

rede<sup>da</sup>smaré

THE RIGHT TO PUBLIC SECURITY AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

RESEARCH

# VIOLENCE, BODY AND TERRITORY:

The lives of women in the Maré  
Complex of favelas



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**The lives of women in the Maré Complex of favelas**

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Redes da Maré  
Cardiff University  
University of Warwick  
Escola de Serviço Social da  
Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

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# RESEARCH TEAM

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## AUTHORS

Bruna Silva  
Camila Barros  
Claire Blencowe  
Débora Bastos  
Eliana Sousa e Silva  
Fabiana Freitas  
Irone Santiago  
Isabel Barbosa  
Joana Garcia  
Julian Brigstocke  
Lidiane Malanquini  
Luana Bezerra  
Luciana Barros  
Rachel Gouveia Passos  
Rosana Morgado  
Tais Almeida

## TRANSLATOR

Gabriela Baptista

## VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

Douglas Lopes  
Thaina Iná

## DESIGN

Adriana Reis  
Gisa Ferreira

## RESEARCH COORDINATION

Claire Blencowe  
Eliana Sousa Silva  
Joana Garcia  
Julian Brigstocke  
Rosana Morgado

## FIELD COORDINATORS

Camila Barros  
Isabel Barbosa

## COLLABORATING RESEARCHERS

Débora Guedes Bastos  
Lidiane Malanquini  
Rachel Gouveia Passos

## FIELD RESEARCHERS

Bruna Silva  
Fabiana Freitas  
Irone Santiago  
Luana Bezerra  
Luciana Barros  
Tais Almeida

## PROOFREADING

Liliane Santos  
Maykon Sardinha  
Moniza Rizzini Ansari

“

*My great-grandmother's  
voice echoed as a child  
in the bowels of the ship.*

*My grandmother's voice  
echoed obedience to the white  
people who own everything.*

*My mother's voice softly  
echoed revolt in the backs of  
other people's kitchens  
under the bundles of white  
people's dirty clothes along the  
dusty road towards the favela*

*My daughter's voice  
unites all our voices  
the muted silenced voices stuck  
in our throats.*

*My daughter's voice gathers  
the speech and the act.  
Yesterday – today – now.  
In my daughter's voice the  
resonance will be heard,  
the echo of life-freedom.*

”

*Women's Voices - - Conceição Evaristo*



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NOSSAS VOZES



# 1.

# INTRODUCTION

We seek to echo many voices in this publication. Working with a group of women, following on from earlier projects developed by Redes da Maré, taught us about movements in Maré, or rather, in the many different Marés: movements of bodies that circulate, modify, and mirror the different experiences of the distinct favelas that are part of this territory.

Maré is a group of 16 favelas with a population of more than 140,000 inhabitants, located in the North Zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro, between the main access roads that connect various parts of the city and the Metropolitan Area. It is an official district of the city, a status consolidated both by the organization and initiative of the residents and by housing programs promoted by the public authorities<sup>1</sup>.

Currently, Maré is the ninth most densely populated district in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and it is larger than 96% of municipalities in Brazil. Despite its cultural vitality, the population of Maré faces a series of urban problems, such as inadequate basic sanitation and public transport, in addition to armed violence and militarized police intervention. Although the majority of Maré's population is made up of women, there is little discussion of how they are impacted by this daily life.

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<sup>1</sup> Redes da Maré, 2019a.

That is the context of the project *The Impacts of Armed Violence on the Lives of Women in Maré: gender, territory and artistic practice*, carried out through a partnership between Redes da Maré, Cardiff University, the University of Warwick, and the School of Social Work at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

Anchored in the decades-long work of Redes da Maré in the region, this research aims to understand the impacts of armed violence on the lives of women living in the Maré Favela Complex, identifying which protection and care strategies they have developed and, also, working to influence public policies based on experiences in the territory.

Within Redes da Maré, this initiative is part of the process of producing knowledge and formulating projects in one of its axes of work, called Right to Public Security and Access to Justice. This branch of Redes has sought to understand and act on the violence and rights-violations that permeate the daily lives of residents in the 16 favelas of Maré, with the main objective of formulating strategies to materialize the right to public security in the region as a constitutional right.

This text systematizes the main results and experiences of the research. It was a dive into the perspectives of women in the face of armed violence in the Maré region, and these are the voices we want to reverberate. Listening to the women, this work favoured the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and community strategies for coping with violence, both for care and protection.

From that perspective, we reflected on the idea that if data, research processes and results seek to transform reality, who better to think about this than the women themselves? To think about policies for women, what would be better than the input of the main stakeholders, based on the survival strategies they have developed in everyday life?

It is important to strengthen and improve access to the rights that have been conquered. More than that, **we need to build strategies to implement public policies of protection and care. It is necessary to understand the types of violence to which women in favelas and peripheries are exposed, taking into account socioeconomic, racial, generational, and territorial relationships.<sup>2</sup> We must go beyond how these women organize individually and collectively to protect themselves, to take care of themselves, and to fight for a better quality of life for all, based on the most basic rights.**

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<sup>2</sup> Collins, 2017.

Thinking about actions to fight violence, and policies for the care and protection of women, based on a community-based organization, implies considering the residents' need to fully access their rights. This includes the qualification of existing public policies, often achievements of the historical struggles of women, who have always sought to guarantee their rights. We hope the following pages can convey these experiences, showing the importance of strengthening institutional and community strategies to protect and care for women in the favelas of Maré and elsewhere.

A **Redes da Maré** is a civil society organization whose purpose is to weave networks to ensure the rights of the 140,000 residents of the 16 favelas of Maré, in Rio de Janeiro. The organization emerged from community mobilizations that have been articulated since the 1980s, with women leading and materializing their struggles.

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## 2. BUT WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH?

When we speak of armed violence in Maré, we are talking about the objective and subjective effects<sup>3</sup> of the presence and circulation of weapons<sup>4</sup> in the territory, which result in individual and collective violations: home invasions, physical and verbal aggression, restrictions on mobility, closure of schools and health facilities, as well as, more directly, injuries and deaths from firearms.<sup>5</sup> These effects are linked to a structure of socioeconomic inequalities in the city, which underpins the urban violence phenomenon and, on a larger scale, affects all cities in Brazil.<sup>6</sup>

In Rio de Janeiro, the repercussions of this phenomenon are especially visible in favelas and peripheries, which are stigmatised as violent places and are also affected by the power dynamics of ar-

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<sup>3</sup> Among the subjective effects mapped by the Building the Barricades survey, “almost 31% [of Maré residents] observed damage to their mental and emotional health resulting from exposure to armed violence, including depressive episodes (26%) and anxiety (25.5%) in the 3 months prior to the survey” (Redes da Maré, 2023, p. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Hamann-Nielebock; Carvalho, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Redes da Maré, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019b; 2020; 2021b; 2022a.

<sup>6</sup> Machado da Silva, 2010

med groups. The situation is made worse by fact that the right to public security has not yet been established in those areas, since the government itself, which should protect life, instead disrespects and violates the rights of the population.

**If public security policies are supposed to protect life, why is their presence in the favelas creating more insecurity and violence?** If the motto of the Military Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro is “to serve and protect”, what kind of protection are they offering when they violate the rights of citizens through their ostensive and militarized action?

We know men are the main direct victims of injury and death.<sup>7</sup> Over the years, we have seen the bodies of young black men on the ground; broken dreams and a trail of pain in each and every one who stayed behind. The number of people dead or wounded by armed violence in the regions of the city where the favela, black, and poor population lives demonstrates the seriousness of this reality. However, police operations and armed confrontations produce not only physical deaths, but also cause moral, mental, symbolic death, and annihilates the right to memory.

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<sup>7</sup> Redes da Maré, 2017; 2018; 2019b; 2020; 2021b; 2022a.

Between 2017 and 2022, the *Eyes on Maré project* recorded **169** police operations and **122** clashes between armed groups that resulted in **195** deaths, **186** injuries from firearms, **572** violations of individual rights, **93** days without classes in schools, and **122** days of interrupted activities in health units.<sup>8</sup> Another impact that must be stressed, although it cannot be measured, is the damage to the mental health of Maré residents.<sup>9</sup> The imminence of confrontation at any time creates a feeling of constant fear and tension and has lifelong consequences, especially for the development of children and adolescents.

Through the data, we also noticed that violations such as home invasions, verbal violence, and sexual harassment are experienced mainly by girls and women. In 2019, for example, 58% of victims of rights violations were women.<sup>10</sup> Women are also impacted by high death rates, since their children, partners, and family members are the main victims of homicides. It is also women who mostly seek protection and guidance to deal with violence and violations, even when they affect relatives and neighbours. That is, even when the violations are not against their own bodies, women are at the forefront of the search for justice and reparation.

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<sup>8</sup> Eyes on Maré is a project aimed at monitoring data on armed violence in the Maré Favela Complex. The collection of quantitative data takes place in a situation of conflict, either police operations or confrontations between armed groups.

<sup>9</sup> The *Building the Barricades* survey shows that 55.6% of Maré residents are afraid that someone close to them will be hit by a stray bullet, 20% identify that armed violence affects their physical health and 31% noticed impacts on their mental health. Among residents exposed to shootings, 44% felt damage to their mental health, 12% had thoughts related to suicide and 30% to death (Redes da Maré, 2021a).

<sup>10</sup> Redes da Maré, 2019b.

In that sense, the *Eyes on Maré project* led to activities that qualify these quantitative data and seek to understand the repercussions of armed violence for different social groups and territories. That is the scope of the research project, *The Impacts of Armed Violence on the Lives of the Women of Maré: gender, territory and artistic practice*, which we discuss in this report, and which has the objective of:

- (I) Mapping the violence that affects the lives of women living in a territory with the presence of armed violence;
- (II) Identifying and strengthening care, coping, and protection strategies against armed violence developed by women living in the Maré Favela Complex;
- (III) Strengthening and producing subsidies for the protection network for women victimised by violence in Maré.

Previous studies contributed to this work. The researches “Resistance practices to address gendered urban violence in Maré, Rio de Janeiro”<sup>11</sup>, “Atmospheric frontiers: gender, violence, and affection in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro”<sup>12</sup> and “Territory of the body: mapping women’s resistance to violence in the favelas of Maré, Rio de Janeiro”<sup>13</sup> have already brought up some points that show us how armed

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<sup>11</sup> McIlwaine, C. et al 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Brigstocke, J., 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Heimer, R. et al, 2022..

violence affects women's lives; one example is the fear of moving between the borders established by armed groups in the territory<sup>14</sup>, and in places with little public lighting or occupied by the trade of illicit substances. They also show that some services responsible for protecting women victimised by gender violence refuse to enter the territory, as is the case of the Maria da Penha Patrol.

Faced with these territorial dynamics, attention must be drawn to other possible impacts of armed violence on the lives of women in Maré and the different types of violence that affect them. What would these impacts be? How does the presence of armed violence in the favelas of Maré affect the different dimensions of the lives of women living there? What are the protection and care strategies developed by these women?

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<sup>14</sup> The Maré Favela Complex is currently occupied by three armed groups that enforce warlike dominance in different ways over the areas where they are located. Two of these groups carry out the retail trade of illicit substances and one of them is characterized as a militia. Rua Ivanildo Alves is a boundary between the occupation of the two armed groups, and it is marked by clashes between them. The area occupied by the militia, in the Roquete Pinto and Praia de Ramos favelas, is separated from the rest of the territory by Avenida Brigadeiro Trompowski.



To answer these questions, we created a research structure that allowed women who are victims of violence to have agency over the methodology, in a collaborative process of knowledge production that combines the investigation itself, the monitoring of these women, and the promotion of spaces of safety and care – which we will discuss in more detail in the next section – in addition to referring these women to the psychosocial and legal services that operate in Maré.

This structure was designed based on the following questions: How can we carry out the research process in a way that is healing rather than painful for research participants? How can we articulate knowledge, embodiment, and verbal expression with the participants? From the experiences shared in the research, it is possible to see that access to body care practices allows women to talk more freely about themselves and how they perceive their bodies.

Focusing on the relationship between embodied sensations and the social environment, we noticed that their bodies are used to fast and intense movements, due to the dynamics of their lives and the territory they inhabit. We also learned that the bond between the women has extended beyond the spaces that brought them together in Redes da Maré, strengthening community support networks.

Through the dialogue strategies of the research, such as conversation circles, we noticed the need to create safe environments in which women can talk about their pain and desires. Another learning point to be highlighted is that armed violence crosses these women's lives and bodies on a daily basis, creating an environment of insecurity even within their homes. But also, and most importantly, we learned these women are protagonists of resistance movements, community strategies for protection and care, and actions to confront the violence they experience.



