Ethnography in an Olympic City

Doing Research with the Police in Rio de Janeiro

Dennis Pauschinger

On an early afternoon of Rio's Olympic summer in August 2016 where I was doing my fieldwork during the city's mega-event cycle, I was sitting in the Special Forces' sleeping and locker room in Cidade da Políca (Police City), one of the two Civil Police headquarters in Rio de Janeiro[1]. 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 standardised 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."

1 Das Kapitel ist in der Zeit der Promotion im Doktorandenprogramm Doctorate in Cultural and Global Criminology (DCGC) und ab 2017 als Postdoc und Associate Researcher am Institut für Geografie der Université de Neuchâtel entstanden. Der Autor hat für diese Arbeit Forschungsmittel durch das Doktorandenprogramm von der EACEA als Erasmus+ Fellow erhalten. Der Beitrag wurde in Teilen bereits im Buch des Autors veröffentlicht: Pauschinger, (2024 im Erscheinen): *Policing Sport Mega-Events: Security, Spectacle and Camouflage in Rio de Janeiro, Oxford: Oxford University Press*.

In this ethnographic vignette, the officer talks about a process that is best described as the production of camouflaging that made specific aspects of security visible and, simultaneously, rendered invisible the routinised politics of death in the city's favelas and suburbs (Pauschinger 2020). Most characteristic of these routines is that vicious circle of attack and response in which Special Forces, equipped with armoured 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 (Barnes 2021; Grillo 2013; Alves and Evanson 2011).

Thus, these so-called security politics in Rio de Janeiro follow specific sociospatial patterns along lines of social inequalities such as class and race. The sport mega-event security architecture was inserted into these scenarios 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. The very ways in which the mega-event security provisions were organised merely repeated, and at times even intensified, Rio's long-standing urban conflict.

And indeed, years later in early May 2021, I was reading the news feed of Rio de Janeiro's newspapers that reported how a police operation unfolded. This time in the favela Jacarezinho, in which the civil police and their Special Forces entered to arrest drug traffickers. It raised my attention because I read the name of a police officer whom I had accompanied for my fieldwork and who was shot in his head the moment he stepped out of the armoured vehicle that morning. What unfolded moments later, was the most lethal police operation in the history of Rio de Janeiro and cost 27 lives. Outlets all over the world covered the story, showing the bloodshed in terrible photographs (e.g., Franzen 2021; Phillips 2021). The suffering and trauma of those who witnessed the scenes, among them children, of how police officers raid houses and kill, is endless. The scenes of yet another funeral, accompanied by many in uniform and the killed police officer's 11-year-old son who cries on his father's coffin, are scenes from a senseless conflict.

Rio de Janeiro's police fundamentally shapes and is shaped by these ongoing experiences at the city's manifold edges. Much has been written on the accountability of the police for these processes within Rio's favelas from the perspectives of the drug traffickers and the community's residents (e.g.

Larkins, 2015; Richmond, 2019; Zaluar, 2004). However, very little is known about how the police officers themselves live with and engage in the urban conflict, and how they deal with being in the epicentre of these everyday urban uncertainties. The conditions of Rio's urban conflict, in which police officers try to establish urban order, produce emotional states that actively generate experiences of insecurity in the city. In my work on the mega-event security, I was able to dive into the world of Rio de Janeiro's police officers. More particularly I had privileged access to different divisions of the civil police and the mega-event security architecture. Whilst I have written about these experiences more extensively elsewhere (Pauschinger, 2023, 2020, 2019), I here highlight the very research experience with the police as such and write about common issues in ethnographic studies such as access, moral ambiguities and danger. The remainder of this chapter therefore sets out in four steps. First, the chapter puts forth the epistemological and methodological basis of my research, grounded in notions of ethnography embedded within a cultural criminological approach. Second, the chapter further highlights the research operationalisation as well as where and when the fieldwork was carried out. Third, the chapter sets out to examine issues of access, trust and objectivity and how I have dealt with them in the setting of the police in Rio. Fourth, the chapter assesses the moral ambiguities of ethnography. More particularly I write about specific situations in which I was confronted with violence during my research and how I was trapped in the decision of writing about these situations or not, how to react within the very moment and if I would then commit betrayal towards my research participants. In a short conclusion I reflect upon the importance of research with and within the police.

1 Ethnography at Brazil's Sport Mega-Events: Theory and Action

My overall interest in my research was to understand how global security models associated with mega-events are deployed and adapted to local security conditions in Rio de Janeiro. In particular I wanted to gather knowledge from the ground to situate the official claims that these mega-event security efforts improve the Brazilian public security system. This entailed a twofold approach. On the one hand, understanding the wider dynamics of the technical implementation of mega-event security from the perspective of policy-makers and senior officers. On the other, elucidating the meaning of those parachuted actions on the ground for Rio's civil police. In other words, how those efforts were

interpreted, adapted and embraced by street officers – both by those directly involved in FIFA-related perimeter policing and those responsible for the ordinary security affairs in the city. As my project dealt with meanings and practices in these different fields, I adopted an ethnographic approach grounded in cultural criminology.

The research project therefore was embedded in the spheres of the cultural criminological project that has emerged as an alternative way of making sense of crime and crime control in contrast to rather positivistic criminological theories (Hayward 2015). Cultural criminology proposes a new approach that

> "places criminality and its control in the context of culture; that is, it views crime and the agencies and institutions of crime control as cultural products – as creative constructs. As such they must be read in terms of the meanings they carry" (Hayward 2008: 119).

