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# Between Trust and Fear

Mothers Creating Spaces of Security amid
Violence in Vila Cruzeiro, Rio de Janeiro

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*For Mama*

# Contents

# Abbreviations

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| AI | Amnesty International |
| AM | Associação dos Moradores |
| BOPE | Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais |
| BPChq | Batalhão de Polícia de Choque |
| CV | Comando Vermelho |
| GPAE | Grupamento de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais |
| IBISS | Instituto Brasileiro de Inovações em Saúde Social |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| PAC | Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento |
| PC | Polícia Civil |
| PM | Polícia Militar |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |

# Acknowledgments

# Introduction

*It is April 15th 2008, and a quiet Tuesday morning in Vila Cruzeiro - a favela[2] community in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro. People are on their way to work, children are in school. Suddenly the firecrackers go off, announcing the arrival of the police and the caveirão.[3] The atmosphere becomes tense and everybody stops in his tracks and tries to find a safe place to hide. The confrontation between the police forces and the ruling drug gang Comando Vermelho (CV) lasts seven hours. The result of this day: nine people killed, fourteen arrested, seven residents shot, and eleven arms confiscated by the Polícia Militar (PM).*

*'A Cidade Maravilhosa'*[4] sets the stage for varying expressions of the complex of violence, fear and insecurity that are especially poignant in the city's *favelas*. The failure of the government to ensure the protection of citizens' security gives way to a variety of armed actors who "carve out alternative spaces of power on the basis of coercion" (Koonings and Kruijt 2007:7). The residents of Rio's *favelas* often live under the rule of such armed actors and are regularly caught in violent confrontations between police, drug gangs and/or *milítias*.[5] In an effort to retake control for the state over this fragmented city, the governor of Rio de Janeiro, Sérgio Cabral, has declared a 'war against crime'. Following the occupation of a conglomeration of *favelas* in May and June 2007 he said: "it is time to take back the city and the state is at war with criminal elements, a war that cannot be won without bloodshed".[6]

'War' however, is fought against entire communities and is not fought only against selected criminal individuals (UN 2007).[7] The confrontation between state security forces and drug traffickers of the *Comando Vermelho* in Vila Cruzeiro as described above provides a case in point. In Brazil, a country that is considered to have been a democracy since 1985, the people living in the *favelas* are hardly protected by state security forces. "A major claim on behalf of democracies is that they more closely approximate the rule of law than do most authoritarian regimes and, consequently, they offer citizens more protection from arbitrary state abuse and violence" (Dahl 1971:27-29; Przeworski 1991:16,31; Tilly 1995:370 in Pereira 2000:217). However, in 'democratic' Brazil the police often form a threat to the lives of the people they ought to protect and levels of police violence are extremely high. Consequently, *favela*

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1  'Attention residents in days of War avoid leaving your houses' CV-MM. "Operação na Vila Cruzeiro termina com nove mortos, seis feridos e 14 presos", *O Globo*, April 15, 2008. (Photo: http://oglobo.globo.com/rio/mat/2008/04/15/operacao_na_vila_cruzeiro_termina_com_nove_mortos_seis_feridos_14_presos-426848911.asp (Accessed on July 1, 2008)

2  A study based on the population census of 2000 by IPLAN RIO (Mayor's Office Municipal Institute of Planning for the City of Rio de Janeiro / *Instituto de Planejamento da Prefeitura Municipal da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro)* calculated that there are between 750-800 *favelas* in the city of Rio de Janeiro. These *favela* communities house more than 1 million people, around 20 per cent of the city's population (Dowdney 2003:70).

3  A *caveirão* – literally translated as 'big skull' – is an armored vehicle used by the military police and the BOPE in many of its operations.

4  'The Marvelous City', as the city of Rio de Janeiro is also known.

5  *Milítias* are groups of off-duty police, ex-police and firefighters, ruling over certain communities and imposing taxes.

6  See, among others, the interview with Cabral in *O Globo*, July 1, 2007.

7  In Rio de Janeiro many people use the terminology of 'war'. The language of war provides a justification for a military-style invasion, and for a strategy that focuses only on force and confrontation (UN 2007).

residents need to find ways to live in the midst of both police and criminal violence. For example, this violence affects the lives of women in various ways, and they have to develop ways to cope and to attend to their routine tasks such as raising their children. While they are struggling to survive, hardly anyone seems to care about the fate of the *favela* residents in general, and those living in the North Zone of Rio in particular, because in popular discourse these people have been equated with criminals.

The increasing levels of urban violence and the related syndrome of insecurity and fear have given rise to a relatively new kind of knowledge about coping with insecurity and violence in everyday life (Koonings and Kruijt 2007:4). However, Moser and McIlwaine (2007:117) claim that still too little is known about how people themselves perceive violence and the fear and insecurity that often goes with it. Some notable exceptions not withstanding (e.g. Sheper-Hughes 1992; Goldstein 2003; Moser and McIlwaine 2004), scarce attention has been paid to how these people really live with violence on a daily basis. In the cases where this question has been addressed, the urban 'poor' are usually treated as a homogeneous group; as experiencing violence uniformly, as being helpless victims or as being inherently dangerous (Moser and McIlwaine 2007:117). It is therefore highly necessary to investigate these processes of stereotyping the urban 'poor' who are living in a context of pervasive violence, and to counter these processes by giving a detailed account of their daily lives. This requires a dynamic understanding of violence, which involves a more inclusive approach to violence and survival in which violence is conceived as a dimension of living. Though violence reconfigures lives in dramatic ways, a focus on how people are attending the routine tasks of their lives is in this approach very relevant (Nordstom and Robben 1995:5).

Amnesty International recently published a report called 'Picking Up the Pieces – Women's Experience of Urban Violence in Brazil' (2008), based on interviews carried out in 2006 and 2007 with women in six states: Bahia, Sergipe, Pernambuco, Rio de Janerio, São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul. In this report it is stated that a focus on women's experiences of urban violence is needed because "the impact of this violence on their lives is complex and profound, yet their stories are rarely heard" (AI 2008:1). In a debate that has mainly focused on young men, this report draws attention to the importance of studying the impact of violence on women living in marginal urban areas. However, it does not provide a thorough analysis of the strategies of women coping with violence and the implications for social networks in these communities.

Based on a longitudinal research on life in the *favelas,* Perlman (2004) concludes that the increasing levels of violence and the experience of fear and insecurity results in the erosion of forms of trust, social relations and networks. In addition, Torres-Rivas claims that "to live in insecurity, with the sensation of a permanent threat, or close to pain or death, all contribute to the breakdown of basic solidarity" (1999:296). However, to focus only on social breakdown would be too simplistic. In the face of violence, social, political and economic relations are simultaneously eroded, created and reconstituted (Harris and De Renzio 1997:392; Kalyvas 2002). The same is true for social capital, which is embedded in social relations (Moser and McIlwaine 2001). This is also because social networks and relations are part of the process of coping with structural violence and inequality. As security is not provided by the state, people develop an alternative sense of security that can be based on different – productive and perverse, formal and informal – social relations. But due to the positive undertone of social capital, there is only a limited amount of studies that have addressed how people reconstitute their social relations in the face of violence.[8]

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8   However, some authors have to a greater or lesser extent contributed to an understanding of relationship-making in precarious environment. See e.g. Goldstein (2003), Moser and McIlwaine (2001; 2007), Arias (2006) and Arias and Rodrigues (2006).

Informed by the insights that social relations are actively reconstituted and that people attend to their routine tasks and develop ways to 'go on' in the face of violence, the widespread stereotyping of the urban 'poor' and the popular neglect of the problematique of women living in *favela* communities I pose the question: *How do mothers living in the* favela *community Vila Cruzeiro create spaces of security through (re)arranging their social relations, as they attempt to protect and provide for their children in a context of high-risk and violence?* Social research, which was conducted in an effort to provide an answer to this question, involves a dialogue between ideas and evidence (Ragin 1994:55). The evidence of this study has been collected during a four-month field research in Vila Cruzeiro from February till June 2008.

Vila Cruzeiro is one of the most notorious and stigmatized *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro. This *Comando Vermelho* stronghold is located in the so-called Gaza Strip, the nickname of the area being an indication of both the levels of violence and the image of this area as it prevails in the rest of Rio de Janeiro. Since the murder of the famous journalist Tim Lopes by members of the CV, that is said to have taken place in Vila Cruzeiro, the people of the community have suffered from increasing discrimination and repressive policing. Here, the violent confrontations between the police and the CV are the primary concern and not as in many other communities the struggle between rival drug gangs or the presence of *militias*. Vila Cruzeiro is part of the Complexo da Penha, which is constituted by eleven different communities. It is part of the Penha neighborhood and the wider metropolitan area Irajá in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro. The history of Vila Cruzeiro as it is known today goes back to the 1950s, when poor laborers of a large plantation in the area and a mining company constructed their barracks on the hills, in search of cheap accommodation. Nowadays Vila Cruzeiro has about 20,000 inhabitants – with different background but mainly Afro-Brazilians – in the Complexo da Penha as a whole live about 120,000 people (Veenstra 2006:27-29).[9]

I selected Vila Cruzeiro as the setting for this research because of the high levels of both criminal and police violence, and because the community and its residents have been stigmatized disproportionately in popular discourse. However, as Tierney observes; "[s]electing a site is not … the same thing as gaining entrance" (2002:14). Especially in *favela* communities getting access is a difficult challenge in itself and it is extremely important to be introduced by a trusted person. To gain access to Vila Cruzeiro and to enhance my personal security, I was introduced in Vila Cruzeiro by Nanko van Buuren of the Brazilian NGO IBISS.[10] He is highly respected by both the residents and the traffickers. He informed the drug gang leaders about my intentions and presence and introduced me to the leading figures within the neighborhood association (*Associação dos Moradores* – AM).

The difficult circumstances under which this research was conducted have asked for a careful consideration of – literally - every step I have taken. Alertness with regard to the safety situation in Vila Cruzeiro at all times was essential. I constantly had to be responsive to the dynamic conditions in the field and reflect on my own role as a researcher. Besides my own security I had to guarantee the security of my informants. In many *favelas* the *lei do silêncio* (law of silence) is an important norm that is imposed by the drug gangs. Residents are not allowed to publicly discuss crimes or acts of violence that take place in the *favela* and that can be linked to traffickers (Arias and Rodrigues 2006:62). Though in practice the limits of this law are constantly pushed by the residents,[11] people were always hesitant and sometimes reluctant to discuss violence related to the CV. I therefore had to ensure the anonymity of my

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9   Numbers obtained in census in 2000. Armazem de dados do governo do Rio:
    www.armazemdedados.rio.rj.gov.br/ (Accessed on July 6, 2008)
10  The abbreviation IBISS stands for 'Instituto Brasileiro de Inovações em Saúde Social' or 'Brazilian
    Institute for Innovations in Social Healthcare'. For more information: www.ibiss.com.br
11  See Arias and Rodrigues (2006) for a more elaborate discussion of this dynamic.

informants and organize the interviews inside the community center – a familiar and safe environment in the eyes of many. To protect my informants, I will use fictitious names throughout this article. Other constraints were experienced during the execution of this research. Often I could not enter the community because a police raid was being carried out, resulting in heavy shootouts between traffickers and police that sometimes lasted hours or even days. In the case I was already inside the community I had to seek protection and wait for the moment it would be possible to safely leave the area.

The particular circumstances in Vila Cruzeiro also asked for a careful consideration of research methodology. Kovats-Bernat (2002) argues that rethinking methodology is necessary when doing research in a dangerous field. Methodology should not be approached as a fixed framework for the research but rather as a flexible and integrative practice informed by shifting social complexities in the field (ibid.:210). I have obtained the evidence on which this study is based through the usage of different methods. Three orientating group conversations with women at the community center helped to identify the most important topics and provided me with a general understanding of the situation in which these women live. Subsequently I have done in-depth interviews,[12] using topic lists to guide the interviews. This allowed me to hold a flexible approach towards my informants, which was useful especially because of the sensitive nature of the topic. Moreover it facilitated the possibility for informants to bring up interesting related issues that they considered important. Besides formal interviews, informal conversations with mothers, children and other residents of the community have taken a significant place in this research. In an informal context people seemed to feel more at ease and these encounters therefore provided me with interesting insights.

The method of participant observation has also proven particularly useful in this context. A great part of my research consisted of participant observation in the community center, in the streets and in the families of some of my informants. It provided me with the opportunity to record actions, interactions or events that occurred and helped to build rapport. Once gained trust more information could be gathered through interviews and information given during the interviews could be verified. Though in itself an undesirable situation, sharing with them the experience of the explosions of violence during the invasions of the police was very important to become more accepted within the community and to gain the trust of my informants. This also gave me the opportunity to directly observe the impact of those invasions and the reactions of the people.

In addition to primary sources, I analyzed newspaper articles about Vila Cruzeiro and themes related to urban violence and public security. Especially during days that I could not enter the community for safety reasons the newspaper often provided the only source of information, aside from a short phone call to someone in the community. It also gave insight into the often biased way of media reporting, and the public reactions to police actions. Moreover I have undertaken a literature research of the most prominent studies on urban violence, Brazilian society and the case of Rio de Janeiro. The use of these different research methods, triangulation ('t Hart et al. 1998:270-271), has contributed to a more accurate understanding of the data and has increased the internal validity of the data assembled. Information collected during group discussions, interviews, informal conversations, participant observation and through newspaper articles could be constantly verified. Moreover it enhanced the flexibility of data-collection which has proven crucial in this highly volatile environment.

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12 I conducted interviews with 16 women between the age of 17 and 42, apart from informal conversations and interviews with other informants. Each of these women has are least one child under the age of 20. This was used as a criterion, because children under this age are most vulnerable and often still fall under the responsibility of their parents.

The limitations of this research partly follow from the precarious situation in Vila Cruzeiro. I was not able to speak to police or gang members; having been associated with gang members would have had a negative impact on the relation of trust with informants who would have been more reluctant to talk to me. Moreover, because of rumors that police informants were active in the community – automatically making outsiders suspect – it would have been irresponsible to be seen with police as this could have severely affected my own safety. Also it should be acknowledged that the 'law of silence' might have resulted in a biased reproduction of these women's perspectives on violence, though I have tried to minimize this bias through triangulation. Restricted time and a precarious safety situation have limited access to potential informants; the situation did not allow for random selection, and only a limited number of informants has been interviewed. I decided to use chain sampling, which proved to be the most feasible and effective sample procedure in this context.

The aim of this research is not to make claims that can be widely generalized but to provide an in-depth and *emic* analysis of the lives of mothers in Vila Cruzeiro and their performances of relationship-making. At the same time I intend to show how these women are, through their actions, related to larger societal processes. As argued by Goldstein (2003:44): being committed to the ethnographic endeavor involves the risk of loosing sight of larger structures. Anthropologists have been criticized for neglecting these larger structures or for thin description when they do try to incorporate abstract structures in their analysis. Goldstein refers to this as "walking the tightrope between 'ethnographic thinness' and our desire to address political and economic structures, along with our growing fears concerning representational practices" (2003:44). She claims that

> Speaking about political and economic structures in the abstract detaches the collective reality of the process from the fact that such structures and processes are produced and reproduced, enacted and resisted by the lived experience of real people. To come to a better understanding of these structures and processes, thick description is still quite useful and is one of anthropology's greatest strengths (Goldstein 2003:44).

