Death on repeat

Violence, viral images and questioning the rule of law in Brazilian favelas

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Abstract: In the past decade, images of fatal police shootings shared on social media have inspired protests against militarised policing policies and re-defined the ways marginalised communities seek justice. This article theorises the repetition of violent images and discusses how social media has become an important tool for localising popular critiques of the law. I provide an ethnographic account of a police shooting in a Brazilian favela (shantytown). I am particularly interested in how residents of the favela interpret law and justice in relationship to contemporaneous movements such as Black Lives Matter. Reflecting Walter Benjamin's concept of mechanical reproduction, this case study demonstrates an 'aura' that is shaped by the social and legal context in which a violent image is produced, consumed and aggregated. This case study suggests the possibility for research examining the ways inclusionary social media platforms are increasingly co-opted by oppressive political institutions.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter, favelas, police shootings, social justice, social media, violence, Walter Benjamin

The death of Caio

One evening, about a month before the 2014 World Cup, a squad of Rio de Janeiro police officers took a tactical position inside a primary school at the heart of the favela (informal community) of Itararé. As a group of drug traffickers passed by, police opened fire. Residents, angry at damage done to the school during the crossfire, began to gather. Police shot rubber bullets and gas at the protestors to clear an escape path. Within minutes, residents posted videos on social media of bloody protesters fleeing the street. Shortly after the protest, a *mototaxi* driver named Caio de Maraes Silva received a call from a friend who needed a ride home from a supermarket near the school. An anonymous

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resident of Itararé, recording with her smartphone inside a clothing store, captured Caio drive past on a motorcycle with his friend on the back. Off-camera, Caio encountered a police roadblock, put his hands above his head, was shot in the chest and fell to the ground dead. The anonymous video then shows Caio's friend running down the street screaming for help. A second smartphone video recorded on a rooftop filmed police jostle Caio's limp body into the backseat of a patrol car. A man whispered in profane shock 'Caralho!' (Fuck!), and another man's voice cautioned, 'Esconde, esconde' (Hide, hide). By the next morning, the videos concerning Caio's death had gone 'viral', receiving tens of thousands of plays on social media platforms. Every major Brazilian news network showed at least one of the videos. Within days, hundreds of Caio's neighbours organised in protest, an event that produced videos and images equally as impactful as the images of his death.

The aura of violent images

I lived in Itararé from January 2014 to June 2015 as part of a longer forty-month research project across three of Rio de Janeiro's favelas (2008–2016). My bedroom was only one hundred meters away from where the above events unfolded. As an ethnographic observer, I noted the forms of repetition that developed around Caio's death and how images of the event were reproduced in both mechanical terms and social terms. Caio's death was replayed, shared, copied and remixed tens of thousands of times on YouTube, Facebook and other social media platforms. The images encapsulated the repetitive nature of violence on Rio's periphery, where favela residents are continuously victims of structural violence, a violent drug war and state neglect. In global terms, Itararé's activist movement repeated much of the discourse mobilised during the same period of 2014 by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the United State. In ethnographic terms, these images provide a prism for which we can understand the creation of publics (Fattal 2014). The social and digital reproduction of Caio's death revealed Itararé's collective understanding of violence and allowed me to conceptualise the footprint of a social justice discourse that emerged from the favela.

An ethnography of repetition is able to imagine the 'real' and the digital as existing syncretically and can track how violent images are shared by a diverse group of actors with an equally diverse set of intentions. In Caio's case, videos were produced by anonymous residents and shared by well-known local activists in the hopes of airing a grievance

against the excessive use of force by police. Brazil's national media outlets presented images of Caio's death to feed into a 'spectacle' (Larkins 2015) of favela violence. Popular visual representations symbolically 'contained' and stigmatised the favela (Page 1997) and helped justify the unequal application of the law on Rio's margins. Police, in contrast, used Caio's death to defend the precarious mental health conditions of the favela's patrol officers who often suffered from post-traumatic stress. And the average social media user in Itararé saw images of Caio's death as a reflection of their own precarity under the law. Despite these varied intentions, each iteration found on social media contained a critique of law and justice on Rio's margins. This article examines how digital repetition brings meaning to images of violent death. This aura is amplified when an image allows a marginalised community to critique an established legal or cultural order. Videos of official misconduct, such as the 2014 death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, have become emblematic of such transformations in the relationship between communities and exclusionary legal regimes.

