, 2011). Field notes that grounded this article were a result of research that considered those directly affected by ‘peace’ operations in Rio de Janeiro, meaning – favela residents, to embody a positionality essential to understand the dynamics of peace in the favelas. The article is based on both authors’ PhD research, and the fieldwork references are taken from Buer’s field notes from events on public security and interviews with professionals working to reduce violence in different favelas in the south and north zones of Rio, gathered in 2019–2020 (Appendix Table A1,A2). The research participants’ names are anonymized with pseudonyms, and their locations are generalized to the city zones for their protection.

2 A short review of violence and peace

The interrogation of various types of peace as imposed or constructed by different actors in the favelas in Rio de Janeiro deserves a short review of the concept of ‘peace’, its broad scope, and, thus, its various potential meanings. According to Galtung, peace is defined as “the absence of violence” (1969, p. 167), and a peaceful social order is defined as “the vast region of social orders from which violence is absent” (1969, p. 168). Within this, a “tremendous amount of variation is possible,” depending on how you define violence (1969, p. 168). This leads us to ask: which forms of peaceful social order exist in the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, which forms of violence do they reduce, and whose peace do they protect?

Violence, as Galtung famously has discussed, can be divided into direct, structural and cultural violence (1969; 1990). Here, direct violence is harm directly imposed by one actor against another, a form of violence that is manifest and easy to identify and

define. In contrast, structural and cultural violence are more diffuse. Structural violence includes a longer causal chain between perpetrator and victim and is thus seen as unjust social structures or social injustice (1969, p. 171). Galtung argues that structural violence can be defined as “*the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is*” (p. 168). Structural violence is indirect, built into the structures of society in the form of some individuals having greater chances of achieving their life potential than others and addresses the injustice of inequality, poverty, racism, colonialism and more, which prevent people from the life they could live in a wholly just world (Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1969). Cultural violence then explains how shaping perceptions and narratives successfully naturalizes and normalizes the existing forms of structural and direct violence and the relations of social domination (Galtung, 1990). Translating this discussion of violence back to the realm of peace, we can see that how one defines and seeks to implement peace depends on which form of violence one seeks to reduce or, ideally, eradicate.

Liberal peace has become the primary blueprint in which the international community has implemented peace operations, with its top-down liberal ideologies, hollow state structures and markets being exported to various conflict contexts, mostly in (post) colonial and ‘developing’ societies in the global south. Since early 2000s, the critical school in peace studies has engaged with this critique, pointing out how a paternalistic and neocolonial view continues to offer a ‘Western’ (European and North American) control over their former colonies (Suhrke, 2001; Pugh, 2004; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2009; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2009; Jabri, 2013). With the ‘local turn’ in peace studies in the 2010s, critical peace scholars emphasized the need to listen to local perspectives in conflict and support local agencies in these contexts to be able to build a longer-term, sustainable peace that is legitimate and useful to the local populations (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2014). Marxist, feminist and decolonial perspectives inspire the critical school and local turn. Marxist perspectives focus more on eradicating social injustice, where peace can only be achieved with social justice and eliminating inequalities between social classes (Richmond, 2016). Feminist and decolonial perspectives on peace critique the state-centrism of the realist and liberal peace and focus instead on the importance of recognizing the intersectionality of violence, the need for peace to address not only direct but also structural, cultural, and more hidden forms of violence that transgress ‘peacetime’ and ‘wartime’ and move from the public into the private realm (such as domestic violence and racism), as well as the need to find local legitimacy in peace operations (Jabri, 2013; Björkdahl and Selimovic, 2016; Wibben et al., 2019; Fernández and Guerra, 2020).

This brief discussion of peace and violence shows how “the definition of ‘peace’ [might] become[s] a major part of a scientific strategy” (Galtung, 1969 p. 168) that can act as a legitimizer of the implementation of a given social control imposed on populations considered dangerous and as a source of violence themselves. Adopting a feminist and decolonial perspective, we consider how the nature of various actors’ implementation of ‘peace’ in the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, including organized criminal groups, the state’s public security projects, and favela community organizations, affect different forms of violence in the everyday.

3 Contextualizing Rio’s militarized public security in the historic racialization and criminalization of the favelas

The militarization of public security in Rio de Janeiro is not a recent phenomenon but rather the culmination of historical processes that have long racialized and criminalized the city’s favelas. We contend that understanding colonial legacies is crucial for grasping coloniality as a structuring factor and its consequences for Rio de Janeiro’s struggle for peace. As detailed in the following section, public support is instrumental in maintaining order in the city’s spaces, where colonial perceptions of wilderness, untamed inhabitants, and uncivilized areas significantly influence the governance of favela residents. Our perspective departs from analyses by authors such as Fanon (1963) and Mbembé and Meintjes (2003), Mbembé (2019), who have delved into the experiences of colonial subjects. The portrayal of colonial space as “empty space” was a common theme in Latin America’s imperial discourse and the imagination of modernity and coloniality as intertwined aspects of the same world system (Mignolo, 2000). As many former colonies gained independence, local elites represented the imperial force internally.

Brazil’s history of the slave trade is dramatic. About 10.7 million Africans were brought to Brazil from the late 15th to the 19th centuries, but only 4.8 million survived (Klein and Luna, 2009). In the late 1750s, more than three-quarters of migrants to the Americas were Africans from the transatlantic slave trade (Klein and Luna, 2009). This influx was first linked to Brazil’s economy, fueled by sugar, coffee, and mining. Salvador and Recife were the main ports in the 16th and 17th centuries, but by the 18th century, Rio de Janeiro became dominant, accounting for 43% of the immigration of the African enslaved population (Klein and Luna, 2009). This forced migration deeply influenced Brazil’s economic growth and left a lasting impact on its social and cultural dynamics.

The police force in Brazil, during the colonial and imperial periods, was constituted of activities of nation-building and social order. The police helped build cities, control vagabonds, and keep royalty safe while expanding agricultural lands owned by oligarchies (Holloway, 1997). Police arrest records from 1810–1821 revealed numerous laws and decrees aimed at controlling and intimidating marginalized urban groups. Alexandra Brown argued that violence was intertwined with state formation through laws sentencing death and physical punishment for enslaved people (Brown, 2000). It is possible to conclude that at that time, one way to strengthen the state apparatus was through consolidating power over enslaved people in a dynamic relation between slave rebelliousness, daily crime, and efforts by the elite to control a perceived threatening population.

While landowners required well-maintained enslaved people for work, the public authorities protected the elites from potential risks posed by the enslaved populations (Reiter and Mitchell, 2010). A comprehensive set of laws, norms, and security measures were explicitly designed to handle the issue of slavery, with an emphasis on “social control” permeating discussions relating to changes in the law, investments in the police force, and the regulation of corporal punishment (Florindo, 2011). These discussions often clashed with the aspirations of an emerging Brazilian elite seeking to align with the civilized and modern ethos associated with Europe. It’s crucial to note that Brazil was the last Western country to abolish slavery.

In 1888, the Lei Áurea, or Golden Law, officially abolished slavery in Brazil. Facing severe restrictions on constitutional rights, limited access to education, and ongoing police persecution under the accusation of being fugitives from slavery, the newly freed population had few resources to participate in the emerging capitalist system (Chalhoub, 2011). Both enslavers and members of the Brazilian elite argued that the institution of slavery, along with racial prejudice, undermined the potential for Afro-Brazilians to work as free individuals in the new capitalist society, despite their ability to perform the work (Oliveira and Kimberly, 2003). As a result, European migrants were perceived as a new source of labor, especially by coffee growers in the Southeast.