## 2.1 AND HOW WAS IT DONE?

There are many ways to carry out research that seeks to understand how society works – what we know as social research.<sup>15</sup> We can reflect on the laws that have already been created or on the number of people who have been hospitalized for suffering violence, or we can talk to people who experience that reality. There is an infinite range of possibilities and variables. This research was constructed with a methodological model that unites the production of knowledge with women aged over 18 living in Maré with an intervention on that reality.<sup>16</sup>

All research carried out with people interferes with reality in some way, as it makes us think about issues that are part of our daily lives. Since this research discusses situations of violence experienced by women in a certain place, we invited some of them to a series of activities that also seek to prevent or improve the harmful effects of that violence on their bodies and mental health. We sought to ensure that contact with these issues did as little harm as possible and that it could strengthen strategies to deal with violence in this territory.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Minayo, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Thiollent, 1986.

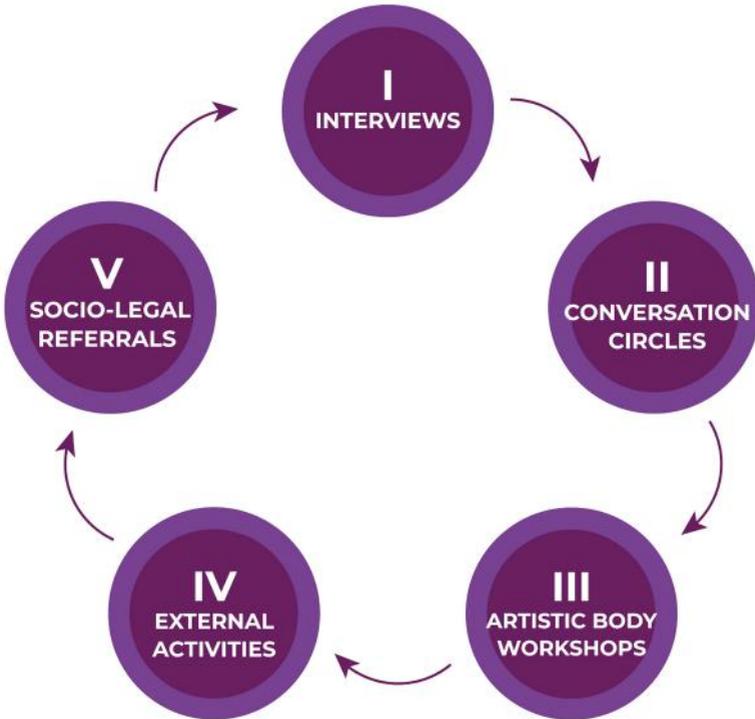
<sup>17</sup> Tucky, 2009.

Despite addressing the issue of violence, we did not select women to participate in the research because they were victims of violence, as we consider that this kind of experience is not the only reason they should be noticed and/or valued. Two reasons led us to take this stance: (I) By linking a woman's importance solely to the violence she has suffered, we would limit that person's perspective and narrative about her own history, which could also bring harmful effects to her; (II) The simple fact of living with guns and the imminence of police operations is already an exposure to armed violence in the life of every resident of Maré.

Throughout this research that dances to the rhythm and movement of the tides (a word that translates to “maré” in Portuguese), we affirm that the production of knowledge about violence and public safety does not need to be rigid, static, and distanced. After all, we are talking about lives. Care can be a way to address the issue, going in the opposite direction of the effects of violence, which are pain, lack of a support network, and a feeling of insecurity.

For this reason, the work was developed through dynamics with a group of 59 women for more than a year – between September 2021 and November 2022 – through the following methodological tools: **(I) Interviews; (II) Conversation circles; (III) Artistic body workshops; (IV) External activities; (V) Socio-legal referrals to the territory's network of services.**

Women were invited to participate in these activities through social networks and women’s groups that already exist in Maré, such as the *Mothers of Maré Collective*.<sup>18</sup> Not all women wanted or were able to participate in all activities, but all women who participated in the interviews were present in care activities..



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<sup>18</sup> The Mothers of Maré Collective is a group of mothers of victims of State violence who live in the Maré Favela Complex. This collective is monitored by the Maré of Rights project, part of the Right to Public Safety and Access to Justice axis. Monitoring is carried out in three central dimensions: 1. Access to justice and rights; 2. Psychosocial care and attention; and 3. Rights to the city. We participated in some meetings of the Mothers of Maré Collective, inviting them to join the project, and some mothers showed interest in participating in artistic workshops and/or conversation circles.

### 2.1.2. Artistic workshops

The objective of the artistic workshops was to build safe and caring spaces for women through collective and shared body practices. Due to their inherent characteristics, artistic practices allow the development of individual and collective experiences, as well as expressions of the knowledge that the participants bring with them.<sup>19</sup> Corporeal practices give us the opportunity to express our existence through the body, something that is not always possible by other means, such as speech. Or, going further, expression through the body can represent an opening to other types of expression. Art itself awakens these possibilities of expression, representation, identification, contact with everyday issues, exchange, and empathy.



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<sup>19</sup> Poole, 2018.

Artistic workshops also became another means of exploring the relationship between body and territory. The regular meetings created a routine of care and contact with issues that are not always reflected on in daily life. The politicization of emotions and affects is an important strategy for taking care of their mental health, especially considering that, in this society, women are responsible for the care of others, and often do not have space to take care of themselves.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the workshops represent an intervention in the reality of these women. Promoting contact with art can boost forms of care and protection, just as Conceição Evaristo says that art is a movement of living-writing, a writing process based on her history and pain, but also on dreams and appreciation of her struggle and her personal and collective trajectory.

The artistic workshops took place between September 2021 and September 2022, and were offered to women over 18 living in the Maré Favela Complex. They were created with dance and yoga-dance methods, and were held four or five times a month, on Wednesdays. The facilitators were Luciana Barros (yoga-dance), Taís Almeida (dance) and Luana Bezerra (dance).

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<sup>20</sup> Sisi, 2019.

Not all women followed by the research participated in the artistic workshops, due to a lack of time or even a lack of affinity with the workshop activity. But this was not a problem, since the importance of the workshops lies in the artistic practice itself and in providing these women with a space for articulation and expression. The artistic workshops are not just a research tool or a link with the institution, but a health promotion tool.



### 2.1.3. Conversation circles

Conversation circles aimed to collectively discuss the central questions for the research through the construction of a safe and caring space for the participating women, from the perspective of promoting mental health. The idea was that this space could also provide political training and strengthen the life projects of the women. In addition, discussing their experiences through their desires and dreams was a way of breaking with the stigma that limits these women to the violence they suffered.<sup>21</sup>

Among the members of the research team, those responsible for building this part of the research design, and carrying out the activity, were Irone Santiago, Bruna Silva, Fabiana (Bibi) Freitas, Rachel Gouveia, Debora Bastos and Isabel Barbosa. **The methodology was developed with the following logic:**

1. Introduction to the activity and the participants;
2. Intervention by the research team;
3. Giving everyone a chance to speak;
4. Collective referrals to the next meeting.

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<sup>21</sup> Tuck, 2009.

Thus, the aim was to articulate the discussions on the research's central themes based on the narratives of the participating women. We always started by talking about the research plan in general, the activity in question, and the theme of the meeting. We also pointed out the ethical aspects, including sharing responsibility with the women for building a safe space for all.

Then the women introduced themselves, bringing questions that they considered relevant, and we started the intervention. After the intervention, we ended the activity by reflecting on the feelings and thoughts that came up, and questioning the positive and negative aspects of the meeting, so that the team could plan the dynamic of the next one.

The activities followed the psychodrama technique, seeking to approach the questions carefully, according to the limits of each participant. Psychodrama uses theatrical improvisation techniques to address individual and collective issues of members of the group. Although it is a group psychotherapy technique, we did not use it in meetings for therapeutic purposes, but to encourage debate. Any boundaries crossed in that sense were mediated by the facilitator of the activities, so that the group would not get lost in the approach and purpose of the meeting.

The conversation circles had the following schedule:

**1<sup>st</sup> MEETING** - Mental health of women in Maré

**2<sup>nd</sup> MEETING** - Being a woman in Maré

**3<sup>rd</sup> MEETING** - Armed violence and the war on drugs policy

**4<sup>th</sup> MEETING** - Ancestry in Maré: dialogues between gender and race

Working in groups imposed some demands on the team responsible for the intervention: building a safe and caring space; articulating collective reflections; consolidating a bond with the group; continually monitoring members; allowing the participation of all; mediating conflicts in the group; and strengthening women's autonomy.

## 2.1.4. Interviews

In addition to the spaces for collective exchange, an important stage of the research was the individual interviews with the participating women. The interviews were prepared, performed, and systematized by Camila Barros, Isabel Barbosa, Rosana Morgado, and Joana Garcia. As the project followed a group of women for about a year, we divided the themes of the interviews into two approaches.

The first round of interviews sought to understand the individual perceptions of the women about the following topics:

- (i) Socioeconomic data;
- (ii) Their relationship with the territory;
- (iii) Their relationship with their family and support network.

The main themes of the second round of interviews were:

- (a) Situations of violence and discrimination they experienced;
- (b) Protection and care practices they developed or activated.

In the first approach, we did not go into the details of the theme of violence and coping strategies, to avoid revictimizing participants during this first contact. It was important to establish a bond, in which the participant was already introduced to the workshops and

care mechanisms, before delving into these themes. They were also provided with psychosocial<sup>22</sup> and legal assistance from Redes da Maré,<sup>23</sup> since participating in the research could make these women come into contact, once again, with experiences of violence, trauma, and pain, in which case individual monitoring would be important.

### 2.1.5. Mobility activities around the city

In addition to that whole process, and recognizing that the city is organized in a way that creates boundaries, conditions the positions bodies can occupy, and prevents access to urban spaces, we took the group of women participating in the research to four locations in the city of Rio de Janeiro: Centro, Ramos, Copacabana, and Humaitá.

Also aiming to provide access to artistic expression, we watched dance and theatre shows, some of which had women who live in Maré in the cast. The objective was to promote another space for care and exchange between the women, but also to push the city's boundaries. The shows we attended had the following themes:

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<sup>22</sup> Women's House of Maré, a Redes da Maré facility designed to empower women from Maré, offers psychosocial support, entrepreneurship, and professional training services in partnership with institutions such as the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).

<sup>23</sup> Maré of Rights is a project of the Right to Public Security and Access to Justice axis of Redes da Maré, aimed at socio-legal and psychosocial assistance, seeking to expand access to the rights and interfere in the social practices of the justice system.

body/territory relations; the relationship between dance, culture, and territories in the city; the complexity of the social structure at the intersection of gender, sexuality, race, class, and territory; environmental issues; and the affirmation of black and peripheral women in Brazilian society.

### 2.1.6. Socio-legal referrals

Through monitoring the group of women participating in the research, some socio-legal and psychological demands emerged. In view of this, we connected with the network of protection and care for women in the territory, referring cases and monitoring their development. The main referrals were related to access to food security, work and income, justice, housing, education, and mental health care.



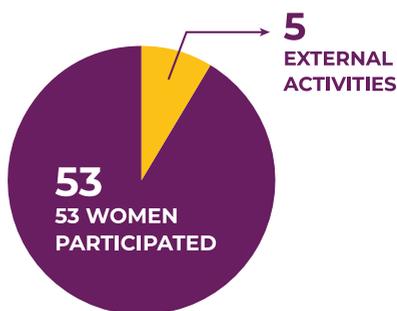
# RESEARCH THAT DANCES TO THE MOVEMENTS OF THE TIDES

THE SURVEY WAS CARRIED OUT BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 2021 AND NOVEMBER 2022



**59 WOMEN**  
PARTICIPATED IN  
SOME ACTIVITY

## EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES



## ARTISTIC WORKSHOPS



## REFLECTIVE WORKSHOPS



**15 REFERRALS**  
TO THE SOCIO-LEGAL  
ASSISTANCE TEAM



**3 GROUPS OF WOMEN**  
TO STRENGTHEN THESE  
WOMEN THROUGH PROTECTION  
AND CARE ACTIVITIES

## 2.2 PRODUCING KNOWLEDGE IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged us to think about our professional, community, and affective practices. Taking into account that the research began in September 2021, contact with women took place with attention to the protocols released by health organizations such as the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), in addition to guidelines given directly to Redes da Maré by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ). Biosecurity measures were applied in all research activities, to prevent the contamination of COVID-19 in the territory and among the participants as much as possible.