The digital reproduction of violent images represents a unique moment in technological and aesthetic innovation. Platforms like social media bring renewed significance to an often undocumented and singular event while also producing new forms of meaning through sharing and the creation of collective meanings. Walter Benjamin (1968) describes this process in terms of an 'aura' that is created by an original work of art that is situated in a specific social context, time and place. Reproductive technologies such as celluloid photography, which emerged in the nineteenth century, disrupt the singular authority of an original work of art by making copies accessible to a plurality of settings. The act of aesthetic reproduction, epitomised by film and print, can transcend the significance of both the copy and the original. Reproduction re-signifies the aesthetic qualities of the original and creates distinct meanings for both the 'real' and the copy (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). Human perception adapts to industrial modes of aesthetic reproduction, and as such, modern society assigns increasing significance to the copy. Mimicry (Bhabha 1984), iteration (Derrida 1977) and simulation (Deleuze 1994) have similar effects to repetition, and scholars have noted how these forms of reproduction often empower communities who were excluded from singularly dominant interpretations of a socio-aesthetic order. Judith Butler's (1993) discussion of 'iterability', or the repetition of cultural norms, also parallels many of the imitative and performative effects of sharing violent images. Social media amplifies the iterative potentials of images and, in turn, the aura

and significance of these images, as they make visible group-based identities, as well as shared associations and physical settings. Ethnography provides opportunity to situate these iterative potentials of digital technology within a specific set of cultural and aesthetic norms.

A recent work by Alessandro Angelini (2016) describes a similar process of mimesis in Brazilian favelas where young favela artists recreate their informally and often maze-like communities using recycled ceramic bricks. These reproduced dioramas act as a backdrop for crude yet personalised avatars made out of Lego blocks. By reproducing the favela, Angelini argues, residents re-signify the aesthetic value of the community and produce a mechanism to transport their perspectives outside the limiting physical and social space of the shantytown. Similar to the re-signification described by Angelini, I observed images of Caio's death were often mobilised to give violence a new communal meaning removed from a singular experience and, subsequently, embedded in the reproductive potentials of the information age. I witnessed the activist community in Itararé engage in imitation, replication and mimesis while protesting police violence. Beyond the memetic nature of social media, activists carried fake coffins at the head of protests to represent victims of police violence. They splattered fake blood at the feet of police. They also performed a roll call during street protests where an individual announced the names of deceased residents and received a callback of *presente* (present) from marchers. The crowd mimicked a response the dead were unable to reproduce, giving a collective voice to the community that far surpassed the significance of any one individual. The reproductive potentials of digital technology built on these iterative practices and allowed Itararé's residents to cultivate an aura around their images.

I found the repetition of violent images was principally used by favela-based activists to delegitimise pacification by making it appear peculiar, inexplicable and detached from an individual's lived reality. For Benjamin, photographs are implicitly understood by those who view them as a mechanical and artificial creation. Nonetheless, mechanical images can also present an unexpected truth that challenges what individuals believe about reality and how they view themselves in an immediate social context. As society favours an artwork's reproduction over its original, the historically rooted social hierarchies that inspired the original work can also be disrupted and transformed (Wolin 1994: 188). Speaking on Benjamin's concept of aura and reproduction, Michael Taussig describes images of violence as producing a surreal experience that asks the viewer to question what is real, what is political and what

is authoritative. Referring to the mimetic nature of Peruvian shamans, who call on the power of colonial imagery to define their own power and undo the suffering of past generations, Taussig explains, 'What we have to understand, then, is not merely some horrific process in which imagery and myth work out from a political unconscious to be actualised, but rather a socio-historical situation in which the image, of crime, for instance, is not less real than the reality it magnifies and distorts' (1989: 14).

Taussig's discussion of 'public secrets' also provides a relevant window into the nature of silence and authority in Brazil's favelas as they relate to what is considered visually authoritative and what is intentionally overlooked. For Taussig, dominant political orders often naturalise their own power by bringing instability to those who are governed. A public secret is a deliberate manipulation of ambiguity and secrecy, done in plain view, 'that which is generally known but which goes unspoken (1999: 50) Ben Penglase applies this concept to the normative forms of violence experienced in the favela and how traffickers often manipulate and make secret public knowledge to maintain their authority. According to Penglase, 'the power of the public secret is not that it conceals a more cynically self-serving political strategy, but that it provides a set of culturally familiar, and convincing, tropes to help people navigate the ordered disorder of their lives' (2009: 59). In this sense, I see violent images reproducing many of the affective and historical conditions of the violent events that they depict; residents find their own images of violence to be significant because these images parallel the types of violence and institutional chaos often recorded by professional journalists. However, rather than reaffirming the need for state intervention, as previous iterations of violent imagery often achieved, local activists introduce an alternative view of digitally reproduced images as a source of counter-hegemonic authority that is capable of deconstructing the favela's oppression, suffering and chaos.