This touches upon the agency-structure debate that has been prevalent in social sciences for many years. The above statement highlights the importance of acknowledging not only agency *and* structure, but how agency and structure are in fact mutually constitutive. Exploring the question how mothers in Vila Cruzeiro create spaces of security through (re)arranging their social relations, I will therefore draw upon of the notion of 'duality of structure' as introduced by Giddens (1984): structure as both a medium and an outcome of social practices. We are born into social structures that are both enabling and constraining to us. These social structures do not exist independently from us; we make them and are made by them. Giddens' structuration theory is concerned with the "conditions governing the continuity or transformation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of systems", which in turn are "reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organized as regular social practices" (Jabri 1996:4). I will build on the notion of 'duality of structure' and integrate theories of urban violence, coping and social capital, to analyze and provide insight into the evidence as collected during the field research in Vila Cruzeiro.

My findings will be presented in three chapters. Chapter 1 will deal with the various actors that contribute to creating an environment of high-risk, insecurity, fear and violence in Vila Cruzeiro. It will describe the different images that the police, the traffickers and the residents of the community hold of one another, as these images influence how people relate to 'others' and how they interact with them. The second chapter will provide an analysis of the context of violence, fear and insecurity and the processes through which this particular environment is structurated. Chapter 3 will discuss how mothers living in Vila Cruzeiro cultivate, arrange, and create social

relations with other actors within the community so as to create spaces of security in the face of violence and insecurity. The implications of their actions for the existing structures will also be discussed, demonstrating the 'duality of structure'. This will provide us with leads to understand why the perverse and undemocratic situation as it exists in many of Brazil's *favela* communities is so persistent. The concluding part of this thesis will discuss the main findings of the analysis made in the previous chapters and use these to explain why the cycle of violence, fear, and insecurity seems to remain unbroken.

*A PM; o 'melhor inseticida social'*[13]

*'[The bandidos] are very good, great. But they have a side to them, you know? They have a side to them that if they have to do it, they do it; I don't even want to know.'*[14]

# Chapter 1: The Actors

## The Brazilian State, Its Police Forces and Drug Gangs

*Vila Cruzeiro has been occupied by the Military Police for over a week now and I am sitting at a table in the community center together with the people working there. Outside, the main street is deserted and the atmosphere is tense. Inside, everybody is busy exchanging stories about the misbehavior of the police during the past week; they are said to have beaten up children, eaten the food and slept in the houses of the people and taken personal belonging from them. 'In principle', Patricia is trying to explain to me, 'most people prefer an honest police [above the drug gang], but not if they behave like this. The problem is that they [the police] don't care, and have never cared about the people in the [favela] communities.'*[15]

We might assume that the 'police' are inherently the good guys, bringing order and security to society. Or that a 'gang member' is only a cruel and violent youngster provoking fear and insecurity in the community. However, these assumptions do not hold in the reality of Rio's *favelas*. Therefore, to gain insight into the context of violence and fear in Vila Cruzeiro, the main actors involved should be characterized. This is not a straightforward matter, because "[a]ll actors are positioned in time and space, and are positioned within social relations in a 'multiple way'" (Giddens 1984:xxv). As Jabri argues, individuals are 'positioned' "on specific locations along the structural continuities of social systems, in the form of symbolic orders, normative expectations and power relations" (1996:130). This social position held by an actor involves the specification of a particular 'identity' within a network of social relations (Giddens in Jabri 1996:130).

An analysis of images actors hold and construct of one another could contribute to a further characterization of actors and their social positions. Moreover, the meaning people give to the world around them, including 'others', is crucial in understanding how they interact with these others. These images are closely related to structures of meaning - or structures of signification, as Jabri (1996) refers to them. Meaning is reproduced through "shared symbolic orders and modes of discourse which enable as well as constrain everyday interaction and situate ... actors in time and space" (Jabri 1996:82). 'Police' for example are not automatically perceived as the 'protectors' of public security, but can be identified in a multiple way. This specific label can carry various connotations and hold different meanings to different people, influencing how one interacts with police. Hence, one of the aspects one draws upon in social interaction are the images one holds of others, while these images are simultaneously constructed and reconstituted in interaction.

The constructed images of the 'other' can be approached as *ascribed* social

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13  The PM (Military Police); the 'best social insecticide' – Colonel of the Military Police Marcus Jardim in "Até tiros contra a dengue", *O Globo*, April 17, 2008
14  Interview with Leticia, April 4, 2008
15  Fieldnotes, April 24, 2008

identities. Social identity is defined by Freeman as "one kind of answer to the question 'who am I?' that is based on membership of a social group or category together with its evaluative and affective connotations" (2001:292). To this specific question, a wide variety of answers can be given. One can be a son, a father, a *favelado* and a gangster at the same time. This demonstrates the multiplicity of social identities. Social identities are also dynamic in nature; the substance and prominence of social identities depend on the context and situation in which one finds oneself. However, although individuals have multiple identities these can come to be expressed in terms of one dominant identity, which is assumed to be inclusive of a certain community or 'group' (Jabri 1996:120). I will identify the main images, or social identities, that different actors in Vila Cruzeiro ascribe to one another, while being aware of the danger of oversimplification. Though sometimes certain images come to dominate, individuals often have their own widely-varying views on others and great discrepancy might exist within a category. Also, one might relate in a variety of ways to the different members of a 'group', or even to one and the same person.

Moreover, it is important to note that images or identities are not at the core of the violence as it is found in Rio. However, these images can, for example, contribute to an understanding of how police violence is legitimized, why gangs hold a degree of power in many *favelas* and how mothers relate to the police and traffickers - having implications for their performances of relationship-making. Characterizing the main actors involved in the reproduction of an environment of violence in Vila Cruzeiro partly through the constructed images they hold of one another, can help us understand the social position of actors and the interaction between those actors. To place all this in perspective the focus will first of all shift to the Brazilian state, which can be typified as a 'disjunctive' democracy.

### 1.1 The State: A 'Disjunctive' Democracy

The end of authoritarian rule in Brazil and the return to democracy in 1985 have not resulted in lower levels of violence (Koonings 1999). On the contrary, violence has increased over the past two decades (Zaluar 2004) and the perception of violence and insecurity has become more intense (Koonings 1999:224). The Brazilian state clearly fails to provide security to a significant part of its citizens. But not only that; the state security forces are in fact a serious threat to the security of those people – primarily *favela* residents – though the protection of citizens from arbitrary acts by the state is a fundamental attribute of democracy (Pereira 2000). Leeds (1996) claims that highly undemocratic phenomenon at the local level – while Brazil seems to be proceeding with its democratic agenda at the national level – can be explained by looking at the ambiguous notion of the state as a protector. Following Tilly (1985 in Leeds 1996:51) she argues that "states act as protectors to their populations from both external and internal dangers, whether real or perceived, legitimate or fabricated." The Brazilian state can be seen as a 'double-edged protector'; one that creates the perception of danger from which the country is to be protected (Leeds 1996:51). Doing this the state legitimizes its own 'heavy-hand' approach toward the criminals located in the 'dangerous *favelas*', while state agents are themselves often involved in criminal activities.

The proliferation of urban violence and the failure of the state to provide security to all its citizens can be explained against the backdrop of institutional failure and impunity, social exclusion and inequality (Koonings 1999; Zaluar 2004). As a result of impunity and institutional failure the Brazilian state does not exercise an effective monopoly on the means of organized violence (Pinheiro 1998:13-14 in Arias 2004:3; Pereira 2000:234-235). To combat the competing forms of organized violence – mainly organized crime factions – the state security forces employ a militarized approach. The militarized operational methods of the police are related to the 'authoritarian legacies' of the previous regime (Koonings 1999; Pereira 2000). Under military rule the police acted with impunity to hunt down or execute political

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dissidents. In the post authoritarian phase the police still operates in much the same way, but now with the drug traffickers and *'favelados'* in mind (Gay 2005:4). The violence in Rio's *favelas* might be partly explained as being engendered by a process of escalation of violent action, developing from the interaction between security forces and *favela* inhabitants. State repression can therefore play a role in creating a reciprocal response from the community (della Porta 2008:222). Also, this 'heavy-hand' strategy results in excessive use of police violence and a high rate of extrajudicial killings. The failure of the justice system is reflected in the low rate of cases going to trial and the failure to discriminate fairly between extrajudicial killings and legitimate self-defense (UN 2007; Pereira 2000).

As Arias argues, "[t]he fragmented and diffuse nature of the Brazilian state, characterized by corruption, official impunity, and lack of hierarchical controls, both emerges from and engenders a divided society" (2004:3). Though Brazil has since the 1960s become one of the world's largest industrial economies, it competes with some much poorer nations for the dubious distinction of being the most unequal society in the world (Gay 2005:4). In the Human Development Report 2007/2008 (UNDP 2007), Brazil is categorized as a country with high human development. At the same time, however, income inequality is immense. While the poorest ten percent of the population has not even one percent of national income, the richest ten percent gets almost forty-five percent. In most big cities the poorest part of the population lives in shantytowns, so-called *favelas*. These people have historically suffered from social exclusion. The state provides some sort of support to the residents that helps them deal with for example infrastructural matters. But in the *favelas* the protection of the interests of citizens are usually in the hands of private actors (Arias 2006:37). These private actors, such as criminals and *milítias*, provide social services and "have created new forms of regulations, dispute resolution, and security" (ibid:11).

In these marginal urban areas the state does not provide security - a vital public good - to its citizens (Przeworski 1995:39 in Pereira 2000:234). Brazil has therefore been called a democracy with "low-intensity citizenship" (O'Donnell 1993:1361 in Pereira 2000:235) or even "without citizenship" (Pinheiro 1996:17 in Pereira 2000:235). I would argue that Brazil is a country with 'selective citizenship', because only part of the population enjoys full citizenship. The excluded 'others' are often subject to state violence and suffer directly from the state's mishandling of public safety policies. Leeds (2007:24) claims that this creates a dynamic whereby violence increases the exclusion of a certain part of the population which, in turn, perpetuates the violence. In this 'disjunctive' democracy, the state institution that plays the most prominent role in this regard is the police.

### 1.2 The Police: Protector or Predator?

*The former head of the notorious 16th Battalion of the PM in Rio, often involved in the operations in Vila Cruzeiro, gave the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur of Extrajudicial Killings during his visit to Brazil in November 2007 a miniature caveirão. This is an armored vehicle associated with repressive policing and arbitrary violence in the* favelas*, and one of the greatest sources of fear among the residents of those communities as its use often results in the death of innocent people. Can a police force in which human rights of people in the* favelas *are treated as one big joke provide security to those very same people?[16]*

The police in Brazil are divided into the *Polícia Civil* (Civil Police – PC) and the *Polícia Militar* (Military Police - PM). The PC is plain- clothed, divided into battalions and is involved in criminal investigation and oversees the operation of various police precincts or *delegacias* (Gay 2005:83). The PM consists of the uniformed reserve units

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16  Informal conversation with Nanko van Buuren, February 15, 2008

of the army that patrol the streets, maintain public order and respond to and investigate crimes in progress (Pereira 2000; Gay 2005:83; Hussain 2007). The military police are state forces under the nominal control of the state governors, but are integrated into the armed forces. In this system of dual control important decisions about police training, equipment, and policies towards civilians are made by the military. Since the 1990s the PM's violence has become a public issue as a result of brutal massacres in those years (Pereira 2000). In response to the high number of extrajudicial killings by police, the oversight and jurisdiction of police homicides was transferred to civilian authorities in 1996. But it is still up to the police to determine what is and what is not a homicide and the PM retains the right to 'oversee' such cases (Gay 2005:84). Moreover, civilian witnesses of police violence are often threatened and there is widespread support for extrajudicial killings both within the PM and among the general population (ibid.). The PM also has specialized units, of which the most famous and notorious one is the BOPE (*Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais*). This unit is highly trained, dresses in black, and has a skull (*caveira*) as its symbol. They are usually called in for special operations, such as raids on *favelas* occupied by heavily armed drug factions. These operations involve the use of heavy weaponry and often result in the use of excessive force against the *favela* population (Hussain 2007:81). Another unit used in special operations is the Choque (*Batalhão de Polícia de Choque* – BPChq). There are also six groups for the policing of 'special areas', among which one is called the GPAE Vila Cruzeiro (Grupamento de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais/16°BPM).[17]

Statistics from the Institute of Public Security concluded that from January to June 2006, police killed 520 persons in Rio de Janeiro city (US Country Report 2007). These incidents were registered as 'acts of resistance' or as cases of 'resistance followed by death'. In the first six months of 2007, the police in Rio recorded 694 'acts of resistance followed by death'. In theory, these are instances in which the police have used necessary and proportionate force in response to the resistance of criminal suspects to the orders of law enforcement officers. In practice, the picture is very different; the police "kill more than they wound and they inflict more casualties than are inflicted on them, suggesting that at least some of the killings are deliberate" (Cano 1997; Chevigny 1995 in Hussain 2007:82). This is confirmed by research concluding that military police officers in Rio de Janeiro shoot to kill, not to immobilize (Cano 1997; Hussain 2007:82).

The police, on the other hand, often claim they are acting in self-defense or defense of others and that the killings are a result of shoot-outs with armed criminals (Gay 2005:84; Hussain 2007:82). This is one of the factors that makes the investigation and prevention of police homicides difficult. Also, the determination as to whether an extrajudicial execution or a lawful killing has occurred is first made by the policeman himself (UN 2007). The initial investigation of the crime scene is in the hands of the police and the first on scene are the perpetrators. The police often remove the (in many cases already dead) bodies to local hospital emergency rooms to create the impression that the police tried to help their victims and to compromise any investigation of the crime scene.[18] Another obstacle is the widespread use of unregistered and unauthorized guns. For the police to plant a gun on their already deceased victims is, for example, common practice (Gay 2005:84).

Besides the high levels of police violence, the corruption of the police forces is a major problem (Gay 2005:85; Arias 2006:36). The police are involved in extortion and criminal activities related to drug traffic and arms sale (Koonings and Veenstra 2007:623; Arias 2006; Leeds 2007:28-29). This has to do with the fact that the police

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17  Governo do Rio de Janeiro – Secretaria de Segurança – Polícia Militar do Estado do Rio de Janeiro: www.policiamilitar.rj.gov.br  (Accessed on July 1, 2008)

18  See also "Os 'já mortos'", *O Globo*, May 25, 2008
    http://oglobo.globo.com/rio/mat/2008/05/24/os_ja_mortos_-509818185.asp (Accessed on July 6, 2008)

are often poorly trained and badly paid (Gay 2005:86; Hussain 2007:75). The arbitrary and generalized violence permits that the police get involved in criminal activities because it makes the problem of violence in the *favelas* seem intractable (Koonings & Veenstra 2007:625). Thus, the state security forces not only fail to provide security to part of its citizens, but through the use of indiscriminate violence and involvement in criminality they put at risk the security of an already vulnerable segment of society.

