

**Pela Vida das Mulheres: Violence Against Women and the Struggle for Justice and Care in  
Urban Brazil**

by

Emily Masucci

A dissertation accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Anthropology

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Lynn Stephen, Chair

Dr. Maria Fernanda Escallón, Core Member

Dr. Lamia Karim, Core Member

Dr. Erin Beck, Institutional Representative

University of Oregon

Winter 2024

© 2024 Emily Masucci

This work is licensed under Creative Commons  
**Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND) License.**



## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Emily Masucci

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

Title: *Pela Vida das Mulheres: Violence Against Women and the Struggle for Justice and Care in Urban Brazil*

In 2006, Brazil passed what is considered one of the most progressive policies on violence against women (VAW) in the world: the Maria da Penha Law. Among its provisions, the Maria da Penha Law called for the creation of a network of gender-specialized services—exclusively for women in situations of violence. Integrating women’s police stations, domestic violence courts, women’s centers, and emergency shelters, this unique policy framework has since garnered international recognition. Yet, by most measures, rates of VAW and impunity in Brazil continue to register among the highest in the world, especially among low-income women of color. Recurring VAW has generated skepticism among women, social movements, and scholars alike, who perceive fundamental limitations in a) the degree to which gender-specialized services serve women of diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds, b) the fragmented and uneven implementation of the law in practice, and c) the law’s capacity to withstand shifts in Brazil’s volatile political landscape.

This multi-sited research investigates the relationship between gender-specialized services, women’s movements, and outcomes of justice and care for women in situations of violence in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Specifically, it investigates why has it been so hard to effectively implement the reforms outlined in the Maria da Penha Law in Rio de Janeiro. How do “gaps”—between the law on paper and in practice—come to be and how do they impact the state’s ability to effectively render gender-specialized services for women in situations of violence? And how do people respond when they perceive that the state is unable or neglects to

concede the rights and services mandated by the law? To do so, it couples a) an investigation of the institutional and political constraints that shape gender-specialized services through interviews with service professionals and differently situated state actors within the network; with b) long-term participant observation and interviews with women activists who are addressing recurring VAW having found they cannot rely on the state for protections or access to rights. Together these perspectives reveal important patterns in the everyday process of providing and accessing gender-specialized care. Ultimately, it is important to understand the contexts and conditions that constrain such efforts so we can develop reforms that are not only progressive on paper, but effective and sustainable in practice.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I extend my deepest gratitude to the *many* people who shaped this project along the way. Firstly, I want to thank my academic advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Lynn Stephen, for her unwavering support and encouragement. Your guidance helped me stay focused, driven, and confident in my work even through the many moments of political and personal uncertainty that marked my path. A heartfelt thank you to my committee members—Dr. Maria Fernanda Escallón, Dr. Erin Beck, Dr. Lamia Karim, and Dr. Ana-Maurine Lara—for the many years of intellectually inspiring and challenging mentorship. Together your contributions have made this work infinitely stronger, and I consider myself privileged to have been trained by such seminal women academics.

To my peers and friends in the University of Oregon's Department of Anthropology, one of the most rewarding parts of graduate school has been learning, living, and of course struggling by your side. A special thanks to Aileen Fernandez, Samantha Queeno, Tanner Anderson, Annie Caruso, Sofia Vicente-Vidal, Katio Campos de Novais, Annalise Gardella, Enrique Gomez, Timothy Herrera, Nikki Cox, Tobin Hansen, Iván Sandoval-Cervantes, Chelle Haynes, and Monya Anderson. My fieldwork was supported by many interlocutors and friends in Rio de Janeiro, who generously shared their time and experiences with me. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with the Olga Benário Women's Movement, Diego and Roberta at the CEDIM archive, Lúcia, Cristina, Judge Kat, and the many other women who work in gender-specialized services, and to the women whose experiences of violence inform this work. A special *valeu* to Alexis, whose friendship and spirit of adventure reframed my relationship to Rio de Janeiro for the better and filled the many months away from home with *pastelzinho e cervejinha e muito amor*.

Thanks to the professors at the University of Oregon, the University of Maryland, College Park, Pontificia Universidade Católica in Rio de Janeiro, and Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro who guided me through different stages of my academic career, especially Maria “Bené” Santos, Janet Chernela, Jen Schaffer, Lucinda Grinnell, Bila Sorj, and David Sartorius. This research also benefitted from generous funding in the form of a National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant, a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Abroad Fellowship, as well as support from the Sylff Foundation, the Center for the Study of Women in Society, the Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies, and Global Studies Institute.

Finally, I am incredibly fortunate to have a family that loves and supports me. Thanks to my parents, Sherry and Paul, who shared with me their tenacious curiosity about the world and instilled in me the importance of hard work, resourcefulness, and pragmatism, but not at the expense of thinking big. To my sisters, Madeline and Abigail, who provided a steady source of belly laughs, FaceTime work sessions, and sisterly love. It turns out—even though you are younger—you’re both pretty cool. To my fierce grandmothers, whose life lessons have proven essential in times of joy and struggle, and to my Aunt Michele and Uncle Matt, who led me to believe it was normal to pursue a PhD... To Marty, John, and Kelsey who have given me the extraordinary gift of a family and a home in Oregon. And finally, to my partner, best friend, and roommate, Caleb. Across place and time, in ways big and small, you have shown up for me. Your support and companionship are beyond measure, but probably register in the order of hundreds of miles of hikes and neighborhood walks, gallons of coffee, days of laughter, a small forest worth of crossword puzzles, five apartments in three cities, and heaps of “cookies” for one especially “good boy” (Pico). Thank you.

To Marielle, *presente hoje e sempre!*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION .....	17
A Note on Terminology .....	21
Making Sense of “Senseless” Violence .....	23
Violence Against Women and the Role of the State .....	26
Structural and Symbolic Violence .....	27
The Social Production of VAW Reforms .....	29
Situating Violence: Bodies and Territory in Rio de Janeiro .....	30
Urban Geographies of Exclusion .....	30
Urban Violence in Rio de Janeiro .....	32
VAW and Women’s Movements in Rio de Janeiro .....	35
A Note on Positionality and Research in Pandemic Times .....	36
Dissertation Outline .....	38
II. RISING TO POWER, FALLING TO PIECES: A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND GENDER-SPECIALIZED SERVICES IN BRAZIL ....	41
Women’s Rights as Human Rights .....	44
Defining and Codifying Gender-Based Violence into Human Rights Law ...	44
Women’s Policy Agencies and the Politics of Translation .....	46
The Maria da Penha Law and the Network of Gender-Specialized Services .....	53
The Network of Gender-Specialized Services .....	54
State and Municipal Administrations .....	56
Women’s Centers and Emergency Shelters .....	58

Sala Lilás and Women’s Health Care .....	58
Women’s Police and CEJUVIDA .....	59
Specialized Courts .....	61
Ambiguous Outcomes of the Maria da Penha Law .....	62
The Problem with Numbers .....	62
Limitations of the Law .....	64
Barriers to Accessing Services .....	65
Partial Integration, Disjointed Implementation .....	67
Crumbling Infrastructure .....	69
Conclusion .....	71
III. PATHWAYS TO “JUSTICE:” NAVIGATING THROUGH AND AROUND GENDER-SPECIALIZED COURTS .....	75
Seven .....	75
Situating the Court .....	79
“Machismo on Trial?” .....	83
The Front Door .....	89
Love .....	91
Retaliation .....	94
Refusal .....	95
The Waiting Room .....	100
“A Denúncia Does Two Things” .....	102
Overlapping Cases .....	106
Waiting .....	108
“Ending” a Case .....	110

The Court .....	112
Emotions .....	116
Courtroom Hierarchies .....	117
“This Is How It Is” .....	119
Conclusion .....	121
IV. THE FRAGMENTED POLITICS OF CARE .....	126
The Situation.....	126
A Tale of Two Meetings.....	129
Meeting #1 .....	130
Meeting #2 .....	133
The Neoliberal Order of Disorder.....	135
Dismantling Women’s Centers: Conflict Between Service Administrators and Professionals .....	139
The Political Economy of Gender-Specialized Services .....	140
A Political Trampoline: Coopting Gender-Specialized Services .....	146
Conservative Backlash: Gender Ideology and Political Violence .....	150
When Cockroaches Fly: The Impacts of the Salary Cuts on CIAM .....	153
Dedicated, Frustrated Service Professionals.....	153
Variation Across Women’s Centers .....	157
Power Imbalances within the Network.....	159
Conclusion .....	162
V. THE ALMERINDA GAMA HOUSE: WOMEN’S ACTIVISM “AGAINST, WITH, AND BEYOND THE STATE” .....	167
Twelve Hours Earlier.....	168

The Little Blue Door.....	171
Conceiving Services for Women .....	180
SOS Mulher .....	181
Ant Work .....	186
Negotiating with the State .....	191
Pockets of Support, Resistance, and Ambivalence.....	193
“The State Doesn’t Care”.....	196
Carioca Street, 37: A Feminist Counter-Space.....	198
Café with Manu and Silvia .....	203
The Tina Martins House .....	207
Conclusion .....	210
VI. CONCLUSION .....	215
Services that Misalign with Women’s Needs and Ideas of Justice .....	216
Neoliberal Politics and the Dismantling of Women’s Services .....	217
Varied Commitments to Women’s Services within State Institutions .....	218
Women’s Social Movements and Alternative Approaches to Justice and Care....	219
Closing Remarks.....	221
APPENDICES .....	223
A. FULL TEXT OF THE MARIA DA PENHA LAW .....	223
B. INTERVIEW GUIDANCE .....	234
REFERENCES CITED .....	237

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Rio de Janeiro street art in Centro .....	23
2. Map of the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro.....	31
3. International Women's Day rally in Rio de Janeiro's Centro district .....	35
4. Street view of Rio de Janeiro's State Council for Women's Rights (CEDIM) before its renovation in 1987 .....	43
5. Street view of CEDIM after its renovation in 1987.....	43
6. Poster for the Second National Conference of Popular Organizations held in 1997.....	45
7. Meeting of the State Council for Women's Rights (CEDIM) .....	46
8. Meeting of the National Council of Women's Rights.....	49
9. International Women's Day Celebration circa 1990 .....	50
10. Women wave banners on International Women's Day celebration.....	50
11. Public demonstration in commemoration of International Day for the Struggle Against Violence Against Women .....	51
12. Women pass out flyers at Safety and Citizenship event in Tijuca, Rio de Janeiro .....	52
13. Rio de Janeiro's Network of Gender-Specialized Services .....	57
14. Inauguration of Rio de Janeiro's first Women's Police Station .....	60
15. Rat infested area in CEDIM courtyard .....	70
16. Map of Specialized Courts in the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro .....	84
17. Women's Police Station (DEAM) located in Centro .....	89
18. Graphic depicting the "Cycle of Violence" .....	92
19. Poster from a 1990s domestic violence awareness campaign .....	98

20. Graphic depicting the "flow of care" .....	103
21. Passage from my fieldnotes .....	108
22. Street view of CIAM Márcia Lyra .....	129
23. Graphic of relevant officials in the State Government of Rio de Janeiro .....	130
24. Newspaper article from O Globo documenting inauguration of CIAM .....	141
25. Graph of State spending on social programs for women .....	145
26. International Women's Day event at Candelária Church .....	167
27. Members of MMOB gather on the veranda.....	169
28. Member of MMOB delivers speech on the veranda.....	169
29. View of Carioca Street from the balcony of the Almerinda Gama House .....	172
30. Members of MMOB negotiate with state officials .....	173
31. The little blue door through which the MMOB entered .....	174
32. The original tiling for A Guitarra da Prata .....	175
33. Inside the Almerinda Gama House .....	176
34. The second level of the Almerinda Gama House .....	178
35. Pamphlet advertising SOS Mulher.....	181
36. Banner and art on the wall at the Almerinda Gama House .....	189
37. Art by members of the MMOB .....	190
38. Wall art painted by a member of the MMOB.....	190
39. Wall art at the Almerinda Gama House depicting Dandara of Palmares .....	190
40. Street view of the Tina Martins House in Belo Horizonte .....	208

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Timeline of Violence Against Women Declarations and Laws, 1979-2021 .....	48

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BO	Boletim de Ocorrência (Police Report)
CEAM	Centro Especializado de Atendimento à Mulher (Specialized Center for Women’s Services)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEDIM	Conselho Estadual da Mulher
CEJUVIDA	Judiciary Center for Support for Women Victims of Domestic Violence (Central Judiciário de Acolhimento da Mulher Vítima de Violência Doméstica)
CIAM	Centro Integrado de Atendimento à Mulher (Integrated Center for Women’s Services)
CNDM	National Women’s Rights Council (Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Mulher)
COEM	Coordenaria Estadual da Mulher em Situação de Violência Doméstica e Familiar (State Council for Women in Situations of Domestic and Family Violence)
DEAM	Delegacia de Atendimento Especializado à Mulher (Specialized Women’s Police Station)
GBV	Gender-based Violence
MLB	Movimento de Luta nos Bairros, Vilas, e Favelas (Movement of Struggle in Neighborhoods, Vilas, and Favelas)
MMOB	Movimento de Mulheres Olga Benário (Olga Benário Women’s Movement)
MP	Ministério Público (Public Prosecutors Office)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NUDEM	Núcleo de Defesa da Mulher (Women’s Public Defenders Office)
PL	Partido Liberal (Liberal Party)
PM	Polícia Militar (Military Police)
PSC	Partido Social Cristão (Social Christian Party)
PSOL	Partido de Socialismo e Liberdade (Socialism and Liberty Party)
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores

	(Worker's Party)
SPM	Secretary for Women's Policy (Secretaria de Políticas para Mulheres)
UFRJ	Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)
UM	United Nations
VAW	Violence against women

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“Hi, my name is Lúcia. May I ask who I’m speaking with?” she paused before continuing.

“We received the police report that Thuani made. I tried calling, but it seems she doesn’t have her phone with her. To your knowledge, is she okay?” Another pause as she listened closely, scribbling notes on the corner of the police report in front of her. Lúcia was nearing the end of her 12-hour night shift at Rio de Janeiro’s off-hours domestic violence court, the Judiciary Care Center for Women Victims of Domestic Violence (Central Judiciária de Acolhimento da Mulher Vítima de Violência de Doméstica—CEJUVIDA). Her voice was kind but laced with fatigue. Depending on the night, she might get a few hours of sleep between calls and transporting women to the city’s emergency shelter. But that night, she’d worn her sweatpants and t-shirt that read “a woman’s place is in the revolution” in vain.

“Okay, can I give you the number of her case so she can follow it in the system?” She read off a 16-digit number and continued, “So the case will be forwarded to the specialized court. Tell her she needs to find a public defender in the 1<sup>st</sup> Specialized Court for Domestic Violence.” She paused and repeated, “1<sup>st</sup> *Juizado*. Yes. And if she needs other non-legal support, she should visit a women’s center or follow up with CEJUVIDA, okay? Have a nice day.”

Lúcia hung up the phone and sat quietly for a few moments. Pulling back her shoulder length hair, she shifted her attention to the next police report in the tall stack that laid before her. She picked up the phone, pinned it between her ear and shoulder, pecked at the dial pad with her middle finger and waited. Straight to voicemail. She dialed another number. Voicemail. And another, when—

“Hi, my name is Lúcia. Is this Clenilda?” She paused before continuing, “I’m calling to talk about the police report you filed, how are you doing?”

Each month in Rio de Janeiro, Lúcia and her team of seven contact between 500 and 800 women in “high risk” situations of domestic violence, as determined by the police. They grant urgent restraining orders and temporary child custody orders, as well as emergency shelter to women at imminent risk of death. Importantly, they also orient women to the other services that might be of support to them. Indeed, as Lúcia’s calls illustrate, CEJUVIDA does not act alone, but rather in concert with a host of other “gender-specialized services,” such as police, shelters, women’s centers, and specialized courts. This network of services for women in situations of “domestic and family violence” constitutes one of a series of reforms mandated across Brazil in 2006 by the Maria da Penha Law, the country’s keystone domestic violence legislation (see Appendix A for full text of the Maria da Penha Law in English). Today the network boasts a host of services for women including women’s police, specialized courts, public prosecutors, and public defenders, women’s centers, emergency shelters, support groups, psychological care, a crisis hotline, as well as various state and municipal programs to prevent and address violence against women (VAW). Together these services were designed to provide comprehensive and, importantly, integrated support to women in across the country.

In Rio de Janeiro, the network of gender-specialized services handles an average of 90 thousand reports of VAW per year and another 40 thousand cases in which a woman accesses services without filing a police report (Oliveira et al. 2022). In 2021, 109,162 women filed a police report and/or sought services to address violence in their lives, which equates to roughly 300 women per day or about one woman every five minutes (Oliveira et al. 2022). While these numbers are likely a vast underestimate of the total amount of VAW occurring in the state, they

do give a sense of the sheer volume of women seeking out and making use of the network of services.

In Rio de Janeiro and Brazil as a whole, the consolidation of this network gender-specialized services outlined in the Maria da Penha Law has undeniably transformed the state's capacity to assist women in situations of violence and to punish abusers. Considered a massive victory for women's rights in the country and the region, it has provided recourse to women whose experiences of violence were previously met with routine dismissal and impunity, and intervened in a deep-rooted culture of misogyny that pervaded the very institutions that were supposed to protect and defend women.

Yet, while the drafting and enacting of legislative reforms is an important step—a hurdle many potential laws never clear, it is only the beginning of a much more complex process of implementing them. As Rosten put it, “laws are just words, unless implemented” (2008, 415). Today, 17 years since the passing of the Maria da Penha Law, research has shown that there are persistent “gaps” between how the law—and by extension services for women—was envisioned in theory and how it is functioning in practice. Scholars have raised questions about the inaccessibility of the law to women of diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds (Pasinato 2015; Wilding 2010, 2014; Hautzinger 2007); the under-implementation and integration of services, especially in rural and suburban contexts (Ávila 2018; Santos 2015; Campos 2015); the persistently high rates of domestic violence (Kiss et al. 2012; Garcia et al. 2013); and the vulnerability of the law's measures in neoliberal political contexts (Meneghel et al. 2011), to name a few. Together these insightful critiques have homed in on the various ways in which the application and implementation of the Maria da Penha Law have diverged from the law as written. Yet, with a strong focus on the disconnects at the institutional level or at the level of

individual women seeking services, they do little to decipher the relational, political, and multi-scalar processes that belie these disconnects. Why has it been so hard to effectively implement the reforms outlined in the Maria da Penha Law in Brazil? How do “gaps”—between the law on paper and in practice—come to be and how do they impact the state’s ability to effectively render gender-specialized services for women in situations of violence? And finally, how do people respond when they perceive that the state is unable or neglects to concede the rights and services mandated by the law?

I contend that insight can be found in the everyday moments in which the law is interpreted, applied, negotiated, and accessed by differently situated stakeholder groups. This dissertation is based on 10 non-consecutive months of multi-sited fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and 6 months of remote fieldwork carried out between 2018 and 2022 and informed by nearly a decade of living, studying, and travelling back and forth to Rio de Janeiro. During my fieldwork, I carried out 29 structured interviews, 30 semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and 5 life-history interviews with multiple groups of interlocutors (see Appendix B for Interview Guidance), including activists and organizers involved in local women’s movements, professionals in the network of gender-specialized services, including social workers, psychologists, lawyers, judges, public defenders, prosecutors, emergency hotline workers, etc., as well as women in situations of violence themselves. I observed their varied experiences as designers, implementors, agitators, and users of the Maria da Penha Law and gender-specialized services. Over time and through shared experience, I got to know them as people too, with families, dreams, strengths, weaknesses, and various ideas about their relationship to the law. I examined the network of gender-specialized services from multiple vantage points, observing dozens of court hearings, attending marches and academic seminars, researching in a local

archive, and visiting women's centers across the city. Together these methods shed light on the everyday process of providing and accessing gender-specialized services—how power flows within, across, and around services and how people, like Lúcia and Thuani, navigate these dynamics as they provide services and utilize them.

Ultimately, the advances and setbacks that characterize the implementation and application of the Maria da Penha Law have broad implications for women's rights initiatives across the globe. The issue of partial or under-implementation of gender reforms has arisen in other countries in Latin America (Neumann 2017; Beck 2021; Walsh and Menjivar 2016b), as well as other regions of the world (Eisenberg 2011; Roure 2011). As Menjivar and Walsh put it, “a law on the books may not be enough to address an issue if contextual factors do not align with the aims of the law” (2017, 223). Thus, it is important to understand the contexts and conditions that constrain such efforts, so we can develop reforms that are not only progressive on paper, but effective and sustainable in practice.

### **A Note on Terminology**

Throughout this dissertation, I use several terms to describe the relationship between gendered subjects and violence: violence against women, gender-based violence, domestic violence, and femicide. I would like to take a moment to clarify how and why I use each term, which have subtle, yet noteworthy distinctions.

- Gender-based violence (GBV) is a broad term used mostly in legal and academic circles to refer to the dynamic relationship between gender and violence. While definitions have evolved over time, GBV generally refers to “any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in

the public or the private sphere” (Trujillo 2010, 130). I use this term when I am referring to theories of GBV and legislation in which GBV is named specifically.

- Violence against women (VAW) is a less theoretical term, and is therefore used in popular contexts in Brazil, among social services, policymakers, and social movements. It is also more specific, in the sense that it more explicitly identifies the gender to which violence is directed. This is important in a city like Rio de Janeiro, where GBV would include violence against Black and Brown boys, which although interrelated with violence against women is distinguished by key differences (Lélia Gonzalez 2020; Evaristo 2016). I default to the term violence against women to avoid confusion and to reflect the terminology used most by my interlocutors.
- Finally, domestic violence is a term that refers to a particular form of violence against women, which occurs in and around the home and is often perpetrated by people familiar with the target of violence, such as (ex-)romantic partners, neighbors, or family members. It is often used in legal and social service circles and can be lumped in with “family violence” to account for the ways in which such violence also affects children and other immediate family members.
- Femicide is a term that builds on the definition of “femicide,” or the intentional killing of women because they are women, by attributing this extreme form of gender violence to the state—“whether through the commission of the actual killing, toleration of the perpetrators’ acts of violence, or omission of state responsibility to ensure the safety of its female citizens” (Sanford 2008, 113; Lagarde y De Los Rios 2010; Walsh and Menjivar 2016).

## Making Sense of “Senseless” Violence

How do we know what we (think we) know about violence against women? Violence is an issue that affects people around the world. It is a part of people’s everyday lives, and yet arriving at a universal definition of violence is more difficult than it might seem. The challenge lies in the fact that violence can take many forms and affect people in an infinite combination of ways. For this reason, scholars agree that we can only make sense of violence through context; through experiences, stories, and social processes (Das 2006; Hume 2009). Gender has become a critical lens through which to interpret violence and, when applied intersectionally, can reveal stark patterns about the relationship between humans and violence.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, messages about violence, gender, and victimhood permeate society and are encoded with ideas about how violence works, where it occurs, and who it affects and why, which in turn inform ideas about how it should be addressed.

In July of 2022, three feminicides occurred within one week in the city of Rio de Janeiro—Elizabeth, Cláudia, and Marcielly were all murdered by their (ex-)romantic partners. Under any circumstances three feminicides in one week would have been cause for public outrage, but it had already been a violent winter for women in the city (Figure 1). In fact, their murders were three of seven that took place in a span of 40 days in the



**Figure 1** Rio de Janeiro street art in Centro reads, "Stop killing us." Source: Emily Masucci. All photos by the author unless otherwise indicated.

*metropolitan region* of Rio de Janeiro, a number that more often reflects the number of monthly feminicides across the entire state. For weeks, these cases were splayed across the news and violence against women (VAW) was on people's minds. I heard conversations over lunch, on buses, and in grocery store lines, as people questioned ("How did he get away with that?!" "How is this possible?"), lamented, and even started to interpret these events ("Wonder why she never called the police"). Stories of sensational violence and the discursive practices that surround them are key ways that society comes to know about violence. Yet, popular discourse often has the effect, intended or not, of obscuring rather than clarifying how VAW works in three interrelated and consequential ways.

First, stories like those in June and July lead people to recognize VAW only in its most **extreme expressions**—femicide, rape, and life-threatening physical brutality. While these forms of violence are deserving of our attention, social workers are quick to point out that they represent the "tip of the iceberg" in terms of the scale and forms of violence that women face. In 2022, femicide and attempted femicide accounted for just 0.003 percent of cases of VAW in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>2</sup> While domestic violence is the most common form of VAW in the city, 62 percent of cases that pass through Rio de Janeiro's specialized court system involve non-physical<sup>3</sup> rather than physical domestic violence (Oliveira et al. 2022). Nevertheless, the impression that VAW only takes the form of extreme physical violence continues to be so pervasive that even women experiencing ongoing violence themselves do not always *recognize* it as such. Routine violence is tolerated and normalized such that it becomes nearly invisible—unrecognizable as violence—thereby making it very difficult to identify let alone address.

Second, and relatedly, cases that make headlines instill the idea that **VAW is a singular, isolated event**. Such is often the defense for perpetrators—"He didn't mean to," "It was one

time, it won't happen again," "It was in the heat of the moment." Yet, in most cases, extreme VAW is preceded by other types of violent behavior, such as threats, and physical and psychological violence that tend to escalate over time. What was once verbal abuse can quickly turn physical and even lethal. Such was the case with Elizabeth and Marcielly, who both filed police reports against their ex-partners for threats and physical violence. In fact, data from 2022 shows that most men who ended up perpetrating femicide had been in court for a previous incident of VAW, in many cases against the very women they end up killing (Oliveira et al. 2022). While Claudia also suffered physical violence in the months leading up to her murder, she was among the many women that never report it. In this way, extreme violence is not an isolated event, but rather a *process* in which ongoing, everyday acts of violence and abuse escalate over time (Menjívar 2011).

Third, popular messaging about VAW—domestic violence in particular—stresses that **violence “can happen to anyone”** independent of race, class, and level of education.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, VAW has and does affect women of varying identities and backgrounds. The problem with statements like these, however, is that they lead to the idea that VAW affects *all women* in the *same ways*. And this could not be further from the truth. Indeed, VAW is not race, class, territory neutral,<sup>5</sup> as these factors coalesce to render some bodies more vulnerable than others. As Menjívar observes, “the political economy of violence does not affect everyone in the same manner; violence weighs differently for those in dissimilar social positions” (28). Further, the factors that contribute to VAW also constrain the possibilities for support and redress in the wake of violence. Women of color in Brazil continue to experience the highest rates of femicide and domestic violence of any group, especially those who live in the city's low-income periphery as did Elizabeth, Claudia, and Marcielly (Oliveira et al. 2022).

In sum, stories of extreme VAW have an outsized influence on the perceptions people have about the scope and causes of VAW in general. They tend to conceptually isolate extreme expressions of VAW (e.g. rape, femicide, assault) from other forms of violence; to register violence as an “event” disconnected from historical processes and relationships; and to treat women as individual “victims” rather than members of differently situated communities. What these tendencies have in common is that they extricate “moments” and “victims” of VAW from the contexts in which they occur and “individualize responsibility” for VAW (Horton 2016, 4; Walsh and Menjívar 2016a). In doing so, they obscure the reality that **VAW is embedded in to broader cultural, political, and socioeconomic processes**, such as poverty and inequality, and various forms of exclusion and discrimination (Horton 2016, 4; Hlavka and Mulla 2021; Menjívar 2011). This reframing allows us to see extreme VAW as a part of larger, multi-dimensional process and to account for the many variables that underpin it. One of these variables are the actions of the state itself, which I take up in the next section.

### **Violence Against Women and the Role of the State**

When cases of violence occur, such as those in June and July of 2022, people expect the state to intervene—as a protector, a mediator, and an arbiter of justice and rights. To be sure, national and state governments, in tandem with international human rights institutions and social movements, have been important protagonists in the process of adopting gender reforms to regulate VAW and codify women’s rights into law—a process referred to by Merry (2006a) as “vernacularization.” However, despite key advances over the last half century, research and lived experience suggest that efforts to expand rights for women can exist alongside actions that undermine and even actively violate them (Eisenberg 2011; Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Blancas 2010). In Brazil, legislative and public safety interventions have struggled to account for the

complexity of VAW, treating symptoms rather than root causes, and creating one size fits all solutions for incredibly multifaceted problems. Thus, the existence of legislation, like the Maria da Penha Law, does not necessarily mean that the state is fully committed to granting rights to women or that the (in)actions of the state have that effect at the local level.

### *Structural and Symbolic Violence*

Theories of structural and symbolic violence are instructive for assessing the circumstances that underpin VAW, particularly the dynamic relationship between the state and the social production of VAW (S. Holmes 2013). Structural violence is an analytical concept that refers to the “impersonal structures that systematically, yet invisibly, harm members of marginalized groups” (Horton 2016, 5). Together numerous political and social structures—such as regressive women’s reproductive health policies or neoliberal cuts to welfare and other public programs—configure the life opportunities of people and entire communities in ways that can be detrimental to their health and wellbeing. The state, many argue, is profoundly implicated in this process. In their article, “The Architecture of Femicide,” Menjivar and Walsh contend,

The state plays a fundamental direct and indirect role in creating structurally violent conditions for large segments of the population. Who ends up poor is not an accident; it is the outcome of *deliberate policy decisions* that cause and perpetuate social and economic exclusion. [...] While poverty may not impact initial risks of exposure to physical violence, it puts poor women at extreme risk for repeated victimization and at a disadvantage in exercising their citizenship rights (emphasis mine, 2017, 224).

Take the cases of Elizabeth, Claudia, and Marcielly for example. All three women lived in the low-income periphery of the city, where despite the Maria da Penha Law public services for women are sparse if not entirely non-existent. It is a region with high unemployment, especially among women, which leads many into situations of financial dependence on their abusers. Given these conditions, many women are forced to make an impossible decision between reporting violence and losing their only source of income, which can result in housing instability, food

insecurity, heightened safety risks, and, for mothers, the possibility of losing custody over their children. In this way, VAW is facilitated by state actions (ex. neoliberal policies that cut welfare and public services) and inactions (ex. failure to protect women), which together fundamentally shape the circumstances of women's lives in ways that render them vulnerable to violence.

Despite this reality, the perceptions that people hold about VAW—that it is isolated, interpersonal, and one-dimensional—are powerful and enable structural violence by concealing it. For this reason, structural violence is often theorized in tandem with what is known as symbolic violence (S. Holmes 2013; Menjivar and Walsh 2017). Developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic violence refers to the discursive process by which our perceptions of social inequalities, and the social world more broadly, inform our “habitus,” or what we think of as natural and just (Krais 1993, 169; S. Holmes 2013, 44; Bourgois 2001). Symbolic violence occurs in the everyday ways in which violence is enabled through “routinized daily acts of control, humiliations, and stigmatization of women and their bodies [...] and the naturalized acceptance of women's manifold forms of social exclusion,” which together “legitimize the devaluation of women's lives” (Menjivar and Walsh 2017, 225). This is important because the ways in which people perceive unequal social landscapes shapes the process by which value and difference are assigned to people and in turn “encoded into legal, political, economic, and social structures” (Stephen 2015, 19). In other words, biased perceptions about VAW are infused into our laws and policies, producing not only ineffective reforms, but actions that can reify and perpetuate VAW.

Together structural and symbolic violence are helpful for understanding the context in which VAW occurs, but this framing has been critiqued for the way that it reinforces the binary relationship between marginalized people and dominating institutions and structures (Horton

2016). Below, I take a closer look at state responses to VAW and how outcomes are the result of variation within the state, rather than uniformity.

### *The Social Production of VAW Reforms*

Popular and academic discourses often lend themselves to a reductive view of the state, as a singular, rational, and coherent entity. To the contrary, political scientists and anthropologists are quick to point out that states are not monolithic, but rather they are comprised of *people*, with diverse backgrounds, interests, and political commitments (Beck 2021). Thus, while the cumulative effects of state (in)actions often end up hurting women, not all state actors are equally responsible for this outcome. This reframing allows us to see how laws about VAW are created, implemented, and enforced by people who hold their own socially and culturally informed ideas about how violence works and how it should be addressed. In this way, popular ideas about violence seep into laws through state actors, who themselves are also social actors. Together not only do these various actors range in their ideas about violence, but also in their everyday commitments and power to implement and uphold laws and policies. In their research on VAW reforms in Guatemala, Beck and Stephen observed “pockets of sincere anti-VAW commitment that existed alongside underfunded and under-committed institutions and actors, leading to uneven and often ineffective implementation of reforms” (2021, 744). In other words, variation across state agencies and institutions leads to gaps between laws in the books, their intended outcomes, and the law in practice.

In the next section, I examine how structural and symbolic violence together with other forms of violence and exclusion map onto the urban landscape of Rio de Janeiro, and how class, race, and geospatial factors constrain the effectiveness of the Maria da Penha Law at the local level.

## **Situating Violence: Bodies and Territory in Rio de Janeiro**

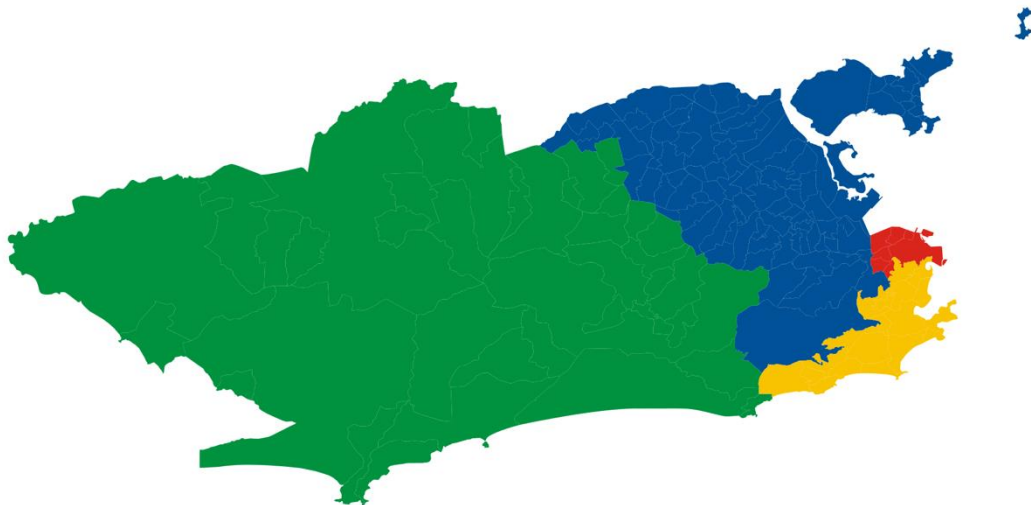
Intervening in an entrenched culture of violence against women involves more than laws and services, but a change in how we think and talk about violence. For this reason, the Maria da Penha Law incorporated a new phrase to define the subjects of gendered violence: women in situations of violence. Like the term “survivor,” the phrase rejects the concept of the “victim” and avoids characterizing women as passive, fragile, and defined by their subjection to violence. Further, the phrase “a situation of violence” was thought to emphasize that the condition in which a woman finds herself is “temporary;” as one psychologist interviewed by Globo stated, “women don’t accept [violence] forever” (Antunes and Izaal 2020). To be *in* a situation of violence is to suggest that both women and violence are situated. In this section, I contend that that to truly understand a woman’s condition of being “in a situation of violence” in Rio de Janeiro, we must understand how violence and vulnerability permeate the urban landscape (Willis 2015; Goldstein 2013). What does it mean to be in a situation of violence in an urban context? What work does this framing do to reveal and/or obscure the experience of violence in Rio de Janeiro?

### *Urban Geographies of Exclusion*

Rio de Janeiro has been characterized as “a city of extremes.” Where stunning landscapes exist alongside some of the world’s most profound wealth inequality, rampant police violence, and, recently, deadliest rates of COVID-19 per capita. Here I am wary of popular discourses within and outside of Rio de Janeiro that reduce the city to one of these extremes—the tropical paradise or a violent hellscape. The reality is that the city is an inextricable combination of both—urban violence is entangled in people’s everyday lives in unique ways. But while violence is a daily part of *carioca* life, it is not experienced or rendered meaningful the same by all

people. Rather, violence is profoundly shaped by race, gender, class, and, importantly in Rio, territory (place) (Krenzinger et al. 2021).<sup>6</sup> In this way, the urban setting of Rio de Janeiro is not only a backdrop, but it is central to understanding how the Maria da Penha Law and gender-specialized state services are embedded in pre-existing fields of social and political power and how these contexts impact local communities and efforts to regulate violence against women. Thus, to begin to understand the violence in Rio de Janeiro, one must account for the ways in which the geospatial landscape exposes some to more frequent and severe violence than others.

The metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro is divided into four primary zones: Centro, the South Zone, the West Zone, the North Zone, as well as a series of suburbs known collectively as the Baixada Fluminense (Figure 2).<sup>7</sup> The differentiated zones of the city are a legacy of urban removal and sanitization efforts that characterized much of the nineteenth century. In a series of



**Figure 2** Map of the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro, divided by zone. In yellow is the affluent South Zone, where the neighborhoods of Ipanema and Leblon are located; in red is the Centro Zone, the historic city center; in blue in the North Zone, which encompasses the Baixada Fluminense; and in green is the expansive West Zone, Rio’s most recent frontier of urban sprawl. Source: CC BY-SA 3.0.

plans spanning most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one administration after another

worked to systematically remove poor people “who could not coexist with modernity” from Centro and “the noble spaces of the city” in the South Zone (Rodrigues and Mello 2015, 23, 25–26). These removals were as much about race as they were about class. For example, the Plano Agache explicitly targeted favelas and popular neighborhoods, due to their “*varied* population and aversion to hygiene” (emphasis mine, 2015, 46). In her archival research, Lorraine Leu traces how “violent eradications” were levied against Black communities particularly in the years leading up to Brazil’s Centenary of Independence event in 1922 (2020).

Forced displacement not only occurred in Rio, but across the country as globalization constrained local economic viability and triggered a huge migration of people from the north to the south. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, hundreds of thousands of people—mostly of Indigenous and African descent—migrated from the northeast to the southeast, where Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo industry was thriving thanks to state development projects and offered promise of employment. Upon their arrival, many found the labor market saturated, and inequality rose, despite the so-called “economic miracle” (Millar 2018, 40). These historical exclusions<sup>8</sup> continue to shape the urban landscape in terms of access to resources and services, experiences of citizenship, and proximity to violence.

### *Urban Violence in Rio de Janeiro*

Today, the communities that form the “periphery” of the city of Rio de Janeiro have limited access to social services, education, employment, sanitation, and transportation. Further, they are the communities hardest hit by COVID-19; those most vulnerable to landslides, flashfloods, and deteriorating air quality in climate crisis; and the sites of the highest rates of homicide, gun violence, and VAW in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro and in the world. In regions like this, the idea of “universal human rights” is practically meaningless, as people

must struggle for the very right to have rights at all (Savell 2021). The area has some of the highest rates of violence and impunity in the country due to ongoing conflict between drug traffickers, militias, and police, extreme wealth inequality, and deep-rooted corruption (Giannini, McNamee, and Miranda 2017; Santiago and Fernández 2017).

In Rio de Janeiro, not only does the state fail to evenly uphold the rights of its citizens, but it also actively violates them. In 2022, 1,327 people were killed by police—amounting to approximately 30 percent of all violent deaths in the city (S. Ramos 2023). Outfitted with AR-15 rifles, military-grade tactical gear, armored tanks, and helicopters, the state’s military police is deeply implicated in the production of urban violence in Rio de Janeiro. Yet, the concentration of police violence in the city is reserved for select communities, namely the Black and Brown neighborhoods and favelas that form the city’s periphery. As one activist put it, “police enter the favela shooting.” But while Black and Brown men are the primary targets of this violence, “women are the ones who have to pick up the pieces” (Krenzinger 2018; Amnesty International 2008). Thus, poor people of color—especially women—living in the periphery collectively experience the state as hyperviolent in its punitive capacity, yet notoriously apathetic in its protective role.

Violence not only concentrates around territory, but also around particular bodies as they circulate the urban landscape. Indigenous feminists contend that bodies—especially those of Black and Indigenous women—are an extension of territory and a critical site in which power and violence are exercised. In this sense, the violence of inequality, racism, and urban exclusion is not only rooted in territory, but maps onto certain bodies (Cox 2015; Wilding 2014). Indeed, race and class are read onto people’s bodies of Black and Brown people circulating in the city in ways that expose them to violence even outside of their neighborhoods. We see this when Black

and Brown men are tailed by shopkeepers in the South Zone and violently apprehended on public beaches and streets (Roth-Gordon 2017); we see this when women of color who work as housekeepers in the South Zone are abused by their white, affluent bosses (Goldstein 2013) and so on. To be in a situation of violence is also to be in a body to which difference is assigned and violence is located.

