

# The Permeable Olympic Fortress

## Mega-Event Security as Camouflage in Rio de Janeiro

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■ **ABSTRACT:** This article reconsiders sport mega-event security in the context of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. The article essentially argues that the mega-event organizers used a security spectacle to camouflage Rio's politics of death in the many favelas and peripheral neighborhoods. Conceptually, this contribution centralizes different notions of spectacle and camouflage and situates both in the history of violent and racial policing of the poor in Brazil. Empirically, the piece explores, across three sections, how (1) the city was transformed into a spectacular fortress by adapting standardized mega-event security measures to the specific public security conditions in Rio; (2) the Olympic fortress was nonetheless selectively porous and permeable; and (3) the spectacle served to camouflage the otherwise deadly police deployments of socio-spatial patterns along lines of class and racial inequalities.

■ **KEYWORDS:** camouflage, mega-events, Olympics, police, racial policing, Rio de Janeiro, security, spectacle

On an early afternoon of Rio's Olympic summer in August 2016, I was sitting in the Special Forces' sleeping and locker room in Cidade da Polícia (Police City), one of the two Civil Police headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. The police officers, all dressed in black, were watching TV, training at the gym, or just waking up from a nap. The room featured some simply equipped bunk beds where the men rest between their deployments during their 24-hour shifts. Rio had prepared to host the world's largest sport mega-event by adopting globally standardized security measures to transform the city in a fortress. The Special Forces were scheduled for possible missions in the many favelas or mega-event-related operations. We engaged in a conversation about the Olympic security arrangements. "They besiege the city now so that the world doesn't see Rio de Janeiro's true reality. But after that, everything will turn back to normal: lots of shootouts, lots of dead, and lots of missions," one of the officers told me. "You see these military forces at the airport highway?" he said, nodding his head in its direction. "They cannot move from there. They cannot do anything. They are here for those who come from outside to feel safe. But you know what, that is of no use. Near where these military forces are deployed, the drug traffic controls it all."

In this ethnographic vignette, the officer talks about a process that I analyze in this article as the production of camouflaging that made specific aspects of security visible and, simultaneously, rendered invisible the routinized politics of death in the city's favelas and suburbs. I show that security politics in Rio de Janeiro follow specific socio-spatial patterns along lines of social inequalities such as class and race. The sport mega-event security architecture was inserted into



these scenarios in order to, on the one hand, secure the Olympic Games, but on the other, to hide the class and racial inequalities that define the city's bloody urban conflict from global audiences and local elites, and to uphold a façade of a safe Olympic city. Finally, I argue that the very ways in which the mega-event security provisions were organized merely repeated, and at times even intensified, Rio's long-standing urban conflict.

Sport mega-events like the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games can today be considered highly political and capitalist spectacles (Boykoff 2016). Since 9/11, sport mega-events have experienced security measures that are better known from the "war against terror," such as standardized militarization of public security, the establishment of camera surveillance, and the de facto isolation of sport venues from the rest of the city (Fussey and Klauser 2015a). These standards migrate from one host city to the next and are adapted to the local security conditions (Boyle and Haggerty 2009: 270). With these trends, security associated with mega-events has currently taken forms that more closely resemble modern warfare than urban policing (Bennett and Haggarty 2011: 1), which evoke what has been called Olympic "spectacular security" (Boyle and Haggerty 2009).

Within these tendencies of mega-event security normalization and technological invention, it becomes increasingly crucial to explore how such measures are implemented and adapted to host cities that already present high levels of urban security challenges, principally in the societies of the so-called "Global South" (Giulianotti and Klauser 2009: 53). There has been considerable research on the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, where sport mega-event security governance was carried out in persistent racially-divided and unequal social environments (Alegi and Bolsmann 2012; Cornelissen 2011; Eisenhauer et al. 2013; Fonio and Pisapia 2015; McMichael 2013).

Yet, because of the country's historically rooted racial and social inequalities, Brazil's World Cup edition and the Rio Olympics are exceptionally important to analyze. Most characteristic of Rio de Janeiro is a vicious circle of attack and response in which Special Forces, equipped with armored vehicles, assault rifles, and helicopters, invade communities causing immediate reactions by drug traffickers, equally well equipped with heavy weaponry, claiming numerous victims among the local residents, the drug traffickers and the police officers (Andreoni and Ernesto Londoño 2020). Everyday life for the nonwhite and poor populations in these territories is commonly interrupted by most violent forms of police controls, killings, and stigmatization (Alves and Evanson 2011; Duarte 2013; Grillo 2013; Puff 2014; Ramos 2012). In addition, most of the victims of Brazil's homicide epidemic are between 15 and 24 years old and in their majority black (FBSP 2016: 6). These dynamics are rooted in a modern Brazilian state project that has historically aimed at erasing the black Brazilian culture from the nation by both a politics of miscegenation that has sought to whiten the population, and a security apparatus that spreads death and destruction in the favelas (Alves 2018; C. Cardoso 2014; Nascimento 1989; Vargas 2012).

