

# The Power of Silence

## Sonic Experiences of Police Operations and Occupations in Rio de Janeiro's Favelas

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■ **ABSTRACT:** This article examines the sonic dimension of police operations and occupations by tracing how the everyday life changed sonically in favelas in Rio de Janeiro during their occupation by Pacifying Police Units. I tune into the silencing practices of these security policies and conclude that a moral silencing of a racialized and gendered class of people takes place. A focus on silence helps us to understand sound as a technology of power, which enables the Brazilian state to operate along a gendered sonic color line. The cases I discuss are two instances of silencing that are a product of the operations and occupations: first, the silencing of the soundscape of the favela during police operations, and second, the silencing of funk parties. These ethnographic instances elucidate how racialized processes of negation of black subjectivity and black cultural expressions take place in the Olympic city.

■ **KEYWORDS:** Brazil, favelas, funk, music, race, silence, sound, violence

### A Morning in a Favela

I wake to the sound of dogs barking. As I shake off my sleep, I realize the sound that woke me and made the dogs bark had been of shots being fired. I hear the faint thuds of the neighbors walking around in their apartment above us. They are already up and awake. Suddenly, the sound of chirping birds mixes with that of a helicopter hovering in the air. It circles above the neighborhood for more than 15 minutes before the noise fades. Tiago,<sup>1</sup> my partner, is lying next to me. He is already scrolling through his phone. He looks out the window and says, "This should take a while." I ask him if the shots we heard came from the police, and he says he doesn't know but that the helicopter was a police helicopter. I grab my phone from the nightstand to read the messages I have received. I see that someone in the residents' group on WhatsApp has asked if there is an ongoing operation. Another member has confirmed: a mega operation. Helena, a friend of mine who lives two hills away from mine, has written, "[It is] apparently 'quiet.' Right now not even the dogs are barking," before concluding that there is "a spooky silence" in the favela at the moment.<sup>2</sup> I put down my phone and make some tea. Tiago remains attentive to his phone and keeps watch to see what is happening outside. When I pick up my phone again half an hour later, I see that I have 350 new messages. All of them are in a group chat for local residents called "Barbecue on Friday"—a security measure for the members, as the police are known to look through people's phones in the streets of the favela and assume that people who



communicate about police operations are complicit with the drug traffickers who live in the area. Fifteen minutes after Helena's comment on the silence, Thalita has asserted: "This silence scares, right?" Someone else has replied: "Here the dogs are barking a lot," to which Thalita has answered: "Here they don't bark at all." Helena has repeated herself: "A spooky silence," and Thalita added, "A mortal silence."

## The Silence of Violence

When we think about violence and the sounds of violence, gunshots and screams come to mind. Maybe we imagine the sound of people running and fleeing, maybe the sounds of walkie-talkies used for communication by perpetrators, and maybe the calm or stressed voice of someone giving commands. What impressed me most while doing ethnographic fieldwork in favelas in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro, however, was the silence: the silence before, between, and after these other sounds. Residents of the favela in which I lived also notice this silence as an important part of police operations, as is shown in the opening scene. Understandings of (in)security are enriched by attention not just to the visual but also to the sonic. Ieva Jusionyte and Daniel Goldstein (2016: 9) have argued that "security's logic is based on dichotomies, dividing 'us' from 'them,'" and that "visibility and invisibility are key tools that security uses to enforce the separation between these empty categories." This ocularcentric approach obscures, or mutes, other aspects of security practices. What do these dichotomies sound like? How is difference and inequality produced beyond the visual? Considering that experiences of security are diverse, as Anjuli Fahlberg (2018) has argued for the case of a favela in eastern Rio de Janeiro, we can see distinctions along the lines of race and gender that inform us about the logic of how security policies are organized and take shape.

In this article, I discuss how police actions in favelas produce social hierarchies through sound and silence. Sound is a technology of power. The powerful use sound to divide the population into different groups, and this happens along the lines of race (Stoeber 2016) and gender. However, I stress, more than a pragmatic use of sound, the inherent power of sound. Uses of sound do not always have their intended effect on people. Experiences of sound depend heavily on the context in which they are heard (Feld 2015). Therefore, sound has a power of its own, which I trace in the context of racialized and gendered security policies. I follow recent work of other scholars that have focused on the ways power and sound come together (three notable examples on this long list are Leonardo Cardoso (2019), Martin Daughtry (2015), and Marie Thompson (2018)). Many sound studies scholars who have discussed silence have related it to noise. As Richard Cullen Rath (2018: 47) has stressed, silence and noise are not exactly opposites. There exists a tension between the two, as they both endanger the other. In this article, I show that the politics of sound play out exactly at this point of tension. As some people's silence is noise for others, and vice versa, this process is heavily influenced by hegemonic ideas of whose hearing is prioritized. Jacques Rancière (2013) has understood this order as the politics of aesthetics. A tuning into sound and silence helps us gain a greater insight in how "aesthetic formations" take shape. Birgit Meyer (2009: 7) has coined this term to help us understand the process of how "subjects are shaped by tuning their senses, inducing experiences, molding their bodies, and making sense." She chose to use the word formations and not communities, as it refers both to a social entity and processes of forming.