Ultimately, urban geographies of exclusion—along the fissures of race, class, and territory—shape what it means for a woman to be in “*a* situation of violence” in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Given this context, I wonder about the work the “*a*” does to isolate VAW from the other violences in which women are situated. To be in *a* situation of violence assumes that violence against women is a singular, isolated circumstance. It is a narrow definition that does not account for lived experiences of multiple exclusions or the degree to which the state is facilitating them. For poor women and women of color, there are only multiple situations of violence. Women in Rio de Janeiro know from their daily experiences that violence is not happening around the state, but *through* it. This lived reality complicates ideas of extrajudicial violence or a parallel state, which assume that illegality and violence occur around and in spite of public safety and laws. In this context, people do not see the state as a protector or enforcer of rights, but instead as a rights-violating force. For this reason, gender-specialized services are a) widely distrusted and b) ineffective and inaccessible among low-income women and women of color and women in peripheral territories in Rio de Janeiro. Services are housed and isolated within institutions (e.g. police; courts) that perpetuate the harm they are tasked with minimizing. These structural and social barriers to justice and the ways in which GBV “permeates institutions charged with providing security” understandably lead women to lose faith in legal avenues for protection and redress (Menjívar and Walsh 2017, 229; Hume 2008). In practice, the Maria da

Penha Law and gender-specialized services can do little to address the nexus of violence in which women find themselves. While individual laws and services like these are not designed to address all the violence in the city, their failure to account for the differential circumstances in which violence against women occurs means that the law and its services are not accessible to all women. Thus, in effect the most vulnerable women do not have equal access to their rights (even those considered universal) and experience what scholars have referred to as partial, uneven, disjointed citizenship (Schmidt Camacho 2010; Hume 2008). In the next section, I examine how women respond to unequal access to the Maria da Penha Law and gender-specialized services at the community level.

#### *VAW and Women's Movements in Rio de Janeiro*

Limited access to the Maria da Penha Law and gender-specialized state services does not necessarily mean that women fail to achieve redress altogether. The case of Rio de Janeiro suggests that when communities cannot rely on the state for protection or access to rights, there are a spectrum of ways that they cope with and seek to minimize violence (Wright 2010; Sieder 2017; INCITE! 2006). Today, movements of women in Brazil and across Latin America, more broadly, are addressing persistent disconnects between how GBV is



**Figure 3** International Women's Day rally in Rio de Janeiro's Centro district on March 8, 2022. Banner reads, "For Women's Lives!"

addressed and sanctioned by law and how it occurs in practice (Menjívar 2011; Macaulay 2005). Organized groups of women are working to address VAW—or at least ensure equal access to redress—through social movements (Molyneux 1998; Gervais and Estevez 2013), neighborhood associations (Schild 1994), public demonstrations (Wright 2010), and Indigenous movements for the recognition of legal pluralities (Sieder and Barrera 2017; De Marinis 2013), among other place-based initiatives (Speed et al. 2009). These efforts have been important not only for addressing the immediate needs of women in situations of violence, but also for infusing their experiences of differential citizenship into political demands at the city, state, and national levels (Figure 3). Scholarship has shown that progressive gender reforms most always stem from local social justice and autonomous community movements, in which women play a central role, and not from isolated top-down policy changes (Htun and Weldon 2012).

#### **A Note on Positionality and Research in Pandemic Times**

As a researcher and the author of this dissertation, my perspective is informed by various elements of my life experience and social identities that together formed the backdrop against which my interactions with differently situated groups of interlocutors played out. During this study, I interviewed and spent time with people across Rio de Janeiro’s class, race, gender, and territorial divides and who held a wide range of relationships to violence. This mosaic of differences and similarities in turn shaped my methodology, my research sites, the types of questions I asked and how I asked them, and ultimately what types of stories I can tell about violence against women in Rio de Janeiro.

Various sites of difference impacted my relationships with interlocutors, albeit in distinctive ways. For one, my nationality and its relationship to class and economic status. For some, my affiliation with the U.S. represented an opportunity. Many were interested in learning

about services for women in the U.S. or talking about various elements of U.S. culture. I tended to half a dozen requests for items on my trips back and forth and even had state actors seek to benefit socially and professionally from my proximity. For others, this difference led to suspicion and skepticism. Such was the case in some social movement circles, where some even admitted to thinking I was a covert agent of the United States. My association with the United States, over nine hours away by plane, also gave my interlocutors a certain picture of my economic and class statuses, “oh she’s American, she’s rich!” and undoubtedly informed the way people interacted with me. Indeed, I was well-funded, which afforded me certain comforts and security that many of my interlocutors did not enjoy, such as the ability to take Ubers home rather than public transportation after a rally at night. Relatedly, my whiteness was nothing short of an asset in a city with some of the highest rates of violence against Black and Brown people in the world. It granted me unfettered access to government buildings, restaurants, and other public spaces, while also rendering me less vulnerable in my daily movements throughout the city. These differences shape how highly subjective categories like risk, violence, and security are experienced and how violence against women is rendered meaningful.

While my relationships with my interlocutors were filled with social and economic differences, there were also similarities and moments of mutuality. We sang karaoke, shared meals and memes and stories, danced, and confided in one another. Of course, this is not to suggest that these moments of connection eliminate or overshadow our differences, but that they were intertwined in ways that made this project at once challenging, incredibly rewarding, and, I hope, insightful for others.

It is also worth noting that this research was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For many months between 2020 and 2021, Brazil had some of the highest rates of

COVID-19 related deaths in the world. Hundreds of thousands of people died in what were largely preventable circumstances, as administrators at the highest levels denied people vaccines, mismanaged public health agencies, and peddled in misinformation. During my fieldwork, I discovered that the majority of my interlocutors lost family members and close friends and were still processing this trauma. The pandemic also came to deeply affect the issue of violence against women, as many women were isolated their homes with abusive partners and family members, and what few avenues did exist for support all but disappeared. While the pandemic was not my primary focus, this research is informed by the narratives of those who survived and the psychic impacts of this shared history of loss are woven into this dissertation.

### **Dissertation Outline**

This dissertation is comprised of four chapters in addition to this introduction and a brief conclusion. In the chapter (II) that follows, “Rising to Power, Falling to Pieces: A Brief History of Women’s Rights and Gender-Specialized Services in Brazil,” I investigate the political, historical, and social conditions that shaped women’s rights and GBV legislation in Brazil over the last 40 years. I trace how women’s activism at multiple scales, particularly local social movements, culminated in the Maria da Penha Law and the network of gender-specialized services, which together transformed the country’s approach to preventing and addressing violence against women. I argue that despite the early promise of gender-specialized services, the outcomes are far more ambiguous than national narratives and data suggest. In each of the following three ethnographic chapters, I provide a different vantage point from which to interpret the possibilities and limitations of the network, highlighting the relationships between differently situated stakeholders within and outside the state and how they inform patterns of gender-based violence in Rio de Janeiro.

In Chapter III, “The Flow of Justice,” I turn to gender-specialized courts as one of the primary sites where the Maria da Penha Law is interpreted and applied at the local level. I use three vignettes from my time observing hearings at one specialized court to explore the factors that structure women’s pathways to and through the specialized justice system. I focus on interactions between women and members of the judiciary (judges, public defenders, prosecutors) to understand the differential experiences of accessing and delivering “justice” against the backdrop of the deeply unjust social, economic, and political conditions that permeate the urban landscape.

In Chapter IV, “The Fragmented Politics of Care,” I shift my attention to the city’s oldest women’s center, where major salary cuts were threatening the continued existence of the service. In this chapter, I examine the varied relationships between service professionals (social workers, psychologists, judges, etc.) *across* the network of services, the administrators that oversee them, and the Maria da Penha Law itself. I contend that the network is comprised of political actors with varied degrees of commitment to the law and with diverging ideas of what the network is and should be. These conflicts compound along the fissures between services—between professionals and administrators—limit the effectiveness of the network as a whole, at a time when demand for support is persistently high.

I pick up this thread in Chapter V, “The Almerinda Gama House: Women’s Activism ‘Against, With, and Beyond the State.’” In earlier chapters, I paint a picture of a network of gender-specialized services that is inaccessible, underfunded, and on the brink of collapse. Yet, the downfall of the network and the under-implementation of the Maria da Penha Law has also resulted in a marked resurgence of women’s movements and activism around violence against women. In this chapter, I narrate the story of the Almerinda Gama House, a popular women’s

center founded by a women’s movement in the center of Rio de Janeiro, and an “alternative” site of care for women in situations of violence. The events surrounding the creation and struggle to legitimize the Almerinda Gama House offer a window into the dynamic (and often porous) relationships between state actors, social movements, and civil society and raise questions about the nature and efficacy of state authority over women’s services.

Finally, in Chapter VI, I conclude this dissertation with some brief remarks about the future of gender-specialized services in Brazil and the implications of the case of the Maria da Penha Law for other gender reforms around the world.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hume suggests that critical consideration of gender is “essential” to theorizations of violence more broadly and that understanding violence in this way destabilizes the notion that “gendered violence” is merely a “subset of violence” (Hume 2009, 23). In fact, gender deeply informs the distinctive ways in which all violence is enacted, experienced, and rendered meaningful by both perpetrators, victims, and communities at large.

<sup>2</sup> In 2022, there were 153 cases of femicide and attempted femicide, relative to 54,377 cases of domestic violence. While these numbers are likely underestimates, they do give a sense of the disparity in terms of the volume of cases (PJRJ Database).

<sup>3</sup> While domestic violence can take the form of physical and sexual violence, the Maria da Penha Law expanded the definition to include threats of violence, psychological violence, patrimonial violence, and moral violence. Patrimonial violence occurs when an aggressor takes or destroys a woman’s personal objects, work materials, documents, and goods and assets, such as jewelry, clothes, cars, money, and even their home. Moral violence is defined as slander, defamation, or insults against a woman’s dignity. Based on recent precedent, moral violence can occur through the internet. While these forms of violence don’t leave bruises or scars, they can be profoundly injurious and many women struggle to recover (Walsh and Menjívar 2016a).

<sup>4</sup> For example, a 2022 pamphlet about the Maria da Penha Law distributed to women in Rio de Janeiro reads, “Domestic and Family Violence against women is present in all levels of society independent of the social and economic position or level of education of aggressors and those attacked.”

<sup>5</sup> Including race (Falcón 2016), gender identity (Peixoto et al. 2022), class (Goldstein 2013; Barbosa et al. 2016), and territory (Wilding 2010, 2012), to name a few.

<sup>6</sup> By territory I am referring to the neighborhood, or zip-code, which is often used in Rio de Janeiro as a reference for identifying a person’s class background. A growing movement has pushed to identify based on neighborhood instead because people who live in favelas do not have a CEP.

<sup>7</sup> The Baixada Fluminense is comprised of the municipalities of Nova Iguaçu, São João de Meriti, Duque de Caxias, Magé, Belford Roxo, Mesquita, and Nilópolis.

<sup>8</sup> Displacement also takes the form of incarceration. Brazil has one of the highest per capita rates of incarceration in the world.

## CHAPTER II

### **RISING TO POWER, FALLING TO PIECES: A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER-SPECIALIZED SERVICES IN BRAZIL**

The State Council for Women's Rights (Conselho Estadual dos Direitos da Mulher—CEDIM) is situated on the north fringe of Rio de Janeiro's Centro district. Originally built in 1907, it is an impressive two-story structure with a creamy mustard-yellow exterior, ornate white trim, green shutters, and layers of graffiti. On a spring day in October, I set out to visit CEDIM and its archive, touted on different occasions as both the "first" and the "only" archive of women's movements in Latin America. Upon entering the building, I was inspected by a young man posted at a kiosk at the entrance.

"I'm here to see Diego," I declared.

"Have a seat," he responded, pointing to a pair of black leather couches with tears in the armrests. I wandered over to the chairs, swatting away mosquitos, as he climbed up the foyer's grand staircase. For a moment it was silent. He came back down with Diego, a compact man in his early 30s with faded orange hair, presumably dyed months ago judging by the extent to which his dark roots had grown out.

"Hi, I'm Emily!" I jumped up and waved awkwardly, still not sure what to do with my hands when greeting someone in the middle of a pandemic.

"Nice to meet you. Welcome to our house," Diego stated. He was serious, or terse rather. On a rare occasion as I took up bi-weekly research at CEDIM, I was able to coax a smile out of him—if only with cynical sarcasm about how well-funded CEDIM was or how much the city valued public workers. Jokes aside, I could tell from the beginning that he felt proud of his work at CEDIM and gratified to share it with someone. A graduate of archival sciences, he invested a lot into the archive, even his own anemic R\$1000 paycheck. If it came at all.

“Want a tour?” Diego offered. I eagerly accepted. He led me first to a room with a padlock on the door. Lowering his shoulder, he shoved the heavy door open revealing two immense, interconnected rooms with vaulted ceilings—one with exposed brick walls and another with white plaster walls and trim the color of sapphires. To my surprise, the rooms were entirely empty, save for the plaster debris strewn about from where the walls had begun to lose their battle with gravity.

“This place is falling to pieces,” he lamented, bending over to mop up a puddle of water with a rag that appeared to be designated for that purpose. He explained that the roof was in dire need of repair. For Diego, the puddles of water in nearly every room, the lack of things as basic as folders, toilet paper, and a fan, and later a rat infestation were unwelcome reminders of “what the state thinks about women.”

He led me to a large auditorium, located at the back of the building. There was a stage (with puddles) and a seating area the size of a movie theater.

“It’s kind of sad,” he reflected, “we used to have events here and this place would be full.” He explained that the pandemic had brought CEDIM’s programming to a halt. But something about the crumbling plaster, the leaky roof, and the emptiness and silence gave me the sense that this building was many years past its prime.

Established in 1987, Rio de Janeiro’s State Council for Women’s Rights (CEDIM) emerged as Brazil was transitioning out of a 21-year military dictatorship (Figures 4 and 5).<sup>1</sup> It was envisioned as a body that would mediate the rapidly evolving relationship between women’s and feminist movements, and legislative bodies at the state, national, and increasingly international levels. Indeed, while women’s organizing was flourishing at the national and state level in Brazil, international human rights organizations were consolidating their influence in

shaping gender policy around the world. In the 36 years since its founding, CEDIM has been a vehicle through which feminists have advanced their efforts to achieve women’s rights and address violence against women—mediating women’s movements and gender policy at the state level. The council was integral to the creation and consolidation of the Maria da Penha Law—Brazil’s landmark domestic violence legislation—in Rio de Janeiro. Yet, despite its influence, CEDIM is, as Diego put it, “falling to pieces.”



**Figure 4** Street view of Rio de Janeiro's State Council for Women's Rights (CEDIM) before its renovation in 1987. Source: CEDIM Archive.



**Figure 5** Street view of CEDIM after its renovation in 1987. Source: CEDIM Archive.

In this chapter, I use the rise and fall of CEDIM as a jumping off point for a broader examination of the historical, political, social, and economic conditions that have shaped women’s human rights and GBV legislation in Brazil over the last 40 years. I begin with a brief survey of the politics and history of women’s rights as a human rights issue, examining how early definitions of GBV were codified into laws and protocols as they were negotiated by women’s movements—at the local, national, and international levels. Then, I trace how these emergent definitions led to the passing of the Maria da Penha Law, which mandated the creation of an integrated network of services specifically for women—including women’s police, specialized courts, and women’s centers. Internationally acclaimed, this integrated policy

approach held promise and at one point was touted as the third best domestic violence law in the world. Yet, I argue that the long-term impacts of the Maria da Penha Law are much more ambiguous than (inter)national narratives and data suggest, as gender-specialized services struggle with implementation, accessibility, and crumbling infrastructure.

### **Women's Rights as Human Rights**

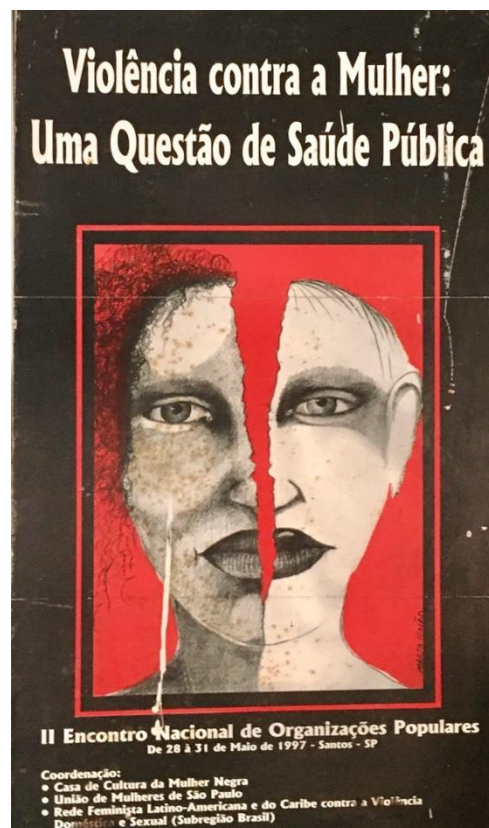
Beginning in the 1970s, incipient feminist and women's movements<sup>2</sup> around the world began to mobilize around the notion of equality for *women as women* (Fraser 2007; Rowbotham 1992; Rosaldo 1974; Delmar 1994).<sup>3</sup> With a heavy focus on "women's role in social relations of production" and equal pay in the workplace,<sup>4</sup> second-wave feminists, largely comprised of white women of middle-class and academic backgrounds, "[paid] considerably less attention to issues such as contraception, sexuality, or violence against women" (Alvarez 1990, 109). It was only in the mid-1980s, that the concept of gender-based violence (GBV) gained traction as a part of the feminist platform and the process of defining and codifying GBV into law ensued (Roure 2011).

#### *Defining and Codifying Gender-Based Violence into Human Rights Law*

Human rights regimes, such as the United Nations (UN), have played an important, if recent, role in typifying and codifying GBV into law. Indeed, only in the last 40 years have concerns about violence against women been explicitly addressed on an international stage. While the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was drafted in 1980 (Alvarez 1990), it was not until 1985,<sup>5</sup> during the closing of the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, that violence against women was specifically identified as "an impediment to peace" (Htun and Weldon 2012). This conference not only produced the first resolution linking violence against women to a human rights violation, but it inspired the phrase "women's rights are human rights," which served as the rallying cry that

“sparked the transnationalization of feminism” (MacDowell Santos 2004). In 1989, the UN released a report on Violence Against Women in the Family, which explicitly cited domestic violence as a universal and serious cause of health problems among women, thereby associating violence against women with international rights to health (Roure 2011). This report urged recognition at the international level that domestic violence was neither a private nor a social or cultural issue, but a public health concern (Figure 6). Together these actions prompted a series of landmark declarations on GBV through the early 1990s.

In Latin America, women’s organizing and evolving conceptions of GBV were being negotiated in the shadows of violent military dictatorships and armed civil conflict, which spanned from 1960s through the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> In this period, international human rights institutions—namely the UN—became critical arbiters of social justice, reconciliation, and re-democratization in the region (Merry 2006b, 56). Indeed, Latin American countries were heavily invested in the language and political power of human rights in the conviction of state authorities who ordered and oversaw the extreme state violence and repression associated with dictatorship and civil war (Franceschet 2003). Thus, for many countries, including Brazil, the surge of GBV activism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century occurred *in tandem* with gradual transitions back to democracy and “peacetime” (Macaulay 2000; Waylen 1994).



**Figure 6** Poster for the Second National Conference of Popular Organizations held in 1997, where the theme was "Violence Against Women: A Public Health Issue." Source: CEDIM Archive.

Addressing violence against women became an important litmus test for the strength of democracy (Alvarez 1990).<sup>7</sup> Consequently, this period marks a moment in which human rights institutions gained currency as key arbiters of international and “universal” rights and justice.

### *Women’s Policy Agencies and the Politics of Translation*

In the wake of the transnationalization of feminism, women across Latin America were focused on institutionalizing their movement<sup>8</sup> through what Mazur (2005) terms “women’s policy agencies,” or “state-based agencies [...] that seek to promote the advancement of women and gender equity” (Schild 1997; Franceschet 2003). In 1987, Rio de Janeiro’s State Council for Women’s Rights (CEDIM) was founded (Figure 7). Among the first of its kind in Brazil,<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 7** Meeting of the State Council for Women's Rights (CEDIM) to commemorate Latin-American and Caribbean Day of Struggle Against Violence Against Women on November 25, 1991. Source: CEDIM Archive.

CEDIM became a fundamental vehicle for women's rights at the municipal and state levels. With 21 members representing both social movements and the state government, CEDIM functioned as a crucial translator between Rio de Janeiro's women's and feminist movements and the State, and "played a central role as a governmental body in the development of public policies aimed at gender equality in the state of Rio de Janeiro" (L. A. de Medeiros 2012, 122).

Women's councils like CEDIM emerged as Brazil was gradually transitioning out of its own highly repressive authoritarian regime in the 1980s. This period of political "liberation" saw the rapid proliferation of women's organizations—both autonomous, state, and transnational—marking a shift towards what Alvarez (1999) calls the "NGOization" of the Brazilian feminist movement. This trend constituted "a strategic response to the return of electoral politics and (fragile and uneven) processes of democratization in much of the region" (Alvarez 1999, 182). To mediate this rapidly evolving relationship between feminist NGOs, women's movements, and the newly democratic state, Brazil invested in women's councils as a new hybrid government-civil society apparatus (Thayer 2009). In 1985, two years before the creation of CEDIM, President José Sarney (1985-1990) established the National Council for Women's Rights (CNDM), which became a powerful site of feminist organizing. According to Medeiros, "Women's rights councils [...] ultimately configured themselves as new interlocutors in the relationship of the women's and feminist movements with the State, at the same time that the number of female (sic) mandates grew in the Legislature, both in federal and state assemblies" (2012, 107). By establishing councils, running for public office, pushing for women's services, Brazilian feminists—or "femocrats" (Franceschet 2007)—were investing heavily in the newly democratic state as a vehicle for gender advances.

**Table 1** Timeline of Violence Against Women Declarations and Laws, 1979-2021.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Law</b>
1979	UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
1984	Brazil ratifies CEDAW – Decree 89.460
1985	Brazil creates National Council for Women’s Rights (CNDM) (Law 7.353/85)
1985	São Paulo establishes Brazil’s first Women’s Police Station (DEAM)
1986	Rio de Janeiro establishes its first Women’s Police Station (DEAM)
1987	Rio de Janeiro creates State Council for Women’s Rights (CEDIM)
1988	Brazil passes new Constitution
1994	Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Convenção Belém do Pará)
2003	Law 10.778/03 Requires health professionals in public and private health services to report cases of violence against women to the police.
2006	Maria da Penha Law (Law 11.340/06)
2007	National Pact to Prevent Violence Against Women
2012	Joanna Maranhão Law (Law 12.650/12) Mandates that the statute of limitations (3 years) for cases involving child sexual abuse only begins after the victim turns 18 years old.
2013	Next Minute Law (Law 12.845/13) Requires hospitals to provide care to people who experience sexual violence.
2015	Femicide Law (Law 13.104/15) Typified femicide as a qualifier for homicide.
2017	Law 13.505/17 Expands on Maria da Penha Law by guaranteeing the right to specialized police and health services, preferably by women. PLS 191/2017 Clarifies that any woman, regardless of their gender identity, can access services guaranteed under the Maria da Penha Law.
2018	Law 13.641 Expands on Maria da Penha Law to typify the crime of failing to comply with a restraining order.
2020	Law 13.984 Expands on Maria da Penha Law by requiring aggressors with restraining orders to attend men’s rehabilitation and reflective groups
2021	Red Signal Program (Law 14.188/21) Expands definition of psychological violence against women and establishes Red Signal Program, which allows women to mark an “X” (preferably red) on their hand to indicate a need for services and show it to participating services, at which point they will help woman seek protection. Mariana Ferrer Law (Law 14.245/21) Protects victims of sexual crimes from unnecessary discomfort during trial proceedings.

In the years following their creation, the CNDM and state councils like CEDIM were important not only for their role in mediating local and national feminist demands, but also in “translating” them into the language of human rights. Indeed, human rights institutions provided a political forum through which to address localized interests in universal human rights law (Merry 2006a, 53). This practice of translation occurred at multiple scales, as international meetings and declarations informed strategies and discourses within national, regional, and grassroots women’s movements, and these local movements in turn shaped models and discourses of human rights (Alvarez 1990, 32; Merry 2006b).<sup>10</sup>

One clear example in which women’s councils exerted their influence as translators between human rights and national policy arenas was in lobbying the Brazilian Constituent Assembly, where the country’s new Constitution was being drafted and debated (Figure 8). Known as the “Lipstick Lobby” (*Lobby do Batôm*), feminists from across the country drew on



**Figure 8** Meeting of the National Council of Women's Rights on August 26, 1986 to discuss women's rights in Brazil's new Constitution. The banner overhead reads, “A real constituent assembly must have women’s input.” Source: Portal Estudos do Brasil Republicano—Arquivo Nacional (BR DFANBSB EZ).

new human rights standards to push vehemently for the insertion of language about gender equity into the new Constitution. In a historic letter, known as the “Letter from Brazilian Women,” feminists outlined their demands, which included “the guarantee of integrating international conventions and treaties, of which Brazil is a signatory, into the Constitution to ensure fundamental human and social rights [and] prohibit discriminatory treatment...” The closing line reads, in all caps, “A real Constituent [Assembly] has to have women’s rights” (Pitanguy 2019).<sup>11</sup> In its final form, the 1988 Brazilian Constitution became one of the first documented efforts to make equality for women the law of the land. This document represented a landmark victory for women in the country and continues to serve as a “shining reference”—as lawyer and activist Lorena Ferreira put it—for gendered public policy and law today. Further, this explicit condemnation of gender inequity by the Brazilian government—rooted in human rights definitions—paved the way for future claims for rights, including the right to justice and care for women in situations of gender-based violence (Figures 9 and 10).



**Figure 9** International Women's Day celebration circa 1990. Activists wave banners that read, "My body belongs to me." Source: CEDIM Archive.



**Figure 10** Women wave banners on International Women's Day celebration. Banners read, “Our Bodies, Our decisions,” and “Rape of Minors, We Won’t Be Silent.” Source: CEDIM Archive.

In the years following Brazil’s redemocratization, women continued to push to see that the rights guaranteed in the new Constitution were implemented and cohered with evolving international human rights standards (Figures 11 & 12). Subsequently, several more landmark human rights declarations passed at the international level, which opened the floodgates for violence against women policy. In 1994, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women—also known as the *Convenção de Belém do Pará*—explicitly defined gender-based violence as “any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere” (Trujillo 2010, 130). This was the most comprehensive definition of gender-based violence until then, particularly due to the way that it challenged the prevailing notion that violence in the home was a private matter that did not



**Figure 11** Public demonstration in commemoration of International Day for the Struggle Against Violence Against Women in front of Rio de Janeiro’s city legislature in Cinelândia Square on October 25, 1993. Banners read “Democracy Without Women’s Human Rights is Not Democracy.” Source: CEDIM Archive.

warrant state intervention and did not limit conceptions of gender-based violence to only domestic violence (Bhattacharjee 1997; MacDowell Santos 2005). It was also important because it obligated signatories to enact domestic violence legislation (Franceschet 2010, 4).

Finally, in 2000, an international complaint mechanism was adopted as part of the Optional Protocol to

CEDAW,<sup>12</sup> and approved by Brazil in 2003. This protocol “allows individual abused women to directly petition CEDAW once domestic relief has been exhausted” (Roure 2011, 794; Kiss et al. 2012). Through this declaration, a monitoring mechanism was implemented that would allow individuals to bypass ineffective state-level justice systems and bring violations directly to Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (Franceschet 2010, 4). It was precisely through this mechanism that Maria da Penha Fernandes took her case to the Inter-American Commission in 2001. In the next section, I detail the case of Maria da Penha and the passing of the Maria da Penha Law, tracing how this new domestic violence legislation served as the impetus for the creation of an integrated network of gender-specialized services for women in situations of violence across Brazil.



**Figure 12** Women pass out flyers at Safety and Citizenship event in Tijuca, Rio de Janeiro on February 16, 2000. Poster reads, "without women, human rights aren't human." Source: CEDIM Archive.

## **The Maria da Penha Law and the Network of Gender-Specialized Services**

Maria da Penha Fernandes was 38 years old when her husband of seven years, Marco Antonio Heredia Viveros, attempted to murder her...twice. On the first occasion, Viveros shot Penha while she was sleeping. She survived, but was paralyzed from the waist down. Two weeks later Penha's husband attempted to murder her again. This time he tried to electrocute her while she was in the shower. After the second attempt, Maria da Penha resolved to initiate a legal process against Viveros. After seven years of drawn out legal proceedings, Viveros was sentenced to 15 years in prison. However, his defense quickly appealed, and the conviction was overturned. But Maria da Penha didn't give up and finally in 1996, nearly 15 years and two trials later, Viveros was sentenced to eight years in prison. Yet, this long-awaited victory was short-lived (again) as he was released early after only serving two years of his sentence. In 2001, Maria da Penha took her case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.<sup>13</sup> It was the first time the commission was hearing a case of domestic violence, made possible by the recent passing of CEDAW's monitoring mechanism. Finally in 2001, the Commission ruled that the Brazilian government had treated Penha's case with negligence thereby violating her right to due process, and recommended the country implement a new domestic violence law.

Despite this ruling, Brazil took no action to modify its practices for two years. Finally, in 2003, President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2011) created the Secretary for Women's Policy (SPM), a council which mediated the relationship between domestic women's and feminist movements and the federal government (MacDowell Santos 2010). By the time this new avenue for policy change opened, members of women's and feminist movements, who had been organizing since the 1980s, were well-positioned to shape the drafting of the new law. Many former feminist activists had settled into new roles in government agencies and councils at the

municipal, state, and federal levels and were central in the elaboration of this new law. Among them, Rio de Janeiro's Nilcéa Freire—who instituted Brazil's first affirmative action program at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) in 2004—was appointed to head the National Ministry for Women under Lula. Her nomination was seen as a victory for CEDIM and the feminist movement in Rio de Janeiro—Freire would be an important ally at the federal level. Finally, after three years of debate (and resistance),<sup>14</sup> the Maria da Penha Law (PL 11.340/2006) was passed in 2006 in a “landmark historical process of constructing and recognizing women's rights as human rights in Brazil” (Pasinato 2015, 409).

#### *The Network of Gender-Specialized Services*

The Maria da Penha Law was designed to conform to the requirements laid out in CEDAW, specifically “defining violence against women as a human rights violation and stat[ing] that violence included any gender-based ‘action or omission that causes death, lesion, physical, psychological, or sexual affliction and moral or patrimonial damage’” (Kiss et al. 2012, 65). To operationalize this definition the law significantly broadened definitions of domestic violence to include physical, psychological, patrimonial, and moral offenses; established stricter penalties for abusers—including the possibility of “preventative prison;” expanded access to restraining orders; created a host of measures geared towards GBV prevention, such as public seminars, educational activities in schools; and increased funding for research and reports analyzing the issue of GBV (Ávila 2018). Further, this legislation mandated the creation and integration of a network of legal, psychological, social, and health services for women affected by domestic violence administered by professionals who were trained on the issue of GBV.

While the Maria da Penha Law was mandated at the international level, and drafted and passed at the federal level, it was up to states (and municipalities) to implement it. Similar to the

United States, political authority in Brazil is organized around a federal system in which power is divided between federal and state governments. Thus, the passing of federal legislation, such as the Maria da Penha Law, initiates state-level processes of interpretation and implementation. As such, there is significant variation in how states interpret that law, the degree to which they invest in it, and the effectiveness of these efforts. It was for this reason that in 2007, less than a year after the Maria da Penha Law was passed, the National Pact to Combat Violence Against Women was created. An agreement between the Brazilian federal government and state and municipal governments, the Pact was designed to ensure that the states would adopt public policies and integrate services for women in accordance with the Maria da Penha Law (Campos 2015).<sup>15</sup>

In the state of Rio de Janeiro, the network of “gender-specialized” services that emerged out of the Maria da Penha Law established new agencies and expanded on others. Indeed, some women’s services, such as the women’s police (DEAMs), had been around for years prior to the passing of the Maria da Penha Law.<sup>16</sup> The new law consolidated a host of services administered by (mostly) women for women *and* ensured that these services were integrated such that women could be easily triaged between them. Indeed, before the Maria da Penha Law women would have to seek out various services—spread across Rio de Janeiro, retell their stories, and piece together support on their own. The resulting network of services for women in situations of violence is ample, and includes a) social services: women’s centers, support groups, and welfare programs, b) legal services: specialized courts and public defenders, c) health services: specialized psychological and medical care, d) public safety services: women’s police, emergency hotlines and shelters. Expanding on the police (and later women’s police), these services were designed such that women could access social services with *or without* a police

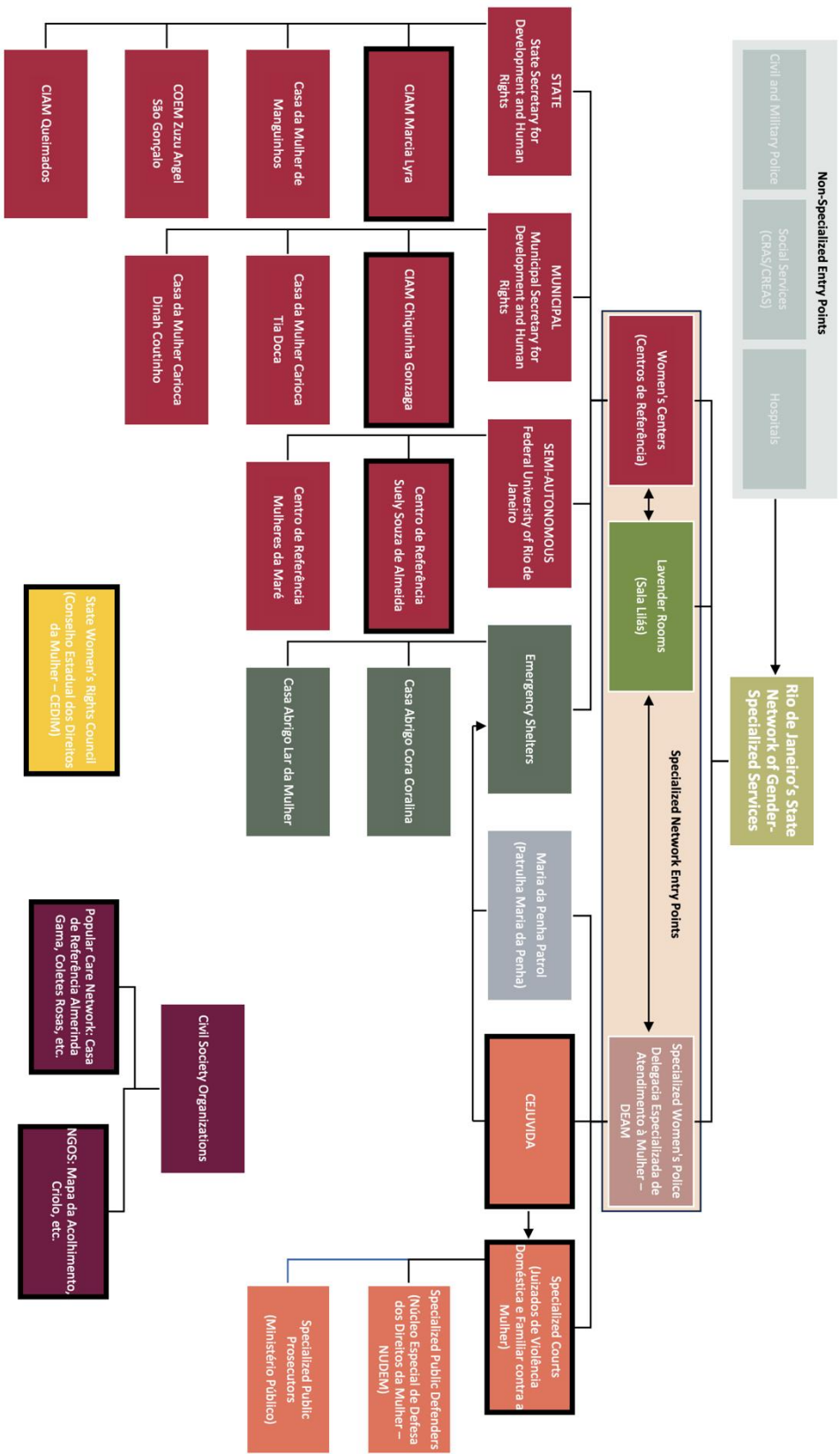
report and decide separately if they wanted to pursue legal recourse. This was a critical intervention because it had become clear that women's police were not designed or able to offer the type of care that women needed (MacDowell Santos 2005).<sup>17</sup>

The network of gender-specialized services is comprised of both State and Municipal services and administrations and depends on their cooperation (Figure 13). For a woman experiencing violence and seeking support, there are several entry points to the network. Some are specialized (women's centers, women's health clinics, and women's police) and others are not (civil or military police, hospitals, and social services). The non-specialized entry points can serve women or triage them directly to the specialized network or both. Together these groups shape gender-specialized services for women in situations of violence in Rio de Janeiro in the following ways:

#### State and Municipal Administrations

Service administrators are elected or appointed officials affiliated with political parties who oversee gender-specialized services at the State and Municipal levels. These agencies include:

- a) The Governor (State) and Mayor (Municipal) oversee the operation of all state programs, including the network of gender-specialized services. The governor organizes the state budget and allocates funds to various programs and services.
- b) The network of gender-specialized services is administered by two secretaries, including the State Secretary for Social Development and Human Rights and the Municipal Secretary for Development and Human Rights. They work with the budget to administer programs, such as food pantries, social projects for rural populations, and social services for minoritized communities, in addition to services for women.



**Figure 13** Rio de Janeiro's Network of Gender-Specialized Services. Boxes outlined in black indicate a site at which I conducted ethnographic research for this dissertation.

- c) Within each State Secretary's office, there are two officials charged with directly overseeing the network, including 1) the State Undersecretary for Women's Policy, and 2) the Municipal Secretary for Women's Policy. The undersecretaries offices serve as liaisons between state administrators and service professionals in women's centers. In addition to state women's centers, their offices oversee and develop programming to provide other services for women, such as career readiness workshops (i.e. hair braiding, cooking, nails), Ônibus Lilás,<sup>18</sup> and women's entrepreneurship opportunities.

### Women's Centers and Emergency Shelters

There are a total of nine women's centers<sup>19</sup> in the state of Rio de Janeiro, as well as two emergency shelters. Women's centers provide support during weekday working hours for women who are experiencing domestic or family violence through services that include: social services, psychologists, and (in some cases) paralegal orientation. Service professionals are trained in gender-informed care, and they hold advanced degrees in social work and psychology. Women's centers also hold regular support groups for women. In cases where a woman is in a situation of immanent risk to she or her children's lives, women's centers can also triage women to women's police and emergency shelters (by request only). Emergency shelters house between 20-30 people at a time in a confidential location. To maximize the safety of their occupants, shelters strictly enforce this confidentiality, meaning that women cannot come and go freely, their children typically must switch schools to prevent an abuser from discovering the shelter, and the use of cellphones or other web-based technology is prohibited (Chaves and Garcia 2019).

### Sala Lilás and Women's Health Care

The Salas Lilás, or Lavender Rooms, are relatively new services within the network. They are sites where women can seek care in the immediate aftermath of rape or other physical

or sexual violence. The space, literally painted lavender and equipped with a child's play area, is designed to appear less clinical and intimidating to women, many in the most vulnerable times of their lives. A mobile version of the Sala Lilás, known as the Lavender Bus (Ônibus Lilás) travels through remote parts of the state to tend to women. Health professionals at the Salas Lilás and Ônibus Lilás are primary care professionals trained in trauma-informed care and perform rape kits among other procedures to ensure that women are a) physically cared for, and b) provided with the documentation necessary to take legal action, should they choose. For many women, hospital records such as these are the only concrete evidence documenting the violence they experienced.

### Women's Police and CEJUVIDA

Women's police stations (Delegacia de Atendimento à Mulher—DEAM) are one of the original gender-specialized services for women in Brazil. In 1985, in response to criticism from women's organizations that men police officers "were sexist and did not take women's complaints of violence against them seriously," São Paulo governor Franco Montoro inaugurated the world's first "all-female" police station (MacDowell Santos 2005, 2). Rio de Janeiro quickly followed suit and inaugurated its first DEAM in 1986 (Figure 14). A specialized unit of the Civil Police, they were envisioned two decades before the passing of the Maria da Penha Law and designed to exclusively serve women. While the expansion of the network over the last 17 years has opened new avenues for support, police continue to process the highest volume of cases and therefore serve as one of the primary entry points to the network. Today there are 14 DEAMs



**Figure 14** Inauguration of Rio de Janeiro's first Women's Police Station (DEAM) in Centro in 1986. Source: CEDIM Archive.

across the state of Rio de Janeiro. Women's police file reports on behalf of women who seek legal intervention into cases of violence. Women's police also report to active crime scenes to provide protection for women, however due to limited staffing they often rely on civil and military police to do this. To file a police report, women must share their testimony at which point an officer will assess the degree of risk to a woman's life. If risk is high, police will triage women to emergency shelters through women's centers (during work hours) or CEJUVIDA (during off-hours). Created in 2010, CEJUVIDA is an extension of the judiciary that works directly with police to shelter women and emit emergency restraining orders, temporary child custody orders, and mandatory distancing from the home orders<sup>20</sup> during hours in which women's centers do not operate.<sup>21</sup> The agency is staffed with two women at a time, on a 12-hour

rotation. Together, women's police and CEJUVIDA can provide women with information about women's centers, and forward cases to a months (often years) long journey through the legal system to specialized courts.

### Specialized Courts

Specialized courts to address domestic and family violence were established by the Maria da Penha Law in 2006. They were designed to intervene in a long history of the judiciary treating perpetrators with impunity and minimizing the crime of violence against women. Specialized courts are unique in that they practice civil and criminal law, and thus have the power to incarcerate defendants and even order preventative prison in cases in which someone is in immediate danger ("Condições..." 2010). Today, there are 10 specialized courts in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro<sup>22</sup> as well as several dozen regular courts with judges who hold "competency in domestic and family violence"<sup>23</sup> in the interior of Rio de Janeiro. Specialized courts work closely with specialized public defenders in the Special Law Center for Women and Victims of Violence (Núcleo Especial de Direito da Mulher e de Vítimas de Violência—NUDEM) and specialized public prosecutors, who advocate for "victims" in and outside of the courtroom, as they carry out thousands of hearings per year—interfacing with women and applying the Maria da Penha Law at the local level. In addition to support groups for victims, the court also sentences perpetrators (mostly men) to participate in mandatory reflective groups.