The favela emerged as a space of abandonment while national and local intellectuals were concerned about the future of the new republic, including its policies regarding health, sanitation, and urban reforms. The housing shortage in poor communities pushed the unable-to-afford homes into the city center for jobs. The elite sought to expel those who did not match their vision of the ‘marvelous city.’ Algranti (1988) noted that Rio de Janeiro’s police force formation coincided with population growth and urban development. Brazil’s governance of racialized groups has two phases: pre-1930s, when police protected enslavers and the elite from enslaved people and newly freed individuals, and post-1930 when black communities seemed neglected as police focused on communists. Racial narratives have linked favela residents to crime, justifying state neglect and policing. In the 1950s, black communities were displaced to favelas, suffering from poor health services and economic conditions that led to high mortality rates.

The “War on Drugs,” initiated in the 1960s through U.S. legislation, allowed the U.S. to provide military aid to several South American countries, including Peru, Colombia, Panama, and Brazil. In Brazil, the “War on Drugs” has led to significant social consequences. Following the re-democratization in the 1980s, the “War on Drugs” has made the annihilation of black communities even more dramatic, making them 70% of homicide victims. Drug trafficking accounts for the highest number of incarcerations, with Brazil ranking third globally in prison populations. The incarceration rate in the last 10 years has risen by 44% (Instituto Igarapé, 2024). Additionally, police operations often target individuals based on race or social origin, with 64% of the prison population being black, despite black people constituting 54% of the overall population. The state’s focus on drug supply, rather than addressing the social and health impacts of drug consumption, perpetuates racial and class disparities, undermining democracy.

Villenave (2022) argues that the killing of marginalized groups is not just an effect of the “War on Drugs” but also a result of a more systematic and racialized logic that has its roots in the colonial past and a necropolitical rationale that governs favela spaces through death. To illustrate this argument, we can consider how unthinkable it is to have heavily armored vehicles being used in police operations targeting drug dealers who operate in – and are from, wealthy areas of Rio de Janeiro. The criminalization of young Black favela residents relates to a colonial view that sees them as ‘dangerous’ and a ‘threat’ needing containment, often through violent means (Hilgers and Barbosa, 2017). This portrayal legitimizes state actions against favelas, justifying militarized security operations purportedly to protect the city from drug-related violence. The extensive state violence in favelas has drawn accusations of black genocide, indicating a necropolitical

relationship where the state engages in ‘killing and letting die’ (Alves, 2014; Vargas, 2005; Vargas, 2013). The state’s treatment of favela residents mirrors colonial logic, as Fanon (1963) suggests, where force is used without diminishing oppression or concealing domination.

When discussing domestic peace operations in Brazil, it is crucial to consider that most police violence occurs in favelas and other marginalized urban areas, where death is often an expected outcome. Under the framework of the “War on Drugs,” militarized interventions in favelas are seen as positive. Vargas (2013) identified a shared sentiment, including fear and abjection, among self-identified white people and respectable citizens toward black bodies and their communities, especially regarding pacifying operations. These sentiments highlight the need to establish clear boundaries between favelas and non-favela areas, creating a divide between “them” and “us.” In this postcolonial city and necropolitical state, peace becomes a form of war, and the state is the means of waging it (Foucault, 1976, in Richmond, 2001). Peace reflects the powers and nature of the state and, in this context, remains intimately linked to Brazil’s violent history of colonization, slavery, and dictatorship.

This section demonstrates how colonial logics intertwine with contemporary security operations in favelas. Under the justification of the “War on Drugs,” favela residents are criminalized as participants in drug activities, and state violence is legitimized as the only method to protect the upper classes from this ‘dangerous population.’ However, these notions are only naturalized and legitimized through the historical racialization of favela residents, whose lives are considered less valuable. In the next section, we will explore the type of peace implemented by criminal groups and the state through pacification projects before examining favela peace formation as a demonstration of favela agency toward positive peace.

4 Peace governmentality

This section examines alternative approaches to peace and violence reduction in the favelas. Here, ‘peace’—the absence of violence—ranges from negative peace, such as order, to positive peace, which involves social justice (Galtung, 1969) based on the violence addressed. Defining ‘peace’ may legitimize various actions. This section explores how drug cartels, militias, the state through the UPP Program, and favela movements offer different forms of peace. We discuss criminal governance providing ‘peace as order,’ the UPP as neoliberal ‘tourist peace,’ and grassroots peacebuilding in favela movements.

4.1 Peace through criminal governance: ‘criminal pacification’

While perhaps controversial, a diluted concept of peace as everything from negative to positive peace allows us to consider how criminal governance might create peace in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas by decreasing direct violence. In this section, we use Magaloni et al.’s (2020) study on organized criminal governance to consider cases where the criminal governance of both drug cartels and militias might be regarded as ‘peace’ as order, including a discussion of the negative implications of this. Magaloni et al. provide a critical study on the different forms of organized criminal governance in Rio de

Janeiro, their impact on local security and the implications of police operations depending on the form of governance. Based on organized criminal groups (OCGs) control over territory, relationship with the state and relationship with the local community, they divide their governance into five different forms of criminal order:

Insurgent, “where the OCG opposes the state, possesses high military capacity, and provides safety and other benefits to civilians to win support.”

Bandit, where OCGs “possess the least military capacity to deter invasions and rule their territories using more ruthless methods.”

Symbiotic, where “OCGs share resources from illicit markets with their state associates but behave in “benign” ways toward civilians by providing local security and other forms of assistance.”

Predatory, where “OCGs form illicit associations with state agents to extract rents from the community and might even engage in activities such as human trafficking, sexual violence, and kidnapping, which they perform under the protection of law enforcement.”

Split, “where communities are divided into territories controlled by rival criminal groups and are subject to constant armed confrontations.” (Magaloni et al., 2020, p. 553)

They find that in both “insurgent” and “symbiotic” forms of governance, where the local OCG manages to reach close to monopolization of violence and has a more long-term, benign relationship with the local population and community, “they might establish forms of relatively orderly rule, delivering conflict resolution and local police to sanction crimes such as assault, rape, domestic violence, and robbery” (Magaloni et al., 2020, p. 553). Regarding peace as order, control, and reduction of direct violence, we will briefly consider how drug cartel governance and militia governance might create relatively peaceful social orders.

4.1.1 Drug cartels

The three most relevant drug cartels in Rio de Janeiro are Comando Vermelho (Red Command), Terceiro Comando Puro (Pure Third Command) and Amigos de Amigos (Friends of Friends) (Costa and Adorno, 2018). Comando Vermelho is the oldest and the most significant drug cartel in Rio in terms of territory and drug sales. It was established during the military dictatorship in 1969 when political prisoners were placed together with common criminals in the prison on Ilha Grande outside of Rio (Perlman, 2010; Soares, 2015). Initially, the gang was formed to ensure prisoner rights, adopting the motto *Paz, Justiça e Liberdade* (Peace, Justice, and Liberty) (Soares, 2015). Comando Vermelho became involved in the cocaine trade when it entered Rio in the 1980s, moving into the favelas to gain some protection from the Brazilian security forces. Over time, disputes among Comando Vermelho leaders led to the creation of Amigo Dos Amigos and Terceiro Comando (later renamed Terceiro Comando Puro after breaking an alliance with Amigo dos Amigos) (Martins, 2018). This shows how drug cartels are dynamic and in relation to Brazil's political context.