Within this phenomenological frame, cultural criminology has extensively criticised positivistic methods (Ferrell et al. 2008; Young 2011; Hayward 2012).[2] As today's late modern societal conditions are always in motion, orthodox methods can hardly bring to light the meaning of the "lives, actions, and words of those studied" (Ferrell 2013: 266). Ferrell notes that "if we understand that many forms of criminality are grounded in the immediate experiences of excitement, pleasure and fear, we must also imagine methods that can explore these experiences" (1998: 32).

Hence cultural criminology has built a tradition to work with ethnography as a core method to better perceive these "theatres of meaning" (Ferrell 2013: 258). Thus, cultural criminology defines ethnography not as a single method but as a methodological approach to study human agency (Ferrell et al. 2008: 178). Typical situations of the construction of meaning can possibly not only be found in the emotional rush and in the excitement of criminal transaction, but also appear in the deployment of crime control strategies which are integrated in the experience of the everyday (Ferrell 2013: 260).

The core of a cultural criminological art of ethnography is what Ferrell (1998) has conceptualised as *criminological verstehen*. Borrowing from Max Weber (1949; 1978), Ferrell (1998: 27) conceptualises *verstehen* as a rather subjective interpretation and compassion with the research subjects, whilst embedding

2 However, cultural criminology is yet not totally rejecting numbers or technologies. There is e.g. interest in socio-spatial methods like GIS and maps (see Hayward 2015).

this into wider sociological and rational understandings of "various rational understandings of social action and social meaning." *Criminological verstehen* in cultural criminology is then the very subjective understanding of crime and crime control much centred in the situational and emotional meaning that is mostly grasped through participant observation (Ferrell 1998: 27).

In relation to my research with police officers, it was this idea within cultural criminology that interested me most. Its take on emotions, to be able to grasp what the experience of police officers themselves was about. An inspirational source for cultural criminology's focus on emotions derives from Jack Katz (1988, 1999), who argues that we must assess the foreground of social performance in order to make sense of other explaining background structures. Katz (1999: 5–6) differentiates between three distinct emotional states and reactions where (1) emotional outburst means to react to and engage with directly and beyond a given situation, (2) the emotional states of a person regarding the reaction and interpretation of others onto these conditions, and (3) how persons move from one emotional state into another that drives the sense of emotions as a bodily experience ("sensual metamorphoses"). This three-dimensional concept orients us to emotions as "self-reflective actions and experiences" that are "corporal metaphors that operate implicitly at the foundations of all of our conduct" (Katz, 1999: 7).

I have therefore considered police officers as edgeworkers (Pauschinger, 2019; Lyng, 1990, 2005a, 2005b). Embedded in the Katzian conception of emotions and combined with the sociology of risk taking, the notion of edgework focuses on those who perform highly risky endeavours at the verge of legality, criminality and/or between life and death, and thus assesses the boundaries between "order and disorder" (Lyng, 1990: 585). This is strongly connected to cultural criminology's take on the act of transgression, which in itself "contains distinct emotions, attractions and compensations" (Ferrell et al., 2015: 73). In late modern living conditions, social inequality, monotonous everyday working routines and unsuccessful attempts at self-realisation are often felt as dull, humiliating and as losses of identity and control. By engaging in edgework, the protagonists seek to regain a bit of that lost control and to compensate for emotional humiliation by developing specific skills through activities such as sky diving or extreme motorcycling. Edgeworkers try to follow a mechanism that makes them take voluntary risks and push themselves to the edge, in search of a rush of adrenaline through constant exposure to risk and the permanent possibility of sudden death or severe injury (Lyng, 1990: 857–859). Many transgressive acts in urban environments can be seen as edgework and attempts at re-

taking control in ontologically insecure worlds (Hayward, 2004: 165). Typically, police officers or combat soldiers, who possess very specific skills, have jobs that carry the possibility of such risk-full moments, where adrenaline rushes can serve as an escape from the humiliating experiences of not being able to do what they are trained to do, or to control what they are supposed to control (Lyng, 1990: 857). In my research I have therefore argued that police officers' emotions contribute fundamentally to the ways in which urban order is produced in Rio de Janeiro and that considering their emotional worlds can help to understand how conflict and violence unfold in the city. With this theoretical layout of my research, I will proceed to highlight the fieldwork itself.

2 The Field and the Research Strategies

Empirically, this chapter draws on data collected during approximately nine months of fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro between 2013 and 2019 and many years of working and living experience in Brazil. During the fieldwork period, I had privileged access to the city's security forces, specifically civil police officers in police stations and in their Special Forces' headquarters. In total I conducted 62 open and unstructured interviews. The participants covered a wide range of different positions within the mega-event security architecture. Among them were ministers and secretaries from high offices, planning staff, street police officers as well as FIFA and IOC local organising committee security officers. To enrich my knowledge and to furnish the content of this work I also interviewed public security experts such as university professors, security consultants and activists. This sample gave me the opportunity to investigate the insights of those who planned, managed, executed and generally worked with the mega-event security.