Caio's death, particularly when viewed through highly circulated imagery, mobilised various interpretative frameworks, modes and scripts relating to the favela's place in Brazilian society. I found that symbols and memories of death 'decompose' across social media, their meanings shaped and reshaped over the course of reproduction (Arnold et al. 2017). Social media as a social space produces distinct forms of continuity and closure that reconstruct the process of mourning. Social media fostered what Jeffry Halverson et al. (2013) call 'mediated martyrdom,' a collective identity made through the digital witnessing of violence. For example, after Caio's death, his portrait hung in restaurants,

mototaxi stands and insurance offices, demonstrating the ways a politicised death can infiltrate the mundane corners of everyday life (Allen 2008) and his death, when discussed, often carried the aura of an 'altruistic act' that allowed the community to recognise their collective social experience (Van der Pilj 2016). Furthermore, what began as a form of community mourning and critique of authority allowed activists to later celebrate the participatory and unifying potential of death.

Ethnography is particularly well suited to track the digital decomposition of death in communities such as Itararé, where everyday narratives of loss and suffering are often overlooked by an alienated discourse relating to law and order on the urban periphery. During my forty-month ethnographic project, social media was ubiquitous and invaded both public and intimate corners of favela life. Events like Caio's death are significant because they take place in a shared digital space and during a particular moment in Itararé's history. Moving forward, I will ask how residents viewed Caio's death as reproducing the favela's previous, present and possible future inequalities under the law. I will pay particular attention to who engages with images of Caio's death and how they reflect contemporary understandings of social justice in marginalised communities.

The repetition of policy and politics

Beyond evoking a general sympathy towards Caio as a working-class hero, videos of his death symbolised Itararé's collective misgivings over Brazil's interpretation of community dubbed *pacificação* (pacification policy) by Rio de Janeiro's lawmakers. Pacification policy destabilised some of Rio de Janeiro's most powerful drug gangs who had, for decades, controlled large swaths of favela land through terror and paramilitary violence (Goldstein 2003; Penglase 2014). Pacification policy called for billions of dollars in social infrastructure and introduced more than forty thousand new officers trained in 'proximity policing'. Efforts such as monthly roundtables between police and community members were promised to build a friendlier, more compassionate and smarter legal order in the favela. For the first four years of pacification policy (2010–2014), the police were boastful of their effectiveness in reducing crime, with violent acts nearly disappearing and drug traffickers losing their ability to operate on the street. By the time I arrived in Itararé in 2014, pacification police were becoming insular and began to rely on military-style patrols. Many in the community believed the

presence of the police made death more frequent and less predictable, especially in terms of where violence was expected to occur and who could fall victim. In 2014 alone, fourteen residents from Itararé were killed in shootouts between police and drug traffickers. Thirteen more were wounded and survived. Most of these casualties were caused by a *bala perdida* (lost or stray bullet). An Amnesty International report entitled *Brazil: You Killed My Son* discussed violence in Rio's pacified favelas and concluded: 'Recent public security policies have failed to halt extrajudicial executions. The military police continue to use arbitrary, unnecessary and excessive force on a regular basis, with total impunity' (2015: 9).

Images of dead and blooded bodies dominated the social media feeds of Itararé residents. They took photos of bullet holes in the side of buildings and family pets mutilated by police gunfire. Images played a key role in the community's ability to deconstruct this violence, place it in a broader political discourse and organise around particular grievances. Social media posts amplified the community's everyday familiarity with death and highlighted the local discourse concerning violence. Activists shared their visual evidence of violence, allowing them to establish a collective narrative in which trauma was familiar, tragic and often provoked by the police. Following Caio's death, a loosely organised group of young social media activists who called themselves Coletivo Papo Reto (Straight Talk Collective) became the leading voice against violence from Itararé. According to members of the group, their name, Papo Reto, was a direct critique of popular media narratives that trivialised and politicised violence in the favela. Papo Reto shared images of police abuse that they received from anonymous neighbours. Their nearly hourly posts quickly evolved into overt political critique of police officers and security policy declarations of loyalty to the favela as a community and culture, discussions of legal and human rights and, most importantly, a call for political action against wanton violence.