The research team also held conversations with the participants about the importance of prevention protocols. The use of a mask was mandatory in all activities and alcohol gel and masks were made available. In addition, access to testing for COVID-19 was expanded through the Health Connection project, created by Redes da Maré.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Health Connection was a project created by Redes da Maré in partnership with Dados do Bem, SAS Brasil, FIOCRUZ, União Rio, and Centro Comunitário de Manguinhos. Residents of Maré had access to testing for COVID-19, online medical appointments, and the safe isolation of infected people, who were monitored by a health team and had access to hygiene and food kits, for a safe recovery. Furthermore, reliable information about the pandemic was disseminated, guiding residents on prevention and recovery methods. Family members who lost their loved ones to the virus were also aided by the project.



The mobilization process for vaccination was a great relief for everyone. Within Maré, an action accelerated the mass immunization of residents of the 16 favelas: the Vaccinate Maré campaign.<sup>25</sup> This resulted from a collaboration between Redes da Maré, FIO-CRUZ, and the City Health Department, coupled with an intense community mobilization for the pre-registration of residents who were not linked to local health units. A pioneer in Rio de Janeiro, the campaign reached around 36,000 residents in six days of vaccination, between July 29 and August 3, 2021. Thus, after 12 weeks of the program, with the administration of the second dose, **more than 95% of the adult population of Maré was vaccinated.**

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<sup>25</sup> Redes da Maré, 2021c.



All this allowed the research to take place with a lower risk of exposure to the virus. At the same time, the majority of participating women indicated that this was the first face-to-face project they had participated in since the beginning of the pandemic. Some carried in their bodies the pain of losing a family member due to the State's negligence of health policies needed to fight COVID-19. Some also feared the ensuing economic crisis and its effects on food security. But overall, everyone was happy to be able to return to social life and activities in the face of everything we went through collectively, but isolated.

The memorial for victims of COVID-19 reminds us of what cannot be forgotten: **the more than 300 lives lost in Maré.**

TERRITÓRIO DA MARÉ  
TERRITÓRIO DA MARÉ



# 3. CONTEXTUALIZING THE MARÉ FAVELA COMPLEX



## CAPTION<sup>26</sup>

### 1 Conjunto Esperança

In 1982, a federal intervention in the housing area, Projeto Rio, built 35 buildings in the region, which housed the first residents.

### 2 Salsa e Merengue

In 2000 this territory was occupied through a municipal government intervention, a project known as Living Without

<sup>26</sup> Dicionário de Favelas Marielle Franco, 2021; Redes da Maré, 2019a.

Risks. The name, Salsa and Merengue, was taken from a Brazilian soap opera.

### **3 Vila do João**

To accommodate the residents who lived on the last stilt houses in Baixa do Sapateiro, a housing complex was built in this region by Projeto Rio in 1982. Its name honours the then president of the country, João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo, as the houses were built by the intervention of the federal government.

### **4 Conjunto Habitacional dos Pinheiros**

In 1989 this territory was occupied through the federal government intervention of Projeto Rio, which built the rows of buildings on the margins of the Yellow Line expressway.

### **5 Conjunto Bento Ribeiro Dantas**

On the other side of the Yellow Line, a housing complex was built in 1992 through the municipal government intervention Living Without Risks. The project's aesthetic included raw brick and concrete. The first residents were removed from favelas that were declared risk areas by the City Hall.

## 6 Baixa do Sapateiro

In a low and swampy area next to Morro do Timbau, the first stilt houses in the region that would become known as Baixa do Sapateiro began to rise. Over time, the next residents began land reclamation in the region, and with the intervention of Projeto Rio in 1980, the last stilts were removed.

## 7 Nova Maré

The Living Without Risks project built this complex in 1996 to house residents of the former stilt houses in Parque Roquete Pinto and Kinder Ovo. Its aesthetics was characterised by houses with exposed bricks.

## 8 Nova Holanda

In a land reclamation next to Parque Maré, a Temporary Housing Centre with wooden houses was built by the State government in 1962. Residents who were evicted from Favela do Esqueleto, Praia do Pinto, Morro da Formiga, and the banks of the Faria Timbó River came to live in these houses. The project, however, was interrupted, and the residents themselves organized to guarantee the necessary sanitary and structural conditions. It was so named because Holland is a country known for land reclamation.

## 9 Parque União

In 1961 this territory was occupied spontaneously. The area was divided in lots by a lawyer who wanted to build a low-income neighbourhood, strengthening access to housing for workers who migrated from the Northeast to Rio de Janeiro. Today it is a very busy area in terms of commerce and gastronomy.

## 10 Parque Roquete Pinto

Residents began reclaiming an area of mangroves on the margins of Avenida Brasil and built masonry houses there in 1955. This has also been the base of the Roquette-Pinto Radio Station.

## 11 Praia de Ramos

The beach then known as Praia de Maria Angú was occupied by fishermen in 1962. This territory also underwent public intervention by the State government for the construction of popular housing, called the Popular Housing Company (COHAB).

## 12 Parque Rubens Vaz

In 1954 this territory was occupied spontaneously. Its name is a tribute to Major Rubens Florentino Vaz.

### **13 Parque Maré**

Following the expansion of housing, this territory was occupied by the first stilt houses in 1953. Because it was closer to Avenida Brasil, its residents had easier access to rubble to carry out land reclamation in the area themselves. The last stilt houses were removed by Projeto Rio in 1980.

### **14 Morro do Timbau**

The territory where the first resident of Maré arrived in 1940. Dona Orosina found a beautiful piece of land among the mangroves, where she built her first shack with her husband. In the same year, Avenida Brasil was inaugurated, making it easier for other residents to access the region.

### **15 Vila dos Pinheiros**

In 1983, this territory was reclaimed by Projeto Rio to connect the rest of Maré to the former Ilha do Pinheiro, now known as Parque Ecológico da Maré Cadu Barcelos. In this region, housing complexes were built to house the residents of the stilt houses of Baixa do Sapateiros and Parque Maré.

### **16 Marcílio Dias**

The first fishing families built stilt houses in this region, formerly known as Praia das Moreninhas, in 1948.

The Maré Favela Complex is considered one of the largest low-income spaces in Rio de Janeiro, currently formed by 16 favelas where about 140,000 residents were counted in a 2013 census, distributed in 47,758 households, which occupy an area of 4.3 km<sup>2</sup>. In this configuration, Maré is larger than 96.4% of Brazilian municipalities. The consolidation of Maré took place between the 1940s and the 1980s, marked by the strengthening of the resident's organization and initiative and by housing programs promoted by the public authorities.<sup>27</sup>

Its geography is crossed by the Guanabara Bay and three important expressways: the Red Line, the Yellow Line, and Avenida Brasil. Most of the territory is contiguous, except for three favelas: Roquete Pinto and Praia de Ramos, separated by Avenida Brigadeiro Trompowski, and Marcílio Dias, separated by the Brazilian Navy complex.

In the 1980s, Maré was already quite densely populated and expansive. Part of its area officially became part of the city with the creation of the Administrative Region – or, simply, RA-Maré (decree 6011, of August 4, 1986). It was officially delimited two years later, through Decree 7980, of August 12, 1988. Two government terms later, through Municipal Law n° 2.119, of January 19, 1994<sup>28</sup>, the Maré district was created and delimited, corresponding to the entire extension of the RA.

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<sup>27</sup> Redes da Maré, 2019a..

<sup>28</sup> Rio de Janeiro, 1994.

The Maré district extends from Conjunto Esperança to Praia de Ramos, along the favelas that were part of the neighbourhoods of Mangueiros, Bonsucesso, and Ramos. However, its delimitation did not include the territory of the Marcílio Dias favela, located at one of the ends of the Maré Complex. Thus, in references to the Maré district, the Marcílio Dias favela is not included.

Marcílio Dias is located between walkways 16 and 17 of Avenida Brasil, in Penha Circular, close to the well-known Mercado São Sebastião. It is a territory about 2,300 meters away from Praia de Ramos. In official terms, this favela does not make up the territory of Maré, but supposedly belongs to the Penha Circular district. However, the region shares the history of the other favelas in Maré. Therefore, the Maré Favela Complex is considered to be effectively composed of 16 favelas, including Marcílio Dias.



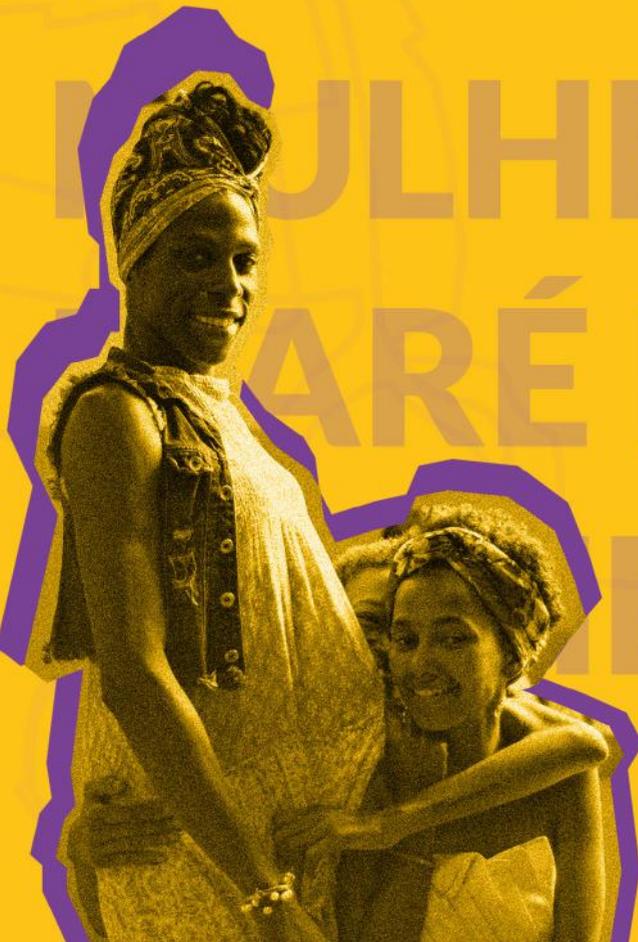
In terms of population, the presence of women (51%) is higher than that of men (49%), similarly to the rest of the city. Throughout childhood, it is possible to identify a higher number of boys; after adolescence, however, girls become the majority, which indicates that “deaths affect men earlier than women in the course of their existence”.<sup>29</sup>

There are different ethnic-racial profiles, with 62% of residents identifying as black or brown. The ethnic-racial profile also varies across the favelas. Nova Holanda has the highest concentration of self-declared black people, while Morro do Timbau has the highest number of white people, compared to the other favelas. Most people who live in Maré - 62% - say they have lived there since they were born, although the presence of north-eastern migrants is considerable.

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<sup>29</sup> Redes da Maré, 2019a, p. 24.

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# 4. HOW DO WOMEN LIVE IN MARÉ?

*By Bruna Silva*

The life of a Maré woman is one of great struggles, because the favela itself is a symbol of our resistance in the city. Of the resistance of favela women, above all. But before talking about us, I would like to introduce myself, because my story intersects with the story of many of us. My story begins here in Maré Favela Complex, in Vila dos Pinheiros. My name is **Bruna Silva**, I'm 38 years old and I'm from Maré. I am the mother of two children: Maria Vitória and Marcus Vinicius. I raised my children the same way my mother raised me, letting my children play, live naturally, study, and do chores around the house.

Their father and I always worked to educate and feed them, until one day a shot crossed our lives, leaving behind an endless trail of sadness. A shot that took a child away from me. My son was a victim, killed by the State of Rio de Janeiro. My son Marcus Vinicius lost his life on the streets of the community while he was wearing his school uniform, and carrying the backpack with school materials that he carried every day. My son was killed at the age of 14 and he was denied his right to life, because the State killed him with a single shot in the lower back. My son, a 14-year-old boy, couldn't bear the weight of that shot.

I remember arriving at the community's Emergency Care Unit (UPA 24 Hours) and finding my son, who asked me: "*Mum, don't go to work. Stay with me, mom. Didn't the police see I was wearing my school uniform and carrying my school materials? What did I do to them, mom?*" At that point, my son could not believe the State had fired that shot; after all, he always knew his place in the favela. My son was a child who was denied his right to life.

My son was also denied the right to health. When he was lying wounded in the emergency room, he had to wait bravely for an hour. When the ambulance arrived at Maré, the police prevented it from entering. An hour later the ambulance came back to rescue my son. The same State that fired the bullet, made the ambulance return empty, leaving behind a child that was shot, in his school uniform, carrying the pride of every mother: a backpack full of school supplies.

Today, I still live in the same favela, fighting to exist. Fighting for the rights denied to my son that day, on June 20, 2018. He makes me resist, to fight for all these children who are left here today. I am sure that the State will not take my only daughter, 15-year-old Maria Vitória, away from me, the same way it took her brother from me, because I fight to make sure that we, the women of Maré, do not suffer any more with the loss of our children. Today, through my loss, I took on the fight for the children living in Maré. Today I try to make a difference, I help with what I can and what I can't. I believe that we are really strong together. I believe it is indeed possible to have a better Maré.