Drug cartels primarily profit from the sale of drugs and arms, using the favelas as their home bases and territories to shield themselves from the state, rival gangs, and militias. These groups often enforce strict community rules and have been known to provide social services, new infrastructure, concerts, and occasional funk parties to gain support and legitimacy from residents while also filling a gap left by the lack of public investments in the area (Arias and Barnes, 2017; Feltran, 2020; Magaloni et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2020). However, they can also be violent and unpredictable, and favela residents live under a code of silence, fearing for their lives if they challenge the gangs' authority. The presence of gangs in the favelas leads to more open drug sales and usage within the communities, with children as young as eight years old being recruited into criminal activities (Dowdney, 2003, p. 148).

Additionally, drug cartels have increasingly started charging for local services such as water, gas, electricity, internet, and transport as profits from cocaine decline. They are also known to bribe corrupt police and politicians, pay low-paid officers to turn a blind eye, and secure votes from favela residents for politicians who support their operations (Arias, 2006, 2017; Feltran, 2020). Unlike the monopoly of Primeiro Comando da Capital – PCC in São Paulo, which has arrangements with the state and police that have significantly reduced violence and homicides in that city's favelas, the relationship between competing cartels and the police in Rio de Janeiro is far more volatile and unpredictable, leading to more open conflict, shootouts, police operations, and consequently higher rates of violence and homicide (Feltran, 2020).

As seen above, where an organized criminal group (OCG) has near or complete monopoly of violence and where it seeks to stay long-term, it might recognize the importance of good community relations to keep popular support for their rule and to deter residents from reporting them to the police or rival groups. The drug trafficking groups in Rio de Janeiro are known to create local forms of governance, including a rule of law where they keep order through a cartel tribunal (*tribunal do tráfico*) where they sanction crimes such as murder, domestic abuse, robbery, rape, sexual abuse of children and open fighting between residents (Arias and Barnes, 2017; Magaloni et al., 2020). Sanctions can include physical punishment, expulsion from the community, and death. Here, one could argue that the local drug gang keeps a form of negative peace in terms of order and control in a more efficient way than the police manage in the streets outside the favela.

Magaloni et al. (2020) mention Comando Vermelho – CV as an organized criminal group with insurgent governance over the favela complex Complexo do Alemão, where they have their headquarters. CV maintains good social relations and a system of order with the local population. It is simultaneously in opposition to the state and, thus, often a target of public security operations. Here, the group reduces local violent crimes, and conflicts erupt only from competing OCGs, internal leadership strife, or public security interventions. Magaloni et al. (2020), however, stresses that this highly depends on the personality of the local leader, with the examples of one local gang leader in Rio de Janeiro being remembered as a “psychopath and notorious rapist” and another as “a provider of social justice and welfare” (558).

Depending on the nature of the leader, drug cartels' rule of law may reduce violent crimes, although through violent measures (Arias and Barnes, 2017). Thus, in situations where the drug cartel has reached a monopoly of violence and control in a neighborhood and has an interest in good community relations, we argue that they might provide a form of negative peace through an ordering of social relations and reduction

of open violent crime. With this, it is essential to note that other factions, in situations where they do not have complete control over territory and no close relations with the local community, can impose very violent orders on the local population and use a massive show of force and violence in an attempt to gain control over the territory and population through violence and fear rather than the provision of security and services (Arias and Barnes, 2017; Magaloni et al., 2020).

4.1.2 Militias

In the 1960s, business owners hired death squads and contract killers, often connected to the police and military, to protect their interests during unrest. These groups operated throughout the dictatorship, targeting ‘delinquents’ and political opponents (Pope and Sampaio, 2024, p. 7). In the 1980s, militias formed in response to drug trafficking threats, comprising firefighters, armed forces, and police, all trained by the state. Like the death squads, these militias justified their actions under the guise of ‘social cleansing,’ which involved expelling or killing alleged ‘bandits’ to maintain order (Pope and Sampaio, 2024, p. 7). Their activities aimed at countering drug cartels were legitimized by the belief that “those who kill outlaws are not outlaws themselves” (Monteiro and Rocha, 2017).

After 2006, militias strengthened their presence and activities primarily in favelas and have, over the years, taken control of more than half of Rio’s favelas (Cano, 2008; Gaffney, 2012; Oosterbaan and van Wijk, 2015). It is important to note that the militia acts as the police during off-hours and that their expansion has occurred with the silent or explicit support of local police units in many cases (Cano, 2008). It can be argued that officers performing such tasks are off duty but operating according to the training and knowledge acquired while doing public security work. Whereas drug dealers historically stick to the trade of drugs and guns, militia groups have offered, and on many occasions forced, all sorts of services to favela’s residents, such as cable television, cooking gas and private security to shop owners (Ribeiro and Oliveira, 2010; Gaffney, 2012). However, while they formerly profited on protection rackets and provision of services, the militias are now increasingly profiting from real estate and drug trafficking. Meanwhile, drug trafficking groups are increasingly adopting the militias’ forms of profit, making the main difference between the militias and drug cartels the participation of public security agents in the militias (Werneck and Nascimento de Souza, 2019).

The main difference between the governance of drug cartels and militia, at least before the militias moved into drug trafficking, was the strict prohibition of drug use and drug sale in areas controlled by the militias, fewer police operations in these areas and thus often fewer weapons in the streets, and disappearance of dead bodies instead of leaving them openly on the roads (Hirata et al., 2022, p. 263). Consider Jose’s* description:

The miliciano offers order, organisation, and cleanliness, but they ask for much more money. With the milícia, you must pay them for everything. It’s like a mafia order. [...] Besides this, it’s calm. Less weapons. The milícia kills and makes disappear, so ‘no one dies’ [...] It’s like, in Narcos, you have Escobar, and then you have the others, the ones who understood capitalism: That bodies and violence don’t sell (Jose*, February 2020, Zona Norte).

Jose* shared how some of his family members prefer living in areas controlled by militias due to the lack of drug sales, drug use, and

the ‘calmness’ of few police operations and weapons in these communities. This brings an eerie sense of calm, which is highly autocratic and violent in a hidden manner.

Despite their connections to death squads and assassination groups, militias were in the early 2000s considered a form of community policing that could retake control over favelas from the drug cartels and was praised by several public authorities and in the press as a “viable and less violent alternative to the territorial control exerted by drug factions” (Hirata et al., 2022, p. 258). In 2006, the then-mayor of Rio, Eduardo Paes, stated that the militia “had brought ‘tranquillity’ to residents in some neighborhoods (O Globo, 2006),” while the “former Rio de Janeiro mayor César Maia called militias ‘community self-defences’ and claimed they represented a ‘lesser evil’ than drug trafficking (O Globo, 2006)” (Hirata et al., 2022, p. 258). However, the kidnapping and torture of a team of news reporters by militia members in 2008 broke this “myth of pacification” (Werneck, 2015: 434) and changed the press coverage of the militias to a more critical view (Hirata et al., 2022, p. 258).

Magaloni et al. (2020) found that the militia governance in Rio de Janeiro most resembles a form of predatory governance, where they “form illicit associations with state agents to extract rents from the community and might even engage in activities such as human trafficking, sexual violence, and kidnapping, which they perform under the protection of law enforcement” (2020, p. 553). They also found that although militias have solid control over a territory, they still use “as much violence toward the population as Bandit regimes” (Magaloni et al., 2020, p. 566). Similarly, Hirata et al. (2022) found that, despite the narrative describing militia-controlled areas as calm, the neighborhoods of Santa Cruz and Campo Grande, known to be controlled by militias, “are the most violent in the city of Rio de Janeiro” (Borges et al., 2016; in Hirata et al., 2022). They argue that a perception of tranquility is due to the low incidence of armed clashes with the police, as, over three years, only 2.97% of all firefights involving the police happened in areas controlled by militias, while 78.8% occurred in areas controlled by drug factions. ‘Peace’, under militia governance, thus signifies a lack of firefights as the militias are so closely interlaced with the state public security apparatus. The population, however, remains insecure under a form of governance imposed by violence and coercion.