Furthermore, a focus on silence is valuable because it guides our attention to the in-between of the experience of violence. Erika Robb Larkins (2015: 11) urges us to include "the terror of these spaces of waiting" when analyzing violence. The experience of a shootout is not just lis-

tening to the shooting and moving on with one's life: it engenders the whole time from knowing that something might happen because violent actors are in the area, and listening in and communicating with friends and family until deciding it is safe enough to walk the streets again. It also includes the careful first steps taken on the street, looking around the corner and checking in with passersby.

Taking all this into account, this article theorizes the governmentality of sound. The data I draw on shows how sound, and especially the absence of certain sounds, produces power. By drawing out the way aesthetic formations take shape in a sonic way, I aim to elucidate the role of sound and silencing in the racialized and gendered security policies in Rio de Janeiro. I discuss the power of sound along the lines of two ethnographic examples, two instances in which silence occurred through actions by the military police in favelas in Rio de Janeiro. Both examples show that security policies produce people living in the favela as a class of people that is unworthy of the state's care (see also Bertelsen and Salem, this issue) and especially unworthy of being heard. These security policies are heavily shaped by the sociopolitical and economic situation in Brazil. During the time of my fieldwork, an increased militarization of Brazilian society took place. Different policies were institutionalized as part of the preparations for the 2014 FIFA Men's World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics and Paralympics. The policies executed by the Pacifying Police Units (UPPs), a problematic proximity policing program (see also Bertelsen and Salem; Sørboe, this issue) negatively impacted favelas, and although policy makers agree the project has failed, it has paved the way for more exclusionary and racialized approaches in recent years. The presidency of Jair Bolsonaro in combination with Wilson Witzel as governor of Rio de Janeiro, both far-right politicians, has hardened the political debate about security policies. In the context of a wider polarization of society, lives of favela residents have been further devalued and silenced as their human rights continue to be violated in excessive ways.

The first ethnographic instances I discuss are military operations, during which police troops entered favelas. These operations produced a fearful silence in the neighborhoods, one that communicated a sense of insecurity. The operations are carried out on the basis of policies that frame *favelados* (favela residents) as people who need to be contained and silenced. As part of this ethnographic example, I draw on the silencing of black fathers in the aftermath of military operations. In their own communities and in the discourse of human rights activism, their mourning for their lost sons is not heard. This case shows the complexity of silencing: we should understand it as a multilayered force coming from different sides (see also Ochoa Gautier 2015). Next to a racialized process, it is also a gendered one. Second, I discuss a more direct use of the ability to control sound by the Brazilian state. Here, listening to the silencing of *bailes funk* (funk parties) shows that a moral silencing of a racialized class of people is at play. *Bailes funk* are silenced not merely or even primarily because of their loudness but, as shown by the ways in which they are silenced, also because of assumptions about race, class, and gender in favelas. This affirms Stuart Hall's (1981: 239) claim that popular culture is "an arena for consent and resistance," a site of tension that elucidates struggles that take place within society. In both instances, silencing should be understood as a technique of control.

I draw on a total of two years of ethnographic research in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 and 2015–2016.<sup>3</sup> For nine months, I lived in a favela in the city's North Zone, and I draw heavily on data from that period, as well as from visits to other favelas. I conducted semi- and nonstructured interviews, and participant sensing (Pink 2009: 67). The latter enabled me to pay more attention to my own experiences of sound, which I could use to be attuned to and ask about my research participants' experiences. This proved especially helpful, because the experience of violence is sometimes difficult to put in words. I do not claim that my own sensory experiences are comparable to those of my research participants, as my positionality as a white European

woman enabled me to experience the daily violence from a privileged and safe space, or as Margit Ystanes and Tomas Salem (this issue) explain, my whiteness served as a shield. For example, the experience of crossfires: although I had as much chance to be hit by a stray bullet when I lived in a favela, police officers tend to direct “stray” bullets toward black male bodies (one of my friends and favela activists often stressed that bullets, more often than not, were not stray). Furthermore, I was not at risk to lose my job when I decided to not leave the house and to wait until the streets were more safe, and I did not have children in daycare or school who had to be picked up when those facilities closed down during a military police operation.

Instead of claiming that I experienced the same as my research participants, I understood my participatory sensing as a form of witnessing, a research approach that aims to “position the anthropologist inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally committed being, one who will ‘take sides’ and make judgements, though this flies in the face of the anthropological non-engagement with either ethics or politics” (Scheper-Hughes 2006: 551). This position inspired me to become part of Bloco APAFunk, a samba band formed by activists who played funk rhythms and advocated for a decriminalization of the music and the free use of public space by all inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, I joined Grupo Musicultura (2015), in which academics and students come together to conduct research about music in favelas. The group consisted of researchers who lived in the favela where the meetings took place, grew up in a favela and now lived somewhere else, or lived in other parts of the city. In this group, I learned what my whiteness and Europeanness meant for my role as ethnographer. The conviviality with the group helped me deconstruct my presumptions about both (in)security and living in a favela and what it means to conduct ethnographic research, as the group functioned according to teachings of Paulo Freire (1972) and his pedagogy of the oppressed. Lastly, digital ethnography, especially the use of Facebook and WhatsApp, helped me understand how people make sense of sounds and navigate hearing silence in their day-to-day lives.