Social media, and the images circulated on it, allowed Papo Reto – rather than the police – to control a narrative about law enforcement in the favela. For example, a few months after Caio's death, Papo Reto posted a call to action on its Facebook page:

> Attention Complexo do Alemão residents, don't stop bringing information of abuse by the military police and special forces in different parts of the favela. Let's go with cellular phones to the street and photograph and film whichever situation of abuse. Send them to Coletivo Papo Reto, Voz da Comunidade, Alemão Morro. Whichever one. Let's go. We are here for ourselves! (CPR 2014)[1]

Papo Reto's post demonstrates a self-conscious politicisation of social media aggregation or the clustering of data and digital content to bring together activists from different social and national backgrounds (Juris 2012). Alongside using social media to communicate a message of anti-violence, Papo Reto embraced the participatory and non-hierarchical discourse of the North American anti-capitalist Occupy movement. Papo Reto facilitated most of Itararé's on- and offline protests regarding Caio and was responsible for aggregating the videos and sharing them with an audience outside Brazil. Reproducing images of Caio's death also led to a creation of secondary images and secondary personalities related to the initial event. His funeral turned into a mass protest in large part because of Papo Reto's online circulation of videos that showed the moments before, during and after Caio's homicide. One of the more dramatic videos of the funeral shared by Papo Reto, one that would eventually make its way to national television networks, showed a *mototaxi* driver tearfully screaming Caio's name into the sky and being met with a sustained silence.

Caio's mother, whom I spoke with a few weeks after Caio's death, told me, 'He was never involved in anything. He was a worker (*trabalhador*).' His death was particularly shocking for a community where most residents identified as working class who made money from physical labour. Driving a *mototaxi* was typically a second or third job for many men in the community. After Itararé's pacification, *mototaxi* work received a greater degree of legitimacy with government institutions, including easier access to licensing and assistance organising into local labour associations. One *mototaxi* driver I often hired to take me around Itararé told me, 'If you have a moto, you can make money. You can deliver things, take people places, get to other parts of town. People sometimes think we are crooks or drug dealers but every family has a taxi driver and most taxi drivers are family men. They are the blood of the community.' The comparison of the taxi driver to blood was no doubt intentional. Caio's death was what many in the community already expected for *mototaxistas*; the job was unsafe – sometimes deadly – and reaffirmed the traumatic and legally precarious conditions experienced by Brazil's working class (Brum da Silva et al. 2011). Because of the *mototaxistas* heightened working-class consciousness, Caio's funeral represented one of Itararé's more pronounced manifestations of digital protest turned real-world political solidarity.

Papo Reto's social media posts also helped develop cultural capital around Caio's mother Denize to attend anti-violence protests in the favela. In part because of the encouragement given to her by Itararé's

highly visible activist community, Denize frequently shared images of her son on social media and gave dozens of interviews to national news outlets. Much like Caio, she was a sympathetic working-class figure and avoided charges of overt politicisation. In interviews with the national and global press, she discussed her sadness over a needless death, the fear she had for her grandchildren and her anger that the system did not hold her son's murderers accountable. Denize and her allies from Itararé acknowledged the performative potentials of digital mourning. By the time I first interviewed Denize at her insurance office at the centre of Itararé, she informed me she had already given dozens of interviews. Before I could ask a question, she appeared to repeat a statement she had given before:

> I was never political. I never wanted to be a politician. Now they're asking me to be a politician . . . It's an election year, and with all the attention militant activists from Itararé are giving my son, the political parties think I could be a good candidate . . . They think I am against pacification. I am not against pacification. I am for pacification. I have a business in the community, and I never went near the drug gangs. My son never went near the drug gangs either. So, I am for the police. I just want them to function like they do in the wealthy part of town. (Interview, December 2014)

Denize's blame of specific police and institutions reflected a tactic of Itararé's activist community, and the tactic of a broader digital inclusion community, to avoid the messiness of party politics. The increased circulation of violent images led many in the community to villainise the police even if they agreed something had to be done about insecurity, gang violence and economic informality. Rather, Denize focused on specific institutions and actors that had subjected the favela to specific social and physical traumas.

