Necropolitics Beyond the Exception: Parapolicing, Milícia Urbanism, and the Assassination of Marielle Franco in Rio de Janeiro

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Abstract: Engaging with the assassination of black city councillor Marielle Franco, the paper discusses how "milícia urbanism", a formation of power and capital accumulation driven by parapolice networks, intensifies the necropolitical governance of Rio de Janeiro. Specifically, this necropolitics is characterised by liaisons among armed, political, institutional and economic actors that enable acts of violence with impunity, aggravating the conditions of violence for subaltern populations. Dialoguing with the Black Studies debate on necropolitics and works on violent democracies, the paper situates milícia urbanism within a postcolonial genealogy of parapolicing. Ever since the colonial plantation, it is argued, parapolicing has been integral to a power technology that avoids sovereign accountability while serving white capital interests. Whereas previous accounts of necropolitics have centred on the sovereign exception, this genealogy furthers an understanding of necropolitics "beyond the exception". The paper concludes that Marielle Franco's black-feminist politics has been vital to contestations of this necropolitics.

Resumo: Discutindo o assassinato da vereadora negra Marielle Franco, o artigo analisa como o "urbanismo milciano", uma formação de poder e acumulação de capital impulsionada por redes de parapolícia, intensifica a governança necropolítica do Rio de Janeiro. Especificamente, esta necropolítica se caracteriza por ligações entre atores armados, políticos, institucionais e econômicos que permitem atos de violência com impunidade, agravando as condições de violência para as populações subalternas. Dialogando com o debate dos Estudos Negros sobre necropolítica e trabalhos sobre "democracias violentas", o artigo situa o urbanismo milciano dentro de uma genealogia pós-colonial de parapoliciamento. Desde a plantação colonial, argumenta-se, o parapoliciamento tem sido parte integrante de uma tecnologia de poder que evita a responsabilidade soberana ao mesmo tempo em que serve os interesses do capital branco. Enquanto os argumentos anteriores de necropolítica se centraram na exceção soberana, esta genealogia promove uma compreensão da necropolítica "além da exceção". O texto conclui que a política negra-feminista de Marielle Franco tem sido crucial para as contestações dessa necropolítica.

Keywords: necropolitics, violence, Rio de Janeiro, urban governance, sovereignty, Brazil

Introduction

On 14 March 2018, Brazilian city councillor Marielle Franco and her driver Anderson Gomes were fatally shot in downtown Rio de Janeiro, sparking vigorous protests worldwide. Marielle, as she was commonly referred to, grew up in Rio's

favela conglomerate Maré and was a black, lesbian mother of an adult daughter. She was an important figure in black feminist and favela movements and a member of the left-leaning Party for Socialism and Liberty (PSOL). She campaigned for reproductive rights and against sexualised violence, for affordable housing and health care for poorer populations, for the promotion of African-Brazilian culture and LGBTIQ+ rights, as well as for democratised urban security politics. Here, Marielle was among the most vocal critics of the militarised police interventions in Rio's peripheralised neighbourhoods, which cause hundreds of deaths each year, mostly of young black men (Loureiro 2020; Neuenschwander and Giraldes 2018; see also Bueno and de Lima 2019; Hirata et al. 2021). Thus articulating a series of highly contentious issues from what Brazilian black feminist Djamila Ribeiro (2017) has called an intersectional "*lugar de fala*" (locus of speech or standpoint), Marielle was "undoubtedly one of the most gifted leaders of the new Brazilian left", as Neuenschwander and Giraldes (2018:133) state.

The assassination took place during a deep political crisis in Brazil. The most influential project of left-wing politics to date—the Workers' Party (PT), which between 2003 and mid-2016 had supplied the presidents—was in a state of decline after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, while conservative, neoliberal, and far-right forces were struggling for hegemony, using aggressive propaganda and increasingly undermining the principles of the rule of law (Anderson 2019; Franco 2018a; Neuenschwander and Giraldes 2018). In contrast, Marielle stood for a new generation of politicians who—more rigorously than former presidents Lula da Silva and Rousseff—advocated for the democratisation and demilitarisation of society, giving a voice especially to black women and subaltern queer people (see Loureiro 2020). In so doing, she championed policies against which the evangelical right, in alliance with militarist and landlord lobby groups, already in the mid-2000s declared a full-blown "culture war" (Messenberg 2017; Silva and Larkins 2019). More specifically, the killing took place a month after interim president Michel Temer had authorised a federal military intervention in the state of Rio de Janeiro, which Marielle Franco was tasked to observe in her capacity as councillor of Rio's Municipal Chamber. Her persistent criticism of the lethal military operations in favelas was perceived as deeply provocative by many who advocated for or benefited from the reigning regime of urban governance.

Occurring in an intensely contested conjuncture, the targeting of a black, queer, leftist woman further needs to be seen against the backdrop of the longer-term racialised and patriarchal architecture of political "spaces of appearance" (Butler 2015) in Brazil.[1] As black-feminist writings have shown, black women have long been ascribed a subordinate position in society (Perry 2016; Ribeiro 2017; Smith 2016a, 2016b). Dominant actors, therefore, perceived Marielle's entry into a central place of politics as a transgression of her "proper place" (see Caldwell 2007), a perception further compounded by her favela background, lesbian identity, as well as leftist and feminist orientation. As Marielle's partner Mônica Benício explained in a memorial letter, "being a black, lesbian, feminist, favela and leftist woman in a parliamentary house full of rich white men, who are symbols of the sectors that represent all the political backwardness of this country, was an act of persistence all along" (cited in Teixeira 2018).[2] Conservative

politicians, in particular, had frequently attacked and reviled the city councillor. Even after the assassination, several prominent politicians, including Jair Bolsonaro, refrained from expressing their condolences. Two far-right politicians even publicly destroyed a street sign in commemoration of Marielle in downtown Rio.

Marielle's political life, then, formed what her assistant Fernanda Chaves called a "*conjunto de coisas*" (cited in Freire et al. 2019), a whole "assemblage of things" that profoundly challenged hegemonic formations of power and politics. While, at the time of writing, it is still unclear who was behind the killing, the authorities assume that the assassination, which was carefully prepared and clearly targeted, was carried out by professional killers associated with Rio's illicit and rapidly expanding parapolice groups known as "*milícias*" (see Benmergui and Gonçalves 2019; Manso 2020; Otavio and Araújo 2020). Regarding these groups, the investigations have brought to light a series of liaisons that involve policemen, politicians as well as religious and economic actors who, for instance, collaborate in vote-pooling schemes or the illicit trading of real estate. Marielle Franco herself had intimate knowledge of Rio's illicit milícia networks. She had worked as a parliamentary advisor to the then PSOL state deputy Marcelo Freixo when he headed a parliamentary investigative committee on Rio de Janeiro's milícias in 2008—and, facing death threats, went into temporary exile in Europe.

Attending to the presumptive involvement of extended parapolice networks in the targeting of an insurgent black woman calls for scrutinising the "necropolitical governance" (Alves 2018), and specifically the "gendered necropolitics" (Smith 2016a), at work. In his study of São Paulo, Jaime Amparo Alves (2014) uses the term "necropolitical governance" to designate historically shaped forms of control and state terror that produce massive death and suffering among black communities in urban peripheries (see also, regarding Rio de Janeiro, Vargas 2018). As Alves, Christen Smith (2016c), and others have shown, parapolice groups with ties to state institutions have long been integral to the necropolitical governance of Brazilian cities. Such parapolice activity has intensified the gendered conditions of violence. For instance, young black men, as well as queer, trans and homeless people, have often been the primary targets of killings, while black mothers have suffered a range of long-term consequences (Alves 2018; Rocha 2012; Smith 2016a). In Rio, gendered necropolitical governance has been intensified and reconfigured particularly by expanding milícia networks, or what Leandro Benmergui and Rafael Soares Gonçalves (2019) call "*urbanismo miliciano*": a milícia-driven system of extraction, investment and control that involves "the illegal appropriation of public land and its allotment, mass construction of buildings, and real estate and financing operations through informal credit" (Benmergui and Gonçalves 2019:382; see also Hirata et al. 2021).