My life story, as well as that of many women who live, work, move around, and build the territory of Maré, is marked by armed violence and State violence. The State took away my right to raise my son, and it took away his right to build his future. But, like me, these victimised women are the ones who have historically fought for our right to a life free of violence in our territory. Whether through political struggle in national and/or community movements, getting involved in religious organizations, dedicating ourselves to work, or, whatever it may be: we resist. I end my story by summoning my comrade in the fight, Irone, to talk about what it means to be the mother of a victim of State violence and also militant. We build forms of resistance, existence, confrontation, and care. Maré is made of women.



Like Bruna, I am also part of this network of resisting mothers from Maré. I'm **Irone Santiago** and I've been through a lot of things in my life, but what gave me the most strength and made me discover that I was much more resilient than I imagined was what happened to my son, Vitor Santiago. And what does resistance mean to us? When you are born a woman from the favela, you are born with resistance. And you continue to resist. And when you go through different situations like I did, it can give you more confidence to be even more resistant, against everything and everyone. Resistance is my name.

When the army occupied the Maré Favela Complex in 2015, his car was targeted. My son was shot twice with a rifle by a corporal named Diego Neitzke. Of the six shots fired at the car, two hit my son and left him between life and death. My son is not only a victim, but also a witness to State violence.

And not only was my son resisting, so was I. I was resisting for him, taking care of him so he wouldn't suffer further violations. I was afraid other things might happen. I spent almost four months inside the Getúlio Vargas Hospital fighting for my son to survive. Resisting against everything and everyone in there, because we are often not seen or treated as human beings in a public hospital. So, I had to fight in the hospital, to the point of taking a team of journalists there to give my son a voice. In that process, it was very important for his story to be told.



So, after that, my activism began, my activism and my search for justice for my son. And I started to see life here in Maré with different eyes and to realize that people suffer violations. But I also realized that people didn't speak up and didn't take a stand because of a fear that prevented them from voicing their cases. That's when I started to get to know social movements. Many social movements sought and welcomed me, like the Mothers of May. And I saw that I wasn't alone, because there were other women fighting and resisting in this whole process against State violence. And I got involved in this path and stayed on it. That's when I consciously built the path of our resistance.

I entered every door that was opened to me on this path. I spoke and really showed my face, no matter what was going to happen to me. And I was threatened many times, but that didn't shut me up or scare me. But it was also a moment of great suffering and pain, because resisting is very difficult, and a very complicated path. That's why I understand a mother whose child was murdered and who doesn't want to talk. She often isolates herself, becomes de-

pressed, or does not speak. I understand, because everyone has their own process to deal with pain. I've also met mothers who are gone, who died because they couldn't resist the pain of loss.

When I reflect on my trajectory before joining the activism movement and today, I see a big change in my life in every sense, because I begin to understand my place in the world. I am a woman who lives in the midst of a patriarchy. I didn't realize it; I didn't see it all. The struggle allowed me to grow, and it gave me the strength to become the woman I am today. Even my speech has been changing, I realize. I started to allow myself to be taken care of and to get treatment to heal, which was fundamental even to keep fighting, because pain just makes us want to attack others. And more and more I learn from Eliana Silva<sup>30</sup> that politics is not done with war.<sup>30</sup> To resist, you don't have to fight with anyone. Often the first step is to fight with yourself, breaking all these sexist constructions, and healing our pain to move forward, so we are able to wage war against the system. we have to be prepared to fight the system.

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<sup>30</sup> Eliana Silva is the founder of Redes da Maré. As a resident of Nova Holanda, she participated in many community movements for housing, sanitation and access to rights in Maré.

It was also important that I was on my feet. I got sick in this process and kept fighting anyway. But I realized that I needed to take care of myself, because there was no point in me standing up and suddenly falling down and not being able to help my children anymore. When my son came home, I discovered myself as a different person. I found out I can handle the situation. I can change my son's bandages, I can put a probe on him, I can change the sheets on his bed... For me, that is also resistance. I find myself in all those faces, and being able to see myself was the best of them.

I had to end up in a hospital to realize these things. I had an aneurysm on the right side that was three centimetres long, and I had to have a quick operation on my head. I stayed at the ICU for a while, and that's how I started to get to know myself. Seven months later I found out that I had another aneurysm on the left side measuring 2.9 millimetres. In that hospital, I began to meditate on my life, on everything I had ever done. So, I looked at myself and my story and found out that I had been in an abusive relationship for 40 years. If being in the hospital with my son led me to fight for him, at this second moment it also led me to fight for myself.

We, women living in favelas, have always been at the forefront of struggles for the improvement of our community, including actions to fight violence in Maré. Based on the words of Bruna and Irone, this is how I want to start my contribution. My name is Fabiana Freitas, better known as Bibi in the place where I live, Nova Holanda. I grew up watching Maré become what it is today, from stilts to brick houses. And I see that the women of Maré are always working to improve the community. And even in the context of armed violence, these women have taken actions to confront that violence.

On a police operation day, everyone supports each other. We don't even sleep, we wait for what's going to happen, because we know that the police don't knock on the door. When they can't open the door with the master key, they break in. So, we stay alert all the time. And if we see they are about to hit someone, we intervene. It has already happened that the police wanted to attack a boy and we did not allow it. We called the boy's mother, who got his documents to prove his innocence. We are always proving our innocence as a way to protect ourselves from these approaches, because they think everyone who lives in the community is involved in crime.



**We also organize in situations of violence against women.** When a man is hitting a woman, we always come together to intervene and separate them. We don't let violence happen. Regardless of the reason for the fight, we are on her side. Because nothing justifies domestic violence. All of this shows how powerful our community is, even with the difficulties we experience.



*Our trajectory is part of the history of the women of Maré. We are women just like a woman who lives in other parts of the city. We also experience the impacts of sexism and gender violence. But, precisely because we are in a territory where armed violence is present, even these relationships show other features. And this also concerns the public network of protection against such violence, since some public policies do not enter a territory where there is armed violence. Then how can we resort to official mechanisms, such as the women's police station? And more than that, how can we seek protection from the same police force that enters our territory violently in police operations?*

*We cannot reduce these women to the violence, pain and illnesses they have gone through, because, despite everything, women create paths. The political struggle was the path chosen by Bruna and Irone, presented in the reports with which we started this discussion. Bibi now works within her territory at the forefront of community actions to confront violence, be it armed violence or violence against women. There are multiple ways of dealing with the violence that is the loss of a child, a direct reflection of armed violence. Or with other impacts that affect these women's social, professional, affective, family, or community life. There are other ways of existing.*



**BRUNA SILVA**



**IRONE SANTIAGO**



**FABIANA FREITAS**



**Bruna Silva** éis a 38-year-old black woman who lives in Vila dos Pinheiros, one of the favelas that make up Maré. Brunna has always been a community leader in the struggle for housing and better living conditions in the region where she lives. During a police operation carried out by the Civil Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro, on June 20, 2018, her son Marcus Vinícius was shot on his way to school. Since then, Brunna has been involved in the National Network of Mothers and Families of Victims of State Terrorism and in the Mothers of Maré Collective, in the fight for justice for her son, for the support of mothers of victims of armed violence, and to prevent other lives from being interrupted by violence. Brunna is currently a researcher for the project The Impacts of Armed Violence on the Lives of Women in Maré: gender, territory and artistic practice and a community mobilizer for the We Are from Maré! We Have Rights project, welcoming and talking to the residents of Maré about the right to public safety.

**Irone Santiago** is a 58-year-old black woman who lives in Vila dos Pinheiros. Throughout her life, she has lived in different regions of Maré, getting to know the realities of this group of favelas. During the occupation of the Brazilian army in Maré, on the night of February 12, 2015, her son Vitor Santiago was shot by an agent of the armed forces, when he was driving home with his friends, after watching a Flamengo soccer match. After being hit, Vitor became paraplegic. Irone fought for her son's recovery, to prove his innocence, and for justice and reparation for what happened. Today, she is part of the National Network of Mothers and Relatives of Victims of State Terrorism and the Mothers of Maré Collective. She also raises the flag of women's struggle for a dignified life, realizing that there are many mothers and women who still live with the harm caused by violence. Irone is a researcher for the project *The Impacts of Armed Violence on the Lives of Women in Maré: gender, territory and artistic practice* and a community mobilizer for the We are from Maré! We have Rights project, welcoming and talking with the residents of Maré about the right to public safety.



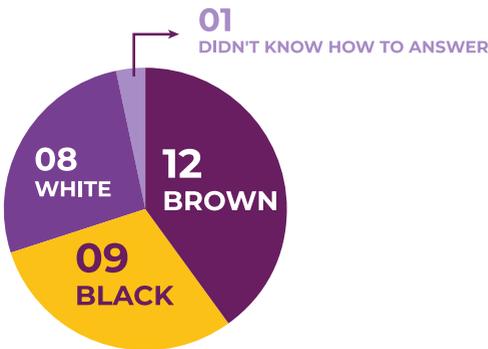
**Fabiana Freitas** is a 47-year-old black woman, born and raised in Nova Holanda. A trueborn favela resident, she was born at a time when Nova Holanda was made up of wooden shacks, and grew up seeing her mother carry cans of water on her head. Some experiences in her life led her to the prison system, where she experienced a lot of violence. She started working at Redes da Maré in the campaign Maré Says No to Coronavirus, an experience that had a big impact on her career. Bibi is a researcher for the project *The Impacts of Armed Violence on the Lives of Women in Maré: gender, territory and artistic practice* and a community mobilizer for the *We Are from Maré! We have Rights project*, welcoming and talking the residents of Maré about the right to public safety.



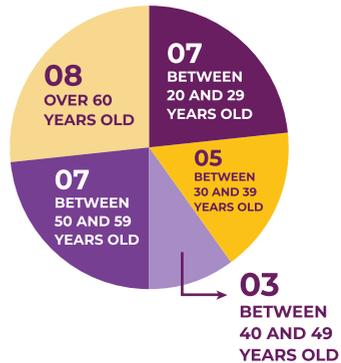
# PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPATING WOMEN

Among the participating women, 30 agreed to participate in the interviews. We collected some initial data about the women who shared their stories with us:

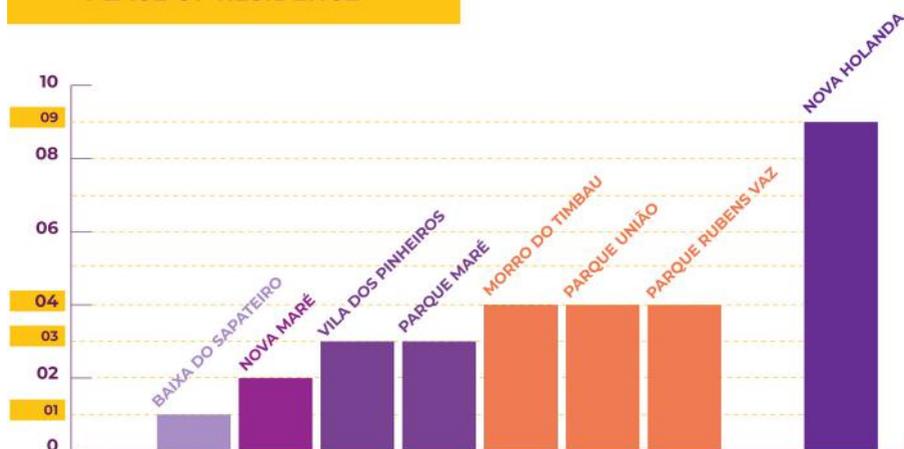
## ETHNIC-RACIAL PROFILE OF THE WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN THE INTERVIEWS



## AGE OF WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN THE INTERVIEWS



**NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING WOMEN ACCORDING TO PLACE OF RESIDENCE**



**01**  
BAIXA DO  
SAPATEIRO

**02**  
NOVA  
MARÉ

**03**  
VILA DOS  
PINHEIROS

**03**  
PARQUE  
MARÉ

**04**  
PARQUE  
RUBENS VAZ

**04**  
MORRO  
DO TIMBAU

**04**  
PARQUE  
UNIÃO

**09**  
NOVA  
HOLANDA

VIOLÊNCIA E  
VIOLAÇÕES  
VIOLÊNCIA E  
VIOLAÇÕES  
VIOLÊNCIA E  
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# 5. UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN MARÉ

Inequalities have a direct impact on women's lives, exposing them to situations of structural and systemic violence. Unequal gender relations influence women's lives in every aspect, because regardless of where they live, their age or financial status, women continue to receive lower wages or to get less recognition in the workplace. They are still the main victims of domestic violence and are mostly responsible for the care of family members.