Together these services and the agencies that administer them comprise Rio de Janeiro's network of gender-specialized services for women in situations of violence. Envisioned in the Maria da Penha Law, this network is designed to operate such that each service flows seamlessly into the next. As previously mentioned, this model for women's services was an important step

towards reducing barriers for women to access justice and care to address their experiences of domestic violence. In the next section, I turn to the outcomes of the Maria da Penha Law at the state level in the 17 years since it was passed.

### **Ambiguous Outcomes of the Maria da Penha Law**

In the years that followed the passing of the Maria da Penha Law, it seemed as though the law was being implemented with early signs of success. By 2013, the number of services for women in Brazil had increased by over 300 percent<sup>24</sup> and a study found that 99 percent of women had at least “heard of” the Maria da Penha Law (DataSenado 2014, cited by Pasinato 2015, 409). Between 2005 and 2016, the national hotline for violence against women, “180,” received 4.7 million calls, as rates of reporting soared across the country (Ávila 2018, 17).<sup>25</sup> Within a short span of time the Maria da Penha Law was considered one of the best pieces of domestic violence legislation in the world.<sup>26</sup>

#### *The Problem with Numbers*

Nevertheless, assessing the impacts of the law and the network of services with precision has proven difficult. While it might seem simple—did the law reduce the amount of violence against women? —measuring rates of violence against women is no simple task. Like other crimes, rates of violence against women are typically aggregated from police reports, which are filed when a woman seeks out the police directly or when the police intervene in an active crime having been called to the scene by a bystander, family member, or victim. The problem with using police reports as the primary metric for violence against women is that *many* women do not report the violence they experience to any public authority (Sagot 2005). Domestic violence is a form of violence that thrives in silence and until only recently was considered a “private,” interpersonal issue—the saying went, “in a fight between man and wife, don’t get involved”<sup>27</sup>

(Medeiros 2016). In addition to doubts that police don't take domestic violence seriously, women experience multiple, often mutually reinforcing pressures *not* to report violence, including concerns over losing the households primary income-earner, fear of retaliation, shame and stigma, and even love (Hautzinger 2007). As such, studies have shown that police reports are not a reliable measure of violence against women and vastly underestimate of the actual amount of violence occurring at any given time (Menjívar and Walsh 2017).<sup>28</sup>

Despite the limitations of data, it can be one of the most effective ways to “prove” the need for laws and policies. For example, despite the early promise of the Maria da Penha Law, a 2013 study found that the law had *not* led to a reduction in annual rates of femicide<sup>29</sup> in Brazil in the period between 2001 and 2011 (Garcia, Freitas, and Höfelmann 2013). In the same year, Waiselfisz’s “Map of Violence” study ranked Brazil as the country with the 5<sup>th</sup> highest rate of femicide in the world (2015). At 4.8 femicides per 100,000 people, the rate of femicide in Brazil in 2013 exceeded four deaths per day, a rate 48 times higher than the same period in the UK (Waiselfisz 2015).<sup>30</sup> Importantly, this study also found that while rates of femicide among white women dropped 9.8 percent between 2003 and 2013, they increased by 54.2 percent among Black women. At 61 percent of all victims, Black women constituted a disproportionate percentage of deaths by femicide (Waiselfisz 2015). In response to these alarming statistics, Brazil formed the National Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry on Violence Against Women in 2011 to investigate the issue of violence against women, particularly femicide, and in 2015 Brazil passed the Femicide Law (PL 13.104/2015) (Mello 2018). The law typified the crime of femicide, or “the killing of a woman for being a woman,” as qualifier for homicide thereby increasing the penalty and establishing a national femicide database (2018, 141).

Together the Femicide Law and the Maria da Penha Law represent the most important pieces of legislation in the fight to prevent and address the endemic issue of violence against women in Brazil. Yet, going on 20 years since the passing of the Maria da Penha Law and nearly 10 years since the Femicide Law, elevated levels of violence against women persist in Brazil. In 2022, 50,962 women registered cases of violence *daily* across Brazil (Oliveira et al. 2022). By the end of that year, 1 in 3 women in Brazil (33.4 percent) had suffered violence at the hands of their partner—a number significantly higher than the global average (27 percent) (2022). In Rio de Janeiro, the picture is equally if not more concerning. According to the ISP, Rio registered 110 femicides in 2022, the highest rate since 2017 (2022). While they reflect only a partial picture of the state of violence against women, these numbers have raised doubts about the efficacy of the laws and network of services for women among national and international policymakers, service professionals, and civil society. How is it that the country with one of the best domestic violence policies in the world, also ranks among the most lethal places in the world for women?

### *Limitations of the Law*

The Maria da Penha Law and the network of gender-specialized services were an important victory for the women in Brazil. While data can only give us a rough estimate of the scope and severity of violence against women, it was undeniable that more women were reporting violence, and more professionals were qualified to provide support. By the 2010s, the law had become a critical tool for addressing domestic violence, without which many women would not have received support. Now, nearly 18 years since the passing of the Maria da Penha Law, scholars have begun to assess the long-term viability and effectiveness of the law and the gender-specialized services it championed (Gattegno, Wilkins, and Evans 2016). Ethnographic

research has enabled a deeper examination of the operational, social, and political factors that constrain the Maria da Penha law and the network of gender-specialized services. In the following sections, I examine several emergent areas for concern, including questions around equitable access at the local level and the integration of services in the network at the state level.

### Barriers to Accessing to Services

Research suggests that there are a series of barriers that may prevent women from accessing gender-specialized state services in Brazil (MacDowell Santos 2004). These barriers—often overlapping—produce “differential access” to formal channels of state support. By differential access, I am referring to the restricted ability for women across race, class, territory and other identity groups to utilize and benefit from these services. These barriers include:

- **Physical and geographical factors** such as long distances to services and extended travel times to the city center. In 2022, over half of women who reported violence live in the interior of the state the country—outside an urban or semi-urban center (Oliveira et al. 2022), yet, less than 10 percent of municipalities in Brazil had a women’s police station and vastly fewer had another service such as a women’s center.<sup>31</sup> (Sub)urban-rural disparities in services for women in situations of violence have been documented across Latin America (Menjívar 2011; Beck 2021) and force women to decide whether the risk of being caught away from home for extended periods of time by their aggressor and travelling to unknown places is worth it.
- **Financial constraints** such as the cost of public transportation, meals in the city, missing a day’s work, or finding childcare. In 2021, Brazil ranked among the countries with the highest income inequality in the world with a Gini Index of 52.9<sup>32</sup> (“Gini Index” 2022), much of which is concentrated in the periphery of the city where services are sparse. In 2021, more

than 3 million people lived in situations of poverty, with a monthly income of R\$486 per person or US\$5.50 per day (IBGE) and more than 1.2 million people were classified as living in situations of extreme poverty—corresponding to a monthly income of R\$168 per person, or approximately US\$1.90 per day (IBGE). Given these conditions, paying for a R\$8.60 roundtrip bus fare can be prohibitively expensive, and many women simply cannot afford to seek care.

- **Pervasive distrust of the state.** Women’s policing (DEAM) was in many ways the hallmark service of the network and has been an area of growing state investment in Rio de Janeiro. In 2019, these efforts were expanded upon the inauguration of the Patrulha Maria da Penha, a police force dedicated exclusively to enforcing women’s restraining orders. Yet, for many women and communities in Rio de Janeiro—which are exposed to some of the highest rates of police violence in the world—addressing gender inequities through the repressive arm of the state is problematic (Caldwell 2010; Perry 2022, 2013). Many women are wary of calling police into their neighborhoods where, as one woman put it, “police enter already shooting.” In territories where there is ongoing conflict between police and organized crime, gangs strictly prohibit calling the police. In this way, gender-specialized policing—the most visible service in the network—is contradictory, as its offer temporary respite to women while also exposing them to increased state intervention and surveillance (Chaves and Garcia 2019). Ultimately, for many, this “trade-off” between safety and autonomy also constitutes a significant barrier to accessing services.
- **Lack of knowledge of other services.** While there are other services in the network besides police, many women are not aware of them. A 2020 study found that for 91 percent of women, the women’s police station (DEAM) is the “principal service that women who have

been threatened with femicide should procure.” Of the remaining 9 percent of respondents, 4 percent suggested seeking services from gender-specialized public defenders, 3 percent suggested family and friends, 1 percent suggested seeking an emergency shelter, and another 1 percent suggested visiting a women’s center or social service center (“Percepções..” 2022). This suggests that women are not familiar with other “entry points” to the network, which for many may be more accessible than police.

Together these obstacles compound in uniquely burdensome ways for women experiencing vulnerability on multiple fronts (race, class, territory). Indeed, the compounding historical impacts of state and structural violences, intergenerational poverty, and geosocial inequality—especially poignant in Rio de Janeiro—do not fit neatly into legal frameworks and social services oriented around GBV. Together these historical, cultural, and material factors make gender-specialized services inaccessible to some of the most vulnerable women and even prompt some to actively circumvent official spaces of justice and care.

#### Partial Integration, Disjointed Implementation

As previously mentioned, the Maria da Penha Law was important for establishing new women’s services and for mandating the integration of services across multiple agencies. It was thought this network of services would provide comprehensive support for women in need of social, psychological, legal, and even medical care. Yet, scholars have suggested that “structuring and articulating the network of services is currently one of the greatest challenges” to the effective implementation of the Maria da Penha Law (Ávila 2018, 22; Pasinato 2015). In practice, services vary widely in terms of numbers, access to financial, material, and human resources, gender-sensitive training, and commitment to the law itself and this variation makes integration difficult (Campos 2015; Meneghel et al. 2011).<sup>33</sup> As of 2023, Brazil has 2,294

gender-specialized services across the country, including 510 Women’s Police stations, 165 specialized courts, 40 specialized public defenders offices (NUDEM), 115 specialized public prosecutors offices, 88 emergency shelters, 287 women’s centers, among other services (“Políticas...” 2023). While in absolute terms this is a large number of services, it is only a small fraction of what would be needed to expand to all of Brazil’s 5,565 municipalities (IBGE). Moreover, there are an uneven number of services across agencies. Women’s police far exceed the number of specialized courts or women’s centers, meaning opportunities for “inter-sectorial” integration are limited. Indeed, disparities across services within the network produce a politics that is “fragmented and discontinuous, permitting few triages,” which is further undermined by “paternalistic approaches” to social services, which “do little to provide effective responses to women in the process of [...] accessing their rights” (Pasinato 2015, 410). Ultimately, what was thought to be the Maria da Penha Law’s biggest strength—integration—has in effect become its most concerning weakness and continuing source of vulnerability, a theme I return to in Chapter IV of this dissertation.

Implementation has been further complicated by the fact that the Maria da Penha Law—the legal framework for gender-specialized services—was strongly influenced by the language and legal culture of human rights, which stresses the unalienable rights of individuals, liberal notions of citizenship and democracy, and, importantly, a specific vision of what constitutes gender-based violence (Merry 2001; Tamale 2008). Thus, while transnational human rights forums offer a clear avenue through which to pursue universal recognition of gender-based violence, they do this at the risk of erasing the particular lived experience of violence (Merry 2006b). As a function of this politics of scale, human rights laws often obscure localized interests, fail to address the specific local causes of violence, and even contradict national and

local efforts to develop legislation on gender-based violence grounded in local epistemologies of justice (Merry 2006a). Among the primary challenges of vernacularization, or translating international laws into national legal vernaculars, are the weak enforcement protocols at the national and local levels and, often, the incompatibility of human rights rhetoric with national and local systems of meaning (Merry 2006b; Molyneux and Craske 2002; Naples 2002). Indeed, for many women in Rio de Janeiro, GBV is one of multiple forms of violence that coalesce around race, gender, class, and territory. In this context of overlapping, mutually-reinforcing violences, addressing GBV can be difficult to address because it is often entangled with other forms of violence—including violence at the hands of the state that has signed international accords and is supposed to be protecting women.

### Crumbling Infrastructure

Towards the end of my time conducting research at the CEDIM archive, I arrived one morning to find Diego escorting a man around the building.

“Hey,” he said, “I meant to let you know, the archive is closed today.”

“Closed?” I asked. There had been no formal procedure to access the space. I was used to just showing up and asking Diego for the key. I wondered why—

“The building is infested with rats. It’s not safe to enter.” I joined Diego and the man, who I learned was a pest control worker, as they surveyed the damage. We walked into the empty, first-floor room that Diego had shown me months earlier on the “tour.” The one with the plaster falling off the walls and the leaky roof. There, in the middle of the floor, lay a dead rat. Upon closer inspection, we located the small hole in the wall where they had been coming and going. I caught myself holding my breath, as though even the air was contaminated. We walked outside to see if we could spot the entrance to the hole. As we neared, a rat scurried away.

“*This* is what the state thinks of women,” Diego repeated, pausing to emphasize the *this* as he pointed in the direction of the rat (Figure 15).

The CEDIM building was in a dire state of disrepair, and it was not alone. In fact, over the course of my fieldwork, I saw this in nearly every social service of the network with which I came in contact—women’s centers in particular. Investment in gender-specialized services had waned such that service professionals at CEDIM were forced to bring their own toilet paper and hand soap to work. In some buildings, there was only one functioning bathroom. The furniture, stained and tattered, looked like it was as old as the services themselves. There were limited office supplies, no functioning printers or ink to fill them. The poor ventilation in many buildings meant the indoor temperature in the summer was often unbearable and the pandemic working conditions were dangerous.



**Figure 15** Rat infested area in CEDIM courtyard.

The physical state of CEDIM and other gender-specialized services was a common topic of discussion. People often referenced the idea that their buildings were “falling to pieces” to argue that the future of the network was not looking good. In this way, the neglect of these buildings took on symbolic meaning, especially for those who accompanied the rise of gender-specialized services in Rio de Janeiro (Honig 2017; Sandoval-Cervantes 2017). Indeed, CEDIM was once a bright (yellow) reflection of hope and progress towards women’s rights in Rio de Janeiro, at a time when the world was turning its attention to the issue of GBV. However, in the decades since, Brazil has struggled to realize the potential of the Maria da Penha Law, as issues with implementation, accessibility, and infrastructure have compromised its vision. Nearly forty years later, CEDIM has transformed into the physical manifestation of, what many feel is, a not so optimistic future for women’s rights in Brazil.

## **Conclusion**

Beginning in the 1980s, movements of women began organizing around women’s rights—and specifically violence against women—as a human rights issue. Following a series of landmark international declarations, countries around the world began passing national legislation designed to address “gender-based violence,” including the Maria da Penha Law in Brazil. The Maria da Penha Law changed the ways in which domestic violence and other violences against women could be punished and mandated the creation of a network of specialized services for women. However, now almost 18 years since it’s passing, Brazil has struggled to reconcile the progressive essence of this legislation—and the gender-specialized services that it platforms—with its ever-changing political, social, and economic interests and the needs of women in situations of violence. While gender-specialized state services emerged out of a progressive coalition movement, the law has faced varied obstacles, including challenges

keeping up with demand, lack of effective integration of services, failure to serve diverse women, volatile funding and political support for services, struggle to standardize practices, crumbling infrastructure, and a failure to monitor and enforce the application of the law. These ongoing issues have changed the landscape of women's rights in Brazil, from one of optimism to one of anxiety and uncertainty. In the chapters that follow, I trace how differently situated stakeholders negotiate the increasingly uncertain future of gender-specialized services in Brazil and the conflicts, alliances, and outcomes that result.

---

<sup>1</sup> Created by Governor Moreira Franco (PMDB) through Decree 9.923/87. The council's first president was Branca Moreira Alves, a seasoned feminist who was closely involved in drafting of Brazil's new Constitution.

<sup>2</sup> By the 1980s, the label "feminist" left many women around the world feeling alienated, and quickly became synonymous with white feminism. Scholars and activists from this period distinguish between *feminist* and *women's* movements to underscore this important fissure (L. A. de Medeiros 2012). For more on women's movements that do not explicitly identify as feminist, for a variety of reasons, see Alvarez, 1990; Heng, 1997; Hernández Castillo, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The rise of second-wave feminism is often attributed to the UN designation of International Women's Year in 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Characteristic of the 1970s, a Marxist-feminist approach took root in Latin America and other parts of the world, where the "specificity of women's oppression [was located] within class exploitation" (Alvarez 1990, 95; Chinchilla 1992; Rubin 1975).

<sup>5</sup> With the exception of Battered Women's Movements in North America and Europe, which began in the 1970s (Alvarez 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Authoritarianism surfaced in Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, while countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala experienced decades of violent civil conflict during which "state[s] waged counterinsurgency wars on mostly unarmed civilians" (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010, 13). It should be noted that during this period of extreme social and political repression, violence against women was a key tool in preserving state power and authority, as "gang rape, sexual slavery, mutilation, torture, and forced pregnancy were part of the ongoing and insidious forms of terrorizing [...] women" during military dictatorships and civil wars (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010, 13).

<sup>7</sup> While it was a positive stride that violence against women became such a prominent issue, it was also problematic. As "promoting women's rights has become one of the key benchmarks used by global institutions to measure development...mark[ing] the nation as modern and suitable for foreign investment," the cost of non-compliance is not substantial enough to keep signatories from co-opting accords for political and economic gain (Neumann 2017, 1107; Weissman 2010). Merry observes that "local leaders are often eager to appear compliant with human rights expectations while continuing to act in noncompliant ways" (Merry 2006b, 43).

<sup>8</sup> There were also many women's movements who fought vehemently against the institutionalization, or "integration," of the movement. Having just re-democratized after a long dictatorship, they felt skeptical of the state, its fragility and its power to coopt their initiative.

<sup>9</sup> The Women's Rights Council in Minas Gerais and the Council on the Feminine Condition in São Paulo were two

---

other early models for the institutionalizing of feminist movements in the form of women's councils in Brazil (Pitanguy 2019).

<sup>10</sup> As one might imagine, “translators” within institutions and organizations hold considerable power as they interpret local grievances and interests and render them compatible with the language of human rights and vice-versa (Merry 2006b; Walsh 2008). International human rights regimes do not exist in a hermeneutically sealed arena, rather, they are implicated in a global network in which power is under constant negotiation. As “contemporary human rights projects take place in an ever-increasing situation of global inequality,” leaders (including translators) are tasked not only with producing declarations and laws to protect local individuals, but more broadly with the empowerment of the subaltern in a globalized world (Merry 2006a, 55). Scholars point out that in this process, a particular, essentialized version of the subaltern is fabricated to justify such aid (Spivak 1988; A. R. Ramos 1992). Universal human rights models, in theory, envision a world in which a universal set of principles apply to and are respected by all, worldwide. Acknowledging the immense diversity of experiences, struggles, and lifeways of minoritized individuals around the world, would render a universal human rights model obsolete. In other words, before the legal work of generating international protocols on human rights occurs, a sanitized, one-dimensional version of the subjects of those rights must be imagined to legitimize the existence of a body such as the UN in the first place (A. R. Ramos 1992).

<sup>11</sup> For the full text in Portuguese see: [https://www2.camara.leg.br/atividade-legislativa/legislacao/Constituicoes\\_Brasileiras/constituicao-cidada/a-constituente-e-as-mulheres/arquivos/Constituente%201987-1988-Carta%20das%20Mulheres%20aos%20Constituintes.pdf](https://www2.camara.leg.br/atividade-legislativa/legislacao/Constituicoes_Brasileiras/constituicao-cidada/a-constituente-e-as-mulheres/arquivos/Constituente%201987-1988-Carta%20das%20Mulheres%20aos%20Constituintes.pdf). Accessed May 10, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> This protocol was particularly significant because it allowed a CEDAW committee to “inquire into grave and systemic violations in a country” (Roure 2011, 794). To date, 187 out of 193 signatories have ratified; the United States is *not* one of them (Roure 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Her case was forwarded to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights by the Comitê Latino-Americano e do Caribe pela Defesa dos Direitos da Mulher-CLADEM-Brasil and the Centro pela Justiça e o Direito Internacional-CEJIL, further evidencing the multi-directional flow of human rights institutions from national to international, local to global (MacDowell Santos 2010).

<sup>14</sup> For more a detailed account of the legislative politics around writing and passing the Maria da Penha Law, see Roure (2009) and Calazans and Cortes (2011), and Santos 2010.

<sup>15</sup> [https://www12.senado.leg.br/institucional/omv/hp/acervo/outras-referencias/copy2\\_of\\_entenda-a-violencia/pdfs/pacto-nacional-pelo-enfrentamento-a-violencia-contra-as-mulheres](https://www12.senado.leg.br/institucional/omv/hp/acervo/outras-referencias/copy2_of_entenda-a-violencia/pdfs/pacto-nacional-pelo-enfrentamento-a-violencia-contra-as-mulheres)

<sup>16</sup> Rio de Janeiro's first DEAM was established in 2000. DEAMs expanded resources for women, “allowing them to denounce violence that not long ago was seen as an invisible private matter” and institutionalizing services including domestic violence shelters, professional legal assistance, and mental health care (MacDowell Santos 2004, 35, 50). Cities across Brazil established similar DEAMs and by 2004 there were 340 in the country.

<sup>17</sup> The messaging of early domestic violence awareness campaigns reified persistent assumptions about violence against women. One of which was the tendency to put the duty of confronting violence on women in situations of violence. The emphasis on “speaking out” against violence cemented the logic that if a woman did not file a denúncia then it was her fault if she continued to experience violence; and, by extension, that she was okay with it or likes it (“ela gosta de apanhar”). Slogans, such as “silence is violence's accomplice” or “one who stays quiet, consents” (“Quem cala, consente”) reinforced the narrative that women were complicit in their own violation by failing to report it to the police. In Chapter III, I examine the multitude of reasons for which women do not report violence to the police.

<sup>18</sup> Ônibus Lilás is a mobile branch of the rede that brings psychological and legal support to women in rural Rio de Janeiro who do not have access to specialized services in their cities. The bus was devised as a solution to this regional inequality, yet its impacts are arguably limited.

<sup>19</sup> At its height the network had 11 women's centers, however two have closed due to lack of funding among other

---

operational challenges. I examine the politics of women’s centers in more depth in Chapter IV.

<sup>20</sup> Known in Brazil as “afastamento do lar” and considered a separate, more serious, measure than a restraining order.

<sup>21</sup> Data has shown that a high proportion of cases of domestic violence occur at night and on the weekends, when abusers are not working and often consuming alcohol (Oliveira et al. 2022).

<sup>22</sup> They include two courts in the Capital and Regional Courts in Jacarepagua, Leopoldina, Bangu, Campo Grande, Barra da Tijuca, Niterói, São Gonçalo, Duque de Caxias, and Nova Iguaçu-Mesquita.

<sup>23</sup> “Competency in domestic and family violence” signifies that judges are familiar with the Maria da Penha Law and apply it to relevant cases, but they are not exclusively hearing domestic and family violence cases. Generally courts with such arrangements are located in smaller towns with lower caseloads. These courts carry out up to half of the domestic and family violence hearings across the state of Rio de Janeiro (CNJ 2022).

<sup>24</sup> Government report (Portuguese) touting the rapid expansion of women’s services: <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/noticias-spm/noticias/14-08-numero-de-servicos-especializados-de-atendimento-a-mulher-cresce-309-em-dez-anos>. Accessed August 30, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Nilcéa Freire created this hotline after the passing of the Maria da Penha Law.

<sup>26</sup> The claim that Brazil has the 3<sup>rd</sup> best domestic violence legislation in the world is regularly cited and attributed either to UNIFAM or just the UN: <https://jus.com.br/artigos/36178/lei-maria-da-penha-a-terceira-melhor-lei-do-mundo>. Accessed December 9, 2022. I dug deep to find any documentation of this claim, but could not. The report itself does not include any such claim: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Media/Publications/UNIFEM/ProgressOfTheWorldsWomen-2008-ExecutiveSummary-pt.pdf>. Accessed December 6, 2022.

<sup>27</sup> “Em briga de homem e mulher, ninguém mete a colher.”

<sup>28</sup> Further, in recent years, Brazil has been the site of “data blackouts,” wherein government agencies remove or bury public data and cut funding for qualitative research to obscure the scope of the issue. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, data revealing the true numbers of COVID-related deaths was altered to make it appear that the issue was under control.<sup>28</sup> In a conversation with a feminist NGO director, she expressed concern that the same tactic might be used to obscure the numbers on violence against women.

<sup>29</sup> The term femicide builds on the definition of “femicide,” or the intentional killing of women because they are women, by attributing this extreme form of gender violence to the state “whether through the commission of the actual killing, toleration of the perpetrators’ acts of violence, or omission of state responsibility to ensure the safety of its female citizens” (Sanford 2008; Lagarde y De Los Rios 2010; Menjívar and Walsh 2016).

<sup>30</sup> In several cities in Brazil, rates of femicide were more than twice the national average, making cities like Vitória and Maceio, some of the most violent places to be a woman in the world (Waiselfisz 2015).

<sup>31</sup> <https://noticias.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/agencia-estado/2023/03/03/brasil-esta-diante-de-um-aumento-de-violencia-contra-a-mulher-diz-pesquisadora.htm?cmpid=copiaecola>

<sup>32</sup> A Gini index is an economic measure of the distribution of income among a population. It is based on a scale from 0 (perfect equality) to 100 (perfect inequality), in other words the higher the index, the higher the inequality. For reference, in 2020 the United States had a Gini index of 39.7 (World Bank).

<sup>33</sup> This is something I explore in more depth in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER III

### PATHWAYS TO “JUSTICE:” NAVIGATING THROUGH AND AROUND GENDER-SPECIALIZED COURTS

#### Seven

“Today is a bad day for you,” Aline jokes, glancing my way as she sifted through today’s docket. It was 2:15 in the afternoon and the hallway outside the courtroom was uncharacteristically vacant. No one from any of the cases scheduled for today had arrived and the silence was unnerving. I scribbled in my notebook, “Today is a rainy day. Maybe low attendance b/c of this?” On days like these, attendance at the courts was in fact always low. Due to perennial neglect in public infrastructure in *Zona Norte* and the increasing severity of storms, the spring rains could be quite dangerous, causing flash floods, loss of power, landslides, and stalled public transit. People often rearranged their schedules to avoid getting caught in the rain, albeit a privilege not all could afford. While I waited, I took some time to draw a bird’s-eye view of the courtroom complete with little squares for tables, tiny computer screens, and even my best rendering of the orchid presiding on the judge’s bench.

Another half an hour passed when Aline entered the courtroom, “Seven is going to talk.” And within minutes “Seven” steps into the room, her arms wrapped tightly around her faux-leather handbag. She pauses a few steps inside the doorway, taking in the bare, eggshell-toned walls. I sit in an area along the side of the room designated for “interns.” There are a dozen chairs positioned differently around the room and, like many who enter for the first time, she doesn’t know where to sit.

Judge Kat is in her office, presumably for her afternoon espresso. As we await her return, the public prosecutor, Mariana, debriefs with the public defender, Ruth, and her assistant, Aline. They gossip about a private defense lawyer from an earlier case who “didn’t understand how

specialized *juizados* work.” Seven sits silently, her head still as her eyes wandered around the room. She hugs her handbag closer to her chest, as one might on a Rio bus that’s driving too fast. After three long minutes, Judge Kat finally returns, greeting Seven with a soft smile and calling the room to order.

Representing the Public Ministry (Ministério Público—MP), Mariana reads the *fatos* (facts) of the case aloud. I learn that Seven is 26, a *parda*<sup>1</sup> woman from Madureira, a working-class neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro’s *Zona Norte* (North Zone). Her name is Ana Paula. She was with her partner Cristiano for nearly 10 years; they lived together with their son for five of them. Her case pertains to a June night in 2020 in which, she narrates, “I was sleeping with my son, when Cristiano woke me with a kick.” He claimed to have lost his *carteira de trabalho*,<sup>2</sup> and accused her of stealing and hiding it.

“I told him I hadn’t seen it, let alone hidden it from him.” This angered Cristiano, she recounts, and he grew violent. “He hit me and called me names. He dragged me into the yard.”

Mariana, the MP, interjects, “*But* was there aggression here?” As an observer, I was confused. To me, it seemed like Ana Paula had just clearly described an aggressive interaction. Mariana’s use of “but” left me wondering if maybe she hadn’t seen it this way.

Ana Paula responds without hesitation, “punches, kicks, hair pulling.” She continues her testimony, “So I ran to my mother’s house down the street.”

Trying to reconcile her testimony with the physical evidence, Mariana probes again, “Where were you hurt?”

“It’s been so long, and I didn’t know there would be a hearing. He continues to bother me because we are dealing with ownership of our home. I have a restraining order, but he doesn’t respect it.”

Mariana asks her various questions about the events of this specific day. Her professionalism at times reading as cold and detached, especially thinking back to her jovial conversation with Ruth and Aline just minutes earlier.

“It’s been so long,” she repeats, “and there were so many occurrences.” She struggles to isolate exactly which “facts” this case concerns. But she manages to remember they’d been separated for a few months leading up to the events of this day.

“He hit me on the head, as always, because he thinks it doesn’t leave a mark. But it does leave bruises and lumps.” She says he’d been violent before, but she never filed a denúncia,<sup>3</sup> “due to fear, delusion... due to being young and thinking I loved him.”

“My son is seven years old, and he always saw the violence.”

Ana Paula has renewed her restraining order and says she is dating someone else now. She adds that her new “mother-in-law”<sup>4</sup> even helps her to care for her son.

Judge Kat probes, “How long have you been dating him?”

“Five months,” she responds.

“Ahh so it’s not really your mother-in-law because the relationship is still recent.”

Ana Paula is dismissed. She stands up and walks out of the courtroom with no sense of when or how her case will be resolved. I wondered if any of this felt like justice to her.

In many ways, Ana Paula’s hearing was ordinary relative to those I observed in *juizados especializados*, Brazil’s specialized-court system for domestic and family violence. From the perspective of the court, Ana Paula fit squarely within the demographic profile of women who are most vulnerable in Rio de Janeiro: *parda*, age 18-35, resident of Zona Norte, and in a romantic relationship with her aggressor. She was represented by Ruth, of the specialized public

defender's office, NUDEM. Ana Paula's case was one of 15 on the docket for the day. To the court, *she* was case number seven.

Yet, Ana Paula's testimony and body language suggest that the events of this afternoon were far from ordinary to her. She'd waited two and a half years for her case to be heard. She bravely came to court, knowing that there was a real possibility she would run into her abuser in the hallway. She waited in the courtroom as Judge Kat drank her coffee. Visibly nervous, she gave her testimony and was met with technical inquiry into the precise nature of the violence she endured. And then she was dismissed.

Ana Paula's brief exchange with the court highlights several key elements that I will explore in this chapter. First, she only filed a denúncia after domestic violence was already an ongoing aspect of her life and relationship. Engaging the police, and the justice system more broadly, was not her first resort. Second, she struggled to remember and isolate the facts of this case from the other violent experiences she had endured in her relationship. This produced a moment of procedural friction wherein the format of Ana Paula's testimony (recounting broadly her experience of ongoing violence) was not compatible with the way the judiciary typifies and processes domestic violence (as a finite event). Third, despite the court's insistence that Ana Paula limit her testimony to the events of the day in question, the judge scrutinized her life beyond the facts of the case. Such commentary invites further inquiry into the relationship between court subjectivities and power in specialized courts. Lastly, Ana Paula's story illustrates the incredibly consequential nature of accessing and navigating the specialized justice system.

This chapter traces the flow of women in situations of violence along pathways through the specialized justice system. Across various phases of state involvement, women interface with a series of actors—including police, judges, public defenders and prosecutors—who interpret the

Maria da Penha Law, Brazil's domestic violence law, each with their own ideas about what characterizes violence and what constitutes justice. Together they comprise a legal system that is driven as much by case law and juridical training as it is by cultural, social, political, and economic variables. This multiplicity of perspectives in the courts is critical to understanding outcomes of justice and redress for women in situations of violence in Brazil. One's positionality within this matrix factors into how laws are applied at all scales of the judicial system; how, to whom, and when legal recourse is accessible; how people feel about and experience specialized courts; and what "justice" means.

In the following pages, I will introduce the Court as a vehicle to understand the relationships of women with the state. Then I shift into a brief overview of the evolution of the courts' treatment of the issues of violence against women. The remainder of the chapter is broken into three parts that examine 1) the reasons women choose not to file a denúncia, 2) the experiences of women as they interface with the courts, and 3) the internal dynamics between internal court actors that shape outcomes for women.

### **Situating the Court**

Ana Paula's case was one of forty-five that I observed between March and July of 2022 at the Leopoldina Regional Court in Olaria. Located in a working-class neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro's North Zona, the glass and concrete building towers six floors above the modest single-story homes it neighbors. Outside, a bright-white fence snakes around the perimeter of the property. A couple of Military Police officers stand guard at a door-sized opening in the fence, scrolling on their phones between visually inspecting visitors. Approaching the main entrance, the temperature drops as the conditioned air spills out from between the automatic doors with each entry. On especially hot summer days, the interior of the building could be up to 40 degrees

Fahrenheit cooler than the outside temperature and entering could be physically jolting, like jumping into a cold river. There are two sets of metal detectors, complete with an x-ray conveyer belt, where four more security personnel in blue uniforms are stationed. If you're lucky, the x-ray operators might offer a half-hearted *bom dia* (good morning) as they point to the plastic tray where all visitors are required to place their items for inspection.

Navigating this series of checkpoints—the fence, the police, the metal detector—was uncomfortable on my first few visits. I felt like I had somehow wandered into a place I was not supposed to be...and wearing fewer layers of clothing than I needed to withstand the frigid air. To be fair, entering new field sites in all government buildings tended to feel like this. But it surprised me how, even after several months visiting, I always worried I was breaking the rules. Can I bring food in? Are phones allowed in the hallways? How does the queue for the elevator work? Months into my visits, I still wasn't sure if I was allowed enter the courtroom directly through the public hallway access, where witnesses, defendants and their attorneys enter. Or if I needed to check in with the *cartório* (front office) to be escorted through the clerk's office and into the side door where the judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and victims<sup>5</sup> access the courtroom. Either way, I—along with Ana Paula and every other woman whose case is heard at the Court—would have to walk through the hallway where a half a dozen defendants and their attorneys waited to be called into the courtroom over the intercom.

The flow of people through and around the court building is not a trivial detail. Rather, it can be understood as an extension and reflection of the embodied experience of traversing the justice system as a whole. The corridors of the Court constitute a unique physical and procedural route that each woman follows. In his research on the phenomenology of courts, Bens argues that we can learn a lot about courts by considering more seriously how they look, sound, and feel—

by considering their “atmosphere” (2022). The work of Sara Ahmed invites us to think not only about how spaces feel and are rendered meaningful, but how *processes* feel and how they take shape in, through, and around spaces (2021, 2006).

In *Complaint!*, Ahmed (2021) traces the experiences of students and academics who file or attempt to file complaints related to sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination at universities. Despite the existence of various policies, she finds that complaints of this nature are often met with resistance. Ahmed argues that coming to know this “gap”—or discrepancy between how complaints are supposed to be handled according to university policy and how they are handled in reality—is to become familiar with how institutional power circulates, through and often *around* formal policy. Indeed, Ahmed asserts that “making complaints teaches us about how institutions work,” and how they do *not* work (25).

Experiencing how policies and institutions work also reveals information about *for whom* they work and do not work. Women of color feminists have been theorizing the “gap” between what institutions say and what they do for decades. Lélia Gonzalez (2020) offers insight into the ways in which contemporary institutions are shaped and constrained by legacies of colonialism and imperialism. She links racialized and gendered exclusions to historical circulations of economic, political, and transnational<sup>6</sup> power, tracing how exclusions occurred through institutions and policies, not necessarily outside or around them. She illustrates how institutional machinery can function to bar access to that which it is supposed to deliver and, in doing so, enable and enact violence.

Systems that are supposed to administer rights and deliver justice are no exception. A growing body of interdisciplinary research on criminal justice has documented the ways in which pathways to justice can be constrained, obstructed, or entirely inaccessible, particularly for Black

and Indigenous women (Beck and Stephen 2021; Deer 2015; Hlavka and Mulla 2021; Stephen 2021). In this case, the institutional machinery—its policies and practices—functions to reify itself, not necessarily to deliver justice. Nevertheless, the knowledge generated from these lived, often intergenerational experiences of inaccessible justice inform people’s ideas about justice and the institutions that claim to deliver it. Whether through direct interactions, storytelling, art, gossip, or even mockery, knowledge about institutions filters through communities in everyday ways (Das 2006). Often this knowledge is packaged as a warning with direct implications for people’s safety and wellbeing. Take for example, mothers of Black young men warning about the dangers of police violence, counseling their boys not to resist, not to run, not to wear hoodies... In states of heightened insecurity at the hands of those claiming to represent justice, this economy of information is a critical, lifesaving resource.

In this way, when a woman arrives at a courthouse in Rio de Janeiro, she is not arriving without certain ideas about how justice works and for whom justice works. She knows the state, and the “gaps” in what it says and what it does. Together these ideas complicate simplistic ideas of “justice,” as that which is in fact just, as a one size fits all mechanism, and as a thing that people should want and strive for. By looking at women’s experiences interfacing with the institutions that supposedly deliver justice, we can gain a better understanding of what this *type* of justice is, how it works, and who it serves.

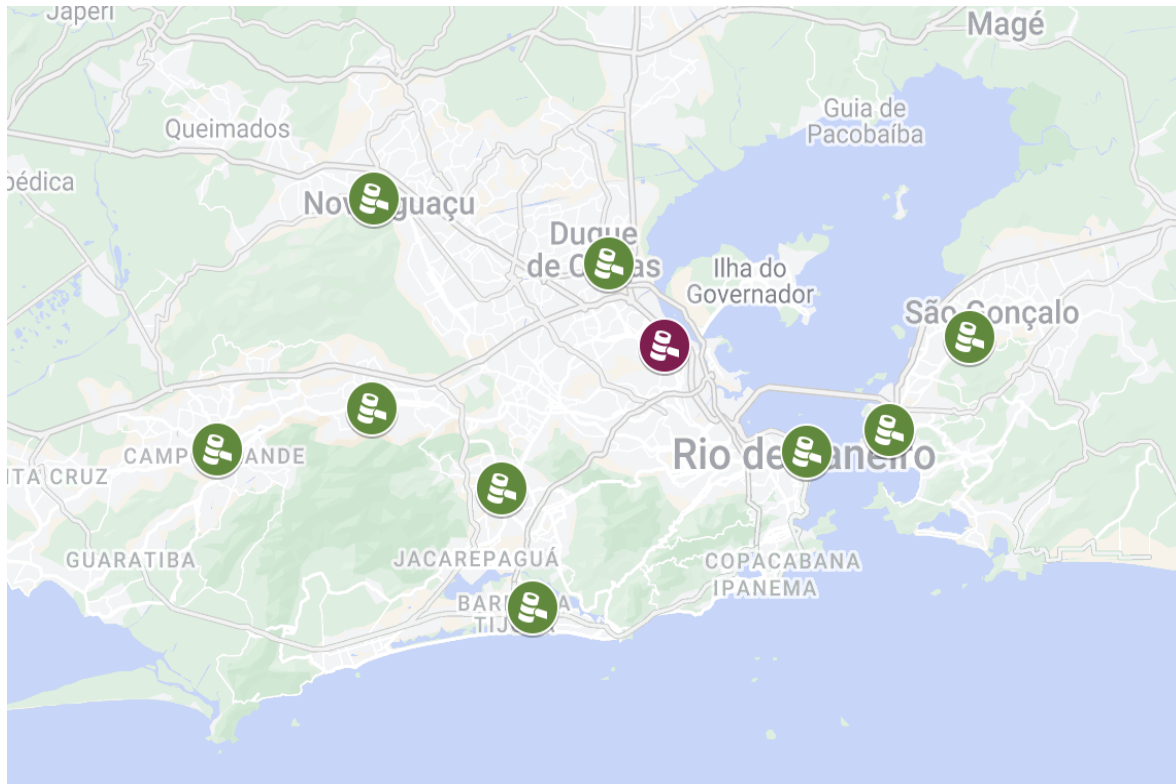
In this chapter, I use this framework to locate and illuminate the pathways of women who file a *denúncia*—literally, complaint, in Portuguese—and begin the process that will supposedly result in justice. Rather than outcomes, I focus on how people circulate through and around courts, along pathways that are often shared. This is for several reasons: one, the judicial process is long and slow and following any single case all the way through the system to its “outcome” is

not practical; second, given the complex nature of each case heard in court, particularly the ways that different forms of violence and vulnerability cross-cut, it is difficult to measure outcomes; finally, courts are often associated with the end of a (sometimes lengthy) legal process. They are frequently represented in popular culture as sites of “closure.” Yet, in the case of poor women who find themselves in specialized courts, courts all too often represent a continuation or, in some cases, escalation of their vulnerability. Thinking in terms of pathways disrupts thinking about violence as a sequence of events with a clear beginning, middle, and end and complicates liberal notions of “justice” as that which is experienced by individuals and resolved by the state. The ruling of a case is not a final outcome much less the end to violence in the lives of many women in Rio de Janeiro. It is just another pathway, one that can continue to be violent in ways both new and familiar.