In Vila Cruzeiro a general mistrust of the state and its police forces can be discerned. A majority of the residents agrees that the state security forces should ideally be acting as the protector of its citizens. And this is what the state claims to do; enhancing public security through their actions that are said to be aimed at the destruction of organized crime. But all the community residents I have spoken to deconstruct this ideal picture. They at least acknowledge that police actions increase insecurity, are often indiscriminate and inflict harm on innocent people. The use of the *caveirão* in particular is widely criticized. Residents complain about the risk of stray bullets and the fact that during police invasion they are 'imprisoned' in their own houses. In addition, many residents describe the police as violent, abusive and corrupt. Juliana, for example, argues that '*the police are more abusive than the* bandidos ('bandits')'. According to her they do not respect anyone; they beat residents, go into the houses of the people where they demand food and take personal belonging; things she has experienced personally.[19]

Instead of the protector the state and its police forces claim to be, and should ideally be in the eyes of the majority of the residents, the predominant image of the police held by community residents is that of a predator. The lower ranks of the police that are often involved in criminal activities often share the same lower-class background and non-white identity with the *favela* residents (Pereira 2000). But as police are subject to mistrust and hatred, those who live in drug-gang controlled areas have to disguise who they are and what they do for a living. Otherwise they are likely to be expelled or executed (Gay 2005:86).

In a protest against violence in Vila Cruzeiro, residents asked the legitimate question, 'Why is there no *caveirão* in the Zona Sul?' ('*Porque não tem* caveirão *na Zona Sul?')* The context in which social interaction takes place should be taken into account, as action is always situated in time and space (Giddens 1984). Just as individuals are all 'positioned' relative to one another, so are settings for interaction. Rio de Janeiro has about six million inhabitants, of whom approximately one-fifth lives in one of the over 750 *favelas* scattered around the city. *Favelas* have existed in Brazil since the late 19th century, but have been largely neglected by the Brazilian government ever since its existence (Hussain 2007:81). *Favelas* are popularly seen as a space for the city's "shady characters, bums, troublemakers and dirty" (Xavier & Magalães 2003:227). These locales as settings of interaction are not neutral, but are related to the image of certain individuals and groups. The image of the residents of the *favelas* in Rio is confused with that of the criminal and the approach towards policing these socially excluded communities has historically been based on prejudice and discrimination. Back in 1900, a police commissioner wrote:

> 'It is impossible to police this area, which has a concentration of deserters, thieves and squaddies,…as such for the complete extinction of the known bandits we must encircle the area, which to be effective will need reinforcements of at least 80 fully armed policemen' (AI 2005:13).

This attitude towards the residents of *favelas* is still prevalent among the police. Police violence has been mostly directed to the poor, socially marginal and non-white – often living in the city's *favelas* - who are subject to stigmatization, discrimination and criminalization. People in Vila Cruzeiro confirm this: '*The police think that*

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19 Interview with Juliana, May 14, 2008

*everything that is black, is a criminal.'*[20] Another woman explains; *'Because it's the poor huh, it's a favela … they don't arrive in the Zona Sul, doing what they do here. Because there the people pay taxes, [they] know their rights. And here they don't, here it's a* favela.'[21] Vila Cruzeiro and its residents have been stigmatized disproportionately after the murder of the journalist Tim Lopes that is said to have taken place in the community. One of the members of the neighborhood association explains:

> 'We suffered a lot after Tim Lopes. In fact, he wasn't killed here, it was over there...[but] people were sacked from there jobs [and] lots couldn't get work because they lived here. Society started associating the community with crooks...We lost projects – who's going to give money to a place which everyone says is full of bandits?'[22]

### 1.3 The Gang: Lost Sons, Community Protectors or Animals?

The drug gangs in Rio de Janeiro are well armed, often even better armed than the police (Gay 2005:84). These gangs employ about 6,000 children and adolescents between the ages of ten and eighteen that serve as 'soldiers' in the drug war (Dowdney 2003). Between 1987 and 2001, 3,940 children were killed by firearms in Rio's *favelas* while they were working as lookouts and drug-runners (Dowdney 2002 in Hussain 2007:81). In Brazil, every year there are twenty-five gun-related deaths per 100,000 deaths. In the *favelas* around the country, and particularly in Rio de Janeiro, this rate climbs to 150 per 100,000 deaths. Whereas for young men, typically poor and black, between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four, in Rio de Janeiro this rate is 250 per 100,000 (Hussain 2007:81-82). This rate is higher than in most war zones around the world (Dowdney 2003). The majority of these violent deaths occur when rival drug gangs fight over territory, or when the police raid *favelas*. The drug trade in Rio is organized hierarchically. While the *tubarões* (sharks or 'big boys') are rarely identified and touched (Leeds 1996:57), and are in fact well connected to the authorities and politicians of the city (Koonings and Veentra 2007:622), the lower ranks are violently hunted down. These distributors are the most vulnerable and exploited ones though "within the social structure of the *favelas* they are either revered or grudgingly respected or feared" (Leeds 1996:57-58).

The origin of organized drug factions in Rio de Janeiro goes back to the late sixties and early seventies, when the authoritarian government decided to house political prisoners engaged in armed struggle with common criminals in a prison on Ilha Grande – an island off the coast of Rio de Janeiro.[23] The political prisoners transferred their organizational knowledge and the notion of collective consciousness to common criminals who used this as a basis to form strong prison gangs (Gay 2005:55; Leeds 1996). The earliest and most important of these gangs was the *Comando Vermelho* (Arias 2006:28). They expanded their influence to other prisons and eventually beyond prison walls (Gay 2005:55). In the 1970s Rio de Janeiro had become an important entry and exit point for cocaine, and dealing in this new and highly lucrative commodity became the main enterprise of the CV (Leeds 1996:54-55) and its rival factions. A struggle over the control of the *favelas*, as strategic centers of the drug trade, followed (Gay 2005:55). The main drug factions nowadays are the *Comando Vermelho*, *Terceiro Comando* and *Amigos dos Amigos* (a splinter group of the CV). In Vila Cruzeiro the local gang is related to the *Comando Vermelho*.

The physical structure of the *favelas*, often built on hills and characterized by its

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20 Interview with Luciana, February 26, 2008
21 Interview with Clara, May 26, 2008
22 Sandra in "Favourite son Popcorn is pride of Vila Cruzeiro", *The Guardian* June 8, 2006
   http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/2006/jun/08/worldcup2006.sport2 (Accessed on July 4, 2008)
23 See Carlos Amorim, *Comando Vermelho: A História Secreta do Crime Organizado* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1993) and Leeds (2006) for an account of this process.

labyrinth of alleyways and limited points of access, is ideal for the protection of drugs sales (Dowdney 2003:57). *Favela* communities are therefore used by leaders of drug gangs as the locus of the operation for this lucrative economic activity (Leeds 1996:62-63). The ability of gangs to operate the drug trade depends merely on the relationship between each drug gang and the surrounding community. Drug gangs rely on the local population to provide new recruits for the various drug gang roles and positions and, more generally, "to provide cover for their activities and to protect them from the police" (Gay 2005:56). The community residents can offer drug traffickers the opportunity to hide during police invasions. Furthermore, by knowing everyone and everything that happens within the community, drug traffickers are in a better position to prevent infiltration, further protecting them from the police and other drug factions (Dowdney 2003:57). To guarantee the community's protection, the drug gangs try to generate goodwill through the provision of social services and financing public works. These services are valuable only because the state does not provide them and because the state entities charged with providing essential security services act instead as a corrupt and repressive force (Leeds 1996:63). Drug gangs take advantage of the absence and mistrust of public authorities to lay down their own law, and use the negative image of the state to win the support of the '*favelados*'.

The images of the drug traffickers existing among residents of Vila Cruzeiro are multiple and highly ambiguous. An individual can be a son, a brother, a violent gangster, and a community protector at the same time. Looking at the social identities of the traffickers ascribed to them by the residents can provide insight in how people relate to them, and why residents interact with the traffickers or refrain from interaction. Many of the traffickers are from the community itself, which often means that they also have family and friends living there. Residents have sons, brothers and lovers who are involved in '*a vida*' ('gang life'). The mothers of traffickers are often terrified, especially during and right after police invasions. These women never know what has happened to their children, how they are doing, and whether they are still alive. Malou, for example, knows a woman whose son is involved in drug traffic:

> 'The mother of my husband's friend, she is evangelic [and] she told me that in her revelation she saw only bad things for her son, quite horrible, she only saw blood, she only saw real bad things. ... [S]he talked to him, but nothing can be done about it. He got into this life and doesn't want to step out. So she is desperate whenever there is an operation here, you know? She is worried about him.'

Juliana has a brother who was in '*a vida*'. He is 20 years old and it's been one year since he stepped out after five months in the gang:

> '[T]hank God he got out...[H]e saw that he didn't have any money, he didn't even have money to get a haircut. He didn't have money for anything. He fell ill. He didn't eat... and he stayed up all night. [But] he couldn't take it anymore...And he left, thank God he got out. He is unemployed, he is at home. But he got out.'

Maria is a single mother with an eight-year-old daughter. At the age of seventeen she met her first real boyfriend. He got involved in the drug trade because he wanted to make easy money. She broke off the relationship, but soon after she realized that she was pregnant. The father found out about this and experienced psychological problems. When his daughter was two years old he disappeared. Supposedly he was killed by members of the CV. Maria finds it extremely difficult to raise her daughter as a single mother.

These sons, brothers and fathers can at the same time be feared gangsters. Leticia is terrified when seeing young boys with enormous guns;

> 'A boy, size of my son, the age of my son with an enormous weapon, heavier

than his own body. I will never get used to it, I am afraid. We have to be more afraid of the boys, the youngsters because sometimes they do not think. To them it doesn't matter, they are minors so they don't think.'

The drug traffickers are also perceived to provide an alternative security system. As Zaluar (2000:666) notices, "[d]rug gangs have ironically filled a perverse role as security guards in some *favelas*". However, this internal security system functions on the basis of fear and coercion. If one gets into a fight with the girlfriend of a gangster, for example, these girls will tell their boyfriends and *'they become hot-heated; they already are hot-heated. They will come and deal with it...'* Leticia explains.[24] But the traffickers do give *favela* residents a means to resolve personal disputes and provide them with sense of personal security. They are in a perverse way 'protectors' of the community. For some, especially for the young and the poor, traffickers even emerge as folk heroes because of their efforts to provide aid to residents and enforce order (Leeds 1996, 60-61).

Within Brazilian society another prevalent image of the traffickers exists. 'The bandidos are the mosquitoes of evil. Those at the margins of the law are just as pernicious as the mosquitoes infected with the pest. Social insecticide is the response of the police to these social mosquitoes.'[25] While the dengue epidemic in Rio de Janeiro was coming to a head, this comparison between mosquitoes and criminals was made by Colonel Marcus Jardim of the PM. It reflects the public consensus that human rights do not apply to criminals (Koonings and Veenstra 2007:624). Instead, repressive and violent police policies and practices have widespread public support in Rio de Janeiro. The slogan 'a good criminal is a dead criminal' has helped several politicians gain popular support and has even helped them win elections. Moreover, it has led to impunity for those who have killed suspected criminals, street children and prisoners (Cabral Gontijo 2004 in Hussain 2007:83).

A popular view is that criminals and those on the margins of society are enemies to be killed. Police commanders claim that eliminating criminals directly reduces crime (Jornal da Polícia 2005, Chevigny 1999 in Hussain 2007:83). However, research suggests that most of those killed are not the criminals that the police and the public suspect them to be (Cano 1997; Hussain 2007:83). Police violence is disproportionately directed towards males between eighteen and twenty-five, mainly Afro-Brazilians from the *favelas* (Leeds 2007:29). The prevalence of discrimination among the police is reflected in the standard phrase *'elemento suspeito, cor padrão'* (suspect is the 'usual' color) heard on police radio transmission, when referring to black youth.

In sum, the images the police, the gang members and the *favela* residents hold of one another, as described above, are both the basis and the product of their interaction. In the next chapter I analyze how in interaction between police, gang and residents a social system marked by violence, fear and insecurity is constantly reproduced.

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24 Interview with Leticia, April 4, 2008
25 "Até tiros contra a dengue", *O Globo*, April 17, 2008.

*'Vila Cruzeiro is not like it used to be...[N]owadays you don't even go out because of the police that come. They come in the morning, they come in the afternoon, they come at night.'*[26]

*'[I was born here] but at that time it wasn't like this. It is worse now. They [the traffickers] die, new ones will come, and it is only getting worse.'*[27]

*'I think that we get used to... surviving other people... children going [dying] with us.'*[28]

# Chapter 2: A Precarious Environment

*Violence, Fear and Insecurity in Vila Cruzeiro*

*'I have hope that things will get better,'* Roberto comments during a group discussion, adding an ironic tone; *'[f]irst there was the police and the battle between the different [drug]factions, now it is only a battle between the police and one faction. So the situation has already improved.'* Everyone taking part in the conversation starts giggling; *'[n]ow it is "just the caveirões"'*[29] Though most residents talk about the violence in the community with a touch of humor, many say they will never get used to the violence, and that many people have high blood pressure or heart conditions as a result. Some people have even lost faith that the situation will ever improve, while others are more optimistic. Several residents claim that life is good in Vila Cruzeiro,[30] though the majority of the people and especially mothers would leave the community if only they would have the chance. It is generally acknowledged that the conflict between the police and the gang is the greatest source of danger. They, as residents, are trapped between the two parties.[31]

The police and the local criminal faction are involved in the reproduction of an environment of violence, fear and insecurity in Vila Cruzeiro. As argued by Giddens (1984) and taken up by Jabri (1996:4) aspects of social life are constantly reproduced or changed through the activities of actors. These actors are at the same time drawing upon and reproducing the structural features of social systems. Giddens claims that

> Analyzing the structuration of social systems means studying the modes in which such systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction (1984:25).

In this chapter I analyze how through interactions between police, gang, and residents, a social system marked by violence, fear, and insecurity is constantly reproduced. Structures - the rules and resources reproduced through human action - are not easy to recognize. Social structures are 'materialized' in discourses and institutions and therefore one way of uncovering the structural features of social system is discourse analysis. Discourses are stories about reality that are produced

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26  Interview with Larissa, June 4, 2008
27  Interview with Leticia, April 4, 2008
28  Interview with Mariana, March 26, 2008
29  Focus group (2), February 25, 2008
30  This sentiment was expressed, among others, in the different focus groups (February 22 and 25, 2008)
31  Focus group (2), February 25, 2008

and reproduced through social interaction. These stories are not just descriptive; they *do* things and "being active they have social and political implications" (Jabri 1996:94-95). Relating all this to violent conflict Jabri argues that, "any analysis of war must incorporate the discursive and institutional continuities which render violent conflict a legitimate and widely accepted mode of human conduct" (1996:1).

Power is an important element influencing the dynamics of discourse and the reproduction of social systems. Some actors have better access to resources that can help spread a particular view on what is to be perceived as legitimate and what meaning should be pervasive (Jabri 1996:83), giving certain actors a greater 'power to define'. Therefore some discourses may become hegemonic, according validity to certain images of reality and being translated and promoted in politics and policies. The institutionalization of discourse, or when stories about signification (the meaning of things) and legitimation (what is perceived normal conduct) are turned into rules, laws and policies, it is a sign of the power of a certain discourse. Once institutionalized, discourses become very difficult to change since people begin acting according to these rules, in turn reinforcing the existing structures. In addition to structures of signification and legitimation, structures of domination should therefore be taken into account when analyzing the structuration of an environment of violence, fear and insecurity.