### Silence and Police Operations

Throughout the week, I heard different sounds in the favela during different times. My house was close to the top of one of the hills, and in the mornings, I could hear mostly the sound of birds, mixed with that of people on their way to work or bringing their children to school. When I left my house and walked downhill, sounds became louder and more diverse: children calling at each other at soccer practice; the coach’s whistle; people chatting while shopping for groceries. Several days a week, the market would bring other sounds: of bargaining, the unloading of produce, and the sweeping of the road. Vendors praising their vegetables, electric razors cutting hair, music playing from a pirate CD stall. The community radio blared out music that mixed with the noises from accelerating buses and *mototaxis* passing by. However, this usual order of sounds in the favela was sometimes disrupted. On a Friday morning when I was on my way to the community center in Maré—a conglomerate of favelas—to meet my music research group, the normally busy market street was completely empty. Some of the small shops were open but had barely any customers. An eerie feeling of something not being right came over me.

However, I had not been to the area often and did not know the neighborhood well, so I decided to keep walking straight ahead. Knowing I was already late, I kept a fast pace, not thinking too much about the unusual silence taking hold of the neighborhood. When I turned the corner of the street where I headed, I saw two military soldiers with their weapons raised, slowly walking past houses on the other side of the street. I immediately realized I had ended up in the middle of an operation. Not knowing what to do, I panicked. I walked a bit further

toward my destination, and hurried in to a small candy store nearby, apologizing to the young man behind the counter: “I will just wait here a little bit until it gets calmer.” He nodded understandingly and continued to look at his phone. Maybe he was communicating with friends and family about the security situation in the favela. When I had calmed down a bit, and felt that it also had calmed down a bit outside, I decided to walk quickly to the building where I met with my research group, some one hundred meters down the street. Only two people had shown up, and they told me that an hour before I had arrived, a boy had been shot on the sidewalk in front of the community center.

The body, through which sound is experienced, is never neutral but rather gendered and racialized. Georgina Born (2013) conceptualizes sound as perspectival and relational, since it is always experienced from particular subjective and embodied, physical, and social locations. It is thus important to understand listening not merely as a biological activity but as a sociocultural one (Daughtry 2015: 41). Security practices are also gendered and racialized and inform how people experience sounds. The same sounds have different consequences for different bodies in terms of security. How security practices are gendered and racialized in Brazil has been discussed in depth by Jaime Amparo Alves. Discussing urban violence in São Paulo, he concludes that the social hierarchy of Brazilian society plays out in an “economy of gendered racialized violence that produces multiple forms of vulnerability to violence and death” (2018: 23). He carefully draws out that black male bodies living in favelas are most vulnerable to police brutality, but also notes that black female bodies, especially the mothers of young men who have been killed by the state, suffer from the illegibility of black death.

During operations, military police or army troops enter favelas. Often, the Batalhão de Operações Especiais (Special Police Operations Battalion—BOPE) is part of these operations, and is known as particularly violent. Their aggressiveness “isn’t so much about effective policing as it is a reflection of the problematic notion that all favela bodies are disposable, acceptable casualties in the war against the [drug] traffic” (Robb Larkins 2015: 68). One of my friends from the favela described it as follows: “When the BOPE comes, they come to kill (*eles vem pra matar mesmo*).” While the official objective of the operations is said to be a crackdown on drug trade, the operations continued during pacification in an adapted way (Menezes 2018). Therefore, they can be better understood as spectacular performances of power by the state (Robb Larkins 2015). During operations, security personnel perform the state both to others and to themselves (Savell 2016: 62). Robb Larkins (2013) has shown that this performance is staged for an audience outside the favela, and that the BOPE’s performance of police legitimacy rather undermines state authority for favela inhabitants. For residents, these operations are times of fear, as it often means that neighbors, friends, and family are in danger of being killed. The military operations claim to bring security by silently ambushing the gangs (Bertelsen and Salem, this issue) but produce a sense of insecurity in the favela, because people are afraid of what happens and what might happen during an operation.

It is here where we can ask, security for whom? A media image is constructed for an audience outside the favela in which the operations are framed as providing security. As Stephanie Savell (2016) explains in detail for the case of operations executed by the army in favelas in Rio, the problem for favela residents is that security is framed in a logic of urban warfare. This reasoning enables the view of residents as compliant with drugs traffickers, and consequently, they are treated as bare lives, bodies outside the political community who do not deserve to be protected (Agamben 1998; Magalhães and Ystanes, this issue; Vargas 2013). In line with this, one of my research participants assured me that it is much more dangerous to be in the streets during an operation than during a shootout. Here again we can see this is especially true for young black men, whom state actors frame as drug traffickers (Alves 2018). They are often vio-

lently harassed, intimidated, and taken into custody after drugs are planted on them. Women face other dangers during operations, such as sexual intimidation, and losing their sons and husbands either to prison or to violent deaths.