Michel de Certeau (1984: 91–3) has powerfully argued that there are two ways of understanding the city. One that is imagined in the spheres of the planners which he denoted as the *concept city* and adopts a view from above, and one that is the city experienced by those who walk the streets. For the aims of this research I needed to apply a mixed methods approach in order to grasp both the official security imagination of those who planned and implemented the mega-event security strategies and the lived experience of those on street level. To develop an account of both the concept and the experienced city, I adopted participant observation and ethnographic interviews as the best methods for undertaking the present work.

Moreover, I had to face the problem that the events related to the World Cup and the Olympics were spatially distributed across the whole city and took place simultaneously. Therefore it has been important to find a way to apply "instant ethnography" to register certain moments of "chaos and confusion" (Ferrell et al. 2008: 180), that can arise suddenly and spontaneously. Following Fassin these observation dynamics lie at the core of the ethnographer's activity, i.e.

> "a presence both involved and detached, inscribed in the instant and over time, allowing precise descriptions and multiple perspectives, thus providing a distinctive understanding of the world that deserves to be shared" (2013: 642).

During the fieldwork I frequented mainly four research localities. First, I spent a significant amount of time in a civil police station where I accompanied the officers in their distinct daily routines. Second, I spent all seven World Cup games in Rio at the mobile civil police station within the public security perimeter around the Maracanã stadium accompanying the police officers' shifts. I also passed some time there before the Olympic inauguration and closing ceremony. In addition, I several times visited the Mobile Integrated Command and Control Centre (CICC-M) within the World Cup security cordon. Third, I frequently observed the dynamics within the Integrated Command and Control Centre (CICC) in Rio de Janeiro during the World Cup and the Olympics.[3] Fourth, I spent substantial time in the *Police City*, the 2013 inaugurated civil police headquarters and home to most of the specialised police departments. There I carried out a series of ethnographic interviews with the members of the civil police Special Forces and observed wider police activities.

With the above-described instant "ethnographic sensibility" (Ferrell 2013: 265), I understood Rio de Janeiro as one entire fieldwork locality. In order to breathe in the SME atmosphere ambience I opted to walk the city, talk to people in the streets and *experience* the city from below in the way de Certeau (1984: 93) had imagined it: "The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below', below the thresholds at which visibility begins." To furnish my arguments with a

3 I also visited the integrated command and control facilities of the armed forces and local organising committee (LOC). Furthermore I several times visited Rio's Smart City centre and once the integrated command and control centre in São Paulo.

cultural criminological "thoroughgoing consideration and appreciation of the visual" (Hayward 2010: 4), and to make sense of the meanings on display, I used these *strolls* around the Olympic city to photograph the mega-event security spectacle.

The police officers I mostly accompanied are from the civil police, one of two main forces within the Brazilian state and the backbone of the country's public security system (alongside the federal police that operates across state boundaries). Whereas the military police patrol the streets, civil police officers investigate crimes, interrogate suspects and file cases with the judiciary, and can be seen as an agency of surveillance and an auxiliary branch of the juridical system (Kant de Lima, 1995: 85). Although the civil police as an organisation has a clear civilian character, it is anchored in Brazil's militaristic past (Zaverucha, 2000: 9). This past still resonates today in its hierarchical, military and hypermasculine everyday working environments. This is especially obvious in Rio's civil police Special Forces CORE, with one of its members stating the following:

> "Here in Rio de Janeiro we use rifles, war equipment like helmets, bulletproof vests against rifles. […] This is military equipment, which for us has become a routine. The CORE is exactly this: Within the civil police, we are a paramilitary force."

Although included in a civilian organisation, the CORE unit uses AR 10 and M4 battle rifles and their uniforms and cars are all black. The CORE is the militarised special resources department and consists of a bomb detection unit, a dogs squad and a helicopter service team. The most important sector in the CORE is a relatively small group of approximately 40 men that work in 24-hour shifts (called SOTE). Their main task is to support the specialised or normal district police stations in dangerous circumstances or in territories dominated by armed drug traffickers. All members are specially trained civil police officers who are selected by physical and psychological assessment and often internalise a hypermasculine and militaristic way of perceiving police work.

Although the police are such an important player in the field, we know relatively little about how police officers themselves deal with doing police work in a city like Rio. Only a few studies have focussed on the civil police officers themselves, including Guaracy Mingardi's (1992) ethnography with civil police officers and Graham Denyer Willis' (2015) ethnographic account of homicide detectives in São Paulo and Roberto Kant de Lima's (1995) and Flavia Medeiros' (2018) brilliant work with Rio's civil police. Being a police officer in Rio also

means to be entangled with, participate in, and suffer physically and mentally from the working conditions in a hierarchical organisation and a most deadly police routine (Cano and Magaloni, 2016).

3 Access, Trust and Objectivity

3.1 Choosing Sides, Getting In and Earning Trust

Starting my fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro I still held the belief that I could cover the police and the side of favela residents. Rapidly I realised that this was too dangerous and complicated. How could I do research being on both sides at the same time? Howard S. Becker (1966: 239) famously reminds us that it is impossible to stay neutral: "the question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side are we on." So I chose to be on the side of the state security forces. However, just because I was on their side, this does not imply that I was blind to the respective other side.