Engaging with the assassination of Marielle Franco, then, can bring into relief how necropolitical governance and milícia urbanism are mutually imbricated. Various writings on new armed actors in Latin America have diagnosed new "security orders" or "patterns of sovereignty", which Desmond Arias and Daniel Goldstein (2010) conceive as manifestations of "violent democracies" (see also Arias and Barnes 2017; Davis 2009, 2010). While directly speaking to milícia urbanism, these discussions have bracketed, however, how the governance of Latin

American cities is shaped by colonialism, racism and patriarchy, as writings on necropolitics situated in the interconnected fields of black studies, black geographies and postcolonial political anthropology have pointed out (Alves 2018; Silva 2009; Smith 2016a, 2016c; Thomas 2019; Vargas 2018). From this perspective, the analytic tools used in the former strand of writings are insufficient for examining the forms of power and violence to which a black, lesbian, insurgent mother from a Brazilian favela is systematically exposed. These writings usefully bring into focus, though, what Javier Auyero (2010) calls "clandestine connections", meaning the often informal or illicit political and economic exchange networks among state, political and private actors that endow these actors with authority, political clout and immunity from prosecution. In the course of the investigation of Marielle Franco's assassination, a range of such connections have become newly visible.

Making productive use of the different analytic foci of violent democracies and necropolitics, as well as the frictions between these approaches, in what follows, I reframe clandestine connections as elements in a postcolonial/post-slavery technology of power that is epitomised by parapolicing and has been reinvigorated in milícia urbanism. This technology, I contend, is not well captured in terms of shifting forms of sovereignty, a notion figuring prominently in both writings on violent democracies and necropolitics. Instead, I understand parapolicing as part of what I have called the "technology of dependency", a technology that exceeds even the sovereign exception (Hutta 2019). In what follows, I first outline how sovereignty has been understood in the debates mentioned. Outlining how milícia urbanism has reconfigured the necropolitical governance of Rio, I then zoom in on the—now largely stalled—investigations in the wake of Marielle Franco's assassination. This leads me to discuss the longer-term genealogical threads that connect parapolicing in the contemporary conjuncture to the social and spatial context of colonialism and the plantation. Here, I call attention to how parapolicing has long facilitated necropolitical uses of violence that evade systems of accountability, exceeding even the exception. Returning to Brazil's current necropolitical conjuncture, I conclude by fleshing out how Marielle's situatedness within subaltern favela activism and black feminism has inspired ongoing—though highly precarious—ways of contesting necropolitical governance in Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere.

From Shifting Sovereignties to Sovereign Necropolitics

The question of sovereign power has occupied both works that focus on new armed actors in the strand of violent democracies and those seeking to theorise necropolitics. In the first strand, Diane Davis' (2009) essay "Non-State Armed Actors, New Imagined Communities, and Shifting Patterns of Sovereignty and Insecurity in the Modern World" is exemplary. Drawing on Charles Tilly's post-Weberian account of violent state-making, Davis understands sovereignty as classically constituted through the state's monopolisation of the means of violence and the simultaneous establishment of citizen-government ties. In the context of neoliberalisation, she suggests, the sovereign formations through which modern

nation-states took shape were profoundly deterritorialised through expanding economic networks that operate at urban and transnational scales. In this process, new formations of sovereignty have emerged in connection to sub- and transnational territories, where clandestine connections blur the lines between different kinds of armed actors (state/non-state, public/private, licit/illicit).

Exercising sovereignty in the late-modern world, on this account, is premised both on controlling the means of violence and on effectively enrolling subjects into territorialised forms of authority. Such a conception is used here as a heuristic for gathering a range of phenomena—including territorial control exercised by police, paramilitaries, private security, vigilantes, or gangs—under the rubrics of "formations of sovereignty" (Stepputat 2015) or "contested sovereignties" (Sieder 2011; see also Bobea 2010; Davis 2010). While this use of the notion of sovereignty allows authors to discuss changes in political and spatial orders across diverse contexts, it is often tied to a rather wide-ranging view on the means through which power and authority are established. For instance, it is often not specified precisely how power is enacted, who is affected, or how a "sovereign" order differs from other formations of power and authority. In these respects, sovereignty remains somewhat elusive, which is also signalled by its frequent substitution with umbrella terms such as "violence-based authority", "violent order", "rights to rule", or "territorial dominion".

In analytically placing the legacies of colonialism and the plantation centre-stage, works on necropolitics have shifted the focus towards specific technologies through which sovereignty is "performed and thus embodied" (Thomas 2019:14) and how it is thereby racialised, sexualised, and gendered. The very grammars of democracy and sovereignty, on this view, have been structured around forms of gendered antiblackness that perpetuate the social divisions formed in the context of slavery (e.g. Alves 2018; Silva 2009; Smith 2016c; Vargas 2018). Deborah Thomas, for instance, while also noting that "sovereignty is best understood as a dynamic practice, and that therefore there is no static constellation to which 'it' refers" (Thomas 2019:5), identifies a series of techniques that sovereign power has deployed and accumulated across different moments of "conquest, settlement, and colonial exploitation and development common to the New World" (Thomas 2013). Among these, she highlights "spectacular techniques" of punishing that already during the colonial era targeted enslaved African and indigenous populations, "displaying tortured and dismembered bodies in order to discourage breaches of the hegemonic order" (ibid.). In a similar vein, discussing targeted assassinations carried out by police-linked death squads in São Paulo's Fundão da Zona Sul neighbourhoods, Jaime Alves (2018:59) points out that these killings often take place "in public spaces such as squares and streets rather than in spaces hidden from sight", suggesting that "the spectacle of death is a defining feature of state sovereignty". Christen Smith (2016c:48) moreover scrutinises the sexualised and gendered dimensions of spectacular violence and how they performatively "demarcate gender/race/class/sexuality lines throughout the city", thus also licensing mundane forms of exclusion.

These accounts of spectacular enactments of sovereignty expand and rework Michel Foucault's (1995) description of torture as a means of sovereign power in

the European age of absolutism. They moreover pick up on works such as Agamben (1998, 2005) that, drawing on Carl Schmitt, posit the state of exception as foundational of sovereign power and necropolitics. When discussing how, "in the Brazilian racialised regime of law, state sovereignty relies on the uncanny capacity of state agents to terrorise black communities and produce dead black bodies", Alves thus invokes Carl Schmitt's definition of the sovereign as "he who decides in [sic] the state of exception" (Alves 2018:8; see also Smith 2016c:49).[3] It is on such an analytic tack that authors also adopt and expand Achille Mbembe's (2003) notion of "necropolitics", which centres on sovereign uses of spectacular violence and the state of exception in the service of the killing and exposure to death of racialised populations in the context of colonial occupation (e.g. Alves 2014; Loureiro 2020; Smith 2016c).

In thus fleshing out the pervasiveness of violent spectacles and the state of exception in post-plantation societies, these works engage a genealogical approach as developed by Foucault that scrutinises the emergence and permutations of power technologies. Such an approach renders sovereignty analysable as a mode of power that is not only contingent but also historically situated and associated with specific forms of knowledge, practice and embodiment, distinguishing it from other—though potentially coexisting—technologies such as discipline or liberal governmentality (see Hutta 2019; Mountz 2013). Moreover, refracting works by Foucault and Agamben through engagements with slavery and racism, works on necropolitics in the Americas move beyond Eurocentric genealogies. Besides drawing on Mbembe's (2003) account of necropolitics in the context of colonial occupation, they engage with the discussion of antiblack dehumanisation in the wake of chattel slavery inspired by Frantz Fanon, Saidiya Hartman, Orlando Patterson, Frank B. Wilderson III, and others (Alves 2018; Smith 2016c; Thomas 2011, 2013; Vargas 2018).[4] This discussion has also centred on the ways in which black women specifically are dehumanised through being exposed to sexualised violence and the "un-gendering" of their bodies when treated as chattel (Hartman 1997; see also Douglass 2018). In thus reworking the genealogy of sovereign power, Black Studies writings on necropolitics emphasise in particular that the exception of black bodies from rights attached to modern conceptions of the human should not be conceived as spatially and temporally circumscribed, but rather as "*always in place*" (Smith 2016c:50), forming the very grounds on which discourses of democracy and the harmonious nation have been founded (see also Silva 2009; Thomas 2013).

While writings on violent democracy tend toward a heuristic post-Weberian understanding of sovereignty, then, works on necropolitics in the Americas build on and rework a genealogical approach inspired by authors such as Foucault, Fanon, Mbembe, and Hartman. Where these latter works highlight the sovereign exception as a condition that is "always in place", though, the very notion of "sovereignty" arguably comes under pressure. This is already apparent in Mbembe's (2003) text, where he characterises colonial uses of violence in sub-Saharan Africa as "not subject to legal and institutional rules" (Mbembe 2003:25). Such violence, Mbembe argues, "is not a legally codified activity" (ibid.).[5] According to the author, codified uses of sovereign violence, as described by Foucault, are

replaced in the colonies by "pure slaughter without risk or instrumental justification" (Mbembe 2003:25). Works focusing on antiblack terror in the wake of the Middle Passage and the American plantation push this analysis further, noting that such terror does not necessarily pass through the logic of the "ban" as described by Agamben. Smith, drawing on Denise F. Silva (2009), thus notes that "it is because black people were never considered human to begin with that the state feels empowered to commit genocidal acts" (2016c:44; see also Sexton 2010; Wilderson 2010).