I asked Denize how she responded to the highly circulated videos of her son's death. She responded, 'I still haven't seen the video. I don't want to. It hurts too much.' Rather than focusing on the event itself or the videos that depicted it, Denize repeatedly described the daily trauma she experienced in relation to Caio's death. For the next year and half, Denize remained the most visible foil for investigators who hoped to underplay the role of misguided policing policy in the favela and remained an advocate for the evidentiary value of videos relating to Caio's death. The investigation, while not refuting the fact that an officer killed Caio, closed ranks around the police involved and appeared designed to gather opinions that downplayed the official negligence. Forensic tests on the bullet confirmed the gun that shot Caio belonged to a police officer. Despite videos showing dozens of individuals on

the street, official reports cited only eleven witnesses to Caio's death. Eight of the witnesses were police who claimed they were defending themselves against an attack by drug traffickers when Caio approached. An official report cited the 114 police who were killed in Rio in 2014 and sought to calm critics by investigating whether post-traumatic stress rather than criminal negligence was to blame for Caio's death (*O Globo* 2014). I saw Denize on the street a year after our conversation in her office. It was a few days after the investigation into Caio's death had concluded. She asked, 'Did you hear? They said he's innocent, the police that killed my son. They said he's the victim, that he is traumatised by the event.' The tone of her voice was one of both indignation and acceptance.

Denize's sentiments reflect the narrative arc of Caio's death, from harsh reality to digital repetition and collective grievance to, ultimately, the reproduction of state power on Brazil's urban margins. Denize's unsuccessful pursuit of legal accountability for Caio corresponded with an activist movement in Complexo do Alemão to seek social justice. The reproduction of violent images established a collective narrative around justice, one that Denize and the activist Coletivo Papo Reto to share a specific moment in the real world and over social media. When justice failed to materialise, activists transitioned to other social and political products that resulted from the highly visible examples of violence in Rio's shantytowns. Specifically, while the repetition did not directly lead to social justice, activists found solace in the connections made between the favela and others fighting for racial and social injustice abroad.

Parallels with global anti-violence movements

The reproductive nature of digital images extended to the conceptual frameworks that observers applied to the favela and its global parallels. As images of police abuse become increasingly visible, social media platforms helped forge a shared sense of temporality amongst users and provided a strategic outlet for reimagining the violence enacted against marginalised bodies (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). Digital imagery allowed activists to aggregate their local perspectives far beyond Itararé, amassing likes, shares and comments from the same individuals who supported anti-violence movements such as Occupy, the Arab Spring, BLM and Las Madres da Plaza de Mayo. By drawing parallels to more global anti-violence movements, activists in the favela hoped their

images would produce similar forms of critical reactions from authorities and the international press. Foreign journalists also drew comparisons between their struggle and police violence in the United States, and even suggested the violence in Brazil was 'way worse' (Oatman 2017). Indeed, comparisons between Itararé's case and violence perpetrated in the United States reveal both parallels and discontinuities.

The centrality of race was often the most notable parallel between social media–based anti-violence movements. The death of Michael Brown provides one of the more compelling parallels between global social justice movements and activist movements to emerge out of Rio's favelas. Brown was killed in Ferguson, Missouri, an impoverished and segregated city on the periphery of St. Louis, just a month after Caio's death. Both Caio and Brown were gunned down in the street by police who claimed they felt threatened by context rather than any substantive proof of threat from their victim. Much like in Brazil, black men in the United States have been disproportionately victimised by police initiated shootings (Sekhon 2017) As Caio identified as *preto* (black) and *pardo* (mixed-race), observers saw skin colour as an essential connection between the event in Itararé and events in the United States. Images of the moments before and after their deaths circulated online, and there were attempts to both villainise and canonise the victims as martyrs. Lastly, the police officers who killed Caio and Brown had avoided charges for murder. Over the course of the investigation into Caio's death and the dozens of subsequent deaths that happened in Itararé, activist groups from Itararé adopted the rhetoric of BLM by coining slogans such as 'Vidas na favela importam' (Favela lives matter). By drawing attention to the biopolitical nature of police violence, Itararé activists paralleled how favela lives, much like black lives in the United States, were often devalued to the point that they suffered physical violence at the hands of their state and society.

