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Policing citizenship

Norms, forms and affects of urban security in Recife, Brazil

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Publication date

2021

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Maurity Frossard, C. (2021). *Policing citizenship: Norms, forms and affects of urban security in Recife, Brazil*.

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Summary

Drawing on ethnographic research in Recife, this thesis analyses how norms and values pertaining to citizenship and authority are shared, negotiated and performed in the everyday spaces, practices and encounters that make up urban security in the capital of Pernambuco, in the Northeast of Brazil. It seeks to address two overarching questions: *How are norms of citizenship and authority (re)produced through everyday urban security practices? How do these practices affect the production and maintenance of sociospatial difference and inequality in Recife?* In answering these questions, I have concentrated on understanding *how* citizenship and authority normativities are practiced. In other words, I focus on how notions of “good” and “bad” are performed in relation to citizens, policing actors, and “policing citizens” through the sensible forms of urban security and the affective responses they (aim to) elicit. The sensorial-political consensus staged by the aesthetics of urban security, as I have explored, works to reproduce and normalize social and spatial differentiation – chiefly along the lines of class and race – in the everyday. Differently positioned subjects are assigned shares in the making of this aesthetic and affective order, which produces difference, as well as commonality. Though it may feel self-evident and all-encompassing, this Rancièrian “police order” also contains political tensions, revealed in the very ordinary processes and relations enrolled in its maintenance.

The approach outlined above seeks to intervene in current debates on urban security, citizenship and inequality. Existing research has included a strong emphasis on the governance of urban (in)security, with a focus on *who polices* (e.g., Beall et al., 2013; Davis, 2020; Koonings and Kruijt, 2007, 2015; Muggah, 2014). Within this literature, gradations of citizenship emerge from security governance failures and fragilities, which tend to concentrate in marginalized urban areas – from where citizen resilience can also arise. Another body of literature has focused on *who is policed*, foregrounding how different forms of security provision converge in their production of killable subjects, along classed and racialized divides (e.g., Alves, 2018; Costa Vargas, 2018; Hansen, 2006; Denyer Willis, 2015; Mbembe, 2003). These scholars approach the production of non-citizenship as an urban security *project*, rather

than a problem or failure of security governance. Finally, a third strand of scholarship has concentrated on how authority and citizenship are relationally performed and negotiated in policing encounters (e.g., Fassin, 2013; Harriott and Jaffe, 2018). Shedding light on how security authority and citizenship are co-constitutive of each other, this research foregrounds the everyday *processes* in which classed and racialized differences are produced, and maintained, but also negotiated – even within highly unequal and fragmented urban contexts.

Joining and contributing to these debates, this thesis argues for a focus on the production, circulation and negotiation of citizenship and policing *norms*, and engages these norms through the aesthetic and affective dimensions of urban security. This approach connects anthropological engagements with everyday normative processes of subject and community formation (e.g., Holston, 2008; de Koning et al. 2015; Lazar, 2013) to recent work highlighting the aesthetic-affective dimensions of politics (e.g., Adey, 2014; Bargetz, 2015; Ghertner, 2014; Ghertner et al. 2019; Navaro-Yashin, 2012; Rancière, 2013, 2015). Such an approach to citizenship and authority, focused on the connections between norms, aesthetic forms, and affects, I suggest, deepens our understanding of how unequal urban orders are both normalized, and potentially unsettled.

Reading everyday urban security practices through Rancière's (2013) concept of the "distribution of the sensible", which also entails a *distribution of affects* (cf. Bargetz, 2015), this dissertation engages the citizenship and policing norms that urban security forms stage and the affective atmospheres they elicit. As highlighted throughout, such security practices stage an aesthetic order in which active citizens and present policers partake as neatly complimentary – a *police order* in the Rancièrian sense. Throughout this thesis' empirical chapters, I analyse a broad range of *sensible security arrangements*, in which state and non-state actors, materialities, and technologies are enrolled in order to engender affective atmospheres of safety and apprehension. My analysis of how urban security forms and affects enact, circulate and unsettle normative articulations of "good citizenship" and "good authority" developed from three ubiquitous security forms, tethered

to differently positioned areas of Recife's South Zone: vertical condominiums, WhatsApp-based partnerships for neighbourhood surveillance, and state and non-state forms of street-level policing. Below, I outline the main points yielded from the different chapters that make up this thesis, teasing out, at the end, key insights that cut across their different contributions.