Conceptually, I develop my argument around the notion of spectacle for both Rio de Janeiro's everyday public security politics and the sport mega-event security provisions. While spectacle can and does configure different modes of power in distinctive settings and for different audiences—often as a reaffirmation of sovereign state power (Foucault 1977; Robb Larkins 2013, 2015)—I advance the idea that spectacle in relation to the mega-event is best comprehended as a security of camouflage. Commonly described, per *Oxford Dictionary*, as an act intended to "hide or disguise the presence of (a person, animal, or object)" or as "actions or devices intended to disguise or mislead," camouflage is best understood as a process through which we can analyze the manifold techniques of mega-event security politics in Rio. Spectacle as security of camouflage is an act then that aims to distract from something else, or as Ieva Jusionyte (2015:

116) argues, it “implies the use of one symbolic and material order to protect another from being recognized by blurring the boundaries between the two.”

Theorized as “necropolitics” in the introduction to this special section, Rio de Janeiro’s specific public security setting, in which police violence is carried out in performative and spectacular ways (Robb Larkins 2013, 2015; Savell 2016), black populations are especially and systematically targeted and routinely killed (Vargas 2012, 2016), and daily shootouts between the police, drug trafficking groups, and para-state militias (Arias and Barnes 2017; Fogel and Richmond 2019) made the organization of security before, during, and after Rio’s mega-events an urgent matter of scientific investigation. This became even more pressing after the election of far-right politicians Jair Bolsonaro as president and Wilson Witzel as governor of Rio de Janeiro, who discursively and actively support police killings and spectacular forms of security politics.

The rest of the article develops as follows: I first historically situate Rio de Janeiro’s racial urban security developments and expand the conceptual approach of spectacle as security of camouflage. Next, I lay out my methodological framework and situate my own status as a white, European, male researcher. Three main empirical and analytical sections then inform the conceptual development toward a security of camouflage: on spectacle, porosity, and camouflage. I conclude by revisiting these three elements, which go hand in hand and produce and maintain a repression-ready security state that follows socio-spatial patterns of race and class inequalities in Rio de Janeiro.

### **Spectacle, Porosity, and Camouflage in Olympic Rio**

A generation of Brazilian scholars has written extensively about Brazil’s and Rio’s public security dynamics, and this short piece cannot do justice to all those who merit acknowledgment here (see for example Zaluar 1999). What stands out in these works, however, is that most of the victims of the city’s daily shootouts are (not by accident) black, young, poor, and from favelas and the city’s outskirts. The conflict’s racial and class spatialization is powerfully described by the phenomenon of the “social accumulation of violence” (Misse 1999: 81) in which very early forms of state violence are directly linked to political and economic elites’ labeling of criminal behavior on nonwhite and poor populations and their territories (Fischer 2008: 155). While it is right to attribute much of how the Brazilian police are structured today and how officers act to the heritage of the military regime (e.g., Caldeira 2000, 2002; Mesquita Neto 2006), the very roots of this were laid much earlier. Rio de Janeiro’s security forces enjoyed a wide-ranging autonomy in which they could establish their own rules and imprison, beat up, and even torture suspected perpetrators (Fischer 2008: 154). This autonomy dates back to the times of slavery in which the police could arbitrarily enforce their power on enslaved people (Holloway 1993: 52).

When I once asked a Brazilian police officer why the police forces are so violent (mainly against black and poor people), she defended herself by answering that the police are just a mirror of Brazilian society. And indeed, what is engrained in the ways in which policing is carried out in Rio today reflects how “colonial and racist legacies” are embedded “in the Brazilian social order,” as the editors of this special section write, referring to postcolonial and feminist Brazilian literature. In particular, the inspiring works of Abdias do Nascimento (1989) and Lélia Gonzalez (1988) have promoted a much-needed critical analysis of how a modern Brazilian state-building project consistently erases the black Brazilian heritage in both popular culture as a project of whitening and of genocidal death politics. This persistence of racial and social othering reflects directly the ways in which urban life is structured by and through the constant controls and killings of black populations (Alves 2018). Following Jaime Amparo Alves’ (2018:

57–61) urgent analysis of policing in São Paulo, the police produce a racially informed social order by waging war against black bodies in spatially distributed territories (favelas and urban peripheries) through killings, so “police terror, then, becomes a tool for the spatial arrangement of racial difference” (see also Medeiros 2019).

The specificity in Rio de Janeiro is that the analysis of urban space must consider the heterogeneous distribution of social and racial residential segregation on both a micro and macro level. On the one hand, the micro level is comprised of a territorial proximity mixed with social distance between social classes. On the other hand, the macro level is structured by an increasing informal settlement on the outskirts of Rio (Ribeiro and Santos Junior 2017: 912). Across these micro and macro scales of urban segregation, there is also a heterogeneous distribution of racial diversity, which makes it difficult to refer to these spaces as “black” or “white,” yet in the course of colonial and contemporary Brazilian history, these spaces have been racialized as such (Calvo-González and Ventura Santos 2018; Magalhães and Ystanes; Roth-Gordon 2017, this issue). In fact, the segregated space and all the dynamics within it are best understood through the notion of “porosity,” proposed by Bruno Carvalho (2013: 10–13) in his book *Porous City: A Cultural History of Rio de Janeiro*. Using the example of the inner-city vicinity Cidade Nova, Carvalho traces back the historical development of the aforementioned urban segregation, yet argues that instead of referring to Rio as “divided” or other dichotomous terms, the city is better perceived as porous. Racially and socially unequal individuals, different religions, and cultural backgrounds transit, mix, and overlap throughout everyday interactions in historical and contemporary Rio.