### Racialized Experiences of Silence

As said, our experience and understanding of sounds is contextual (Feld 2015). The same counts for silence. Silence is not just a passive state marked by the absence of certain sounds; it is active. In sound studies, scholars have stressed that sounds get their meaning in relation to the (cultural) context in which they are heard (Novak and Sakakeeny 2015). The same counts for silence:

Silence too has many everyday meanings that are produced subjectively rather than objectively . . . An individual or community can be silent, find silence, fear silence, or be silenced in myriad ways without any kind of objective silence existing . . . Silence, it seems, has no inherent moral valence. It can be good or bad, productive or destructive, godly or murderous, created, imposed, or sought out . . . In short, silence is a moving target. (Rath 2018: 76)

When talking about silence in the case of police operations in favelas, we refer to not an absolute silence but a relative one: one in which sounds of daily life are missing. This silence can be stressed by other sounds, for example, dogs barking or a helicopter flying overhead. Residents of favelas regularly commented on sounds and silence in their neighborhoods, such as those in my WhatsApp group chat. On Sundays, I often saw Facebook posts from people discussing the sounds and music they heard in their neighborhoods. Hellen, a social worker who lives on top of one of the hills of her favela, commented on the different types of music she heard coming from neighboring houses and rooftops. She happily noted: “This is peace in the favela!” For Hellen, then, the sound of peace is the sound of activity, of people enjoying themselves. The arrival of UPPs in strategically located favelas a few years before the mega-events in Rio de Janeiro, have—contradictory to their name—regularly silenced this peace of the favela (see also M. Franco 2014; Livingstone 2014). The silence is sometimes produced consciously, but at other times can better be seen as a byproduct of police actions.

Interestingly, the fear of going to the street produces silence, but it also works the other way around. When people hear a specific silence—the absence of the hustle and bustle of everyday life—they become afraid. Here we can understand silence as a sensory disruption (Panagia 2009) as part of what Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2016) has called an occupation of the senses in her discussion of Israeli political violence in Palestine. The presence of the military police produces a silence that occupies and limits the possibility for people to hear and produce their day-to-day sounds, the sounds that Hellen calls the peace of the favela. People keep silent not only as an expression of their fear but also as a strategy to keep safe. The silence enables them to listen to what is happening outside, and during their silence, they search for sonic markers that enable them to develop knowledge about the safety situation. This helps them make decisions about leaving the house and advising others to enter or stay out of the favela. This way of dealing with silences can be better understood as acoustemology, a term Steven Feld (2015: 12) has coined to “theorize sound as a way of knowing.” Following this line of thought, listening to the silence of police operations does not only give *favelados* information about the security situation outside their door. The silence communicates much more. The silence communicates the authority of the police troops in the neighborhood. It informs residents’ ideas about the legitimacy of the Brazilian state. It tells them about the status they have in their city. In the

silence, they understand that their routines, wishes, time, and ultimately lives are not worthy of being heard according to how the Brazilian society is organized along the lines of dichotomies on which security practices are based (Jusonyte and Goldstein 2016).

### **Mourning Mothers, Silent Fathers**

Tuning in to the literal silence of a police operation is not the only way to help us understand how security policies affect favela inhabitants. To better understand the security policies, it is also important to uncover which stories about these event we hear and which experiences are silenced. In general, large media outlets dehumanize victims of police brutality by describing them as criminal subjects (Oliveira Rocha 2012; Vargas 2004; for a broader discussion on the role of mediatization of violence in Brazil, see also Oosterbaan 2017). Stripped from their humanity and right to live, young black men are said to be involved in drug trafficking, and according to Brazilian sayings such as “direitos humanos para manos direitos” (human rights for right men) and “bandido bom é bandido morto” (a good thug is a dead thug), this connection with crime is enough to justify the killing (Fischer 2008). There is one exception to the silencing of experiences of state terror in favelas: the stories of mothers who have lost children at the hands of the police. Alves (2014), writing about the invisibility of black pain, explains that white ontology normalizes violence against black people, emphasizing that through the racial ordering of society, black death can be ignored by the state. Luciane de Oliveira Rocha (2012) adds to this the painful experience that mothers must go through when they are blamed for the deaths of their children, as they are said to not have raised them properly.

In recent years, mostly thanks to efforts from favela activists and favela community journalism, stories of black mothers who have lost children have found their way into mainstream media (see also Braathen, this issue). Although this does not mean that the state and law respect black bodies, it is an important step toward breaking the silence around black pain. The mothers are the only ones who are heard, and in this way can try to give the victims of police killings a voice. Ultimately, this is how they challenge the legitimacy of the state. Peris Jones and Wangui Kumari have discussed in depth how women’s efforts in providing security have been silenced, both in society and in academic theorizations of security. They call for a broader understanding of security in order to include “the taken for granted and invisibilised emotional, reproductive and socio-economic gendered labours of women” (2019: 1835). The work of the mourning mothers can be seen as this type of work. To be able to be heard, women must connect themselves to the idea of motherhood as a sacred symbol (J. Franco 1985), and use the image of the mother strategically (Vianna 2015). The mourning black mother trope is such a well-known image that it has become a symbol around which the pain of losing a child can be expressed and around which resistance can be organized collectively. Furthermore, the trope provides legitimacy to speak and to be heard. Even when the mother cannot be present, other family members express that they are there fighting in the name of the mother (Vianna and Farias 2011). Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International enforce this discourse, stressing the painful experiences of mourning mothers and helping them tell their stories all over the world.