### **“Machismo on Trial?”**

In 2011, the Leopoldina Regional Court in Olaria became the sixth specialized court instituted by the State Court of Rio de Janeiro. Today, it is one of ten regional courts to house a specialized court, or *juizado especializado*, for women in situations of violence in the state of Rio de Janeiro (Figure 17). It has jurisdiction over approximately 30 neighborhoods<sup>7</sup> and depends on the collective support of 20 police precincts. Under Judge Kat and Judge Camila, the Leopoldina Regional Court receives approximately seven to nine thousand cases (*processos*) per year—equating to well over 550 cases per month<sup>8</sup>—and has the highest caseload of any regional court in the state.<sup>9</sup>

The creation of specialized courts—outlined in Article 14 of the Maria da Penha Law—signaled an intervention in the judiciary’s long history of minimizing and decriminalizing violence against women. Until the Maria da Penha Law was passed in 2006, domestic violence



**Figure 16** Map of Specialized Courts in the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro and surrounding areas, including the Leopoldina Regional Court highlighted in purple. Source: ©2024 Google

cases were not treated with a differential legal mechanism. Rather, domestic violence was tried under Law 9,099/95 in a Special Civil Court, where cases of “battery” were treated as a penal misdemeanor alongside other cases such as neighborly disputes (Roure 2009). Civil offenses under the pre-2006 law carried a penalty of no more than one year in state prison. However, judges often ordered offenders to pay not in terms of years or months of prison time, but in *cestas básicas*, or baskets containing dietary staples.<sup>10</sup> In effect, judges would assess the value—in kilos of dried goods—of a woman’s suffering and by extension her physical, emotional, and spiritual integrity. This practice fueled the impression that domestic violence was not a serious crime and it allowed abusers to act with near impunity.

Before 2006, it was also legal for judges to mandate conciliation, a practice in which the courts would mediate so-called conflicts of man and wife with a focus on “preserving” the

family unit. This practice was common throughout Latin America, and courts in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, Guatemala, and Colombia joined Brazil in mandating what Macaulay terms the “conciliation model” (Macaulay 2006). This model, Macaulay argues, “re-naturalizes domestic violence by implying that a couple can, and should, be reconciled even when one systematically abuses the other” (2006, 110). In effect, this model stalled any meaningful intervention to protect women in situations of violence until the abuse was so grave as to cause death or near death. Such was the case of Maria da Penha herself.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, even in death justice was never guaranteed. In cases involving so-called “wife-murder,” the justice system still did not act to hold perpetrators accountable. They were frequently acquitted by juries who deemed such murders to be in the “legitimate defense of honor,” also indexed as crimes of passion or “violent emotion.” This language can be traced back to Portuguese colonial penal law<sup>12</sup> and, although eliminated with the 1831 Brazilian Penal Code, it continued to be invoked in courts through the twentieth century and beyond.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most high-profile cases involving the “legitimate defense of honor” argument was that of Rio de Janeiro socialite Ângela Diniz who was murdered by her boyfriend Raul “Doca” Street in 1976. Diniz had broken up with Street and, refusing to accept the end of the relationship, he shot her six times in the face, arms, and head. At the 1979 trial, Street’s defense attorney—a former Supreme Court justice—contended that Diniz was “a prostitute” and “a disgraceful woman” who acted with “violent moral aggression” towards Street. He advanced the argument that Street, who claimed to have killed her “*por amor*,” responded in the “legitimate defense of his honor.” The trial was the subject of Brazil’s first live courtroom transmission and drew substantial media attention.<sup>14</sup> In 1979, the country watched as a jury all but acquitted Street

based on this argument; he was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to two years in prison that he was never required to serve.

Feminists in Rio de Janeiro were outraged by this verdict and formed the Ângela Diniz Mobilization Center to organize and pressure the state for a retrial. The story had become something of an international scandal. The Washington Post even picked it up in an article entitled, “Machismo on Trial.”<sup>15</sup> In 1981, the case was heard for the second time and this time the jury found Street guilty and he was sentenced to 15 years in prison. While the frenzy of media attention might suggest that this story was somehow unusual or extreme, this defense strategy was so commonplace that Brazil’s Superior Tribunal of Justice (STJ) intervened in 1991, ruling the “legitimate defense of honor” argument inadmissible in court.

In cases in which a woman compromised a man’s supposed honor, be it through an extramarital affair or simply acting contrary to his will, it was not the husband’s behavior that was being judged. Rather, as was the case with Ângela Diniz, the woman’s behavior was dissected and used to justify, or at least qualify, the killing as less serious and in some cases warranted. While the STJ ruling was an important signal that this type of defense was no longer appropriate, federal and regional courts continued to use language invoking ideas of deserving violence and scrutinizing victims’ behavior. Part of what makes this so hard to change, is that courts refract societies’ views back to them, they are embedded in society. Further, this culture is reified through legal language, which is coded with gendered messages. Thus, even if not specifically citing the legitimate defense of honor, courts effectively use this defense very often. For example, in 2019, I observed an attempted femicide trial, in which the defense argued that the victim was a “*vagabunda*” who took advantage of the defendant. That he was an “*homem de trabalho*,” a working man, who labored to support the victim and her children, which the defense

repeatedly pointed out were not even his. In this case, he had stabbed her in the abdomen with a machete nearly causing her death.

This dynamic raises questions about the degree to which the courts are responsible for enabling the conditions that reinforce women's vulnerability to this form of violence. Indeed, feminist scholars have adopted the term femicide—which builds on the definition of “femicide” or the intentional killing of women because they are women—by attributing this extreme form of gender violence to the state “whether through the commission of the actual killing, toleration of the perpetrators' acts of violence, or omission of state responsibility to ensure the safety of its female citizens” (Sanford 2023; Walsh 2008; Fregoso 2023). While femicide and attempted femicide cases are heard in standard Jury Tribunals, where court actors are not trained in gender, the outcomes of these cases reflect back onto the system as a whole and how it treats women. They register into the public imaginary and form perceptions of the criminal justice system as a whole—including specialized courts—as that which does not care about or protect women.

Together, these practices and this culture of misogyny led many women to keep their experiences of violence to themselves, and to lose faith in the justice system altogether. The hope set out in the Maria da Penha Law was that by creating alternative gender-specialized *juizados* women would be able to access rights and protections and regain trust in the judiciary. To borrow language from the activists of the time, it rendered public what was until then considered a private<sup>16</sup> issue (Alvarez 1990, 103). Under no illusion this single law could change the persistent culture of misogyny in the justice system, these courts effectively set out to channel women around the patriarchal minefield of the standard civil and criminal courts and into a designated space where judges and court personnel were trained with an *olhar de gênero*, a

gendered lens. These courts were a critical intervention in gender-based violence adjudication, without which women hardly stood a chance at accessing their rights.

But correcting course on the issue of adjudicating violence against women is not as simple as passing a new law and creating new courts (as if that were even simple). It is an ongoing process of regaining legitimacy and trust, as histories of disenfranchisement are not so easily forgotten. A 2020 study found that 78 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, “The Brazilian Justice system treats violence against women as an issue of little importance” (“Percepções...” 2022). In an interview with Judge Elen de Frietas, a specialized court judge, she contends that “it is still very much in the consciousness of the population that we are in a sexist, patriarchal society. That in in fights between husband and wife, one does not intervene.<sup>17</sup> That this won’t result in anything.” She goes on to contextualize this distrust in the courts, stating that “in previous legislation, the aggressor arrived at the judiciary and most of the time he was acquitted with payment of a *cesta básica*. So, we need to work to show that today's reality is different, you know, that there is a law [the Maria da Penha Law] that stipulates differential treatment for these types of [domestic violence] cases.”

Judge Elen’s statements signal that women come to court with pre-existing relationships with the state and perceptions of courts and of the justice system, more broadly. Courts are embedded in historically constituted fields of social, economic, and political power. Women understandably remain skeptical of the courts due to the culture of dismissal of women’s issues within the justice system. These relationships color their perceptions of the specialized courts and inform their decisions and apprehensions about pursuing any legal avenues of redress at all. But women’s distrust of the state as an arbiter of justice doesn’t stop here. In the next section, I

will detail the ways in which distrust in courts interlocks with distrust in police and leads many women to circumvent official avenues of justice.

### **The Front Door**

From the perspective of the justice system, a case starts the moment a violent act is either reported by a “victim” or the moment an aggressor is “caught in the act” of violence by police. In both cases, the case is documented in a *Boletim de Ocorrência* (police report), commonly referred to as a BO or a *denúncia*. Once a denúncia has been filed, the police investigate, determine protective measures for victims, and triage the case to the judicial system. For this reason, the police are deeply influential gatekeepers in the process of adjudicating the Maria da



**Figure 17** Women's Police Station (DEAM) located in Centro, Rio de Janeiro.

Penha Law. So much so, they are commonly referred to within the network as a “*porta de entrada*,” or front door, to the network of specialized services for women in Brazil (Figure 18).<sup>18</sup>

Until 2020, a denúncia through the police was a required first step for a case to end up in a specialized court. In 2020, Rio de Janeiro launched the Maria da Penha Virtual, an experimental web app that allows women to file for urgent restraining orders without interfacing with police. The app has been deemed a success and expanded across the state and in its first three years it has been used by over 3000 women—a substantial number, but a very small fraction of the total amount of reported violence. While still in its infancy, the app comes with its own barriers—such as secure internet access, a general lack of awareness of its existence let alone how to use it, and concern over engaging legal action. Indeed, whether initiated through a BO or virtually through the Virtual Maria da Penha platform, both options trigger judiciary intervention, a major source of concern for many women seeking respite from situations of violence.

Thinking back to Ana Paula’s testimony, she narrates that her partner had been violent in the past, but that she had never filed a denúncia before, “due to fear, delusion... due to being young and thinking [she] loved him.” She cites “fear” as the first reason she decided *not* to file a denúncia. In her formulation of complaint biographies, Ahmed posits that stories of complaint “include those times we decide *not* to make complaints, not to say something or not to do something, despite an experience or because of an experience” (2021, 20). Indeed, filing a denúncia and deciding to engage the legal process, as I illustrate in this section, “might be the start of something [...] but it is never the starting point” (20). In the state of Rio de Janeiro, 54% of women who were murdered had suffered domestic violence before, but never filed a denúncia

(Dossiê Mulher 2021). For victims, the decision to file a denúncia is part of a process of making sense of experiences of violence and trauma that do not always have clear beginnings or ends.

Here I detail several “fears” that women in situations of violence negotiate as they decide whether to invoke the Maria da Penha Law by engaging police and filing a denúncia. While far from comprehensive, they range from the personal and interpersonal, to the level of community, all the way up to the institutional. Each of these considerations represents a juncture in women’s pathways as they try to reconcile the decision to pursue legal recourse with their personal needs and the interests of their communities. I contend that one cannot understand the significance of going to the police and filing a denúncia without also considering the reasons that women choose not to.

### *Love*

Ana Paula articulates “being young and thinking [she] loved him” as one of the reasons she did not file a denúncia at first. For many women in situations of domestic violence, untangling violence from love grows increasingly difficult with time. This is a documented pattern in abusive relationships, known as the “cycle of violence” (Figure 19). The idea of the cycle of violence was created to explain the process by which domestic violence unfolds over time. It is used by social workers and judges as a theoretical tool for explaining and interpreting violent behaviors between intimate partners. The cycle goes something like this: abusers violate their victims, apologize and promise to change, victims forgive them and there is a “honeymoon period,” but inevitably tension builds until there is another violent outburst. According to social workers, this cycle repeats in more or less the same sequence. The severity of the violence often escalates, but rarely does it actually stop.

Part of this pattern of abuse involves emotional and psychological manipulation, such that victims begin thinking that violence is an expression or extension of love, such as violence exercised out of jealousy or possessiveness. Recall when Raul “Doca” Street claimed that he



**Figure 18** Graphic depicting the "Cycle of Violence" in an information pamphlet. Source: CEDIM Archive.

killed Ângela Diniz “por amor” (and a jury bought it!). This association was so widespread that Brazil adopted a new campaign to address domestic violence and femicide, “quem ama, não mata” (one who loves, doesn’t kill) which even became its own television series aired on Rede Globo in the early 1980s. But women still struggle to identify their experiences as violence. In the words of one activist and former social worker, “violence is so naturalized in Brazilian society and there is so much violence that for many women violence is only when a husband punches you in the face, or kills you, cuts you into 100,000 little pieces, puts them in a suitcase, and throws them in the river” (Adriana Mota, pers. comm. October 28, 2021). In other words, violence is a label that does not resonate with many women who feel their experiences are not extreme enough to be considered violent.

But beyond its emotional qualities, what is perceived as love also enables certain socioeconomic and kinship arrangements that have practical relevance as women decide to file a denúncia. Indeed, “love” is also frequently tied in to an abuser’s role as the head of household. “He is the father of my children” or “he’s a good father” are frequently cited as reasons not to

report men to the police. Further, in many cases, men are the primary breadwinners, and women and their children often rely on them financially. Women worry that if their partners were to be incarcerated that they would not have the resources to support themselves and their children alone. This fear is born out in the data, which shows that women in Brazil have the highest rates of unemployment of any group 16.8 percent (Neves et al. 2021). Further, those who are employed often work in unregulated, or so-called “informal” labor, where regulations are especially lax (Millar 2018). The cost of taking time off from work and paying multiple bus fares to go file a denúncia can also be prohibitive. This can further unravel, as women who decide to pursue legal intervention into situations of domestic violence frequently find themselves in battles over child custody. Without financial resources, they risk losing their children to the state. During my time in Rio, I heard of one case in which a woman lost custody of her child and was working with social workers at a women’s center to help resolve the issue. Not only was she unsure of the legal process for regaining custody, but when I learned of her case she still wasn’t aware of the physical location of her child once he was transferred to state care.

In short, women must balance their own needs with the desire to protect their children, concerns about financial stability, and the guilt and grief that comes with denouncing the person they thought they loved. Many women just want police to make the violence stop, not to arrest and incarcerate their partners. In an interview with Adriana Mota, ex-director of SOS Mulher and the State Council for Women’s Rights, she recalls many cases in which women would go to them emphasizing “I don’t want him to go to jail, I just want him to stop hitting me” or that they just wanted the police to “go scare him.” Mota remembers trying to make sense of this with her colleagues, “Look, no one here is a ghost. We don’t have a way to ‘go scare him.’” In effect, the

punitive dimension of the Maria da Penha Law presents a barrier for women who could benefit from protective measures.

### *Retaliation*

Another barrier that women experience is fear of retaliation, which can occur in several interrelated ways. First, and perhaps most obvious, is the possibility of retaliation from the abusers themselves. Domestic violence is about power and control (Sagot 2005), both of which the abuser loses if a woman reports his actions to the police. For this reason, abusers commonly threaten and coerce their victims into silence. If an abuser were to find out that the police had been notified, they might retaliate in an extreme escalation of violence.

Second, retaliation can come from family and community. While women in situations of violence are often pushed, by their abuser, into isolation from their friends, family, and neighbors—another example of abusers’ attempts to control—they are still embedded in community. Women are pressured by the people they trust, including other women, to endure violence and preserve the family at all costs. They are encouraged to be good wives to their husbands and to submit to their authority. When a woman living in a context like this goes to the police, she is not only undermining her own family, but threatening all these cultural norms. Women regularly face social retaliation and pressure to stay in a violent relationship from her own family and community (including the Church) (Almeida et al. 2023).

Third, in territories that are contested, often referred to as “territórios conflagrados,” there are overlapping codes of justice, or “legal pluralities”<sup>19</sup> (Wilding 2014). In many communities in which criminal organizations exercise control, residents must abide by a set of alternative rules. One of them prohibits violence against women. But, as one social worker in Maré clarified, “It’s not because they think violence against women is wrong, but because if a woman is murdered

and the police enter, it will be bad [for them].” In other words, criminal organizations punish violence against women because if someone “invites” the police into these neighborhoods, they are creating a situation of vulnerability for their operations. Under no circumstance is a resident of such a territory permitted to call the police. There are prescribed penalties for breaking this rule that range from being expelled from the community to physical punishment to torture and death, even for women who seek help for themselves (Wilding 2012; Savell 2021).

### *Refusal*

Avoiding the police can also constitute a form of political refusal. “I don’t like police entering the favela and periphery [...] we don’t want our men dead,” asserted Elinea at a *roda de conversa* commemorating Rio’s Municipal Day for Combatting Femicide in 2021. Elinea was not the first person to blend concerns about police violence into conversations about the violences that women of color endure. For many women, the police are the most recognizable “face of the state” and one of the primary sources of violence and insecurity in their communities.

With some of the highest rates of police homicide in the country, in 2022 Rio de Janeiro’s police killed 1,327 people in so-called “police operations,” over 87 percent of whom were young Black and brown boys and men (S. Ramos 2023). For context, in the same year, police killed 1,096 people in the *entire* United States.<sup>20</sup> While police violence disproportionately leads to the deaths of young Black men and boys, women are also impacted, albeit in unique ways (Wilding 2014). They are mothers who have lost sons to police violence (Rocha 2020; Amnesty International 2008). They are young daughters who grow up hiding under desks in school during shoot outs. They are sisters of young boys who have been incarcerated. When the state enters the favela and periphery, it is women who must pick up the pieces (Krenzinger et al.

2021). In the words of Adriana, an activist from the Baixada Fluminense, “we [Black women] die by femicide, we die with the deaths of our children, and we die from the pain of our communities.”

Not only this, but poor women of color in these neighborhoods find themselves in the position of having to fight for the right to have rights (Savell 2021). They do the work of the state while the state undermines it. This task has been taken up by movements of mothers who have lost their sons to police violence. Eliene, a mother of two boys (including one who was killed by police) states,

We live dignified lives in the favela, the state is what comes in and violates our rights and our lives. [...] I have to fight to make sure my son stays alive. I have to fight to prove to the state that my son is a kid and just wants to live...while this should be the role of the state. [...] People ask me why I don't move from Manguinhos<sup>21</sup> after what happened to my son. They want me to think my território is violent. But my território isn't violent, it's violated.

In her experience, the very institution tasked with protecting communities and their rights is the one that “violates” them.

In a recent survey, when asked what number they would call if a woman was being abused or threatened by her current or ex-partner, 67% of respondents answered 190,<sup>22</sup> the number for the Military Police (“Percepções..” 2022). Only 20% responded 180, the number for the women's police. Given that most women 78% of all respondents and 84% of Black women respondents agreed with the statement, “many police officers do not believe in the seriousness of denúncias related to threats [in domestic contexts] and the risks women run” (2022). These numbers reflect two interrelated issues: 1) most women are not readily distinguishing between different forms of policing and 2) most women feel that police, regardless of what kind, do not take their complaints seriously—Black women, in particular. In the words of one woman, “the state only enters [the favela] to shoot.”

The emphasis on the denúncia did not come out of nowhere. It is a product of the influence of the mainstream feminist movement to exert power over the direction of interventions into the issue of violence against women. Even in the 1990s, it was clear that these efforts were not rooted in the needs of differently situated women. Rather, the feminist movement in Brazil in the 1980s was predominantly comprised of white, middle-class, college-educated women.<sup>23</sup> Many of these women, having just returned from periods of exile from Brazil's military dictatorship in Europe, were eager to advance a feminist movement inspired by their counterparts in France or the United Kingdom. To unite with other feminist movements around the world in their condemnation of violence against women, they used a rhetorical strategy that accentuated how violence against women "could happen to anyone." This strategy was utilized not only to raise awareness of the prevalence of violence against women, but also to conceptualize violence as an issue that transcended individual circumstances and identity categories (Alvarez 1990). Yet, in doing so, white feminists fueled the underlying assumption that violence affected *all* women in the *same* ways—that is, with the same frequency and severity and by the same logics—and therefore that redress looked the same, using Beth E. Richie's term, for "everywoman" (2000, 1135). In doing so, mainstream feminist movements positioned violence against women as "race and class neutral" (1135).<sup>24</sup>

By the time this activism garnered mainstream public attention, and gave way to concrete legal protections and services, "everywoman" became a white middle-class woman" (1135). This is significant because the resulting services for women in situations of violence—mostly oriented around policing and punishment for abusers (Figure 20)—were created based on the needs and priorities of the white, middle-class everywoman. This pattern was not limited to just Brazil. In her research on gender violence policy in the United States, Richie is critical of the way in which

whitewashed formulations of violence against women led to a “reliance on law enforcement as the principal provider of women’s safety [and resulted in] the expansion of state power in the lives of poor women of color” (1136). In a seminar I attended in Rio de Janeiro, Célia Soares—a professor and former director of one of Rio’s women’s centers—argued that from domestic violence awareness and denúncia campaigns “emerge[d] the idea that the police [were] the only and best option for women.” In other terms, the emphasis on policing, the denúncia, and incarceration is not random, rather it is a byproduct of the epistemologies of justice to which hegemonic feminism ascribed.



**Figure 19** Poster from a 1990s domestic violence awareness campaign. It reads, "Violence against women will send you to jail." Source: CEDIM Archive.

Despite these barriers, women’s police stations (DEAMs) continue to “represent one of the most visible faces” of the network of gender-specialized services (Norma Tech, 2006, 19). In an interview with Delegada Sandra Ornellas, then director of women’s police in the state of Rio de Janeiro, I asked why she felt women in favelas and peripheries avoided appealing to police for protection. She simply responded, “they are really stuck in the cycle of violence.” While the cycle of violence may play a role in patterns of violence, to reduce the many factors that women must contend with to this seems reductive. Her response made me wonder if the idea of the “cycle of violence,” and the rhetorical work it does to explain violence, might at times reify cycles of violence. What is the significance of the “cycle of violence” being used to explain away deeper issues in policing or obscure the many variables women contend with as they

navigate violence in their everyday lives? How might the cycle of domestic violence be looped into cycles of urban violence, or cycles of social and economic neglect?

In a seminar in July 2021, the new director of the state of Rio de Janeiro's DEAMs, Delegada Eugenia Piaui argued that the denúncia "is where we *start* to work with a woman so she can break the cycle of violence." In the hours, days, and months following this seminar, I was hung up on her use of "start" here. Thinking about the denúncia as the "start" is common among police and other actors in the justice system. While the filing of the denúncia is the act that initiates legal procedure, it is not the start of the process for women, as the very concept of the "cycle of violence" would suggest. Indeed, the idea of violence as a cycle, while imperfect, has been important for reframing violence as a process. Yet, in practice, this language gives the impression that nothing before the denúncia matters—only insofar as it informs the denúncia itself. If the denúncia is the start, then for many women it is also the end. Or a continuation of the same, maybe.

Given the various considerations associated with appealing to the police in the previous section, most women never make it to the stage of filing a denúncia. As one feminist lawyer and survivor of domestic violence put it, "*o sistema é feito para desistir*" ("the system is made to [lead one to] give up"). Women may continue to live in situations of violence, they may "break" the so-called cycle on their own or with the support of family and friends, or they may procure other governmental resources, such as women's centers and shelters over those associated with the justice system, and non-governmental resources, such as Church, NGOs, and community organizations.

## The Waiting Room

Every month the Court hosts what is called an *audiencia de acolhimento*, or care hearing, for a group of up to 30 women who have active cases under the Maria da Penha Law. In theory, Ana Paula participated in one of these hearings—in which the women are required to gather for a group session and then individually consult with the judges. But Judge Kat was forthright about the reality that, with their caseloads so heavy, they can't serve everyone. We gathered in the designated waiting area for victims. It was a spacious room with a play area for kids and a long window that let in some natural light. As the women filtered into the room, a small TV fixed to the wall above a play dinner table was running a news story about recent burnings of bus stations in the city's West Zone in protest of precarious public transportation infrastructure.<sup>25</sup> People took their seats, forming two rows facing each other the length of the room, and Judge Kat began.

“Thank you all for coming, it's great to have you all here.” She started by introducing the various representatives of the network that were present, including Rafael from the Ministério Público, Judge Camila, Yasmin from NUDEM, and two officers from the Maria da Penha Police, a specialized police unit dedicated to enforcing restraining orders.<sup>26</sup> She paused to ask if anyone had any questions about the different people or institutions she had introduced.

A middle-aged woman, who had been scrolling on her phone at the far end of the room, raised her hand, “how can I end my case?” Visibly annoyed, she went on, “If I want to end my case, do I need to be here?”

“Yes, you need to be here,” Judge Kat responded.

Another woman raised her hand, “How do the police notify the aggressor of the restraining order?”

Judge Kat explains that the courts should contact him, but various women chime in to report that their aggressors never knew. “Will they let us know when they make him aware?” They don’t have a concrete answer.

Judge Kat tries to steer the hearing back to the cycle of violence and the Maria da Penha Law, “a punitive law, that lays out educational work, and protects women.” Then she fields a second round of questions.

A young woman with a baby on her lap asked about how child custody works. She explains that her ex-partner threatened her and their baby—both are now covered by her restraining order. But she is also dealing with a custody battle in Family Court. Judge Kat assures her they can talk about the specifics of her case in her individual consultation.

Judge Kat and Rafael continue explaining the law. “A denúncia does two things,” Judge Kat explains. It allows women to get a restraining order,<sup>27</sup> which takes immediate effect, and it generates a penal process against the aggressor, which is slow.

Judge Camila continues, “I want to reiterate that you should come to us. Us women need to be more united... sometimes, you have to help us help you.”

“I know it’s annoying (*chato*) to have to go to the police,” Rafael tries to relate.

The mandatory individual consults begin, as the assistant calls women back one by one to talk to the judges. They each take 10 to 15 minutes. As the room slowly clears out, Yasmin from NUDEM explains why women can’t just “end the process.” She explains, “cases exist to protect society, not you.”

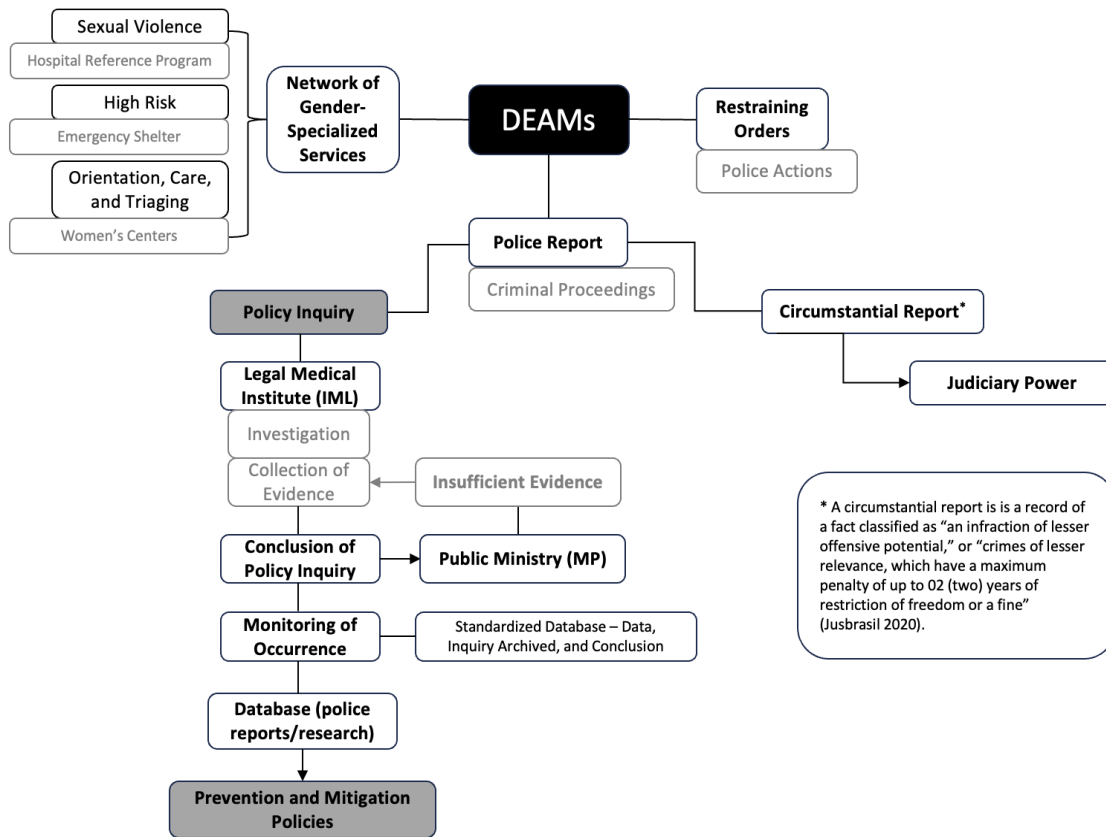
Unlike Ana Paula’s hearing, this care hearing provided a space for victims to dialogue with representatives of the judiciary. These interactions are meaningful in their own right, but they also provide some context for Ana Paula’s case. Here I outline several elements of this

hearing that bear on the pathways of women through the judicial system. In particular, I call attention to the discussions around denúncias and restraining orders, the issue of overlapping cases, the process of waiting, and the desire to “end the case.” Each of these pieces reflect the varied interests and concerns of different actors in the court system and point to the ways in which the needs of women diverge from the practices of the courts.

*“A Denúncia Does Two Things”*

At the group hearing, I was struck by the way in which Judge Kat took time to explain to the women how denúncias work—that they do “two things.” The first “thing” they do is facilitate the restraining order. Indeed, when a woman appeals to the police there are a series of procedures laid out in the Maria da Penha Law and in the DEAM Handbook,<sup>28</sup> which are visually represented in what is referred to as the *“fluxo de atendimento,”* or flow of services (Figure 21). Of note, is the absence of anything before “DEAMs,” highlighted in black, in the flow. The pathways that lead women to DEAMs and around them are invisible to the state.

To access the DEAM, a woman must call the police<sup>29</sup> to apprehend an aggressor “*em flagrante,*” in the act; or she can travel to a police station and file a report after<sup>30</sup> the violence has occurred. In the denúncia, the victim must relate the details of the alleged crime, including information about people involved, the location, and a narrative of the violence. This narrative is used to translate<sup>31</sup> the events into “crimes” and evaluate risk. The evaluation of risk is a particularly important step in the process. It is the point at which the police assess the possibility of danger and death for women. But evaluating risk is not a straightforward process, as risk can mean different things to different people. Today, they use a form to determine whether a woman is in “imminent risk of death,” but as recently as 2019 this evaluation was not standardized and left up to the judgement of the individual police delegate. Depending on the risk, the police will



**Figure 20** Graphic depicting the "flow of care" as outlined by the Women's Police handbook. Of note is the absence of any stage before the DEAM. Source: DEAM Norma Tecnica.

also decide—in cases in which an aggressor was apprehended—to order preventative prison as a protective measure for the victim. Yet, even with the standardization of this process with the form, these are very subjective moments in which police exert influence in ways that follow a case through the system. Further, there is a robust body of research that evidences the ways that racial and class biases inform how police register crimes (Hlavka and Mulla 2021; Willis 2015; Menjívar and Walsh 2017). The process of risk assessment is similarly subjective.

In cases that present “high risk,” police encourage women to file for a *medida protetiva* (restraining order), and triage them to other services, such as emergency shelters and women’s centers. Restraining orders are one of the most utilized tools the DEAM has at its disposal. For

some women, a restraining order can be an important form of protection from abuse. It can restrict the abuser from contacting the victim in-person, online, or through phone or other means of communication. Failure to comply with a restraining order is punishable by between 3 months and 2 years of prison time (Art 24, *Lei Maria Da Penha* 2006). But for many, restraining orders are “just a paper.” When I asked Anne, a woman I met in an emergency shelter, if she had a restraining order, she simply responded, “yeah, it’s there in my folder,” waving her arm in the direction of the dormitory. I am reminded of Sara Ahmed’s (2021) insistence that complaints are never just papers in filing cabinets in offices, or in this case in folders in emergency shelters, they are stories.

The (heavily abbreviated) story of Anne’s restraining order goes something like this. She met a man online, fell in love, and moved to Rio de Janeiro from Manaus to be with him. Not long after they were married, he became abusive. She endured years of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse and was regularly made a prisoner in her own home. After years of violence, she decided to leave. She was referred to an organization that helped women in situations of violence through a friend at church. Anne was escorted to an emergency shelter, where her caseworker<sup>32</sup> insisted she file a denúncia and get a restraining order. But Anne resisted because “they [the police] don’t go after”<sup>33</sup> such cases. She cited a friend who filed a denúncia and got a restraining order after her husband nearly killed her with a machete—“the police didn’t help her.” In Anne’s case, she and her friend lived near an area controlled by “militias,” where the police literally do not go to enforce restraining orders.

The issue of enforceability of restraining orders is concerning. In her testimony, Ana Paula also called attention to the fact that she “ha[s] a restraining order, but he [her ex-partner] doesn’t respect it.” (Oliveira et al. 2022). Between 2018 and 2021, a yearly average of 26,000

urgent restraining orders were conceded by the judiciary in Rio de Janeiro, and across the same period a yearly average of about 2,010 cases of *descumprimento* (noncompliance) with restraining order were reported (Oliveira et al. 2022; “Dados Estatísticos” 2022).<sup>34</sup> Concerns about enforceability and doubts that police will or can protect them justifiably lead women to worry about the specific details of when and how and *if* their abusers will be notified that there is a restraining order. Indeed, the women in the meeting were concerned about the fact that no one ever came to notify their abusers about the restraining order.

A recent study by Rio de Janeiro’s Institute of Public Safety found that in 2020 over 83% of women who were victims of femicide did *not* have restraining orders (Oliveira et al. 2022).<sup>35</sup> On more than one occasion—including in my interview with then Director of Rio’s Women’s Police Force Delegada Sandra Ornellas—this particular statistic was touted as proof that the restraining order works; that the majority of women dying from femicide did not have restraining orders so therefore those with restraining orders were not dying. This interpretation suggests that the restraining order was the factor that made the difference. But there is an alternative, if pessimistic interpretation of these numbers that I find more compelling: that the majority of women dying from femicide did not have restraining orders because they do not work or are not accessible. That these deaths are not reflective of patterns of violence occurring beyond the reach of the system, but they are occurring despite it. Given that most restraining orders are not renewed—a process women themselves must initiate every three months<sup>36</sup>—it is also possible that some of these women had restraining orders that lapsed.

Circling back to Judge Kat, the second “thing” the denúncia does is set in motion a criminal case against the aggressor. Referring to the flowchart, this part involves a police investigation, which is forwarded to the Ministério Público, at which point a legal case is opened,

and the court proceedings begin. What this flowchart also obscures is the pace of this part of the process. The simple flow depicted, from one step to the next, removes the sense that this process is bound by time at all. But as Judge Kat assured the women, it is “slow” (*demora*). Resources are limited, the process is largely still analog (albeit digitization and virtual proceedings did gain support during the pandemic), and the system struggles with high caseloads.

Judge Kat’s decision to explain the *denúncia* is significant not only for what it reflects about the system, but for what it reflects about her perception of the women. It was meaningful that she explained it at all, given every woman present had *already* filed a *denúncia*. Her attention to these details suggests that she perceives women do not know what a *denúncia* is or how it works. But, as detailed in the first section, they do know other things about *denúncias*, many things. Yet, they are not the same “things” that the court does, or that the court deems relevant.

### *Overlapping Cases*

The case of the woman with the baby is another noteworthy moment in this group hearing. She was concerned with how her restraining order and case in the specialized violence courts would affect her concurrent case over her daughters’ custody in Family Court. Ana Paula also had a child that was impacted by the violence. But in her case, she was engrossed in a parallel legal battle over the ownership of their home. Their cases evidence the messiness of domestic violence. The court doesn’t have a way to process the on-going and multifaceted nature of violence in Ana Paula’s relationship; the overlapping cycles of violence that she has and continues to endure. They can’t address the issue of her son having seen it all. That must be taken up in “family court.” They can’t help her deal with the contested ownership of her home. That must be taken up in “patrimony court.” In this way, legal policies and practices designed to

address separate issues (custody, violence, patrimony) fragment integrated dimensions of violence and force women to pursue multiple and time intensive legal processes to address them all, increasing their vulnerability. For many women who take action to escape situations of violence they must navigate multiple legal pathways at the same time. But these pathways often contradict one another. For example, in cases involving child custody, parents seeking primary care are encouraged to attend as a display of their investment. But what if the mother has a restraining order on the father? She could opt to send a lawyer on her behalf, but she would not be able to testify. She could opt to skip the hearing where her child's father would appear and wait for another court date to deliver her own testimony, likely delaying her case by months if not years.

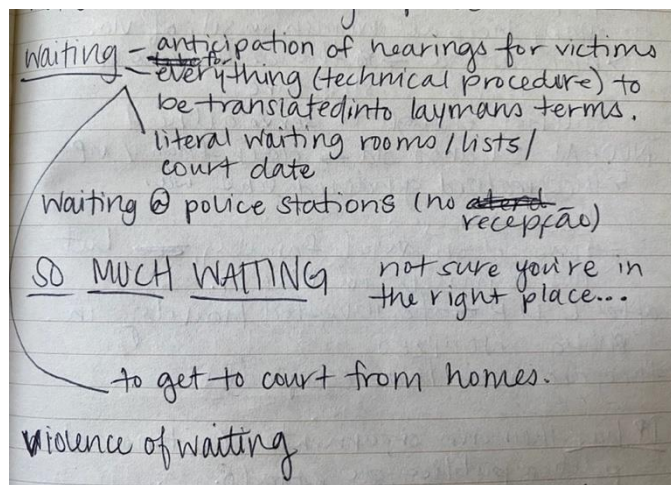
From the perspective of specialized courts, the overlapping nature of these cases presents a challenge. There were many times when cases involved multiple elements and it was difficult to disentangle them. One day, the court was holding a virtual hearing and the members of the court had to step out to give the defense privacy with his client. Judge Camila, the prosecutor, public defender, clerk, and I were all hunched around a desk when the public defender asked the Judge Camila, "Do you address issues pertaining to family?" She confidently responded, "No, because this ends up being Family Court." She continues, "it's really up to individual judges, but we have to be careful of the use of [specialized courts] to resolve other issues...in cases when patrimony is involved." Judge Camila goes on to explain that the courts are overloaded with cases, seeming to imply that this had something to do with people increasingly seeking out specialized courts to manage issues that did not pertain to domestic violence.<sup>37</sup> But beyond this, there is also a question about the legitimacy of specialized courts. If they contend with issues pertaining to child custody and disputes over ownership of property, they fear they will no longer

be a specialized court. But, as the cases of Ana Paula and the mother from the group hearing evidence, trying to isolate domestic violence is really hard in practice. In neglecting to attend to these variables they run the risk of failing to serve women.

### *Waiting*

It felt significant that the group hearing took place in a waiting room. With each news story, the TV playing in the background seemed to emphasize that, while we were in the waiting room, the world was still going on around us. Waiting was an unavoidable part of every woman's pathway through the system and the waits could be substantial. I scribbled dozens of frantic annotations in my notebooks about the waiting in courts (Figure 22). This led me to think about waiting as more than the time in-between two parts of the process, but rather as a process itself. And a somewhat violent one at that.

Further, the act of waiting is another way in which power is exerted in courts. In his research on poor people's experiences waiting in an Argentinian welfare office, Auyero finds that "subordination is created and re-created through innumerable acts of waiting" (2011, 24).



**Figure 21** Passage from my fieldnotes where I document and reflect on the frustrating process of waiting.

Of the cases I observed, the average time from the point at which a woman filed a denúncia to the date of her hearing was nearly two years.<sup>38</sup> For some, these years grinded slowly by as they anxiously awaited their hearings. For others, life went on and they were in an entirely different set of circumstances by the time the hearing came around. And for many, like Ana Paula, it seemed like they were somewhere in between. Recall her repeated statement, "it's been

so long.” In the two and a half years since she filed the denúncia, she had already started a new relationship. In the words of one activist, “time ends up resolving things faster than justice.”

But waiting for the day of the hearing was just one way that waiting occurred. The day of the hearing, it was also common for people to wait for hours. The day I went to interview Judge Kat for the first time, we had agreed to meet at 12pm. I went to the clerk’s office to check in and the clerk responded (not knowing we had scheduled a meeting), “she doesn’t usually get here at this hour.” The first case listed on the docket was scheduled for 12:30. She arrived at 12:40 and invited me back for the interview. I offered to reschedule, thinking she would need to rush into the courtroom because she was behind schedule, but she insisted she had time.

Typically, the docket listed cases starting around 12:30, scheduled 15 minutes apart. But in practice, the hearings for the day usually didn’t start until 1:00, at the earliest, and each hearing lasted longer than 15 minutes and sometimes up to one hour. Meaning there was no way to predict when your case would be heard. It became a whole day affair to sit in the waiting area. On more than one occasion, victims and defendants expressed their frustration about having to take an entire day off work to come to the court. It was not uncommon for the court to reschedule hearings for which one of the parties was missing.

Waiting is a visceral experience. It is freezing. The fluorescent light is irritating. The seats are covered in plastic, but are shaped so you have to fight not to slide off. Often there are not enough seats for everyone to begin with. There is even an entire economy of waiting in courts in Rio. People with little carts push around coffee and pre-packaged sandwiches that they sell to the people waiting. For women, waiting for their hearing, having anticipated the day for years, was another way the courts were spaces of discomfort. This is an issue the judiciary openly acknowledges. Yet, it doesn’t seem to impact the everyday practices of the courts. For

example, every afternoon Judge Kat would take a 15-minute coffee break. Sometimes court actors would debrief between cases, joking about what celebrity the defendant looked like, for up to 20 minutes at a time. While these moments of pause may have been an important, if inadvertent, approach to emotionally cope with the weight of violence against women work, they also had the effect of further drawing out the already lengthy process of seeking justice and protection.