To what extent can we speak of "sovereign" uses of violence, then, where violence dispenses with any legal codification or the decision on the exception? Drawing on Mbembe (2003), we might respond by positing the colonies themselves as paradigmatic spaces of exception, which—according to Mbembe—are systemically excepted from *ius publicum*, the European juridical order.[6] In a similar way, the dehumanisation of black people in the context of slavery might be understood as an exception that "is always in place" in the sense of a permanent state of exception that serves to assert sovereign power. Alternatively, we might stretch the very notion of sovereignty to encompass any de facto formation of colonial and postcolonial power, akin to Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat's (2006) heuristic notion of "de facto sovereignty", understood as a "form of authority grounded in violence" that is "tentative and always emergent" (Hansen and Stepputat 2006:297; see also Wenner 2020).[7]

While each of these approaches has its analytic merits, I offer an alternative way forward in the remainder of this paper—for two main reasons. First, even dehumanising uses of violence in Brazil have often deployed the sovereign technology of legal codification in order to affirm the sovereign order. Posing antiblack violence as per se arbitrary in the sense of "not a legally codified activity" eclipses this technology, along with their partial continuities with sovereign power in the metropole. Second, while the colonisation of Brazil and the Brazilian plantation have undoubtedly been premised on widespread arbitrary and uncodified uses of especially antiblack violence, such violence has often operated in tension with and by suspending sovereign techniques.

Instead of either theorising any use of necropolitical violence in terms of the sovereign exception or stretching sovereignty's genealogy to encompass all kinds of practices through which authority is exercised, I suggest complementing the necropolitics–sovereignty nexus with a focus on dependencies. More specifically, I propose that what is referred to as "clandestine connections" in writings on violent democracies might productively be conceived as an embodied power technology organised around racialised and gendered dependencies that is genealogically distinct from, yet imbricated with, sovereign (as well as disciplinary and biopolitical) power. In Rio's necropolitical formation, I seek to show, a technology of dependency complements the violent spectacle and the legal exception with forms of invisibilisation and an ethos of vigilantism, both of which are integral to parapolicing and milícia urbanism. To flesh out the operation of such a more-than-sovereign, though state-supported, technology of power, the following section turns to the assassination of Marielle Franco.

"Quem mandou matar Marielle?"

Marielle Francisco da Silva, as Marielle Franco was formally called, and her driver Anderson Pedro Mathias Gomes were fatally shot from a moving car in the Estácio district in Rio's Central Zone as the 38-year-old city councillor was on her way back from a meeting of black women. Her assistant survived the attack. Since March 2018, the question "*Quem mandou matar Marielle?*"—"Who commissioned the murder of Marielle?"—has been at the centre of numerous initiatives campaigning for an investigation into the crime and a valorisation of Marielle's legacy.[8] This question has been explicitly directed at politicians and public authorities held responsible for delays and failures in the investigation. More than denouncing individual failures, this question targets what, in a declaration on the assassination by the NGO Human Rights Watch (2018), is called the broader "climate of impunity in the state of Rio de Janeiro, which feeds the cycle of violence".

While it is often noted that impunity can facilitate violence by impeding systems of accountability, it has remained less clear which power mechanisms are at work in suspending accountability or rendering its application selective. Following Hansen and Stepputat (2006), we might be tempted to identify the work of sovereign power and the state of exception wherever impunity manifests.[9] As I seek to illustrate in what follows, though, where parapolice networks foster impunity and the invisibilisation of illicit activities, this often has to do with the work of embodied dependencies.

Specifically, the investigations of Marielle Franco's assassination have brought to light a series of racialised and gendered liaisons related to milícia networks in Rio de Janeiro's West Zone. On the one hand, the investigations have shown that virtually all armed and political actors that have come under scrutiny have intimate attachments to networks running violence-based extraction, investment and vote-pooling rackets in the West Zone, a stretched-out, largely low-income region of mostly residential and some industrial areas (Araujo and Cortado 2020). On the other hand, a close reading of these revelations shows that the power technology at work in these networks is designed, performed and embodied in ways that facilitate the killing of subaltern subjects, thus exposing milícia urbanism's necropolitical underpinning. To unpack the operation of this necropolitics, I will first interrogate how milícia urbanism has reconfigured formations of power and inequality in Rio and then examine some of the networks of actors revealed by the investigations.

Milícia Urbanism in a Necropolitical Key

Milícia urbanism in Rio's West Zone has emerged from the city's uneven social geography, which has long been marked by racialised and gendered class cleavages. Historically, white populations have tended to reside in better-off neighbourhoods in Central and South Zone districts, whereas black and brown people form the overwhelming majority in the disenfranchised peripheries in the city's North and West Zones as well as the precariously serviced favelas scattered across the city (Campos 2010; Vargas 2006, 2018). These cleavages have been fuelled by the racialised stigmatisation of favelados and other peripheralised communities as latently deviant and criminal "dangerous classes" (Campos 2010), harking back

to the 18th and 19th centuries when white fears of an autonomous black city animated regular martial police raids in black communities (Chalhoub 1988; Holloway 1993).

Racialised inequalities have also been gendered. For example, black women frequently perform precarious care work as maids, cleaners or housekeepers for white South Zone residents (Rolnik 2007; see also Caldwell 2007). Moreover, while young black men are often seen as embodiments of "dangerous blacks" (Vargas 2006), black women, throughout Brazilian history, have systematically been exposed to multi-layered conditions of violence and stigmatisation. For instance, to legitimise lethal military operations in favelas dominated by drug-trafficking organisations, prominent politicians have stigmatised black women as enemies of the state who nurture criminals (Rocha 2012; Smith 2016a). Moreover, hegemonic actors have deemed violence legitimate whenever these women are said to transgress their "proper place" in society, which is constructed around images of domestic service, sexual availability, and social subordination (Caldwell 2007; Perry 2016).

As concerns state power, this multiply uneven geography has been supported by a systemic informalisation of the ways in which peripheralised neighbourhoods are governed, allowing for arbitrary and highly selective forms of intervention (Fischer 2008). Such informalisation also shows, for instance, in public institutions' avoidance of investigating or prosecuting police killings (Denyer Willis 2015). Moreover, informalised governance has fostered what Matthew Richmond (2019), drawing on the violent-democracies approach, describes as diverse coexisting "security assemblages" in the peripheries that, while creating forms of local order through armed control, also co-produce the conditions of violence and insecurity. In these assemblages, armed control and the provision of services and infrastructures are mediated by networks of actors that engage in political and economic exchanges. These actors include, for example, the members of illicit gambling networks (*jogo do bicho*) active in periurban low-income neighbourhoods; the drug-trafficking organisations that since the 1980s have based their retail infrastructure in favelas; as well as parapolice groups such as the milícias (see Alves 2020; Arias and Barnes 2017; Campos 2010; Vargas 2006).

While drug gangs, in particular, have absorbed most public attention, parapolice groups also have long been integral to Rio's urban governance. Among many others, they have included the "*esquadrões da morte*" (death squads) of the military dictatorship and the "*grupos de extermínio*" (extermination groups) that were active in the 1980s and 1990s in the Baixada Fluminense and had direct ties to the police as well as influential politicians or merchants (Alves 2020). Death-squad violence has victimised especially young black men as well as queer and trans people, while at the same time terrorising entire communities. Black mothers, in particular, have suffered from the consequences of losing their sons, adding to the quotidian state-sanctioned violence that black women face daily (Rocha 2012; Smith 2016a; see also Douglass 2018). Parapolice groups have thus been formative of Rio's gendered antiblack militarised governance, where public and private, state and non-state, formal and informal actors jointly establish violence-based forms of control (Campos 2010; Smith 2016c; Vargas 2018).

Piggybacking on earlier generations of parapolice groups, Rio's current armed actors referred to as "*milícias*" have both intensified and reconfigured the city's necropolitical governance.[10] These actors first emerged in the 1980s in the West Zone's south-western area around Jacarepaguá, where low-income communities are juxtaposed with luxurious condominium settlements (Arias and Barnes 2017; Benmergui and Gonçalves 2019). Initially composed of local members of the militarised police and firefighter forces, they started out in the low-income neighbourhood of Rio das Pedras as "anti-crime" vigilantes, using extortion and lethal violence to usurp residents' associations, levying taxes for residents and local businesses—benefiting from Rio's uneven geography and informalised governance, which has systematically distanced swathes of urban dwellers from access to rights, services and infrastructures (Gay 2017). In the 1990s and early 2000s, as privatisation and deregulation measures associated with free-trade and austerity politics further softened sovereign state control, these vigilante groups developed into extended, though still neighbourhood-based, multi-actor networks that began monopolising the trading of all kinds of goods and services (Zaluar and Conceição 2007). Since the mid-2000s, similar networks mushroomed across the West Zone and adjacent regions, correlating with an explosion of reported cases of blackmailing, torture and disappearances, continuously extending and adapting their repertoires of violence and profit-making (Cano and Duarte 2012).