This is particularly important for this article, as Rio’s public security reveals a completely different rationale for securing the mega-events than in any other host city before. In London 2012, an unprecedented security spectacle was articulated in relation to the discourse on global terror, youth gangs, and to ensure sponsors the tranquil staging of the Olympic Games (Armstrong et al. 2016; Fussey et al. 2011). Although risk analysis of global terrorism and the standardized mega-event security models were implemented in Rio, the “real” threat was considered to be the ongoing urban conflict and the supposed dangerous other, the young, nonwhite youth from the favelas.

Such socio-spatial impacts of mega-event security and surveillance arrangements have been analyzed through a Foucauldian framework at EURO UEFA 2008 (Klauser 2013, 2017) and the 2012 Olympics (Fussey 2015). These analyses foreground how security and surveillance processes are spatially managed and manage space, and advance that, de facto, Foucauldian disciplinary and security mechanisms (Foucault 2007), go hand in hand in mega-event security mobilizations. Although these are helpful tools for understanding how these mechanisms also played out in Rio, and indeed show some striking parallels, I here propose a different angle of analysis. Hence, I direct attention to notions of spectacle and camouflage that help bring to the fore a better comprehension of how the security strategies during the mega-event periods in Rio were organized.

Most famously, Michel Foucault (1977) has laid out that spectacle as sovereign power was used by the king to demonstrate his sovereignty by straightforward and public shows of strength. An example could be military parades through the streets, or the open torture and killing of convicted criminals. The king, in this sense, used spectacle as a form of power to remind his subjects that he had the power to decide who dies and who lives; in striking contrast to other forms of power (e.g., discipline), spectacle acts on an audience in order “to educate” that audience (Goldstein 2004: 25). Whereas spectacle in a Foucauldian sense is rather seen as a way for the state to punish and correct disorder in society, Daniel Goldstein (2004: 25, 182) develops this notion further and demonstrates in his ethnography of lynching in urban Bolivia that spec-

tacular violent performances can configure a mechanism of reclaiming citizenship—making visible what stays unseen in the shadows of a failing democratic rule of law and public services.

Relating this back to Rio, Erika Robb Larkins (2013: 565) has argued how spectacle as a means of “highly visible performances of state power,” plays out in frequent police favela invasions. The police forces promote their actions in mediated spectacles to send a strong message to the public on TV screens outside the favela, but reaffirm their image as ruthless officers within the community. At the same time, drug traffickers use the spectacular to reaffirm their power within the communities and transmit the image of the violent other to the outside (570). This makes much reference to spectacle as defined by Guy Debord (1992: 13), who understood it as a form of dominant order that exercises social control through mediating late capitalist consumption. Spectacles of violence in favelas normalize war while clouding the fact that realities in these territories are enmeshed with socioeconomic, historical, and cultural patterns (Robb Larkins 2015: 13; see also Leite 2012). This is indeed helpful in order to appreciate that mega-event security has transformed into a consumerist spectacle in its own right (Boyle and Haggerty 2009).

Nonetheless, I maintain that it is crucial to understand how both sport mega-event and ordinary security operations in Rio de Janeiro played out by considering different conceptions of spectacle all together. In this article, I add a layer to these ideas by stressing Rio’s mega-event security politics as an act of camouflaging. I draw upon Jusionyte’s *States of Camouflage*, in which she advances the idea that in the three border regions of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil, state agents such as fire brigades often use their official identities to make use of political authority while engaging in illicit activities, veiled by camouflage tactics. The central argument here is “that the logic of camouflage reveals how the state always already disguises the violence that it pretends to be separate from” (2015: 116).

In Rio de Janeiro, camouflage techniques have long been used by the local police when they are involved in “dangerous connections” (Misse 2006) to sell weapons to drug traffickers or ask for bribes, or when militias, formed by state agents, are extorting whole neighborhoods. Rio de Janeiro—and this must be said with the upmost clarity—cannot be comprehended if we do not consider camouflage politics in which state agents enact a performance of statehood to hide their involvement in criminal activities. By approaching the relationship between statecraft and criminality through the concept of camouflage, it allows us to foreground how “the predatory and brutal” is hidden “under the just and peaceful” so that techniques of camouflage can be considered the very “modus operandi of statecraft” (Jusionyte 2015: 116).

Linking this to spectacle as something that on the one side can radically direct the spotlights on specific incidents, and simultaneously, on the other side, can render other things invisible (Goldstein 2004: 16), camouflage is a helpful concept for understanding how spectacular mega-event security measures worked in Rio de Janeiro in both putting security operations on display in certain regions, while the very same security apparatus continued to perform highly spectacular police performances in others. What I essentially argue is that camouflaging best captures how the spectacular fulfills different purposes in different spatialities upon different audiences, yet always works as a reaffirmation of state power that hides, disguises, or puts on display.

### **Doing Research in the Olympic City**

Methodologically, this article takes advantage of Zoltán Glück and Setha Low’s (2017: 285–287) scalar approach to security. The authors investigate how security is produced socio-spatially on global, regional, national, urban, local, and bodily levels. Glück and Low distinguish between “security as a state of being” (the experiential and emotional domain) and “states of security”

(the configurations of state power and governance of security). They demonstrate how macro levels of security states, as well as micro levels of everyday practices and subjective and bodily experiences of security, are produced through socio-spatial strategies, that is, strategies that vary according to the social and spatial relations that they engage with.