### *“Ending” a Case*

Like the woman with her cellphone, many women just want their cases to end. They have varied reasons, including the fact of the wait rendering their case virtually obsolete. Of the 42 cases I observed between March and July 2022, 18 pertained to women who wanted to end their case, or “tirar o processo.” But as Yasmin, the public defender, pointed out women can’t just “end” their cases because “they exist to protect society, not [them].” Rafael, a public prosecutor, put it this way: “the *Ministério Público* (MP) is an independent institution that defends society.” He explains that once a denúncia is completed, the MP files charges on behalf of *society*, not the victim herself, because “it’s not in the interest of society that [women] suffer violence.” The victim, then, becomes the MP’s primary source of evidence. This is significant because, contrary to what most victims think, they do not control their own processes; the MP does. They cannot simply “end” a process if they no longer wish for their case to be prosecuted.

The only way women can assert power in the outcome is by refusing to “talk.” Recall Aline confirming to the court that Ana Paula, referred to as “Seven,” was “going to talk.” In many cases, the victim is the only “witness” and source of “evidence” the MP is using to prosecute the case. If the MP doesn’t have the victim’s testimony (and there are no other witnesses) there is insufficient evidence, and the defendant is absolved. When women opted to

“stay silent,” the court generally responded disapprovingly. As though they felt the women were making a mistake. The phrase, “she gave up (desistir) the process” was common to explain this situation. However, in cases involving witnesses, the case could proceed without the victim’s testimony. For example, if police arrested the perpetrator “in the act,” police could be summoned as witnesses and testify against the defendant. In cases in which physical violence was a factor, medical reports also provided concrete evidence, although they often lacked detail.

In some situations, women wanted the defendant absolved because they were still together. In others, they felt the penalties were too harsh; that they didn’t know this process would be so long and consequential. In one case, the judge asked why the victim was refusing to talk and she said, “it passed, it’s over, it doesn’t make a difference to me anymore.” She explains that she thought getting a restraining order would be a short process, not this “severe.” She feels this case “harmed” (prejudicar) her partner too much, “he can’t get a job [...] he tried to commit suicide.” Judge Camila asked her if she felt his suffering—since the incident—was worse than the suffering he had caused her. She responded, “yes.” Judge Camila asserted to the court, “she already feels he was punished” and absolved him.

In practice, actors within the specialized court system—especially victims and legal professionals—often hold diverging views on the role of the court and how they fit into it. Legal professionals are trained in the laws set forth in the country’s Civil and Criminal Codes and, in the case of specialized courts, the Maria da Penha Law. They work within this specific legal framework to “defend society” by prosecuting individuals who have committed crimes. While the two aren’t always mutually exclusive, this approach to “justice” often seemed to prioritize punishing offenders over delivering redress for victims. To “defend society,” the MP relied on victims and, in some cases, victims knew or at least sensed this. In a conversation with Marisa

Chaves, then director of one of Rio de Janeiro's four women's centers, she asserts that "women feel used by the state. They retell the story of their abuse over and over. They give testimony, but don't feel that the state protects them. They are *morendo de medo*"—literally, *dying of fear*. Maybe this was also a fear that Ana Paula refers to when she explains why she never filed a denúncia.

Most victims had no idea what to expect in court. The process could be traumatizing; uncomfortable at best. I think back to Ana Paula's disorientation when she entered the courtroom and didn't know where to sit. Everything from the uninviting, physical space of the courtroom to the judicial terms and language used, colloquially called *juridiquês*,<sup>39</sup> to the lack of a definitive ruling on her case creates the impression that this process was not *for* her.

Whether victim's expectations of court are "right" or "wrong" according to legal codes, there can be a real sense of confusion around whether the court is defending their interests. Victims, while typically not familiar with the intricacies of the law, have their own set of interests and social codes informed by race, class, and territory that at times sharply diverge from those of the court, such as pressure not to involve police. In my time at the Court, I documented a host of reasons that victims came to court—such as, continued fear of an abuser, wanting to end the process, or as a last resort, as was the case with Ana Paula—but they are not there to "defend society." Raising another question: What type of society are the courts defending? Could it be the same society that put Ana Paula here in the first place?

## **The Court**

After several months of attending court cases, I learned that the docket always started with defendants who were incarcerated.<sup>40</sup> The first defendant of the day entered the room, hands

cuffed behind his back, wearing a perfectly white t-shirt, discolored shorts, and a pair of disintegrating Havaianas (flip flops). He had been in prison *preventatively*<sup>41</sup> for five months.

The prosecutor read the facts of the case. He was 28. He had broken into his grandmother's house and threatened to kill her with a twelve-inch carving blade. The defendant was quiet during the testimony of the two police officers who arrested him, sitting with his head hanging, eyes to the floor. When it came time for him to testify, he opted to "remain silent" ("ficar em silêncio").

Today, Judge Kat explained, the court would decide if he would remain in prison, or if he would be released. His grandmother did not have a restraining order, so they were balancing concerns about the logistics of releasing him and protecting her.

"If you are released, where will you go? Do you have anywhere to go other than your grandmother's house?"

"Other than my grandmothers? No," the defendant responded.

"Well, we can't release you unless you have somewhere else to go. Can you think of anywhere else you could stay?" This struck me as somewhat unfair. Was he really going to remain in prison for not having multiple potential places to live if he were released?

"We will need to get in touch with your grandmother to see if she is okay with you being released. She did not show up for this hearing today. We will need to investigate this, but we will likely file a release order."

"I have her phone number if that helps," the defendant offers. Whether he knows it or not, he is expediting his release in doing so. In my observations, cases were regularly delayed for things as trivial as hunting down a phone number.

“Yes, what is her phone number?” asked Judge Kat, repeating each set of numbers back as she scribbled them down on her printout of the docket. Judge Kat calls, but no one answers. He is dismissed and escorted back downstairs.

Judge Kat and Lena, the prosecutor, agree that they need to get in touch with the victim to see “if she is afraid for her life,” before they can order the release. They ask Ruth, a public defender, to try calling her again.

Ruth retorted, “This isn’t my job. The Public Defense Office can’t contact people who aren’t actively seeking us out.”

In a standard court, calling a victim to discuss the case would be anyone’s job but hers. She is a public defender, whose office typically represents defendants who do not have access to a private lawyer. However, in Brazil, there are specialized public defenders who comprise the Center for the Defense of Women (NUDEM) housed in the Ministério Público, through which public defenders advocate on behalf of the victim as well. In most of the cases I observed, the defendant *and* the victim were represented by a public defender, albeit not the same one.

Given this dynamic, Judge Kat and Lena have reason to believe that Ruth is the one who should call the victim. But Ruth felt otherwise. She explained that the public defense office cannot contact people who are not part of their caseload; people who aren’t actively “seeking us out.” According to Ruth, she can only contact a victim that is represented by NUDEM and who was triaged there through the proper legal channels. Her point, as I understood it, was that she was not automatically every victim’s public defender and advocate.

Lena, representing the Ministério Público (MP), pressed the issue. She was “confused” because it is not her role to defend individual women. The MP files charges on behalf of “society,” but it is her job to decide what to recommend in terms of the preventative prison. She

lets out her own frustration, “I consistently find myself in the position of having to advocate for victims!” But, because the defendant is in preventative prison and there are no formal charges, the MP cannot keep him in jail. The only way she can justify this is if the victim *through a public defender* tells them she is still afraid of him being released. But, she argues, if the public defender won’t advocate for the victim, she will have to weigh both the defendant *and* the victim in her assessment. “And if we release him and he kills her?!” she yells.

By this point she wasn’t the only one yelling. Judge Kat expressed her frustration with Ruth too, who she feels is obligated under the Maria da Penha Law to act. “It’s exactly for this reason that NUDEM exists!” she reasons. “I don’t understand this...I’m so lost!”

As the discussion turned into an all-out yelling match, the commotion attracted two other public defenders—one from NUDEM and one from the conventional public defender’s office. The specialized defender immediately took Ruth’s side. She added candidly that she feels a certain “oppression” coming down from Judge Kat and Lena, not just here, but in general. “My *carga horário* (workload) is four hours, it’s 2pm and I’ve been here for two hours and there are so many cases remaining. I do not get paid enough for this.”

Ruth and the other specialized defender leave the room, slamming the door, as the group turns to the other defender who had just entered. “Everyone has a different interpretation of the role of NUDEM in cases like these, even within the public defender’s office.” She shrugs and offers a light-hearted grin.

Ruth marches back into the room, highly agitated. Judge Kat and Lena tried to dialogue with her further, but she yelled over them. It all seemed very personal to her. “I won’t forget this, Kat,” she cautions, referring to Judge Kat by her first name without her title.

Lena doubles down, “I just want to understand my role here.” She argues that she can’t keep him in jail if no one manifests on behalf of the victim. Ruth, pointing her finger at Judge Kat for emphasis, reasserts that it is not her role to step in on behalf of a victim that she is not representing.

“And the victim?!” Lena and Judge Kat scream, simultaneously. Lena follows up, “I’m not talking about you personally, I am asking an institutional level question.” She repeats this sentence several times as Ruth yells over her on her way out the door for a final time.

The months at the Court passed, yet each time I reflected upon this exchange, I continued to see something new. Three elements, in particular, drew my attention. First, the highly emotional nature of this interaction. Courts are emotional places, not just for the victims and defendants, but for those who run them in the everyday. Second, that these emotions are tied, in part, to courtroom hierarchies that privilege certain subject positions over others. And third, that the Maria da Penha Law and the legal apparatus itself bends in the direction of *perceived* justice. Together these dynamics illustrate that courts are far from objective arbiters of the law, rather they are just another site in which the law is negotiated (Hlavka and Mulla 2021; Beck 2023).

### *Emotions*

The process of adjudicating the Maria da Penha Law is an emotional one. There is a certain tension between the ordinary and extraordinary that plays out in specialized courts every day. It was normal for graphic descriptions of extreme physical violence to be followed by enthusiastic claims about which celebrity that defendant looked like. Emotional testimony interrupted by grumbles that the microphone for recording it isn’t working again. Tears of desperation butt up against afternoon *empadas* (savory rolls with fillings). As an observer, a day in court felt like emotional whiplash. I could *feel* the conflict in my body, a fact which I could

only assume was somehow visible to others around me when Ruth, at the end of what would be a particularly emotional day, counseled, “just direct your gaze above the horizon and you won’t cry.” Ruth, a seasoned public defender, had strategies for processing the emotions that came with hearings, as did Judge Camila who once suggested “doing mental calculations” so you don’t cry “because it’s the rational side of your brain.” But when it came to this fight, Ruth seemed to be caught off-guard.

Beyond procedure and institutional structure, courtrooms are comprised of a series of people—a judge, “victims,” police, public defenders, prosecutors, defendants, lawyers, witnesses, office assistants, and even so-called “interns” like me. They are a product of human relationships. Indeed, the courts are full of compassionate, yet fiery Ruths. Their hallways are walked by courageous and frustrated Ana Paulas. They are presided over by espresso-loving Judge Kats and prosecuted by Lenas. The relationships between various people within the court system are complex human relationships and reveal how arbitrating justice is more than a legal process; it is a social, and inevitably emotional one.

### *Courtroom Hierarchies*

Despite the diversity of stakeholders in a courtroom, they are spaces that privilege certain subject positions over others. That is, power is distributed unevenly among court actors. Part of Ruth’s frustration seemed to arise from a place of resentment, or in the words of her colleague, a sense of “oppression.” Public defenders are among the most overworked and underpaid members of the judiciary and most “do not get paid enough for this.” During my time at the Court, I observed Ruth run back and forth between the building’s two courtrooms to represent victims whose hearings were occurring simultaneously. While each courtroom had an assigned Judge and a prosecutor, Ruth was spread across two courtrooms. Put simply, there are not enough

public defenders. For this reason, Ruth's assistant and public defender *in training*, Aline, often stepped in to represent victims when Ruth could not.<sup>42</sup> Ruth was understandably exhausted and Judge Kat and Lena pressuring her to take on one more case seemed to push her to a breaking point.

Courtroom hierarchies extend to victims and defendants as well, albeit in different ways. Judge Kat and Lena's insistence that they contact the victim was not based on protocol or any piece of the Maria da Penha Law. There were other cases in which, despite the absence of the victim, the defendant was released without a fraction of this debate. They seemed to think that this case was particularly serious. The fact that this particular defendant was a young, Black man, who had been violent towards his elderly grandmother, felt significant.

While most of the legal professionals at the Court were women, there is a very stark race, class, and territory divide. Of the public defenders and prosecutors that I observed eight were white and one was Black. They were typically well-dressed, highly educated, and lived in the South Zone.<sup>43</sup> Judge Kat herself is a white mother of two in her late fifties. She lives in Ipanema, over 15 city miles away from the Court and its jurisdiction. She has a private driver transport her to and from the court three days per week. In many ways, the disparities between court personnel and those they presided over seemed to replicate the disparities that have long permeated the justice system as a whole—disparities in race, class, and proximity to violence. The only marked difference in the demographic composition of specialized courts versus standard civil or criminal courts was that the judge was always a woman.

In this sense, courts are spaces that reproduce geosocial inequality and reify certain dominant perspectives about violence against women and those who commit it. They tend to conceptually isolate extreme expressions of GBV (e.g. rape, femicide, assault) from other

forms of violence and socioeconomic exclusion; to treat women as individual “victims” rather than members of communities; and to register violence as an “event” disconnected from historical processes and relationships (Deer 2015; Sanford 2008; Sanford, Stefatos, and Salvi 2016; Carmona López, Gómez Caballero, and Castro Rodríguez 2010). The courts rely on a series of assumptions about violence, “victimhood,” and redress that reflect deeper institutional histories of legality, epistemologies of justice, and their relationship with society at the individual, community, and national levels.

*“This Is How It Is”*

Finally, I was struck by how much the law was being actively led and contested in the courtroom. While the Maria da Penha Law does have some concrete provisions, such as those related to sentencing or restraining orders, it is also a law with much room for interpretation by courts. In fact, in 2010 and again in 2018, the Brazilian National Justice Council released a 90-page “Manual” delineating the structure, roles, and procedures of specialized courts, suggesting the need for further clarification and, importantly, standardization of the applications of the Maria da Penha Law (CNJ 2018). Conventional understandings of law and policy, which tend to view laws as sets of finite rules, do not account for the variation in court personnel and their understandings of the law’s applications. In response to this tendency, feminist legal scholarship invites us to conceptualize laws not as sets of policies or regulations, but instead as products and producers of social discourse (Haney 2000). In the case of the Maria da Penha Law, the law brings into being new meanings and definitions of violence, new social categories, and new roles, such as that of women’s public defenders (NUDEM). In this sense, the passing of this law—albeit a progressive victory at the time—was only the beginning of a long, dynamic process of legal and cultural interpretation and translation.

At the heart of this argument was a question about whose role it is to defend and represent victims. In some sense, the entire court apparatus is designed to protect women, or at least legitimize the issue of violence against women. But there must be some semblance of due process, as the court cannot condemn every offender that walks through its doors. So, to ensure each party is represented there are court actors with designated roles. Lena, the prosecutor, is there to “defend society” by prosecuting the defendant. The standard public defender is representing the defendant. Judge Kat is there to impartially rule on the case. But, in this case, no one is defending the victim. Without her testimony, one of the primary pieces of evidence against the defendant along with testimony from two military police officers that apprehended him “in the act,” the court struggles to proceed. While this responsibility would typically fall on NUDEM, Ruth’s point is that she is not involved in this case at all, the victim did not “seek her out.” And the fact that the defendant has been imprisoned preventatively for five months is problematic. In short, the victim seems to have slipped through the cracks with no defense. The fact that this can happen at all is concerning. It points to another moment along women’s pathways in which *they* must do the work of the state—in this case by “seeking out” a public defender.

The result was a court body in which the prescribed roles seemed to dissolve when a case appeared to contradict their sense of what was just, or, better yet, their sense of what the Maria da Penha Law is *supposed* to do. The next day I messaged Judge Kat to thank her for the interview and the opportunity to observe her court room. She replied, “I wanted to apologize for the mess in my courtroom yesterday. Unfortunately, when we work with women's rights, this is how it is. We must always be attentive for the Maria da Penha Law to be applied (which addresses your question). [...] It's hard, but we keep trying.” Her words suggest that women’s

rights are a site of conflict; that the applications of the Maria da Penha Law are not always obvious, but something one must be especially “attentive” to. Ultimately, the picture Judge Kat paints, paired with my observations in specialized courts, point to the subjectivity and discretion surrounding the application of the Maria da Penha Law, which nonetheless have highly consequential impacts on people’s lives in Rio de Janeiro.

## **Conclusion**

Courts are a compelling site for research on gender-based violence for obvious reasons. They are the spaces where “justice” happens, where the law bumps up against everyday people in both ordinary and extraordinary ways. In the case of specialized courts, they offer a window into the process of both adjudicating and complying with the Maria da Penha Law—a law with provisions to hold courts accountable as much as individual perpetrators of violence. They also provide a sense of how courts relate to other institutions within and beyond the network of specialized services for women.

Organized around three vignettes—the hearing of Ana Paula, the Care Hearing, and the conflict between three members of the court—this chapter shows how justice for women who experience violence is occurring within context of deeply unjust social, economic, and political conditions; how in the words of Graeber, “practices can reproduce structures of inequality even as we claim to challenge them” (2014, 74). Yet, while courts illuminate many things, there are also limitations to what one can understand about domestic violence law and the experience of seeking justice from courts. The courts are neither a beginning nor an ending point for violence in many of the lives of the women who navigate them. Many experience overlapping cycles of violence that span months, years, and even lifetimes. But like telescopic images of distant stars, a

day in court reflects a snapshot in time; denúncias filed years ago only becoming visible and interpretable at a hearing years later.

Yet, the events and structures of inequality that occur in court offer clues and insight into what happens outside it. Ana Paula's story reflects just one of multiple pathways women take through the network of gender-specialized services, which reflect larger patterns in the system. Ana Paula testified that she had been experiencing violence for some time before she filed a police report. This is very common. Considering only a very small percentage of cases ever make it to a hearing, court observations shed light on the mosaic of factors that both lead women to court and prevent them from getting there. Her testimony, and the cases that make it to court, also reveals important details about what happens outside of the courts and the various points at which her pathway diverged and converged with those of other women. It blurs the distinction between inside and outside court and urges us to think about how what happens in court is interpreted and assigned meaning outside of it. I will take this up in the next chapter.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pardo is a racial category used by the Brazilian Census, which refers to people of mixed ethnic ancestries (African, Indigenous, and European).

<sup>2</sup> Also colloquially referred to as a "carteira assinada," a coveted government-issued document, similar in appearance to a passport, which details a worker's history of "formal" employment. It is accompanied by a series of worker's benefits, including a guaranteed minimum wage, as well as social prestige and recognition. For a deep dive into the significance of categories of formal and informal labor in Brazil, see Millar 2018.

<sup>3</sup> The term denúncia is used to refer to a "Boletim de Ocorrência", or a police report.

<sup>4</sup> In Brazil, it is common for people to refer to their long-term or domestic partner as their spouse ("marido/esposa"), regardless of whether they have been formally married. It is also common for couples (even relatively new couples) to refer to their partners' parents as their "mother-" or "father-in-law."

<sup>5</sup> I use the term "victim" throughout this chapter to reflect the language of the judiciary and to avoid confusion about the relationship of individual women to the cases I describe. The label of "victim" itself can be thought of as another site of discomfort and another instance of the courts reducing women to individual "victims," as outlined in the Chapter I. To be sure, "victim" is not a label I heard women using to talk about themselves and their relationship to violence or that of anyone they knew. More often women use the phrase "she lived through a situation of violence."

<sup>6</sup> See also Mohanty 2003 for critical discussions of transnational feminism.

<sup>7</sup> Including residents of Complexo da Maré, Complexo do Alemão, Jacarezinho, Vigário Geral, Ramos, Penha,

---

Inhaúma, Méier, Irajá, Ilha do Governador, Anchieta, Pavuna, among others.

<sup>8</sup> In 2021, this number got as high as 11 thousand cases, at which point the president of the Justice Tribunal of Rio de Janeiro designated 12 specialized judges from across the city to hear 1,500 cases in two weeks to help address the unmet demand (AMAERJ 2021).

<sup>9</sup> For context, the neighboring district of Nova Iguaçu receives only two thousand cases per year.

<sup>10</sup> Literally translating to “basic baskets,” a *cesta básica* contains between 10 and 15 kilograms of dietary staples, typically dried rice and beans, flour, cooking oil, salt, sugar, pasta, tomato sauce, and ground coffee. The *cesta básica* is supposedly enough food to feed a 4 person family for no more than one month. It is also an important proxy unit for the health of the Brazilian economy. This rough measure of inflation calculates how many minimum salaries it take to purchase one *cesta básica*. This has been an especially present calculation for Brazilians recently, as inflation is causing a sharp decrease in the value of the Real, with no increase in salary to offset it.

<sup>11</sup> See the story of Maria da Penha in Chapter 2.

<sup>12</sup> The *Ordenações Filipinas*, in the First Portuguese Imperial Penal Code stated, “If a man caught *or learned of* his wife cheating, he could kill her.” This law was on the books for more than 200 years under Portuguese colonial rule (emphasis mine, Mello 2018, 85).

<sup>13</sup> There was never any explicit mention of “*legítima defesa da honra*” in the Brazilian legal code. There is however language referring to “*legítima defesa*,” which stipulates crimes committed in self-defense are treated differently.

<sup>14</sup> Here is one piece of original reporting on this story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igP9mLB9zoY>.

<sup>15</sup> The article can be accessed here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1981/12/06/machismo-on-trial/fe2ba0d1-2702-40be-8eb6-6ac2c7aaa858/>.

<sup>16</sup> The Brazilian legal code explicitly differentiates between public and private “criminal acts.” Public criminal acts are those that are practiced by a stranger in the public sphere. They are prosecuted by the state as “offense[s] against society” (Roure 2009, 75). Private criminal acts (such as statutory rape, threats, defamation, etc.) are different in that it is up to the victim or their legal representative to report the crime and open a case, *unless* the aggressor is caught “in the act” (*em flagrante*).

<sup>17</sup> This phrase in Portuguese, “*em brigas de marido e mulher, não se mete a colher*” is commonly used to normalize “fights” between spouses and reinforce the idea that domestic violence is a private issue in which others should not concern themselves or get involved.

<sup>18</sup> Today, there are 417 DEAMs in Brazil, 14 of which are located in the state of Rio de Janeiro. DEAMs are designed as places for women to seek legal orientation, to access protective measures, and to file denúncias.

<sup>19</sup> Also referred to as systems of “parallel,” “extrajudicial,” “gang,” or “informal” justice.

<sup>20</sup> From The Washington Post’s Police Shootings Database: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/>. Accessed on August 27, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Favela in Zona Norte and the territory in which the Mothers of Manguinhos lost their sons to police violence.

<sup>22</sup> Brazil’s equivalent of 911.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed overview of the history of the feminist movement in Brazil see Chapter 2.

<sup>24</sup> For this reason, many women from refused to identify themselves as feminists. Rather they simply adopted the label “women’s movements” to differentiate themselves. While the predominantly white feminist movement was focused on

---

typifying and addressing violence against women, women of color were working in neighborhood associations to resolve a much more holistic set of issues, such as sanitation, police violence, inequities in education, and fighting for things like public daycares. These concerns were all thought to be “women’s issues.” It was not until much later that their ideas were incorporated into the network. For more on this important history, see Chapter 3.

<sup>25</sup> The public bus service had increased their fare again and people, already upset by the poor quality of the service (i.e. packed buses, limited routes, dangerous platforms), were starting to retaliate. See news story in Portuguese here: <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2022/07/06/estacao-mato-alto-do-brt-pega-fogo.ghtml>

<sup>26</sup> The police force started off as an experimental public security force for women with restraining orders in Vitória, Espírito Santo. In 2019, the city of Rio de Janeiro instituted its own version. I will return to this in Chapter 5.

<sup>27</sup> Technically, women can get restraining orders without filing a denúncia, but the process of filing a denúncia is one avenue to get a restraining order.

<sup>28</sup> In 2006, the National Secretary of Women’s Policy together with the National Secretary of Public Security stepped in, creating the institution’s first *Norma Técnica*, or Technical Handbook. This document details the state of DEAMs and calls for the standardization of police practices in DEAMs across the country.

<sup>29</sup> She does not necessarily have to call the Women’s Police, but women’s police are generally known to be more sensitive to issues of violence against women than non-specialized police, who continue to dismiss cases of domestic violence outright.

<sup>30</sup> Again, this is the judicial system’s perspective. I take issue with the notion of “after” the violence later in this section.

<sup>31</sup> In her research on women’s police stations, Cecília MacDowell Santos found that “the registering of women’s complaints in the women’s police station is a selective interpretation of social facts as crimes” (2005, 121). When a woman narrates her experience of violence, the police must decide how that narration squares with the forms of violence typified by the law. They must then associate this specific infraction with her case and the accompanying narrative. This document is then used by the Ministério Público to open a case. However, as with the process of evaluating risk, the process of translating women’s narratives of violence into legal documents is fraught. In more cases than one, I learned about BOs that were incomplete or inaccurate. In one case the BO indicated that a victim requested “afastamento do lar,” or distancing from the home. But when the judiciary followed up, they learned she never wanted the house, that she’d moved out earlier that week. In another case, the BO was read in court (meaning the case made it all the way through the system) and the victim responded, “Is that all they put in there?” We assume that police are acting in the best interest of women and representing society by enforcing the law. Further, we assume that by virtue of their gender, that women police officers are more effective at doing so. But, in practice, men and women police officers simply “mediate conflicts and construct crimes [...] They legitimize social categories” (122).

<sup>32</sup> The woman worked informally as an advocate for women in situations of violence through the non-governmental organization known as GRAM.

<sup>33</sup> “Eles nem vão atrás.”

<sup>34</sup> Again, the burden is on individual women to re-report their abusers for failing to comply with the restraining order. Thus, we can assume that the overall amount of noncompliance with restraining orders is higher than the numbers of *reported* cases of noncompliance reflect. Further, given that restraining orders can be renewed over time, it is hard to provide an exact percentage of the number of cases of noncompliance relative to the number of active restraining orders, as some may have been conceded in a different year from that which the case of noncompliance was reported.

<sup>35</sup> This report on the state of violence against women in Rio de Janeiro is conducted yearly by the Instituto de Segurança Pública. It can be found here: [http://arquivo.proderj.rj.gov.br/isp\\_imagens/uploads/DossieMulher2021.pdf](http://arquivo.proderj.rj.gov.br/isp_imagens/uploads/DossieMulher2021.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> If the average case take 2 years to make it through the system, she will have to renew up to 8 times to keep an active restraining order.

---

<sup>37</sup> This was not the first time I heard about this. Célia at CEJUVIDA also talks about people trying to use the mechanism of the Maria da Penha Law to achieve custody over kids or ownership over a home. She perceived this as deliberate, that women were knowingly and intentionally manipulating the system.

<sup>38</sup> Approximately 1.95 years, to be more precise.

<sup>39</sup> This portmanteau is a combination of the Portuguese words legal (júridica) and Portuguese (português) and is often used by non-experts to refer to legal jargon.

<sup>40</sup> Incarcerated defendants (“reus presos”) are held in a cell under the court room and escorted in and out through a designated door, complete with a giant padlock, by a Military Police officer.

<sup>41</sup> According to the Brazilian Penal Code, offenders who pose imminent risk to society can be incarcerated as a preventative measure, before charges are filed and a ruling is made. Preventative prison was established in 1979 as part of the “December package,” along with the reduction of the age for being tried as an adult from 18 to 16 years old. This package was aimed at reducing “violence” (Gonzalez 122).

<sup>42</sup> This practice has since been the topic of new debate within the judiciary. They want only trained public defenders to represent victims, but they are not addressing the root issue, which is that caseloads are too high.

<sup>43</sup> As discussed in Chapter I, *Zona Sul* (the South Zone) is the most affluent regions of Rio de Janeiro. Neighborhoods, including Ipanema, Copacabana, Leblon, Gávea, and Lagoa, are among the most expensive and luxurious in all of Brazil.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FRAGMENTED POLITICS OF CARE

#### **The Situation**

Cristina hung up the phone and took several deep breaths, eyes fixed to the table where she sat.

“Sorry, Emily. It’s just that we are going through a delicate situation and now the media is our last resort.”

I gently inquired about the “situation,” which had been unfolding for several weeks.

“I can’t even get into it, Emily, because I get emotional,” she lamented. “I’m going to speak to the media... What if my name comes out and they get rid of me?” She continued to process the thought that her position as the director of the Márcia Lyra Integrated Center for Women’s Services (Centro Integrado de Atendimento à Mulher - CIAM)—Rio de Janeiro’s oldest public women’s center—may have been at stake, but ultimately determined,

“I cannot accept this disrespect for professionals, women professionals, women citizens...this disrespect for the history of this service.”

She paused, shook her head, and added, “They have other interests...they are doing whatever they want.” I wondered to whom she was referring.

A few weeks later the article came out in *EXTRA*, a Globo news outlet based in Rio de Janeiro, and my questions were answered. The headline read “Public support system for women victims of violence faces staff reduction, precarious structure and salary cuts.”<sup>1</sup> The article narrated “the situation:” in late September 2021, there was an unannounced salary cut that impacted professionals working in Rio’s state women’s centers.<sup>2</sup> It also identified the “they” Cristina had been referring to (“they have other interests”)—the cut had been enacted without

prior communication by the State Secretary of Human Rights. Overnight, experienced professionals, like Cristina, with advanced degrees in social work, psychology, and law went from earning R\$2,208 to R\$1,193 per month—approximately UD\$400 to US\$215—a value roughly equivalent to Brazil’s minimum wage.<sup>3</sup>

This salary cut alone would have been enough to critically jeopardize the continued existence of the state women’s center, CIAM. But the reality was that this was not an isolated occurrence. Long before these salary cuts, CIAM was already teetering on the brink of closure. In the *EXTRA* article, one anonymous professional-turned-whistleblower points this out, “Gradually, since 2014, every public policy related to women’s human rights, especially in services that assist women and combat violence against women, has been dismantled” (*EXTRA*). From the perspective of service professionals,<sup>4</sup> the network had been under serious strain for nearly a decade leading up to the salary cuts and the publication of this news article. They had done their best to furnish a quality service for women in situations of violence, in the form of social services, support groups, psychological care, and assistance accessing the judiciary. But by the time the article came out the network was nearing total collapse—deprived of resources by the very state that was supposed to provide them.

This chapter sets out to make sense of the circumstances surrounding the 2021 salary cuts and what they reflect about the shifting terrain on which violence against women (VAW) work is happening in Brazil. Drawing on Nadar’s (1972) concept of “studying up,” this chapter builds on Chapter III by shifting the focus from service seekers, local communities, and outward-facing professionals to instead capture the dynamic relationships within state institutions—between service professionals (social workers, psychologists, and paralegal advisors) and administrators. In doing so, it complicates popular and academic discourses that tend to frame the state as a

homogenous and coherent entity (Mirchandani 2006; Neumann 2017). Rather, this framing enables a closer look at how power, resources, and interests circulate and vary among differently situated representatives of the state (Thelen, Vettters, and Benda-Beckmann 2014). Moreover, as a function of this variation, scholars argue that institutions also range “in the degree to which they uphold or challenge gender inequalities” (Beck and Stephen 2021, 744). Research has shown that in many cases institutions of the state—even those tasked with addressing violence against women—exhibit gradations of compliance with laws and fluctuating commitment to services for women (Beck 2023; Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Blancas 2010; Merry 2006a). In other words, just because progressive laws and services exist does not mean the state is uniformly committed to enforcing them or rendering them effective in practice. In this way, CIAM can be thought of as a site of political struggle, where the Maria da Penha Law and services for women in situations of violence are being negotiated on an everyday basis.

In this chapter, I first introduce CIAM and narrate the immediate response to the salary cuts. Then, I explore the relationship between funding and the politics of gender-specialized services to demonstrate how the salary cuts fit into a larger neoliberal political offensive that targets services for women through a) cutting funding, b) coopting the network of gender-specialized services, and c) targeting the Maria da Penha Law and other legislation that addresses violence against women. Then, I explore how together these dynamics produce three broad outcomes, including: dedicated, yet frustrated service professionals, variation and power imbalances across services, and ultimately the public perception that public services do not work—leading some to seek or create alternatives.

## A Tale of Two Meetings

I first met Cristina during my preliminary research in 2019, two years before the salary cuts. Cristina is a petite, middle-aged white woman, with a warm smile and chin-length copper hair. Before taking the helm at CIAM, she worked for Promundo—a Brazilian NGO that works with boys and men to “promote healthy masculinities”—and more recently ran a state children’s shelter. The day



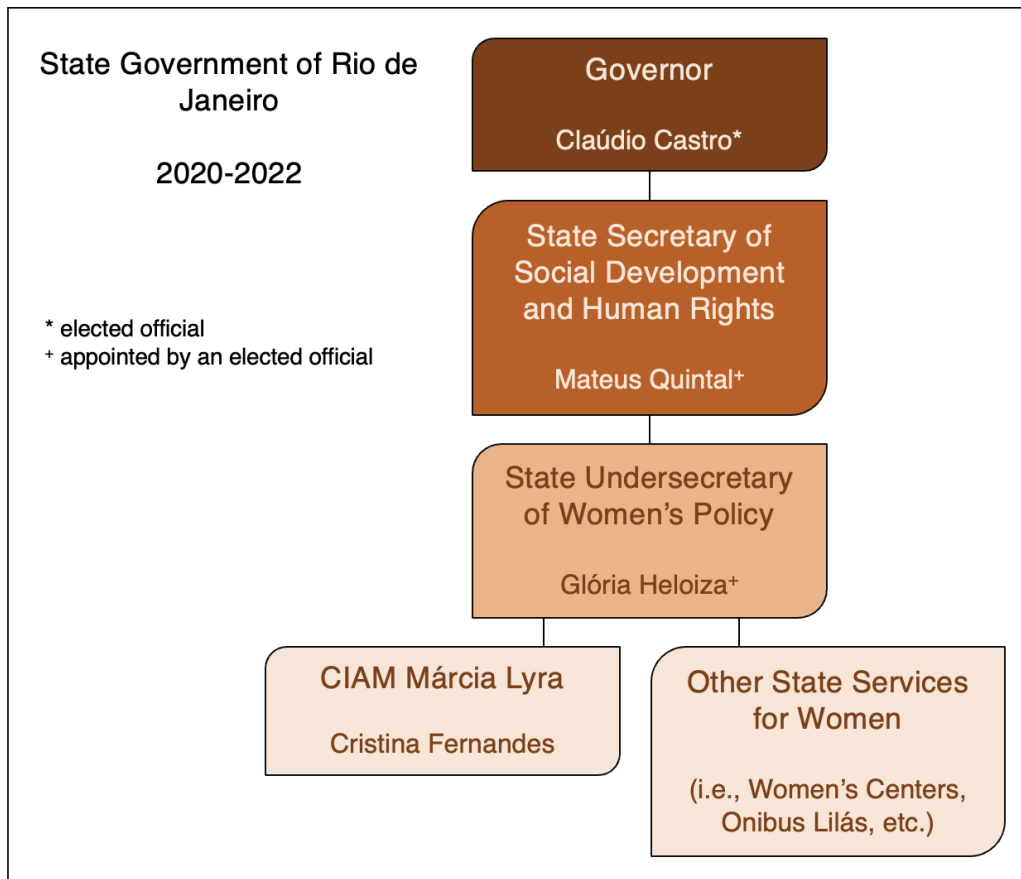
**Figure 22** Street view of CIAM Márcia Lyra in Rio de Janeiro's Centro district.

of my first visit to CIAM, I walked to Centro from my apartment in Santa Teresa, snacking on a *salgado* (savory street carbs) I’d bought from a downtown vendor. I located the center tucked along a narrow city street just wide enough for one car to slip through at a time (Figure 23). Its location in Rio’s Centro district, I later learned, was strategic: designed to serve women across the city,<sup>5</sup> but also situated near Central train station such that women from the periphery could access it covertly on their way to and from work. Renovated and opened in 2000, the CIAM building itself was one of many Portuguese architectural relics in Centro, donning high ceilings, stone trim, and grand doorways; but it was poorly maintained. As Cristina ushered me upstairs into a sparsely furnished office, she joked that when “the Americans” from the US Consulate visited CIAM they were immediately concerned by the lack of emergency exits. Her laughter

seemed to suggest that emergency exits were the least of their worries. It wasn't until two years later that I started to understand why.

*Meeting #1*

In November 2021, two months after the salary cuts, I was invited to attend a meeting of the State Council for Women in Situations of Domestic and Family Violence (Coordenaria Estadual da Mulher em Situação de Violência Doméstica e Familiar - COEM). Linking the state legislative, judicial, and executive powers, the council held bi-monthly meetings to discuss the operations of the network, bringing together judges, social workers, psychologists, lawyers, policewomen, and the State Undersecretary for Women's Public Policy (Figure 24). Meetings like this one are critical to the functioning of the *integrated* network of services for women



**Figure 23** Graphic of relevant officials in the State Government of Rio de Janeiro, 2020-2022.

mandated by the Maria da Penha Law.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the fact that members of COEM share a common mandate does not guarantee that they share the same interests or commitments to women's services.

With people still trickling into the virtual meeting room, Carla—representing the State Public Prosecutor's Office (Ministério Público)—asked Cristina about the outlook at CIAM in the wake of the salary cuts. Before she could say much, Glória entered the meeting. A former judge herself, Glória Heloiza was nominated as Undersecretary for Women's Public Policy in 2020 by Governor Cláudio Castro following an unsuccessful bid for Mayor of Rio de Janeiro with the Social Christian Party.<sup>7</sup> She had no prior experience in the network or with women's services, not unlike most political appointees. Nevertheless, she stepped in to reassure the council.

“We aren't trying to get rid of anyone. We are just making a few modifications. The issue of salaries will be resolved soon. *Everything is fine*” (emphasis added).

Carla gently pressed Glória for more information, “has anyone quit since the salary cuts?”

“Everyone is getting paid.”

“But the amount has changed,” Elen, a domestic violence court judge, amended.

“This is a different issue,” replied Glória. She continued,

“I can't comment on this. I'm just the Undersecretary [of Women's Public Policy]. But I've been in touch with the [State] Secretary for Human Rights and we have come up with a plan. This issue [meaning the salary cuts] has already been resolved.” Growing defensive, she added, “It's bad to walk into a meeting without knowing what issues will be raised. I have limits. I'm not responsible for this. It's up to the directors of services to choose their teams.”

In a matter of seconds, the tone of the meeting shifted, and tensions rose. Various members of the council tried to interject.

Judge Elen spurned the idea that Glória was oblivious of the recent concerns of the network, “You haven’t been coming to COEM meetings. We’ve been talking about this. That is the point of these meetings. You are responsible to speak on behalf of the Secretary.”

Glória retorted, “This meeting is an invitation, not a summons. I wasn’t here because I had other meetings. My absences were justified.”

“We all have responsibilities,” Judge Elen responded.

“I was doing a lecture last time...” Glória set in again.

Judge Kat interrupted her. They shouted over one another for several seconds, before Judge Kat won some air space. “Everyone has meetings. Your presence is fundamental. We need you as a representative of the executive power. The point of this meeting is to talk about challenges. We are not trying to attack you; we just want to understand.”

Glória asserted, “I’ve always put myself in support of this network. When I am not present, it is because I have a [schedule] conflict.” She turned back to the issue of the salaries, emphasizing that it is not her responsibility if people decide to quit, they are “free to release themselves from duty.”

Moments later, Gloria’s phone rang. The ringtone was shrill as it refracted through the computer microphone. She performatively held up her phone so that it was in the frame of her webcam and declined the call, citing this as evidence of her commitment to this meeting: “See, I’m not going to answer this call because I am here with you.” She continued,

“Regarding salaries, we have a solution...”

Carla quickly retorts, “we are still trying to understand the problems. You are saying there is already a solution, but you don’t know the demands.”<sup>8</sup>

Glória responds,

We can’t compare 2021 to 2015 or 2016. The *handbook*<sup>9</sup> recommends eight people at CIAM, but this is a recommendation, not a requirement. The governor [Claudio Castro] is dedicating adequate funds to pay salaries and extra money for reforms. The governor cares about the network, but it can’t be done in a month. He is the first governor to care about this issue, the last governor [Wilson Witzel] didn’t care. This is the first undersecretary [for women].<sup>10</sup> I think CEAMs need cars and drivers, I’m working on this. *The problem is not political, it’s budgetary.* (Emphasis added)

Glória’s winding response was met with continued frustration and by the end of the two-hour meeting it seemed as though nothing had been clarified or resolved.<sup>11</sup> But one thing was for sure: there was a deepening rift between service professionals and the service administrators.

### *Meeting #2*

Two weeks after Glória’s contentious appearance at the COEM meeting, I was invited back. People were chatting light-heartedly as members entered the Google Meet for the second time that month. Judge Kat and Carla, from the Public Prosecutor’s Office, were discussing the possibility of an in-person gathering to celebrate the end of the year. They floated a few potential dates before Glória entered the virtual meeting room and the chitchat pattered out. To begin, Judge Kat asked four rapid-fire questions, “so what is going on with Cristina’s situation? What service teams are functioning? How many professionals are in each? How is the salary issue?” Glória asked if there were any other questions as she took notes. Carla replied, “I want to know the number of professionals and their salaries before and after the salary cuts, so we can know what happened. It’s not a complaint, just a request.”

“Let’s start with the most important question: salaries,” Glória began. “No service team did not receive their salaries. There was one resignation.” She spoke in vague terms and double

negatives about how the decision to cut salaries was made and asserted that she and the State Secretary for Human Rights were in “advanced conversations, but there was no date for the release of the new salary amount. It’s under analysis and soon this issue will be resolved.”

“So there is no guarantee the salaries will return to the previous amount?” Judge Kat confirmed. “People need money to live.”