Reality shows us that there are intersectional differences in women's trajectories. Does a woman who lives in Maré have the same access to health or justice, for example, as a woman who lives in the South Zone? Is a black woman treated the same as a white woman, even if they live in the same territory? Does a poor woman have the same access to the city as a woman who has a fixed and stable income?<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gonzalez, 1984.

During the monitoring of women carried out in this research, some experiences were shared by all of them, while others were shared by only some. They felt those experiences in their bodies and minds.

## 5.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF VIOLENCE

There is violence we call structural. What does structural mean when we are talking about something that happens in our daily lives? Something that is social? Structural, in this case, means the way things happen and are organized in our society. Patriarchy is structural because the roles of men and women have been assigned over time in an unequal way.<sup>32</sup> Racism gives economic, affective, and political advantages to whites and disadvantages to black and indigenous populations.<sup>33</sup> And that structural violence marks the lives of women.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Saffioti, 1995.

<sup>33</sup> Almeida, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Crenshaw, 2002.

In the research, we heard stories marked by racism. A black woman over the age of 60 recalls being persecuted in her youth at a shop in a neighbourhood near Maré, and she wondered if that had happened because of the colour of her skin or the way she dressed: “*she might look like she was from a favela*” (Luz).<sup>35</sup> Or a young black woman who recalls an episode when she was shopping for clothes and “*the salesperson just looked at me from top to bottom and said, ‘look at our prices here, they are very high, I don’t think they are for your kind’*” (Marina). The worry and stigma leave marks on black women’s bodies.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The names of all women have been changed.

<sup>36</sup> “*And it’s something I avoid doing to this day, I don’t like to go into expensive stores. If I go to the shopping centre, I get extremely dressed up. I don’t like to touch anything inside the store, I keep as far away from everything as possible. If I have to go through my bag, I want to leave the store, I go to a bathroom*” (Marina).

**Racism** was also present when a young black woman, born and raised in Maré, started going to the university. And she felt the first impact of not seeing many people with the same reality as hers. She felt the discrimination against her territory camouflaged as bad taste in the jokes made by her classmates, who know Maré from news reports: a violent territory.<sup>37</sup> She saw that academic content still ignores the contribution of an important part of Brazilian thinkers - black thinkers - which proves that epistemicide is still practiced in those spaces. And that there is still a long way to go to ensure the permanence of people who come from the same origin as you.

*<sup>37</sup> "I began to realise that I was a 'peripheral' person in college. I think that, because I've studied here my whole life, with people like us, we don't see that kind of question, because everyone is the same. As much as there were people from Timbau in the schools here, and even people from Bonsucesso, it wasn't an issue. Then, in college, I started to feel this strangeness. I think it's because we arrived at a place that is not our territory, then people are like 'who is this person?', 'she's from the favela', 'how can you come from the favela, people?'" (Ursula).*

**Homophobia** was also remembered as something significant in the lives of the LGBT women we came into contact with. A young black gay woman reported that although she is less afraid of suffering violence because of homophobia when she is in Maré, she notices that people create conflicts because they are uncomfortable living near gay couples. These are indirect conflicts, but they are based on homophobia.<sup>38</sup> This has already triggered death threats at knifepoint.

*<sup>38</sup> “[The person] called me bald, naughty, she said I was shameless. She said: ‘you keep raising that flag, you tramp’. I had never exchanged a word with her before that, we didn’t even have a flag here, by the way. That’s when we realized what was really going on” (Marina).*

The fear of talking to her family about her desire to be with other women also marked the life of a young white woman we talked to. The risk of suffering psychological or physical violence, being forced to leave home and being financially dependent are some of the causes that keep these LGBT women from assuming and/or living their sexuality. In other words, women who publicly express their sexuality feel a little safer in Maré, but those who are part of a conservative family may suffer violence as a result of their sexuality, to the point that some do not have affective-sexual relationships with other women.

Regarding the different dimensions of **domestic violence** (an expression of gender-based violence), some young and mature women also reported previous experiences in their lives, such as sexual violence experienced in childhood and adolescence.<sup>39</sup> In the experiences they shared, this violence was perpetrated by men in their family, by partners with whom they had an affective relationship, or by employers.<sup>40</sup> They talked about the great damage caused by violence to their life, their self-esteem, their relationship with their bodies and sexuality.

*<sup>39</sup> “As an adolescent, I lived with my aunt, and her son touched me when I didn’t want it, and I had this violence with the father of my children. There were days when we sat down and talked, he hugged me, he loved me, but when he was stressed, with an outside problem, he wanted to make trouble, take it out on me.” (Zida).*

*<sup>40</sup> “I have experienced sexual harassment. In my childhood, when I was 11 years old, because children feel it. My father’s brother-in-law. I only told my mother in my 50s. I was harassed by my boss. I started working when I was 17 or 18 years old. He harassed me. I was afraid of losing my job and I stayed. He wanted me to clean up his office, but I left before he came.” (Paula).*

**Domestic violence** was highlighted as an experience endured by different profiles of women, whether young or mature, black, brown, or white. The women reported the indirect harm caused by these experiences when they witnessed their mother or their daughter suffering this type of violence or because they directly experienced that situation as adults.

The violence that often started with humiliations, screams, and threats, turned into things being broken at home, pushing and false imprisonment, preventing women from leaving the house. In some cases, this violence takes the form of physical violence such as stabbing, beating, and/or even death.<sup>41</sup> Finally, when they managed to separate, two black women realized that they were slandered by neighbours and family members. Many women isolated and silenced themselves because they were judged as if they were to blame for the violence they suffered.<sup>42</sup>

*<sup>41</sup> “Last time, he broke the dishes, broke almost half a dozen dishes, broke the drying rack, he even opened the cupboard to break the rest of the dishes, it was a very tense situation. I did experience violence, apart from the situations that I also realise were violent.” (Luzia).*

*<sup>42</sup> “Everyone asked what was going on and I kept quiet, I didn’t tell anyone. Today I find it easy to talk about this situation, but at the time I didn’t.” (Betina).*



It is important to understand how these situations happen so we can notice, within our work or in our territory, signs that a girl or a woman may be suffering violence. Precisely because it happens at home, based on threats, isolation, and silencing, it is everyone's duty to pay attention to the signs and seek to support this woman or girl as much as possible. These actions can prevent another victim of femicide from becoming part of the statistics.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> According to the Brazilian Public Security Forum (2022a), 1,341 victims of femicide were reported in Brazil in 2021. In the first half of 2022 alone, 699 cases of femicide were mapped, which means that in that period, four women were killed each day (Brazilian Public Security Forum, 2022b).

**Armed violence** also has impacts on gender-based violence. When violence comes from a member of armed groups, the possibilities for acting are limited, since the power of firearms is involved. So, who can you turn to in this kind of situation? How do you protect yourself when it's ongoing? If the man is part of a group that has armed control over the territory, how to act in the face of gender violence?

The military power enforced by public security agents also has impacts on these women's lives. Despite the fact that police operations affect and frighten all residents and people who circulate in Maré, black men and young people are at greater risk, as the main targets of armed conflicts.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Redes da Maré, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019b; 2020; 2021b; 2022a.



The women in the research were also affected, mainly by *police violence*, when their homes were invaded, when they feared for the safety of their children and grandchildren, and especially because they had already lost children during police operations.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *"I had that experience with my eldest son. I was sleeping in my room and the boys were in this room. My son was still alive. There was an operation. The police opened the gate, came into my house, and I didn't hear them. The police went into the room. My son must have been 14 years old. He was sleeping on the top bed. They pulled the blanket off him. He was sleeping. He thought it was me and pulled the blanket back. The police pulled it three times. Finally, the police officer put the rifle on his head. When he felt the rifle, he opened his eyes. The police brought him close to the table, and pointed a knife at him."* (Zélia).

It is possible to observe that women fear mainly for others, for brothers, sons, or relatives who are usually male and black. Women are often assigned the role of caregiver, of always caring for the family, and therefore are affected and fearful about the safety of others. A young brown woman expresses this concern when she says: *"I fear more for others than for myself"*, *"I'm very afraid of that. Because his skin is darker..."* (Leila).

Women who live alone are very afraid of having their homes invaded and being sexually or financially harassed. Those who live with more people fear for the lives of their loved ones, whether inside their own home or if they are moving through the city on their way home. Thus, they also stay awake and in constant contact to somehow secure their lives. Some women also commented on damage to their homes caused by gunshots. The group we monitored also experienced harassment and persecution during police approaches on the streets, on the way back home.<sup>46</sup>

*<sup>46</sup> "I'm afraid of the police too, I'm not going to lie, the other day the police stopped me right there, close to where I used to live" (Úrsula).*

## 5.2 IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE ON WOMEN'S LIVES AND BODIES

What happens to women's bodies after police interventions lasting more than 18 hours? What happens in the body when a police operation begins and when they end? How does the body feel when the helicopter leaves and the noise of the police assault vehicle moves around and follows its path? What are the psychosomatic symptoms registered in the body of women in Maré after violence?

The public security (or insecurity) policy changes the entire context and routine of the body when a police operation is taking place. The noise heard on the streets is no longer made by children, the favela no longer smells of the bread from the bakery, but of the smoke from gunshots. The body is surprised and goes into a state of alertness, because the alarm clock is the sound of the helicopter flying over the house, crossing the body psychologically and emotionally. The sound of the helicopter and the police assault vehicle becomes the soundtrack of the favela, creating an atmosphere of terror that does not seem to bother the police. And the dance the bodies of residents are invited to dance is a dance of impotence, fear, distress, nausea, and anxiety that screams.

Everything starts to get messed up inside. The body becomes paralyzed, shaken, scared, angry, and goes into extreme despair. It becomes a body that internally vibrates to the same rhythm as the music produced by the sounds of the helicopter and the armoured assault vehicle. There is no safe place. Leaving the house can mean being hit, and staying home means the risk of experiencing violations that begin with home invasion. What is registered keeps reverberating in the body days later, the fear of going out on the street, worrying if everyone is okay, the memory and the muscles activated when you hear any sound similar to the helicopter. The body already warns you that it was registered, that it was archived as muscle memory.

And the stage on which this happens is the limited space of the house. The path the body takes in that dance sometimes goes from one room to another, in a search for safety. This dance has breathing, it has pauses. The dance starts with the head completely scrambled and with random movements. It is the body looking for resources to protect itself and react to the situation of insecurity.

When walking through the streets to go to work, study or move to another location, some of the women are approached and questioned about their life and their route. If they seek to intervene in a violent approach to another person, they are cursed, threatened with death and rape. Their daily life is changed, and at that moment, even the colour of their clothes is a reason for suspicion.<sup>47</sup> How does this body feel when it is the object of public security policy, and not the subject of the right to public security?

*<sup>47</sup> “When I worked at the airport, I had to leave at 5am, because I had to arrive at 6am. The police were carrying out an operation here, at dawn, and my clothes were all black, and during the day we walk in the middle of the street, but at dawn we walk closer to the walls. The policeman pointed his rifle at my face. He asked me why I was wearing black, but it was my uniform.” (Darcy).*

**Armed violence** causes physical illness in many of these women. They develop hypertension, diabetes, panic disorder, eating disorders, or pain that they feel in the body and gets so intense it also affects their mobility. The movements of their bodies are tense and agitated, symptoms of situations they experienced.

Changing routes to avoid members of armed groups or public security agents was one impact of these situations on the daily lives of women.<sup>48</sup> Choosing which paths to take to avoid contact with the person who assaulted them also occurs in cases of gender violence.<sup>49</sup> This shows that violence does not end in the act itself.