Due to my privilege as a white, heterosexual, Northern European man and PhD fellow, financed by the Erasmus+ program, I had advantaged access to Rio's sport mega-event architecture and different police institutions in Rio's public security sector. Often in Rio, I was referred to as a "gringo", a term used in Rio to identify foreigners across the ranges of race and class (Moutinho 2006). Yet, there is no way of negating that being identified as a foreign, white, and hetero man came with tremendous advantages of access, treatment, and recognition. This, of course, always has an influence on my own reflections, judgments, and decisions in my research, as it also influences how others judge me, as Flavia Medeiros (2018) has shown in her work as a black woman from Rio de Janeiro doing fieldwork with police officers.

On the one hand, I was able to carry out ethnography in the government's command and control centers fully equipped with cutting-edge security, surveillance, and communication technologies, and to visit the FIFA and IOC security center for interviews. On the other hand, I gained access to different police departments of the Civil Police. The Brazilian Constitution defines that in each state there is a Military Police force that patrols the streets and represses crimes, and a Civil Police force that functions as juridical police that does the investigative work to solve crimes. The Civil Police command the police stations where crimes are registered, and oversee a myriad of specialized police departments like the homicide divisions. I was able to have access to one neighborhood police station and could pass day and night shifts with police officers. In addition, I spend considerable time on a bus that was transformed into a mobile police station to register crimes within the Maracanã security cordon and with the Civil Police's Coordenadoria de Recursos Especiais (CORE) (Coordination of Special Resources).

I use a mixed methods approach that combines ethnography with qualitative open interviews, with interviewees ranging from street officers to high-level security officials in Rio's mega-event security program and the city's public security apparatus, as well as walks through Rio's event spaces. Access to these localities—and more importantly—to police officers of different hierarchical positions and functions, was granted to me when I was on a preliminary research visit in 2013. Once I arrived for the actual start of the research period in April 2014, I was handed from one responsible person to the next, and the Civil Police directory left the decisions to allow my visits and interview requests to each responsible department respectively. Like this, I was able to use my contact networks to do fieldwork in 2014 (World Cup), 2015, 2016 (Olympics), and 2019 (Copa América). A lot of the trust gained throughout the fieldwork was also surely attributed to taking the perspective of the police officers seriously and, more than that, to look at their side of the dynamics.

Doing research with the police also means to consider that these officers are often involved in situations where they are criticized, are declared as enemies, and are themselves both the targets and articulators of violence (Pauschinger 2019). Rio's police kill and spread fear more than many other police forces, but are also killed much more frequently than in many other cities. Thus, what the police do and say must be considered within these complex and "paradoxical social positions as people entrusted to keep society safe, even as they themselves struggle to defend themselves and their families" (Denyer Willis 2015: 16–17). The best method to take these considerations seriously is then to look at the police more closely. Ethnography with such a lens contributes essentially to investigate aspects of the police that would otherwise be difficult to access: the police officers' particular motivations, their fears, and their emotions related to being police and carrying out policing (Fassin 2017: 8).

## Spectacle: Building Rio's Olympic Fortress

The mega-event preparations brutally transformed Rio de Janeiro's urban landscape. Beside the deepening of the racialized socio-spatial divisions through favela evictions and resettlements of poor populations to aggregate Olympic venues (e.g., Gaffney 2010), to guarantee the event's security, Rio employed different strategies. One of these was the implementation of the much-studied Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora (UPP) (Pacifying Police Unit), a militarized security strategy to occupy and install permanent Military Police units in 38 communities in areas that were important for both the World Cup and the Olympics (see Salem and Bertelsen, this issue; Sørboe, this issue; Gilsing, this issue).<sup>1</sup> The other security strategies that were more officially and explicitly linked to the mega-events can be coalesced into three simplified pillars: (1) the "integration" of the many different security agencies involved in the mega-event security planning; (2) technological surveillance and communication strategies; (3) and militarized policing.

To address the first pillar, the Brazilian government implemented what it named the Sistema Integrado de Comando e Controle (SICC) (Integrated Command and Control System), which aimed to bring together the ministries involved in the mega-event security, the distinct police institutions, the military, and the intelligence agencies, among others—in short, all institutions and agencies involved within the mega-event security. To materialize this strategy, the Brazilian authorities founded the Secretaria Extraordinária de Segurança em Grandes Eventos (Special Secretariat for Mega-Event Security), which oversaw and took the lead in coordinating all security-related action plans, and situated it as a branch of the Ministry of Justice.<sup>2</sup>

The second pillar is comprised of infrastructures that physically and technologically supported the SICC by constructing Centros Integrados de Comando e Controle (CICC) (Integrated Command and Control Centres) from which the mega-event security operations were coordinated. The system is an adapted military strategy that militarizes Brazil's public security sector even more, and is increasingly managed by economic means (B. Cardoso 2013, 2019).<sup>3</sup> Beside one main center there were mobile and local CICCs at and around the sport venues during the World Cup, and during the Olympics, additional regional CICCs, one in each Olympic venue, complemented the mega-event security strategy. Camera surveillance was one of the main supporting tools to create "situational awareness" during the events, so as to be able to implement a model of "permanent monitoring" (interview, 1 September 2014).

The third pillar—the militarized policing strategies—is the one that is most relevant to this article. The policing strategies at the World Cup and the Olympics differed in some details, but it can firmly be said that the policing model was a merger between traditional policing strategies in Rio de Janeiro and what is well-known from the globalized standards of mega-event security: lockdown strategies and the isolation of the urban areas around sport venues produced the famous security islands with checkpoints, metal detectors, and a plethora of state and private security employees (e.g., Fussey and Klauser 2015a).