“I don’t see a decrease in value. The financial crisis is not of today, it’s a long time coming,” Glória retorted, her tone warping into the same frustrated one we had all witnessed two weeks earlier.

Another judge from one of Rio’s specialized courts for domestic violence,<sup>12</sup> Renata, stepped in, “what is the rationale for the decrease in the salaries?”

“We’ve already heard this from the Secretary of Human Rights. They were forced to do this restructuring.” Glória explained. “Everyone is experiencing money issues, all of Brazil, all of the world. Workers have the right to resign if they want. I can’t say the new salaries will leave everyone satisfied. But it’s our job to guarantee the quality of services. And, despite the current difficulties, our teams have handled all the demand coming to them.”

The degree to which CIAM was “handling demand” was up for interpretation along with what “handling” looked like. To Cristina “handling demand” meant keeping the service open with over-worked staff, impossible hours, little pay even as CIAM had been shrinking and resources diminishing for nearly a decade. At its height, the service employed 30 social service and psychology professionals; by this point there were only eight remaining, including Cristina. Salaries barely cleared the poverty line, and the buildings were in desperate need of maintenance.

Despite these existential challenges, in both COEM meetings Glória was not only vague about the details of the salary cuts, but she was impersonal. She offered words of neither

sympathy nor solidarity as the professionals under her office grappled desperately with the sudden change in financial outlook. Yet, she was precise in one sense: her deflection of responsibility for the salary cuts impacting the network. In the first COEM meeting, she steadfastly resisted taking accountability, but not only did she direct responsibility away from herself and the state administration, “I have limits. I’m not responsible for this,” she did so by volleying responsibility back towards the network, “It’s up to the directors of services to choose their teams.” And after the second meeting, it became clear that this wasn’t an isolated instance, “everyone is experiencing money issues. [...] Workers can resign if they want.” In this way, Glória deflected responsibility *away* from her office and tactfully directed it *towards* women’s center directors, “financial crises,” and previous administrations. While on the surface it seemed as though Glória was indiscriminately pointing the finger at everyone but her office, there was an underlying logic to her strategy—whether she herself was aware or not. I take this up in the next section.

### **The Neoliberal Order of Disorder**

In my conversation with Cristina, she was acutely aware of her positioning—wedged between Glória and a far-right state administration that refused to take accountability for gender-specialized services, and the service professionals she oversaw and worked with at CIAM and the women who utilized the service. When I asked about the next steps for CIAM, in the middle of the uncertainty wrought by the salary cuts, Christina responded,

Tomorrow there is a team meeting. I think they [the professionals at CIAM] have the right to decide if they are going to continue in these absurd conditions or not. And I will be with them if they decide they don’t accept this new salary... I interpret the [salary] decrease as a very perverse attitude. They [the state administrators] decreased [the salaries] exactly to generate discomfort.

“What sort of discomfort do you mean?” I pressed Cristina.

“I mean...they know... the administrators know, that if the directors put pressure on their teams, in the hopes that we will be able to convince them to revert the situation [read salary cut], they will work.”

It was clear that Cristina was thinking through the power relations of the network and finding herself at a crossroads. She felt that the state *intentionally* put her in the position of having to a) force her team of colleagues to work under untenable (and continuously worsening) conditions or b) close the service indefinitely. She felt herself pinned between a state that was not serious in its commitment to addressing violence against women and a legitimate and urgent need for gender-specialized services. By trapping service directors in this political corner, administrators wash their hands of the fallout. If people resign, it’s because the service director failed. If the service closes, it’s because the service was weak or dysfunctional. In separate conversations in August 2019 and October 2021, she expressed doubt that CIAM would continue to exist: “I don’t know if tomorrow we close.”

The more I thought about the COEM Meeting and Glória’s assertion that “everything is fine,” relative to Cristina’s experience of near institutional abandonment, I began to think of the disfunction of the network, not as a form of disorder, but as an order in and of itself.<sup>13</sup> Drawing on the work of French philosopher Henri Bergson, Kathleen Millar writes that “there is no such thing as disorder but only order configured differently” (2018, 136). What would thinking about the disfunction of CIAM not as a deviation from some imagined state of equilibrium reveal? How might we begin to make sense of the possibility that different stakeholders have different ideas about what the network does and should do, and what success looks like? How might investigating the order of disorder distill meaning about power within the network and the logics of the state?

Together, Glória and the state of Rio de Janeiro's efforts to divert funding, restructure, and undercut public services for women, all while blaming service professionals, reflect a distinctly neoliberal political-economic strategy. Neoliberalism—an economic doctrine that has profoundly impacted Latin America since the early 1990s—is primarily characterized by the divestment of state funds from public institutions, the unleashing of the “free market,” and the privatization of social services “justified by limits on public spending” (Saad-Filho 2020, 23). Women's centers are increasingly vulnerable to this playbook. Indeed, neighboring São Paulo initiated an effort to privatize its three public women's centers in 2021, claiming that under new leadership they could expand services teams and renovate buildings.<sup>14</sup> While the city went so far as to post a call for bids, the effort did not materialize, in large part due to the mobilization of a coalition of women's movements against the initiative.<sup>15</sup>

Not unlike the women of São Paulo, Cristina and her team held the line at CIAM, as the state whittled away at their resources. As one feminist activist in Rio de Janeiro put it “our network of services for women is tireless. It is a shining star in our country. They [service professionals] are really dedicated people. They [the state] can only destroy this, if they destroy the people.” The case of Cristina and CIAM is evidence of this. Glória and the state aren't targeting the network directly, but the workers that deliver services within the network—without whom the network topples. In other words, they aren't eliminating services outright, instead they are hollowing them out by making the working conditions untenable, by cutting salaries and waiting for workers to quit. The situation Cristina found herself in was a prime example of the ways in which neoliberal politics radiate through state institutions and the ways in which these institutions—comprised of *people*—are entwined in struggles for resources and support.

Moreover, neoliberalism is not only characterized by economic policy, rather it “also promotes a reorganization of ‘political society’ along the lines of decentralization, trimming down of the state, affirming basic human rights, and calling for minimally functional democracies” (Hale 2005, 12). In his research with indigenous communities in Central America, Charles Hale finds that neoliberal states often foster a “counterintuitive” rights-granting ethos, as they maintain control “not by denying rights but rather by granting them, as long as they maintain the prerogative to set standards [...] associated with these rights” (2005, 19). This approach allows states to oversee the selective incorporation of demands, infusing them with neoliberal, capitalist logics that preserve unequal hierarchies and structures while claiming to address them (Merry 2006; Speed 2006). This dynamic has proven particularly problematic for institutions that are supposed to protect and support women (Beck and Stephen 2021).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, despite having passed the Maria da Penha Law and signed on to various women’s human rights accords, Brazilian administrators at the federal and state levels continue to act in ways that directly undermine these commitments.

To think in terms of the order of disorder reveals the ways in which the precarity of the network of gender-specialized services is not natural or inevitable. It pushes back on the common assumption that public services are fragile or ineffective *because* they are public (Wilding 2012), as though this is some inherent quality of the services themselves and not a result of human decisions and political projects, such as those filtering through Glória and landing on Cristina. It is an entry point for a deeper examination of *why* and *how* dysfunctional public services come to be, and it holds space for the reality that, like order and even in tandem with order, disorder can be orchestrated to the benefit of some and detriment of others. In the next section, I turn to a deeper analysis of how the state undermines women’s services in the

advancement of this neoliberal political project. I examine four distinct, yet interconnected patterns that emerge, including a) the systemic divestment from women's centers—including the ways in the neoliberal politics of dismantling women's centers occur through the budget, not around it, b) co-opting women's services, and c) conservative backlash and the destabilizing of legislation aimed at addressing violence against women.

### **Dismantling Women's Centers: Conflict Between Service Administrators and Professionals**

In the month of October 2021, it rained 28 out of 31 days. The rainfall was so incessant that water stagnated on low-lying street corners for weeks. When the ground remained saturated for extended periods of time, mudslides posed a serious threat in a mountainous landscape like Rio de Janeiro.<sup>17</sup> The Saturday night *roda de samba* in the square near my apartment—where people gathered together to play and dance samba—had been cancelled three weeks in a row and the city felt quiet, uneasy.

I remember the day I met Helena Piragibe because it was one of the three sunny days in October. Now in her mid-sixties, Helena is a powerful feminist icon in Rio de Janeiro having organized various campaigns for women's rights in her over 30 years of activism, including the passing of the Maria da Penha Law. Today, she is a national coordinator of one of Brazil's most historical feminist groups, the Brazilian Women's Union (União Brasileira de Mulheres - UBM) and the Treasurer of the State Council for Women's Rights (Conselho Estadual dos Direitos da Mulher - CEDIM). It was on this sunny October day that she helped me to understand why many felt that the salary cuts were more than an isolated budgetary injury to the network; why these cuts registered among service professionals as part of a systemic, political "dismantling" of the network.

*The Political Economy of Gender-Specialized Services*

In the COEM meeting, Glória assured the network that “the issue [of the salary cuts was] not political, it [was] budgetary.” She insisted that the governor supported the network and that these “adjustments” would not affect the Castro administration’s commitment to these services. Yet, Glória’s efforts to *depoliticize* the network, through statements like this, left the opposite impression. Indeed, to detach the budget from the politics of the network obscures the many ways that they are closely intertwined with larger efforts to undermine the very services that the state is supposed to provide.

“Look at you!” Helena remarked as I enabled my Zoom camera. “You’re so young!” I had gotten this comment before and it always made me feel self-conscious, aggravating the ever-present imposter syndrome of a perennial grad student. I smiled and thanked her for taking the time to meet with me and she explained that she preferred to keep her camera off because she “wasn’t looking her best.”

“How are you today?” I inquired.

“We’re always busy, *né?*”

“*Então,*” Helena began reflecting on the years between 2000 and 2014, during which President Luíz Inácio Lula da Silva—known colloquially as Lula—and his political protégé Dilma Rousseff were in office. Representing Brazil’s Worker’s Party (PT), Lula was a populist who rose to prominence as a union organizer in the 1980s and 1990s, and Dilma, a figure known for having been jailed and tortured during the Brazilian military dictatorship in the early 1970s. This period, Helena explained, was positive and productive in terms of investment in public policies: “We had moments here in Lula’s government in which there were many [social, cultural, and economic] projects. There was a great incentive to create specialized women’s

centers.” And they did. On March 8, 2000, Rio de Janeiro inaugurated its first public women’s center to commemorate International Women’s Day: The Integrated Center for Women’s Services—CIAM (Figure 25).<sup>18</sup> With the passing of the Maria da Penha Law in 2006, Brazil set out to expand and integrate its services for women in situations of violence.

At this point, Helena turned on her camera. Sitting in front of a window, the backlighting from the sun beamed through the fringes of her short, jet-black hair.

Indeed, the early 2010s was a period during which federal investment in public policies was high (Cardozo and Martins 2020). Under the Lula administration—Brazil saw the development of various social assistance “projects” aimed at eliminating extreme poverty and



**Figure 24** Newspaper article from O Globo documenting the inauguration of CIAM in 2000. The headline reads, "new weapon against violence." Source: CEDIM Archive.

addressing inequalities based on race,<sup>19</sup> class, and gender. Lula adopted domestic economic policies which expanded social security, instituted *Bolsa Família*—a direct cash-transfer to families living below the poverty line—and increased the minimum wage by 67 percent between 2003 and 2010 (Morais and Saad-Filho 2011, 35). He appointed highly experienced ministers to his cabinet, including Nilcéa Freire to National Secretary for Women’s Policy. Freire was instrumental in passing the Maria de Penha Law, and she prioritized funding for women’s services and oversaw the creation of the domestic violence crisis hotline “180.”<sup>20</sup>

Yet, this moment of political possibility did not last. Helena contends that the current “dismantling” of the network began with the impeachment of Dilma, in what she refers to as a “coup:” “So, there were many employees [in the network] until 2014, with that... that coup. Then, as the state began to break down, it also began to fall into a very complex, very problematic situation. [...] They started to take away from healthcare and carry out political reform, [and] worker’s reform.”

Helena paused and directed her attention to something in the room where she sat. She bent down and lifted a small terrier into the picture. “The whole time we’ve been talking she’s been scratching at my leg to get my attention.” She carefully placed her dog on her lap and continued, “so we entered a complex situation. And then from there to here, from 2014 to here, it’s been...you’ve seen Emily. I don’t even like to talk about it because it hurts a lot. It’s painful for us all. Because it’s been a broad dismantling.” Helena’s interpretation of the political circumstances surrounding this “complex situation” is common. Many veteran feminists feel that the removal of Dilma<sup>21</sup> marked the end of the peak years for the network. In an interview with Edna Calheiros, a colleague of Helena and coordinator of CEDIM, she too asserts that the “dismantling began on the national level with the impeachment of Dilma.”

The two events—Dilma’s impeachment and the start of the decline in support for services—did roughly coincide, yet economists are quick to point out that in 2015 Brazil entered a recession (Cardozo and Martins 2020). As it turned out, Lula’s popular anti-poverty measures were one small piece of a broader economic agenda, which Millar has described as “neodevelopmentalist” (Millar 2018; Boito and Berringer 2014). During his tenure, Lula had prioritized economic development through macroeconomic policies that focused on exports. When the global prices of exports fell, so too did Brazil’s economy. This economic downturn generated a political crisis that eventually gave way to the 2015 impeachment of then President Dilma Rousseff. She was succeeded by then vice-president Michel Temer<sup>22</sup> who served for the 2 years leading up to the 2018 election of Jair Bolsonaro. To many, including Helena and Edna, the impeachment of Dilma seemed to represent a symbolic ending as much as a concrete one. It marked the end of the Worker’s Party, ensnared in political scandal,<sup>23</sup> and the start of what many political scientists have referred to as a conservative backlash movement (Hunter and Power 2019), during which investment in public services has plummeted.

For Helena, the fall of the Worker’s Party in Brazil also signaled the start of what she describes as a “painful” and “complex” period of coping with the loss of the hard-won gains that feminists had achieved in the decades prior. This political and economic instability has meant that for the network of services, especially women’s centers, the future became increasingly unclear. Helena narrates,

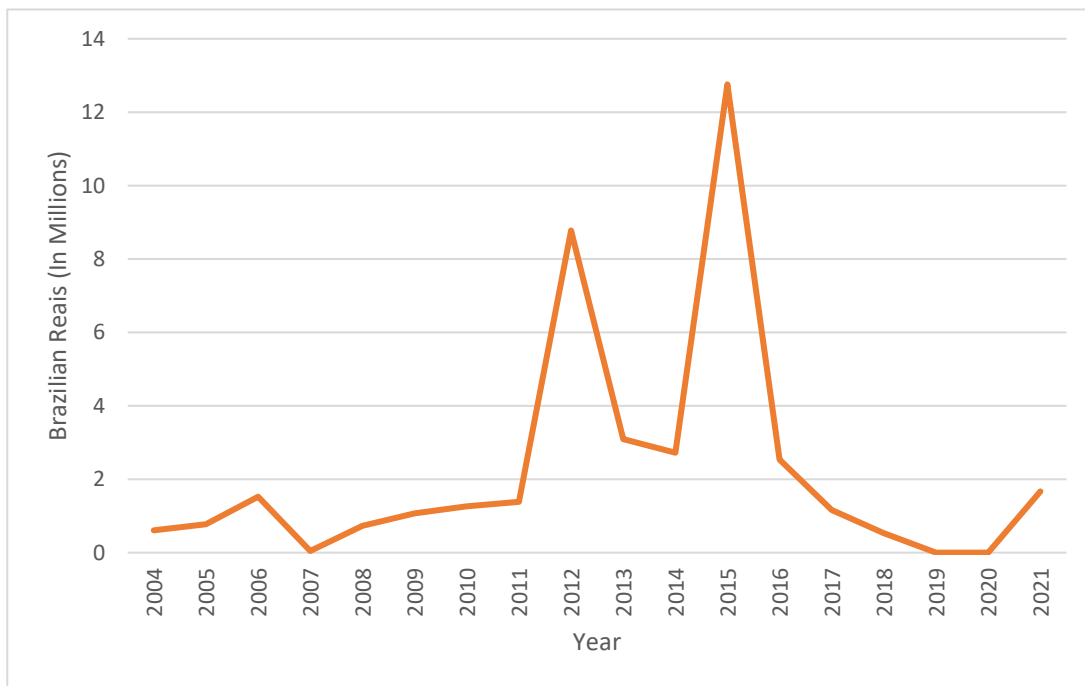
Each one [government administration] that comes in, removes employees. Removes them from where? Specialized women's centers. Because they are ‘useless,’ you know. They [women’s centers] *only* serve the public. Then they [politicians] want to create policies for women, [...] but what is the state policy. There is no state policy when you don't have funds in the budget allocation. There's no budget, we don't have a budget, and when there *is* a budget, they skim funds in such a way that we can't get it [the money]. [...] Where is the money? Where did it go?

Here Helena specifically identifies women's centers as the site in which the "dismantling" of the network is occurring. She attributes their vulnerability to the fact that they are a "public"—read social—service. In Brazil, the designation "public" carries gendered, classed, and racialized connotations about user constituencies (Wilding 2012). Indeed, years of fluctuating investment has created the impression that public services are inefficient, and of lower quality than private services (2012). This impression informs many middle- and upper-class Brazilians decisions to pay for private healthcare rather than using free care in public medical centers, for example, or to enroll their children in private schools instead of sending their children to public primary and secondary schools. As such, public services have come to signify services for the poor, who cannot afford the private alternative. And in Brazil poverty is highly racialized and gendered. In this sense, women's centers can be differentiated from other pieces of the network, such as the judicial apparatus or the police, that are not defined by their "publicness" in the same way. They are public, social services, which makes them, in the words of Helena, "useless."

Further, for Helena, the politics of "dismantling" the network are intimately tied to the politics of the state budget. She points out that state policies on violence against women cannot exist unless there is a budget to support these activities and Helena's question about where the money went is a reasonable one. As the federal government descended into political turmoil, the state government of Rio de Janeiro was embroiled in its own interrelated, yet distinct political crisis. With few exceptions, the governorship of Rio de Janeiro has been the site of deep-rooted financial corruption since the turn of the century. Of the six governors elected to the office since 2002, four have been publicly condemned for corruption and the current governor is under investigation for money laundering and operating a "shadow budget."<sup>24</sup> This political volatility

has in turn generated its own financial peril. I am reminded of Glória’s attempt to quell concerns by stating that “everyone is getting paid.” Such an assurance would be unnecessary, if not for the very real possibility that everyone could *not* get paid. Edna remembers a period of three months in which public employees were not paid under the former governor Luiz Fernando Pezão. And more recently public workers went another three months—from January through March—without pay as the budget expired and the network was restructured.

Despite Glória’s attempts to convince the network that the salary reduction was “not political, [but] budgetary,” Helena wasn’t convinced. In the state of Rio de Janeiro, nearly R\$12 million was allocated to services for women in the 2021 budget—R\$5 million of which was destined for a State Fund for Women’s Rights that the network could use at its discretion. These allocations were thought to be a victory among many service providers in the network. Yet, by the end of 2021, only R\$1.7 million or 14 percent of the budget was spent on services for



**Figure 25** Graph of State spending on social programs for women in situations of violence in Rio de Janeiro, 2004-2021. Data source: Relatórios das Ações Realizadas – Sefaz-RJ

women, and the State Fund, which was supposed to receive \$5 million, went entirely unfunded. Given the recent history of corruption in the Rio state government, people like Helena are closely attentive to the “disappearance” of such funds. While they may never know where this money went, professionals and allies of the network are deeply concerned that the money did *not* go to women’s services, as promised.

To make matters worse, at the federal level, the tenure of Damares Alves as Minister of Women, Family and Human Rights (2019-2022) saw the budget for public policies to combat violence against women slashed by 94 percent—from R\$367 million to R\$23 million.<sup>25</sup> Damares, an evangelical pastor and staunch supporter of Brazil’s far-right “anti-gender” culture war, was nominated by Jair Bolsonaro to oversee the newly restructured Ministry of Women, Families, and Human Rights<sup>26</sup> and over four years shut down the only federal women’s center—Casa da Mulher Brasileira—and undermined the very idea that domestic violence was in fact a crime (Ladeira 2022; Bohn 2022). Many like Helena postulate that budget cuts constitute a purposeful and political display of power; an act that calls the government’s commitment to women’s services into question. The precarity of the budget—both at the federal and state levels—led Helena to conclude, that “there is a policy that is underway here in Brazil of destroying public policy. [...] This here,” she concluded, “is a laboratory.”

#### *A Political Trampoline: Coopting Gender-Specialized Services*

As the first COEM meeting intensified, I received a series of WhatsApp messages. I glanced down at my phone. They were from Cristina. “Don’t waste your time with this undersecretary,” she wrote, “COEM is so much more than this.” And followed up with the statement, “Glória is campaigning for next year.” With the 2022 elections nearing, Glória had recently declared that she would be running for the position of state senator (Deputada Federal).

Cristina wasn't the only one to notice a change in her tone. In the COEM meeting, Glória touted the accomplishments of the network, promising to find funds to purchase an official car for CIAM, claiming that the services are operating effectively, and making plugs for two new women's centers that would be opening soon in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro. In the same meeting that professionals in the network were denouncing salary cuts, Glória claimed things were going great.

A few months after the November COEM meeting, I sat down with Judge Kat to discuss the impacts of prospective politicians acting within the network. She explained,

We've had [under]secretaries, and today we have an [under]secretary [referring to Glória] who doesn't understand the network...they want to be in that position...they are political positions, defended by [political] parties. They want to be in these positions just so they can win votes for future elections. In other words, the position works as a political platform.

So, this causes a great deal of harm... She monopolizes the meeting. You know what happened... After she joined, after she became undersecretary, our network lost strength. It lost a lot. Why? Because she enters the meeting, she doesn't let us talk, she monopolizes, and she... is a difficult factor...

Here Judge Kat suggests that not only do prospective politicians use the position to their own benefit, but that it is to the detriment of the network. She asserts that the network "lost strength" during Glória's tenure.

I was struck by the vulnerability of the network to this type of politics. It was, after all, this way by design. So long as the network is structured the way, such that political appointees administer services,<sup>27</sup> is it not necessarily politicized? Judge Kat responded,

Yes, that's one thing that we try to separate a little bit. In some meetings, she [Glória] joined. But in some meetings at the beginning, we didn't invite the politicians, only the employees. [...] And then when they [the political figures] appeared, the employees did not speak. Ideally everyone would be there, but really it hasn't been this way. And you saw it and you yourself realized in that moment how difficult it is. She talks from the top down. So, if a person there opens their mouth, she will punish [them]. If she is there, we will never know what is going on [with the network]...

Here Judge Kat describes “separating” political administrators from the meetings so that employees have space to speak without retaliation or resistance. In this way, she and the other professionals in the network have resorted to informal strategies and channels of communication—through separate meetings and WhatsApp chat groups—to insulate the network from partisan politics and adjust for the inherent conflict of interest they perceive in political appointees overseeing public services. In the words of Diego, the archivist at CEDIM, these roles are in effect “political trampolines”—serving to launch prospective politicians into their careers. Such politically driven figures stand to benefit from the power to drive how the policy and related institutions are perceived.

The network of gender-specialized services is generally recognized by national and international policymakers and service professionals alike as a successful strategy for delivering differentiated care to women in situations of violence. It is the fruit of an innovative public policy framework set for by the Maria da Penha Law and a source of pride for many feminists around the country. Yet, policies gain a public life that can become untethered from the reality or experience of the policy. In *Complaint!*, Ahmed finds that in some cases people stand to benefit from the *appearance* of compliance and commitment to policies and regulations, whether they deliver on it (2021). To be sure, in the case of women’s services in Brazil there is much to be gained by preserving the appearance of compliance; by coopting the network. According to Sandra Morgen, “the process of cooptation involve[s] both direct and indirect pressures by powerful state forces, and accommodation and resistance to those forces by [those] who [seek] to maintain their oppositional organizations” (Morgen 2002, 166). In other words, cooptation is a process that involves conflict between two or more groups of differently positioned political actors with uneven access to power. Cristina was open about her concern for women’s services

under conservative administrations at the national and state level, affirming politicians “run things, even though they aren’t qualified.” Indeed, one cannot understand the network without accounting for the ways in which stakeholders hold varying degrees of power over the network that are not necessarily a reflection of their qualifications or a commitment in the wellbeing of the network or women.

The use of the position of Undersecretary to kickstart a political career is one of the most obvious ways in which the network is coopted. But it is not the only one. Cooptation occurs when the state selectively blames directors, like Cristina, for challenges keeping up with demand. Or when figures like Glória or Castro take credit for the work of women’s centers. In fact, one of Cristina’s original critiques of the network was that politicians cut the budget and restructure, but when a grave case of violence occurs or when the yearly violence report (*Dossiê Mulher*) is published and rates have increased, they performatively support the network.

Another more subtle form of cooptation occurs when the state leverages funds (or a lack thereof) to constrain the work of women’s centers and to selectively fund some activities over others (Morgen 2002). For example, since 2019, the state of Rio de Janeiro has invested in a new police force known as the Maria da Penha Patrol. This initiative was designed to increase access to the Maria da Penha Law by broadening the reach of women’s police stations and extending protection to women whose restraining orders were violated. While the Maria da Penha Patrol has undoubtedly provided aid and security to many women in Rio de Janeiro (Macaulay 2022), it signals a return to the reliance on and investment in police to intervene in the issue of violence against women. Indeed, for nearly two decades, prior to the creation of CIAM, women’s police functioned as the primary gender-specialized service for women in situations of violence (MacDowell Santos 2005).<sup>28</sup> With police at the helm, policies for women were constructed based

on logics of public security and punishment<sup>29</sup> and, while reporting did increase, there were serious limitations to inserting women's services into the repressive arm of the state—particularly questions of unequal access to protections and rights (Santos; Hautzinger). There were few alternative avenues for recourse until the gradual emergence of women's centers in the 2000s, including CIAM. In short, women's centers were created to fill a critical gap in services for women in situations of violence; women's police alone were not enough. Yet, the expansion of policing programs—even gender-specialized ones—is touted as an advancement for the network. This might be so, if not for the fact that while funding for police is increasing, that for women's centers is plummeting.<sup>30</sup> In response to this pattern, Cristina said, “they must be on some really good drugs if they think that [the Maria da Penha Patrol] is going to work.”

Ultimately, in the context of Rio de Janeiro, conservative figures who co-opt the network to ascend the political ladder, like Glória, often go on to represent Brazil's growing “anti-gender” culture war. Indeed, the divestiture and cooptation of women's centers is occurring against a backdrop of conservative backlash that has spanned the last decade in Brazil.

### *Conservative Backlash: Gender Ideology and Political Violence*

Over the last decade, countries across Latin America have rejected the promises of liberalism and relapsed into neoliberal conservatism (Enríquez and Page 2018). In this process, gender and gender politics have become a key site of political division. Conservatives across the region—including in Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Brazil—have converged around the idea of “gender ideology” to advance their political projects. And their interests are not simply to squash liberal policy (i.e. abortion, recognition and protections for LGBTQIA+ people, etc), but to install a regressive order of their own. Indeed,

One defining feature of the gender backlash in Latin America is that it promotes alternative framings for rights and gender relations. In fact, the challenges raised by these

groups have open-ended political consequences, since they seek to delegitimize a basic foundation of national and international policies since the 1990s: that gender is a social constructed constellation of structures and meanings that create hierarchies and power inequalities. (Biroli and Caminotti 2020, 2)

In the Brazilian context, under President Jair Bolsonaro, legislatures at the federal, state, and municipal levels have systematically stripped any mentions of “gender” from public policy agendas (Biroli 2016). In an interview with Renata Souza, a member of the state legislature for PSOL, she emphasized that

In the formulation of laws, all the projects that we [legislators] present with gendered terms are amended so that they become sex. *Todos todos todos todos todos*. They [conservatives] don't want any bill to address the gender debate. It is a complete setback from what we had socially accumulated until today, to recognize the gender debate is fundamental for us to reduce gender violence.

In a politically conservative city, like Rio de Janeiro, leftist resistance to this agenda is ever-present, but unable to contend with the conservative majority.<sup>31</sup> In the months since I spoke to Helena, Brazil held one of the most anticipated presidential elections in the country's history between former president Lula and right-wing incumbent Jair Bolsonaro. Closely watched around the world, this election was thought to be a referendum on Bolsonaro's brand of far-right conservatism. Thus, when Lula won by almost 2 points, hope was restored for many Brazilians on the left who, like Helena and Edna, felt deeply troubled by the direction Bolsonaro had taken the country. However, despite the relief that came with the defeat of Bolsonaro, the results of the election did not bode well for the defeat of what scholars have termed “Bolsonarism” (Leandro Pereira Gonçalves 2022; Chaguri and Amaral 2023). While Lula took the presidency, Bolsonaro's Liberal Party (PL) won 99 seats in Brazil's lower chamber of Congress (comprised of 513 members),<sup>32</sup> up from 77, and along with their conservative allies now control over half the chamber.

Unlike the mixed outcomes at the national level, the state of Rio de Janeiro proved unwavering in its support for Bolsonaro, who won his home state by 11 points. Conservatives across the board secured critical victories. Cláudio Castro, member of the Social Christian Party (PSC), was re-elected governor of Rio de Janeiro in a landslide, first-round victory<sup>33</sup> over leftist, PSOL candidate Marcelo Freixo. And Bolsonaro's Liberal Party won 11 seats in Rio's 46-member lower chamber, making PL the most represented party in Rio de Janeiro. In sum, despite Lula's victory, the political scenario in Rio de Janeiro continues to deteriorate and for professionals in gender-specialized services relief is nowhere in sight.

In this environment, the Maria da Penha Law, Brazil's foremost piece of gender legislation in Brazil, has been targeted since its creation and, with rampant political violence, those who defend it risk their own safety.<sup>34</sup> In 2012, the constitutionality of Maria da Penha Law was called into question by conservatives who alleged that gender-specific legislation is discriminatory towards men. The case rose to Brazil's Supreme Court and was ultimately ruled constitutional (Avila 2018). Unable to eliminate the law completely, conservatives moved to pass amendments to weaken its measures. As I write this dissertation, there are more than 200 bills in the National Congress to modify the Maria da Penha Law. Despite clear indications that the denúncia and the criminal justice pathway is not one that many women opt to follow,<sup>35</sup> "almost all of them are projects that focus a lot on *increasing* the penalty [for domestic violence offenses], but do not pay attention to improving the service network" (Mota, personal communication, 2022). According to Adriana Mota, an activist and former Undersecretary for Public Policies for Women in Rio de Janeiro, asserts

Here there is a very large focus on the following idea: if the penalties were greater, if the penalties were stricter, we would finally be able to reduce crimes. [...] In the Maria da Penha Law, we have dedicated a lot of time to [...] considering some arguments of anti-punitivist feminism by understanding that the Maria da Penha Law is not a law that only

deals with the criminal issue, which will imprison men, but it is also a law that has educational components, access to justice components, reparation components that are important.

The emphasis on criminalizing domestic violence and the “focus” on penalties has cascading effects that register at multiple scales. At the individual and community level, the emphasis on punishment has the effect of deterring many women from accessing the Maria da Penha Law.

This emphasis also carves out women’s centers are sites of care and transfers power to police and judicial spaces which are closely tied into conservative political circles.

In the next section, I will turn my attention back to CIAM, Rio de Janeiro’s state women’s center, as a concrete example of what happens when state and federal administrations divest from, coopt, and destabilize public services.

### **When Cockroaches Fly: The Impacts of the Salary Cuts on CIAM**

While the unannounced salary reduction was a breaking point for CIAM, the reality was that the network of gender-specialized services—and women’s centers in particular—had long struggled with mounting political resistance and financial constraints. Together, the compounding effects of years of budget cuts, cooptation, and direct political resistance had produced several outcomes that were fundamentally compromising the work of CIAM, and the network of gender-specialized services writ large. In the following section, I will examine how these dynamics have resulted in dedicated, yet frustrated service professionals and variation and imbalances across services, which together fuel the perception that women’s centers—and by extension the network as a whole—don’t work (Campos 2015; Ávila 2018).

#### *Dedicated, Frustrated Service Professionals*

For Cristina and other service professionals working in the network of gender-specialized services, the precarious state of women’s centers was the source of social and emotional distress.

Unlike service administrators, like Glória, service professionals are the people, who Lipsky (1983) would refer to as “street-level bureaucrats,” who work with service seekers on the “front line” of care for women in situations of violence. Like Cristina, these workers are highly qualified and experienced professionals who work directly with service seekers, as well as carry out day-to-day administrative tasks within services. As such, their perspectives on services are informed by their relationships with service administrators *and* the women they are designed to serve. While administrators rarely (if ever) interface with the clients of the services they oversee, professionals deliver social services on a daily basis. As advocates, they form relationships with women and witness firsthand how their service makes a difference in their lives. This proximity raises the stakes when services are undercut and defunded, as professionals not only have to grapple with the implications for the service but also for the people it serves. Indeed, Cristina said as much when she was processing the significance of the salary cuts, which she felt reflected a “...disrespect for professionals, women professionals, women citizens” *and* a “disrespect for the history of this service.”

As a result of this social and moral commitment to services for women, service professionals are forced to take it upon themselves to fill in the gaps when the state forgoes support. In various interviews, I learned of service professionals buying supplies with their own money, working multiple jobs to get by, and struggling emotionally with the stress of being overworked, underpaid. Not only that, but the COVID-19 pandemic was a period of near insurmountable pressure on CIAM and services like it. While Cristina and her team had learned to cope with the precarity of social work in “normal times,” the chasm in commitment to the service that existed between her team and service administrators made adapting to their new reality a monumental challenge.

According to Cristina, as the demand for services spiked—“many women just needed someone to talk to”—the operations of the center were strained and further fragmented as they tried to pivot from in-person to remote services. The state did not provide them with the technology, adequate personal protective equipment, or logistical support to do this; Cristina was on her own. She and her team tested and refined a methodology for providing remote support for women, “but there was so much pressure [...] it was it was something that demanded so much effort.” Cristina described using her personal cellphone to hold sessions with women, because the state refused to provide an alternative. “The phone rang at one in the morning, Saturday, Sunday, the phone rang.” Essentially on call 24/7 for a year, she recalls “I’ve never worked so much in my life.” In one short phrase, she described her experience as director of CIAM during the pandemic: “*a barata voa.*” Roughly translating to “the cockroach flies,” she used the phrase to depict the disorder of the network and CIAM during this period—“when the cockroach flies, no one knows where to run.”

Having exerted herself to her limit during the height of the pandemic, the salary cuts were emotionally devastating to Cristina. “If I talk about it, I’ll cry,” she once told me. Cristina was not the only service professional to struggle emotionally with the volatility of the politics of women’s services. In a conversation with Adriana, a social worker at a women’s center, about the politicization of gender and the state of gender-specialized services, she admitted, “Shame is one of the feelings I have. I feel stunned.” She shared that she and her colleagues are all in therapy to help cope with the challenges of working in such an environment; “It’s not easy to be okay,”<sup>36</sup> she confirmed. Another social worker, Emmanuelle, used the word “devastating” to describe the dismantling of women’s centers.

Part of what made the situation so “shameful” and “devastating” was fact that if the center was too close, women would go unserved. When Cristina met with her team in the immediate days following the salary cuts, this was at the center of the discussion. She explains that when they found out about the cuts, she called a meeting to find out how the team would proceed. “It was a Friday night, and I said if you want, we won’t open our doors on Monday. And ...this is where I get emotional...they said, ‘But it’s not the women’s fault. There are people who need care, and many scheduled to come in. How can we just simply close the doors. They [women] will pay the bus fare and get here and we won’t be there...’” Professionals felt that they owed it to women to stay open even as working conditions at CIAM deteriorated. They felt that the care they provided women was critical, and without it women would suffer. With the stakes so high, professionals felt they were in the position of having to choose between their own wellbeing and that of the women they served.

However, the idea that they had a choice at all was an illusion. While they might have been able to cobble together enough resources to care for some women, CIAM simply could not sustain itself under the new conditions. In effect, the salary cuts were instated to *produce* the illusion of choice—to stay open or close. In other words, the bind in which the professionals at CIAM found themselves was not inevitable; it was manufactured. In this way, the salary cuts were producing vulnerability not only for women who depended on the service to escape situations of violence, but also on the workers who provided the service. They were designed to push CIAM to the breaking point and to test how far service professionals would go to preserve it.

This dilemma left social workers at women’s centers, like Emmanuelle, Cristina, and Adriana, in a state of heightened secondary trauma. This concept of secondary trauma is

typically used to describe the mental and physical toll of working with trauma survivors— hearing their stories of violence and providing life-saving care (Ellis and Knight 2018). More recently, the idea of secondary trauma has also been used to capture the struggle of social workers to effectively deliver services during the pandemic (M. R. Holmes et al. 2021). On top of this, workers in Rio de Janeiro’s women’s centers were in the crosshairs of a political battle over which they had no control. Together these dynamics left social workers overwhelmed with personal traumas in the form of burn out, precarious working conditions, and mental health, along with the collective trauma of not being able to provide desperately needed care.

#### *Variation Across Women’s Centers*

While CIAM was confronting a moment of existential significance for their service, not every service in the network was struggling. This has to do with the way in which the network came to be. While CIAM and other services for women existed before the Maria da Penha Law, the real strength of the law was thought to be in its creation of a network of *integrated* services for women in situations of violence. Indeed, before the Maria da Penha Law services did not communicate between each other, meaning that women had to identify and seek out each individual service on her own. Once integrated, however, each service would flow into the other and professionals would support women by providing access to an entire network of services (legal, psychological, social care, etc.). While this restructuring did remove many barriers to justice and care for women seeking support, it also meant that professionals across branches of government and with ranging degrees of power were expected to work together to provide services. In the process, differently situated professionals exercise uneven amounts of power as they interpret the Maria da Penha Law and negotiate what constitutes violence against women, what support for women looks like, and how and when it is delivered. Further, not all services

are equally vulnerable to the budgetary manipulation, cooptation, and anti-gender politics that were plaguing CIAM. Meaning that even a similarly situated professional in an analogous service might have more or less power depending on access to funding among other factors.

In practice, there is a fair amount of variation in terms of financial outlook and autonomy across Rio de Janeiro's four state women's center. Indeed, CIAM Márcia Lyra is not the only women's center in the city of Rio de Janeiro. There are three other centers that comprise the primary social services of the network in the city—two operated by the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and one operated by the municipal government of Rio de Janeiro—each with their own financial outlook.

CEAM Chiquinha Gonzaga, the municipal center, is located just a few miles from CIAM Márcia Lyra. Yet, the situation is quite different. Adriana, a social worker at one of UFRJ's two women's center explains it this way:

The state center [CIAM] is going through a situation of dismantling—professionals being dismissed, contracts ending... There is no one to replace them. Delayed salary, cut salary. I even consider myself privileged because I come from a federal center [CRM-SSA at UFRJ], so we don't run the risk, when there's someone being cut, of being fired. This isn't a thing. But in the centers of Rio this happens. The municipal center [CEAM] is in good condition. They have a whole team of lawyers, psychologists, social workers. We don't have a lawyer in ours, but we rely on the network. Those in the municipality have a nice structure and such. But the state has very bad problems and is in a very bad moment.

Indeed, in the COEM meeting, the director of Rio's municipal women's center, CEAM Chiquinha Gonzaga, Rosangela was excited about finally having funds to install Wi-Fi in the building, after many years of deteriorating infrastructure. "This is one of the best moments in the municipal center. We are serving women with quality," she asserted. The optimism in Rosangela's voice was such a sharp departure from the general sense of frustration and despair about the salary cuts at CIAM. Indeed, the municipal government has been experiencing a resurgence of investment in social services as part of Mayor Eduardo Paes' mission to "revitalize

Centro.” Yet, while funds had become available, the sporadic nature of this funding means that CEAM Chiquinha Gonzaga cannot depend on steady investment in their service.

The two centers at UFRJ are financed through the university budget and thus are a degree removed from the gender politics of the state and municipal centers. The two centers are located in the North Zone, one on Ilha do Fundão on the campus of UFRJ and the other in Parque União in the favela complex known as Maré. These semi-autonomous centers are overseen by social service professionals in close partnership with the College of Social Services, where their connection to a larger institution provides a buffer from the rest of the network and affords them access to otherwise exclusive infrastructure and resources. Professionals at URFJ recognize that their circumstances are different than those of their counterparts in government women’s centers. There is a higher level of stability and less interference from political administrators. Because of their location they serve women from more diverse socioeconomic, racial, and territorial backgrounds. This is not to suggest that these centers are not also vulnerable. Public universities have been targeted in recent years with massive budget cuts, and when the university suffers so do these women’s centers. Ultimately, this variation evidences the degree to which state investment determines the efficacy of the service.

#### *Power Imbalances within the Network*

Cristina is among the network’s most experienced professionals, but at the COEM meeting she and the other women’s center directors hardly spoke. Rather, as Glória deflected responsibility for the salary cuts, Judge Kat and other specialized court judges stepped in on Cristina’s behalf. While the COEM meeting made it seem as though the professionals in the network were united, the reality was this was a circumstantial alliance born of mutual concern for the future of the network they comprised. This situational allyship illustrates that the interests

or commitments of state actors vary across time and context. And while the network was collectively pushing back on the CIAM salary cuts, there were other moments in which they were not as aligned. The differential struggles and vulnerabilities across services in the network of gender-specialized services sometimes produced tension between professionals themselves. What emerges is a picture of the state as what Beck would term a “patchwork” (2021), wherein agencies rarely act in concert, rather they form a patchwork of allyship and resistance.