In the light of structures of domination, it is particularly important to give a detailed description of how the 'less powerful' experience violence. Drawing upon Taussig (1987), Nordstrom and Robben argue, "violence is slippery; it escapes easy definitions and enters the most fundamental features of people's lives" (1995:4). Each participant or witness to violence brings his or her own perspective. Nordstrom and Robben (ibid:5) therefore claim that it is crucial to adopt a dynamic approach to violence and not to propose essentialist and singular definitions (that are often based on dominant discourses). The experience of violence can provoke feelings of fear and insecurity. Characteristics such as gender, class, age and ethnic composition all affect the manifestation of fear (McIlwaine and Moser 2001:972). This implies that to give a rigid definition of 'fear' would not do justice to these different manifestations of the phenomenon. The meaning of fear should be described on the basis of the perceptions given by relevant individuals; in this case by the residents of Vila Cruzeiro in general, and mothers in particular. That fear is not only a way of talking about the world but also a way of acting (Reguillo 2002:205), will be demonstrated below. Because especially in a context of violence, fear – as a basis for and a product of action – is a critical factor in understanding how people organize their social relations (Moser and McIlwaine 2001). This will be elaborated on in the next chapter when dealing with the mothers' performances of relationship making in the face of violence. Central to this chapter will be the question of what the environment of high-risk, insecurity, fear and violence in Vila Cruzeiro entails, and how it is being shaped and reconstituted through the interaction of the different actors. How can the cycle of violence in which these residents are caught and the atmosphere of fear and insecurity as it exists in Vila Cruzeiro be explained?

## 2.1 The Militarization of Policing

*The interrogation is very easy to do / get the slum dweller and beat him till it hurts / Interrogations are very easy to finish / get the criminal and beat him till he dies.*

*A criminal from a slum / you don't sweep up with a broom / you sweep them up with grenades / with a rifle and with a machine gun.*[32]

This is one of the songs sung during training by members of the elite wing of Rio de Janeiro's military police, the *Batalhão de Operações Especiais* (BOPE). These kind of

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32   "Gritos de Guerra do BOPE assustam Parque Guinle", *O Globo*, September 24, 2003

performances are used to render the use of violence a legitimate form of conduct when combating crime. The discursive approach emphasizes the importance of the interpretation of violence, its meaning and legitimacy. Schmidt and Schröder (2001) argue that the transition from conflict to violence in not an automatic process. To provide legitimation for violent practice, the use of violent imaginaries is necessary. In Rio de Janeiro, performances, inscriptions, and narratives are used to legitimize police violence against drug traffickers and *favela* residents.

As we have seen, one existing image of traffickers is that they are the 'mosquitoes of evil'. Police commander Jardim used the term mosquitoes to refer to criminals – in a time in which the dengue epidemic had already cost many lives – to make violent practices seem a necessary evil in the fight against the rising tide of crime, violence, and drug trafficking (Rotker 2000; Pinheiro 1999 in Hussain 2007:83). Put differently, he aimed at the legitimization of police violence in general, and the invasion of Vila Cruzeiro on April 15, 2008 in particular, by referring to its necessity for the enhancement of public security. The image of the *favela* residents in Rio is equated with that of the criminal, as was explained in the previous chapter. Hence, the justification of repressive policing and the use of violence against *favela* residents is drawn from the identification of all *'favelados'* with those involved in drug trafficking. This highlights a characteristic element of violent imaginaries: a polarized structure of 'we versus they' that no individual can escape (Schröder & Schmidt 2001:10).

The media play an important role in portraying and imagining violent conflict (ibid.). In Brazil the media often provide further legitimation for police violence through accounts and TV images where the *favelas* are portrayed as the locus of violence. The negative image of *favelas* and its residents is perpetuated in narratives about the 'violent *favelas*', instigating coordinated police action to retake control for the state (Perlman 2004:129). The following incident demonstrates that community residents are well aware of the role of the media in spreading the discourse of 'state security':

> While Vila Cruzeiro is under the occupation of the police, the streets are deserted. Sometimes, however, you can see the police marching through the streets. At a certain moment policemen are marching in line through the street behind the football field and from there taking a little alley going up. All this is being filmed by a cameraman. Inside the community center this provokes the staff to give a comical imitation of what they expect will be broadcasted on the news that night; policemen walking through the streets of Vila Cruzeiro and a voiceover saying *'everything is quiet in Vila Cruzeiro...'* The staff performance carries a cynical undertone implying that they think that in reality it is not that 'quiet', but that the police are in fact themselves disrupting the community.

The state is in its repressive actions trying to show its power, and is legitimizing the militarized approach toward policing by using a discourse of state security and referring to the 'war against crime'.

What happened one week after the beginning of a police occupation of Vila Cruzeiro is telling for the militarized way of policing that is used in *favela* communities, and for the process of 'imagining violence'. The BOPE put up a black flag with a skull (*caveira*), in the highest part of the community. The military police underlined that, in military routine, it is normal to put up flags to mark the occupation of territory. During the ceremony of putting up the flag, forty policemen were celebrating, yelling *'caveira*!' *'We have taken over the community. With the BOPE, the 'marginal' knows he has to leave while still alive'* said a lieutenant.[33] This performance was widely broadcasted in the media. However, when later that week the

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33   "Bope finca bandeira na Vila Cruzeiro para anunciar a expulsão do tráfico", *O Globo*, April 22, 2008. See Appendix 2.

police left the community, there was nothing to be found in the media about their withdrawal.

The militarization of the police is symbolized by the '*caveirão*', an armored vehicle used by the military police in many of its operations. The residents of Vila Cruzeiro associate it with the repressive and indiscriminate violence to which they are subject. The sentence 'they come in shooting' - also the title of an Amnesty International (AI) Report decrying police violence in the *favelas* - is often heard in Vila Cruzeiro when referring to the police using the *caveirão*. From a young age children know the reputation of the *caveirão*; '*the four-year-old already knows; the* caveirão *killed...that's how they speak, rightly.*'[34]

The invasions of the police and the usage of the *caveirão* create an insecure environment marked by fear and violence. In Vila Cruzeiro the fear of stray bullets is omnipresent. During confrontations they are constantly worried about their family and friends, and it severely inhibits their freedom of movement. The residents never know when a shootout will start and therefore are often afraid to leave their houses and stay out in the street. As Larissa remarks; '*[T]hey come in shooting... you can't stay in the street...[I]t is annoying...being imprisoned inside your house. More even for her, she is little, and she has more the age of playing.*'[35] Juliana adds bitterly:

> '[a]nd the funny thing is that they [the police] only come at times that the children go to school. At night there are no children in the street. At night nobody appears. You can't play at night, and you are imprisoned during the day.'

These police invasions are a source of fear for many of the residents; '*They [the police] terrify children, they terrify everyone. My son won't go from here down to the street, he is afraid.*' The story of Lourdes[36] provides a good example for the atmosphere of fear and insecurity that is created and the impact this has on the life of many residents.

> Eleven years ago Lourdes lost one of her daughters when she was hit by a stray bullet while sleeping in her mother's bed. Last year during the occupation of part of the Complexo da Penha, she was herself hit by a stray bullet in her arm, while protecting one of her sons. She is afraid of what the police with its *caveirão* might cause in the future, especially after 'the war' last year.[37] All that has happened has left Lourdes and her children to live in constant fear and with a heightened sense of insecurity. '*Whenever I hear gunfire I run inside and people laugh at me. I am scared, I am scared*.' She always tries to watch her children. Even when there is shooting down in Vila Cruzeiro while the children are in school, she will go down there to see if her children are okay.[38] Lourdes does not support the start of the PAC[39] that aims to improve living conditions in the *favela*. She is afraid it will cost many innocent lives: '*Because if it [the PAC] comes,* caveirões *will come, gunfire; who will they take? Innocent people...They kill more innocent people than bandits.*' Her daughter Mariana once asked her, crying, '*shall we go [and live] somewhere else?*' Lourdes would like to go and live somewhere else but she cannot afford to buy another house: '*If it would have been possible I would have long left.*' Her other daughter confirms, '*[i]f we could leave, we would go.*' Her cousin Alexandra comments: '*It is good here as long as there is no*

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34  Interview with Juliana, May 14, 2008
35  Interview with Larissa, June 4, 2008
36  Though Lourdes does not live in Vila Cruzeiro but in Chatuba, a poorer community that is also part of the Complexo da Penha, her story does provide a valid case study to exemplify the dynamics of fear and violence as it has been discerned in Vila Cruzeiro.
37  Interview with Lourdes, March 27, 2008
38  Fieldnotes, March 12, 2008
39  PAC, *Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento*

*shooting. When the shooting starts...pfff'* and she imitates the sound of gunfire. The girls laugh.[40]

It is not just the invasions with heavy weaponry, but also the abusive behavior of the police that leads to fear and disdain of police among community resident. Stories about the misbehavior of the police are constantly circulating among the residents; 'they have beaten up children', 'they have eaten the food of residents', 'they have slept in the houses of the people', 'they have taken personal belonging from us'. These stories following from the abusive actions of police generate an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. People are afraid to be maltreated by the police; *'they arrive and don't want to know of anything, they come in beating. They don't ask anything...They hit you in the face [and] don't want to know who you are. My prime fear is that they will come into my house.'*[41] This fear is not unfounded. During a police occupation, for example, twelve military policemen stayed to sleep in the house of a woman. She left her house and went to stay with her family because she was afraid what would happen if she stayed. Juliana complains that this kind of police behavior terrifies her and her children: *'The way they entered my house, made a mess of my whole house...They don't respect anyone... They beat the face of one, beat the face of another...They don't show any respect...and we become terrified.'* While the community was under the occupation of the police, residents were afraid to be stopped and maltreated by the police, as had happened to many children in that week. Consequently they preferred to stay inside their homes and the daycare project of the community center would be almost completely empty. It is through their militarized performances and abusive behavior that the police evoke fear and insecurity from within the community. In this process, the image of a repressive police is reconstituted and spaces are created in which other armed actors can gain power and law down their own law.

## 2.2 The Presence of the Gang and *a Lei da Favela*

The failure of the state to extend full citizenship to the people in Rio's *favelas* gives way to an alternative rule of law in those places. In Vila Cruzeiro, the local faction of the Comando Vermelho tries to enforce its norms and rules upon the community. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the relations between residents and traffickers are multiple and multifaceted. The gang has developed a system of 'forced reciprocity', as Dowdney (2003) terms it. The traffickers need the *favela* and its residents for protection, while this system at the same time serves the need of the community for 'law' and 'order' (ibid:71). However, because behavioral rules are merely enforced for the gang's interest and not for the good of the community (ibid.:72), the system of 'forced reciprocity' "is upheld through a double tactic of mutual support and a punitive system of violence for noncollaboration". As claimed by Arias (2006) and Dowdney (2003) and confirmed by my own research, nearly all residents at least tolerate criminals' presence, because of the protection and aid provided by the traffickers and their explicit threats of violence (Arias 2006:34).

The activities of traffickers are thus not confined to the trafficking in illegal goods. They are involved in governance activities that can be divided into three areas: punishment related to drug trafficking, control of other criminal activities, and keeping order (Arias and Rodrigues 2006:65). Arias and Rodrigues state that "[t]rafficker reactions to residents' behavior in these three areas and residents' knowledge of these reactions amount to a general set of 'rules' regarding appropriate behavior in the *favela*" (2006:65). As one resident explains, *'there is a list with rules [that apply] inside the* favela*, but not outside it. You cannot steal, kill, etc. Outside [the* favela*] they do everything.'*[42] So residents are expected not to steal from other residents

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40   Fieldnotes, March 20, 2008
41   Interview with Lourdes, March 27, 2008
42   Roberto in focus group (2), February 25, 2008

or from residents of surrounding communities. Rape and other extreme violence against women and children is also prohibited. Patricia explains that inside the community you do not find much domestic violence in the sense of physical violence, '*because the* bandidos *don't like that.*'[43] Causing public disorder is also not allowed. And anyone owing a debt to traffickers or interfering with trafficking is punished (Arias and Rodrigues 2006:65-67).

Punishments vary with the crime and residents' understanding of punishment for breaking the rules also varies. Possible punishments are beating, non-fatal shooting and execution (ibid.). One informant asked me the question; '*Do you know why there are no robberies and assaults in the community*?', providing the answer herself expressing through sign language that your hand will be cut off, or you will be shot in your hand or foot if you do steal.[44] Some people are afraid of punishments that could follow from breaking the law of silence, knowing too much or getting into a fight with someone related to a trafficker. Most people are afraid and hesitant to talk about gang related issues and thus to break the law of silence. '*I am afraid that I will talk too much, that people will tell me too much...and you become what,* X9 [a telltale]? *[You can't be a]* X9 *here in the* favela', one woman explicates.[45] Another woman explains that she is afraid that her son, who always pays close attention to what the *bandidos* say, will know too much. She is afraid that the police will stop him, like they have done before, and that he might talk; '*We would have to run. Run from the* morro [community]. *[It would be] [v]ery, very dangerous.*'[46]

This alternative social system and *a lei da favela* are based on coercion and fear that are used to uphold the norms and enforce the rules in the community. Through the visible armed presence of the gang, the traffickers demonstrate their power and physical superiority. Though most people are used to this armed presence, and seem not to pay any attention to it or to be bothered by it in any way, some residents do express their fears. Lourdes, for example, repeatedly told me that she was afraid of the *bandidos*. Once we were walking up to her house when Lourdes suddenly became nervous and wanted to get into a *combi* (van) as we had to pass a group of *bandidos*. She later explained that she had been afraid that they would not recognize her because she usually takes another road up.[47] Especially at night some people prefer to stay inside because of the more obvious presence of the traffickers; '*After 9 p.m. I stay inside the house. It is not more dangerous, but the guys (*as caras*) stay more out in the street. They are all out in the street.*'[48]

Another fear following from the presence of the drug gang in Vila Cruzeiro is that children might get involved in the drug trade. '*Everybody says it's difficult to raise children...[Y]ou go to those places where the armed boys are of her age, of her size [referring to her daughter], holding arms.*'[49] Several residents convey their worries about possible involvement of their children in drug traffic; '*I fear for the future of my children [and I am] trying everything for them not to get involved*'.[50] And,

> '[I'm afraid that my children will enter the life]. That is what I most think about, every day. Even more because I have two boys, it's terrible, if the two boys will grow older, ah I'm very afraid...I don't know what to do...For my part, I would leave this place. But my husband doesn't want to [and] neither does my mother...These kinds of things close to the children.'[51]

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43  Conversation with Patricia, April 24, 2008
44  Leticia in focus group (2), February 25, 2008
45  Interview with Leticia, April 4, 2008
46  Interview with Juliana, May 14, 2008
47  Fieldnotes, March 27, 2008
48  Interview with Vanessa, May 21, 2008
49  Ibid.
50  Interview with Malou, May 14, 2008
51  Interview with Juliana, May 14, 2008

Though the alternative system upheld by the gang is based on fear and physical domination, it does give residents a way to resolve personal disputes and it provides them with a sense of personal security, however ambiguous. Many informants express that they feel much safer within their community than outside their community. As one resident explains, '*I have never been to another [*favela*] community [because] I am scared to death.*'[52] Another woman comments that in the south zone of Rio, there are more assaults and robberies. '*We don't have that here; here we only have stray bullets.*'[53] Someone else confirms, '*[t]here are no robberies here; I sleep with the window open. In the center, there are frequent robberies.*'[54] It is an alternative sense of security they create in the absence of a state providing their security and in interaction with the ruling drug gang. In the *favela*, a general code of conduct and shared notions of right and wrong on which trafficker actions are based, provide residents with a perception of security in an area marked by high levels of violence, contributing to a 'myth of personal security' (Arias and Rodrigues 2006:67).