The policing of the rest of the city was undertaken in a venture of the Federal, Military, and Civil Police, the National Public Security Force, the Armed Forces, and the Municipal Guards. Overall, the Olympics featured 88,000 security agents that included 41,000 military personnel (SECOM 2016: 4). The different police institutions in tandem with the Armed Forces patrolled the relevant neighborhoods, and as such, Rio was transformed into a spectacular militarized security fortress.

Taking two examples of how the city and the sport venues were spatially militarized and fortified, it is worth looking at the Copacabana neighborhood and the Maracanã Stadium. Copacabana is maybe the most visible and famous area in Rio de Janeiro, also well known for its high-class apartments; its old, rather white and traditional population; and its favelas at the

**Figure 1:** Fencing, National Guard, metal detectors, and CCTV at the volleyball arena  
(© Dennis Pauschinger, 2016).



back of the neighborhood, squeezed into the mountains. Racial disparities are visible here when those who serve are in their majority nonwhite and those who sit at the tables in their majority white. Copacabana was crowded with international visitors, during the World Cup fan fest and when it featured the Olympic volleyball arena. Walking around the block and observing the ongoing dynamics during both events, I was stunned to see the extent to which police forces and the military were present: military cars, fully equipped with soldiers, all relevant police forces standing guard, and warships that patrolled the beach, as well as military helicopters that constantly overflow the region. The access points to the volleyball arena were fenced, securitized with national guards, controlled with metal detectors, and surveilled by CCTV (Figure 1).

I registered similar observations at the Maracanã Stadium. Many hours before the inauguration of the Olympic opening ceremony, circulation was gradually restricted. The many different police forces and the military patrolled and guarded the region to prepare for the arrival of spectators, athletes, and heads of state (Figure 2). Here, too, helicopters overflow the area, and ticket checkpoints, security perimeters, CCTV, and metal detectors were intended to control and manage the entry to the stadium.

These mega-event security arrangements transformed Rio into an Olympic fortress, and resonate with claims by Brazilian authorities in the days before the event. At one of the press conferences at the Open Media Centre in Rio de Janeiro, on 10 June 2016, a few days before the World Cup's start, journalists insistently asked General José Carlos de Nardi if Rio would be prepared to host the World Cup. Seemingly annoyed, he answered:

Rio de Janeiro has the right conditions because Rio de Janeiro's [Military Police] is *very good*. You can stay calm because they [the Military Police] are going to overcome any problem. Look



at it carefully. I am saying it again: the Armed Forces, with their contingency troops, . . . with their infrastructure and strategies, are already acting . . . to demonstrate how a globalized security is forming a trio: the public security institutions, the Ministry of Defence and the Intelligence Agency, creating an ensemble called Security of the World Cup. Because Brazil is certain, dear Sirs, to be prepared in general terms to confront whatever problems may occur.

Different dimensions of this quote are of analytical importance. The first is that it is reminiscent of how sport mega-event security is inserted within a global expectation and standards that I have laid out. One of the main aspects of security at such events is the approach to a totality of security, or as Colin Bennett and Kevin Haggerty (2011: 1) write, “Each mega-event now exhibits a ‘total security’ effort akin to planning and deployment in times of war.”

A second important point is that these total security efforts fulfill a specific function at such events, which convey notions of spectacle as the form that conditions everyday life in a mediated society (Debord 1992), and attract the audience to the dramatic and legitimizes common materializations of “political and economic power” (Robb Larkins 2015: 13). The transformation of Rio into a fortress, marked by a spectacular security performance, is as much a consumption of security as it is, in Foucauldian terms, spectacle as sovereign power that here serves as a means to manifest state dominance. The scenes described above are here reminiscent of military parades where all the available arsenal of military power is shown to impress and transmit strength—both in materialistic terms and discursively by the general’s statements. In accordance with this, in a press kit from the Brazilian military, distributed before the World Cup, General Jamil Megid pronounces that they are “ready to deliver security for the foreign tourists,

**Figure 2:** Military patrols in the Maracanã surroundings at the 2016 Summer Olympics  
(© Dennis Pauschinger, 2016).



football delegations and heads of state present at the World Cup.” Mega-event security here was produced as spectacle to demonstrate state power and show an international and local elite that “everything was under control,” and that at any moment, the state could act.

### **Porosity: The Selectively Permeable Fortress**

Despite the “total security” spectacle in Rio, the fortress was permeable and porous. On the one hand, permeability is here understood as in its very sense of being able to disrupt a given stronghold or wall. The permeability of the mega-event security architecture is tellingly compared to Franz Kafka’s (1926) novel *Das Schloss* (*The Castle*) when Pete Fussey (2015: 219) writes, “where despite an imposing appearance and seeming omniscience . . . edifices of Olympic security do not always live up to their appearances of scale, cohesion and capacity.” On the other hand, porosity is here comprehended in the sense of Carvalho’s (2013) notion that although certain urban spaces may be forbidden for specific racial and social classes, there is a certain porosity in which these categories overlap. In two steps, I analyze how permeability and porosity played out in Rio.