*<sup>48</sup> “Yes... the way. When there is an operation, we don’t leave the house, and sometimes we have to change our entire route. My daughter missed the morning shift, she couldn’t get to her internship, she was stuck at home. Then I took her to Avenida Brasil. This change makes us tense.” (Rose).*

*<sup>49</sup> “I even changed my route, to avoid meeting my ex-husband” (Zélia).*

## 5.3 IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE ON WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Mental suffering is historically considered less important, or a weakness of those asking for help. But these are real problems that affect the lives of many people, especially those who have already suffered some type of violence. And if we think about women from the favelas and black women, this situation is even more serious, not only because of the suffering itself, but because that pain is still overlooked by the rest of society.<sup>50</sup> This population has always been dehumanized in the history of Brazil. They are considered to be stronger, or are simply criminalized for their pain.<sup>51</sup>

*<sup>50</sup> “The woman at the Clínica da Família told me: ‘only the sick need medication, you have nothing.’” (Zélia).*

*<sup>51</sup> “I stopped having access to many services that I had; both for financial reasons, but also because I never know if my issues will be properly understood, both for being a woman, for being a lesbian, and for being a black woman. And we know the difficulties we face even to have access to medical care, issues of thinking that we can endure more pain, among other things. We know very well where these assumptions come from.” (Marina).*

Violence, whether physical, psychological or moral, causes mental illness. Addressing these experiences through care was one of the main objectives of this project. Being exposed to the situation of armed violence, by itself, brings a series of repercussions to our health. *Agitation, constant state of alertness, interruptions of routines, and stress are some of the symptoms.*<sup>52</sup> Those can develop into *depression, anxiety, and panic disorder.*

*<sup>52</sup> “Look, I’ll tell you, armed violence terrifies me, both with an operation and without an operation. Because sometimes you’re sitting at your door and suddenly the boys pass by with those huge guns. It makes us a little scared. I won’t say I’m not afraid. I’m terrified. You think something is going on, you’re afraid a gun will go off all of a sudden. [...] Now when there is a police operation, that’s when the fear increases. Because we know that the police shoot at random.” (Lola).*

The *feeling of powerlessness* and *silencing* marks part of the stories told by the women. How do you protect yourself if the perpetrator of violence has a weapon, whether he is a member of armed groups or a public security agent? Who to turn to in situations of violence against women? Are protective measures, such as the Maria da Penha Law, effective in this territory?

The suffering of the situations they experienced had many impacts on the emotional state of these women. There were cases of sexual violence that caused such harmful effects that a young brown woman resorted to a suicide attempt. Cases of domestic violence also affected these women's self-esteem, causing depression and isolation.<sup>53</sup> Many feel that they have lost part of their lives by dedicating themselves to relationships in which they were disrespected.

*<sup>53</sup> "I was exposed in my marriage. My ex-husband got angry, because he didn't want me to study or work. People asked about me, and he said I was at the motel with a lover, when I was working, studying. Because of that, people came to ask me questions, and they told me what he was saying. That violence hit me in such a way that I got depressed. I weighed as little as 40 kilos" (Betina).*

Feelings of guilt for situations of violence they experienced also marks the narrative of many women. And this guilt is not an individual process, as many of them were told that if they had acted differently, they would not have had these experiences. This is also a very stark reality for the mothers of victims of armed violence, who are always questioned about the reasons that led their child to die in that way. This is one of many impacts on mothers and relatives of victims of armed violence, as we will see in the next topic.

### 5.3.1 Living with the loss caused by gun violence

*“Help me scream, because I will never be the same”* (Zélia) was a sentence a mother said in one of our activities. It is impossible to measure the pain of a mother who has to bury her child.<sup>54</sup> Even more so when they die violently.

*<sup>54</sup> “I am living by the grace of God and the orishas. I’m a dead woman, my appearance on the outside is one thing, on the inside it’s something else, it’s dead. [...] I feel like a woman without... for me I don’t exist anymore, I’m a dead woman. [...] Because I am a lively woman, but my liveliness has been extinguished since my son died. For me, nothing matters in life anymore.” (Dete).*



On November 4, 2022, a Memorial to the Victims of Armed Violence in Maré was inaugurated, a project of the Right to Public Safety and Access to Justice axis of Redes da Maré. This is a wall full of tiles painted with the names of victims of violent deaths, the more than 120 victims of armed violence that were recorded. It includes drawings and messages left by people close to them, along with the manifesto written by the Mothers of Maré Collective: do not let us forget the traces left by armed violence. This mural is located on Rua Ivanildo Alves, an area known for armed confrontations.



The right to memory is another right violated when a family member is lost to armed violence. In addition to the pain of the loss, of the burial, of having to identify the body, these women also see the memory of their children being attacked in the mainstream media.<sup>55</sup> The media show the face of their children, always questioning their innocence, as if their deaths were justified in cases of involvement with the trade of illicit substances, also known as drug trafficking. A feeling of injustice and revolt marks people's life after a loss caused by violence.

*<sup>55</sup> "I was a mother and a father. When I lost my son, I lost him and I couldn't cry, I had to solve it all. It is difficult for a mother to lose a child and still not be able to cry, because she is the one who has to receive...there is someone who jumps in to solve it." (Zelia).*



Reacting with feelings of revolt was one of the first symptoms the women reported feeling after the situation of violence. Some mothers say they manage to deal with the anger they feel in other ways, little by little. Others look for evidence to show exactly what happened, to clear their children's names, or to identify who executed them. A quest for justice.

Participation in political or community-based organizations is one of the ways to deal with what happened. Others work to keep their minds busy.<sup>56</sup> These mothers express, in a very committed way, how hard they are working to change reality so that no mother needs to bury her child because of violence. Or they simply want improvements for their community. And there are also spaces where everyone gathers to support and strengthen each other.

*<sup>56</sup> "Now I work. I keep my mind busy so I don't have to stop and stay indoors alone, so I can stay home and not remember anything" (Betina).*

Public holidays gain another meaning in their lives, as these would be moments to gather with family members. How can they see the movement of other families and not miss it? Birthdays, Mother's Day, All Souls' Day are particularly difficult, as times of the year that evoke strong feelings about family. Dates related to the movement of birth, life, and death.

Many seek to revive their last memories with their children. They spoke in detail about the week of the incident, the atmosphere in the community that day, the clothes their son was wearing when he left home, his last words. Many had to hold back their tears to assist those around them, because "there was no time to bury my pain, no time to cry" (Zélia). Others stay silent about what they experienced, trying to forget. Others seek work to occupy their minds.

Keeping up with everyday life is often a challenge. The children grew up, played, moved around, and made friends in that territory where their mothers stayed. And some points in the vast territory of Maré bear marks of those memories. Meeting friends, family and professionals who saw your child grow up, always means re-

visiting those memories. Those points and meetings also have different meanings for the mothers: some feel them like salt in the wound, others as a way to still be contact with what their child was in life.

Feelings often spill over into the physical body. Feeling disoriented when walking down the street, difficulty concentrating, confusion, shortness of breath, agitation, stress, constant alertness, hypertension, panic disorder, depression. We do not want to list every illness, there are studies and professionals dedicated to this. But, in their own words, in the face of loss, mothers are *“trying to put something in its place”* (Zélia). Empowering these women is a right-to-life policy. The right to their own lives.



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## 6. THE TERRITORY AS AN AFFECTIVE MAP OF THE WOMEN OF MARÉ

The city has an important influence on women's relationship with their bodies. The organization of the territory influences all the elements that make up the constitution of women's bodies.<sup>57</sup> It affects how they see themselves and others. It affects how they move, where they move, where they find comfort and safety, how they eat, how they take care of their bodies, how they exercise, how they care for others. It is a body-territory relation.

In Maré, the imminence of violent police operations has a major effect on residents' bodies. Living under the constant threat of eruptions of violence contributes to tension, anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. These are not just issues of the mind, but are also expressed in the way women feel about and care for their bodies.

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<sup>57</sup> Grosz, 1998.

In this section, we will briefly talk about the women's relationship with Maré and other territories in the city of Rio de Janeiro. How do women view their territory? Do they feel safe where they live? And outside Maré, how do they feel? What do they fear when crossing the boundaries of the city?



## 6.1 THE TIDE OF WOMEN

The relationship of the women who participated in the research with the territory of Maré is marked by countless feelings, sometimes contradictory ones. Their relationship with the place where they grew up and/or live ranges from the feeling of insecurity caused by armed violence to the feeling of belonging and having affection for the relationships they formed in the territory. And among women, we also find different relationships of belonging and security with the place where they live and create.

The boundaries of the city of Rio de Janeiro also demarcate the existence of women. When asked about how they feel about Maré being called a favela, for example, the answers derive from that relationship. A number of women of different age and ethnic-racial profiles reported that they do not feel comfortable calling the place where they live a favela, because they perceive that the favela is viewed negatively by the rest of society, as an unhealthy, violent place without culture.<sup>58</sup> This view of the favela has already impac-

<sup>58</sup> *“They speak ill of the community and I’ll say right away that I live in a community, but let’s make comments. It’s not the place that makes the person. It’s the person who makes the place. I told you that not everyone is a criminal. So, like, I hold my head high because I don’t bother anyone. I just say it. “Where do you live?” In the community. Now, I say I live in Maré. So, today I am not ashamed, you know?” (Renata).*

ted their lives in job selection processes and in disparaging views from people who do not experience their reality. Thus, one way to get a job and protect yourself from discrimination is to say that you live in Bonsucesso, a district next to Maré.

The women who do not identify with the term “favela” prefer to call Maré a “community”. We found this type of response mostly in mature women, of different ethnic-racial profiles. These women believe it makes more sense, because the word “community” is associated with ties of solidarity and collectivity. For them, Maré is made up of people who share the same reality and who often help each other, as happens when neighbours take care of each other’s children so that parents can work, or stay alert in case of public security agents violating their homes.

In the group we monitored, we also met women who identify with and are often proud of being from the favela. The favela, for these women, who are mostly young or involved with social and community movements, means resistance and power, given all the history of struggle and improvements achieved in this territory. This perspective is also provoked by their experiences in spaces of critical political thinking on human rights.

Discussing feelings of security within the territory, women in general report that they feel safe because they know the territory and its residents, despite not feeling comfortable with the presence of armed groups.<sup>59</sup> That is, there is no process of normalising the armed domination of those groups over the territory.

*<sup>59</sup> “[Here] we know how to impose ourselves... a way for us to prevent these things from happening” (Zida).*

In relation to this, a mature brown woman and an adult white woman say that they do not feel safe in their territory and even avoid leaving home.<sup>60</sup> Almost all of the women we came in contact with indicate that they are afraid to walk along Rua Ivanildo Alves, a boundary region between territories occupied by different armed groups, where armed clashes happen frequently.

<sup>60</sup> *“I avoid going out at night. Lately, I only leave the house when it’s something important. My daughter is having an event, so we have to be with her. I’ll only go to a family party if it’s close by. But going to places, being exposed, make me very afraid.” (Lola).*

Police operations are a source of fear for all participating women. These are unpredictable situations, as you never know the exact moment they will happen and how the public security agents will act. A black woman’s words shows the revolt many residents felt in relation to abuses of authority, violations and discrimination committed by the police within the favela<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> *“From the moment they violate our right to come and go, they violate our space, our homes, and also the territory where we live, which is not respected as common territory, as being part of society. They think there can be no respect within the favela, both on one side and on the other. For me, that is already violence. This difference in treatment towards favela residents ends up causing residents to revolt, wanting to know the reason for this violence.” (Betina).*

The LGBT women we had contact with reported they are able to move around and show affection more easily in Maré, despite recognising indirect homophobic attacks. This happens when they realize that the discomfort with their existence emerges in conflicts for other reasons, such as everyday issues between neighbours, as we mentioned earlier.

On the other hand, women feel that there are spaces of support and protection in the territory. They mention civil society organizations fighting against violence in such as Redes da Maré, the services provided by the Maré of Rights project and by the Women's House of Maré, and also this research project.<sup>62</sup>

*<sup>62</sup> “A Casa das Mulheres, me acolhe com as psicólogas, procurei fazer cursos, o espanhol já fazia aqui muito antes do que eu tinha passado. Faço esse curso de gastronomia, faço ioga!.” (Luzia).*

A feeling of affection for Maré formed a large part of the women's narratives, always marked by stories of the times of the stilt houses, of community relationships, and existing sports, leisure, culture, and socio-legal services.<sup>63</sup> However, some women want to live elsewhere in the city because of the insecurity caused by police operations.<sup>64</sup>

*<sup>63</sup> "I think I'm much more privileged. Where else can I go to the Olympic Village and learn zumba, and everything? Some people are jealous of that. There are people who live in Vicente de Carvalho, close to the shopping centre, and say: 'Wow, you do all that?', 'I do, I do zumba, stretching, I do a lot of things'. Then the girl said: 'You're rich and you don't know it.'" (Rose).*

*<sup>64</sup> "I wanted to leave. After I lost my son, I am very afraid of the operation. I feel very scared. My other son doesn't stay alone, no. When there's an operation, he is terribly afraid. He is black, child." (Zelia).*

## 6.2 BEING A WOMAN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE MARÉ

It was possible to observe that women make a distinction between how they feel outside and inside Maré. The feeling of security when they are in Maré is confronted with the insecurity of not knowing when a police operation will happen, moments in which they feel absolutely unprotected and vulnerable.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *“Not in Mare. Nobody messes with me, even if I walk here at dawn.” (Betina).*

In general, there is fear of what might happen, as the repercussions of a militarized police intervention are always unpredictable. Some women reported at first that they are not nervous because they have already gone through worse situations in relation to armed violence in the territory. They bring up the fact that, in the past, there were more police operations, which used to take place once or twice a week. A young black woman shared how she feels in the midst of the armed conflict: *“They shoot, and it feels like they are hitting us”* (Zida).