This section has looked at how criminal governance can bring a sense of ‘peace’ to the favelas in Rio de Janeiro. Leaning on the work of Magaloni et al. (2020) and Hirata et al. (2022), we find that although both drug cartels and militias place a violent, weaponized rule on the everyday life of the favelas they control, both can, in specific contexts and particular forms, provide a form of negative peace as the absence of direct violence. Still, here, it is essential to note the insecurity of the presence of heavy arms and open use and sale of drugs that often occur in these neighborhoods and the constant threat of violent police operations. For favelas controlled by militias, a sense of ‘peace’ might arrive from the lack of open drug sales and heavy weapons in the streets, but mainly due to the minimal chances of experiencing violent police operations, as local violent crime does not seem to decrease in these areas.

4.2 The UPP pacification project: protecting liberal subjects

At the core of peacebuilding scholarship and practice is the ethical drive of liberal humanitarian governmentality of peace as stability and

absence of conflict and violence. This concept denotes the simultaneous deployment of humanitarian and security practices to govern vulnerable subjects in conflict zones. Rio de Janeiro, as an area in dispute between drug cartels and the police and the future host of both the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016, offered the perfect conditions to implement the Pacifying Police Program (UPP). Following this decision, public security gained a new breath of investment. It was both part of international institutions' requirements and a doorway to readapt and transform the traditional security practices in Rio. We argue it was an opportunity to deepen public security with a rationale in which urban militarism and police intervention are entangled with new and subtler ways to exercise control and surveillance.

The Pacifying Police Program (UPPs), initiated in Santa Marta and Cidade de Deus in 2008, had the objective of eradicating drug trafficking groups from the favelas and establishing a continuous police presence within the communities. Taking inspiration from public security reforms in Medellín, Colombia, the UPPs aimed to decrease gang-related homicides, enhance police relations with favela residents and encourage cooperation and respect for the unique culture of each community (UPP, 2017). The program consisted of four phases: Firstly, the BOPE and the military police would invade the favela and reclaim the area from the drug gangs. Secondly, these forces would secure and clear the area of any remaining criminals. Thirdly, they would establish a permanent UPP base and ensure a consistent presence of community police. Finally, they would provide more social and public services to integrate the favela into society and grant full citizenship (Oosterbaan and Van Wijk, 2015). The project integrated military, police, social actors, and businesses to regain control over these territories and populations, both through police occupation and through projects such as PAC¹ and UPP Social² (Carvalho, 2018; Public Security and Favela Epistemology, 2019). While the UPPs program has been the subject of much research, with both criticism and praise, its brief duration and rapid decline suggest that it was unsustainable and possibly not intended to last beyond the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016 (Hoelscher and Norheim-Martinsen, 2014; Livingstone, 2014; Gledhill, 2015; Oosterbaan and Van Wijk, 2015; Leite et al., 2018).

The UPPs are the most recent state initiative that has followed the idea of implementing peace in a conflict area. As we will discuss, the UPP project shows a continuous and increased militarization of public security in Rio de Janeiro, in which a desire for peace did not translate into a peaceful implementation. Still, following mainstream frames – as in realism and liberal peace, peace implementation was done using top-down logic. We argue that humanitarian governmentality does not consider favela residents as a primary referent object of peace operations but only as a secondary concern, or worse – a disposable group, in this governance regime. The primary referent object, then,

is the international tourists. From this perspective, we aim to advance the argument that this practice of humanitarianism and security underpins the notion that humanitarian government is derivative of a rationality of values in which the primary goal is the emotions and morality of the European – and white people upper-class population.

UPPs represented a state rationale in which life in the favela is militarized, and police operations are justified to control the 'dangerous classes' (Das and Poole, 2004; Leite et al., 2018; Public Security and Favela Epistemology, 2019; Co-Creation in the City: Rights and culture of favelas and peripheries, 2019). The selective placement of the UPPs shows an intention to pacify the most central favelas in Rio de Janeiro, portraying a safe city to the many tourists visiting the city during the mega-events in 2014 and 2016. While the government claimed that the UPPs were implemented in high-risk favelas, many critics have argued that they instead operate in 'high-value' favelas in the touristic south zone, along the major highway between the south zone and the international airport, and around the large sports venues (Hoelscher and Norheim-Martinsen, 2014; Livingstone, 2014; Oosterbaan and van Wijk, 2015). Research participants interviewed saw the UPP program as having been introduced to keep the city safe only during the games and fell apart as soon as necessity declined as the world turned its eyes away from Rio de Janeiro (Francisca*, August 2019; Gabriel*, Maria*, September 2019, Zona Sul, Douglas*, September 2019, Zona Norte).

Schuberth's research found that many favela residents were hopeful that the UPPs would lead to a slow police reform, aiming to pacify the militarized police forces and the favelas (Schuberth, 2019). In the beginning, the UPPs showed promise in significantly reducing lethal violence and resisting killings – police killings presented as acts of self-defence (Oosterbaan and Van Wijk, 2015). Critical voices, however, pointed out that the Brazilian state's sudden pacification attempt to "bring peace to the favela" and "include the favela in the city" was contradictory to the state's history of violence against the favelas (Carvalho, 2018). This was exemplified by the creation of the UPP within the military police department, which has received very few reforms since the military dictatorship. Favela residents further reported difficulties in balancing the two violent powers in the community: drug traffic and the UPP. Although the UPP entered the favelas to expel the drug cartels and take control, drug trafficking mostly remained. As Menezes (2018) describes, this forced many favela residents to live under the control of two conflicting authorities: the boss of the drug cartel and the UPP commander, causing the favela residents to move from living in the 'crossfire' to living in a 'minefield' where every misstep could be deadly.

The military police were, however, portrayed in the leading media "between 2009 and 2011, as an institution that was bringing peace to the city of Rio de Janeiro" (Carvalho, 2018, p. 96). This tension of historically violent and militarized police forces suddenly posing as community peacekeepers, including the use of blue caps, referring to the UN peacebuilding forces, created some difficulty with trust and respect from the favela residents. Douglas, for example, believes that the UPP never succeeded due to the history of violence and lack of trust between favela residents and the police:

The UPP went wrong because they wanted to impose their project. It went wrong because those who live in the favela don't like the police in the community because of the (violent) operations; there

1 PAC – *Programa Acelerado de Crescimento* in portuguese. An investment program coordinated by the federal government in partnership with the private sector, states, municipalities and social movements.

2 Launched in Rio de Janeiro in 2010 and transferred to the city in 2011, UPP Social provided quality information about the needs of the favelas served by the Pacifying Police Units (UPP). It enhanced public services beyond security, including sanitation, education, and healthcare.

are always confrontations with residents and innocent people (Douglas*, September 2019, Zona Norte).

In the most optimistic view, the UPPs provide only a temporary respite from the militarized and violent policing of the favelas. During this period, the same military police force aimed to reduce conflict in the area and sought to enhance relations between the favela residents and the government. However, since the UPP was still under the authority of the military police, it's not surprising that efforts to transform them into a community police force were unsuccessful, given the historically violent and aggressive nature of the military police and its record of violence and abuse in the favelas. This is further problematized by the fact that in many favelas, during the first phase of the UPP, BOPE forces would 'reclaim' the favela and raise "the squad's flag from a favela rooftop during invasions" (Larkins, 2013, p. 569). Larkins argues that "the act signals that the favela is now under BOPE and, by extension, state command" (2013, p. 569).