This tension was particularly evident in the relationships between professionals associated with the judiciary and those associated with social services, such as women’s centers. One factor that appeared to contribute to this rift was access to resources and institutional support. Indeed, while women’s centers struggled with decreasing state investment, crumbling infrastructure, and low wages, the situation in courts was quite different. Unlike CIAM and other public women’s centers, the specialized courts were staffed with highly paid judges who lived in Ipanema and wore designer clothing. They had access to private drivers, large offices, and better functioning technology. During my time conducting court observations, I learned that each judge works no more than four days per week—more often three—starting between 12-1pm and usually ending around 6pm (at the latest). This is not to suggest that the women’s courts did not also have struggles with heavy caseloads and low pay—especially among public defenders, yet relative to women’s centers, specialized courts enjoyed a level of stability and support that far exceeded that of women’s centers.

The privileged position of judges generated friction in the network, as others felt they were not sensitive to the constraints within which other services operated. Helena put it this way, “There is an illness called ‘judge-itis.’ It is an illness that happens to arrogant, prepotent women who think they know everything, when they only know one piece...” While the judges felt they

were on the cutting edge of delivering gender-specialized services, others were wary of the degree to which courts could (and should) prompt social and cultural change around the issue of GBV. This apprehension is in part a response to a trend across the world, which Franceshet terms the “judicialization of social conflict” (2010, 24). With the breakdown of the welfare state, many turn to the courts to fill in the gap of unresponsive state institutions and defend their rights as citizens (Macaulay 2006). Cristina went so far as to call the justice system a “total institution,” citing the Foucauldian (1977) concept by name. Indeed, women’s center directors are quick to point out that the network is largely oriented around policing and criminal justice. “They do everything. The justice system sees a hole and fills it. [...] They are not concerned with creating services that are complimentary.” These branches of the network continue to emphasize the denúncia as the primary mechanism for redressing VAW, while social science has long proven this to be a restrictive avenue for many women (MacDowell Santos 2005; Hautzinger 2007). As Lorena—a popular lawyer for women in situations of violence—points out, “the courts are designed to uphold the status quo.”<sup>37</sup>

As a result, women’s center directors see their jobs as exceedingly important, as they are designed to fill in the gaps. Unlike the judiciary, women’s centers offer social services without the pressure to denounce, they treat women as members of communities, and accompany them over periods of weeks, months, and even years as they negotiate violences in their lives. Women’s centers help women navigate the legal system if they choose to do so, interpreting jargony court documents and providing logistical support to get to and from courts. Ultimately, the courts and women’s centers, as stand-alone institutions, are both essential to addressing and preventing violence against women. Together, however, they could offer truly comprehensive

services—as envisioned in the Maria da Penha Law. Yet, in practice, these unevenly resourced institutions are not equally able to support one another.

## **Conclusion**

As I closed my notebook and exchanged some final words with Cristina in the wake of the 2021 salary cuts, she asserted, “if we close, that’s what they want.” As of early 2024, CIAM has managed to remain open, but their capacity to serve women in situations of violence continues to wane. In this chapter, I think through the implications of the 2021 salary cuts and what they mean for the broader network. I argue that they are reflective of a pattern of what many professionals refer to as “dismantling” social services for women in situations of violence. This process of dismantling is made possible by the vulnerability of the network to political co-optation and budget manipulation, which are especially problematic in neoliberal political contexts like that in Rio de Janeiro. Where there are limited resources, there is conflict and this conflict infiltrates relationships among state professionals, like Cristina and Judge Kat, in the network and between state professionals and state administrators, like Glória. While there is variation in stability across services, the outcome of the salary cuts at CIAM is detrimental to the network as a whole. It reinforces the idea that social services for women are dysfunctional. Today, the Lula government is working to reverse some of the damages inflicted by the Bolsonaro administration at the federal level through new policies aimed to provide pension for orphans of femicide or to prevent sexual violence against women at public events. But at the state level, Governor Castro continues to undermine women’s services in Rio de Janeiro, dampening the impacts of federal interventions and advancing his project to dismantle the network of gender-specialized services.

Women’s centers were envisioned to provide care for women in situations of violence. They filled a gap in the network and are a critical service. They are also the most vulnerable of all the elements of the network—the structure of the network is not conducive to stability or continuity. Yet, without them, the avenues for redress, which are already constrained, are further restricted. But this isn’t the end of the story. When people sense that services do not work or experience firsthand the dysfunction of the network, whether at a women’s center or a specialized court, this doesn’t mean they fail to achieve justice and care altogether. Rather, people create alternative strategies of care for themselves and their communities. In the next chapter, I will trace how the gaps in the network of services for women in situations of violence—especially women’s centers—have motivated efforts by social movements and non-governmental organizations to organize around alternative options for women. Their efforts raise questions about the degree to which the state upholds the Maria da Penha Law and the nature of state authority over women’s services.

---

<sup>1</sup> The full article in Portuguese can be found here: <https://extra.globo.com/noticias/rio/sistema-publico-de-apoio-mulheres-vitimas-de-violencia-enfrenta-reducao-de-pessoal-estrutura-precaria-corte-de-salarios-25242137.html>. Accessed on November 23, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Professionals at women’s centers were among the dozens of workers under the Secretary for Social Development and Human Rights that were impacted by these salary cuts (Calheiros, pers. comm. 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Assuming professionals working in women’s centers did not hold other employment, this salary would nearly qualify them for Brazil’s welfare program, Bolsa Família (and later Auxílio Brasil), intended for people in situations of poverty and extreme poverty.

<sup>4</sup> Service professionals are trained personnel who run and work in gender-specialized services, including psychologists, social workers, and legal advisors. These workers are selected through a process known as the *concurso*, a selection process that slots people into government roles based on performance on a qualifying exam. Positions like these can be competitive and thus have a low rate of turnover relative to service administrators, like Glória.

<sup>5</sup> At the time of CIAM Márcia Lyra’s creation in 2000, Centro was a far more central district than it is today. The urban sprawl to the north and west have pulled the geographical center of the city away from the Guanabara Bay, on which Centro is situated.

<sup>6</sup> The Maria da Penha Law (2006) mandates the “operational integration of the Judiciary, the Public Prosecutor’s Office, and the Public Defender’s Office with the areas of public security, social assistance, health, education, work, and housing” (Title 3, Ch. 1, Art 8, Part 1).

---

<sup>7</sup> PSC is a small, conservative party that platforms issues such as regulating abortion, reducing the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 16, and deregulating the economy. See their mission and values on their website: <https://psc.org.br/missao-valores/>.

<sup>8</sup> In her research on sexual harassment complaints in universities, Ahmed documented a pattern of institutional noncompliance with its own policies. One of the ways they were able to skirt the issue was through focusing on “solutions” and “resolutions” without pausing to understand the problem itself (2021, 61). She finds that a solution “can be a way of making ap problem appear to have been dealt with, as if it is in the past” (2021, 58).

<sup>9</sup> Here Glória is referring to the “norma técnica” for CIAMs, a handbook developed to standardize practices across CIAMs and ensure basic standards of care for women.

<sup>10</sup> This is statement is inaccurate. The State Undersecretary for Women’s Policy was created in 2013.

<sup>11</sup> I tried on four different occasions to schedule an interview with Glória. Each time, her secretary offered to schedule a time and date and then stopped responding to my messages.

<sup>12</sup> For more on Rio’s gender-specialized courts for domestic violence, see Chapter III.

<sup>13</sup> According to Max Weber’s (1948) theory of “rational-legal bureaucracy,” bureaucrats form part of an efficient hierarchical apparatus, governed by rules and procedures to ensure that actions are carried out in an impersonal, uniform, and predictable manner and through which state power flows unidirectionally from top to bottom. For Weber, bureaucracy is the machinery that executes the everyday activities of the government *with order*. Yet, in practice, Cristina’s experience in the government hardly seems predictable or impersonal.

<sup>14</sup> See news story here: <https://azmina.com.br/colunas/centros-de-acolhimento-de-vitimas-de-violencia-podem-ser-privatizados/>

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter V for a deeper dive into the relationship between social movements and the state around the issue of services for women in situations of violence.

<sup>16</sup> As “promoting women’s rights has become one of the key benchmarks used by global institutions to measure development...mark[ing] the nation as modern and suitable for foreign investment,” the cost of non-compliance is not substantial enough to keep signatories from co-opting accords for political and economic gain (Neumann 2017, 1107; Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Ravelo Blancas 2010; Olivera 2010). The result is that states sign on to accords with little to no intention of implementing them.

<sup>17</sup> While only one major mudslide was documented in Rio de Janeiro in October 2021, a tragic mudslide in February 2022 in Petrópolis killed at least 231 people. These disasters differentially impact poor people who live in precariously stacked structures on the hillsides.

<sup>18</sup> It was later renamed the Márcia Lyra Center for Women’s Services, after Márcia Lyra, a woman who was murdered later that year.

<sup>19</sup> In 2012, the Lei de Cotas mandated that race be considered among college acceptances, setting aside 50 percent of places for people of color and students who studied at public elementary and secondary schools (Trevisol and Nierotka 2015).

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed account of the activism that preceded the passing of the Maria da Penha Law see Chapter 2.

<sup>21</sup> For an analysis on the gendered dynamics of Dilma’s impeachment, see Snyder and Wolff 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Ironically, Michel Temer, as São Paulo’s Secretary of Public Security under Franco Monotero’s administration in the 1980s, was closely involved in the creation of Brazil’s first women’s police station (MacDowell Santos 2005, 23).

---

<sup>23</sup> By the mid-2010s, the Worker’s Party was embroiled in controversy over a corruption scandal known as Operation Car Wash or *Operação Lava Jato*, wherein executives, politicians, and other public figures embezzled funds from Brazil’s private-public oil company Petrobras and laundered them through the front of a carwash. This scheme occurred under PT leadership and therefore many believe the party was complicit and even actively involved in this criminal enterprise.

<sup>24</sup> While Rosinha Garotinho (2003-2007) was not charged with corruption while in the office of governor, she was later impeached from the office of mayor of Campos dos Goytacazes for corruption; Sérgio Cabral Filho (2007-2014) was charged and imprisoned for corruption; Luiz Fernando Pezão (2014-2018) was charged and imprisoned for corruption; Wilson Witzel (2019-2021) was recently impeached and is awaiting his corruption trial. Cláudio Castro, Rio’s current governor assumed the role with the impeachment of his running-mate Witzel, and was recently reelected in 2022 in a landslide victory. Until now, no formal charges have been raised against Castro, but his proximity to Witzel has raised suspicion and he is currently under investigation.

<sup>25</sup> Two thirds of federal women’s services experienced cuts—some lost up to 99 percent of their funds. See news story (in Portuguese) here: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2022/10/governo-bolsonaro-corta-verba-de-acoes-para-mulheres-em-ate-99-no-orcamento-de-2023.shtml>

<sup>26</sup> Before Bolsonaro, the ministry was simply the Ministry of Women’s Policy. Lumping women’s issues with concerns about the family is a way to ensure that “family values” and “preserving the family unit” are prioritized (Martinez 2022; Bohn 2022).

<sup>27</sup> As political appointees, service administrators cycle through ever several years, as they come and go with each government or step back to seek political office themselves. In this way, the people with the most institutional knowledge are not the administrators, who often have no background with social services let alone gender-specialized ones, but the professionals within the network.

<sup>28</sup> Apart from several state emergency shelters.

<sup>29</sup> The messaging of early domestic violence awareness campaigns reified persistent assumptions about violence against women. One of which was the tendency to put the duty of confronting violence on women in situations of violence. The emphasis on “speaking out” against violence cemented the logic that if a woman did not file a denúncia then it was her fault if she continued to experience violence; and, by extension, that she was okay with it or likes it (“ela gosta de apanhar”). Slogans, such as “silence is violence’s accomplice” or “one who stays quiet, consents” (“Quem cala, consente”) reinforced the narrative that women were complicit in their own violation by failing to report it to the police. Yet, as detailed in Chapter 4, there are a multitude of reasons for which women do not report violence.

<sup>30</sup> I will return to the internal conflicts among professionals that arise as some services are funded and not others.

<sup>31</sup> This majority is comprised of almost exclusively white men, a demographic that holds nearly 80 percent of seats in the state legislature. In a 2021 report conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union with UN Women,<sup>31</sup> Brazil ranked in 144<sup>th</sup> place out of 192 countries for representation of women in government. Women occupy just 17.7 percent of seats in the two houses of Congress (Amaral 2022).<sup>31</sup> Of these women, over 60 percent are white women.

<sup>32</sup> Known as the Câmara dos Deputados.

<sup>33</sup> In Brazil, similar to the United States, there are two rounds of elections. The first is designed to reduce the number of candidates down to two, which will then face off head to head in the second election. However, if a candidate wins over 50 percent of the vote in the first round, they automatically win the election without going to the second round of voting. Castro won 58.6 percent of the vote.

<sup>34</sup> In Brazil, political violence against women (especially women of color) politicians is a growing issue inside and outside government spaces. The most glaring example was the political assassination of city councilwoman and human rights defender, Marielle Franco in a drive-by shooting in 2018. Souza, a lifelong friend and chief of staff for Marielle,

---

argues that her murder constitutes, what she terms, a political femicide.

<https://agenciapatriciagalvao.org.br/destaques/o-feminicidio-politico-de-marielle-franco-por-renata-souza/>

<sup>35</sup> For more detail on the reasons women choose not to file a denúncia, see Chapter 4.

<sup>36</sup> “*Não é fácil ficar bem.*”

<sup>37</sup> One worker in CEJUVIDA, the Judiciary’s off-hours emergency restraining order service, argued that the judiciary ends up doing a lot of work they aren’t designed for because other services are underresourced.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ALMERINDA GAMA HOUSE: WOMEN’S ACTIVISM “AGAINST, WITH, AND BEYOND THE STATE”

Candelária Square was brimming with hundreds of demonstrators. The multicolored flags of their movements arched high above like paintbrush strokes on a sky-blue canvas (Figure 27). It was a special day—International Women’s Day or 8M as it’s known among activists, short for the celebration’s date on March 8<sup>th</sup>. The gathering started to spill into the nearby streets as a mobile stage was parked on the edge of the square behind Candelária Church.<sup>1</sup> One-by-one representatives from social movements, political parties, and local organizations climbed into a truck outfitted with stage and half a dozen large speakers to deliver their remarks. On the truck



**Figure 26** International Women's Day event at Candelária Church in Rio de Janeiro, March 8, 2021. All photos taken by author unless otherwise indicated.

hung a banner that read “For the Lives of Women! Out with Bolsonaro and Castro!<sup>2</sup> For jobs, rights, and reproductive justice! Enough with racism, machismo, and LBTIfobia.” As the speeches carried on, I circulated through the crowd. I was approached by activists selling independent newspapers, promoting one of Brazil’s many leftist political parties, and detailing their movements to make public transportation safer, to expand services for trans women, to organize women’s workplaces, and to legalize abortion. It seemed like everyone who had anything to do with women’s rights and social justice in Rio de Janeiro was there. Or so I thought.

### **Twelve Hours Earlier**

Manu’s<sup>3</sup> alarm rang. She woke, long before the sun, left her two kids with their grandmother, and made her way to the city center. She waited at an otherwise deserted bus stop as dozens of women joined her from across the city under cover of darkness. They boarded a bus together and got off together, moving quickly and stealthily to avoid detection by the militia<sup>4</sup> that monitored the street. They gathered around a little blue door, the locked storefront of an abandoned building downtown. One member of the group used a chain cutter to break through the lock. Another pair of participants took turns kicking in the door. The door gave way and Manu ducked into the building. She was joined by nearly 50 members of the Olga Benário Women’s Movement (MMOB), a women-only collective that seeks to address gender inequities in urban Brazil. The MMOB is comprised of a racially diverse group of young women, between the ages of 18 to 30, from neighborhoods mostly in the working-class periphery of the city. Most members are students at one of Rio de Janeiro’s public universities and technical schools and are active in other groups—in addition to the MMOB—including in student movements, racial justice movements, and class-based movements.

The women barricaded the door behind them and waited, anxiously, until the militia members on patrol took notice. The militia tried to force their way in, but ultimately failed and called the police. The military and civil police reported to the building soon after sunrise.

With the police stationed outside the door, the women gathered on the veranda above (Figure 28). Streaming the moment live on Instagram, Manu grabbed a megaphone and started explaining their purpose:

On this March 8, a day of organized struggle for women, we are here in this public building that was sitting abandoned for more than 8 years, without a social function, with the goal of saving women. In the state of Rio de Janeiro in 2021, 98,000 women reported experiences of domestic violence and in the same year 78 women were murdered in feminicides. These 78 women suffered violence and didn't report it because they are afraid to enter police stations in our state. *Because here the state doesn't care.* Despite the existence of state services, they don't care. The number of women suffering violence is much higher than these services can address. And still, we see the government cutting the budget for public policies to protect women. And for this reason, the women here today are saying that spaces like this don't need to stay abandoned. These spaces need to be used to save lives and this is why we are here. *É pela vida das mulheres.*



**Figure 27** Members of MMOB gather on the veranda of the recently occupied Almerinda Gama House as police gather outside.



**Figure 28** Member of MMOB delivers speech on the veranda as police gather below.

The take-over of the building was not spontaneous, rather it had been carefully planned to coincide with International Women’s Day. The members of the MMOB were long frustrated with the many obstacles that prevented women in situations of violence—especially poor women of color—from accessing formal systems of justice and care. Indeed, despite this expansive network of services for women, rates of violence in Rio de Janeiro continue to be high. In response, following a tradition of grassroots social movements occupying buildings and repurposing them, the women of the MMOB planned to create something of their own. In fact, they had been quietly preparing for weeks, carefully combing through public records to select which public building to occupy, developing their rationale and researching relevant statistics, and strategizing their entry tactics. Now inside, they were ready to announce what they had accomplished. Back at the International Women’s Day rally, less than a mile from the occupation, a young woman handed me a pamphlet that read “The Almerinda Gama<sup>5</sup> House is Born.”

This chapter explores the “birth” of the Almerinda Gama House, an autonomous women’s center in Rio de Janeiro. Together, Chapters II, III and IV of this dissertation reflect a system of gender-specialized services that is partial, inaccessible, and collapsing. But that is not the end of this story. This chapter shifts the frame of analysis from the mechanics of the downfall and disfunction of gender-specialized services to instead capture the generative effects of women’s social movements, their (often, but not always) contentious relationship with the state, and their willingness to take risks to provide support for women experiencing violence. This chapter is about what happens when people feel that “the state doesn’t care.” In *Complaint!*, Sara Ahmed argues that people who interact with institutions learn about the “gap” between what institutions are supposed to do and what they actually do (2021). For many activists, coming to

know these gaps through lived experiences of attempting to access justice and care to no avail is followed by efforts to fill them. Such was the case in the 1980s and 1990s when women's movements pushed for the passing of the Maria da Penha Law and organized around the institutionalization of gender reforms (Chapter II). The case of the Almerinda Gama House is *another* important example of how gaps get filled when the needs of the public go unmet, and of the power of social movements to generate bottom-up solutions. It is a story of the dynamic institutional ecosystem around public policies, a story of the relationship between the state and social movements around violence against women work. At a larger level, this chapter illustrates the porousness of state-civil society boundaries and the ways that they influence one another as they vie for dwindling resources against the backdrop of Brazil's neoliberal politics of austerity. In the next section, I will detail my first visit to the Almerinda Gama House and what conversations with members of the MMOB revealed about their movement and their critique of the state network of gender-specialized services.

### **The Little Blue Door**

On March 9, the day after the initial occupation, I decided to visit the Almerinda Gama House on Carioca Street (Figure 29). While I regularly navigated this part of the city—located in the heart of Rio's Centro district—Carioca Street was one that I tended to avoid. The street had once been a vibrant cultural landmark, known for its many musical instrument shops frequented by some of Rio's most famous musicians. Today, empty store fronts line the street, quietly telling the story of Rio's unregulated real estate speculation, which decimated local businesses in the 2000s.<sup>6</sup> Unlike other urban development projects that aim to buy up cheap property to build luxury housing, the Rio de Janeiro city center is not a particularly residential zone<sup>7</sup> and thus buildings in areas zoned for commercial activities have sat virtually abandoned.



**Figure 29** View of Carioca Street from the balcony of the Almerinda Gama House.

First, I saw the police car lights. Military Police, not Civil. Then, as I crossed the street, I noticed people gathering on the sidewalk outside the building. Some wore formal attire, others t-shirts and *havaianas*—Brazil’s trademark flipflops. The energy was tense as the State Secretary of Planning and Management argued that a structural integrity report had condemned the building and that the women of MMOB, now occupying it, needed to evacuate for their own safety (Figure 30).

“So where is the report?” Joana, a coordinator of the movement prodded. No one had it.

As I stood observing this exchange, a young man turned to me and asked if I knew about the occupation. His name was Pedro. I told him how I met a member of the MMOB at

International Women’s Day rally the day before but wasn’t closely familiar with this movement or their occupation.

“The Almerinda Gama House is Rio’s *first* women’s center,” he asserted. I was surprised by this claim. I’d been working with professionals at all four of Rio’s women’s centers—some for nearly two years. The state women’s center, CIAM, was less than a half-mile from where we stood.

We spoke for what felt like 30 minutes before migrating to a new sliver of shade to avoid the oppressive March heat.<sup>8</sup> Several people joined our conversation. Leticia, a young member of MMOB (unlike Pedro), mentioned that they chose this location because it is where the most violence against women occurs and where there is the most demand for services. Again, I was



**Figure 30** Members of MMOB negotiate with state officials in front of the newly occupied Almerinda Gama House.

struck by the inaccuracy of this. Anyone in the network of services would tell you that the periphery of the city was in desperate need of services and that per capita rates of violence were higher there.<sup>9</sup> It seemed particularly ironic, as most members of the MMOB themselves live in the periphery, where it is more violent. Another member standing nearby cited Rio as the second most deadly state for women in Brazil and Brazil as the country with the fifth highest rate of femicide in the world. Two more claims for which I could not find concrete evidence.<sup>10</sup> While I did not yet understand why, it was clear from the beginning that the discourse surrounding the issue of violence against women, the reason for this ongoing violence, and the types of interventions necessary to address it diverged significantly from those that circulated among



**Figure 31** The little blue door through which the MMOB entered to occupy the building. Note the indentation near the lock where they pried open the door.

professionals and administrators within the network of gender-specialized services. These divergent narratives suggest the existence of two worlds that seldom intersect or overlap.

Two hours into our conversation, I could feel my feet beginning to ache from standing in place, my knees buckling slightly under my weight, and the skin on my calves burning from the sun. When I think of Rio de Janeiro, I think about my legs; about how faithfully they propelled me through the city, about the sheer physicality of urban ethnography. I began entertaining the idea of heading home—thinking I might even get to the

grocery store before the evening rush—when Pedro waved me over to the little blue door (Figure 31).

“You wanna go inside?” he asked.

“*Que?*” I leaned in. I couldn’t hear him over the screeching brakes of a bus that stopped nearby, his face mask eliminating any possibility of lip-reading.

“Come!” he shouted, exaggerating his waving motion.

Pedro knocked on the little blue door, now dented where I assumed the original lock had been broken. A woman opened it just enough to peer through, revealing a thick chain and padlock on the inside.

“Who invited you here?” she questioned. “What movement are you affiliated with?” After several minutes explaining how I learned about the occupation and why I was interested, she opened the lock and let me in.

Stepping through the little blue door felt like entering a portal into another realm. Inside it was cool and dim. My eyes were slow to adjust from the bright street to the dark room. A dozen people sat just inside the door. As I greeted them, a woman named Luisa handed me a spiral notebook to sign in. There were three fields etched into a hand drawn table: name, date, and movement. It wasn’t until later that I realized how crucial membership in a movement was for personal identification and trust in this space. I simply wrote the letters “UFRJ,”

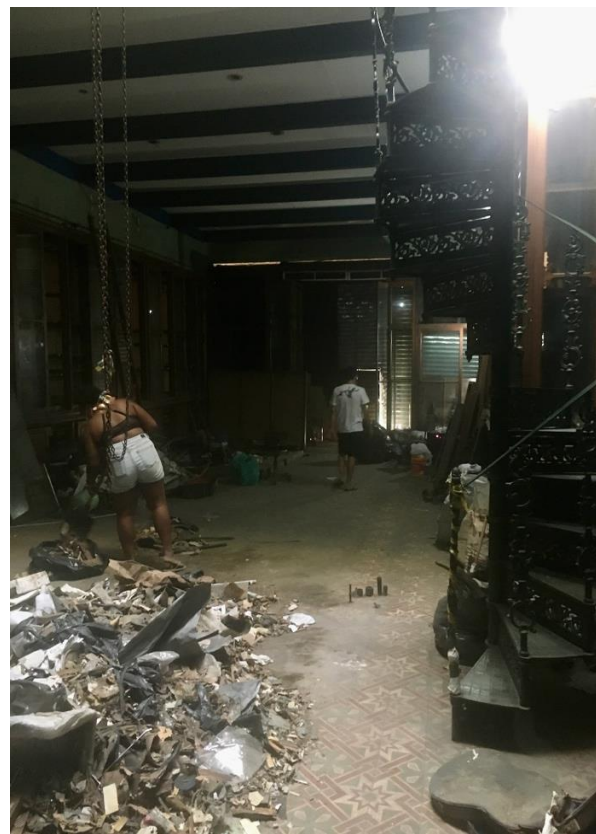


**Figure 32** The original tiling for A Guitarra de Prata, the famous instrument store that once functioned in the space that is now the Almerinda Gama House.

the acronym for the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, where I was affiliated. Before I returned the notebook a quickly glanced through the names logged above mine. One stood out: Mônica Benício, city councilwoman and widow of Marielle Franco, who was assassinated in a politically motivated attack during her mandate on the Rio de Janeiro city council in 2018. While it was clear members of the MMOB had limited knowledge of the network of gender-specialized services, I started to perceive that they were incredibly well-connected in other social and political spheres—particularly among activists and leftist politicians.

The interior of the building was grand, flaunting 20-foot-high ceilings, intricate tile floors, and dark, hardwood display cases that stretched almost to the top. The former site of *A Guitarra de Prata*, a famous guitar shop, it was easy to imagine the guitars and *cavaquinhos*<sup>11</sup> that had filled the display cases (Figure 32). While the room was coated in a thick layer of dust and full of debris, it was obvious that it had once been a beautiful place.

Luisa led me past a huge pile of debris and up a delicate spiral staircase (Figure 33). We surfaced in another immense room, the natural light beaming through three doors that exited onto a balcony above the street (Figure 34). Towards the back of the building there



**Figure 33** Inside the Almerinda Gama House a week after the initial occupation.

was a small staircase that led to a mezzanine level where, Luisa envisioned, “the dormitory would be.”

On our way back towards the staircase, we bumped into a woman with long curly black hair. It was Manu, short for Manuela), who delivered yesterday’s speech on the balcony. I was excited to meet her and, without much finesse, asked her about their goals in occupying the building. I expected a response similar to that which she articulated the day before. Something along the lines of “we are here to hold the state accountable for failing to provide quality services for women.”

Instead, her response took a different form. “Olga<sup>12</sup> was founded in 2011 by members of the Movimento de Luta nos Bairros, Villas, e Favelas (MLB) and other [neighborhood] movements who became aware of the importance of prioritizing the struggle of women in society. It was important that it was a movement geared towards action, that could affect change.” She explained that the MMOB began by occupying buildings to create daycare centers, which would “guarantee mothers the ability to work outside the home.”<sup>13</sup> The movement gained national traction and today there are chapters across the country working towards popular daycare and women’s centers. She explained that the Almerinda Gama House is in fact the ninth occupation of the MMOB in Brazil with the goal of creating an autonomous (non-governmental) women’s center—the first of its kind in Rio de Janeiro. In creating a women’s center, the MMOB will offer social assistance and psychological care—through professionally qualified volunteers—and provide temporary shelter for women in situations of violence. Additionally, they aim to foster a space of “consciousness-raising and political reflection [...] to open women’s perspectives about their place in society.”



**Figure 34** The second level of the Almerinda Gama House, where activists slept during the first few weeks of the occupation.

It struck me that unlike her speech on the balcony, Manu did not critique the network of services, mention the unmet demand, or cite rates of violence against women in Rio de Janeiro. Instead, she identified the occupation as a product of a social movement that was committed to creating services for women in need. While catered to two different audiences—1) the police and public at large and 2) me, an American anthropologist—the two versions of the story of the Almerinda Gama House that Manu told offer a window into the dynamic relationship between the MMOB, the Almerinda Gama House, and the state that “doesn’t care.”

In the first version, shouted from the balcony on March 8<sup>th</sup>, Manu delivered a heavy critique of the state for its failure to create and support public policies for women; to utilize

vacant public space that could serve a “social function,” like providing much-needed services for women; and ultimately to protect and uphold the rights of women in Rio de Janeiro. She positioned the MMOB as a movement that aims to intervene in light of what they perceive as the state’s omission of responsibility to serve its gendered constituencies. She speaks forcefully to the relationship between social movements and the state. In the second rationale, Manu tells the story of the founding of the MMOB and the goals of the movement to provide popular services to women, including daycare and women’s centers. She highlights the generative element of their work—the aim to create, to be a “a movement geared towards action, that could affect change.” She explains that the Almerinda Gama House is an extension of their movement, underscoring the relationship not between the MMOB and the state, but instead that between the MMOB and the Almerinda Gama House.

Together these two stories reveal a third important piece of information: that their violence against women activism is as much about how the MMOB relates to the state as how it relates to itself. Indeed, social scientists have long sought to understand the conditions that coalesce to form and define social movements (Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Mohanty 2003a; Stephen 1997). Scholars of “new social movements” forwarded the concept of “collective identities” to signify the ways in which “people act in concert, often with the object of achieving a new, distinct, or semiautonomous kind of presence and cultural recognition [...] in the process of political activity” (Stephen 1997, 20). In other words, social movements are dynamic, in that collective identity is formed through political activity, and in turn the political activities of a movement inform their identity (Escobar and Alvarez 1992).

Social movements are also defined by their relationship with other movements—contemporary and historical. Indeed, the efforts of the MMOB to establish the Almerinda Gama

House are part of a long tradition of women's organizing and feminist thinking. Specifically, Latin American feminisms and women's movements grapple with the gendered impacts of the region's unique history of colonialism, imperialism, and other forms of political exclusion and economic exploitation (Gonzalez 2020). Various movements have sought to understand and address the relationship between this history and the prevalence of GBV through intersectional social movements (Molyneux 1998; Gervais and Estevez 2013; Lara 2020), neighborhood associations (Schild 1994; Gonzalez 2020), public demonstrations (Wright 2010), and indigenous movements for the recognition of legal pluralities (Sieder and Barrera 2017; De Marinis 2013), and even the creation of services for women (MacDowell Santos 2005; Hernández Castillo 2006). Together this body of scholarship and activism has prompted multi-scalar social and political transformation, from community-level initiatives to national and international policy, including the Maria da Penha Law itself (Blackwell 2006).

To make sense of the relationships between the MMOB, the state, the network of gender-specialized services, and the Almerinda Gama House, I returned on March 10<sup>th</sup> and nearly every day after that for 5 months. I spent hundreds of hours at the Almerinda Gama House, getting to know activists, participating in committees, cleaning, organizing, and spending the night on guard. Ultimately, their efforts offered a window into what happens when people feel that the state unreliably and unevenly cares for women in situations of violence; when policies "fail."

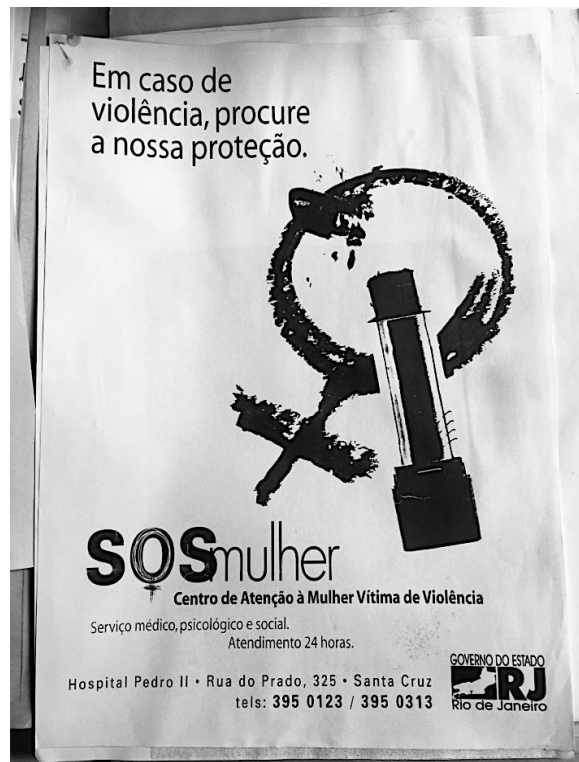
### **Conceiving Services for Women**

The "birth" of the Almerinda Gama House marks a significant moment in the history of violence against women activism in Rio de Janeiro, and in Brazil more broadly. While it represents a departure from state-controlled women's services of the last several decades, the Almerinda Gama House also signals a return. The MMOB is not the first group to organize

autonomous women's centers. As previously noted, their movement is embedded in an intergenerational history of feminist and women's organizing to address VAW and generate social services in Brazil, with mixed results. In this section, I situate the birth of the Almerinda Gama House historically with the goal of illustrating how the contemporary feminist landscape is a product of intergenerational social and political forces dating back to the 1980s and beyond. Yet rather than attempting to disentangle contemporary feminisms from their past iterations, I seek to understand their relationality and how they shape the possibilities of the Almerinda Gama House in Rio de Janeiro. In doing so, I illustrate how contemporary women's organizing is characterized not just by addressing old problems with new approaches, but instead by the interplay between old and new in terms of strategies, movements, and outcomes.

### *SOS Mulher*

In 1980, five years before the creation of Brazil's first women's police station, a civil society movement SOS Mulher (SOS Women) set out to provide volunteer social, psychological, and legal assistance to women in situations of domestic violence. Created in the wake of Brazil's *abertura política*,<sup>14</sup> SOS Mulher was one of the first movements to provide social services for women in explicit situations of domestic violence in Brazil (Figure 35).<sup>15</sup> It was envisioned by civil society feminists who sought to develop "a strategic



**Figure 35** Pamphlet advertising SOS Mulher, reads "In case of violence, seek out our protection." Source: CEDIM Archive.

struggle around the issue of violence against women” that would operate autonomously, so as to avoid partisan co-optation and politicization (L. Medeiros 2011, 9). Between 1980 and 1981, SOS Mulher opened chapters across Brazil, including in São Paulo, Campinas, Porto Alegre, and Rio de Janeiro.

In addition to serving individual women, SOS Mulher also facilitated reflective, consciousness-raising groups. It was thought that through such groups women “would have an opportunity to collectively share their experiences of violence, to understand that they weren’t alone, [and] to see, through conversation and dialogue, that there was a way out and it was through a process of conscientization” (Melo, cited by Diniz 2006, 17). SOS Mulher worked directly with women around an emancipatory model of consciousness-raising, which sought to educate women on issues of “masculine subordination” with the guiding philosophy that “women could only free themselves if they engaged in feminist reflection, about themselves, about who they are and how they relate to the world” (interview with Andrea, cited in Medeiros 2011, 11). Early projects to “re-educate” women, and society at large, about the issue of violence against women represent a key period in the history of the network. While the idea of an integrated network of gender-specialized services was still decades away, these efforts signaled a moment in which people were starting to reconceive of the meaning and impacts of gendered forms of violence, and even implement new strategies and practices to address the issue.

While the work of SOS Mulher was novel and impactful, it was also short-lived. By the mid- to late-1980s, most autonomous feminist groups working to address the issue of violence against women—including SOS Mulher—had dissolved (Alvarez 1990, 247). Beyond representational issues,<sup>16</sup> scholars attribute the rapid rise and fall of autonomous feminist groups in the 1980s to shifting political strategies within the broader feminist movement in Brazil. For

example, this period was marked by the demobilization of women's movements that had gained broad support in their opposition to authoritarian rule. While this political transition offered key opportunities for women's movements, it also presented a critical dilemma regarding the best way to situate themselves relative to the newly democratic state. Contentious internal debates about how to best advance feminist projects divided the movement (Schild 1997). On the one hand, there were those who believed in integration, or the institutionalization of gender demands by electing feminist leaders, affiliating with liberal political parties, and using the newly democratic state apparatus to create and defend women's rights and build gender-specialized state institutions. On the other hand, proponents of autonomy were skeptical of the (recently authoritarian) state apparatus and its vulnerability to shifting political ideologies and wary of the pitfalls of the state co-opting their rhetoric and outcomes through its processes of recognition (Escallón 2023; Laó-Montes 2016). They argued that social justice for women could only occur through social movements, community organizing, and creating leftist coalitions outside the influence of the state (Schild 1997). Within a period of less than a decade, SOS Mulher found itself at the center of this debate and by the late-1980s many formerly autonomous feminists found themselves allured by promises of stable government funding, leadership positions for women, and institutional backing for women's services.

With the fall of SOS Mulher, the state of Rio de Janeiro went almost two decades without a women's center. Instead, the state spent resources developing women's policing as the primary gender-specialized service for women in situations of violence (MacDowell Santos 2005). This period came to an end when the Márcia Lyra Integrated Center for Women's Services (CIAM) was inaugurated in the state of Rio de Janeiro on March 8, 2001—exactly 21 years (to the day!) prior to the occupation of the Almerinda Gama House. Having redirected their attention to

pursuing gendered advances through (and not around) the state, feminists dedicated their struggle to pushing for more comprehensive gender-based violence (GBV) legislation. With the passing of the Maria da Penha Law in 2006, CIAM Márcia Lyra<sup>17</sup> was joined by three other state-run women's centers to form the network of gender-specialized services that continues to exist today in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

The tension within Brazilian feminism between integrated and autonomous political ideologies belies the relationship between autonomous and state-run services for women and the porous relationship between them. There is considerable overlap between feminists within the state and feminists outside it. Many of the women who were activists in the 1990s and 2000s were absorbed into the government. In fact, some of the women who worked in SOS Mulher continue to occupy government positions in the network of gender-specialized services or in local universities where they train new generations of social workers, psychologists, and lawyers to work in these services. They now find themselves in a tense relationship with younger generations of feminist activists, including the MMOB, who are *again* skeptical of the state as the machinery through which to recognize and deliver women's rights. In a meeting with the national coordinators of the MMOB, one member put it this way, "the network [of gender-specialized services] is only feminist women older than 40, and it can be hard to connect with their generation." An older feminist in a conversation with members of the MMOB put it this way, "before we had women's centers, SOS Women started this struggle. This policy wasn't a given, it is the fruit of a lot of struggle." This woman is articulating what Whittier calls "spillover," wherein "movements can spill over onto each other over time, as in the influence of an earlier movement on a later one, or across contemporaries" (2004, 536). Now decades later, this earlier generation of feminist activists continues to influence the culture of feminist

organizing in Rio de Janeiro—many *through* state institutions. Their influence arguably challenges the neat separation between social movements and the state (Schild 1997).

In short, the model of providing public psychological and social services to women in situations of violence piloted by SOS Mulher has become the standard and has since been adopted by state-run centers, and now, to a certain extent, the Almerinda Gama House as well. As such, the Almerinda Gama House is not an isolated effort. Rather, it is part of feminist activist genealogies that span across decades. Yet, despite these historical continuities and recurring debates in violence against women work, there are also fundamental divergences. Indeed, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the work of the MMOB and other groups<sup>18</sup> is simply a revival of the feminist movements of the 1990s. They are different people who find themselves in a unique political, social, and economic context that shapes the possibilities and limitations of their efforts. For example, while the 1990s and 2000s was an era of renewed investment in the public sector in Brazil, today women are organizing within contexts of far-right conservatism and gender backlash (Hunter and Power 2019; Biroli and Caminotti 2020), which has triggered widespread divestiture from public services, the militarization of police, and the explicit contestation of advancements for women and other minorities. Further, while their service model draws on aspects of SOS Mulher and state women’s centers, I found their feminism to be far more intersectional and their demographic composition far more diverse than that of their “feminist” predecessors—who were predominantly white, middle- and upper-class, college-educated women. Despite seismic shifts in the political landscape, scholars have evidenced how social movements—ephemeral and long-lasting—have been and continue to be important drivers of social change and political pressure in Brazil (Htun and Weldon 2012; Gonzalez 2020).

Ultimately, the story of SOS Mulher teaches us that with autonomy comes the freedom to make decisions and to avoid political compromise, but that autonomy is not without its own challenges. I couldn't help but wonder how the MMOB's attempt at establishing the Almerinda Gama House, an autonomous women's center, would be different. In the following sections, I will trace how the MMOB advanced their efforts.