Sadly, in this process, the image of the mourning black father is silenced, as it is illegible for the general Brazilian audience. Some fathers decide not to speak up, as they fear being targeted by the police upon having their voice heard (Alves 2018: 236). However, when the father is present, his role is minimized while the image of the mother is singled out, as was the case in the wake of the killing of 10-year-old Eduardo. In a protest a few days after her son was killed, Dona Terezinha led a group (of mostly women) down a hill to join protesters who had gathered

in front of the national and international press. On the news, she and her husband were both shown during the interview, but she was the only one talking and sitting in front. She was the one who appeared in the photos taken in the commemoration a year after Eduardo's death. When the father appeared in photos, he took a supporting pose, putting his arm around his wife, but Dona Terezinha was shown as the one in charge, often holding a photo of her murdered son. All these examples show that there are very clear, gendered roles in how mourning black lives can be made heard to the Brazilian audience (and, as shown by the case of an international tour of black mothers organized by Amnesty International, the world). Although these roles are effective in communication about, for example, human rights violations, they are also problematic. When the idea of the mother as the only caring parent is reproduced, it normalizes and finally may justify fathers not taking responsibility for their children. The work of mourning is an emotionally tiring and exhaustive form of labor and should not simply be expected of and allowed for women. This dynamic, where only women are visible in caring roles, echoes the myth of matrifocal families and absent fathers that can be traced back to Brazil's history of slavery. Manolo Florentino and José Roberto Góes (2017) have shown that slave holders thought the development of kinship ties was incompatible with captivity and therefore that enslaved people were not allowed to have families (see also Ystanes and Salem, this issue).

However, there is also a sense of power in the fact that women have the possibility to break the silence about the security practices in the favela that target black lives. On the stage of mourning, mothers are the central and most legitimate actors that can have their voices heard. Nonetheless, the silence of black fathers shows us yet another dimension that helps us understand the gendered dimension of silence, and how gendered roles are reinforced and shaped through silencing. As Marie Thompson (2018: 108) asserts: "gender is constituted with, through and alongside the sonic." As I have shown, police operations often have deadly consequences but also impact the lives of favela inhabitants in other ways. The police also use less deadly, but not necessarily less violent, security practices—including the silencing of Brazilian funk music.

### Silencing of Funk Parties

On a Monday in 2015, my first day back at fieldwork after three years, I went to talk to my old neighbor Luanda in one of the favelas in the North Zone. When I met her at the cultural center where I used to live, she seemed worried. Recently, there had been more confrontations between police and gang members. Today, Luanda was hanging around the cultural center because she was waiting for the electricity to be restored. She had wanted to do the laundry, but the electric pump that brought water to her house was not working. Last Saturday, she told me, police officers had destroyed an electricity transformer by shooting at it. They had done this to stop the funk party, because, according to Luanda, they did not like that a lot of *proibidão* (lit. "highly forbidden")—a subgenre of funk that narrates life in the favela (Lopes 2011) with a focus on violence (Grupo Musicultura 2015: 155)—was being played. When we finished catching up, Luanda accompanied me outside to catch a minivan to go home. When we got to the street, she asked a construction worker if the vans were passing. He told her they were not, explaining that the electrical company had finally come and was now blocking the road while restoring the electricity transformer the police had destroyed two nights earlier. As I searched for a *mototaxi*, Luanda went back inside, relieved that she would soon be able to do her laundry.

Sovereignty is often discussed in terms of violence and death. It is understood as the ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity (Hansen and Stepputat 2006; Oosterbaan and Pansters 2015). Finn Stepputat (2015: 129) has argued that it is central to look at "formations of



sovereignty,” as this is a process that is always in movement, and contested. An important part of the formations of sovereignty, however, is not just the decision about life and death (also understood as necropolitics in the case of UPPs in Rio de Janeiro (Bertelsen and Salem, this issue)). Martijn Oosterbaan and Wil Pansters (2015: 125) have argued for a more complete understanding of sovereignty that “includes the power to govern the self and others, the constitution of order and security, the ability to discipline and punish, as well as the authority to decide on inclusion and exclusion from communities.” This connects to Chelsey Kivland’s (2014) argument that a discussion of hedonopolitics is needed in order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the performance of sovereignty. Hedonopolitics can be understood as the power to decide who can and cannot have fun, and, more broadly, what pleasure means. Elucidating hedonopolitics helps us understand how the criminalization and moralization of funk is part of the police’s performance of sovereignty in favelas. Furthermore, it shows that the ability to silence certain sounds connects to the performance of authority.

Funk, an electronically produced type of music, is often described as the voice of the favela (Lopes 2011: 130–150). However, not everyone enjoys the *batidão* (heavy beat) that comes rolling from several walls of sound equipment during dances late at night. The attendants of these parties, *funkeiros*, are mostly people in their teens and twenties, maybe thirties. *Bailes*, as the parties are called, also have an unintended audience. The residents of the neighborhood in which the party is held, and sometimes of neighborhoods that surround the locality, are flooded by the thumping bass. People complain about the loud noise that keeps them from sleeping. In Gaiola, a neighborhood where the *baile* gained nationwide notoriety after it appeared in a hit song, people tried to sell their houses to literally flee from the heavy beat. However, the audience might not be completely unintended, as Oosterbaan (2009) explains in his discussion of the soundscape of a favela. He shows that evangelical churches that blast gospel music, and drug traffickers who organize the *bailes funk* compete for authority in a sonic way, by dominating the soundscape. This politics of sonic presence helps us understand why people who organize the parties give great importance to the volume of the music, and why it is so important for the police to silence them.