First, referring to the permeability of the fortress, I want to draw attention to the Maracanã region once more. On 18 June 2014, the day of the group match in which Spain played against Chile, 85 Chilean fans broke through all the security checks, ticket controls, and highly secured FIFA security perimeters and invaded the stadium. The fans reached as far as the FIFA press-room within the Maracanã where most of them were detained. After the incident, it was widely discussed who was responsible for the failure and how such a slip could happen. Although the integration concept between all security forces was a major project for and among the security officials, it seems that cooperation between state and private security was a problematic issue. Similar issues also happened in London 2012, where Olympic security operations were shaped by inherent tensions among heterogeneous organizations and across different temporalities and multiple scales (Fussey 2015: 213). These inherent tensions came to the fore in Rio during the World Cup in numerous situations, as shown in the case of the Chilean invasion. Specifically, these tensions in Rio were also marked by the preexisting institutional conflicts among the police forces.

Second, this directly leads to the aspect of porosity and to race and class relations. After a World Cup game and a long day of work, many officers from the different police institutions would hang around on the green space in front of the mobile police station, positioned in the security perimeter outside the fences of the stadium. Shortly after the matches, informal and non-FIFA licensed and nonwhite street sellers walked around the stadium. I was standing around with Civil Police officers when one of them approached the group. To my surprise, the officers bought some peanuts from the informal seller. When one police officer in the group said to a higher ranked colleague, “Oh, the chief is buying illegal stuff,” he answered in a laughing tone, “Fuck it, it’s just peanuts.”

What can here be observed is this porosity of class and race relations in Rio de Janeiro. As Carvalho (2013) has pointed out, the back and forth between segregated urban space is always possible and happens still today on a daily basis. Think only of the numerous house servants, security guards, and chauffeurs that by matter of obligation transit between the favela and peripheries and the high-class apartments of economically prosperous Brazilian households. Throughout the many years I have been in Brazil, these possibilities of transiting through and across segregated spaces on micro and macro scales were for me always a matter of choice, but for the working poor were often permitted only in specific conditions of labor.

During the mega-events, this was stunningly visible in the sport venues, where the general cheering public in the stands was mostly white, while those selling merchandise and serving food were people racialized as nonwhite. Rio's security forces saw boys from favelas as falling into the common suspicious categories (Salem and Bertelsen, this issue) and barred them from entry at the mega-event security perimeters. Within these security perimeters, private security officers were checking tickets while municipal guards were bringing young black men to the mobile police station in which I was doing fieldwork—young men whom they considered unfit for this white mega-event consumerist festival at that particular moment. In contrast, I could walk more or less freely around, as someone corresponding with the stereotype of a legitimate and white spectator of a World Cup game. The peanuts scene is a reminder to these relationships in which the security perimeter around the stadium was highly secured before the game but became accessible and porous once the game was over and the police decided “to let in” those who served their needs.

A similar approach related to my own positionality in my research came to mind when I realized how I was able to permeate many of the secured spaces. During the Olympics, the highly militarized and policed space around the stadium on the day of the inauguration ceremony was normally not accessible. However, I was able to navigate easily around the Maracanã together with a Civil Police officer, who helped me infiltrate the security perimeters. Armed Forces close to checkpoints at the Olympic inauguration day did not prevent my access, and even informed me in which direction I should walk in a friendly tone and with good humor. At the same time, I could walk around behind the scenes of the Olympic Park arenas and was not checked once for any special credentials. I even accessed areas where basketball players who had just played a game were waiting for the shuttle to their team hotel. The Olympic Park, fully controlled by CCTV, was not able to detect me wandering around in areas I was not allowed into. On that day, I was able to bring things through the metal detector system at the national force checkpoints, without triggering any alarm.

I attribute this free navigation of mine to my status of a white foreigner, who is not targeted as the culturally and racially constructed other in Brazilian society (Alves 2018; Misse 2006; Vargas 2016). The project of whitening Brazil and erasing black Brazilian heritage by a politics of cultural and spatial exclusion and killing (Nascimento 1989; Vargas 2012), however, continued throughout the mega-events. Data produced by Terre des Hommes (2016: 10) shows that the city government actively “cleared” Rio de Janeiro's wealthier neighborhoods in the South Zone from street children, or tried to prevent youth from the peripheries from coming into these areas. The report highlights that police killings increased before the tournaments and continued during the events: 92 shootouts were reported during the Olympics alone (19).

### **Camouflage: “They Armor the Events”**

Sitting in the Civil Police headquarters in Rio's center in August 2016, my talk with the officers goes smoothly. We chat about the Civil Police's participation in the Olympics security operation, when suddenly one of them looks at his cell phone and says: “It came in via WhatsApp just now. One national force officer has been shot in Maré.” The ambience in the room changes immediately from tranquil to tense. Now we hear a voice message that the other wounded officer had launched into the chat group and that had quickly made the rounds among the police officers. His voice is hysterical, and he gives an account of how they had missed the right road and suddenly were shot at. The next morning, local TV stations broadcast a live police operation in the favela complex Maré, the one near to the main airport road, which had been occupied by federal

troops. The police operation is directed from within the regional fusion center that features a special operations room for the Olympics. The incursion of the favela Vila do João in the Maré complex provokes three dead and three suspects are arrested. Meanwhile, heavy daily shootouts in other favelas occur, and a photograph showing a creek of blood running down a favela alley goes viral in the activist networks. The Olympics, however, continue.