Indeed, widespread torture, human rights abuses, corruption and forced disappearances by the UPPs have been documented in several favelas, symbolized in the torture, murder and disappearance of the bricklayer Amarildo de Souza by UPP officers in Rocinha in 2013 (Torres and Werneck, 2012; Carneiro, 2013; Gledhill, 2015; Oosterbaan and van Wijk, 2015; Villenave, 2022). Some research participants stressed that the UPPs further criminalized and prohibited favela *baile funk* parties, closed many community radio stations and imposed curfews in many favelas (Pedro*, August 2019; Gabriel* August 2019; Zona Sul; Co-Creation in the City: Rights and culture of favelas and peripheries, 2019; Fleury, 2012; Gledhill, 2015; Public Security and Favela Epistemology, 2019). From a critical perspective, the UPPs were thus another state project of control and monitoring of the black favela spaces and bodies aimed at temporarily reducing the violence in these areas to increase safety in the rest of the city during the mega events in 2014 and 2016.

By examining how the UPPs were implemented and conducted in Rio de Janeiro, we pointed out that humanitarian governmentality follows a liberal logic that does not consider favela residents a primary referent object in this governance regime. The UPP operation showed that instead, the primary referent object is the international tourist. Once the events are over, those who benefit from this operation are the "white people" middle-class population, considered deserving neoliberal citizens of Rio de Janeiro in this rationale. As a result, the UPPs as peace operations represent a mutual co-optation of humanitarianism by security, highlighting a symbiotic relationship between care and control, that is, between the humanitarian hand that cares and the police and military that is the hand that strikes. In that sense, favela residents are constantly occupying a place of ambiguity in which the very lives that are identified as in need of protection are the lives that become targeted by lethal apparatuses of state security.

4.3 Favela peace formation

After exploring what peace might mean under criminal governance and the state's attempts at governance in the favelas above, this section considers Buer's concept of favela peace formation (2022; 2024) as a way favela community organizations might construct non-violent peace in the favelas in Rio (see also Fahlberg, 2018 for nonviolent favela politics and Richmond, 2016,

2019 for peace formation). Interviewing teachers, social workers, activists, journalists and researchers based in the favelas in 2019–2020, Buer found that they perform many peacebuilding tasks, like mediation between residents, criminal groups and the police; demobilization and reintegration by helping youth leave drug gangs; monitoring and documentation of human rights abuses during police operations and military occupations; security sector reform by participating in local politics; and in court cases like the ADPF 635³ *das Favelas* to reduce violence in police operations; reconciliation by producing and sharing knowledge and experience from the favelas with the rest of the city; and peace education (Buer, 2022, 2024). Buer defines this work to reduce violence as favela peace formation: "nonviolent, favela grassroots, locally legitimate peace processes that navigate various blockages and opportunities within and outside the state in its construction of alternative futures with more social justice and less violence" (Buer, 2024, p. 5). Favela peace formation can be divided into three different forms: community-based activism, navigating the state, and shifting narratives, as will be discussed in detail below.

4.3.1 Community-based activism

Throughout their history of partial state abandonment, marginalization, racialization and criminalization, favela residents have on several occasions collectively organized to construct houses, roads, sewage and other infrastructure, respond to landslides and floods, organized trash collection and mail delivery, and taken over responsibility in health clinics, kindergartens and schools (Caldeira, 2000; Goldstein, 2003; Alves and Evanson, 2011). Buer's (2022) thesis shows how favela peace formers⁴, in addition to constructing physical infrastructure in their communities, also have a long-term focus on the new generations of favela residents. Many of her interviewees prioritized providing educational and recreational opportunities to children and youth who receive low-quality public education and very few recreational and legal employment opportunities. By providing new opportunities and educating the youth, favela peace formation reduces recruitment to the drug cartels and empowers future generations to become new leaders in the struggle for social justice in the favelas. By treating the favela children and youth (young, black males who are the primary targets in police operations) as individuals allowed to dream, learn and construct a future for themselves and their families, favela peace formers also play a fundamental role in *rehumanising* the very boys who are criminalized and killed in the "War on Drugs."

4.3.2 Navigating the state

Most of Buer's (2022, 2024) research participants identified the state and its public security forces as the favela's main threat to security and peace. Therefore, much of the favela peace formation's work with

³ The ADPF Favelas Case is a citizen initiative against police violence in Rio de Janeiro. It challenges two state security policy decrees submitted to the Supreme Court in November 2019. The initiative seeks recognition of police human rights violations in the favelas and calls for measures to reduce lethality and ensure justice for victims.

⁴ Favela peace formers is a term to describe the actors involved in favela peace formation.

the state involves mediation between favela residents and the state that is supposed to protect them. Favela peace formers continuously document and denounce state murder and abuse in their communities through demonstrations, reports, meetings with state officials, social media and more, with some actively risking their lives to save others during police operations. Favela residents have also succeeded in organizing themselves as activists and accessing the justice system to both pursue justice for murdered favela residents and reduce violent public security operations, as in the example of the ADPF 635. The court case ADPF 635, known as the “ADPF of the Favelas,” is an initiative started by the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF in Portuguese) during the Covid-19 as an attempt to protect favela residents from police operations using heavy weaponry such as helicopters and armored cars. The document that grounded the decision was produced collectively by the Public Defender Office with organizations deeply intertwined with the favelas such as *Educafro*, *Justiça Global*, *Redes da Maré*, *Conectas Direitos Humanos*, *Movimento Negro Unificado*, *ISER*, *Iniciativa Direito à Memória e Justiça Racial*, *Coletivo Papo Reto*, *Coletivo Fala Akari*, *Rede de Comunidades e Movimentos contra a Violência*, *Mães de Manguinhos* – all collectively admitted as *amicus curiae*, as well as the *Observatório de Favelas*, *Grupo de Estudos dos Novos Ilegalismos (Geni/UFF)*, *Fogo Cruzado*, *Maré Vive*, *Instituto Marielle Franco*, *Conselho Nacional de Direitos Humanos* and the *CESeC (ADPF das Favelas, 2020)*.

On August 17th, 2020, the Supreme Court reached a unanimous decision granting several “important points to protect the rights of the population of the favelas and reduce violence during police actions” (Lopes, 2020), such as banning the police from firing guns from armored helicopters or prohibiting the use of schools and hospitals as operational bases for civil and military policies. The process and success of the ADPF 635 is thus a historic victory for the favelas, as it is the first time several favela peace-forming movements have come together to demand changes to the public security policies in Rio de Janeiro. It shows that some avenues of the state can indeed be open for favela peace formation through collaboration with selected political parties and the public defender’s office.

However, there are many challenges in implementing its rule, as the security forces see it as an attempt to limit their power. The civil police, for example, have claimed that after implementing the ADPF 635 measures, Comando Vermelho has expanded its territory (Agência Brasil, 2024). This claim was immediately contested by the collective part of the initiative, who highlighted that the police have not presented any data to support their claim and that it is rather the militias that are growing as they are rarely confronted by police forces (Fogo, 2024). An undeniable result of ADPF 635 is that the suspension of police operations in the favelas of the state of Rio de Janeiro in June 2020 led to a 72.5% reduction in the number of deaths and a 50% reduction in the number of injuries resulting from actions or shootouts within a month (GENI/UFE, 2020). The ADPF 635 shows how favela peace formation uses one avenue of the state, the judiciary, to demand the reduction of violence of the executive power and its deadly public security policies and how the state can use non-militarized tools to reduce violence by collaborating with favela movements. However, as noted in the introduction, 2021 and 2022 saw three of the four deadliest police operations in history in Rio de Janeiro (G1 Rio, 2022). This shows how, despite a Supreme Court rule to reduce police violence, the security forces maintain a militarized security logic.