However, loudness is not the primary reason for the criminalization of funk. Especially the moralization that happens around funk music is a discrimination of popular culture along the lines of race and gender, based on what has been called in the discourse of the state a “civilizing mission” (Oliveira 2014; Silva 2016: 339). The prohibition of funk is a hedonopolitical process that connects to a history in which the Brazilian state has prohibited capoeira and samba (Lopes and Facina 2012; Silva 2016: 318–319). All are cultural practices connected to formerly enslaved black people, expressions Lélia Gonzales (1988) would have called *Amefricanidade*, stressing the music’s African roots. Although funk music has been criminalized since it was first played, UPPs in favelas gave the criminalization a different, more formal character (Grupo Musicultura 2015). In the 1990s, large media outlets related the music several times to violent events (Essinger 2005: 204–243; Lopes 2011: 33–65). This led to the pejorative connotation of *funkeiros*, a nickname for people who enjoy funk. What followed was the criminalization of funk during parties in favelas, while it was framed as pop music<sup>4</sup> when the audience was white, middle class, and outside the favela (for a detailed discussion, see Lopes 2011). The police perceived the parties in the favelas as gatherings of drug traffickers and as hotbeds for the sale of drugs in small quantities (Silva 2016). In this line of thinking, the music is seen as inciting crime and corrupting youth, which makes it a “case of the police” (Lopes and Facina 2012: 195).

By the time the UPPs started occupying different favelas, the negative public opinion about funk parties had paved the way for an official prohibition of the *bailes*. Not only *bailes funk* but all cultural events, including birthday parties and parties where other types of music were

played, were prohibited. *Favelados* who wanted to organize a party had to get permission from the UPP commander who was responsible for their neighborhood. Although laws have been drafted to both prohibit and protect funk music and parties (Lippman 2019), the UPP commander was the one who could set the criteria for a party to take place. This caused the process of getting approval to be very arbitrary. In one of the favelas in the city center, for example, the UPP commander used the parties as a form of leverage: if no shootouts had occurred, then the weekly *baile* could take place. In other areas, police officials tied their success to the occurrence of *bailes*: “If we have a funk party here today, it means that the police has lost” (Silva 2014: 173, my translation). Alves (2018: 91) says this understanding of funk parties is an anti-black rhetoric that stigmatizes cultural practices of black youth as a security problem. This also becomes clear from the way police commanders explain why funk has to be banned from favelas: they say favela inhabitants need to be made conscious of the music’s bad influence (Silva and Silva 2012: 50).

This bad influence is understood in terms of not only racial dimensions but also, importantly, gendered ones. In Brazilian state discourse, the proper nuclear family is a strong symbol (Florentino and Góes 2017). Funk, however, narrates all kinds of stories about (romantic) relationships that do not sit well with the heteronormative standard set by a society heavily influenced by traditional forms of Catholicism and the evangelicalism. One example is the music video for the megahit “Me Solta” (Let go of me) by Nego do Borel featuring DJ Rennan da Penha (Canal KondZilla 2018).<sup>5</sup> In the video, the funk artist is shown kissing another man while wearing high heels, a skirt, and earrings. A public outcry emerged after the video premiered, condemning Nego do Borel of corrupting youth. Furthermore, funk proposes another understanding of femininity, often denounced as promiscuous or, in cruder terms, slutty. Mariana Gomes (2015), however, has shown that the *funkeira* as a new role model can be perceived as liberating and empowering women. Gomes also discusses the critiques that funk has received from the feminist movement, which clearly echo the anti-black rhetoric through which a broader audience discusses funk.

In terms of gender, not only the feminine body is moralized through the disapproval of funk. Next to this, in the police’s prohibition of funk, we can read a power play related to machismo (for a discussion on hypermasculinity in favelas and how police officers position themselves as hypermasculine warriors, see Sørbøe, this issue). At *bailes funk*, black masculine power is performed by skillfully dancing *passinho*,<sup>6</sup> boasting expensive clothes or jewelry, or, and this is seen as more problematic by the police, flaunting weapons. As stated earlier, the police frame funk parties as places where illegal activities occur and argue that the violent crackdown on them is thusly justified. However, even more than a place to have fun, the *baile* is a place to be seen. Numerous comments from youth on funk events announced on Facebook read, “Serei vista” (I will be seen). By prohibiting the parties, the police, although perhaps unconsciously, take away the possibility of the *favelados* to show what they are worth, and perform their gendered identities.

### Civilizing Funk and *Favelados*

Next to the literal silencing of *bailes* via prohibition, police also tried to sanitize them by installing all kinds of rules that would “make the party acceptable.” After five years of occupying the Complexo da Penha, the UPP decided a funk party could take place in what was formerly the city’s most popular *baile* venue. The event, referred to as a pacified *baile*, had various restrictions: the DJ had to pay attention to what kind of music he played (songs referencing gangs were not allowed), and the UPP commander had decided on the very early end time of 2 a.m. This way of sanitizing the party was unsuccessful, as the number of visitors dropped and the local

gang found other ways to challenge the hedonopolitical claim to authority the UPP police made (Gilsing 2018). However, it is a very clear example of how the regulation of a certain sound, funk music, is weaponized by the police to control a racialized group of people, *favelados*.