Of mud, marble, and mirrors

Recife's aesthetic and material forms have long been the objects of urban development and governance interventions, as Chapter Two has unpacked, geared towards different visions of the "good" city, and the "good" urban citizen – notions that have been enmeshed with urban (in)security in different ways. Aesthetic dichotomies associated with the (post-)colonial city's polarized expansion – such as dry/wet, formal/informal, and high/low – have been historically sensed and made sense of through their classed and racialized connotations. Norms that pertain to hygiene, development, and security have materially sedimented onto Recife's urban landscape, cementing the exclusion – and, at times, fuelling the resistance – of the people and places deemed as threats to such norms. The material and spatial orderings – and *otherings* – of this chapter reverberate throughout those that follow; not as historical precedents in a linear trajectory, but as past configurations of relations that are still active, ongoing, and relevant for understanding the material and spatial dimensions of urban security, citizenship and inequality.

Condoscapes

Such spatial and material dimensions are central to Chapter Three, which unpacks vertical condominiums through the security norms, forms and affects that shape and are shaped by this housing typology, within and beyond the limits of their discrete gate-wall-*portaria*-high-rise arrangements. While governed by explicit rules of conduct, which seek to manage behaviour within condominium confines, this residential space also enacts more tacit

normative connections between residents' safety and forms of classed and racialized separation. The recognizable security atmospheres that this ubiquitous urban form affords are not fully contained by the formal perimeters of individual enclaves, however. In addition to constituting securityscapes (Maguire and Low, 2019) in themselves, condominiums shape spaces of security around them, and elsewhere. Their rapid and clustered proliferation – specifically relevant in Recife's South Zone – make *condoscapes* out of the areas where many of them tower over. Outside the affective atmospheres they immediately engender, material and immaterial condo-elements are inscribed in working-class housing estates, resulting from “civilizing” impositions (cf. Kopper 2016, p. 205), as well as from residents' security concerns and condo-like aspirations. However, walls, gates, and *síndicos* do not necessarily make a condominium: in the case of the state-provided residential enclave discussed here, condo norms and forms appeared as “out of place”, contributing to an affective sense of inequality (cf. Bottero, 2019) amongst dwellers of the *habitacional*.

Smart phones, good communities

Chapter Four unpacks a norm-form-affect cluster that is less immediately visible than condominiums, condoscapes, and their others, while similarly ubiquitous: area-based WhatsApp policing groups. In such digital spaces, encounters with (potential) criminality are translated into sharable content – an encouraged citizenship *practice*. Functioning as more than channels for narrative complaints around perceived urban danger, such groups encouraged security providers and recipients to sensibly perform and negotiate notions of “good” citizenship and “good” authority in a range of ways. Affording visibility, instantaneity, and intimacy to participant-police relations, these digital spaces enabled citizens to share, in real-time, the security-related practices of seeing and showing that made up their voluntary vigilant labour – and performed their willingness to partner with the local PM battalion. The same channels through which citizens became visible to peers and the police also allowed the police themselves to perform presence – even when not physically deployed to the sites where reported

occurrences took place. These groups afforded the sensible circulation of converging citizenship and policing norms across territories that were usually performed and narrated as fundamentally distinct urban (in)security contexts. This, however, does not mean that the immediate sociospatial context ceases to matter: the stakes, risks, and effects of active participation were very much shaped by one's positioning in Recife's fragmented urban landscape. Visibility, instantaneity, and intimacy were affordances that applied to citizen-police encounters in relationally different locales, but the surveillant aesthetics and affects that emerged within these broad frames for security (inter)action were situated matters. The vertical surveillance that this digital platform enabled and encouraged within condoscapes differed from the lateral vigilance they demanded from partner citizens of low-income communities – a form of seeing and showing that was potentially detrimental for the watcher and the watched.