Leeds (1996) and Goldstein (2003) argue, among others, that the gangs provide a parallel state structure. But though the gangs are involved in governance activities, they should not be seen as parallel forces for two reasons; they do not have the desire to supersede the state (Dowdney 2003:72) and they are in fact part of the existing political system (Arias and Rodrigues 2006; Arias 2006). The first point is explained by Dowdney, who states:

> Faction domination of the *favela* is only possible due to the failings of the government rather than any desire or ability on the part of factions to politically, socially or militarily supersede the state. As a result, factions must be seen as a 'concurrent presence' in socio-political terms, rather than a 'parallel power' that threatens the existence of the state (2003:72).

The second, and most important reason why the gang presence should not be approached as a parallel order, is elucidated by Arias (2006) and Arias and Rodrigues (2006). They claim that traffickers are actually part of the existing political system, while it may appear that traffickers are in conflict with the state. But the power of gangs "emerges from and depends, at least in part, on state policy towards these communities and a positive participation in the support of trafficking organizations" (Arias 2006:8). This has to do with the discrepancy between anti-trafficking initiatives in the name of state security and ground-level practices by repressive and corrupt police. Therefore it would be more useful to investigate how the state actually helps build, maintain, and extend trafficker power, as will be done below. This could contribute to an understanding of the perpetuation of the cycle of violence that dominates the life of Vila Cruzeiro's residents.

### 2.3 The Cycle of Violence, Fear and Insecurity

Through the interaction between the gang, the police and the residents of Vila Cruzeiro a cycle of violence, fear, and insecurity is perpetuated. The images that these actors hold of one another are both a medium and a product of this social interaction. By now it should be clear that the state fails to provide security to part of its citizens, including the people living in Vila Cruzeiro. Instead the police are often violent and abusive. Leeds (2007:29) argues that "the antipathy generated by police actions increases the distance between *favela* residents and the police." The predominant image of a predatory police – being abusive, repressive, violent and corrupt – is reconstituted and the general mistrust of the state and its police forces among residents is reinforced. At the same time the hope that the state will fulfill its 'ideal'

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52   Interview with Maria, April 7, 2008
53   Focus group (2), February 25, 2008
54   Focus group, February 22, 2008

role as a protector is minimized.

The negative interaction between the police and *favela* communities results in distrust and disdain of the police by community resident who are consequently - while not necessarily in favor of drug dealers - even less inclined to cooperate with the police (Leeds 2007:29). Some people in Vila Cruzeiro claim that the police are worse than the bandits. This is illustrated by the following incident:

> I visit the community for the first time after having been absent for a few days because of a police occupation. Not having read anything about a change of the situation – e.g. the withdrawal of the police - in the newspapers, I ask one of my friends if the situation has improved. She answers that the situation has in fact improved; *'The police have left; now there are only the* bandidos.*'*[55]

Lourdes confirms this standpoint saying, '*the* bandidos *will shoot a lot, but the* bandidos *do not come in shooting. The* caveirão *does, it comes in shooting...[they are] worse than the bandits*.'[56] As the distance between residents and police grows, greater spaces are left in which the violence can occur, giving the impression to the organized drug factions that they can act with impunity (Leeds 2007:29).

In the militarized ways of policing, antagonistic relations between the state and the *favela* residents are staged, and prototypical images of residents and the perceived link with violence and banditry are enacted. The image of criminals as the mosquitoes of evil that should be extinguished for the good of state security is used to legitimize militarized behavior. These repressive actions also affect the *favela* residents, who in popular discourse are equated with criminals. Through these performances that are largely symbolic and in which all members of the community are treated as criminals (AI 2005:15), their marginal position in Brazilian society is staged and a social system in which *favela* inhabitants are socially excluded is reproduced. This supports Jabri's argument that "systems of inclusion and exclusion are structurated through identiational discursive and institutional practices implicated in the legitimation of and support for violent conflict" (1996:8).

Greater exclusion of *favela* residents and lack of access to other means of maintaining their security will only increase trafficker power (Arias and Rodrigues 2006:79). In the context of the state's failure to provide public security, localized strategies are developed to maintain order. These often depend on criminal gangs and therefore reinforce the legitimacy of perverse social organizations (Arias and Rodrigues 2006; McIlwaine and Moser 2007). In order to guarantee their protection and safety, the traffickers exploit the image of the violent police and construct narratives of mutual respect and reciprocity to gain support from residents. Following Arias and Rodrigues (2006:59) I have argued that *favela* residents who conform to local norms, enforced by traffickers, feel a degree of control over their own safety and that a "myth of personal security" is created in otherwise violent neighborhoods. This sense of security is built through discourses of differentiation. Using Caldeira's (2000) argument that: "narratives of exclusion and inclusion play a fundamental role in supporting Brazil's 'disjunctive democracy'," Arias and Rodrigues (2006:55) argue that the way traffickers maintain order plays an essential role in constituting the political identity of *favela* residents. In their strategy not to be marginal, the residents invert social order by decrying police violence and suggesting that the traffickers with whom they have to live on a day-to-day basis provide a higher degree of security in their communities than exists in surrounding areas (ibid.:60). Many people feel safer inside the community than outside Vila Cruzeiro, as has been demonstrated above. Thus the *favela*, seen as dangerous and marginal by society as a whole is seen as a place of refuge and safety by its residents (ibid.:60). However, this 'myth of personal security' is only valid insofar as both resident and trafficker behavior is constrained

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55  Fieldnotes, April 28, 2008
56  Interview with Lourdes, March 27, 2008

by understood and accepted uses of force (ibid:78). Still, gangs are accepted by the community as a legitimate force due to fear and a lack of serious alternatives (Dowdney 2003:71).

A key reason for the ineffectiveness of the police in protecting citizens from criminal gangs is that they too often engage in excessive and counter-productive violence while on duty and participate in what amounts to organized crime while off-duty (UN 2007). Kalyvas (2003) argues that in violent conflict a discrepancy can often be discerned between the main conflict and identity and the identities and personal motives on the ground. In Rio de Janeiro actions by corrupt policemen on the ground show a discrepancy with the discourse of 'state-security'. Upper-level politicians and police usually do not have effective control over lower-level state representatives, as we have seen police often engage in brutal operations at the local level. Moreover, many police and politicians take bribes from funds targeted for social aid (Arias 2006:37). Arias claims that "[t]hese actions strengthen drug traffickers, who, as a result of bribes to police and politicians, operate freely in *favelas* and provide aid to residents" (ibid.). Through these actions in which personal motives are central, the police support the existence of drug trafficking and the presence of criminal factions in the *favelas*. In that sense the police and the traffickers are in reality often accomplices in crime.

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*A Never Ending Story?*

*After a one-and-a-half week occupation of Vila Cruzeiro by the police, which had left many criminal suspects dead and residents injured, the police on a certain day 'just left'. No confrontation, no shoot-out, nothing. Different informants told me that the traffickers had paid the police to leave, a suggestion that had been confirmed by close friends of the traffickers. After the police had left, the bandidos who had fled to other areas in the city came back, seemingly knowing the police would not bother them. The same night they threw a big party - so-called 'baile funk' - as they are used to do every weekend. The following Monday morning the arrival of the police was again announced by the fire-crackers.*

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The police are involved in the criminality they are suppose to combat and therefore contribute to the existence of criminality and the perpetuation of the cycle of violence they are supposed to break (Leeds 2007; Koonings and Veenstra 2007). In fact, the generalized violence permits that the police get involved in criminal activities as it makes the problem of violence in the *favelas* seem intractable (Koonings and Veenstra 2007:625). The persistent presence of criminal gangs in the *favelas* again feeds the discrimination and stigmatization that the *favela* residents face. It is a vicious circle of discrimination and violence, reproduced through the actions of agents, in which human dignity is attributed to 'us' and not to 'them' – the residents of the *favelas*. In this process of dehumanization, excessive violence by the police is exploited by gangs to gain support from residents and the violent actions of criminal gangs are used by the state to legitimize its actions. State involvement in criminality sustains the presence of drug gangs on which residents, faced by a lack of alternatives, come to rely more and more. The gang stays in control and maintains a social system based on fear and violence. The continuing confrontations between police and gang simultaneously reproduce a situation of high-risk. The police and the traffickers, acting upon structures of domination, legitimation and signification, thus reinforce an environment of violence, fear and insecurity. The cycle of violence is perpetuated also because, as Giddens claims, "reproducing... structural properties

agents also reproduce the conditions that make such action possible" (1984:26).

The residents of Vila Cruzeiro therefore continue to live against the backdrop of police and criminal violence and in an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. Mothers generally agree that Vila Cruzeiro is not a good place to raise your children and that it has become more and more difficult. The greatest fear existing among them is the fear for stray bullets that are often the result of confrontations between the police and the traffickers. These form a direct threat to the lives of the people in the community. Additional concerns people have seem to differ depending on their particular characteristics, circumstances, social position and the age and sex of their children. These concerns and risks include, among others, involvement in drug traffic, police violence, alcohol use, drug use and sexual relationships at a young age. The next chapter will be devoted to how mothers, drawing upon their knowledge of the existing social structures, negotiate security in this precarious context through performances of relationship-making.

*"Maternal practices begin in love, a love which for most mothers is as intense, confusing, ambivalent, and poignantly sweet as any they will experience."*

(Ruddick 1980:344)

# Chapter 3: Creating Safe Spaces?

*Mothers and Their Performances of Relationship Making*

*I am sitting in a restaurant opposite the community center, and just ordered lunch, when a heavy shootout starts. We all seek protection in the kitchen and the bathroom. As I am sitting on the ground, a six months pregnant woman is standing next to me, in the corner. She has her eyes closed, and is praying while holding her belly. The sound of gunfire is all around. It makes me start thinking; how could you raise a child in an environment where violent confrontations are frequent? Where the state does not guarantee security but is in fact a direct threat to the wellbeing of the residents? In a community where thirteen-year-old kids join the ruling drug gang? As if she is having similar thoughts she says; 'I want to leave this place. Everyone wants to leave this place.' How do mothers cope with raising their children if they do not have the opportunity to go and live somewhere else? How do they try to provide a sense of security for themselves and their children? 'Only God can protect us', I hear her say.*

In Vila Cruzeiro, women raise their children in an environment marked by violence, fear and insecurity. These mothers hold a complicated position, having to negotiate a sense of security for themselves and their children.[57] As Ruddick claims, "[f]or whatever reasons, mothers typically find it not only natural, but compelling to protect and foster the growth of their children" (1980:344). In Vila Cruzeiro women try to protect and provide for their children in the midst of police and gang related violence. To fulfill this task successfully has become more difficult over time, which can be partly attributed to the militarization of policing and the presence of the gang. On the one hand, the gang is often accepted, to a certain extent, as providing an alternative form of security, income and social integration, while on the other hand they form a threat to the well-being and safety of children in different ways. Children might be attracted to or recruited by a drug gang, while being a member of a drug gang severely reduces life expectancy. Moreover, and most significantly, children run the greatest risk of becoming victims in confrontations between the police and the drug gangs. The main challenges identified by these women are to prevent their children from being hit by a stray bullet and to keep their children on the right path, whatever this may entail. I acknowledge that the mothers central in this chapter do not form a homogeneous group. Their experiences of violence, socio-economic position and other characteristics vary widely. All, however, have at least one child under the age of twenty and face the challenge of raising their children in an environment of high-risk and violence.

The structures of domination, legitimation and signification contributing to this precarious environment are reconstituted in interaction based on images of the 'other', as was demonstrated in the previous chapters. Though residents feel "largely

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57  Robben (2005), Green (1995), Sheper-Hughes (1992), Goldstein (2003) and McIlwaine and Moser (2007) have all reflected on the often ambivalent position of women when it comes to issues of violence and security.

divorced from these 'outside' forces, except as a generalized target of them", they are in fact embedded in structures of power (Goldstein 2003:1-2). The structural features of society constrain and inform the actions of mothers in their attempt to protect and provide for their children. As Goldstein claims about the women she studied, "[t]heir lives [are] informed and constrained by the hierarchies in which they find themselves embedded" (2003:5). It should be stressed that these powerful structures "leave untouched the fundamental significance of the knowledgeability of human actors" (Giddens 1984:26). This is what enables actors to 'go on' in a diversity of contexts (ibid.). In their effort to attend to the task of raising their children in a context of violence, mothers living in Vila Cruzeiro cultivate, arrange, and create social relations with other actors in Vila Cruzeiro so as to create spaces of security.[58] In these performances of relationship-making, mothers not only draw upon existing structures but through their actions of creating safe spaces they can simultaneously reinforce or transform those structures. Before turning to an analysis of how mothers reconstitute their informal and formal social relations, I will first outline a theoretical framework that can add to an understanding of performances of relationship making in the face of violence.

### 3.1 Relationship Making in the Face of Violence: Trust, Fear and Social Capital

In precarious environments, people rearrange their social relations in an effort to create spaces of security. The value of social relations is the social capital embedded in and generated through these relations that can be used to achieve one's objectives. The meaning of social capital has been under debate and approaches vary depending on disciplinary background. One of the main divides in the discussion on social capital is between those using it normatively and those using it analytically (Goodhand and Hulme 2000:391). The need to make analytical use of the concept of social capital is even greater in a context of violence, because it can account for both negative and positive implications of social capital. For the purpose of this study social capital will be defined as "rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity, and trust embedded in social relations, social structures, and societies' institutional arrangements that enable its members to achieve their individual and community objectives" (Narayan 1997:50 in McIlwaine and Moser 2001:965).

The value of the concept of social capital to this study is twofold: First, it illuminates the process of structuration (Callett 2004) and, second, it identifies certain aspects of social structure by their functions (Coleman 1988; Callett 2004). Contributing to the development of the first point, Coleman claims that "the concept of social capital constitutes both an aid to accounting for different outcomes at the level of individual actors and an aid towards making micro-to-macro transitions." (1988:101). By building on the 'duality of structure' (Giddens 1984) I take further Coleman's intention to make micro-to-macro transitions, using the concept of social capital to demonstrate how agency and structure are mutually constitutive. In a context of everyday violence, structural forces are at play that shape to a certain extent how individuals form and reconstitute their social relations, and, simultaneously, social capital. Through their actions of rearranging and creating social relations they can both reinforce existing structures or challenge them. Cattell claims that social networks can be approached as "key mediators in recursive relationships between structures and agency" (2004:960). She argues; "[n]etwork characteristics will help shape individuals' responses to structural constraints and opportunities, but, at the same time, the networks will reflect these responses" (2004:960). Acknowledging the mediating role of social networks and relations may illuminate social processes

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58 These spaces can be physical, psychological or social in nature. But because these are in practice closely intertwined, I will not explicitly distinguish between them and instead demonstrate how they are interrelated.

involved in the perpetuation or possible transformation of the context of violence, fear and insecurity as it is identified in Vila Cruzeiro.

Second, the value of the concept of social capital is that it identifies certain aspects of social structure by their functions. It identifies the value of these aspects of social structure to actors as resources – derived from the relational features of the community in which they live – that they can employ to achieve individual and community goals (Coleman 1988:S101). This includes a consideration of the aspects of social relations, as identified by Coleman (1988:S102-104), that can constitute useful capital for individuals and contribute to the value produced, namely: obligations and expectations, information channels that facilitate action and social norms accompanied by sanctions. Social capital as I perceive it is not just a resource for, but also an outcome of the actions of individuals and groups. The specific objective that is dealt with in this study is the objective of mothers to create spaces of security in order to protect and provide for their children. In fact, Jacobs claims that social capital refers to "cross-cutting social networks which provide a basis of trust, cooperation and *perceptions of safety*" (1961 in Cattell 2004:948. Emphasis added). Social relations are valuable to mothers exactly because they carry and generate social capital; resources they can draw upon to create a sense of security.