Today, the milícias are estimated to control around a third of Rio de Janeiro's neighbourhoods, more than any of the city's infamous drug-trafficking organisations. They are active even in several favelas of Rio's North Zone and the adjacent Baixada Fluminense region. Some of them collaborate even with drug traffickers of the Terceiro Comando Puro (Alves 2022; Hirata et al. 2021). Running minibus transport or garbage collection as well as the distribution of gas and cable TV, milícias increasingly also intervene in such matters as oil distribution pipelines, sand extraction, shrimp fishing, and even health-care and social-housing provision —apart from trafficking arms and drugs (ibid.; Müller 2021).

This massive upscaling of parapolicing networks was enabled by intense collaborations among various actors. Apart from members of the police and the militarised firefighters, these actors have involved primarily local and regional politicians that benefit from the milícias' capacities of vote-pooling (Cano and Duarte 2012). Thereby, milícias have exerted considerable influence on urbanisation processes and urban politics. Controlling neighbourhood associations and government programs of social housing, as well as running sectors of the local and regional construction, extraction and service economies (Araujo 2019; Benmergui and Gonçalves 2019; Müller 2021), they form part of what Rivke Jaffe (2013) has called a "hybrid state". In such a hybrid state, criminal organisations, politicians, police, and bureaucrats "share control over urban spaces and populations" (Jaffe 2013:735), variously implicating urban populations within these hybrid entanglements.

Significantly, though, while Jaffe, in her study based in Kingston, Jamaica, relies on the notion of "variegated sovereignty", I argue that Rio's milícias have displaced and complemented sovereign techniques. For in routinely "disappearing" victims and obstructing investigations by harshly sanctioning any communication

about killings (Cano and Duarte 2012), they effectively complement the "spectacular display of the black body in pain" (Smith 2016c:187), a strategy of sovereign power, with elaborate techniques of invisibilisation and obfuscation. Moreover, milícia power has relied on embodied forms of control that hark back to the racialised and gendered discourse of "dangerous blacks", which has long undergirded police and death-squad violence alike (Alves 2018; Smith 2016c; Vargas 2006). This embodied dimension shows in the milícias' harsh sanctioning of "*vagabundagem*". This morally laden notion, which also permeates police interventions, refers to various illicit behaviours that are distinguished from those of decent and upstanding residents ("*moradores de bem*"). As Tássia Mendonça (2014) shows in her discussion of residents' experiences with the milícia active in the West Zone neighbourhood of Batan in the late-2000s, the notion of "vagabundagem" metonymically links drug dealing, drug use or stealing to subaltern blackness, as expressed particularly in the dress and hair style associated with *funk* culture, as well as to sexual and gender dissidence and expressions of extreme poverty (see also Cano and Duarte 2012).

Compared with drug-trafficking organisations, the milícias' policing of vagabundagem indexes a distinctive feature in the imposed security assemblage. Favela-based drug traffickers, largely black men, while violently imposing local forms of dominion, contest state power in the context of "the principle of *enmity* that informs civil society's and the state's relation to them [i.e. black men]", as Jaime Alves (2018:169) has noted. This means that when they enter into armed confrontations with the police or retaliate and protest against lethal interventions in favelas—for example, by setting city buses on fire and blocking avenues—this cannot be separated from a sense of opposition to the state's long-term war against "dangerous blacks". By contrast, Rio's milícias, by and large, have not been targeted by the state's racialised enmity. While occasionally also entering into conflict with state actors, they instead tend to reinvigorate such enmity, at least inasmuch as their militaristic vigilantism is premised on the rigid control of subaltern blackness and queerness, and on local police battalions' support (Zaluar and Conceição 2007). Drawing on Smith (2016c), the (in-)security assemblage enacted by milícia urbanism might therefore be characterised as a new kind of "genocidal assemblage" that aggravates the conditions of violence for subaltern populations.

Moreover, as the rapidly expanding milícias are growing more diverse and increasingly enter into conflicts with rivalling armed groups, the gender profile of targeted killings is changing. Now, women from peripheral neighbourhoods are frequently killed when liaising with the "wrong" actors, which reveals "the male patriarchal legal-illegal dimensions of power of the political-criminal world", as José Cláudio Souza Alves (2022) suggests highlighting the hybridity of state power. Moreover, pressure on insurgent political engagement has intensified, extending to any politicians who challenge milícia power. This was testified in 2016 when nine political candidates running against the milícias' candidates were assassinated in the Baixada Fluminense ahead of the municipal elections (Martín 2016; see also Albuquerque 2020). At the same time, there has been a surge in death threats against, and killings of, black women, LGBTIQ+, or indigenous leaders who make insurgent claims within wider spaces of political appearance.[11]

Thus reconfiguring urban governance and embodied regimes of control, then, the spread of milícia urbanism has intensified necropolitics in Rio. Considering this multifaceted intensification of the conditions of violence and how it affects specifically black, female, queer and politically insurgent subjects from urban peripheries contextualises the assassination of Marielle Franco, as she was situated precisely at the crossroads of intersectional subalternity, spatial peripherality and political insurgency. Let us turn, then, toward the investigations carried out to date by public authorities and journalists, which bring into relief how the clandestine connections that are constitutive of Rio's hybrid state operate as part of an embodied, necropolitical technology of power.

Clandestine Connections

To begin with, there are strong indications that professional killers associated with milícia networks were directly involved in the killing. This is signalled by various details concerning how the killing was prepared and carried out, including the highly skilled use of a specialised weapon and a cloned car, which mirrors other homicides of contract killers associated with Rio's milícias. Given the timing of the assassination, some commentators conjectured that local parapolice groups sought to assert their power in relation to federal state actors by carrying out a high-profile assassination amid a security operation that purported to assert sovereign state control (see Manso 2020). This hypothesis illustrates how parapolice groups might be able to partake in local formations of authority that are discontinuous with federal-level sovereignty. At the same time, though, there are indications that the killing was contracted by actors with close connections to both parapolice groups and wider political and institutional circles. Conspicuous details, such as relevant CCTV cameras having been turned off, point to a wider-ranging network of actors that operates through covert forms of communication and exchange. The ramified lines of investigation have brought out a whole range of such—confirmed and potential—clandestine connections that involve parapolice groups, police forces and politicians. I can only offer a glimpse into some of these interdependencies to illustrate how they work towards suspending systems of accountability while also forming part of embodied mechanisms of power.

Since March 2019, the retired policeman Ronnie Lessa has been under arrest. The prosecutors accuse him of having carried out the shooting from a car driven by an ex-policeman, who is also under arrest. Prominent representatives of Rio's police forces have portrayed Lessa as a solitary perpetrator who killed Franco due to his disdain for minorities. While this hypothesis already signals the salience of the crime's embodied dimension, federal investigators consider it more likely that he was hired by politicians who simultaneously helped maintain his long-term impunity. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that Lessa used to work as a contract killer who was hired especially by contraband organisations, a fact now supported by evidence. Simultaneously, Lessa had several businesses, collaborated closely with a so-called milícia in the neighbourhoods of Rio das Pedras and Gardênia Azul in Rio de Janeiro's West Zone, and had close ties to institutional,

political and economic actors. Some of these ties, especially to the police, go back to Lessa's work in the 1990s for Rio's special operations military police unit BOPE, which specialises in the extermination of alleged members of drug trafficking organisations. But already before entering the police—in 1989, at the age of 18—Lessa had joined the infamous Scuderie Le Cocq, one of the first death squads of the military dictatorship. Building on the experiences and ties developed through his work for the death squad and the BOPE, Lessa developed a series of clandestine liaisons with local politicians and traders especially through his key role in the parapolice group known as Patamo 500, which was formed in the late 1990s and was active until the mid-2000s. Patamo 500 carried out numerous contract killings as well as illegal incursions in favelas (Costa and Ramalho 2019a; Freire et al. 2019; Soares 2020).