This field vignette puts on display how the traditional production of spectacular police operations in Rio continued during the Games. However, it also trains attention on how the spectacle in Rio de Janeiro acts on different audiences with differing intentions and purposes. Rio's mega-event security was not only infused with failures but also distributed selectively along lines of racial and social inequality. The security measures unfolded in some spots of the city—important as tourist zones like Copacabana—with vigor; while other spatialities (e.g., the outskirts and favelas) were not “secured” at all but instead experienced state power through militaristic police invasions. In other words, we must understand the deployment of massive amounts of soldiers and CCTV in some areas, and the absence of those in other areas, for exactly what they are: racially selective notions of spectacle, which I conceptualize as security of camouflage.

When I was observing what was going on within the CICC during the Olympics, I wondered why the public relations department was taking photographs of the flickering screens with surveillance camera images. When I saw the photos on the secretary of security's official Twitter feed, accompanied by explanations and descriptions of these images, I understood that their intention was to reproduce the security spectacle. A tweet before the start of the Olympics said the Olympic security was now all set up, with the hashtag #SecureGames (Figure 3). The pro-

**Figure 3:** “Security scheme for the Olympic Games is already on the streets #SecureGames” (Secretary of Security of Rio de Janeiro, Twitter, 5 August 2016).





duction of spectacle was accompanied not only by the many public statements of the security authorities but also by the work of the public relations department of Rio de Janeiro's security secretary. The press department was trying to produce images of the security spectacle and publish them with the same clear message as many of the security operations were themselves intended to convey: a feeling and a sensation of total control. These messages were directed to those audiences visiting the Olympics and not to those who were suffering from the consequences of the security operations (Figure 4).

This reproduction of the spectacle had a specific purpose during the mega-events. It is not only a way to demonstrate state power and the totality claim of secure events but simultaneously an attempt to camouflage a conflict that has the potential to produce images that do not fit into the shimmery world of the Olympics. As a Civil Police officer narrates:

I don't think that the state distributes the resources according to necessity. Unfortunately, here in Rio we see that the state's resources are distributed according to visibility . . . You can verify that there are areas in the interior of the capital or in the Baixada [Baixada Fluminense is a neighbor district of Rio de Janeiro city] and in the suburbs that present a higher criminal record however have a reduced number of police patrols because these areas have less visibility . . . So, they try to transform the South Zone, which is a tourist zone, into a mirror . . . and this leads to a false sense of security. When a tourist comes to Rio, principally for this kind of event, he will not get to know reality. He will get to know a reality that was produced to preserve the image of the security of the state. (Interview, 24 October 2014)

**Figure 4:** “Images from the helicopter that overflies the Maracanã and that are transmitted in real time to the screens of the #CICC” (Secretary of Security of Rio de Janeiro, Twitter, 26 July 2016).



Police operations are here recognized as a way of hiding away normalized dynamics of violence, while at the same time rendering the security that is intended for the mega-events *visible*. From an analytical point of view, all these actions are techniques of a security of camouflage. This security of camouflage is a performance of political authority by blending with uniforms, while at the same time blurring the boundary with criminality (Jusionyte 2015: 131–132).

Two other quotes from fieldwork interviews with Special Forces police officers add another layer to this. The first said, “They armor the events. They armor the forces, they are armoring. What is not armored continues bad and gets worse every day” (interview, 13 June 2014). It forcefully demonstrates how the mega-event security spectacle was employed to secure certain event spaces but at the same time served to occlude the violence in other territories. The armoring practice is a way of deciding what should be seen, when, and by whom (Goldstein 2004: 16). I received the second quote a year after this interview from a Special Forces member who explained:

Now that I am in the CORE . . . the difference is that I see a completely distinct reality. It’s as if I was in a daily war for real. When I worked in the police station, I already thought that some things were wrong, but I didn’t see half of what I see now. You understand? It’s like, you know, the reality we know from the South Zone it’s a world totally apart, man. It’s a world that I even like, but it’s really not the reality of Rio de Janeiro. Here it’s a hell. If you go to the North Zone, you see communities totally abandoned by the governors, things are infernal. (WhatsApp voice message, 15 September 2015)

The specificity in these interviews is not the mere decision of hiding or rendering something visible through spectacle; it is a mechanism that does both at the same time. The security of camouflage then is characterized by the power to actively decide that it *pretends* in spaces of whiteness to be a protective force, whereas it *hides* away at the same time the repression and violence in those spaces of nonwhiteness and social disparity while simultaneously staging spectacular violent actions to reaffirm its state power in both the favelas and the wealthy zones, acting on different audiences.

The newly appointed Special Forces officer on his side, however, now sees what he beforehand ignored or did not want to see. Moreover, the invisible that has always existed turned visible for him. Yet, police officers of the Special Forces, who are essentially those that produce spectacle in the respective territories, who procure a way out of their everyday emotional dilemma of sensing their very police work as a vocation but expose themselves to deadly risks while carrying out their work, are thus both the products and producers of Rio’s urban conflict (Pauschinger 2019).

The world that the security of camouflage intended to hide appeared in another interview very clearly. The interviewee, who worked in a favela of Rio’s North Zone in a public health post, told me that his institution had to be closed numerous times during the World Cup because of the police interventions: a stray bullet killed a sleeping child, and the inhabitants of the neighborhood were exposed to the steady urban conflict and kept in the crossfire of the police and the drug trade (interview, 2 September 2014). Thus, these politics of death were hidden through the mega-event spectacle as camouflage, but restricted to abandoned regions. However, with the Olympic closing ceremony, the spectacle as a form of camouflage fell off, and spectacular security politics returned with their normalized patterns of violence throughout the city—and not only in the abandoned spaces as described by the police officer. All too often, these missions are horrific incidents that would not have fitted into the “New World,” as the IOC advertised the Rio Games.