Performances of relationship-making are informed by trust. Trust, an "unconscious assumption of support" and "a resource in time of personal or neighborhood need" (Jacobs 1961:65 in Cattell 2004), is embedded in and generated through social relations, and is central to decisions taken in the process of relationship making. Contemporary work on social capital distinguishes between 'thick' and 'thin' forms of trust (see e.g., Newton 1997 in Callett 2004:949). 'Thick' trust is associated with social networks which are 'dense' or close knit, 'thin' trust with looser ties (Callett 2004:949). While some authors focus on the production of 'thin' or wider, generalized trust, through associational membership (Putnam) or widespread social interaction (Jacobs 1961) (both in Cattell 2004:949), Coleman identifies density and closure as necessary for trust (Coleman 1990 in Cattell 2004:949).

Though so far research done on social capital has focused on trust, fear is a critical factor in understanding how people organize their social relations, especially in a context of violence (Moser and McIlwaine 2001). This is supported by Reguillo's claim that fear is not only a way of talking about the world, but also a way of acting (2002:205). She states that fear is a spontaneous action that liberates a type of energy that forms a defense against a perceived threat. But it is "[t]hrough socialization that the individual learns to identify and differentiate the sources of danger, to use and control his or her own reactions, and, especially, to incorporate a combination of knowledges, procedures, and alternative responses to different threats perceived" (2002:190-191). These processes of socialization do not imply homogeneous experiences of fear or responses to the perceived threats. Fear is individually experienced and its response depends on the individual (Reguillo 2002:191; McIlwaine and Moser 2001:972). Green (1995) concludes that fear is a state of "stringing out the nervous system one way toward hysteria, the other way numbing and apparent acceptance". Routinization allows people to live in a chronic state of fear with a facade of normalcy (Green 1995:107). People develop "[t]o each fear (of certain spaces, actors, visions and representations of the world), a few responses" (Reguillo 2002:204). These responses, based on the inherent knowledge of actors, can include the reconstitution of social relations. Based on the above, I will assess how and to what extent both fear and trust motivate mothers' performances of relationship-making in the face of violence.

Two distinctions made by Moser and McIlwaine (2001) in their conceptualization of social capital are useful when exploring the process of relationship making in a context of violence. They distinguish between productive and perverse social capital and between cognitive and structural social capital. The distinction between

productive and perverse social capital is valuable to this research, though I acknowledge that the distinction is not clear-cut. Certain forms of social capital can have a variety of implications for different actors and at different times. Productive social capital and social organizations in local communities are "those that generate favorable outcomes both for its members and for the community at large" (Moser and McIlwaine 2001:968). 'Perverse' social capital and social organizations are those that have positive benefits for its members, but include negative outcomes for wider communities and are frequently based on the use of force, violence and/or illegal activities (Rubio 1997; McIlwaine and Moser 2001:968). Perverse organizations proliferate in the absence of trust in state security forces and can be functional to individual and household risk management strategies (Moser and McIlwaine 2001). I will assess how in Vila Cruzeiro the local gang, a perverse organization, is functional to the creation of spaces of security.

The second distinction is made between structural and cognitive social capital (Uphoff 1997, 2000 in Moser and McIlwaine 2001). Structural social capital is defined as "social organizations and formal networks of trust and cohesion" (McIlwaine and Moser 2001:968) and can be either productive or perverse in nature (ibid.:975). Moser and McIlwaine define cognitive social capital as "invisible, informal elements of trust, altruism, and charity, as experienced among individuals in communities" (2001:968). Informed by the above conceptualization of social capital, I will distinguish between informal and formal social relations in the analysis of how these are cultivated, arranged, and created by mothers in Vila Cruzeiro in order to create spaces of security.

### 3.2 Informal Social Relations

In their efforts to create spaces of security for themselves and their children, mothers' negotiation of the following informal relations seems crucial: the relation between mother and child, family relations and relations with neighbors and friends.

#### 3.2.1 Mother-Child Relations

*'[I]f you don't claim a child as your own, the world will. The world is a magnet. The world is a magnet that pulls the young...into the hole. So we have to do what we can.'*[59]

Mothers try to create safe spaces through the strengthening of the relationship between themselves and their children. Through communication these women aim to enhance control over their children and hence, to heighten their sense of security. That to protect a child is seen as an obligation of the mother, is adequately captured in Eva's words; *'The mother cannot disappear. The mother has responsibility.'* The women who, in the eyes of others, do not take good care of their children are fiercely criticized. Watching over your children is considered a necessity in the precarious environment as it is found in Vila Cruzeiro. As a woman with two children expresses, *'it is difficult. You have to take care [of your children]; if you don't, you will loose them.'*[60] Educating children is seen as central to both avoiding they will become a victim in police confrontations and ensuring their security in the future – for them to follow the right track.

Children learn from a young age how to behave in case of a confrontation. This is partly because they are growing up in an environment were violence is highly visible and part of everyday life, and partly because mothers talk with them about issues related to violence. It is acknowledged that getting hit by a stray bullet is largely a matter of bad luck, and some women argue that you do not need to explain because it is so obvious; growing up in Vila Cruzeiro children see it and hear about it all the time. Most mothers, however, try to inform and raise their children in such a way that

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59  Interview with Patricia, May 26, 2008
60  Focus group, February 22, 2008

they know how to act whenever there is gunfire. The strategies used by these women vary and depend, among others, on the age of their children. The majority of mothers prefers to explain the reality they live in, and talk openly with their children about stray bullets and the *caveirão*. Like, for example, Malou; *'I talk with them [about the things that are happening], they learn everything... When there is gunfire, you can't stay out in the street, you have to stay inside the house.'*[61] In contrast, Leticia does not tell her four-year-old daughter the 'truth', but has developed another, rather unusual way to ensure her daughter will go or stay inside the house in case of a shootout. She tells her that *caveirões* are not *caveirões* but fire engines and that bullets are not bullets, but balloons that will come down, explode and set your hair on fire;

> 'So [in case of a shootout] she says "I am going home mum, let's go." And she runs inside the house. [My daughter] is taught not to go out in the street, when there is gunfire you stay inside the house.'[62]

Leticia is trying to take away the sense of the fear of her daughter and instead, to create a 'safe space';

> 'To ease her mind, [we say] if you go to sleep nothing will be happening, mummy is here, daddy is here. I think she feels safe with us, so she goes back to sleep. So why would I say these are bullets?'[63]

Though this strategy is not very common, it does shed light on a more general tendency. Mothers try to gain control over their children and to create spaces of security through communication; whether this entails explaining what is really going on, or giving alternative explanations.

The most important aim of mothers is for their children to lead a 'righteous life'. This includes living at home, doing honest work and/or going to school, and usually excludes involvement in drug traffic, drug or (excessive) alcohol use and sexual relationships at a young age. To increase the chances that their children will stay on the right track, they follow a similar strategy as described above: gaining (a sense of) control over a child through communication and the formulation of rules. The statement, *'You have to tell them what is wrong, what is right'*[64] is widely shared. Though mothers emphasize different aspects in the upbringing of their children, all articulate the importance of talking, informing and setting limits.

These limits and rules can relate to, among other things, how they dress, what time they can come home and if they are allowed to go out. The importance of discipline and setting limits is often stressed; *'You have to protect them'* it is stated.[65] Leticia is afraid her son might get involved in traffic and therefore tries to control to a large extent what he does and who he hangs out with. Because she claims; *'quem se mistura com porcos, farelo come'*, which is a proverb meaning that who gets involved or hangs out with criminals, becomes a criminal himself. She is constantly checking were he is and doesn't let him go out at night; *'I am afraid. And I can't sleep when he doesn't come home. So I don't let him go out.'* And she teaches her son;

> 'Look, don't get involved... If you get involved, you will die ...If you get into this life, I myself would take you to the police...I would tell the police "arrest my son, because he is involved." I'd rather see you arrested than dead.'[66]

Implicit is the assumption that 'at home' her son would be protected from bad influences. Eva also expresses the importance of the home as a safe place;

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61  Interview with Malou, May 14, 2008
62  Interview with Leticia, April 4, 2008
63  Interview with Leticia, April 4, 2008
64  Interview with Vanessa, May 21, 2008
65  Fieldnotes, April 24, 2008
66  Interview with Leticia, April 4, 2008

'I don't give her the freedom to go out alone…Because I am afraid of freedom. That is were they learn. The child learns that he can do anything. Because here where we live there are many [bad] things going on. We, the mothers, have to take care of [and] protect our children.'[67]

The changing face of violence in Vila Cruzeiro has tied people to their homes more and more, and the assumption '*Se voce pegar a rua, a rua pega voce* [if you take to the street, the street will take you]' is widely shared. This sheds light on the distinction made between '*rua*' (street) and '*casa*' (home). The home is generally associated with safety, protection and trust, whereas the street is associated with danger, bad influences and fear. People commonly consider their home the safest place in the community, to hide during shootouts for example; '*everyone stays inside the house… there is no way I would leave the house*', says Vanessa. When the firecrackers go off that announce the arrival of the police, mothers almost immediately go look for their children to make sure they are safe and preferably take them home, also when they are at school or playing at the community center.[68] Some, however, stress the fact that you are never entirely safe; '*It can even happen when you are at home, asleep. You could walk in the street and nothing could happen, and you could be home and something could happen; a bullet could fly into your house.*'[69] But this same woman proclaims, '*I don't like to stay out and talk to people, I am always in my house, taking care of my house [and] my children.*'[70]

To understand these paradoxical statements it is needed to acknowledge that the home is more than just a physical space. This could help explain the central importance of the home as a safe space, and its normative distinction from the street. A home is not just a physical space, from which physical protection is drawn; the home as a social place has the same, even stronger, connotation of security mainly because it is associated with the relation between mother and child. In his book on street children in North-East Brazil, Hecht claims; "Home and street are not concepts attached primarily to physical spaces; they are notions revolving largely around the children's relationship to their mothers and concomitant implications of this relationship. Being at home is being with one's mother" (1998:108). In addition, Hecht states that "[in] a general sense, home means sticking to what the children refer to a *vida boa*, the righteous life, or the right track. And always, the right track revolves around an adoration of their mothers" (1998:109). While his analysis is based on the perspectives of (street) children, mothers in Vila Cruzeiro seem to attach similar values to the home. It implies a righteous life and a close connection between mother and child, in contrast to the street that is associated with 'bad influences'. Mothers feel a degree of control and safety tying their children to their home. This involves strengthening the relation between mother and child through communication, and gaining control through discipline and the enforcement of rules. This refers to different aspects of social relations that constitute useful social capital for these mothers in their efforts to create spaces of security – rules, norms, obligations, information channels and trust. These efforts can contribute to the minimalization of feelings of fear and insecurity for both mother and child.

### 3.2.2 Family Bonds

In addition to the relation between mother and child, bonds with the rest of the family play a crucial role in the creation of spaces of security. Relatives can and often do offer practical and/or emotional support related to the upbringing of their children and their efforts to cope with violence. In a practical sense, relatives often help looking after the children of these women. Children going to public schools have

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67   Interview with Eva, June 4, 2008
68   An observation I made during all the police invasions.
69   Interview with Malou, May 14, 2008
70   Ibid.

classes either in the morning or in the afternoon and consequently have a large part of the day off. Mothers do not want their children to be out on the street alone, because of the risk of violent confrontations and 'bad influences' of the street. Thus, in case both parents are at work, they need someone to look after their children. Women who do not have family in the community or do not want to bother them, and cannot afford to pay someone to look after their children, often lock their kids inside the house or consider starting to work at home. Others do find family members willing to take care of their children.

Mothers who have their own relatives or their husband's family living nearby often express the possibility of calling on their fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters to look after their children. Lourdes, for example, has three sisters living close to her. When the children are playing in the street above, one of them will keep an eye on them.[71] Elisa states that if she has other things to do while her husband is at work, her son will stay with his grandmother, his uncle or with one of the neighbors. Some women even had their mothers raising their children. Also, older children usually help to take care of the younger ones. Eleven year old Larissa, for example, helps her mother Eva with almost every task inside the house, and often takes care of her little sister.[72] Sometimes (more or less extended) families live in the same house and make sure there is always someone there. As Juliana explains, reflecting upon the importance of support and reciprocity between family members;

> '[If I have to go and do other things] I leave them with my sister; my sister looks after them...When she goes out I look after her children. That is why when we go out, not everyone goes out. There always has to be someone at home.'[73]

Furthermore, the information channels, through which relatives inform one another about the safety situation, are crucial. In case of a police raid everybody seems busy informing one another about the state of affairs. People use their (cell) phones to check whether family members and friends are all right. Moreover, they exchange information about where it is safe to go and what exactly is going on.[74] This communication system can enhance feelings of security. Juliana stresses the importance of this system; *'Everyone has to take his or her cell phone, and you have to call; "get the children, there is gunfire...here there is gunfire, are you at home?" We have to live like that.'* Other women would use their family living outside the community to stay there in case of severe gunfire in Vila Cruzeiro, and then call people in the community to ask what the situation is like.

Family relations are valuable merely because of the – often reciprocal – support that can be gained from them. Moreover, these relations provide information channels that can ensure more accurate action in the face of violence. This is needed because of the environment of fear and insecurity that these mothers live in. Drawing upon relations with people they trust, which are in many cases family members, mothers try to create a sense of security. This is based on the valuable aspects of these family relations that constitute social capital; norms, obligations, reciprocity, trust and information channels that facilitate action.

### 3.2.3 Neighbors and Friends

While social cohesion in general is high in Vila Cruzeiro, violence has affected mothers' relations with neighbors and friends. There is less visiting among them, and the choice of friends and how mothers interact with neighbors is made carefully and is informed by both fear and trust. Perlman's research (2004) shows that violence and

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71  Fieldnotes, March 12, 2008
72  Interview with Eva, June 4, 2008
73  Interview with Juliana, May 14, 2008
74  This statement is based on many of my observations made during police invasions.

insecurity lead, among others, to the erosion of trust among neighbors. This seems partly true in Vila Cruzeiro, though the relations people have with their neighbors differ greatly. Some mothers are not so close to their neighbors and sometimes would hardly even talk to them. '*I love to talk, but not with just anyone. To my neighbors I only say hi, but I never visit them. And I don't let anyone inside my house*', says Maria. Leticia is also very careful in her contact with neighbors;

> 'I don't leave [my daughter] with neighbors. Just [with] family. I don't like to be with neighbors a lot...if I would say this [what they can and cannot tell her daughter] to a neighbor, [I will get into a fight with] the neighbor. And you can't. So it all has to be inside the family.'[75]

This carefulness can also be discerned with regard to friendships; '*we even are afraid of friendships*' one woman claims,[76] because you never know to whom people are related. Though almost everyone directly or indirectly knows people that are involved in the traffic, many people avoid contact with the *bandidos* and people closely related to them; '*[I don't know the mothers of the traffickers], I am terrified. I don't like these kinds of people.*'[77] Most mothers exclude other women who do have children involved in the drug traffic from their social networks; '*I don't know them, and I don't want to get to know them. They stay there; I stay here.*' This is because many agree that '*You have to be afraid [only] when you interfere with them,*' as Larissa phrases it. Though living in Vila Cruzeiro automatically means to a certain extent being part of the social network of the *favela* ruled by the drug gang, gang members and people who are known to have close contacts with traffickers are often barred from people's networks. This seems even more salient in the case of mothers.