The impunity Lessa enjoyed over decades despite directly being involved in a number of serious crimes derived, as Bruno Paes Manso (2020:198) has suggested, from his connections to the very institution of law enforcement tasked with investigating such crimes. Through his lucrative work as an elite killer as well as his involvement in contraband and extortion rackets, Lessa was able to make a sizeable fortune. He lived in a luxurious apartment in Rio's West Zone seaside district of Barra da Tijuca—in the same condominium as Jair Bolsonaro, which has given rise to speculations around the potential involvement of the current president himself in the killing of Marielle Franco. Therefore, we must assume that part of the rich income Lessa generated through his lethal services was distributed to whoever helped secure his immunity from prosecution, a kind of exchange long known in the region (Araujo and Cortado 2020).

The figure of Ronnie Lessa illustrates several aspects that characterise the kinds of dependencies at work. First, the fact that Lessa was able to transpose some of the violent techniques developed, trained and exercised in Scruderie Le Cocq and BOPE to the parapolice groups epitomises an intimate conviviality of state institutions and informal violent actors. Second, Lessa's case illustrates the broader networks of actors that support and benefit from parapolicing and that are constitutive of what Jaffe (2013) calls a "hybrid state". Typically, these actors include, for instance, politicians striving for electoral success, traders of illicit goods fending off competitors or criminal investigations, and further parties who seek to take vengeance, pursue gains, impose authority, or secure territorial dominion over urban areas (see Araujo 2019; Arias and Barnes 2017). These networks can also be understood as emerging from "clandestine connections" in Auyero's (2010) sense, as they skilfully elude broader visibility and public accountability (see also Auyero and Mahler 2011). Third, these hybrid entanglements demonstrate how the parapolice practices thus fostered by institutional affinities and clandestine connections can be mobilised as part of embodied political and economic projects that transcend individual parapolice actors' immediate material or territorial interests. Before coming back to the intimate conviviality of state and parapolice actors, let us dwell on this last aspect and look at how the political entanglements of some of the actors targeted by the investigations also index longer-term political and economic projects that underlie the gendered necropolitics at work.

Political Entanglements

Two months after the assassination, a witness accused the city councillor Marcello Siciliano of having hired an ex-police officer and head of a milícia in Rio's West Zone to carry out the murder. According to the denunciation, Siciliano, who was affiliated with a Christian-right party, sought to impede Marielle's political engagements with the local community of a district dominated by milícias, as these engagements diminished his political influence. At the same time, however, evidence of a cover-up of the actual crime by Rio's investigating police authorities grew. Therefore the federal police became involved in the investigation and soon presented evidence of another potential instigator of the attack—Domingos Brazão, a former member of Rio de Janeiro's audit office and a political rival of Siciliano. Brazão, a petrol station entrepreneur and also a right-wing politician, might have tried to take out his competitor by engineering falsified testimony that simultaneously diverted attention from the actual clients of the assassin. In this context, Rio de Janeiro's most notorious group of contract killers, the "Escritório do Crime" (Office of Crime), has also been named as a potential per-petrator (CartaCapital 2019). Active since at least 2004, the Escritório do Crime, which—like Patamo 500—is formed around ex-police officers of the BOPE, at the time of writing, is accused of 19 murders and has close ties to a milícia in Rio's West Zone district of Jacarepaguá (Extra Online 2019). Should the Escritório do Crime have carried out the assassination, it cannot be ruled out that they also col-laborated with Ronnie Lessa, given the activities of both Escritório do Crime and Lessa in the same region.

In further investigations, Siciliano and Brazão have likewise been proven to have direct contacts with parapolice groups in and around Jacarepaguá, where the sphere of influence of both politicians is located—and where today's milícias net-works first emerged. Even more: Siciliano and Domingos Brazão's brother Chi-quinho Brazão, in their functions as vice-president and president of a district commission for municipal affairs, respectively, are accused of involvement in the forgery of real-estate contracts in the region. In light of this, a bill introduced by Marielle Franco in the Municipal Chamber of Rio to assist low-income populations in gaining access to housing in areas of informal housing may have been a thorn in either Siciliano's or Chiquinho Brazao's side—especially given Marielle's community engagement in the milícia-dominated neighbourhood of Gardênia Azul, near Jacarepaguá (see Ramalho and Lang 2020). Or, Brazão himself could have been entrusted within his party MDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement) to have the councillor murdered out of revenge. For Franco's political mentor Marcelo Freixo had initiated an investigation against the cattle rancher and former president of the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro Jorge Picciani, also from the MDB, which led to Picciani's arrest. Picciani, however, died of cancer in May 2021.

However, Brazão's commissioning of the crime could also have been deliber-ately insinuated—for example, by his competitor Siciliano, who might have been interested in distracting from his own involvement (Costa and Ramalho 2019a; Freire et al. 2019). Or, it could have been insinuated by Cristiano Girão, yet another local politician with milícia connections, who already in 2017 sought to contract the Escritório do Crime for Marielle's assassination—at least if we

believe in the testimony of Julia Lotufo, the widow of the killer group's ex-leader Adriano da Nóbrega. As Latufo stated in 2021, Girão feared that since Marielle was mobilising residents in Gardênia Azul, she would go on to combat all milícias in the West Zone and thus jeopardise his and other politicians' power base (Marques 2021).

Apart from politicians, parapolice groups and contract killers, Rio de Janeiro's police forces have also figured prominently in the entanglements the investigations have dragged into the public eye. The Federal Public Prosecutor's Office had to intervene repeatedly when police investigations were delayed or obstructed, evidence disappeared, or relationships between investigators and suspects became known. After surveillance videos had already disappeared from the hands of the homicide squad in 2018 and a witness had reported bribes paid by milicianos to the investigating police authority, the investigative debacle reached its climax in mid-2019 when the manipulation of the witness statement concerning Siciliano's accusation became known (Costa and Ramalho 2019b). Given these indications of police misconduct, the attempt to portray Ronnie Lessa as a lone perpetrator could be part of a coordinated police cover-up.

The longer the investigations continued, the more factual and potential connections among political actors, parapolice groups, the police and other parties came to the surface. It is striking—though not necessarily surprising—that predominantly right-wing politicians with stakes in land ownership and real estate, largely white men, have figured prominently in these connections. Here, we can also include the Bolsonaro clan and Rio's former state governor, Wilson Witzel. The Bolsonaros' long-term sponsorship of Adriano da Nóbrega, the ex-leader of the Escritório do Crime and a former BOPE policeman, became known in the course of a police operation ordered by Rio's public prosecutor's office in January 2019 (see de Abreu 2019). When Nóbrega was killed during a police operation in February 2020, suspicions grew that the presidential family had wanted to cover up its own involvement in the assassination of Marielle Franco and further crimes by disposing of a central witness. In the meantime, it also became known that the president's son Flávio Bolsonaro was involved in the illegal financing of real estate controlled by milícias in Jacarepaguá (Barrocal 2020; Ramalho 2020). The wife of the slain miliciano Nóbrega, on the other hand, suspected that the far-right governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro, Wilson Witzel, made her deceased husband the target of the fatal police operation—even in defiance of a large bribe offer. Witzel, she surmised, was interested in perpetuating the theory of Jair Bolsonaro's involvement in Marielle Franco's assassination as he was planning to campaign against his former party colleague in the 2022 presidential election (see Pereira and Marques 2020).

Gendered Necropolitics: An Overdetermined Field

In sum, the extensive investigations have fleshed out an intricate web of both confirmed and conjectured co-dependencies shaped around armed control, capital accumulation, and anti-democratic politics. This applies, regardless of whether the assassination of Marielle was carried out by Ronnie Lessa, the Escritório do

Crime, or both, and whether the Bolsonaros or Wilson Witzel commissioned the killing, or whether it was Siciliano, Brazão, Picciani, Girão, or an alliance of actors. As the investigations have repeatedly shown, the clandestine character of these connections prepares the ground for violent activities that exceed legal accountability—also making it difficult, and sometimes impossible, for researchers to gain detailed knowledge.[12]

At an instrumental level, the contractor(s) of Marielle Franco's assassination might have attempted to secure continued access to real estate and political support in neighbourhoods controlled by milícias; they might have sought revenge for the legal measures Marielle Franco or her parliamentary mentor Marcelo Freixo took against milícias or fellow politicians' fraudulent activities; or they might have sought to stop the upcoming black feminist politician from gaining even more popularity and mobilising the population against the interests of right-wing politics (see also Freire et al. 2019; Manso 2020). All these hypotheses have in common, though, that they tie into longer-term endeavours of majority-white propertied classes who use violent means to assert their claims to material, political, and territorial hegemony, articulating these claims through anti-democratic constructions of class, race, gender and sexuality.