The silencing of *funk* happens not only through rules and regulations (see also Grupo Músicocultura 2015) but also in a more tacit way of moralization. How this process works out in individual opinions around *bailes funk* is illustrated by my conversation with Andrea on a Friday night in July 2018. As we sit on the street around a table with her partner, some friends, and her three-year-old daughter, I try to convince Andrea to join us at the *baile* later that night. Although I don't expect her to come—she has to put her child to bed and is in the middle of finishing her master's thesis—her answer surprises me: “No, we are not coming!” She frowns and proudly says, “I have never been to a *baile*.” Sipping her beer, she explains that when she was younger she always went to Lapa—an area with bars in the city center. When she returned to her house in the favela, she would make sure to avoid the street where the funk party was taking place. She would even walk through different streets so no one would see her and think she was coming back from the *baile*. When I asked why she did this, she said, “I always thought it was better to be outside the favela and not have my image associated with *funkeiros* and *funkeiras*.” Andrea's fear of being seen as a *funkeira* and her aversion to funk parties connect to aesthetic sensibilities of a broader audience. Funk is condemned not only by people from outside the favela, for whom looking down on cultural expressions that come from the favela is a way to assert difference and stress superiority, which is part of a politics of difference that lies at the core of, for example, being able to make claims to citizenship (Holston and Appadurai 1996; Perlman 2010; Valladares 2000).

The police, through a moral discourse around the music and events, legitimate the silencing of parties, which connects them to illegality and frames them as apologies of crime (Grupo Músicocultura 2015: 154). Furthermore, the music is understood as a bad influence because its lyrics refer to sex. Especially interesting (and wry for the artists from the favela who created the genre) is, when the music is detached from the favela environment, the consequences are different. João, a human rights activist and lawyer, questions the influence that the place where the music is played has on the way it is treated. At upper-class parties, people laugh about the lyrics, enjoy themselves, and have fun, without fearing that police will come in and start shooting. “Why is it not possible to understand a *baile* in the favela in the same way, as youth enjoying themselves and celebrating the weekend?” João asks. The profound disapproval of the music and dances, to the extent of criminalization and the destruction of equipment, can be explained by what funk has come to signify. This can be understood as sonic protocols: “culturally specific and socially constructed conventions that shape how sound is indexed, valued and interpreted at any given moment” (Stoever 2016: 24).

The sonic protocol of funk at a party in the favela is shaped by ideas of race and class. Jennifer Stoever's understanding of the sonic color line helps us understand how the process of denouncing funk takes place: “The sonic colour line is the learned cultural mechanism that establishes racial difference through listening habits and uses sound to communicate one's position vis-à-vis white citizenship. In the United States, the ideology of the sonic colour line operates as an aural boundary: sounds are racialized, naturalized and then policed as either ‘black’ or ‘white’ . . . ‘whiteness’ appears inaudible, undetectable as anything other than a sounded marker of normalcy” (2018: 119). Although the history and social reality of race and racism in the United States and Brazil are different, this explanation helps us understand why Andrea denounced funk and did not want to be associated with *funkeiros*. By refusing funk, she formed her listening habits and taste along the lines of white citizenship, a way of listening that is perceived as normal and proper (for a discussion on how this process plays out in how activist frame their message in the

case of the removal of a favela, see Ystanes and Magalhães, this issue.). She performs a type of hearing that she knows to be accepted as the dominant way of listening in Brazil. Through this act, she tries to conform to the generally approved markers of citizenship, that she, through the very same process, also perceives as normal. The sonic color line, then, not only explains why people perceive of funk as immoral noise, but also clarifies the process that lies at the base of the criminalization of the music (for the broader context of negation of black subjectivity and cultural expressions in Brazil, see also Lélia Gonzalez in Cardoso 2014).

As Andrea's story shows, the moralization of funk does not just happen outside the favela but is also at work inside the neighborhoods. The sonic color line enables "some listeners to hear themselves as 'normal' citizens—or, to use legal discourse, 'reasonable'—while compelling Others to understand their sonic production and consumption—and therefore themselves—as aberrant" (Stoever 2016: 14). This not only makes us understand Andrea's distaste for funk music but also explains the tone of conversations I had with people who did go to *bailes funk*. Often, these people spoke to me in an apologetic way, saying things along the line of: I know I should not go to these parties, but I go anyway; I don't really like the music, but I do dance to it. This self-censorship should be understood not as a false consciousness but as the result of the sonic color line at work. This racialized line of thinking justifies the silencing of the parties. The process of marking funk as abnormal and improper sound legitimizes the otherwise criminal acts of destroying sound equipment and imprisoning DJs and MCs. The silencing of funk is an important act in the mechanism of keeping up the sonic color line.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed the relation between silence and power. Martin Daughtry (2015) has shown in the context of the Iraq War that sound is central to the experience of war. What happens in favelas in Rio de Janeiro is not strictly a war (though it is often framed as an urban war or war against drugs), but Daughtry's insight can be extended to the experience of violence. Tuning into sonic experiences of silence stresses an important aspect of how the violence that results from different security practices is experienced in a gendered and racialized way. By elucidating the politics of sound, I have widened the spectrum of understanding how sound works as a technology of power. I have discussed various instances of silence and silencing: the silence of a police operation; the silencing of mourning fathers and of funk music. By giving different examples of silence and silencing, and discussing various dimensions implied in these examples, I have shown the complexity of how to understand silence. It is, however, important to include silence in research, especially in violent contexts, because in silence a large part of experience is hidden. What the discussed instances have in common is that they are products of a logic in which *favelados* are produced as a group of people that needs to be detained and civilized by the police. This reasoning lies at the core of unwritten rules about what stories can be heard and which experiences cannot be understood. Silence and silencing, then, become a technology of power that reproduces dichotomies in Brazilian society. A social hierarchy is formed along the lines of who can and who cannot be heard.