4.3.3 Shifting narratives

Shifting narratives is a foundational and all-encompassing part of favela peace formation, as so much of the conflict is created and sustained by racism and prejudice against the favelas and their residents. As Patrícia* (February 2020, Zona Norte) shared, “The army, the police, they do what they do in the favelas only with society’s permission.” This ties back to the criminalization of the favela residents throughout history, as ‘good people’ in the *asfalto* are made implicit in the war against favela residents by believing in the dehumanizing narratives surrounding the favelas (Scheper-Hughes, 2004). The coverage of crime and violence in the mainstream media feeds a fear of the favela among the *asfalto*, which again leads to popular support for highly militarized police operations in these communities.

Therefore, a significant focus of favela peace formation is placed on producing and sharing knowledge from the favela, collaborating with local, national and international universities, research institutions, media, civil society groups and tourists to portray the favelas as creative, sustainable, cultural, hard-working communities. Favela peace formation strengthens this positive narrative of the favela by hosting, receiving and staging academic, artistic, musical and cultural events in the favela; creating cultural spaces like art centers and museums focusing on favela history and culture; organizing events showing the favela residents themselves the strengths of their community; communicating localized news through community media channels; and monitoring, producing, sharing and debating research data and analysis on issues relevant to the community. Shifting narratives thus show how favela peace formers work to reduce the cultural violence of criminalization and dehumanization of favela residents and to bridge the gap between the favela and *asfalto* in the hope that the rest of society and politicians will see the favela as part of the city, to understand, include, respect, love and protect these communities, and push for more favela friendly public policies.

Favela peace formation thus represents forms of local agency in the favelas working to build a positive peace from the ground up through practical solutions in everyday life, like working with children, youth and other vulnerable groups. However, favela peace formation also works to slowly transform the discourse of violence and influence the state to recognize and strengthen citizenship in the favelas, which thus also works to deepen democracy in Rio de Janeiro. Favela peace formation recognizes the inequality of lived life in Rio de Janeiro, with the historical marginalization, racialization, and criminalization of the favelas and their residents, and works to reduce these inequalities and injustices by empowering favela residents, navigating the state, and combating criminalizing narratives.

Contrary to the ‘peace’ through criminal governance and the UPPs, favela peace formation, being non-violent, has little power or territorial monopoly of violence in the favelas and is therefore limited in providing negative peace as the absence of direct violence. The best they can do is to mediate the effects and damage of this direct violence when it occurs by acting as a humanitarian actor in conflict zones and preventing direct violence through pushes for security sector reforms and campaigns to reduce police violence. However, favela peace formation provides a dimension that is ignored by the other actors providing ‘negative peace’ in Rio de Janeiro: favela peace formation slowly works to construct a positive peace, which includes the absence of structural and cultural violence as well as direct violence (Buer, 2022, 2024). In order to

break the cycles of violence to impose order and control rooted in the history of the state, the police and the criminal organizations, we argue that it is a grassroots favela agency that has the potential to construct positive peace in which human security and citizen rights are protected, allowing a more democratic state to emerge.

4.4 Whose peace?

This section discusses peace governmentality by providing an overview and graphical representations of the actors, their interactions, and their impact on peace and conflict in the favelas. The relationship between militias and the state can be one of cooperation, overlap, or conflict. As discussed above, the militias are partly made up of public security personnel and corrupt politicians. This makes it extremely difficult to draw a clear line between the state, its public security apparatus and the illegal militias. For militia-controlled favelas, this can mean a negative peace as the close cooperation and overlap lead to fewer police operations in these areas. Parts of the public security apparatus still target the militias with police operations that lead to conflict. It is important to repeat that these police operations are few compared to the ones targeting drug cartel-controlled favelas. In contrast, the public security forces' relationship with the drug cartels is clearly one defined by confrontation and conflict through frequent, hyper-militarized police operations. Some few exceptions include cases where the local drug gang has paid off the police to stay away, resulting in a form of bought, negative peace in that favela (Buer, 2022). Finally, the public security forces' relationship with favela peace formers is overwhelmingly one of state violence during police operations, where favela peace formers suffer, mediate and protest this violence. On very rare occasions, some form of cooperation has developed, but none has led to sustainable projects as far as the authors are aware.

As discussed in 4.1, the militias and drug cartels increasingly resemble each other, and some have even started to cooperate openly. However, their relationship is traditionally considered one of conflict over territory, mostly leading to clashes and violence. The militias' relationship with favela peace formers is very often one of threats or non-existent. One of the symbolic leaders of the favela struggle for rights, militia members assassinated Marielle Franco and her driver (G1 Rio, 2024). As discussed above, the militias take over local civil society and state processes, which effectively shrinks the space for

independent favela peace formation processes critical to their rule. Favela peace formers' relationship with the drug cartels, on the other hand, seems to be one of relative coexistence. The main threat for favela peace formers in favelas controlled by drug cartels is thus to be caught in shootouts between the armed groups and police. Favela peace formation can also be threatened by violent and often unpredictable gang leadership or gang members from outside the community not respecting the residents. Favela peace formation adapts to the cartel rule and sometimes mediates for access to certain areas of the favelas but remains neutral. Buer's (2022) interviews with favela peace formers in 2019–2020 overwhelmingly identified the state and the militias as the two main challenges to peace in the favelas.

Table 1 provides an overview and graphical representation of the main actors, their interactions, and their impact on peace and conflict in the favelas.

Table 2 below summarizes the different actors and their impact on everyday life in the favelas regarding insecurity, violence and peace. It lists the form(s) of violence these actors perpetrate or reinforce. It also shows which form(s) of violence they reduce and which type of peace they achieve or work toward.

The state is represented by its police operations in the favela and the UPP program, as described above in sections 3 and 4.2. Overall, the police operations bring direct violence to the favelas and the UPP program brought direct violence of conflict and shootouts in their implementation. The UPPs managed to reduce direct violence by diminishing the presence of weapons, drugs and shootouts when in complete control. However, as Menezes describes, favela residents were scared to be associated with either the UPPs on one side or drug cartels on the other side. They thus went from living in the crossfire to living in a minefield (2018). A militarized state, therefore, perpetrates direct violence during police operations, reinforces cultural violence of racism by criminalizing favela residents as drug traffickers and reinforces structural violence of inequality in life chances by prioritizing the "War on Drugs" over social and economic development. As concluded above, in retrospect, the UPPs present more as a project of domination aimed at securing the 'peace' of tourists and elites for international events instead of building a sense of genuine, positive peace in the favelas.

Organized criminal groups have a complicated presence in terms of violence and peace in the favelas, as it is determined by their leadership, control over territory, connection with the local community and relationship with the police and other criminal groups. In general,

TABLE 1 Relationships and interactions between actors.