Becker (1966: 242) takes a clear stance towards the political project of research in the social sciences when he suggests that the researcher should be on the side of the powerless in order to swing the power balance towards the weaker. Instead, I tried to approach it like Didier Fassin (2013: 641) who tried not to choose *any* side when he *did* and *wrote* his ethnography on police work and the youth of the Parisian periphery. Instead, he aimed "to combine interactionist and structuralist approaches" by first, exposing the ways in which the police treat the youth, second, relating that to more "sociological characteristics" of those who carry out these actions, and third, placing these situations into the wider picture of public security policies directed to the *banlieus* (Fassin 2013: 641). Bearing this approach in mind, I tried to deal with ethically complicated situations during the research and writing process as I will show in this article.

Mitchell Duneier (2001: 336) describes in his ethnography about Afro-American street vendors how it is a difficult matter of *getting in*. The *getting in* is not so much a matter of obtaining formal authority (if this is at all possible/necessary) to access a given research field, it is more a matter of earning the trust of those we want to study. To get into the field is therefore not a reference to just the locality or a territory, but rather it is about how we possibly can get close enough to those under investigation in order to participate in their activity.

Through conversations with research colleagues I rapidly realised that my access to my field of study was extraordinarily good and provided me with a way into normally rather restricted areas. Thus, it is worth shedding light on how this access was guaranteed, and how I was able to open so many important doors. To put it bluntly: my initial contact with the civil police was a coincidence. When I was on a family visit in São Paulo 2013 before the PhD started, I was already looking for possible subjects and research sites. I visited several NGOs in São Paulo and participated in meetings of the committee that was founded to oppose the ways in which the World Cup and the Olympics were organised in Brazil. At that time I was not yet sure which city – São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro – would be better suited to carry out my research plans. My inclination was toward São Paulo as I knew the city from the years I lived there, and as all eyes would be on Rio for the mega-events, I thought it more interesting to write about São Paulo. However, I also knew that Rio de Janeiro would be more compelling due to its specific security conditions and because not only would the important World Cup games take place there, but also the Olympics.

A retired friend of mine in Rio de Janeiro worked for many years at a Brazilian bank and one of her clients was the civil police chief in Rio de Janeiro in 2013 when I initiated this research project. My friend suggested that she could arrange a meeting for me with the police chief. First, I was not that enthusiastic, because I knew that the civil police would only have a minor role in the World Cup security. Nonetheless, I knew that this could be a good contact to come closer to Brazil's security authorities, so I decided to go for a three-day trip to Rio.

The meeting with the civil police chief was pretty short. She asked me straightforward "what can we do for you?" After I had briefly explained the purpose of my research, she brought me to the office of the civil police operational sub chief who was the one who was in charge for the whole World Cup security strategy for the civil police. After I waited for a while in his office, he came in and greeted me. I presented my project and he told me that I could have access to whatever I wanted. The short Rio trip had been worth it.

I went back to Europe to start the PhD programme in September 2013. Since the visit in Rio I had hoped to accompany the sub chief in his work directly during his daily activities. Some weeks before I would return to Rio to initiate my fieldwork in April 2014, I wrote the operational sub chief to announce my arrival. To my shock, he told me that the police chief had left her position to run for the state parliament elections and that he now had to wait for whoever would be announced as the new chief of the civil police. I already saw my whole

plan collapsing just like a house of cards. The only thing I could do in that situation was to wait. Then I learned that he himself was appointed as the new civil police chief and I thought it could probably not get better than that, and that I had a lot of luck.

Once in Rio, however, it took a long time until I could actually start. It took at least two weeks until he responded. The World Cup was approaching and as he was new in his office, it was difficult to get through. Once I could reach his office they directed me to the civil police academy to meet with the police official in charge there. Luckily, I already knew a policeman who worked in the academy, who had created a security and safety course, which trained a lot of police officers across different institutions for the mega-events. I had skyped with him before coming to Rio. It helped a lot that he was sitting in the office just beside the police academy chief. He showed me around while I needed to wait for the chief. Later, we would all go together for lunch and I could already place my research interests among those working in the academy.

In the conversation with the police academy chief I realised that my disappointment having being directed towards her school was unnecessary. The police chief had just delegated me to someone else to take care of me. Luckily the police academy chief brought me into contact with a policeman who was responsible for the civil police in the Integrated Command and Control Centre (CICC), the heart of the World Cup security. I met him the very same day and could record an interview with him. He directed me to the Special Forces and the police station where I would later spend many day and night shifts. He wrote a recommendation letter with which he authorised from the highest police levels that I could do research, but explained: "It is totally up to them if they want you to be around or not. We have this policy that we authorise you, but they decide if it is all right for them." The letter worked at the Special Forces headquarters and they allowed me to come and go whenever I wanted. The same happened with the police station. The station chief granted me access to her station and suddenly I was in. Nonetheless, it was one thing to have the official authorisation of the station chief and another one to be accepted by the many police officers that work there. This was maybe the hardest part.

To get more familiar with the security structures and to get to know the who-is-who of the security hierarchies, I always tried to interview people immediately. In this way, the conversations did not stay with the usual small talk and the "later I'll call you", but we could engage in very interesting subjects. Usually one interviewee would say: "you know this is an area I am not familiar with, but talk to this guy, he knows more about that." In this way, I went from

one person to the next and could always say: "It was your friend who told me to talk to you and he sends greetings." It seemed that every other interview provided me with an additional two other people I should interview too. As I was sent by someone they knew, the access was easier and the conversation came smoothly. Almost always when I obtained a contact through a public relations spokesman or had to be satisfied with the spokesman himself (as in the case of the military command structure in Rio), the interview did not go beyond what one could also read in press releases. To the advantage of this research these occasions were very rare.