Other mothers, however, are very close with their neighbors. Vanessa states that in addition to her family, the neighbors play an important role looking after the kids; '*There is always someone to watch. I help [them as well], everybody helps one another. Where I live that is a good thing.*'[78] This is confirmed by Malou who states that when she or her child falls ill at night, there is always someone to take them to the hospital, or a neighbor to help them out. One woman comments;

> 'Neighbors are like family. For example if one is at work, the other will look after her kids and vice versa...there is violence everywhere. Before I lived in fear. I see it as God's protection that I could buy a house here. At least now I have my neighbors that help me.'[79]

This reflects the tendency of some residents to glorify social cohesion in the community in the face of social exclusion by society at large. In general, it can be stated that of all informal social relations dealt with, performances of relationship making with neighbors and friends differ most. Mothers employ and create these relations because they can provide support, but usually they carefully consider with whom to interact; an attitude that is informed by both trust and fear.

### 3.3 Formal Social Relations

In Vila Cruzeiro, where the state fails to fulfill its role as a security provider and a general mistrust of the state security forces exists, mothers develop an alternative sense of security based on different social relations and networks. To create spaces of security in order to enable the protection of their children, mothers not only reconstitute their informal relations but also their relations to institutions and organizations within the community. These include the churches, schools and

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75  Interview with Leticia, April 4, 2008
76  Ibid.
77  Interview with Juliana, May 14, 2008
78  Interview with Vanessa, May 21, 2008
79  Focus group (1), February 25, 2008

education in a wider sense, the community center run by the neighborhood organization and the local gang.

### 3.3.1 The Church as a Last Saving?

For a majority of the mothers in Vila Cruzeiro, the church plays an important role in their lives in general, and for the creation of spaces of security in particular. In Vila Cruzeiro the church as an institution is central to the life of many, most particularly women. The general decline of the influence of the Catholic Church in the *favelas* (Gay 2005:151-152), and the rapid growth of other dominations, especially Pentecostalism (Arias 2006:34; Gay 2005:151-152; Goldstein 2003), is also visible in Vila Cruzeiro. Here, the number of Pentecostal churches has risen dramatically over the past years, though still many women proclaim to be catholic. First, religion provides a sense of security, something to hold on to in a context of high-risk and pervasive violence. As Patricia points out; '*it is a refuge for people in the community*'. Sandra, for example, says; '*fear...fear...I am not afraid because I believe in God.*'[80] Second, churches can be employed as alternative environments in which norms can be transferred that enhance chances of keeping children on the straight and narrow path. This was argued by some of the women, for example; '*it teaches "the good" ... [t]hose guys that stay out of the church like more those kinds of things, the street...Here it is a coexistence of unity, of not doing "the bad", not doing wrong things.*'[81] Thus, by women in Vila Cruzeiro the church is sometimes perceived as an alternative space in which children can be raised and educated, where they learn 'the good', and are kept away from the street and its bad influences. The church can also help people back on 'the right track', as it is one of the few accepted ways out of gang-life (Goldstein 2003:219; Gay 2005:152); '*[The churches] have helped a lot because many youngsters have left the life, of the crime, of the traffic and have joined the churches,*'[82] a resident explains. This is related to the fact that the presence of these churches is usually accepted by traffickers. Many of them have relatives who have joined these churches and those who publicly display their religious life-style often have a high degree of consideration in the community (Arias and Rodrigues 2006:59).

Goldstein (2003) reflects on the meaning of religious conversion in the context of urban violence. She claims that religious conversion can be understood as a response to the context of violence in which women in *favela* communities live and that it is in fact a gendered form of oppositional culture; "It seems as if women are choosing religious conversion as a form of oppositional culture, one that resists male oppositional culture, namely, gang membership and participation in urban violence" (Goldstein 2003:217). In addition, I argue that it provides an alternative sense of security for women who try to raise their children in this violent environment. It offers a 'safe' space that can help keep children away from or get them out of gang life, or other 'bad influences' from the street.

### 3.3.2 Education: A Way Out?

Among mothers in Vila Cruzeiro, education is thought to be the main way to a secure and better life for their children. Attending school keeps them off the street for part of the day, and is perceived to enhance chances for a better future. Schools are usually seen as safe spaces, in both the physical and the social sense. However, when their children are in school and a shootout starts, most mothers immediately go and look for their children and preferably take them home. As a social safe space, the school is not uncontested either. Some mothers fear that in school their children might encounter bad influences; '*I am afraid of [what happens] inside the school, [that is] what worries me most... Where I live, we always keep an eye on them...But in school you*

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80   Interview with Sandra, February 22, 2008
81   Focus group (2), February 25, 2008
82   Interview with Patricia, May 26, 2008

*don't have the security of knowing everything they are doing*', Clara says.

Even though schools are not unanimously trusted as 'spaces of security', and some women are critical about the education system in Brazil, still they all want their children to go to school, and preferable to follow higher education. As Leticia says, *'To study is important, isn't it? Without a study we are nothing...we live in a* favela *and don't have an education? [My daughter] won't be like that.'*[83] This is of particular importance in a context of violence, because of the perceived link between education and the 'righteous life'. With better education, one could in theory get a better job which could be an incentive to become a *'trabalhador'* (worker) instead of a *'traficante'* (trafficker). This link between honest work and studying is illuminated by Eva who states, *'[i]f you [a young man] don't study people immediately think you are involved [in drug traffic], that you are doing bad things'*. All mothers seem to agree on the importance of education for their children; as both a means to secure a better future and as an occupation that keeps them of the street and busy for part of the day.

However, some obstacles are in the way. Although the Brazilian education system has undergone a 'silent revolution'[84] (Gay 2005:112), it is still marked by serious flaws, that affect residents of certain *favela* communities in particular. The first flaw is related to the "bifurcated public and private school system" that would limit social mobility (Goldstein 2003:93). Public education is free, but the quality of education is less than in private schools. As many *favela* residents cannot afford private education, it is for them more difficult to enter universities for which highly competitive admissions examinations have to be taken (ibid:95).[85] In Vila Cruzeiro mothers encounter additional problems that lead some parents to consider transferring their children to others schools outside the community. Because of the violence, the schools in Vila Cruzeiro are often closed, undermining the learning process of the children. Moreover, there is a lack and a large turnover of teachers,[86] because of the trying circumstances in which they have to teach (Leeds 2007:25-26). This contributes to the discrepancies that exist in terms of the quality of schools and education available in Rio de Janeiro (Gay 2005:112). The physical state of the schools in the area and the lack of resources form additional concerns affecting the quality of education. Also, basic education hardly relates to the social context of the *favelas*, resulting in a high number of drop-outs that are more vulnerable to recruitment by a gang (Leeds 2007:26). But even if children and adolescents make their way up through the education system, this does not guarantee employment or higher wages. They have to deal with discriminatory recruitment policies in which a *'boa aparencia'* – implying a white skin color – is often a prerequisite. Moreover, people from *favela* communities in general and Vila Cruzeiro in particular are confronted with the stigma of their community and need to provide a false address when applying for jobs.

To keep children and young adults off the streets was one of the goals of the recent changes made to the school system in Brazil (Gay 2005:113). This function of schools can be considered of great value to women trying to raise their children in a context of violence. However, many public schools including those in and near Vila Cruzeiro, are not in session all day. Children go to school either in the morning from 7a.m. till 12p.m. or in the afternoon from 12p.m. till 5p.m. and are left unoccupied for the rest of the day. Therefore, alternatives have to be found. One of the recent developments in Vila Cruzeiro was the construction of a community center in which all kinds of activities are offered.

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83  Interview with Leticia, April 4, 2008
84  Gay (2005:112) argues that enrollments in primary and secondary school are up and that the proportion of the population that is illiterate continues to decline. Also, government initiatives to raise the level of teacher training and preparation and a system whereby school in the public and private sectors are evaluated and accredited on a regular basis have been introduced. Furthermore, new and innovative government funding has made resources available to those who need it most.
85  This is also confirmed and recognized by some informants.
86  Focus group (2), February 25, 2008

### 3.3.3 The Community Center: 'Fechar todo o espaço'

In 2005 a community center was built in Vila Cruzeiro, which has taken a prominent place in a visual sense as well as in the social life of the community. It was constructed with the help of the Brazilian NGO IBISS and the Brazilian government, and is run by members of the neighborhood association (AM). By many women and their children the center is considered very important in their efforts to cope with violence. First, the community center organizes all kinds of activities that keep their children off the street. Second, it provides a safe meeting place for women, where they can discuss various topics. Some women even declare to enjoy living in Vila Cruzeiro, mainly because of the community center, as having this is seen as a large advantage above other communities.

Before, hardly any activities were organized for children and other residents of Vila Cruzeiro. Nowadays, many women bring their children to the community center every day, so they can play at the daycare, or to do one of the many activities. Because *'you have to make sure that children always have activities...so they don't have to see the violence.'*[87] Or, as most mothers perceive it; so they don't get involved in or become a victim of the violence. Some mothers refer to this, stressing the necessity to *'fechar todo o espaço'*, meaning; to occupy all their free time in which they might go astray. As Malou explains; *'[You have to] occupy their time more with things like courses...with soccer, swimming, dancing. You have to fill their free time with IBISS...You have to occupy their minds...'*[88] For some young adults the project provided a way out of gang-life; through the program *Soldados Nunca Mais*[89] they have left the gang and are now employed at the community center.

The center is not only a safe haven for children and adolescents, but also a place where these women can meet each other and have the opportunity to discuss a wide variety of issues and help each other with advice. It is perceived as a safe place to exchange ideas and discuss problems related to violence and the upbringing of their children. It is for some also the place they go for help in case of problems, hoping to get support from the AM. Moreover, being connected to members of the AM can enhance personal security, as they are highly respected in the community. Also, the members of the neighborhood association are among the few people in the community challenging violence. However, they carefully have to negotiate their actions, as they exist with the permission of the drug gang and with government support.

Though the community center is perceived as a secure place by many and plays a pivotal role in the lives of some of the women, there are some issues that undermine the position of the center as a safe space. Still, many people are not reached by the community center, and these are generally the people who need it most. Also, though the center is perceived by many as a secure place, the increasing violence leads to a decrease in the attendance of the project. Some consider it too dangerous to bring their children to the project and leave them there, as a shootout might start any moment. On days when the police invade the community, the project stays empty, classes are cancelled and sometimes it is even decided to close the center. An additional problem is that the government does not always pay the salaries of the employees. This affects their motivation and leads them to search for alternatives. It can even be an incentive for the ex-*bandidos* working at the center to slip back into the lucrative business of the drug traffic.

### 3.3.4 The Comando Vermelho: Perverse Social Integration?

Women try all kinds of things to keep their children out of drug traffic and gang life, as has been demonstrated above. They carefully negotiate their informal relations

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87   Focus group, February 22, 2008
88   Interview with Malou, May 14, 2008
89   A project initiated by IBISS, aimed at taking youngsters out of gang life.

and create alternatives by relating to different organizations in the community. In the meantime, however, some mothers do understand why children and adolescents get involved in the traffic; as long as these children are not their own. Moreover, in the absence of trust in state security forces, the gang might even become functional to the creation of spaces of security, however fragile and ambiguous.

Though they try to keep a distance from gang members and their intimates, and prefer 'honest work', most women in Vila Cruzeiro showed greater sympathy towards the gang than towards the police forces. They interact with the traffickers – directly or indirectly – on a daily basis. Even if people try to refrain from interaction as much as possible, living in Vila Cruzeiro implies being part of a network of 'familiar faces' that is to a large extent controlled by traffickers. Others see the people they love getting involved; their sons, brothers and lovers. The experience of exclusion is also shared among community residents, and provides a popular explanation for the attraction of gang life. Building on Goldstein who argues that *favela* residents have "accepted banditry as an option in the face of extreme poverty" (2003:203), I would argue that it is in the face of inequality, exclusion and arbitrary police violence that most people consider gang life a legitimate form of (perverse) social integration. This popular explanation of banditry is reflected in the following song;

> On each hill a different story
> That the police kill innocent people
> And who was innocent is a bandit today
> So he can eat a fucked-up piece of bread

> Chico Science, "Banditry for Reasons of Class" (Pereira 2000:228-229)

Some women claim that it is partly the police's fault that children join the gangs, 'I know many kids that have been beaten up by police...I know several kids that are in "the life", because they rebel in reaction to having been beaten up by the police' says Lourdes. Her children once told her, 'if we are going to die anyhow, we could better take up arms and die ... fighting the police.'[90] This illuminates the process in which police violence fosters the perverse social capital embedded in the gang. But although most women to some extent understand and legitimize involvement in drug traffic, they strenuously try to avoid that their own children will become involved.

While the gang generates the necessity to create spaces of security, relations with the gang are simultaneously employed to create these spaces. Many people see the gang as providing an alternative form of security in the absence of state security provision, as was already shown in the previous chapter. Like other residents, mothers build a sense of security through discourse of differentiation. In their strategy not to be marginal, residents reverse social order, complaining about police violence and suggesting that the traffickers with whom they have to live provide a higher degree of security in Vila Cruzeiro than exists in the city at large. As Arias and Rodrigues state, "They may be discriminated against in society but they are...*em casa* ('at home') when they are in the community" (2006:79). The tendency for residents to feel safer inside the community than outside Vila Cruzeiro – except for the risk of stray bullets – can also be discerned among mothers, though to a smaller degree as the gang does constitute a threat to the future of their children. Though some of them use their relations with traffickers to resolve problems, the majority of women and especially mothers seem to avoid everything and everyone related to gang life more than other residents. However, the same dynamic of inverting social order can be discerned. Mothers are part of the social network to which the law of the *favela* applies, and use this to at least create a *sense* of security.

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90   Interview with Lourdes, March 27, 2008

### 3.4 Spaces of Security and the Perpetuation of Violence

The performances of informal and formal relationship making of mothers in Vila Cruzeiro have been described above. But what is the meaning of this reconstituted landscape of social relations? Having analyzed mother-child relations, family relations and relations between neighbors and friends, it can be concluded that the level of importance and intensity of these relations are shifting. In Vila Cruzeiro more and more importance is attached to the relation between mother and child because this bond - related to the home as a 'safe' space - is crucial in ensuring (a sense of) security for both mother and child. Therefore, much effort is put into strengthening this relationship. In addition, strong family relations seem to be crucial in the process of coping with violence and the creation of spaces of security through reciprocal support and information exchange between relatives. Views and performances with regard to relationship making with friends and neighbors differ widely. In general there seems to be a tendency to glorify social cohesion, but to reduce chances of violence against themselves and to enhance perceptions of security, mothers have become more careful in their choice of friends and how one interacts with neighbors. Informed by fear and trust, the emphasis thus shifts away from a wide network of friends and neighbors to the smallest unit of mother and child; there where insecurity is smallest, the influence a mother can exert greatest and trust strongest. This implies that 'thick' trust, opposed to 'thin' trust is central to social relations in Vila Cruzeiro. And, using Coleman (1990 in Callett 2004:949) I argue that the density – through the strengthening of family relations - and closure – through a careful choice of friends and acquaintances - are necessary to build trust and perceptions of security in a environment of violence, fear and insecurity. This does not necessarily entail a breakdown of social capital, but rather a concentration of social capital in a smaller circle to which more importance is attached and of which the home is symbolic. Though many people acknowledge that the context of violence reduces social interaction, social relations are considered very important in being able to cope with violence and insecurity.