The killing of Marielle Franco is thus overdetermined in the sense that the "violent conditions" (Laurie and Shaw 2018) that made it likely are redundantly distributed throughout the social, political, and spatial field in which Marielle herself lived. This applies to the violent practices enacted by parapolice networks as well as to their key actors' embodied political orientations, which have long opposed the subaltern feminist and anti-racist politics of democratisation that Marielle represented. Both aspects are closely connected as, conspicuously, some of the same politicians that have been involved in, and openly supported, parapolicing over many years have also fiercely agitated against Marielle and her politics—not least the Bolsonaros. Marielle Franco's assassination, then, ties in with a gendered necropolitics that the accumulation regime of milícia urbanism has intensified. While thus aggravating necropolitical governance, milícia urbanism simultaneously builds on the long history of parapolicing in Brazil, which has shaped technologies of power since the colonial period, as the next section seeks to show.

Parapolicing in the Postcolony

Before outlining a genealogy of parapolicing, let me clarify my use of this term, which in North Atlantic debates has tended to be associated with commercial security companies (e.g. Rigakos 2002). In works related to the violent democracies approach in Latin America, by contrast, the term "parapolicing" has been used to tackle a range of violent actors proliferating in peripheralised city spaces and rural areas, such as state-linked death squads that emerged under the military dictatorships or Rio's milícias (e.g. Benmergui and Gonçalves 2019; Fondevila 2011; Wynter Sarmiento 2015). While it has been tempting to attribute the proliferation of these actors to an "absence" of sovereign state institutions (e.g. Koonings and Kruijt 2007), parapolicing in contexts such as Rio de Janeiro has been intimately linked to the state, receiving support not only from the police

forces but also from generations of politicians, public officials, and their moneyed clientele. Specifically, parapolicing has helped cultivate a racialised and gendered ethos of vigilantism that pervades even formal institutions, including the police (Rodrigues et al. 2018). I, therefore, understand parapolicing as a force integral, rather than parallel, to stateness. This force, I suggest, has emerged already in the context of colonialism and slavery, where it has taken shape in conjunction and tension with the colonial deployment of sovereignty, as a close reading of writings from history, sociology and political anthropology shows.

Sovereign Violence on the Plantation

In the context of the Brazilian slave estate, a range of practices of domination unfolded extremely violent power-effects by avenging transgressions of the law while simultaneously referring back to a sublime sovereign order. As Silvia Hunold Lara's (1988) meticulous study of violence and domination in colonial Brazil shows, this was the case with the bans that were used as punishment against both free and enslaved subjects (albeit in different measures) and with spectacles such as the lashing of slaves that took place both in towns and on the plantations. Genealogically, these techniques hark back to enactments of sovereign power in the European feudal states. As in the Ancien Régime, such techniques were meant to induce fear and respect among the subjects of the ruler and had "the ultimate purpose of purging the guilt of a crime, restoring order and ultimately leaving the royalty augmented", as Lara (1988:90) notes (see also Foucault 1995). At the same time, in the context of racial chattel slavery, where black people were considered latent "enemies" of the sovereign order (Fernandes 1976), these power techniques operated in the register of dehumanisation (see Finley 1980). For instance, the public lashing sessions that from the late 18th century onwards only targeted black and brown enslaved bodies (Lara 1988) often seriously injured and mutilated the very subjects of punishment (Smith 2016c).

However, this does not mean that such practices were uncodified in Mbembe's sense or "excessive" in the sovereign order's terms. Quite on the contrary, these violent practices were meant precisely to manifest and thereby assert the reigning moral and legal order, inscribing the law onto the scarred and mutilated bodies of the enslaved—especially when performed on public town and city squares (Smith 2016c:176). What is more, these uses of violence had an exemplary character embedded in discourses of "economic" and even "good government". Naturalised assumptions around what constituted "measured, fair, corrective, educational, moderate and exemplary physical punishment" (Lara 1988:96) extended from the crown and the church to local potentates and even parts of the working populations in the colony. When the *senhor*'s (master's) use of violence in the private context of the plantation was perceived as excessive by the local public—involving too many lashes, too cruel instruments, causing too much harm in relation to what a subject was deemed to deserve—this was considered "inhumane". And the crown feared that it might provoke disloyalty and thus damage rather than strengthen sovereign power (Lara 1988:53).[13]

In the same breath as sovereign power sanctioned the dehumanisation of people of African descent, then, it sought to "humanise" the very conditions of dehumanisation through codes of "moderate punishment"—all while taking techniques used in metropolitan contexts to another level of racial terror. Importantly, though, these spectacles of sovereign violence, whose performance was vital particularly to the government of towns and cities (Smith 2016c), were further complemented by practices that exceeded even this legal-humanistic codification of dehumanisation.

Violence Beyond the Exception

The same plantation archives that exhibit "a veritable science of seigneurial domination" (Lara 1988:53) also bespeak widespread uses of violence that defied the (paradoxical) codes of sovereignty. Such violence included the sexual exploitation of enslaved subjects, specifically women (Caldwell 2007), and pervasive arbitrary forms of coercion, revenge, and punishment (Rodrigues et al. 2018). Arbitrary violence, especially against the enslaved, was encouraged by the *sesmaria* system of land tenure, which the crown installed due to its incapacity to establish direct lines of command for governing the vast colony (Fernandes 1976; Prado Júnior 1969). Notably, this system rendered the exercise of sovereign power contingent on the loyalty and collaboration of the *donos da terra*, the landlords who were also enslavers. For instance, in practice, these planters were tasked to oversee the disciplining and punishing of their subjects, whose social, legal and human rights were radically curtailed. What is more, as the donos were also obliged to defend their lands against insurgents or invaders, they routinely mobilised enslaved and free labourers as vigilantes, who committed acts of revenge and retribution, apart from launching occasional attacks on rivals (Lara 1988). Meanwhile, regional magistrates effectively brokered secret deals with the powers above and below, exploiting the planters' dependency on the magistrates' goodwill when facing prosecution while simultaneously benefiting from the metropolitan elites' dependency on a regular flow of goods.

Here, we can see the colonial origins of a technology of dependency that integrated vigilantism and arbitrary violence into the very diagram of power. The crown willingly turned a blind eye to the goings-on on the plantations inasmuch the regional administration, the donos da terra, and the labouring enslaved people kept the system running. This deliberate ignorance was assisted by enslaved workers' racialised and gendered dehumanisation. While this embodied technology of dependency was imbricated with sovereign power, it also exceeded it. Whereas sovereign power refers back to a legal order affirmed in exemplary punishment and the decision on the exception, colonial planters were largely unconcerned about such an order. Even though they would occasionally invoke the law or perform the role of what Butler (2004) calls "petty sovereigns", their uses of violence were "not convergent" (Lara 1988:310) with the exemplary punishment administered by the colonial magistrates, being premised on different codes and techniques. Rather than being staged as a spectacle that affirmed sovereign power, the truly "excessive" violence donos da terra authorised on the plantations

was purposely concealed to avoid legal process and the undermining of the sovereign order. Local potentates' uses of violence, then, rather than manifesting a temporary or even permanent exception that expresses a sovereign decision to reduce subjects to bare life, tended to avoid sovereign power altogether—all the while serving the interests of its representatives.

If the sovereign exception already enabled the gravest forms of racial terror and violence, then, the plantation was marked by what we might call second-order exceptionalism: the exception from the exception, which replaced violence bound to the sovereign structure of legitimation, or "codified violence", with "pure slaughter", to adopt Mbembe's words. Forms of torture, sexual violation and killing were excepted here from the need even to appeal to the capacity to suspend the law, which would reiterate sovereign power. At the same time, sovereign and dependency-based technologies reinforced each other, as the latter built on the dehumanisation enforced by the first, while at the same time further diffusing a gendered white-supremacist vigilante ethos among the representatives of sovereign power.

As the entangled histories of 19th century policing and patronage show, after Independence, such racialised and gendered violence would continue in the rural fazendas and feed into the urban security architecture that involved a paramilitary branch of militia troops (Graham 1990; Holloway 1993). The vigilante ethos cultivated on the plantations moreover shaped the practices of the first police forces of the imperial era. As these forces terrorised the growing urban and periurban black communities through both spectacular intervention and clandestine abuse, they took the activities of *quadrilheiros* (bailiffs) and *capitães-do-mato* (bail bondsmen tasked with hunting down escaped slaves) of the colonial period to a new level (Campos 2010; Holloway 1993; Lara 1988). Meanwhile, the dependencies among the crown, the local administration and the planters morphed into an ever more intricate system of patronage that reshaped the patriarchal and racialised formations of subjecthood and citizenship (Costa 2000; Graham 1990).