At the same time this brought me into the security structure not only of the civil police, but of various other institutions. For example, I was presented to the main person responsible within the CICC. He was a totally open person who was easy to engage with. He was even more important for me two years later, when the Olympics took place and he personally granted me access to the CICC and I could come and leave whenever I wanted.

Throughout my time with the police I also recognised how they liked that someone was interested in their work and their side of the story. They seem to suffer a lot from the ways in which they are portrayed in the media and feel a lack of respect for them and their work from the people in general. There is no need to discuss that this has to do with the long list and history of human rights violations and power abuse by the police; still, my insistence to stay with them at the station and show real interest, gave me the possibility of access too.

Once in the civil police station or its mobile version within the Maracanã security cordon, trust was a completely different matter. At the beginning it was very difficult to relieve the suspicion against me. The World Cup was a crucial trust building dynamic when chaos and confusion erupted and I started to help the police as a translator. These circumstances brought me closer to the police officers. Trust grew substantially due to my regular visits and late night research shifts. I started to go for dinners with small groups of police officers, ride within their police cars and developed friendly relationships with some of them. When I arrived at the station, some would say such things like "come on in, you are already one of us here." However, this was not the case with all of the police officers, as some had serious reservations towards me. My presence at *their* work place seemed to bother them and restricted my access within certain situations.

Another important aspect to guarantee access and to gather data during the fieldwork was insistence. I once waited several hours in front of Rio de Janeiro's security secretary's office. Mr. Beltrame's personal assistant had al-

ready rescheduled the interview three times. That day he had to attend several emergency meetings. I waited patiently and got my one-hour interview with him.

I also had to learn to take advantage of every opportunity that arose immediately. At a party I got to know someone who worked in the local organising team of the World Cup for the security section. He said to me: "the only chance you have to visit me is tomorrow morning." I was in Barra da Tijuca and was supposed to sleep there too, as it was too far away from where I lived. He told me to come to Rio Centre in the morning. I knew that would require me to get up really early to go home and then go to the centre of the city. That morning it rained heavily and there were no buses, so I had to take a cab. The problem was that Barra da Tijuca is a neighbourhood in Rio's West and I was living in Rio's South. It took me over an hour. And then I realised: Rio Centro is actually the name of a centre where fairs or conferences happen and where the local organising team had its headquarters, and it is located in the neighbourhood I just had left. So I had to go all the way back. But I made it, and it was important as all my official requests to interview FIFA people proved fruitless.

There were many obstacles I had to overcome. Maybe one of the biggest was that I was a one-man show who could not be at the same time in different places. So sometimes it was very hard to decide what kind of event to attend. The day the World Cup started I was expelled from the CICC. This signified a major setback for me, but I could transform that the very same day into something really fascinating, which was the access to another unexpected research locality – the mobile police station. Instead of giving up I went straight to the special forces and – once again – waited patiently for a respondent. What happened was that I told my story to the secretary who was staffing the phone that day, just sitting in front of me while I was waiting. She gave me the number of a friend of hers who was the driver and engineer for the mobile police station. I called him, told him my story and he invited me to accompany him the very next morning at five in the morning to participate with the mobile station at a last safety exercise in the Maracanã borough. This opened doors for the whole World Cup period and beyond.

The data selection was a difficult but also very exciting process. I spent a approximately nine months in Rio in my fieldwork localities. Within this process – and if we take ethnographic methods seriously – these fieldwork months implied an awful lot of taking fieldnotes. Normally, these fieldnotes should be transformed in longer memos. What I mostly did is that whenever it was possible I wrote the memos the next morning or that same night.

However, due to the intensive schedule with interviews and participant observation I did not always succeed in doing that. I worked with two different styles. I had physical paper notebooks where I wrote my jottings. However, I also realised for example that it would make sense to take notes on my cell phone as all the police officers constantly were looking at their own devices to access chatting platforms like WhatsApp. So I could do the same and write things down and send them to myself via email in several updates during one evening for example.

When I came back from the fieldwork and looked at my data I realised that I could simply change the subject of my work. I could have written a book about my ethnography within the civil police station alone. However, this was not the aim of the research. It was not just about the police. It was also about other themes and connections, so I included as much data as possible from the police ethnography. However, there were limits to doing so. The data that fed into the written text were chosen according to the situations that appeared during the fieldwork and started to form the structure of the written text.

3.2 Objectivity and My Position within the Field

The trust and confidence I earned during my stays in the station and other fieldwork localities, raises a series of serious issues of objectivity and my position within the field. The cultural criminological *ethnographic sensibility* requires that the researcher cross boundaries that other disciplines would consider as *no go areas* of scientific objectivity. The *criminological verstehen* explained above is an effort to rupture such borders as an attempt to immerse oneself within the culture under study. Yet, much criticism is directed towards ethnographic accounts, as being simple descriptions and uncritical adaptations of what the researcher has experienced within the field (e.g. Salzman 2002). Duneier (2001: 343) reminds us of the "Ethnographic Fallacy" put forth by Stephen Steinberg in a conference paper about Gans' (1982) *Urban Villagers*. Steinberg alerts us that ethnography sometimes tends to take reality with all its details for granted without making the effort of interpretation and situating findings within wider structures that are hidden in the backgrounds of the observed. Following Duneier (2001: 343–4) there is no easy way to escape this problematic: it requires both some confidence from the reader towards the ethnographic writer, and the ethnographer's effort to situate the observed into wider political and social-economic backgrounds.