Gender and, specifically, motherhood created other notable parallels. For example, Denize established a close relationship with an anti-violence group called Mães de Maio (Mothers of May) with analogies that predated the digital age of anti-violence. The group was formed by mothers of youth who had been killed in a 2006 wave of violent police operations that swept São Paulo (Vianna and Farias 2011). After images of Caio's death were highly circulated, Mães de Maio met with Denize spoke at several protests together. They spoke about their experiences with police violence and for a time, shared Denize's story over their social media accounts. Their movement's name is a clear homage to the group known as Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of

May Plaza), formed by the mothers of those who were disappeared by Argentina's military dictatorship. Like their Argentinian counterparts, representatives of the Mães de Maio travelled the world, spoke with international human rights workers and demanded accountability for the deaths of their children. To this extent, Denize benefited from not only the perceived parallels of her plight with anti-violence movements in her community but also a black spatial praxis within Brazil and a feminist praxis seen throughout Latin America (Alves 2014).

News reports and articles produced by international journalists also discussed Caio's death by drawing technological parallels between favela activists and activists from Occupy, the Arab Spring and BLM. Papo Reto's message created a ready-made counter-narrative for outsiders who wanted to critique the pomp of international mega-events such as the 2016 Rio Olympics and 2014 World Cup, which often took the form of sterile police press releases. These comparisons often promoted the commonalities between oppressed communities and the inclusionary potentials of digital technology. For example, six months after Caio's death, the *New York Times Magazine* published a multi-page profile about Papo Reto titled 'The Media Doesn't Care What Happens Here' (Shaer 2015) The article drew parallels to other events that shared the technological features of Papo Reto, such as Occupy, the Arab Spring and BLM, as well as the video recording of Rodney King's 1991 beating at the hands of Los Angeles police and videos recorded in Itararé with the latest generation of smartphone. The article demonstrates the interpretive frameworks mobilised by outsiders who hoped to draw parallels between more global technical trends and activism in the favela.

The article embraced a narrative concerning the transformative potentials of digital technology in marginalised communities and ended with a broader discussion of the viability of online platforms to make people in authority more accountable for their actions (Scott 2016, 2018). By focusing on technology, the article described Itararé's activist movement through a readily understood motive and a globally understood method of visual critique. As the article suggests, and as I have explained several times, outside observers sought to locate ideological parallels between the favela's brand of activism and more global activist movements. Indeed, Papo Reto was modelled after the Occupy movement in the United States, and other favela activists drew methodological inspiration from yet other global movements. However, Itararé's Ocupa (Occupy, in Portuguese) movement appeared to be more of a branding strategy than a practical and theoretical descendent of

the North American activist movements. Where Occupy was based in anti-globalist and quasi-anarchist aspirations that emerged in Manhattan after the 2008 financial crisis, Ocupa Itararé made direct connections between socio-economic inequality and the violent policing tactics facing Brazil's poor.

Two years after Caio's death, on the eve of the Olympics, a delegation of BLM leaders arrived in the city. They were hosted by Mães do Maio and supported by other international NGOs. The visit was covered by dozens of international news sources and broadly advertised online as a means for BLM to globalise. Several online articles suggested BLM leaders were seeking to apply their goals outside the English-speaking world. Still, most of my informants in the favela were unaware of the BLM movement or its presence in Brazil. I spoke to an activist from Papo Reto named Fabio, who had met with the BLM delegation during the Olympics:

> I only stayed with them for part of a day and it was outside of [Itararé]. It was a positive thing. but they didn't really leave a strong impression. We shared an open table to talk to the press, and they were really cool. But, really, it was only this one day, and we haven't really been in contact since. Maybe someone from Mães do Maio had a stronger impression. (Interview, September 2016)

I asked if he felt the visit changed the relationship between Itararé and similar anti-violence movements in the United States. He said:

> There was higher visibility during the Olympics, and they gave us respect by visiting us. There's the problem with physical distance between our groups. It seems we have our problems that grow and change. All of us militants know, we have to focus on the part of the world we are from; we have to fight our own fights. We are conscious of our shared oppression, if not before, then after the visit. We can grow together from there, but our fights are unique, and they will resolve themselves in unique ways.

Fabio believed remaining part of an international discourse was important for Itararé's activists but reaffirmed he believed the legal and cultural issues to emerge in pacified favela required uniquely local solutions. I asked about the parallels between violent images from the United States and Itararé, and Fabio described an inherent empathy that individuals from these communities have for one another, particularly after seeing images of violence:

> I don't see all the stories, of course. I try to understand most of the headlines in English, and they look just like the headlines from our papers. They show black and poor people from the ghetto (*o gueto*) dying. I think

> people in our communities always knew this happened on the other side of the world, but now, with social media and these types of encounters, we have proof.