Necropolitics in the Periurban Context

Arbitrary violence beyond the exception has characterised formations of power and government in Brazil up to the present day, even if operating within a range of different social and spatial contexts. The system of "*coronelismo*" that was in place during the First Republic (1889-–1930), for instance, conferred wide-ranging policing powers to landowners and other propertied individuals, including merchants, who received the military rank of *coronéis* (colonels) (Leal 1977). Again, local potentates, commonly white men, were placed within multi-actor networks of mutual favours and dependencies, which rendered their arbitrary powers contingent on loyalties and interdependencies that secured their impunity. Forms of self-administered justice and the private use of police and militia violence proliferated especially in rural areas, but also in cities, building on the militia units developed in the 19th century (Graham 1990).

Importantly, coronelismo remained premised on racist and patriarchal arrangements. While some white middle-class and elite women gained new liberties as

the monarchy was overthrown, subaltern women continued to be excluded from social and political citizenship, which was tailored to the figure of the propertied, white, heterosexual family father (Costa 2000). These exclusions tied in with the burgeoning discourses of the Brazilian nation, which went along with the fierce policing of black lives and sexual and gender nonconformity at the urban scale (Bledsoe 2015; Caulfield 2000; Green 1999). To this day, reference is made to coronelismo as a symbol of patriarchal arbitrariness supported by networks of loyalty and conservative morals.

With advancing urbanisation, the technology of dependency was reconfigured by urban clientelism, which in the context of Rio de Janeiro first characterised especially the city's northern peripheries (Alves 2020; Perlman 1976). As the colonial planters had employed vigilante groups, so powerful merchants and landowners, assisted by politicians and state actors, now hired armed strongmen to pressure opponents and disappropriate the predominantly black working populations (Alves 2020; Campos 2010). The gendered discourse of "racial democracy", which glossed over structural racism, facilitated these continued forms of violence and disparity (see Caldwell 2007; Smith 2016c).

The 1950s was a crucial phase in the formation of more organised parapolice groups. Now, merchants with close ties to state representatives in Rio's North Zone and the Baixada Fluminense region hired gunmen to put down popular unrest related to land contestations. These gunmen have been described as early precursors of today's milícias, even though they did not establish comparable forms of territorial dominion or business schemes (Alves 2020; Reist 2018). The US-supported civilian-military dictatorship played a crucial role in further consolidating parapolicing as it integrated these armed gangs into the structure of the state's security apparatus (Costa 1998; Smith 2016c). Soon known as "*esquadrões da morte*" (death squads), these parapolice groups with sovereign license gained professional expertise in carrying out torture, extortion, killings and disappearances of populations perceived as politically insurgent or inimical to the (normatively white) Christian family.

Notably, Scuderie Le Cocq was among the first of these death squads, continuing to strike terror into Rio's periurban neighbourhoods even after the end of the dictatorship—thus enabling Marielle Franco's alleged assassin Ronnie Lessa to enter the group as late as 1989. Turning towards the more recent past, then, the case of Scuderie Le Cocq also illustrates that the democratisation process of the 1980s did not put an end to parapolicing. The death squads, which had been part of the police apparatus, now morphed into "extermination groups" (*grupos de extermínio*) run by private actors—which continued, however, to collaborate closely with police and politicians (Alves 2020; Scheper-Hughes 2006). They were recruited by business people or leaders of illegal gambling networks to eliminate commercial competitors, adverse politicians, as well as the homeless, LGBTQ+ people and other often poor and racialised subjects whom these actors considered killable. One of the most infamous extermination squads was Ronnie Lessa's Patamo 500.

In sum, this genealogical outline of parapolicing in Rio demonstrates that when police soldiers in Rio's West Zone began forming the first protection rackets now

referred to as "milícias", they built on (largely) clandestine connections that genera-tions of gunmen, death squads and extermination groups supported by private, political and state actors had forged as part of a multifaceted, embodied technology of dependency. The milícias thus form part of a kind of necropolitical governance that historically has been shaped by the plantation, coronelismo, urban clientelism, and the military dictatorship—and that more recently was reinvigorated by Bolsonar-ismo. If the assassination of Marielle epitomises this necropolitics-beyond-the-exception, though, it also indexes the vital role the black feminist's embodied poli-tics played in its contestation, as the last section highlights. I will begin with a brief outline of what has been referred to as the current "militia state".

Contesting the Militia State

While today's milícia networks piggyback on a long history of parapolicing, the intensity and extent of their territorialising practices are rather novel. To establish armed control over vast peri-urban areas and a range of businesses and services, milícias and associated contract killers collaborate with political and institutional actors at multiple scales. As we saw in the investigations of Marielle's assassina-tion, milícia networks include not only politicians seeking to pool local votes and police battalions that shield lethal practices; they also extend into public institu-tions such as Rio's audit office, which brokered illicit real-estate deals, and up to federal politicians such as Jair Bolsonaro and his son Flávio. What is more, as Bol-sonaro was elected president seven months after Marielle's assassination, para-policing received a broader boost, reinvigorating the ethos of vigilantism nationwide (see Fogel and Richmond 2019).

Once in office Bolsonaro, long known for his support of unchecked lethal mili-tarism, sought to consolidate what commentators have called a "republic of mili-tias" ("*república das milícias*"; e.g. Manso 2020) or "militia state" ("*estado miliciano*"; e.g. Rodrigues and del Río 2019). These terms describe a governmen-tal regime that, on the one hand, entertains intimate connections with illicit armed actors while, on the other, incentivising the "upstanding citizen" (*cidadão do bem*, linked to the above-mentioned *moradores do bem*) to combat criminality, vagabundagem and political opposition by whatever means—preferably by taking up arms (see Nunes 2020).

Intersecting with racialised and gendered class projects of disappropriation, this variegated parapolice governance exposes profoundly anti-democratic, particularly antiblack, antifeminist and antiqueer, orientations (Nunes 2020; Silva and Larkins 2019). The slogan "A good thug is a dead thug!" ("*Bandido bom é ban-dido morto!*") that Bolsonaro resuscitated from the last military-civilian dictatorship has epitomised the underlying necropolitical ethos of vigilantism (Reist 2018). The nationwide intensification of parapolicing also shows in rural contexts, where there has been a surge in agribusiness-driven militia, vigilante and police violence that targets indigenous communities, settlements of the MST (Landless Workers' Movement), and *quilombolas* (members of Afro-Brazilian maroon communities).[14]

Importantly, though, considering this embodied dimension of necropolitical governance casts into relief both the precarity and the importance of embodied

resistance. Before concluding, I therefore want to return to the multifaceted *conjunto de coisas* that Marielle embodied. I will highlight particularly the critical potential arising from her positionality as a queer black feminist affiliated with favela movements.

"Eu sou porque nós somos"

Like many black feminists before and after her, Marielle developed her political activism in a favela context, where she experienced the deadly effects of necropolitical governance up-close. Especially after a girlfriend was killed in an armed confrontation between police and drug traffickers in the Maré, as a young adult, she became determined to defend "poor and black human life against the armed ferocity of the state-security forces and their extra-legal, gangsterized and paramilitary avatars", as Neuenschwander and Giraldes (2018:132) put it. To counter state-supported violence, Marielle emphasised the significance of self-organising in peripheralised neighbourhoods: "Especially for the areas most neglected by the state, strengthening collective grassroots action [*ação coletiva de base*], neighbourhood organising and/or popular assemblies can be a qualitative 'leap' for these regions that are said to be 'needy' or lacking in participation" (Franco 2018b:125–126; see also Bartholl 2015; Perry 2013).

In the Maré and other peripheralised communities, subaltern organising against violence has been intimately connected to lived practices of solidarity and an affirmation of resistant identity, including through expressions of black arts and music. As Marielle herself contended, "black *favelada* women" have often spearheaded such organising, taking on "central roles in the fight for state policies that challenge inequality and expand the human dimensions of civil rights" (Franco 2018a:136–137; see also Perry 2016). This is also exemplified by the active role Marielle played in neighbourhood women's meetings and black feminist networks, her single motherhood and lesbian identity particularly sensitising her to the sexualised and gendered dimensions of necropolitics. At the same time, Keisha-Khan Perry (2016:105) notes, "[t]he public image of black women, particularly those who live in poor neighborhoods, is that they lack the political sophistication needed to organize social movements". In thwarting this image, Marielle helped pave the way for black women and other subaltern subjectivities to gain political agency, both in urban peripheries and broader political spaces of appearance.