Young (2011: 133) approaches this problematic in a similar way: "We have to be constantly aware, then, of the underlying narrative about the subjects which the ethnographer is communicating to the outside world." He suggests adopting an "ethnographic lens" that is marked by a twofold layer of narratives. A first narrative is the ethnographic text or the "subjects' story." A second one is a "meta-narrative", that is shaped and influenced by the personal history of the ethnographer where he provides the "interpretative structure, the discourse within which the narrator interprets the story" (Young 2011: 134). Such a process can lead to a problematic "ethnographic othering" within which the ethnographer tends to depict the studied group and culture through his own lens and may not do justice to those portrayed (Young 2011: 153–73).

Another pressing issue for ethnographies is whether respondents hide their real self away, whilst we are doing the research. A police officer once told me, that he behaved differently when I was present. Again, Duneier (2001: 338) helpfully relies on what he calls the "Becker Principle" which consists of the dynamic that "most social processes have a structure that comes close to insuring that a certain set of situations will arise over time." In other words, the police officer may have behaved differently during some encounters, but could not have done that in each of the situations I witnessed during the whole fieldwork period.

Thus, ethnography requires reflexivity about the researcher's position within the field. It is important to know the ethnographer's social position and political stance and *how* the researcher relates to the field. Moreover, this research adopts Ferrell's (1998: 24–5) principle that while ethnographic methods move beyond the normal boundaries of scientific objectivity, they do so in a conscious way: the research performance as such is a deeply political activity. Said differently, there is no such thing as a classical scientific objectivity that many positivistic researchers claim for themselves.

The present research is truly influenced by my aversion against the ways in which mega-events and especially the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics are organised. I engaged in the Hamburg *NOlympia* campaign and together with a group of colleagues released a position paper that asked for a more holistic approach within the bidding process that assesses openly and honestly the risks and dangers for a city that hosts the Olympics.[4] Yet, this does not free me from a thorough analysis of my fieldwork findings – also if they do not cover my own political opinion. Therefore, Ferrell's (1998: 25) argument holds some truth for

4 See: http://www.olympiakritik-aus-der-wissenschaft.de/

my own position and for this present work: "These perspectives further emphasize that methodologies inevitably intertwine with theoretical stances, political choices, and the social situations in which they are practiced." Furthermore, the striving for total objectivity and research without bias is not possible. As Becker (1966: 247) put it we "can never have a "balanced picture" until we have studied all of society simultaneously."

Reflexivity extends to the researcher's own social status. I am certain that my good access to the field has also to do with the fact of being a white, European male who holds a degree from a German University and whose joint UK-German PhD research has been financed by the European Union. In other words, I am part of what one would probably call the European educational elite. At the same time, however, I might have had an advantage over someone who had never been in Brazil before. I worked and lived in São Paulo for three years in a social organisation that develops social activities in three favelas. Through the marriage with my wife who comes from that very place, Brazilian culture and Brazilian Portuguese was part of my everyday life for the last 20 years. This had a crucial influence of my position in the field. On the one side, it helped me to *get in* at ease in the sense that I was able to participate in conversations, narrate jokes and to laugh at the right time. It even got to the point that some of the police officers thought that I would be a Brazilian *from the South*.[5] As the civil police mostly works in plain clothes, I was confused for a police officer in numerous situations (also Denyer Willis 2015: 14).

These personal conditions, paired with the plain clothes narrative above, enabled me to witness situations that otherwise I would not have been able to access. It was also of advantage to be *visibly* alien to the societal conflicts in Rio de Janeiro. Many respondents were eager to explain circumstances they would have hardly done if I had been a Brazilian.

On the other side, the advantage I had in terms of language and basic understandings of Brazilian culture did not free me from learning the language, codes and practices of the field (Van Maanen 2011: 13).[6] My NGO work in a favela had marked me profoundly. The topic of violence, criminal networks and the

5 Many Brazilians of German descent live in the South of Brazil and may speak Brazilian Portuguese with a slightly different accent.

6 Language was a major issue for this work. As a native speaking German, writing in English with data in Brazilian Portuguese was challenging. See also Maclean (2007) and Caldeira (2000a: 17).

police started to interest me when I witnessed the attacks of the criminal network *Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC)* [First Command of the Capital] in São Paulo. The *crime talk (Caldeira 2000b)* in São Paulo's periphery and my own experience of police violence marked me tremendously and let me adopt a certain view and a certain cultural and linguistic vocabulary alien to the world of police. When I initiated the research I first decided to *choose the sides* of the urban poor as I was totally immersed in the fight against the "poverty of rights" (Fischer 2008). In other words, I had to learn the language and codes that predominated among the people in my field: the Brazilian public security agents (see also Goffman 2014: 230). However, this experience challenged my pre-existing opinions on Brazilian police officers and Rio's urban conflict.

4 Moral Ambiguities in Doing Ethnography

Doing ethnography implies being aware of ethical questions that will arise during the research. It is important to state that I have not done covert research (see e.g. Norris 1993; Blackman 2007) or hidden the research questions from any of my respondents. All interviewees have signed consent forms and read an information sheet with my research aims, approved beforehand by the University of Kent ethics committee. Nevertheless, two ethical questions have marked me during the research. The first one refers to what Norris (1993: 123) mentions as "the dilemmas posed when the researcher is faced with direct evidence of misconduct by those he or she is researching." Beyond that, what happens when the researcher himself participates in situations that are ethically and morally questionable? The second issue refers to an internal conflict and a feeling of *betrayal* towards my respondents during the research process. I will approach both questions by presenting one situation from the field.