According to Fabio, the reproduction of these images, while not indicating complete similarity between the parallel movements or even creating lasting connections between them, grew the aura and meaning of the violent images. The connection between anti-violence activists made violence more authoritative and its victims more real.

Speaking with activists in the months and years that followed Caio's death, it was clear to me there was little fetishism on the part of Complexo residents for BLM, Occupy or other non-violent movements. These movements were references that provided racial, classed and political analogies between the two communities. However, police abuse was perceived as much through the lens of Itararé and Brazilian pacification policy as through the lens of transnational blackness or the universal fight against police violence. Furthermore, several activists expressed hesitation to support ideologies from the Global North, given the US-backed dictatorship that brutalised previous generations of favela activists. Activists from Itararé were also keenly aware of the socio-economic history of the favela and how it contrasted with *o gueto*, as they referred to it, of the United States. Rather than drawing one-to-one parallels between global activist movements, favela activists such as Fabio suggested a more general aesthetic of injustice and oppression was being reproduced abroad. Beyond race, gender and class, the reproductive qualities of violent images frequently emerged as a point of unification between Itararé and other marginalised communities.

International allies, journalists and academics often overlooked the affinity that many Itararé's activists felt with political protests in Latin American's indigenous communities. Much like the collections of images that have emerged from Brazilian favelas and US inner cities, countless images have been shared online depicting violence against the Tupi, Brazil's largest indigenous nation. Members of the Tupi community frequently take part in highly publicised acts of civil disobedience such as land invasion and sit-ins. Corporate media has often villainised native Brazilians as pre-modern others who disregarded the land rights of white settlers. Much like outside activists did with Itararé's anti-violence movement, violent images from native communities reproduced themes of marginality, an aura of oppression transported from one marginalised community to another by digital technology. At times, activists in Itararé spoke of blackness, indigeneity

and the favela's economic informality as one in the same. A group of activists in Itararé named Raizes em Movimento (Roots in Motion), an active partner of Papo Reto, went to an indigenous Tupi village a day's car ride to the north of Rio. The leader, Alan Brum – an activist who had organised political action in the community for more than twenty years – explained to me:

> The youth in [Itararé], they need to go see how people fight for five hundred years. The favela is like a *quilombo* (escaped slave encampment) and an *aldeia* (village). Those living in the forest, trying to escape injustice, living with land that the state does not consider theirs. The state, colonisers, have tried to remove them from their land for generations and their resistance is emblematic of what we want to see in [Itararé]. We want to see a permanent fight like what the Tupi fight.

Activist leaders like Brum, hoping to both represent and guide social consciousness in the community, acknowledged the parallel concerns of communities suffering from similar socio-economic and institutional conditions and called for an act of marginalised resistance that could be reproduced perpetually into the future. Blum believes a solution to this aesthetic of violence was the reproduction of the Tupi's sense of struggle and the ethos of resistance inherent to indigenous communities.

Scholars have noted the shortcomings of comparing social justice movements in Brazil with their analogues abroad. Keisha-Khan Perry (2013) believes black resistance in Brazil is frequently and falsely equated to black nationalism or other movements in the United States. Race is seen as only one of many forms of marginality and identity through which violence and marginality is experienced in the favela. Along this vein, the anthropologist Jan French (2009) has argued Afro-descendent communities seeking legal rights reserved for indigenous communities often form more syncretic and intersectional identities. While ideas from the Global North concerning race and democratic participation can have a radicalising effect in marginalised communities, the historical context of these radicalisations is often particular and non-uniform. Efforts by BLM leaders and journalists to see Itararé's anti-violence movement as a reproduction of more international movements suggests that outside observers share a desire to find similarities between the struggles of marginalised communities across the globe and to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Internet in reproducing inclusionary social conditions. Many outside accounts of Itararé's violence smoothed over discontinuities and particularities in order to

construct a cohesive narrative concerning the Global North and paint favela activists as the peripheral adapters of broader technologies and movements.