The same applies to formal social relations that are related to structural social capital; social organizations and formal networks of trust and cohesion that can be either productive or perverse in nature (McIlwaine and Moser 2001). Among mothers in Vila Cruzeiro, distrust of state security forces is salient as a result of the failure to provide security and the threat the police pose to the lives of these women and their children. Mothers therefore create alternative spaces of security based not only on informal relations, but also on formal social relations. Women draw a sense of security from their child's participation in education, activities at the community center and alternative values found in the church which could be seen as a gendered form of oppositional culture. Mothers also come to rely more and more on perverse social capital in the creation of spaces of security. While they tend to avoid interaction with gang members and people close to them, living in Vila Cruzeiro they are automatically part of an alternative network of rules and norms. Moreover they are generally more sympathetic towards the traffickers with whom they live on a daily basis than towards police who participate in indiscriminate raids on the community. Thus, though the gang is one of the main instigators of violence, they simultaneously and paradoxically contribute to a sense of security.

In their efforts to create spaces of security mothers are not only informed by structures, but their performances of relationship making simultaneously have an impact on these structures. In their informal relations, the circle of people they trust and with whom they interact is decreasing (though this widely varies between individuals). This means that there is not much of a base for collective action to challenge the persistent structural features that contribute to the violence in the community. At the same time, the social organizations they rely on in their creation of spaces of security have severe limitations with respect to guaranteeing safety and social mobility. Except for the AM, these organizations do not explicitly challenge the

existing environment of violence, or are even one of the main perpetrators of violence.

Thus, through their actions of creating spaces of security, mothers do not challenge the existing structures of domination, signification and legitimation that are at the base of the precarious environment that often makes their lives so difficult. And that make the creation of safe spaces a necessity in the first place. The distinction made between *rua* and *casa* and the increasing importance of the home as a space of security can be employed to explain why these women do not challenge existing structures. Action is largely limited to the private sphere of the house and focused on personal security. People do not (often) take to the streets to protest against the violence, as the street is associated with danger.[91] In fact, legitimizing to a certain extent the presence of the ruling gang and creating spaces of security that do not explicitly challenge police or criminal violence, mothers reinforce the existing structures that make these actions possible, or even necessary. As Giddens claims, "the flow of action continually produces consequences which are unintended by actors, and the unintended consequences also may form unacknowledged conditions of action in a feedback fashion" (1984: 27). Hence, mothers in Vila Cruzeiro add to the perpetuation of the cycle of violence, fear and security that was identified in Chapter 2, and unwillingly necessitate the creation of spaces of security in the future.

The structures of domination, signification and legitimation that have reinforced the militarization of policing and a law of the traffic inhibit the transformative power of mothers. An agent's transformative power is formed by the ability to choose, creatively apply and interpret different schemes. Not all actors, however, enjoy the same level of transformative power (Sewell 1992:20). While mothers do enact agency, embedded in persistent structures of domination they seem to hold little transformative power. The police and the local gang have more power than these women: they have the 'power to define', while the counter-discourses of mothers are rarely heard. These women are left with the rhetorical question: *Fazer o que?* (What to do?): *'What to do? You can't do anything; [just] keep your mouth shut [she grins]...every man for himself'* says Vanessa.[92] Clara, answering the question if she thinks the situation in Vila Cruzeiro will improve; *'No, I don't think so...[Because] nowadays...it is better organized. These things they sell here, you know? Me, you, a group of mothers, we are not going to make it better.'*[93]

As during my stay in Rio I have spoken to members of the organization *Mães do Rio* (Mothers of Rio) - women whose children have fallen victim to police violence and have united themselves to fight injustice – and being aware of the many active human rights groups in Brazil, including those centered around women, I want to know why there is no such thing in Vila Cruzeiro. When I ask Gabriela why there are no groups of women acting against, or challenging, the violence in the community she says; *'If you say anything about the police, they will come to your house and kill you. If you say anything about the* bandidos*, they will kill you. So, what to do?'* But if in other communities these kinds of groups exist, why, then, not here? I ask. *'Porque aqui é Vila Cruzeiro'* she answers.[94] Because this is Vila Cruzeiro.

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91  There are examples of protest against violence by residents of Vila Cruzeiro, however, these are few in number and size.
92  Interview with Vanessa, May 21, 2008
93  Interview with Clara, May 26, 2008
94  Fieldnotes, June 5, 2008

*'It will only get worse. I don't think [the situation] will ever improve.'[95]*

*'What we pray for most is that [the situation will improve]. I think it will improve, [but] we don't know when.'[96]*

# Conclusion

Brazil was declared a democracy in 1985. However, against the backdrop of institutional failure, impunity, inequality and social exclusion the state has failed to provide security to part of its citizens. As a result, the residents of *favela* communities in particular are often left in the hands of other armed actors, while they are at the same time subject to state violence. In Vila Cruzeiro, people are regularly caught in violent confrontation between the ruling drug gang and the police. Here, the police forces, traditionally assigned to protecting its civilians are seen as predators; violent, repressive, abusive, and corrupt. Instead, a local drug gang related to the *Comando Vermelho* is ruling the community, upholding an alternative social system based on coercion and fear.

In interaction between the gang, the police and the residents of Vila Cruzeiro a cycle of violence, fear, and insecurity is produced and maintained. This interaction is based on images the actors hold of one another and that are at the same time the product of this interaction. The police and the gang are creating, acting upon and reinforcing structures of domination, signification, and legitimation which have allowed for the militarization of policing and increasing presence of traffickers enforcing a 'law of the *favela*.' The cycle of violence is so persistent mainly because the police not only fails to guarantee security, but is often directly involved in the perpetuation of crime. At the same time, the 'war on crime' is used to legitimize repressive and indiscriminate policing that poses a serious threat to the lives of the residents. This leads residents to rely more and more on the traffickers. Thus, although the relations between gang members and residents are multiple and highly ambiguous, residents tend to be more sympathetic towards the traffickers with whom they live on a day-to-day basis. The traffickers use the negative image of the state to gain support from the residents, while state involvement in criminality sustains the presence of the drug gang. Hence, in interaction between police, gang and residents an environment of violence, fear, and insecurity is created and constantly reproduced.

Faced by these challenging and precarious circumstances, women trying to protect and provide for their children create spaces of security. To create these 'safe' spaces mothers cultivate, arrange and create social relations with other actors in the community. I claim that in a context of high-risk and violence, social capital plays an important but limited and ambiguous role in this process of coping. Informal and formal social relations carry and produce social capital and are therefore valuable to the creation of spaces of security. From information exchange, reciprocity, norms, rules and trust constituted through these relations a sense of security can be drawn. Strengthening and employing the relations with their children, relatives and a careful choice of friends therefore contributes to the construction of a sense of safety in the

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95  Interview with Juliana, May 14, 2008
96  Interview with Vanessa, May 21, 2008

face of violence. At the same time people negotiate their relations with social organizations in order to create spaces of security. Education is considered crucial to ensure a better future for children. It keeps them off the street and ideally provides a way out of the context of violence. Churches also take an important place in the coping strategies of mothers; many women see the church as a safe alternative environment in which to raise their children, a place where they learn 'the good'. Religion can be seen as a gendered form of oppositional culture; one that keeps youngsters out of gang life, or provides a way out of the traffic. The community center is also seen as a secure space to leave their children, and a place where they are offered alternative activities. In addition, it is platform to meet with other women and discuss problems they encounter. Moreover, the members of the neighborhood association are among the few people in the community challenging violence.

However, in the process of coping with violence in Vila Cruzeiro the role of social capital is imperfect for two reasons; it does not form a base for collective action and is partly perverse in nature. Mothers do enact agency; they are knowledgeable actors, drawing upon existing structures to create spaces of security and in turn affecting the existing structures. Nevertheless, these women hold limited transformative power, exactly because the existing structures are so persistent. The militarization of policing and the law of the traffic are based on the overwhelming power and physical superiority of both police and gang. Invoking fear upon the community, they hold the power to define the meaning of violence, and what is perceived normal conduct. Mothers therefore move away from the public sphere and tend to focus, more and more, on personal security. Through religious conversion, education and other cultural activities and sports, women do try to influence the future of their children. However, religious conversion as an emotional response to violence is a way to engage with traffickers, and one that leaves the violence largely unchallenged (Arias and Rodrigues 2006:58-59). Also, the education system in Brazil is marked by serious flaws. And though the neighborhood association shows initiatives to challenge violence, its existence depends on both the gang and the state. Thus, mothers find their efforts for long-term improvement of the lives of their children inhibited by serious obstacles, following from the inequality, social exclusion and discrimination that characterize the Brazilian state. In Brazil structures of domination are not only overtly present, in addition "power runs silently through discursive and institutional practices and severely limits the transformative capacity of individuals and collectivities" (Jabri 1996:83), mothers living in Vila Cruzeiro included. The remaining short-term focus on survival hardly leaves any room for long-term structural change.

Contributing to a better understanding of the above is the centrality of the home as a space of security in both a physical and a social sense. Because of the violence people are tied to their homes more and more and the importance of the home as a safe space is growing. While the street is associated with 'bad influences' and the danger of stray bullets, police violence and gang involvement, the home is associated with the 'righteous life' and is symbolic for the relation between mother and child. Mothers put much effort is binding their children to 'home', and thus to themselves. The significance of the home and its positive connotations sheds light on the tendency for people to be drawn inwards more and more and to withdraw from the public realm.

Thus, social capital among mothers in Vila Cruzeiro does not form a base to collectively challenge violence. In addition, social capital is partly perverse in nature. Though residents acknowledge the dangers and risks in their community, in the face of social exclusion and police violence people tend to invert social order and create the image of the community as a safe space; being 'at home' in the community. In the absence of trust in state security forces, even mothers partly rely on the gang to create a sense of security. However, this is not a very straightforward matter as the gang forms a threat to the wellbeing of their children, as do stray bullets resulting from

confrontations between police and gang. But faced by a lack of alternatives and a climate of fear and insecurity, partly upheld by the gang, its presence is often accepted or legitimated, fostering the existence of perverse social capital.

Trust and fear are decisive in performances of relationship making in insecure environments. In the absence of trust in state security forces, mothers rely on other formal and informal relations. Fear of police and gang-related violence leads these women to decide to concentrate on those relations where they can exert most influence, insecurity is smallest and trust greatest. To minimize risks, they withdraw from the public realm more and more and try to create spaces of security in the private sphere, while at the same time allying with other social organizations to construct a sense of security. Holding limited transformative power, these mothers do not challenge the existing structures and accept and to a certain extent legitimize the situation as it is. It is a cycle of violence, in which women have the feeling that they cannot do much more than create safe bubbles. Through these performances of relationship making they leave intact the cycle of violence and in a feedback fashion perpetuate the necessity of the creation of spaces of security itself. Though their efforts to protect and provide for their children might enhance short-term, personal security, or at least a sense of security; on the long-term it reinforces the cycle of violence, fear, and insecurity and leaves unchallenged the perverse and undemocratic situation as it is found in Vila Cruzeiro.

# Epilogue

Rio Janeiro is a city of extremes. Everyday again I was confronted with two of its paradoxical faces. Doing research in Vila Cruzeiro, while living in Santa Teresa – a bohemian neighborhood – asked much of my ability to switch between 'worlds', moods and atmospheres. Once, I was on the phone with a friend who was at Ipanema beach, while I was hiding from gunfire in Vila Cruzeiro. She asked me to join her, but I could not even have made it, had I wanted to, because it was impossible to safely leave the community. These extremes are what make Rio such an exciting and interesting place, but at the same time it often made me feel lost and confused. The journey home from Vila Cruzeiro provided the much needed time to come to terms with what I had heard, seen and experienced. Especially after a heavy shootout between the police and the traffickers, it always took some time before I could smile again. Though I have had wonderful times in Vila Cruzeiro, the injustice done to its residents and the sensation of it being a dead-end situation, often made me feel down-hearted. Knowing I could go back to my relatively safe home, while they did not have a choice but to live in the midst of violence. To my dismay, nobody in the wealthier neighborhoods seemed to know, let alone care about what exactly was going on in other parts of the city.

Going out in Rio's more prosperous neighborhoods, I met several middle-class Brazilians who did not understand why I would choose to go to a place like Vila Cruzeiro, and why I would care the least about the people living there. Usually they expressed the public sentiment that the repressive approach to policing *favela* communities is necessary to combat crime, and that its residents deserve this treatment because 'they are all criminals'. This one-sided image of *favela* residents, plus the humor and warmth of the people I met in Vila Cruzeiro, strengthened my motivation and kept me going despite repeated setbacks. The least I can do, I thought, is to let their voices be heard, and to counter the stereotyping of these people. Therefore, I sincerely hope to have provided an accurate account of these women's struggles to raise their children in the face of both police and criminal violence, and to have done justice to the stories they told me.

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# Appendix 1: Photos



*Photo 1: View over Complexo da Penha*



*Photo 2: Vila Cruzeiro*

*Photo 3: The caveirão as a screensaver*



*Photo 4: A bullet-scarred house (Photo: Mariana)*

*Photo 5: One of the many Pentecostal churches in Vila Cruzeiro*

# Appendix 2: Newspaper Article

## Bope finca bandeira na Vila Cruzeiro para anunciar a expulsão do tráfico

### Oitenta homens da tropa de elite, cujo símbolo é uma caveira, ocupam a favela

Fotos de Marcelo Franco

Camilo Coelho*

• Uma semana depois de iniciar a ocupação da Vila Cruzeiro, o Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais (Bope) hasteou ontem uma bandeira preta com uma caveira — símbolo da unidade — na parte mais alta do morro. Os policiais disseram que comemoravam a expulsão dos traficantes de drogas do local. Segundo eles, desde sexta-feira, não acontecem confrontos na favela. Os PMs ressaltaram que, na rotina militar, é comum o hasteamento de bandeiras como forma de demonstrar a ocupação do território.

Segundo a Polícia Militar, os traficantes da Vila Cruzeiro possivelmente fugiram para o Complexo do Alemão ou a Cidade de Deus.

Durante a cerimônia de hasteamento da bandeira, 40 policiais comemoraram gritando "caveira!".

— Nós assumimos a comunidade. Diante do Bope, o marginal sabe que precisa sair enquanto está vivo — disse o tenente Dias.

A bandeira foi hasteada na laje de uma casa em frente ao Grupamento de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais (Gpae) da Vila Cruzeiro. O Bope montou acampamento no Gpae, desde terça-feira, com pelo menos 80 homens. No prédio, foi instalado um ar-condicionado.

Ontem, os policiais derrubaram um muro de concreto usado como escudo pelos traficantes. Os moradores aproveitaram a presença da imprensa para reclamar que policiais atiraram no transformador deixando a favela sem luz. ■

*Do Extra

UM POLICIAL do Bope fotografa a bandeira com o símbolo da tropa estendida na laje de uma casa da Vila Cruzeiro

UM MURO de concreto, usado como escudo pelos traficantes, foi derrubado pelos policiais militares do Bope

*'Bope puts up flag in Vila Cruzeiro to announce the expulsion of the traffic', O Globo, April 22, 2008*