One given day I went to the registration room within the back of the police station with one of the police officers who had to take the fingerprints of four black boys. After the humiliating registration procedure, the police officer hit the boys violently in the face and kicked their legs brutally. The boys wept and cried (for a detailed description of the situation see Pauschinger 2019). My first thoughts when I witnessed the incident were blinded by rage: *What an asshole. What a jerk, hitting little boys. This is all senseless*. However, after I came home very late that night, I started to process the experience reflecting on writing about the ethical questions related to the two topics anticipated above.

The following few paragraphs will deal with the first issue of the involvement in morally ambiguous circumstances. The above scene has provoked at least three issues that are summarised in the following topics: *reaction*, *intervention* and *complicity*. Addressing the first issue, it presents the dilemma of how I should have reacted. Did I react in the right way? Is there any correct way to react? Basically I watched the incident without a lot of reaction at all. It happened quickly and did not last more than 15 to 25 seconds. If, and I am sure about that, the officer would have continued the beating I would have said something to stop him. The incident provoked me to think, until when do we need to remain in our *neutral* observer position? Is this at all possible? When do we need to step up? Is there any need to do so? To what extent are we crossing a moral line when we let things happen, and who is it that sets this line? All these questions can be narrowed down to our own moral standards that may vary from those who read the ethnography and can expose the work to heavy criticism. The following and second issue may provide some answers.

The question of *intervening* involves a series of issues. Once the situation was over I asked myself several times: What's next? Should I go to his superior to report what he had done in order that he cannot do it again? But what about the trust I gained from the officer? Can I violate it? To whom do I owe loyalty in this case, the boys or the officer? An intervention could have provoked a series of totally unknown and may be dangerous consequences for the research process, the access and myself. As an answer to some of the questions above, I decided not to intervene in the situation as I stood on the police officers' side – I was *with him* in that moment. I evaluated that my task was to make sense of the situation later within my writing. Furthermore, Polsky's (1967) notion of "guilty knowledge" helps to assess some of the questions. If we study criminal behaviour we have to be morally prepared to witness, accept, and sometimes even to participate within criminal activity. Polsky asserts that we,

> "will not be enabled to discern some vital aspects of criminal lifestyles and subcultures unless he [the researcher] (1) makes such a moral decision, (2) makes the criminals believe him, and (3) convinces them of his ability to act in accord with his decision" (1967: 140).

This notion of *guilty knowledge* is related to what was laid out earlier in terms of the *criminological verstehen* put forward by Jeff Ferrell (1998) and cultural criminological research methods that pledge for a direct involvement within the immediacy of the research field.

Finally, there is the concern of *complicity*. What responsibility did I have in the whole situation? Did he do it because I was there? Did he want to show off? Did he feel the necessity to demonstrate power? Alice Goffman (2014: 236) refers to this kind of question in her own ethnography *On the Run*. She asks herself if she would augment the risk of her participants being stopped and frisked by the police, because they walk around the neighbourhood with a white girl, as she had read in older policing literature. Through her own experience she realised that even without her, the police stopped her participants equally frequently: "In order to understand whether one's words or actions are creating something strange and foreign, one must first learn what is normal" (Goffman 2014: 236). In this sense, it was reassuring that I had witnessed the same officer beat another boy in a different situation where he was unaware of my presence.[7]

The ethical question of *betrayal* is directly connected to the question of trust and a current problem for ethnographic research within security forces. The issue accompanied me during the whole fieldwork period. Again, Duneier (2001: 336) helpfully writes, "Fieldwork can be a morally ambiguous enterprise." During the whole fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro I felt such a moral ambiguity that is directly connected to my own biography. As I had always been on the other side and not with police officers, I had continuously criticised the Brazilian police for their violent actions in favelas. During the fieldwork I learned that the police themselves are sometimes trapped in the complexities of the Brazilian public security system and are rather the *powerless* than the powerful. However, to earn the trust of the police I needed to show clearly on whose side I stood. In order to do that, I was not forced to lie, nevertheless I had omitted some aspects of my personal background, always maintaining a respectful treatment and bearing in mind that there is no such full transparency or sincerity in the research process (Duneier (2001: 336).

Yet, my fieldwork was accompanied by a constant preoccupation that some of my respondents would discover what I had said in newspaper articles and conference talks before my research: that the Brazilian police has a racist violence problem. I did not want to appear as one of those "idiots from the human rights movement" as this could have closed my access. After a few months however, I engaged in vivid discussions with some officers on such topics and

7 There can also arise a series of legal questions involving ethnography. Principally Alice Goffman's (2014) book has been the subject of massive controversy. See Steve Lubet (2015a, 2015b) and Lewis-Kraus (2016).

defended my standpoints, as the intimacy was greater than the political differences. Furthermore I experienced several situations where I got engaged in more or less humiliating action towards suspects myself. I witnessed interrogations and sometimes asked the prisoners things that made the police officers laugh out loud and made me earn respect. Nonetheless, this made me realise how quickly one can be overwhelmed with and immersed in certain situations.