### *Breaking the Silence*

On 14 March 2018, Marielle Franco was murdered in the center of Rio de Janeiro. Marielle, as she became internationally known by her first name, was city councilor and long-time funk activist. As part of the Association of Professionals and Friends in Funk (APAFunk), she fought

for the decriminalization and acceptance of Brazilian funk by the state and in the public sphere. She would repeatedly narrate her experiences as a young girl, going to the *bailes* in the favela where she grew up. Every week she enjoyed playing funk music with her daughter in the APA-Funk band, often singing along loudly while playing the tambourine. She also was outspoken, and always tried to make sure women's voices were heard in funk and in the activist movement around the music, guarding it from falling into the same moralist critiques described in this article.

Responses to Marielle's death resembled the ones that occurred after black youth were killed at the hands of the police: fake news tried to frame her as either the daughter or the lover of gang leaders, and claimed her election as politician was financed by the Comando Vermelho gang. Marielle was a proud *favelada* and fought against police brutality, alongside the mothers of black young men who were murdered. In her work for the Rio de Janeiro's State Human Rights Commission, Marielle questioned the racialized and gendered security policies of the state and tried to help the victims. Furthermore, her presence alone as a black, bisexual *favelada* "challenged the racism and sexism of institutions like the city council where fellow lawmakers refused to take the elevator with her" (Reist 2019). Sadly, the outcome of investigations around Marielle's assassination (which were reported to be hindered by highly ranked officials) also resembled the many investigations around killings of young black men. For a year, it stayed unclear who had fired the shots and it is still unknown who has ordered the assassination.

In the wake of Marielle's death, her friends, family, colleagues, and supporters tried to make sense of her death. In this process, the saying "they tried to bury us but they didn't know we were seeds" was often put forward, later condensed into "Marielle *semente*" (Marielle seed) (for a discussion of community activism, see also Braathen, this issue). Marielle's battle for a more inclusive society generated a push for an inclusion of voices that are otherwise silenced in various domains of society. She was the first black *favelada* city councilor, and three women have followed in her steps in the recent elections. Moreover, Marielle was part of a group of black students who entered university after quota for black and indigenous students had been introduced—students who continue to spread their knowledge and form an inspiration for children in favelas. Furthermore, the collective Movimentos, a group of young activists from Brazilian favelas and peripheral neighborhoods, many whom were friends and colleagues of Marielle, has been formed in an academic research center. Movimentos tries to foster new perspectives in the debate about public safety and drug policies. In this debate, the voice of young *favelados* has been silenced, although they are largely the most targeted by racialized and gendered security practices related to the war on drugs (Movimentos and CESeC 2019). Initiatives like Movimentos also remind us that there are still many fights to be fought against the power of silence and silencing in academia.

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## NOTES

1. All names are pseudonyms.
2. Favelas in Brazil are neighborhoods of mostly low-income residents, and most of this population is black or colored (see also Bertelsen and Salem, this issue). Favela is often translated as slum, but this does not account for the variety of living conditions found in these areas, often built up through joined efforts of residents and with little to no help from the government. Out of respect to the residents, and following numerous activists and scholars on Brazil, I have chosen to keep using the native term favela throughout my work.
3. It is important to note that my research took place in a very specific moment in time in the history of Rio de Janeiro’s security policies. In this period, in the years before and after the 2014 FIFA Men’s World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics, Rio de Janeiro’s security policies came to the foreground for an international audience, the most well-known being the UPP program. My colleagues in this special section have discussed the implications of UPPs for the populations living in the favelas where they were rolled out in depth. My discussion adds the sonic dimension to insights on how social hierarchies are established through security policies.
4. This process of adaptation from an underground music genre by a wider audience is something that happens to many music styles. This process both changes the music and the music is also often changed to make the songs more acceptable for a larger audience. In this article, when I say funk, I mostly talk about the subgenre of *funk proibidão*: a genre that narrates life in the favela, often with a focus on violence. I lack the space to write in depth about the origins and development of this genre, but that fact that the name mentions that it is prohibited signals the political struggle around funk music. For more information about this subgenre, I recommend the work of Carlos Palombini (2013).
5. DJ Rennan da Penha is, at the time of writing, incarcerated because of allegedly being connected to drug traffickers. This is another way through which police have criminalized funk. Another famous case is the imprisonment of five funk MCs in 2010.
6. This is a form of dancing to funk that mostly young men perform. It is a street dance that resembles break dancing, as it includes battles between two dancers or two groups of dancers, but incorporates movements from typical Brazilian forms of dancing, such as *frevo*. Furthermore, the performances are loaded with humor and can sometimes even be seen as theatrical.

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