Caio's death provides a distinct example of the aura created by digital reproduction in marginalised communities. The subjects portrayed in violent images, and the objectives behind the activist movements that share them, are not superficial imitations but rather reflect the unique contexts through which communities experience law and justice. Observers, both casual and professional, rightly point to the parallels found between movements like the one I discuss in Brazil and the more widely discussed BLM movement in the United States. These movements share affective reactions to violence and violent images, as well as practical similarities. As the brief yet impactful encounter between activists from Itararé and BLM suggests, the virality or repetitive nature of police abuse videos provides one example of the desire to construct a more global lexicon of social justice.

Conclusion

This case study suggests the possibility for future research relating to the iterative combination of death, justice and social media. New technologies will create new strategic outlets for imagining violence, shared social spaces and collective grievances against the law. These overlapping spaces, where violence is imagined and shared, do not have to be as visible as what I have discussed. Rather, future work can look at less obvious and non-aggregated visual representations of oppression and how they unconsciously reproduce critiques of the law.

I also believe future work may look at the ways visual repetition may justify oppression rather than marginalised solidarity. In this article, I was cautious to claim reproduction and aggregation were unambiguously positive, maintaining a relativistic perspective on the democratic potentials of digital technology. Rather, I find digital technology is often described in disruptive terms and scholars rarely examine the ways that social media upholds forms of inequality. While digital technology appears as a novel human experience, long-term ethnographic projects such as the one I have detailed demonstrate the introduction of new modes of communication can also intensify a community's engagement with long-standing cultural logics (Hughes 2018). Internet trends evolve, and what images go 'viral', although appearing aesthetically different than previous technologies, may help perpetu-

ate oppressive legal institutions (Rosa and Bonilla 2017). Examples of problematic forms of oppressive authority found on social media since the main events outlined in this article include the 2016 fake news scandals (Johnson 2018), the US president governing by Twitter declaration and a similarly problematic rise of white nationalism on social media (McGranahan 2017). Furthermore, police body cameras sometimes allow perpetrators to control the violent images they produce (Stalcup and Hahn 2016). The contested ownership of violent images caught on police body cams eschew the liberating power of death. These cases offer new ways to question the reproductive potentials of digital technology as not just a liberating and inclusionary phenomenon but rather an example of a modern information society that perpetuates previous injustices.

With this cycle of violence, perpetuated via social media and other digital forms, it is, then, important to ask why activists continue to engage with the reproduction of violent images. Anti-violence activists remain faithful in a process of reproduction that appears, through ethnographic anecdote, to be limited, iterative of oppression and, at times, unknowingly or coincidently operationalised towards an unclear legal objective. I believe activists are conscious of social media's limitations and contradictions yet remain animated by visual evidence that favela residents have tools to challenge historically oppressive narratives about their communities. By understanding how activists negotiate the political limits of social media, researchers will be able to present a more precise and honest narrative of digital reproduction in marginalised communities.

Evolving trends in technology also suggest there is a form of life and afterlife of violent videos. Images of death, as they age, are recycled and reproduced and become irrelevant, demonstrating that there are often unrealised and unfulfilled potentials for political mobilisation and legal critique (Westmoreland 2016). For example, four years after Caio's death, his mother, Denize, was still fighting for information from the investigation and asking for officers to be held responsible. The officer who killed Caio disappeared from the public spotlight, and more than one hundred residents have since been killed in the crossfire between police and drug traffickers in Itararé. Members of the activist collective Papo Reto have travelled to international social justice conferences dozens of times, and some of its members have been hired by major Brazilian news networks to represent favela issues. Nonetheless, shifting media narratives and political priorities have made violent videos to emerge from the favela less significant, less shared and less

relevant than they were in 2014. The official end of pacification policy and Brazil's election of a right-wing, tough-on-crime president, Jair Bolsonaro, have shifted the ways favela residents critique local security policies. Furthermore, in the favela and abroad, social justice advocates appear more focused on the threats to participatory democracy than the highly visible images of death that have continued to be produced. The increasing irrelevance of the violent image, its aura dimming through continued repetition, suggests those who seek justice in the favela will require new tools that can reproduce the collectivising power of social media.

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Note

1. "Atenção Moradores do Complexo do Alemão, não param de chegar informações de abusos da PM e do BOPE em diversas partes da favela. Vamos por os celulares na rua e fotografar e filmar qualquer situação de abuso. Mandem para o Coletivo Papo Reto, Voz da Comunidade, Alemão Morro, qualquer um. vamos que vamos. Nós por nós."

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