The question of *betrayal* and *trust* re-appears again when it comes to writing up the research. It is then when we have to decide what details from the field observations can furnish the narrative of the ethnography without betraying the trust of the respondents (Fielding 2006: 287). After the scene from the field narrated above, the officer had said to me: "Better you don't put this into your book." However, the scene with the boys appeared to be crucial for my thesis as it touches on some of the most pressing research questions. I decided to use the scene within my work.

Still, there is something that bothers me profoundly with that decision. Again, it comes back to the question of trust and betrayal. During the whole fieldwork on numerous occasions my respondents would make jokes and more or less serious comments about my motives, my status and my research aims. They sometimes even joked that I was an *X-9*, a popular expression for a spy that would write a report criticising their actions. I sensed two things. On the one side I can imagine that my respondents would not like to see some episodes published I describe within the research. On the other side many of them were happy to know that someone would write about *their* positions and *their* working conditions. Denyer Willis (2015: 134–8) explains how he was positively surprised when he exposed the grievances about police work in São Paulo in an article for the *New York Times*. It was massively criticised by officials high up in the ministries and very much welcomed by the police officers he had worked with. Almost all of my respondents were committed to doing the right thing and that it was impossible to always stick to the legal rules "as this is the only way to do the job." The police officer from the scene above gave me the reason why I should not describe the scene in my book: "It could be bad for my superior." The reason was not because he had felt uncomfortable with what he had just done, but that it would not be good for the police's reputation.

Two further reasons helped to decide what to do. First, I do not reveal the time, place and identity of anyone involved in illegal action. Second, I have never withheld from the participants that I would *describe everything what I see*. As said above, I presented the scene not to blame or denigrate anyone. The scene serves purely to *understand* the *circumstances* that lead to such incidents

from *the viewpoint of the police*. For me it is important that what I report within my research is not meant to condemn or to accuse any of those I have studied. On the contrary, I am aware of the nuances and complexities of Rio's public security sector within which the police officers and the high ranked authorities must constantly improvise how to act, are themselves in danger or have no adequate answers for the reality they face. Yet, it is also clear that police work in Brazil is deeply entrenched in what I have elsewhere described as a politics of death (Pauschinger 2023).

This exemplifies the difficult circumstances within which police work is done in Brazil. During my fieldwork these realities of violence materialised. One of my respondents was killed in an armed assault, another one was shot on duty and several others reported about the psychological and physical scars they carry from being police officers exposed to highly dangerous situations. Not least because of these realties, it is an endeavour to do justice to the research subjects. Fassin (2013: 640) puts this fear of betraying one's own research subjects into context by saying: "Carrying on an ethnography is cumulating debt." Writing it, is then a form of "repaying" this debt. We therefore owe most to those we have worked with. However, for Fassin (2013: 640) there is a second dimension: we also owe to those "primarily concerned by the issues on which we conduct research." This relates back to what I have pointed out in the beginning of this section, namely that it is not only a matter of *choosing sides* but to put what we observe into context and try to understand why things happen and people act as they act. In other words, I will and have to segue my conviction to portray the world I saw, as the world I saw. This includes without doubt my *ethnographic lens* – my personal filter – of what I want to transmit within my research which first and foremost serves to answer my research questions. As an endeavour, a cultural criminological sense of ethnography is presenting what stays hidden and is considered as "dangerous knowledge" (Ferrell et al. 2008: 191; Young 2011: 174). At the core of this research lies a central question expressed by Ferrell et al.:

> "Cultural criminology's goal is to expose that presence [of structures of inequality and injustice in everyday life and crime] to those who might not see it, thereby helping ourselves and others to understand and confront the everyday reality of injustice […] And for cultural criminology that's just the question: How best can we endanger existing arrangements of predatory crime, punitive criminal justice, and pervasive late modern exclusion?" (Ferrell et al. 2008: 192)

The ways in which mega-events are organised these days, produce a series of losers. The inequalities and injustices may not only be on the side of the urban poor or those deprived of civil rights, but they also may be found on the sides of those acting within the Brazilian public security spheres.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has exposed the epistemological and methodological foundations of my research with police officers in Rio de Janeiro, the ways in which I have dealt with issues of access, objectivity and the moral ambiguities of being in the field. Taking a step back and reflecting upon my reasoning in this chapter we clearly have to ask ourselves if in the times we are living in, such a position that I am defending here is still justified. In times in which the Brazilian police brutally assassinates black people in thousands per year, there is almost no other space as to understand these dynamics as 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). In times in which police brutality makes the news globally and in which those considered "other" in society are in its vast majority the victims of such policing strategies. A recent and important paper by Jaime Amparo Alves (2021) rightly questions the approach that I have justified in this chapter and if it is actually still coherent with increased racist police brutality, that we take a position of neutrality and look at the police with the ethnographic curiosity to understand *their* side. I have not yet answered this question for me entirely, but what I have written here, reflects the reasoning I had when I did my research and analysis of my material. What stands out for me is that I am still persuaded that if we want to understand why they are doing what they are doing we have to get close, into the immediacy of police practices and into the structures of police organisations. Yet, it is, of course, easier to say that if I have never, and will never be able to experience the same level of policing power upon my body, than those who are under constant police and societal surveillance. I concur with Beatrice Jauregui (2013: 148), who has powerfully described writing ethnography as an "ethical process", and as a "dirty job", but who believes "that somebody has got to do it".

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