Many report that they are afraid of their homes being invaded, they have to change their route to work because of the operation<sup>66 67</sup>, they are afraid for themselves or of someone in their family being shot<sup>68</sup>. They mention their feelings towards the actions of the State, as police treat people differently inside and outside the territory of favelas. According to one woman, *“on the asphalt there is a respect that you cannot violate houses, that you follow the laws correctly, speak nicely with the residents, but when you get inside the favela this behaviour changes. It’s because there is a difference in treatment”* (Betina).

<sup>66</sup> *“Because of the operation, I couldn’t go out to work.” (Renata).*

<sup>67</sup> *“I missed a medical appointment because of an operation here in Maré.” (Marina).*

<sup>68</sup> *“I don’t leave the house; I don’t take the children to school.” (Vanessa).*

Coexisting with different armed groups, which impose themselves on every corner, displaying their weapons, or the restrictions imposed on African-based religions in Maré were not perceived as violence that causes insecurity. The feeling of security was related to the fact that they know everyone who lives in their favela, they know where they should go to be safer, and there are less chances of being robbed inside Maré.

When they leave Maré, the main reason for insecurity for all the women is the possibility of robberies<sup>69</sup> and sexual violence.<sup>70</sup> They say that, unlike in Maré, they don't know the people who are moving around public transport and city streets<sup>71</sup>, which makes individual protection strategies more difficult.<sup>72</sup>

*<sup>69</sup> "I am afraid of being mugged. The world is violent. I'm scared." (Paula).*

*<sup>70</sup> "I am afraid of being raped, like, somewhere at night, in very deserted places." (Úrsula).*

*<sup>71</sup> "I'm more afraid to be out there. Out there, it's different. You don't know your opponent, and you don't know who's behind you" (Betina).*

*<sup>72</sup>“I’ve had to change my routes too, because of robberies. I already had to avoid taking public transport that was very crowded, and to wait until they were emptied to avoid possible harassment” (Marina).*

They even say that they have been through risky situations next to police patrols, who did nothing in the face of violence. The LGBT women we spoke with also said that they feel more unprotected and exposed to homophobic verbal and physical attacks when they are away from Maré.



A very important issue women perceive when they go out of Maré is the discrimination they suffer because they live in a favela.<sup>73</sup> When they walk the streets, when they are in university spaces and job interviews, they feel that they are treated differently when people find out where they live. Mistrust and criminalisation of their bodies and existence mark some of these moments of movement and dialogue in other parts of the city.<sup>74</sup>

*<sup>73</sup> “From the moment you hear ‘Wow, you don’t even look like you live in a favela’, because of the way I talk, the way I behave. When you hear, ‘Wow, you don’t even look like you live in a favela’, does that mean people who live in favelas are not educated, that they don’t study or have any knowledge?” (Betina).*

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<sup>74</sup> Cecchetto; Muniz; Monteiro, 2018.

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# 7. STRENGTHENING CARE POLICIES IN MARÉ

This research is focused on learning about and strengthening protection and care as prevention and protection against the different forms of violence that permeate the daily lives of women in Maré. These ideas, although powerful and considered necessary by the women participating in the project, were not understood and expressed in the same way. Their understanding of protection, care, violation, and violence proved to be very diverse and referred to views about the body, its forms of expression, its limits and needs.

The attempt to find a collective understanding of these issues in the exchange of views and experiences was one of the broader objectives of the project. Both the physical activities and the conversation circles made it possible to observe the diversity of viewpoints and the search to build bridges between generations, as well as a respectful weaving together of the visions and values of each woman.

In that sense, the proposal to take care of the body took on many meanings. Some women think of care as working on their physical beauty, others see it as a health issue, and for some it is an issue of sexuality. All of them felt they did not have time to taking care of their own bodies a priority. This is because these women have always been responsible for taking care of family members and neighbours, both in relation to domestic tasks and financial needs. Women are routinely responsible for food, hygiene, health, education, and the financial support of those around them.

Each of these dimensions brought powerful, creative reflections, but also pain, damage, and resentment. Many realize that they have lived all their lives to care for others, to the point of becoming ill when their caregiving was no longer needed. Some of them even said that they only look after themselves when they become ill and seek psychosocial care services, physical activities, and professional training.

Putting the body at the centre is fundamental for collective reflection. Taking the body as a theme sparks other very rich elements for understanding, such as gender, race, different ways of understanding sexuality, our view of the territory we live in, and the relationships between generations. To that extent, the individual experience often becomes more important than a more general reflection on the condition of women; that is, the women talked more about themselves than about a collective they feel part of. The project sought a basis for constructing this collective understanding of what it means to be a woman, a resident of Maré, whose identity and history share common cultural and social traits.

No narrative is adequate when we address the care and protection of women in the favela, who are mostly black women. There is no way to readjust the pain of bodies violated by the condition of being a woman, poor, and from the favela. Many of these women living in the favelas already suffer violence because of where they live, this



territory called Maré. Many are women who haven't had opportunities to study or have a good job, and that's why they are at the base of the pyramid.

There is an enormous distance in society, due to the inequality that structures it, and this distance is already a violence. Lack of access or unequal access is violence. In view of this, we must develop strategic care practices that can reach and support these women. Thus, we designed a welcoming approach based on reflection, awareness of pain, touching the body, and caring for themselves and the women around them.

Each woman deals with situations of violence according to the material and subjective resources available to her. But many of these situations of violence or overload have an impact on the women's mind and body. One cannot escape the pain they carry in the body, which is not often shown in the newspaper. It is impossible not to talk about the women who, like Dona Orosina, the first resident of Maré, built their places to live in the world with their own hands. Women like Eliana Sousa Silva, who encourage Maré residents to organise and fight for better living conditions, housing, work, health, and education. Maré is full of women who led the construction of this territory.

Their pain dissipates into the hope of being alive, of trying to live each day in better conditions. They look at the project's care practices and the research in general as a relief and an opportunity to dissolve the violence that affects them. It became part of their routine, an appointment. When a meeting did not happen for some reason, as in days of police operations, they missed it.

The routine of the meetings was not created by the research team alone. In fact, the participating women had great influence and agency over it. They created a routine of taking photos after the classes, for example. They invited the team to participate, as they reminded us that we are also women and need to be taken care of. They got in touch, reminding each other and asking if they were going to class. Care was established in a collective, shared, and participatory way.



## 7.1 PROTECTIVE PRACTICES ACTIVATED OR DEVELOPED BY WOMEN IN MARÉ

Throughout their lives, the women we spoke to developed multiple ways of protecting themselves from situations of violence. The strategies they used vary according to each woman's trajectory, territory, and body. Knowing these strategies is of paramount importance for us to think about and strengthen actions to fight violence based on community initiatives. And to draw new paths.

To deal with armed violence, a strategy used by women is to **wear white or light-coloured clothes**, as they perceive that the police associate wearing black with involvement with armed groups. Thus, even clothing is an issue taken into account by women during police operations. One of the women even recalled being approached by a police officer who asked why she was wearing black.

Monitoring **group messaging** services, such as WhatsApp, is another tool used by women as a form of protection, in addition to **social network** pages that communicate information about police operations and clashes between armed groups. In this way, they have access to information about the dynamics of the territory.

On days of police operations, if these women are at home, some tend to lock the door and hide in more secluded and protected areas of the house.<sup>75</sup> Because they live alone, other women prefer **to go out on the streets**, as they feel exposed to the risk of sexual harassment if public security agents invade their homes. A mature black woman also reported that she has the habit of **keeping proof of purchase** of the goods she has at home, to prove to public security agents that her assets are legal. Faced with the criminalisation they suffer, that is a way residents can protect themselves.

*<sup>75</sup> “To protect myself, I stay at the back of my house, the safest place. From time to time, we hear shots at dawn, and we already have everything planned. We have a mattress, I say: ‘We’re going to run with this mattress to the kitchen and we’re going to stay there.’” (Lima).*

In some favelas, it is customary for women to leave their homes and **gather in public spaces to collectively protect themselves**. Unlike what happens when they are alone at home, on the streets these women form a collective body, in which they all intervene when they see someone in a situation of violence. Obviously, this intervention and mediation is limited when they are faced with an armed agent. But it is a way of showing that no one is alone in that situation.

This strategy for protecting against and confronting armed violence constructed by women of Maré is historic. Seeking to strengthen this protection network in the territory with a technical framework, since 2016 the Right to Public Security and Access to Justice axis of Redes da Maré has developed a task force to be on duty during police operations and armed conflicts. The work consists of sheltering residents, providing assistance in cases of violation of rights, and mediating contact with public security agents, in order to prevent violations.

Our research participants also reported carrying out **mediation** activities, seeking to prevent other residents from being harmed by public security agents. One woman had once used her **body as a barrier** to prevent the police from assaulting her son. In a way, women end up putting themselves at risk to protect the lives of those around them, since they have been threatened by State agents in these situations.



Regarding gender-based violence, the women also mentioned community protection and care strategies. The development of a **support network among friends and neighbours**, whether this support is emotional, spiritual, political, or financial, has made the situation safer for women facing violence.

Women in a certain region of the Nova Holanda favela have developed **community actions to fight violence against women**. When they realize a resident is suffering some type of violence, they promptly get together to intervene or make noise with pots to embarrass the perpetrator.

One woman also mentioned that the meetings of a **group of women** from an evangelical religious institution were also a space for strengthening herself. According to her testimony, this group meets periodically and autonomously on the rooftop of one of its members to discuss issues that affect their lives. Women who are part of African-based religions also pointed to those institutions as spaces for care and protection, as well as for strengthening themselves as black women.

**Body-related, artistic, and cultural activities** were also mentioned by the women as forms of care.<sup>76</sup> Some of them were advised by health professionals to seek out these activities as a treatment for depression, anxiety, and panic disorder. And indeed, this was the way for these women to look after and take care of themselves. They are also spaces for **physical and mental health care**.

<sup>76</sup> *“At the gym, I think it’s the moment when the person disconnects from all problems and focuses on that exercise, on that activity, like dancing, you’re there doing that and you’re present. You’re not thinking, ‘I don’t have to do laundry, I don’t have a bill to pay.’ I think the brain switches off. It helps, it helps a lot.” (Leila).*

When seeking to access health services to deal with the impacts of violence on their bodies, the women did not feel protected. At the Family Clinic close to Maré, for example, a mother of a victim of armed violence was told by a health professional that *“only the sick need medication”* (Zélia). She experienced a trivialization of mental suffering.

On the other hand, the only care she was offered was medication, which, she reported, left her numb and disoriented, which affected her daily tasks and life organization. How much does this feeling of “*disorientation*” impact that woman’s life, to the point of putting her at risk during police operations or armed confrontations, for example? We do not want to deny that medication is needed in many cases. The point is that if care is limited to the use of medication, this only treats the symptoms, not the causes, of mental suffering.

The women reported that they had access to mental health care at the Psychosocial Care Centre (CAPS77), where their pain was taken seriously. However, they feel that the professionals there are still unable to grasp the impact of losing a child to this type of violence. How then to propose a treatment if the user is not seen as a whole, through their gender, class, racial, and territorial relations? We also heard from a young black woman who sought private psychological care and suffered discrimination by the professional she saw.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> CAPS are public mental health services that have a community-based approach, which means their objective is to carry out work coordinated with the community in which they operate, seeking to strengthen the bonds between service users and their community relationships. The service is open to all and it is aimed at people in psychological distress or with mental disorders.

<sup>78</sup> *“I had a lot of difficulty, for example, when I needed therapy, after a first suicide attempt. And when I got to the appointment with the psychologist, the first thing she did was look at me and get super tense. I had gone through some very complicated situations of racism at the time. I tried to tell her what was going on, and she said she didn’t understand, that everything was very foggy, and during the session she grabbed her purse and kept holding it tight. So it made me feel very bad, it took me a long time to be able to seek therapy again.” (Marina).*

The women showed great awareness of the **limitations of the protection and justice network** in their territory. Discussing the Maria da Penha Law, which some of them sought to access, they said that the response of employees at the women’s police station was that “the service does not work in the favela”. As we mentioned earlier, this is due to the fact that some institutions in the women’s protection network, such as the police, do not act in this territory, or only do so through militarized police incursions.