Boundary citizens

The task of enacting seemingly suspicious or criminal subjects as threats within – and to – the dominant aesthetic order, as this dissertation shows, is distributed amongst a range of state and non-state actors, materialities, and technologies. Whether within informal urban security arrangements or formalized partnerships, it was a task increasingly demanded from those eager to be recognized, and enacted, as so-called “good” citizens and communities. As Chapter Five unpacked, however, street-level security workers were still deployed – while officially *employed* – for the making and maintenance of affective atmospheres of safety in Recife's South Zone, which entailed sorting citizens and clients from elements and *marginais*. As the chapter discussed, state and non-state forms of “ostensive” policing, understood broadly as the kind of policing intended to be seen and felt, enacted a seamless continuum between being the *citizen* and the *client*, while reading potential threats for the same classed and racialized markers. Both dimensions of bordering, as the chapter discussed, required the *affective labour* of policing actors. From this boundary positioning, emerged a boundary subjectivity that unveiled frictions and fragilities at the core of the police, in the

Rancièrian sense. Here, I am gesturing towards the subjects who are included in the police order of urban security, but ambivalently so; precariously treading the very sensible borders that their violence work is deployed to enforce.

Sensible shares, aesthetic divides, inequality affects

From the many urban security processes and relations that this dissertation engages, a range of circulating practices emerge as enactments of “good” citizenship in relation to urban security, which we might categorize as follows: first, *curating and maintaining built and sensorial environments* according to dominant articulations of the look and feel of safety; second, the largely visual *sensing, capturing, and sharing of (potential) criminal occurrences*; and third, the *active recognition of and submission to security authority*. Meanwhile, practices that enacted “good” authority tended to share an emphasis on *performing flexible, ubiquitous, and immediate presence*. The norms that this thesis has unpacked circulate across spaces that *recifenses* and policing workers commonly perceive and enact as different worlds, when it comes to law-breaking and law-enforcing.

While the aesthetic consensus enacted by these sensible security arrangements staged a self-evident complementarity between active citizens, and present policing, these orderings also enacted divisions. Here, I suggest, that the processual and relational crafting of this aesthetic order reproduces sociospatial inequalities in two key ways. Perhaps most evidently, the forms and affects that compose it work to solidify classed and racialized imaginaries of which people, places, and offenses should be the target of security attention. Muggings, for instance, alongside other property-related crimes, mobilized the attention of citizens and the police as occurrences that victimize “good people” – in contrast with homicides, widely held as the fate of “bad people”, involved in illegal practices and, therefore, killable. Aesthetic markers associated with class, race, gender, age – and, importantly, address – were similarly sensed, captured, and circulated as relevant risk factors,

perpetuating all too familiar *otherings*. Less familiar, perhaps, are the forms of inequality that emerge amongst those who share a dedication to the citizenship agendas discussed here, but who are situated differently in Recife's urban landscape.

In spatial terms, these "good citizen" subjectivities complicate the contiguous surfaces and fixed borders that divided city images and imaginaries evoke, suggesting instead a *topological* take on citizenship, tethered to "dynamic and continuous fields of relations" (Hepworth, 2015, p. 112), rather than on fixed localities and borders. Even if outside of fixed dualisms, though, the arrangements of sensible security presented and analysed continued to shape spatial processes and experiences along classed and racialized lines.

As I suggest throughout this thesis, the aesthetic ordering of urban security is predicated in differentiating *citizens*, *condôminos*, and *clients* – those who are seen, heard and felt as the rightful recipients of security services, whether state or non-state – from their others, the *marginais*, *bandidos*, and *meliantes*. There is a strong affective component to *how* these differences are performed in the everyday. The affects that mundane security practices and materialities are orchestrated to engender – that is, the affects that are object-targets of security (Anderson, 2015) – vary, in accordance with the subject in question. While those who appear as citizens, *condôminos*, and clients are attuned to a sense of safety, their classed and racialized others are attuned to a sense of apprehension in policing encounters – especially when traversing spaces where they are perceived as out of place.

An *affective sense of inequality* also circulated amongst marginalized subjects as they precariously partook in urban policing practices. This formulation draws on Wendy Bottero's (2019) engagement with inequality through the normative dispositions of ordinary people, who are often required to morally substantiate their actions, as well as value those of others. As Bottero (2019) argues, this also entails subjects and collectives being able to oppose norms that are dominant. Experiences such as "suffering, disrespect and stigmatization", she suggests (*ibid.*, p. 89), "represent powerful affective

forces generating dissent and struggle". The different analytical threads that this dissertation weaves together do not seek to establish a direct and causal relation between the affective sense of "a wrong" (Rancière, 1999, p. 35) and the emergence of sensible dissent. More modestly, though, it suggests that an affective sense of inequality within a given distribution of the sensible affords the conditions for its disruption: for the "wrong people" (Panagia, 2012, p. 100) to emerge as sensible political subjects.