Actor 1	Actor 2	Relationship	Impact on conflict/peace
Public security forces	Militias	Cooperation/overlap	Negative peace at best
Public security forces	Militias	Confrontation/conflict	Violent Conflict
Public security forces	Drug cartels	Confrontation/conflict	Violent Conflict
Public security forces	Drug cartels	Cooperation/bribes	Negative peace
Public security forces	Favela peace formation	State violence	Violent Conflict
Public security forces	Favela peace formation	Cooperation	Extremely limited, but potential for positive peacebuilding
Militias	Drug cartels	Confrontation/conflict	Violent Conflict
Militias	Drug cartels	Cooperation/overlap	Insecurity, negative peace
Militias	Favela peace formation	Threatening, non-existent	Insecurity, violent, authoritarian rule
Drug cartels	Favela peace formation	Coexistence, non-cooperation, threats	Relatively peaceful coexistence

TABLE 2 Actors and their impact on favela everyday life, violence, and peace.

Actors	Actions	Impact on favela everyday life	Type of violence committed/ reinforced	Type of violence addressed/ reduced	Type of peace achieved/ work toward
The Police	Public security operations	War, direct violence, assassinations, human rights abuses, forced entry, threats, racism	Commits direct violence in police operations, reinforces cultural violence of racism by criminalizing favela residents,	Reduce direct violence of crime through law enforcement	War insecurity
Pacifying Police Program – UPP	Public security pacification operations	Conflict Less weapons and drugs Minefield for residents	reinforces structural violence by prioritizing the war on drugs over favela development	Reduced direct violence	Insecurity. Negative peace.
Militias	Protection rackets, expensive charging of local services, drugs and weapons trafficking. Local rules.	Local rules and law of silence. Agreements with police reducing police operations. Less weapons and drugs. Insecurity of violent rule, murder, disappearances and shootouts. Limited civil society.	Commit direct violence of shootouts, murders, etc. Commit cultural violence of racism by demonizing Afro-Brazilian religions, reinforce structural violence by exploiting favela residents.	Reduce direct violence of crime and shootouts	Insecurity. Negative peace.
Drug cartels	Drug and weapons trafficking, expensive charging of local services. Local rules and justice tribunals.	Local rules and law of silence. Rare corrupt agreements with police reducing police operations. Insecurity of crime, drugs, heavy weapons, violent rule, murder and shootouts with the police/other criminal groups. Largely allow civil society/favela community groups to carry on their work.	Commit direct violence of shootouts and crime. Justify the state’s cultural violence of criminalization of favelas by continuing trafficking, some demonize Afro-Brazilian religions. Reinforce structural violence by limiting the state’s access to favelas.	Reduce direct violence of crime and (rarely) shootouts	Insecurity. Negative peace.
Favela community organizations/ Favela peace formation	Work with children and youth, women’s groups, produce knowledge, arrange events to combat criminalization and discrimination of favelas, respond to local needs, demand services and less violence from the state, emergency response, mediation.	Non-violent community development aimed to reduce all forms of violence, demand more from the state, improve everyday life and life chances of favela residents, help youth escape crime and enter the university and job market. Limited in its reach and funding.		Reduce cultural violence by rehumanizing favela residents. Reduce structural violence through local development Attempt to reduce direct violence of police operations	Positive peace, but has limited power to guarantee positive or negative peace

both militias and drug cartels bring insecurity in the form of violent, weaponized criminal rule. In addition, since 2005, drug cartels like Terceiro Comando Puro and several militias have converted to and secured high positions in “sects of Evangelical Christianity that regard Afro-Brazilian religions as devil worship” and have carried out attacks on Afro-Brazilian religious leaders and places of worship (Boaz, 2020, p. 1). These relatively new evangelist drug traffickers and *milicianos* demonize Afro-Brazilian religions in a ‘spiritual warfare’ and attack with violence, forced evictions, vandalism and threats (Da Silva, 2019 in Boaz, 2020). The attack on Afro-Brazilian religions represents deeper attacks of cultural violence in terms of reinforcing the colonial logic of dehumanization and demonization of black Brazilians.

Still, as discussed in section 4.1, both militias and drug cartels can, under the right circumstances, offer negative peace in the form of a violent rule. The militias can bring some security through strict enforcement of local rules and agreements with police and other criminal actors that reduce shootouts. There are also traditionally fewer heavy

weapons and drugs in militia-controlled areas than in drug cartel-controlled areas. They implement a strict code of silence, and few civil society actors seem to work freely in their areas. The militias thus commit direct violence in their violent rule and shootouts with other criminal groups (rarely the police), commit cultural violence of racism by demonizing Afro-Brazilian religions (Buer, 2022), and reinforce structural violence by exploiting favela residents. Regarding peace, the militias may reduce direct violence of crime through strict local rule enforcement and reduce direct violence of shootouts in corrupt agreements with the public security apparatus. As discussed in 4.1.2, militia-controlled areas are considered ‘safer’ in the sense that they receive much fewer deadly police operations than cartel-controlled areas. At best, they may thus offer negative peace in the form of criminal control.

While the drug cartels and militias increasingly resemble each other, areas controlled by drug cartels are still more targeted by violent police operations. Their rule presents insecurity and direct violence of crime, drugs, heavy weapons, violent rule, murder and

shootouts with the police or other criminal groups. The drug cartels justify and reinforce the state’s cultural violence of criminalization of favelas by continuing violent crime in these areas, some commit cultural violence of racism by demonizing Afro-Brazilian religions and reinforce structural violence by limiting the state’s access to favelas and thus the resident’s access to public services. The drug cartels may reduce direct violence of crime through strict local rule enforcement and shootouts when in corrupt agreements with the public security apparatus. However, this is rare as the gang-controlled favelas are the primary targets in violent public security operations in the “War on Drugs.” Like the militias, they may offer negative peace in the form of criminal rule.

Finally, favela peace formation contrasts with the other actors as it does not commit, reinforce or justify any type of violence. Instead, as discussed above, favela peace formation works to reduce all forms of violence, by demanding more from the state, improving everyday life and life chances of favela residents, changing criminalizing narratives and providing favela youth with new opportunities. Favela peace formers present the potential to reduce cultural violence of racism and criminalization by dehumanizing favela residents and working to include them as citizens deserving of rights; reduce structural violence by providing services neglected by the state; and attempts to mitigate direct violence of police operations. However, favela peace formation remains limited in its reach and funding, especially regarding direct violence reduction. This can be seen in the court case ADPF 635, which was won in the Supreme Court, but the police continue to commit abuses in the favelas.

Figure 1 illustrates a summary of the discussion in section 4, showing how different actors either commit, reinforce, or justify direct, structural, and cultural violence (solid arrows from actor to triangle) or, alternatively, reduce it (dotted lines). It highlights that the state and organized criminal groups (OCGs) offer similar forms of

“peace” to the favelas—an unstable and negative peace—while continuing to bring war through police operations.

This section has explained how both the state and OCGs contribute to direct, structural, and cultural violence, perpetuating the cycle of violence by allowing one form of violence to justify others. In contrast, favela peace initiatives aim to break this cycle through non-violent efforts. However, with limited resources and power, they struggle to reduce the direct violence inflicted by the militarized forces of the state and criminal groups, which remains the biggest threat to their work and the daily lives of favela residents.