In Rio de Janeiro, however, security politics as spectacle ultimately means a politics of death (see Magalhães and Ystanes, this issue) that continues to cost lives in the communities and of

police officers. The newly elected far-right Brazilian president and Rio de Janeiro's Governor Wilson Witzel, have changed the nature of the spectacle. They promote police violence and killing as the core of their security politics, which equally enacts a performance of state power, but as one that does not try to hide state violence but rather showcases it to produce terror among the favela inhabitants. In 2019, Witzel filmed himself in a Special Forces helicopter while the police officers were shooting into a favela during a police operation to picture him as a politician who acts against the drug traffic and supports the local police.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have analyzed how we can possibly understand the security politics in Rio de Janeiro before, during, and after the mega-events. I have argued that security politics in Rio follow specific socio-spatial patterns along lines of class and racial inequalities that are historically rooted in projects of policing and killing the poor. Security politics in Rio are routinely carried out by using different forms of spectacle as a reaffirmation of sovereign power by multiple actors in the field. Mega-event security has transformed the city into a fortress, however, putting on display a security spectacle that I have conceptualized as a security of camouflage that has hidden away the brutal, oppressive, warlike police missions in the favelas and outskirts.

Despite the many forms of security mechanisms such as the total control, security perimeters, CCTV surveillance, and the use of militarized policing, the fortress was porous and permeable. The forms of spectacular security operations and the traditional routines of killings were still operating and important. Thus, the organizers produced a security of camouflage to render unseen and invisible the official security politics—their politics of death. When Jules Boykoff and Pete Fussey (2014: 267) assert that the 2012 Summer Olympics in London have left a legacy of “a repression-ready security state,” in Rio de Janeiro this state has been more than ready before the mega-events and has acted for many years beforehand. However, the mega-events have better equipped this repressive security state and helped refine its performance. These kinds of legacies are the ones that the mega-event officials, as well as those responsible for public security policies, do not want the wider public to see and want to render invisible.

Mega-event security politics certainly provoke consequences that are invisible for the wider audience, but very visible and insecure everyday dynamics for the affected populations. According to the Amnesty International (2016: 13) report *Brazil: A Legacy of Violence*, the Olympics have not made the city safer for everybody; rather, the police killings and the violent repression of protests are the real legacy of the Olympics. Although these dynamics have been a common companion of Rio's public policies, many of the abuses have had a direct link to the mega-events, as they have intensified before the inauguration and after the closing ceremony.

These silencing strategies through killings are inscribed in Brazil's history as a continuum, from slavery to the well-known bloody massacres of organized police violence against prisoners (Carandiru), street kids (Candelaria), and unarmed favela residents (Vigário Geral), to today's daily favela incursions in Rio de Janeiro. The 2018 assassination of black Brazilian city council member and human rights activist Marielle Franco, who was born and raised in the favela complex Maré, symbolizes the preliminary climax of such death politics. The persons who pulled the trigger were part of a militia, yet who ordered the killing is still unknown. The recent killing of George Floyd in the United States has revealed the necessity of a more global and public discussion about racist police brutality and shone a light on the pervasiveness of racism in organizational structures of police forces. The highlighting of such institutional racism by civil society has raised calls for deeper public transparency within police structures. Such transpar-

ency would benefit police forces too, brokering relations to repair trust with communities and to protect their own officers.

There is no pause in Rio. While this article is finished amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazil emerges as the world's new epicenter and Rio de Janeiro's government obscuring the number of deaths (Lima 2020). Accompanying the pandemic concerns, is a marked increase in favela operations of 27.9 percent by police in April 2020 compared to the same month in the previous year, with a parallel increase of 57.9 percent in the number of people killed in the course of these missions. One of the latest victims was again a 14-year-old black boy from the Salgueiro Complex in São Gonçalo, a city of greater Rio. João Pedro Matos Pinto was shot when Special Forces stormed the favela, his body taken away by a police helicopter. It was only the following day his parents found his body in the morgue (Ruge 2020).

The insights gained from this article hopefully spark more scholarly investigations into the camouflage mechanisms of both contemporary security politics and at sport mega-events at large. Both too often work with the shimmering and shiny, while they hide the brutal under the supposedly just and peaceful. Camouflage, so I have argued, plays an important role within these mechanisms as the *modus operandi* of ordinary and sport mega-event security politics in Rio de Janeiro and beyond.

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## NOTES

1. A thorough analysis of the outcomes and effects on and within the 38 communities with UPPs is beyond the scope of this article, but there is a variety of studies (written in Portuguese) that examine the UPPs in detail (for English articles, see, e.g., Denyer Willis and Prado 2014; Richmond 2019; Saborio 2014).
2. The Ministry of Defence also had an important role in the mega-event security and implemented its own command and control centers, yet had representatives in those run by the Special Secretariat for Mega-Event Security.
3. The CICC based in Rio de Janeiro is an especially interesting case, as it was planned independently of the mega-event cycle. Yet, the development and size of the CICC can be attributed to the Olympics. The initiative to build the CICC is without doubt inserted in a general turn in Rio's urban planning and security strategies that lays toward smart city and resilience discourses (see also Gaffney and Robertson 2018; Luque-Ayala and Marvin 2016).

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