An important stepping-stone in Marielle's political trajectory was her participation in a community-based university preparation course aimed at protecting black lives from state-supported violence by facilitating favela youth's access to public universities (Neuenschwander and Giraldes 2018). But still after finishing her studies in sociology and administration, and after moving to a lower-middle-class area of Rio's Tijuca neighbourhood, she continued to assert her embodied affiliation with peripheralised communities and play an active role in black women's and community events. It is against this backdrop that in her successful campaign for a seat in Rio de Janeiro's Municipal Chamber, Marielle appeared in the streets of the Maré, presenting the slogan "*Eu sou porque nós somos*" ("I am

because we are"), a saying she adopted from ubuntu philosophy. Self-confidently inhabiting the position of *mulher negra favelada*, or black favela woman, Marielle here inverted the stigmatising representation of both favela inhabitants as "dangerous classes" and black women as lacking political sophistication and agency. Simultaneously, she articulated a "we" committed to radical democracy that can be related to black and LGBTIQ+ communities, the progressive movements of the favelas, as well as to black feminism and the African diaspora.

Black feminism, in particular, has played a vital role in forging this notion of an at once situated and expansive "we". This is articulated in Djamila Ribeiro's description of black feminism as "an instrument for thinking not only about black women themselves, a category that is also diverse, but about the model of society that we want" (2016:100; see also Hill Collins 2000). Significantly, this black-feminist imagination is tied to a historical and translocal consciousness, where activists understand themselves "as heirs of ancestral heritage" who "fight to restore denied humanities", as Gabriela Loureiro (2020:51) notes, referring to Ribeiro (2017). As Loureiro further explains, Brazilian black feminist scholars such as Lélia Gonzalez and Sueli Carneiro, in dialogue with international black feminists, have long advanced a "transnational articulation of a Black and Latin American feminism capable of encompassing the Black diaspora in the Americas through the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender and imperialism" (Loureiro 2020:51). Marielle, then, enacted a transformative reimagining of the relationship between gendered black subjectivity and favelas. Here, she also followed in the footsteps of black scholar Beatriz Nascimento, who in the 1970s and 1980s developed a black-feminist perspective on favelas' situatedness in the black Atlantic (see Smith 2016b).

"Marielle virou semente"

Marielle's embodied politics gave particular weight to her critique of a militaristic security policy that builds on the principle of racialised and gendered enmity. In one of her last posts on Twitter, she commented on the killing of 23-year-old Matheus Melo at a police checkpoint between two favelas, denouncing the logic of war: "Another murder of a young man for which the military police might be responsible. Matheus Melo had just left the church. How many more have to die for this war to end?"[15] As Marielle elaborated elsewhere, she saw this security policy as expressive of a systemic violation of favelados' fundamental right to live (Franco 2018b:105), which also particularly impacts black women (Franco 2018a:139).

Denouncing bellicose policing, Marielle, at the same time, criticised the precarity of social services in the peripheries as well as the state's selective enactment of sovereignty. Specifically, she interrogated the state's failure to impede the expansion of milícias across Rio's West Zone: "Thus, the state does not prioritise actions of military occupation of the same scale for the city as a whole. The example to be cited here refers to the West Zone, for its exception" (Franco 2018b:134). Franco here contrasts the lack of military action in Rio's West Zone to the martial interventions followed by the installation of so-called Pacifying Police Units (UPPs)

in favelas that were newly valorised in the preparations of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympics (Freeman 2014). If the interventions in Rio's favelas mobilise the sovereign state of exception as a means to enable disappropriation and lethal violence (Loureiro 2020), the exception of the West Zone from military occupation arguably indexes the state's support of a necropolitics beyond the exception.

Attending to how Marielle interrogated both exceptional violence and lethality beyond the exception can also sensitise us to how different power technologies mutually reinforce each other. For instance, while milícia urbanism has led to a surge in clandestine killings, forced disappearances have simultaneously accumulated in areas under UPP control (Musumeci 2020). As Marielle herself contends, this is because disappearing people is "typical of the way the Military Police act" (Franco 2018b:117). This resonates with what Rodrigues et al. (2018) have called the sense of a "diffuse right to kill" pervading the Brazilian police (see also Denyer Willis 2015; Vargas 2018), which originates from the police's historical "conviviality with the naturalised militia" (Rodrigues et al. 2018:268)—or what I have called parapolicing.

Contesting the militia state, then, involves disrupting the force of parapolicing in a range of institutions and spaces. In the hotspots of milícia urbanism, the legislation to regulate land use Marielle proposed to Rio's Municipal Chamber, which emerged from her situated community engagement in the West Zone, had the potential of intervening in a critical point of the milícias' multi-scale spatial practices. Furthering popular access to housing and real estate, it simultaneously would have jeopardised one of the milícias' central sources of income—and leverage in their wider political networks. More broadly, Marielle's and other black mothers' leadership in publicly denouncing disappearances has also played a key role in contesting the force of parapolicing. While exposing the dependencies supporting killings with impunity, it has also furthered networks of solidarity that are fundamental to asserting a sense of home in an intensely necropolitical context (Loureiro 2020).

Finally, Marielle's activism, which formed part of multiple long-term and ongoing collective processes, brings into strong relief the multi-scale effects of black-feminist mobilising. While her assassination has shockingly exposed the precarity of contesting Rio's necropolitical governance and the militia state from a subaltern *lugar de fala*, it simultaneously has provoked subaltern—black, feminist, queer, favelado, indigenous, working-class…—mobilisation across Brazil and elsewhere. Thus, although her efforts to intervene in the necropolitical governance of the city were prematurely ended, Marielle has, as activists put it, turned into seeds—"*Marielle virou semente*" (Loureiro 2020:51).

Endnotes

[1] Reviewing Hannah Arendt's account of what she called the political "space of appearance", Judith Butler discusses how political appearances are embodied through formations of sexuality, gender, and race. Particularly pertinent to the political life of Marielle Franco, Butler highlights "the persistence of the body against those forces that seek its debilitation or eradication" (2015:83).

[2] All translations of Portuguese sources are by the author.

[3] This capacity, Alves notes, shows in the police's "sinister power" to decide not only who to kill, but also "who is dead, who should be taken to the hospital, and who deserves to live" (2018:61; see also Denyer Willis 2015).

[4] Drawing on Frantz Fanon's notion of a "zone of nonbeing" and historical works on slavery, this discussion highlights the systemic dehumanisation, denial of kinship, and gendered sexual violation of enslaved, racialised people of African descent (see Sexton 2010).

[5] This relates to Mbembe's discussion on colonial government in sub-Saharan Africa, where "no bond" with the colonised populations, no "covenant" in Hobbes's terms, was established, giving rise to a form of government that "plunders its object and deprives it of what used to be its own" (Mbembe 2001:34).

[6] Mbembe argues in reference to the colonies in 19th century Africa that as their inhabitants were declared "savages" living outside the order which the "civilizing" project of colonisation sought to extend into "wilderness", the colonies formed spaces of exception: "the colonies", writes Mbembe, "are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended—the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of 'civilization'" (2003:24; see also Hansen and Stepputat 2006).

[7] Hansen and Stepputat actually oscillate between the invocation of the Agambenian state of exception as "origin of sovereign power" (2006:301) and a heuristic post-Weberian understanding of sovereignty as violence-based authority.

[8] See the website of the Instituto Marielle Franco: https://www.institutomariellefranco.org/ (last accessed 3 June 2022).

[9] Hansen and Stepputat build on Agamben when, in a much-cited paraphrase, they define "de facto sovereignty" as the "ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity" (2006:296; see also Wenner 2020).

[10] The widespread use of the term "*milícia*" (militia) derives from newspaper reports, but has been criticised by researchers for evoking associations of military or paramilitary fighting organisations.

[11] For example, in April 2019 the Brazilian Federal Police recommended personal protection for black federal deputy Talíria Petrone after discovering concrete plans for an attack, and in 2020 black state deputy Renata Souza also reported death threats. Openly gay former federal deputy Jean Wyllys resigned his mandate in January 2019 and went into exile (Anjos 2019; Lang 2020). All three were also members of the left-leaning PSOL (see also Rodrigues et al. 2018).

[12] Even long-term expert researchers such as José Cláudio Souza Alves, a sociologist based at the Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ), have had to rely largely on the reports of investigative authorities and journalists in their seminal works on parapolicing (see e.g. Alves 2020).

[13] For instance, where a punished slave suffered severe injuries, their master could consequently be obliged to sell them (forming of course a moderate penalty meant to leave the master's authority intact), and if an enslaved person died at the hands of a free person, the latter could be banned and exiled to overseas prisons.

[14] In the areas that are dominated by agribusiness, for instance, farmers have increasingly contracted gunmen and the militias known as "*jagunços*", who shoot indigenous activists and peasants or expel them from their lands, often acting in tandem with military police (Rodrigues et al. 2018).

[15] The tweet is available at https://twitter.com/mariellefranco/status/973568966403731456 (last accessed 6 June 2022).

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