5 Conclusion: interrogating peace in a violent city through postcoloniality

By studying how militias, drug cartels, the state and favela peace formers interact to build different kinds of peace and violence, this article has shown that the state itself, through its militarized public security policies and history of violence against the favelas, is a significant producer and reproducer of violence. In this regard, criminal governance and state governance perform actions that build violence while, in best case scenarios, sustaining negative peace. The corrupt linkages between the state, drug cartels and militias, and the closeness between the militias and public security forces, complicates the clear distinction between these different actors in Rio de Janeiro, both in terms of the violence imposed or the type of peace sustained. In this article, we have shown that the state’s militarized security interventions in the favelas are not easily distinguishable from the unstable, violent criminal governance of militias and drug cartels, in the sense that each, under the best circumstances of complete control over the territory, end up implementing a negative peace based on fear and

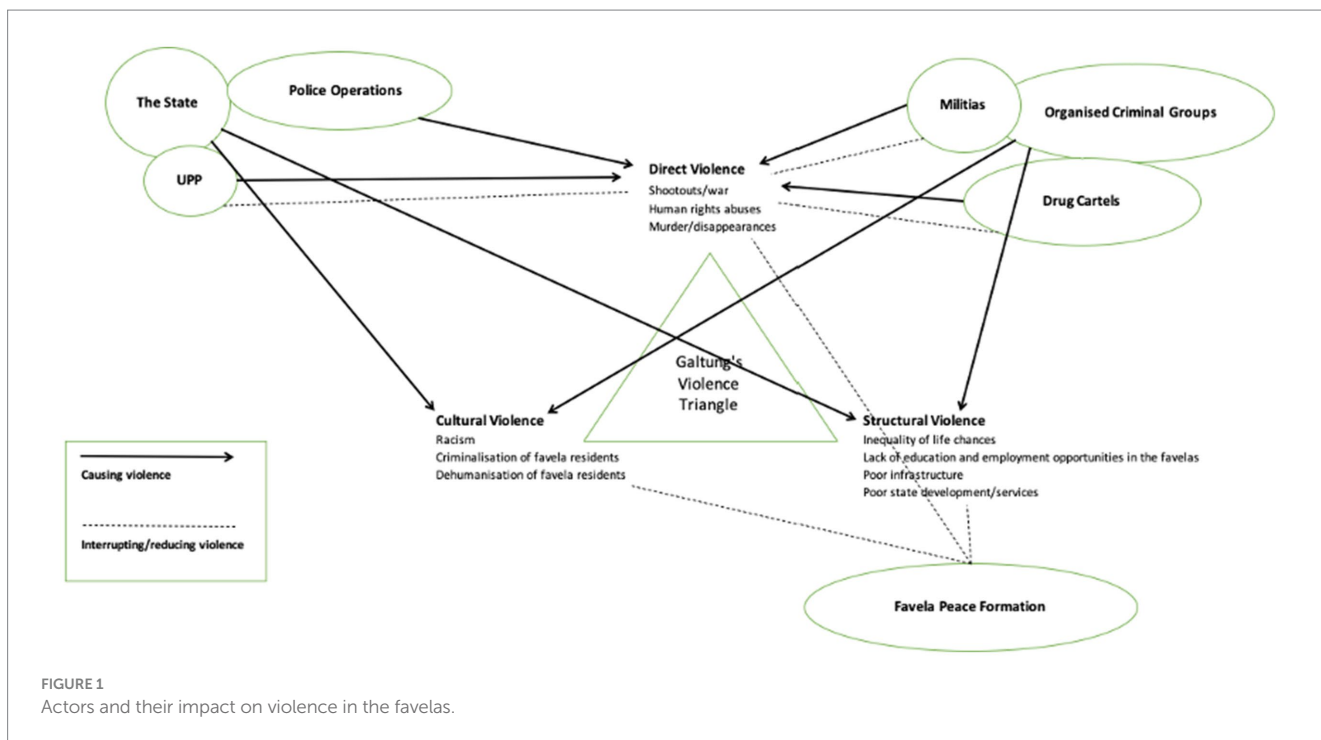


FIGURE 1 Actors and their impact on violence in the favelas.

the absence of social justice, citizenship and democracy. Going back to Galtung's discussion of peace, with a narrow definition of peace as purely the absence of direct violence, even "highly unacceptable social orders would still be compatible with peace" (Galtung, 1969, p. 168). We conclude here that the state's militarized public security policies, militias and drug cartels all impose highly unacceptable social orders on the favelas, leaving favela residents subject to these various, complexly interlinked violent regimes, very often implemented by those who have the responsibility to defend them as citizens. This shows not only the violence of the "War on Drugs" in Rio de Janeiro but also, perhaps more importantly, how closely entwined the Brazilian state is with its colonial history and, thus, how far it is from a democracy that includes and respects the interests, rights and security of all its citizens.

This study highlights the importance of including favela communities in peace formation efforts as a pathway toward positive peace and democracy in Rio de Janeiro. Favela peace formation offers a unique opportunity to rethink and construct an inclusive concept of peace that embraces its plurality by addressing the complexity and intersectionality of everyday violence. Supporting these grassroots peace processes with funding and partnerships would help strengthen citizenship and human rights in the favelas, which would deepen democracy and thus build toward sustainable peace. It is, therefore, urgent that grassroots peace processes in the favela are taken seriously as part of the solution when considering new alternatives to the current public 'order' imposed by a violent entanglement of police operations, militias and drug cartels. Rather than imposing a violent order, favela peace formation adapts to the evolving needs of these communities.

By interrogating various forms of 'peace' in a violent city through a postcolonial perspective and feminist epistemology, this article shows the shortcomings of top-down pacification projects in urban violence and the deep-rooted colonial logic and violence of these projects. The article thus adds nuanced, critical understandings of peace in non-conflict violent contexts by showing how the state, through its militarized security logic, can be a significant reproducer of violence and spoiler of peace, in contrast to main narratives portraying the organized criminal groups as the only producers of insecurity in these contexts. In a violent, necropolitical state, the militarized state represents as much of a threat as a solution, and the fight for democracy and positive peace seems to be left mainly in the hands of favela peace formation.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding authors.

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Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent from the participants or participants legal guardian/next of kin was not required to participate in this study in accordance with the national legislation and the institutional requirements. Both authors had their research approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) at the University of Manchester before the data collections for this article.

Author contributions

IB: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. SV: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Appendix

TABLE A1 Interviews.

Name* (Pseudonym)	Date of interview	Location of work	Position of research participant
Maria	September-2019	Zona Sul (South Zone of Rio de Janeiro)	Leader and tour-guide at a community-based non-governmental organization
Francisca	August-2019	Zona Sul (South Zone of Rio de Janeiro)	Independent community English teacher and tour guide at a community-based non-governmental organization
Pedro	August-2019	Zona Sul (South Zone of Rio de Janeiro)	Community leader and founder of a long-standing community-organization focusing on children and youth and the rights and dignity of favela residents
Gabriel	August-2019	Zona Sul (South Zone of Rio de Janeiro)	Leader and tour guide at a community-based non-governmental organization
Jose	February-2020	Zona Norte (North Zone of Rio de Janeiro)	Co-founder and reporter at an independent communications collective formed by favela youth activists
Douglas	September-2019	Zona Norte (North Zone of Rio de Janeiro)	Artistic coordinator at an NGO working with youth and culture in several spots in Rio de Janeiro
Patrícia	February-2020	Zona Norte (North Zone of Rio de Janeiro)	Public security coordinator at a community-based civil society institution

TABLE A2 Events.

Name of event	Organizer(s)	Date	Location	Description
Segurança Pública e Epistemologia Favelada (Public Security and Favela Epistemology)	Fransérgio Goulart and the Department of International Relations at PUC-Rio	August - October 2019	Complexo da Maré, Complexo do Alemão	Seven classes over the course of three months on issues connected to public security and rights in the favela. Not open for public, details anonymised.
Co-creation in the city: rights and culture of favelas and peripheries	Co-Creation Project	June 27th-28th, 2019	PUC-Rio	International conference as part of the project: The Cohesive City: Addressing Stigmatisation in Disadvantaged Urban Neighbourhoods (Co-Creation)/EU