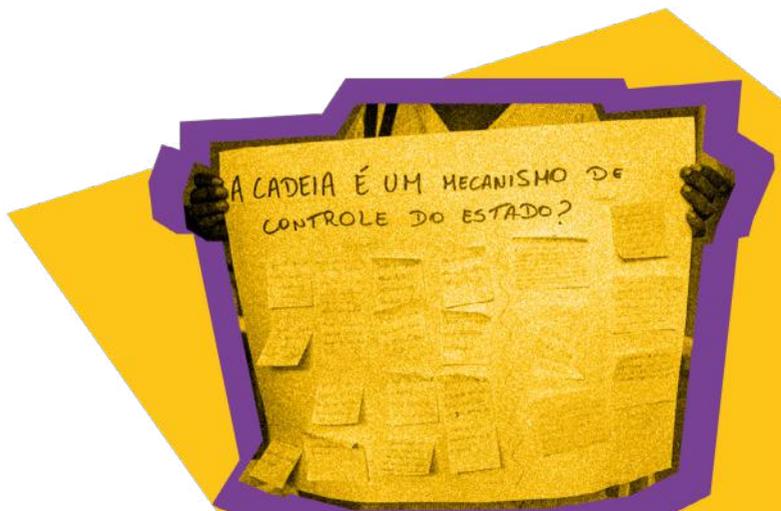
Despite these limitations in terms of access to justice, the women pointed out they felt protected by **the socio-legal services** offered by Redes da Maré.<sup>79</sup> In dialogue with the service teams when working on this publication, we have reflected on the importance of access to justice as an important tool of protection and care, because most of the demands they receive from Maré residents are related to family law, to guarantee the basic conditions for access to food security and for their children's lives.

*<sup>79</sup> "Through Redes, there's this thing about rights, that we can call and the woman from Redes comes and assists us. There is also the Maria da Penha Law, but it doesn't solve much. But we have Redes here." (Zida).*

Faced with this whole context of insecurity and lack of access to justice, some women reported that they **sought out armed groups** to protect themselves from situations of violence, especially violence based on gender or homophobia. This does not mean that the women agree with these armed groups, and they know that the judgment carried out by them is not based on the law and on democracy, but it is a way of preventing this violence from developing to the point of threatening their lives.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> *“It was basically a person who threatened us physically, and that day I felt very powerless, because even though the drug-dealing guys had smoothed things over, they didn’t do anything to me, but they didn’t do anything to her either. We had no way to fight for our rights and we couldn’t call the police and accuse her of lesbophobia, we couldn’t sue her. So, there is a very strong feeling of impotence.” (Marina).*

Thus, the women we worked with found ways to live despite their experiences of violence. Even though they are often not treated equally by health services and public institutions, favela women have always devised community strategies to take care of themselves. This is the history of Maré. Women have been at the forefront of major changes in the territory. Thus, women are not limited to the experiences of violence they went through individually or in the community. Quite to the contrary, they are potent in their ways of existing in the world.



## 7.2 IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES ON WOMEN'S LIVES

The first care activity initiated by the yoga and dance instructors was to draw the attention of each woman to the signs of their bodies. Being silent, observing movements, looking at themselves and at others, touching their own body and the body of others were ways of making the theme familiar and accessible to each woman.

The space reserved for the artistic activities had a strong influence on the activities. Self-preservation, secrecy, security, and trust were elements sought by the instructors to ensure the women paid more attention to the proposed artistic interventions on their bodies. At the beginning of the work, the space used brought many challenges in relation to those elements. Moving to another space allowed for a greater range of activities and it guaranteed that they had the place to themselves at that time.

The changing makeup of the group was a challenge for building a more constant and consistent base of relationships among the women. However, the fact that some of them already had previous relationships with each other made up for the lack of consistency.

Since they already knew each other, they did not use the space to get to know each other, yet they came to recognise other elements of women's conditions that they may not have known before, by discussing these elements with them. Others were welcomed as they arrived and got to know the group, creating affective ties.<sup>81</sup>

*<sup>81</sup> "The main point I perceive is that I feel good about being in the project. Your project is super important, like, recognizing me as an autistic person, because we already have difficulty socialising, so it helps us to create this socialisation. It is very difficult for us to help, to do all the things. It is very difficult for us to be heard. I notice the lack of a space for us to open up, to talk about certain situations. Thank God I no longer go through delicate situations, as I have been through a lot in my life, because I am already able to love myself." (Lima).*



During the workshops, we realized that the number of women at the meetings varied each week. However, this did not allow the group to change and it did not hinder the practice. The workshops sought to encourage both self-care and collective care. The women recognised themselves in the pain of others. Soon a caring environment developed.

As well as recognising their own pain, it was noticeable that the women also knew how to embrace the joy, relief, and growth from body stretching, and to recognize the health benefits they experienced. As a collective victory, a collective conquest, they walk together, they give and receive the weight of the body, either in massages or in the asana positions, and finally they dance together, their own dance.<sup>82</sup> They discover their bodies and the bodies of others. They discover the pain and power of being who they are. Women being extraordinary women.

The body theme was introduced in an innovative way for many women, and the relationship between the body and health also

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<sup>82</sup> Asanas are body postures used in yoga. They help develop physical, mental, and spiritual balance.

prompted new reflections. The project does not define health as the absence of disease and, therefore, did not guide activities towards the treatment of body and mental pain.<sup>83</sup> The concept of health

*<sup>83</sup> “Yoga helps me try to balance my head, try to calm my thoughts. I leave here feeling lighter, so the next day I feel more excited, like someone else. The energy of the other ladies, other women. Even if they have worse problems than mine, we exchange energy, and it’s the best thing in the world. Because many times when the person does this and touches you, they are not giving you negative energy, they are giving you healing energy.” (Darcy).*

we adopted sought to involve the broader dimensions of women from Maré, with reference to race, age, sexuality, and a whole set of values, beliefs, and social practices in their relationship with themselves, with others and with the territories they move around in. This broader conception of health (and its precariousness) was worked on in each meeting from the perspective of expanding critical awareness and collective empowerment.

The conversation circles were very important in the project, according to the women who were led, guided, and supported. With psychodrama, a technique that combines work with body and mind, we realized that the voice is part of the body and that it is not possible to silence yourself all the time. The bodies screamed that they needed to speak, that they needed to listen, reflect, digest, and leave with a new perspective, a new way to look at the violence traversing their bodies. As if the conversation circle were a newspaper written by all of them, collectively. So, they spoke out and diluted their thoughts into words.<sup>84</sup>

*<sup>84</sup> “The classes are relaxing. Even the conversation circles are good, because we talk about what we’re feeling, what’s hurting, what we think needs to change. Something like... We went there, my sister is very bitter. I managed to drag her. It’s a little moment to take care of ourselves.” (Zida).*

At the end of each body care class, they took a moment to say a word. To make sense of everything they experienced and accessed through touch, putting it into words. In the conversation circles there was more than one word, there were many words, it was about giving a lot of meaning. And the words mixed with crying, laughing, and identifying with the experiences of others.

Although most of the time it is impossible to talk about violence without talking about pain, we can see that these bodies are no longer just pain and the impacts of violence. They are women who talk, who know how to express their emotions and listen to their bodies, who support each other as women, residents, friends. Here we bring Larrosa Bondía making full sense of the word: “[...] every human being has to do with words, comes to being in words, is woven with words”.<sup>85</sup> Expressing the body made room for the women’s words, and for knowledge about themselves, about their relationships among women, about their territory and the social context in which they live.

The women who for any reason stopped participating in the activities or who participated in an inconsistent way, explained to us their reasons: the dynamics of life, getting a new job, going through pregnancy, family demands, and caring for those around them. This shows how access to care is a challenge for women in Maré.

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<sup>85</sup> Bondía, 2002, p. 21.



Even these women, however, also reported that they incorporated the practices they learned into their daily lives. In the morning, as the first activity of the day, they were able to take a few minutes to stretch and get in touch with their bodies. They even brought these care practices to other family members, such as their children, explaining each part of the body and how feelings are felt in the internal organs. Indeed, it was an awakening to body awareness. Others said they started dancing more, without feeling awkward or ashamed of their bodies.

A final impact of the proposed activities on the lives of the participating women was the bond between them, which has expanded beyond the walls of Redes da Maré, whether they go to the beach together, socialise at one of their homes, or when they are concerned about everyone attending the meetings. But one situation in particular stands out for its potential as a community strategy to confront violence.



BASTA DE  
VIOLÊNCIA  
BASTA DE  
VIOLÊNCIA



## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

**Formulating a public security policy that breaks with the warlike-militarized model that encourages the armed context in Maré and other favelas and urban peripheries in Rio de Janeiro, rather than combating it.** This should be done with the participation of the population, using community-based knowledge about coping, protection, and care practices that effectively work.

**Public health policies need to take into account, in their actions and their professional training, the reality experienced by women in relation to gender, race, age, and territory.** In this way, we will follow the principles of integrity, equity, and social participation, so important in the construction of the Brazilian Unified Health System and of dignified access to health.

**The training of professionals working in health, justice, public safety, and social service** must incorporate ideas about tackling all forms of discrimination and violence, in addition to training in Human Rights.

It is essential to design and strengthen **public employment and income policies for women in Maré**, seeking to tackle the criminalisation of their bodies and to boost their financial stability. This is also an action to fight violence against women, since financial dependence is a barrier for women to break away from domestic violence.

**Artistic and body activities** are effective physical and mental health care alternatives, developing collective care and bonding. In that sense, it is also necessary to promote public spaces and social centres for women that encourage artistic and body activities.

**Community-based care and protection strategies** are also important actions in the face of a daily life crossed by violence. It is essential to strengthen and develop collective awareness, through campaigns of community exchange and mobilization.

It is essential to develop **actions to fight violence against women** with approaches aimed at men, based on their experience of masculinity.

Strengthening **women's groups** is a community strategy with great potential to develop into actions to fight violence in Maré.

**Implementing mental health facilities** for women in Maré and other areas on the periphery of the city.

**Implementing access to justice services** in favela territories, related to gender issues, such as Public Defender's Office centres and sheltering spaces.

**Elaboração e execução de políticas públicas de reparação** para mães e familiares de vítimas de violência armada.

**Elaborating and carrying out public reparation policies** for mothers and families of victims of armed violence.

**Investing in urban infrastructure and urban mobility** to guarantee the right to the city for women living in favelas.

It is necessary to **expand equipment and places in day care centers and collective care spaces for children**. In this way, women were better able to work and practice their activities.

Faced with the characteristics of domestic violence and the stigmas that favela residents still suffer, it is essential to **implement a work and income secretariat nucleus** in Maré.

**Spaces for political training on gender, sexuality, sexual and reproductive rights** are needed as tools for identifying and confronting violence against women in Maré.

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# 9.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The reading of a body as female, black and/or from the favela interferes with how she experiences the territory and the violence that crosses it. But that same body also acts on the urban territory.<sup>86</sup> The subjectivity of these women is affected by the readings of their body, sometimes framing them as fragile and vulnerable, sometimes as strong and combative, especially if we think about the different ways of seeing a woman by the colour of her skin.

However, they also use these relationships as a protection strategy, mediating situations of conflict or perceiving the mood in their surroundings. For this, it is also important to know how to interpret these perceptions, because often a calm and/or empty space is not a good sign. This generates stress in the community in general, but especially in women, because of the imminent danger in public or private spaces, and worrying about how to behave in this context.

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<sup>86</sup> Grosz, 1998.



Armed violence interferes in all dimensions of the lives of women in Maré, including the visibility of other types of violence to which residents are exposed. The *Bulletin for Monitoring and Combating Violence in Maré*, for example, has already shown that gender-based violence was very significant in 2022, and has been so for many years.<sup>87</sup> Faced with this reality, we need to think about and strengthen public policies based on the needs of its residents.

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<sup>87</sup> Redes da Maré, 2022b.

Working with the body through collective practices is an effective way to empower women who live in situations of violence: to learn self-care techniques; to build relationships of trust, care and mutual support; to educate the body to perceive its sensations; to practise disinhibiting and communicating through body language and voice; to offer a much-needed place for women to verbalize their feelings and anguish and develop self-confidence.

As part of a research practice, community body workshops can: allow the emergence of new understandings that can be discussed later in interviews; establish trust between research participants and research teams; and offer a valuable resource to the community, thus avoiding excessively extractive research. These are highly effective ways of fostering care practices among women who live in Maré, as well as provoking reflections and feelings that probably would not have arisen in traditional qualitative interviews.

The expansion of access to rights by women living in the Maré Favela Complex, whether in relation to justice, health, housing, work and income, education, or food security directly reduces their exposure to violence. In that sense, the State needs to be increasingly present in the favelas, not through armoured vehicles and helicopters, but through high-quality social public policies designed with the participation of Maré residents.

In the history of Maré, women have always been at the forefront of community organization to improve the living conditions of residents. And they are also primarily responsible for the care of their children, family members, neighbours and the community. Despite the violence they experience, women were never reduced to these experiences. They are more potent than that. **Maré is made of women.**



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E NOTAS



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