### **Ant Work**

The first two weeks at the Almerinda Gama House were dedicated to clean-up and organization, raising awareness about the occupation through social media and news, and networking with representatives of the state to negotiate over the building. Donations poured in from across the city: food, sleeping pads and blankets, a fridge, a stove, stage lights for downstairs, a mattress, a sofa. People also donated their skills and time. An architect affiliated with their movement came and evaluated the safety of the structure, a graphic designer created all the online content, an elder made benches and tables out of the scrap wood found in the building, and a local popular kitchen donated hot meals (*quentinhos*) for lunch. Members of various allied social movements accompanied the work<sup>19</sup> alongside members of MMOB (and in many cases *as* members of MMOB). They helped scrub the floors, walls, and ceilings, haul out hundreds of pounds of debris, and decorate the building with original art. Without running water or electricity (apart from an improvised *gato de luz*<sup>20</sup>), there was little respite from the heat. After a day at the occupation, I would return home covered in a layer of soot mixed with sweat and mosquito repellent. There was a rotation (*plantão*) of people who would sleep in the building, as the space was not to be left unoccupied. It was one of the most effective mobilizations of collective action that I had ever seen. "This here," Manu smiled as she scrubbed the banister one afternoon, "is ant work."<sup>21</sup>

With each day, I saw how ordinary, yet highly coordinated acts at the Almerinda Gama House were transforming the space. I understood Manu's use of "ant work" to reflect how collective power was generated by people whose individual, sustained efforts to clean, decorate, and give life to the space amounted to something bigger than themselves; how small, everyday acts compile in transformative ways. Returning to social movement theory, scholars have problematized "new social movement" frameworks for failing to contextualize the process of forming "collective identity," particularly in women's movements wherein gender is so often assumed to be a unifying category (Gonzalez 1988). Stephen puts it this way, "rather than assuming the natural existence of collective identities, we have to look contextually at how mobilization arises and how its meaning and interpretation may vary between individuals and over time" (1997, 21). Indeed, the collaborative actions of the MMOB and their close coalition evidence how their group is effective *despite* its heterogeneity. If "ant work" reflects the mobilization of people in social movements—*what they do*—I was still left wondering about the "collective identity" that would drive such a mobilization—*who they are*.

Later that week the Almerinda Gama House received its first service seeker, a woman in an ongoing situation of domestic violence. I was surprised that the house was going to host a woman so soon. It had been less than a month and the interior of the building was still very unpolished—the plaster from the walls peeling, the rooms dark without adequate lighting, and the bathroom without running water. Nevertheless, having learned about the women's center from a friend, she stopped in during her lunch hour to seek support. Manu and Luisa led her upstairs and asked her to explain her situation. She spoke and they listened, taking notes on an intake document modeled after those used in state women's centers.

At the end of her story, she added “I didn’t cry yesterday, and I didn’t cry today, but the moment I arrived here I cried because I felt really cared for.”

After the woman left, Manu reflected, “Her story is so similar to mine. [...] She just needed to know there was a place for her to go.” Indeed, my research with the state women’s center reflected just this. That while some women do solicit ongoing psychological treatment and social assistance, many simply need to talk and know that they will be heard (pers. comm. Cristina Fernandes). Even if the center was rough around the edges, the MMOB felt assured that they had accomplished something that the state could not. They may not have been “qualified” professionals, but they were convinced that their lived experiences of vulnerability—and, in Manu’s case, domestic violence—afforded them the ability to at least listen to women’s stories with care. Joana said as much at the Almerinda Gama House’s first public event the next day,

For [the MMOB], the issue of violence against women is a critical issue. This is a space of struggle for women, and it won’t be a closed space. We built this in two weeks, which [the state] couldn’t do. They are afraid of what we can do [because] women’s struggles are transformative. [...] We are creating public policies, but they aren’t coming from the state. Our proposal is different. This is not just an institutional space, but a political, collaborative space created by *ant work*. [emphasis mine]

Her words prompted a chorus of snapping fingers.

I left the Almerinda Gama House that evening thinking again about “ant work.” Manu had referenced ant work in the context of completing chores as a way to contribute to a larger organized effort. Yet, Joana used the phrase to characterize the *process* of engaging in political struggle for public policies for women. As I began to consider the possibility that ant work was more than a metaphor for diligence and cooperation, I asked another prominent member of the MMOB what ant work meant to her: “it means that the construction of our work is collective, little by little the work grows and multiplies because each person carries out a fundamental role in the process of constructing and consolidating the movement. [...] MMOB is a feminist, class-

based, and socialist movement” (Figure 36). It turned out that ant work *was* about people bannng together to achieve goals that individually they could not. But that wasn’t all. Their use of the term ant work captured not only *how* they organize, but *whom* and *why* they organize: “MMOB is a feminist, class-based, and socialist movement.” Indeed, the concept of ant work referred not just to any process, but a *specific* process of engaging in collective struggle *against*



**Figure 36** Banner and art on the upstairs wall at the Almerinda Gama House. The banner reads "For women's lives, through socialism."

*larger, more powerful entities.* Ant work was also a metaphor for socialism.

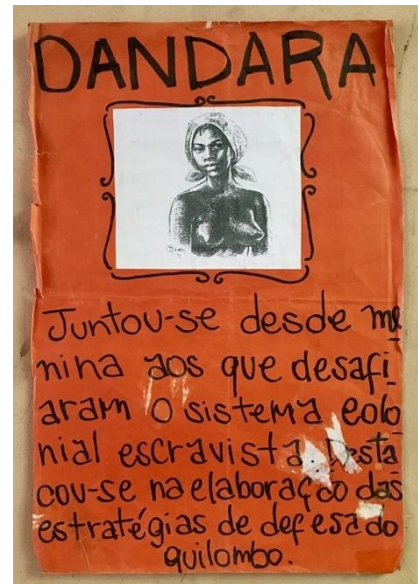
Latin America has a rich history of anti-capitalist, socialist-feminist activism (Alvarez 1990). Since the 1970s, against the backdrop of military dictatorships and civil conflict, feminists across the Americas have turned to Marxist theory to make sense of the “interrelationship between women’s movements, the class struggle, and the struggle for socialism” (Chinchilla



**Figure 37** Art by members of the MMOB hanging on the walls of the Almerinda Gama House. Collage depicts revolutionary figures such as Angela Davis, Lélia Gonzalez, and bell hooks along with the word “resistance.”



**Figure 38** Wall art painted by a member of the MMOB depicting the profile of a Black woman with the Angela Davis quote, “When Black women move, the whole structure of society moves with them.”



**Figure 38** Wall art at the Almerinda Gama House depicting Dandara of Palmares, an Afro-Brazilian fighter who defended Brazil’s most famous quilombo, Palmares, from the Portuguese in the late 17th century.

1992). The MMOB explicitly situated themselves relative to this lineage of socialist activism. Figures such as Olga Benário, Che Guevara, Luísa Mahin,<sup>22</sup> Paulo Freire<sup>23</sup> and revolutionary groups such as the Black Panthers and the Zapatistas were references commonly cited among members. Their inspirations spilled onto the walls of the Almerinda Gama House in the form of handmade posters of Dandara,<sup>24</sup> Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Lélia Gonzalez (Figure 37).<sup>25</sup> Manu’s phone wallpaper was the iconic image of an armed Sandinista woman breastfeeding. This mosaic of freedom fighters locates their movement not only within genealogies of feminist organizing in 1990s Brazil, but within revolutionary, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, anti-racist feminist struggles around the world.

The MMOB handbook states, “the MMOB has the primary objective of fighting for the rights of women through socialism” and continues

For us, women of the MMOB, the fight for women's issues is an instrument of the struggle for socialism. As such, we walk together with all the combative movements and organizations of the working class and youth, of the city and the country, as the victory of socialism depends on the unity of the people and the common struggle of all exploited and oppressed to change the system and transform our lives.

In short, I came to understand “ant work” not only as a reference to the organized, cooperative activities of the Almerinda Gama House, but instead as a source of “collective identity,” as well as an aspirational methodology. It refers not only to the collective (ants), but to the context through which the collective is mobilized (work).<sup>26</sup> It is about the power of collectivity and the transformative potential of collective power. It is a roadmap for exercising grass-roots power in the interest of revolutionary social change. Completing one chore at a time, serving one woman at a time.

### **Negotiating with the State**

This morning Glauber Braga, federal deputy<sup>27</sup> from Rio de Janeiro with the Socialism and Liberation Party (PSOL), visited the occupation. He toured the space and then sat down for a live conversation on Instagram with one of the coordinators of the house. As they channeled their discussion towards a cellphone propped up on a nearby plastic table, I slumped against the opposite wall on one of the newly built benches. Manu walked in wearing a new tank top with a picture of Almerinda Gama surrounded by flowers. The MMOB was selling them for R\$20 to generate proceeds to support the Almerinda Gama House. The shirts represented one of about a half a dozen efforts to generate revenue, including donation drives, a makeshift thrift store, member contributions, and—as the house became more established—events such as *fórró* dance nights, World Cup watch parties, and drink sales during Carnival. In the event that these sources of cashflow were not enough, the Almerinda Gama House could also appeal for support from the

state and national chapters of the MMOB—although such assistance was also limited and could not provide sustained relief.

Manu walked over and collapsed onto the bench next to me, the joints of its makeshift legs creaking under our combined weight.

“I have to return to ALERJ<sup>28</sup> to talk with right-wing politicians about Almerinda...”

I laughed, “Ooo, quite the diplomat!”

“I don’t have experience with this, I’m learning as I go. I’m not a very diplomatic person... but if all goes well, I will talk with the president of the state legislature.” She paused and we turned to the “live.” Glauber was petitioning his followers for support for the occupation.

“Anything helps,” he stressed.

Joana, a public-school teacher and another coordinator of the house, walked over.

“So, we talked to the Undersecretary [for Women’s Policy]. She said we can’t stay here... that she won’t support the occupation.”

“Glória?” my body grew tense. Glória Heloiza had been at the center of the recent salary cuts to the rede that I had been following alongside my research at the Almerinda Gama House. I was not even a little surprised that she took this stance but kept it to myself. I had decided it best to avoid inserting myself into their networking efforts and dialogues with the state.

“We met with Joyce<sup>29</sup> last week and she won’t enter the negotiations either,” Manu said.

While Manu was appealing for institutional support from the state legislature, Joana was trying to negotiate with administrators of women’s services. They asked the state to allow them to legally stay in the building, or to provide a suitable alternative to the building they currently occupied. Despite their multi-pronged approach, the women of MMOB were struggling to translate progressive political and activist support into enough concrete political and economic

will to fund and legitimize the Almerinda Gama House. Support from leftist politicians at the municipal, state, and federal levels—including Glauber Braga, Mônica Benício, Zeidan, Tais Ferreira, and Luciana Boiteux—had proven insufficient in the deeply conservative city of Rio de Janeiro. State administrators, even progressive ones like Joyce Trindade, wouldn't touch the Almerinda Gama House—especially, Joana and Manu hypothesized, with an election around the corner. Thus, while they didn't lack vision, they struggled to legitimize their work.

The MMOB's efforts to obtain state recognition and connect with the network of gender-specialized services revealed that the Almerinda Gama House was perhaps not as autonomous as many members claimed. Indeed, the women of the MMOB took pride in the idea that *they* had generated an entirely new and independent service. On various occasions, I heard the assertion: “we are doing what the state can't (or won't).” Yet, it was becoming increasingly clear that to develop a women's center that was administered by their movement, they also needed state recognition—without which they could not sustain the Almerinda Gama House. Thus, in practice, they were pursuing a hybrid integrated-autonomous women's center and the clear demarcation between “we” (referring to the MMOB) and “the state” was not so clear after all.

In the following section, I will explore some of the challenges that the MMOB encountered as they attempted to establish the Almerinda Gama House, particularly their relationship with the state and the network of gender-specialized services, and the process of formalizing their occupation considering the everyday financial and logistical difficulties of rendering a semi-autonomous service.

#### *Pockets of State Support, Resistance, and Ambivalence*

It had been several months since the initial occupation when I decided to ask professionals in the network of gender-specialized services—with whom I was still in close

contact—whether they had heard about the Almerinda Gama House and, if so, what they thought. In my time conducting research on GBV in Rio, I had not come across any other movement that was so directly and concretely intervening in the network of gender-specialized services, and I was eager to see how members of the network perceived these efforts.

First, I asked Judge Katerine. Not only was she a gender-specialized court judge, but she was one of two coordinators of the State Council for Women (COEM), which held biweekly meetings with representatives of each institution within the network of gender-specialized services in the state of Rio de Janeiro—including courts, women’s police, women’s centers, public defenders, and the domestic violence emergency hotline. If anyone was going to be aware of the MMOB and their effort to establish a new women’s center, it would be her. She grinned and shook her head, “Is that the occupation of trans women? Who are these women?” I clarified that it was a women’s movement occupying a building to create a new women’s center, to which she responded, “But we have a whole policy already defined.”

Then, I asked Edna, the President of the State Council for Women’s Rights (CEDIM). I recalled a conversation in which Joana mentioned contacting Edna to solicit a letter of support from CEDIM. Edna participated in all COEM meetings in addition to those with Glória, the State Undersecretary for Women’s Rights, who had denied support to the Almerinda Gama House. She was aware of its existence, but after several months no letter was ever furnished. Diego, Edna’s executive assistant and the archivist at CEDIM, couldn’t say why.

After a few months I noticed that Matilde Alonso, the chief lieutenant of the Rio de Janeiro women’s police (DEAM), and Flávia Nascimento, director of the specialized public defender’s office (NUDEM) followed the Almerinda Gama House’s Instagram account. Later a representative of NUDEM visited for a conversation hour—the only personal contact I observed.

These interactions (and lack thereof) left me wondering how, after months, some of the most powerful and well-connected members of the network of gender-specialized services could be unaware of or exhibit concern for the efforts of the MMOB at the Almerinda Gama House.

The MMOB had identified obvious pockets of support and resistance to the Almerinda Gama House, especially among leftist and conservative politicians and administrators, respectively (Beck 2023). But they had also identified another pocket: one of ambivalence, of lack of awareness. Indeed, despite the porousness of the boundaries between the state and the MMOB, this points again to the existence of two parallel worlds. The MMOB was clear that they wanted to create a center that reflected their political and philosophical principles. While they were practical about the degree to which state support for their efforts was necessary to further their goals, it seems they underestimated the degree to which the political turmoil surrounding gender-specialized services would affect their own efforts. According to their handbook, the MMOB contends that: “the network of [gender-specialized] services is insufficient. Fifteen years after the Maria da Penha Law, there has not been a reduction in violence against women. This is in part due to how the applications and effectiveness of the law bump up against the inadequacy of public services.” This felt true to what I had observed in the network of services during my research. Yet, from my very first day at the occupation, I was left with the impression that many participants were not particularly familiar with the network—apart from women’s police—and less so the current situation.

While the Almerinda Gama House struggled to find its footing, the state network was involved in its own existential struggle spurred by the reduction of professionals’ salaries and the soaring demand for services. While state services may have stood to benefit from the emergence of a new women’s center, my interviews with women’s center directors and social workers

suggest that they were working so many hours and under such bad conditions that they were focused on simply making it through the next day. With working conditions so tenuous and funding so sparse, professionals struggled to imagine the future of women's services at all, let alone a future that involved a progressive social movement. While the Almerinda Gama House interpreted the lack of interest in their efforts as antagonistic, the reality was that the state network was confronting the same barriers that the MMOB were. They were in the same struggle for resources in parallel worlds to provide care for women in need. But they didn't perceive it as such.

*"The State Doesn't Care"*

Over the months I conducted research at the Almerinda Gama House, I heard many critiques of the network: "there are few spaces [for women];" "[women's centers] are staffed by only one woman, who sits at a desk, and doesn't care;" "DEAMS are not open 24 hours per day and are staffed by men." And even some claims that "the state [didn't] have a public apparatus for violence against women;" that "there are no women's centers." In Manu's speech on the balcony on March 8<sup>th</sup>, she suggested not only that women's police stations did not work and were not trusted, but she went a step further by suggesting that through and despite these shortcomings, "the state doesn't care."

By this point, I'd been following the unraveling of the state women's centers in Rio de Janeiro for nearly 2 years. The most enduring impression that I got from professionals at women's centers was that they did care, deeply, about the work they do.<sup>30</sup> And without their individual commitments to this work women's centers would have collapsed long ago. But did the fact that the MMOB was mobilizing around—what I understood as—inaccurate or partially inaccurate conceptions of the state network and VAW matter at all? Perhaps, my intimate

familiarity with the network of gender-specialized services was clouding my perception of what was happening here. The perception that the state “doesn’t care” must come from somewhere.

In *Complaint!*, Ahmed (2021) writes that it can be hard for people outside institutions to understand how and why power circulates on the inside; how and why disfunction occurs. But that this does not mean that their grievances about this disfunction are invalid or wrong. As Ahmed argues: “power works by making it hard to challenge how power works” (2021, 125). Thus, people come to understand institutions not based on how they work or were designed work, but based on their experiences—often personal—of how they *don’t* work. While Judge Kat may feel that there is “a whole policy already defined,” that does not mean that people understand or experience it as such.

Indeed, the critique of the MMOB—that “the state doesn’t care”—says as much about the object of critique (the state and network of services), as it does about the critic. It is tied to what the state does and doesn’t do and for whom. I contend that the MMOB are illustrative of what Nancy Fraser terms “subaltern counter-publics” which constitute “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (1990, 67). For members of the MMOB, the majority of whom live in the city’s low-income periphery, the state’s neglect of everything from infrastructure to sanitation and public health, to education, to public safety is a part of everyday life (Goldstein 2013; Penglase 2014). Communities in Rio’s favelas and peripheries are not used to relying on the state for services and have been forced to implement alternative sources of care for themselves (Lelia Gonzalez 1988; Millar 2018). As one member of MMOB put it, “we are the living consequences of the state leaving people behind”—especially true among poor women of color under the Bolsonaro

administration. This brings into focus another interpretation of Manu's statement that the state doesn't care. That the mechanisms designed to care for women don't work; that there is a *lack* of care. In this sense, not only is the Almerinda Gama House intervening in what they perceive as a system of state services that is disinterested with the rights of women, but also in a state that is experienced as *uncaring*.

Nevertheless, the MMOB struggled to reconcile their strategy and political ideology, born out of lived experiences of exclusion, with the practical reality within which they found themselves. Realistically, there was no way to advance the Almerinda Gama House without state recognition. They needed to engage the state to the extent that they could secure access to the building, and operate alongside the rest of the network, but not so much that they would lose the power to direct their own operations according to their principles. In this way, their very rejection of the state involved the legitimization of it. The state was both the problem and the solution.

### **Carioca Street, 37: A Feminist Counter-Space**

On April 14, about five weeks into the occupation, I opened the little blue door to throw out the trash for pickup that evening. Once a week, the city of Rio collectively heaped its trash onto the sidewalks. I hated trash day because on more than one occasion over the years, I was charged by cockroaches that darted out from under a trash pile (with purpose, no less!) towards my feet. Without approaching the pile for fear of its temporary residents, I took aim and slung the heavy trash bag across the sidewalk. When I looked up, I made eye contact with two policemen. I panicked and quickly slammed the door shut, fumbling with the padlock until it finally clicked. In that moment, I reasoned, I would rather have been arrested for trespassing or evading the police, than responsible for the expulsion of the MMOB from that building. I hastily

climbed the stairs and peered over the upstairs balcony onto the street. I saw police lights and watched as stern-looking uniformed man approached the door.

*BANG! BANG! BANG!* He rapped on the door, the sound echoing through the concrete structure.

I ran to get Manu who was in a meeting on the mezzanine level.

“The Municipal Guard is here!!”

“The Municipal Guard?” she asked confusedly. Shaking her head, she added, “Every day it’s something different...”

I took solace in her annoyed reaction. *At least she didn’t seem scared*, I comforted myself as we shuffled back down the spiral stairs and approached the door. Without opening the door, Manu said,

“Oi?”

“Oi. Can you open the door?”

“I can hear you,” she responded firmly, “but what is this about?”

“I’m looking for a building, I’m wondering if it’s this one...”

“What address?”

“Carioca Street, number 37.”

“It’s here.”

“Have you been here for a while?”

“Yes, for more than a month.”

“Do you all know that you are trespassing?” Manu’s pressed her ear to the door; we made eye-contact as his words sunk in. I watched her face as she quickly decided how to respond.

“We are not. We are in conversations with the state. This is a *state* building,” Manu reasoned, emphasizing the word “state” to question the *Municipal* Guard’s jurisdiction. The Municipal Guard is a civil police force that operates within the municipality of Rio de Janeiro. While the location of the Almerinda Gama House did fall within their territorial jurisdiction, Manu was making the point that the building itself was state, and by extension public, property. While this logic certainly left room for debate, the confidence and authority with which she spoke was enough to deter further conflict.

“Oh okay, God bless.” He retreated.

We stood there for a few seconds catching our breath before she commented, “Oh so now the State wants to talk to me. I’ve been trying to talk with them and nothing, and now they want something?!”

As the weeks passed, it became clear that one of the primary challenges that the Almerinda Gama House faced had to do with their approach to creating a women’s center through and in an occupation. For the MMOB, the decision to push for a popular women’s center through an occupation was deliberate—more than a means to an end. The struggle for this women’s center was intricately tied to the broader struggle for urban space. Their handbook states as much: “We carry out occupations because we realize that demanding public policies and government actions is not enough to guarantee our rights. We also need to build *alternatives* based on popular power!” [Emphasis mine]. Here, the MMOB tether their feminism to the politics of urban space evoking what Holston (2009) terms “insurgent citizenship,” wherein urban movements challenge uneven and exclusionary practices through projects that seek to exercise collective power to make claims for rights.

Occupying or “squatting” is one form of insurgent citizenship that has been used by social movements across the world to address entrenched geographies of exclusion. From movements of students struggling for accessible public education (Hopkins and Todd 2015; Tarlau 2019) to efforts to secure housing in cities like New Delhi (Datta 2012), occupying is used as a political tool to draw attention to the geospatial contours of urban inequality. As such, I contend that occupying is an example of what Magaña has referred to as the creation of “counter-spaces,” or the “spatial projects produced through the political imagination and practice of social movements as an *alternative* to spaces created by the dominant system” (emphasis mine 2016, 228). This approach has been used in urban Brazil, most notably by the Movimento de Luta nos Bairros, Vilas, e Favelas (MLB) who organize around urban reform and the right to housing through the occupation of public property (Aragão, Soraggi, and Corrêa 2021). For the MLB, the occupation is both a methodology for creating political pressure *and* a method for securing immediate housing for otherwise unhoused families. In doing so they use the tool of the occupation to resist the politics of urban exclusion and poverty and in doing so present an alternative.

In the context of movements to address violence against women in Latin America, the creation of what I will call “feminist counter-spaces” has been especially important in the struggle to make public what has long been characterized as a private issue. This strategic approach has been leveraged by movements across the continent, from mothers whose daughters have been murdered and disappeared in Mexico (Wright 2010) and El Salvador (Stephen 1997) to movements for reproductive rights in Argentina (Sutton and Vacarezza 2020) and evidences how “many feminists hope to use the new spaces and forms of insurgent citizenship to build a commitment to the politics of diversity and to address structural transformations in the world political economy that deprive people of basic survival needs (Wekerle 2013, 249). In the case of

the MMOB, the creation of a feminist counter-space is not only about the protesting of current conditions, but it is also explicitly tied to this effort to build “alternatives” to what Magaña describes as the “dominant system” (2016, 228). Such a project fuses the politics of violence against women with the politics of urban inequality, including debates about the right to the city.

Despite its transformative potential, it was becoming clear that addressing perceived “gaps” in the network of gender-specialized state services through an occupation posed both logistical, economic, and political challenges that constrained the work of the Almerinda Gama House and even rendered their efforts vulnerable. For the first few months, the MMOB felt that the likelihood of eviction was low,<sup>31</sup> “no one wants to violently evict women from a space that is dedicated to the issue of violence against women...especially in an election year.” While the state had yet to “violently evict” them, it did not appear that the state was particularly invested in their success either. It turned out that the security and vitality of the Almerinda Gama House hinged on the state letting them stay. In other words, they needed the state in their effort to critique it.

Without state support, the MMOB had to contend with the challenges of sustaining and operating an autonomous women’s center and manage the everyday risk of “trespassing” on their own. It was exceedingly obvious as March turned into April and April into May that the logistics and finances of the Almerinda Gama House were consuming the occupation leadership. As the space was never to be left empty, it was a constant struggle to organize rotations of members to stay in the building, and especially to spend the night. Having slept in the building a handful of times, I didn’t blame them. The mosquitos were insufferable—even sleeping under a fan on full-blast couldn’t keep them away—and the building shook as buses raced down Carioca Street all night. The hard concrete floor pushed into my bones, and I never got a second of sleep.

Moreover, the finances were tenuous at best, with over R\$2200 (about US\$440) in expenses per month—for water, Wi-Fi, repairs, food, etc. The reality was that the Almerinda Gama House was constantly teetering on the edge of closure. Yet, despite the absence of state support, the occupation sustained itself, through the support of the MMOB at the national level.

### **Café with Manu and Silvia**

One May day, about a month after the unannounced police visit, Manu and I sat in plastic chairs around a table downstairs for our afternoon *café*.

“Shit, that’s good,” she shook her head, eyes closed and cracked a smile. The key to Manu’s heart, I had learned, was extra strong coffee. Maybe it was the taste, or maybe it was the caffeine bump she needed to make it through the day, juggling responsibilities as a single mother of two, an undergraduate student in social services, a ranking leader of the MMOB, and coordinator of the Almerinda Gama House. In the end, whatever her reasons, it meant that I got to sit down with her and talk about everything and nothing for 30 minutes. It was the only time she ever sat down.

That day, she was eager to show me an article that had come out in the BBC about the MMOB and their women’s centers. The title of the article read “For the first time I felt cared for: the occupations that care for victims of domestic violence and run the risk of eviction,”<sup>32</sup> and detailed the precarity of the MMOB’s women’s centers despite the meaningful impact they were making across urban Brazil. Manu seemed pleased that Rio de Janeiro’s occupation was recognized in the article. I wondered what she felt about the possibility of eviction but didn’t ask. Manu was involved in nearly every decision at the Almerinda Gama House. While there were other “coordinators” of the space, all elected by the membership, Manu was among the most active. She was technically in charge of the political side, negotiating with the state, pushing for

support, etc., but it seemed to me that she was equally involved in the little, everyday things as in the “big picture” stuff. I could see the toll this took on her, I knew she worried, and it seemed cruel and unnecessary to raise the possibility that everything she’d worked for at the Almerinda Gama House could be taken away.

She shared that she had just met with Fernanda, a national coordinator of MMOB, who encouraged her and the women at the Almerinda Gama House to “think about what kind of public policy [they] do.”

“So, what kind of public policy is this, do you think?” I queried.

“This...” she paused, “this is another form of creating public policy. We don’t want to substitute the state. We are creating other more complex and profound forms of care, which is not *assistencialista*.”<sup>33</sup>

We sat in silence for a few seconds. She added, “we don’t want to isolate ourselves, but we want to grow, with the *people* at the center.”

“I see,” I replied. “Sounds nice...but complicated.”

“Very.”

Before we got back to work, Manu invited me to a virtual meeting of the National coordinators of the MMOB’s women’s centers later that week. While the state of Rio de Janeiro was reluctant to legitimize their occupation, the MMOB had another source of support: itself. Indeed, the Almerinda Gama House is not the only occupation of its kind. Rather, it is one of 11 women’s centers established through the occupation of public buildings by the MMOB across urban Brazil since 2016.<sup>34</sup> Manu felt that the Almerinda Gama House had a lot to learn from these other occupations, which ranged widely in terms of outcomes. Leading up to the occupation of the Almerinda Gama House, eight occupations had been carried out across urban

Brazil and, of them, only one had suffered eviction and repossession by the state (Recife). In the months after the Almerinda Gama House, another one would fall (Florianópolis), but an additional four occupations would be established. Of the occupations in operation some are in active negotiations with state officials over the buildings, while others have struggled with stalled negotiations and eviction notices. Many centers, however, continue to operate even under imminent threat of eviction.

One women's center in particular served as a model for the rest of the movement: the Tina Martins House, the MMOB's first and most established women's center. Located in the city of Belo Horizonte about 250 miles north of Rio de Janeiro, the Tina Martins House was established in 2016 in response to a case of femicide. The story goes that the women of the MMOB protested this femicide by occupying a building near the campus of the Federal University of Minas Gerais. To their surprise, no one kicked them out. So, they were faced with a decision about what to do with the space and opted for a women's center. Eventually, after months of negotiations with the state, and were ceded another building, where they would have legitimate access and even some state support (Assis and Tommasi 2018). In their negotiations, they arrived at a hybrid model—wherein the state would finance the utilities and building, and the MMOB would fund the cost of the service and house activities. The MMOB would maintain their organizational autonomy, but they were recognized by the state as a legitimate women's center and became an integral part of the city's network of gender-specialized services. In its first six years, the Tina Martins House directly served approximately 1,000 women in situations of violence. Further, their programming—activities, outreach, and mutual aid—had reached approximately 5,000 women across BH. With the capacity to serve about 50 women per month, the Tina Martins House has become a reference not only for the MMOB at the national level, but

for the state network of gender-specialized services in Belo Horizonte. Today, their center is promoted alongside the state-operated women's centers; the police and courts refer women to them; and the state social service professionals openly acknowledge that they would be unable to keep up with demand without them. As Fernanda put it, "they don't call us the 'girls from Tina' anymore. Belo Horizonte didn't have much, and today it has Tina Martins."

Fernanda was one of the founding members of the Tina Martins House. She was a social worker in the state network before that. Her experience in both arenas meant that she was someone that people looked to for leadership. That, and she was articulate and charismatic, but in an unassuming way. I could see why people gravitated towards her; she was steady. She had even travelled to the Almerinda Gama House to provide support during the first week of the occupation.

The National meeting was virtually attended by about 20 women, all involved in coordinating occupations to create women's centers. Unsurprisingly, Fernanda led the meeting. She spoke about various issues with the network of services and the challenges of establishing their women's centers:

Each house should have a plan. What do you have the conditions to do? We can do intakes. We don't need psychologists and social workers to provide humane, qualified listening. Women want to be heard, oriented, and believed, and we can do this. And in cases where we don't know how to help, we will figure it out together. We don't want to reproduce with the [state] network does, which is just check off that women were there. We aren't looking to hit a metric. It's a process to decide how we want to operate, based on the arms and legs we have. But it's really important that we insert ourselves into the network. This will make us stronger and more formalized.

Again, the MMOB's efforts to critique the state services were blended with the reality that they needed to "insert" themselves into the network to become "stronger and more formalized."

Fernanda echoed Manu's sense that they shouldn't "isolate themselves," that "growth" necessitated engagement with the state. But for a self-described "combative" movement

engagement was often understood to be problematic, especially for the Almerinda Gama House, which was in the conservative state of Rio de Janeiro. Their anxieties about turning to the state for recognition echoed the discourse that circulated among feminists during Brazil's redemocratization, about the risks of pursuing integration and the institutionalization of women's services *or* autonomy, to retain control over them (Alvarez 1990). To my surprise, Fernanda emphasized that engagement with the state could occur in multiple ways,

We are with the state, against the state, and beyond the state as a social movement. We are with the state when we fill some of these huge gaps that the state leaves within the service network itself. We are with the state when we provide this service, despite it being the obligation of the state. We are with the state when we provide care. We are against the state when we protest, when we occupy these spaces, when we create these radical and radicalized movements that call attention [...] to the obligation that the state has to meet the demands. And we are beyond the state when we once again create a new and different service than what the state provides for women.

Fernanda's narrative underscored the dynamism and dimensionality with which the MMOB operated: with, against, and beyond the state. She asserted that engagement with the state did not necessarily entail compromising their values as a movement. It could take multiple, coexisting forms that ranged from cooperation and engagement to critique and protest that *together* could forward their aims. With this framing, the MMOB seemed to sidestep the either/or debate that ultimately weakened the power of their predecessors. They also dodged the common pitfall of social movements of conceiving of the state as both the problem and the solution. Their pragmatic hybrid approach was about using the tools they had as leverage and recognizing the power in taking a multipronged approach to social change.

#### *The Tina Martins House*

With just two weeks left of my fieldwork in Brazil, I booked a flight to Belo Horizonte to visit the Tina Martins House. When I arrived at my AirBnB, the host—a young woman who

worked in child psychology—asked what I planned to do during my brief visit. I was surprised to learn that she knew of the Tina Martins House.

“Yeah, I mean, it’s pretty well known in BH.”<sup>35</sup>

I left my things and walked to the Tina Martins House (Figure 39). It was my first time in BH and the crisp winter air was such a refreshing departure from the humidity of Rio de Janeiro. I easily located my destination and knocked on the door. A middle-aged woman with long, pin-straight black hair, glasses, and an infectious smile, opened the door, baby on hip, and introduced herself as Silvia. She gave me a tour of the building, pointing out the dormitory that slept 12 women, the collective kitchen and library, the open-air meeting area, and the two offices where intakes for women in situations of violence occurred. Unlike the dust-covered, under-furnished Almerinda Gama House, the building was clean, organized, and well-stocked.

We sat down for *café* and before I asked a single question, she began to tell me her story. Five years earlier, she arrived at the Tina Martins House seeking respite from an on-going situation of domestic violence and subsequent police violence as she tried to escape.

“The state services only offered superficial help and the police were violent,” she narrated. “I was treated as the aggressor for simply trying to save myself



**Figure 40** Street view of the Tina Martins House in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais; the first women's center created by the MMOB in 2016.

and my kids.” Not only had the police minimized her situation in the formal police report or *denúncia*, but they informed the aggressor that she had filed a *denúncia* before Silvia could get to safety. He retaliated violently and she was forced to flee with her three kids onto the streets. Through the help of a psychologist at a state women’s center, she was referred to the Tina Martins House, where she and her children stayed for 10 months. Today, Silvia is an active member of the MMOB and a coordinator of the Tina Martins House. She reflects,

“Today I know that it wasn’t the state that saved me, it was women who saved me.”

After my visit, I understood why the Tina Martin’s House was a model for the women at the Almerinda Gama House. It was a functioning women’s center that had provided care and safety for hundreds and hundreds of women. But while they have these highly organized and successful models, the women of Rio de Janeiro’s Almerinda Gama House are facing a unique reality. Indeed, every city has its own distinct political economy, and while the Tina Martins House was established in a politically liberal city, the Almerinda Gama House was situated in an entirely different political landscape. One where services for women—state and autonomous—were vulnerable and struggling to survive.

After 7 months, the eviction notice arrived. The Almerinda Gama House had sheltered 8 women and 5 children up until then and was still struggling to stay in service. As I write this, a year and a half after the initial occupation of the Almerinda Gama House on March 8, 2022, the house is still operating and providing care for women despite the uncertainty of pending eviction. While an August 2023 court decision placed a temporary pause on the eviction, the Almerinda Gama House continues to struggle for a permanent, state-authorized space to operate. It is unclear how long this process might take.

## Conclusion

On a July evening, days before I was set to return to Oregon, the Almerinda Gama House hosted a *feira junina*<sup>36</sup> to fundraise and celebrate five months of existence. We spent the whole afternoon adorning the building with streamers and multicolored tissue paper flags. Upstairs a group of university students organized a feminist art installation. A local all-women *forró* group played music typical of northeast Brazil, and we danced and danced and danced. As the group partnered up for a *quadrilha*, something similar to a square dance. I grabbed Clara's hands. She laughed as I stumbled through the steps. We swung around, arms linked, before lining up across from each other. We all put up our hands to create a tunnel for people to dance through. When it was our turn, Clara and I shuffled through, giggling self-consciously.

Heart rates elevated, we wandered over to the plastic chairs that lined the perimeter of the dance floor and sat down. Clara had been living in the Almerinda Gama House for about a month, having escaped a situation of domestic violence at the hands of her husband. She and I had grown close as we cooked, cleaned, and passed time together. She was from Manaus, where I had done research before and she loved to reminisce on “real” *farofa*, finely ground, toasted manioc (“not like the powder people eat in Rio”), or *tacacá* (fish stew) made just right. Clara sat quietly before speaking. “I haven't danced for six years” she paused, “and you all got me to dance.” At that my body stilled. I'd spent months watching and participating in the growth of the Almerinda Gama House. Having been closely involved in analyzing the work of the MMOB and how it fit into that of the state network of gender-specialized care in Rio, I hadn't paused to consider the significance of what they had accomplished. While there was still so much uncertainty, the Almerinda Gama House had succeeded in providing care for Clara and a handful of others. They did so, not by having a perfect space or technical training, but by extending

resources and support to women who needed them *when* they needed them. In this way, their work—antwork—was profoundly aspirational, evidence of the possibilities of popular services and the power of organized collectives to create meaningful impacts in people’s lives.

In this chapter, I examined the creation of the Almerinda Gama House as a window into what happens when people feel that the state “does not care” about them or for them. In this case, the MMOB intervened in what they perceived as a pattern of state neglect and unwillingness to fulfill its obligations to protect and provide care for women, who continue to experience some of the highest rates of violence in Brazil and in the world. In its first five months, the Almerinda Gama House tapped into a highly organized coalition of popular urban movements in Rio de Janeiro and transformed an abandoned building into a functioning women’s center. Despite this well-orchestrated effort, they struggled to gain political footing, as they were met with pockets of support, resistance, and even ambivalence from differently situated agents of the state. It turned out that social service professionals, figures the MMOB had hoped would extend support, were struggling against the very forces the Almerinda Gama House set out to critique and disrupt. In doing so, the MMOB too found itself in a desert of a social service landscape, with resources too sparse to maintain the women’s centers that already existed, let alone a new one.

Whether the MMOB can sustain the Almerinda Gama House in this environment remains to be seen, but sitting next to Clara I couldn’t help but feel that they had already accomplished something remarkable. The MMOB’s efforts to build the Almerinda Gama House—a popular, semi-autonomous women’s center—illustrate the critical role social movements play in pressuring the state to meet and even expand its commitments to women citizens. Their occupation suggests how marginalized women cope with recurring violence in the absence of public power, implementing alternative blueprints for justice and care, and reconfiguring the

logics of gendered citizenship in the process. The state of the network of gender-specialized services was dire, and near collapse, but the MMOB offered one possible exit.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Igreja de Nossa Senhora da Candelária is one of many historical churches in Rio. But it is most strongly associated with a 1993 massacre in which several off-duty military police officers killed eight people, including six children, who were sleeping on the steps of the church. The church is at once symbolic of state violence and a reference for activism in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of this event, on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Jair Bolsonaro was president of Brazil and Cláudio Castro was (and continues to be) governor of Rio de Janeiro. Both were/are members of Brazil's far-right Liberal Party (PL).

<sup>3</sup> All names are pseudonyms unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>4</sup> In the context of Rio de Janeiro, the militia (*milícia*) refers to armed paramilitary groups comprised primarily of ex-police and other agents of the state. Unlike other gangs in Rio, they do not focus exclusively on drug-trafficking, but operate a highly organized and violent criminal enterprise that includes requiring payments from neighborhood residents for safety, managing informal local economies, extortion, and even killing for hire (Penglase 2014). Given their ties to the military police and other specialized law enforcement groups, it is widely known that the militia has close ties to the conservative far-right. It has even been proven responsible for the murder of city-councilwoman Marielle Franco—many believe at the order of Jair Bolsonaro.

<sup>5</sup> Almerinda Gama was an important figure in the fight for women's suffrage in Brazil. See Tenório (2021) for a deeper dive into Gama's contributions to contemporary feminism.

<sup>6</sup> Tell the story of real estate speculation on this street. <https://pge.rj.gov.br/imprensa/noticias/2021/06/pge-rj-faz-acordo-com-fundo-imobiliario-e-estado-retoma-imoveis-na-rua-da-carioca>

<sup>7</sup> In fact, on the weekends it is thought to be very risky to walk downtown because it is so desolate, save for the area around the bay where several museums remain open.

<sup>8</sup> Temperatures regularly top 100 degrees Fahrenheit during the day triggering intense thunderstorms in the evenings. One of the most famous Brazilian songs, “Águas de Março” (Waters of March) by Antônio Carlos Jobim, is an ode to Rio de Janeiro's rainiest month.

<sup>9</sup> The Dossiê Mulher 2022 data reflects this: the rate of violence against women in the “Capital” region (the municipality of Rio de Janeiro) is 1,090.5 per 100 thousand, while the rate for women in the “Baixada Fluminense” (peripheral metro area) is 1,309.6. Worse yet, the “Interior” of the state (outside the Rio metro area) is 1,388.3 (2022, 23). In other words, contrary to Letícia's claim, rates of violence against women are higher in the regions outside the municipality of Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>10</sup> People frequently cite the Waiselfisz (2015) study that ranks Brazil as the country with the 5<sup>th</sup> highest rate of femicide in the world. But this study was published in 2015. Now, 8 years later, it is not clear that this statistic still applies. Rio de Janeiro is not the 2<sup>nd</sup> most violent state for women in Brazil.

<sup>11</sup> A cavaquinho is a ukulele-like guitar, very characteristic of samba and choro.

<sup>12</sup> Members of MMOB commonly use the term Olga to refer to their movement internally. Olga Benário, the namesake of their movement, was born in Germany to a Jewish family in the early 1900s. She became famous for her communist activism during World War II, during which time she married Brazilian Luís Carlos Prestes, and moved to Rio de Janeiro. She was ultimately deported from Brazil for her association with communist organizing and executed in a concentration camp in Nazi Germany. Her daughter, Anita, still lives in Rio de Janeiro and has visited the Almerinda Gama House.

---

<sup>13</sup> Daycare was one of the many issues that poor women’s movements in the 1990s began fighting for that differentiated them from feminist movements at the time. They fought through neighborhood associations. This prioritization of daycare placed MMOB within the activist landscape, as a movement rooted in women’s movements, not feminist ones. One difference between rede and Almerinda Gama.

<sup>14</sup> A period during which the Brazilian dictatorship relaxed control over social and political organizing that eventually gave way to the end of the dictatorship, the drafting of a new Constitution, and redemocratization.

<sup>15</sup> Certainty people had ways of supporting women before this that weren’t recognized.

<sup>16</sup> Brazilian feminism in the 1980s and 1990s was largely driven by the interests and activism of white, middle-class, college-educated women. For more on the exclusive nature of late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminism in Brazil, see Chapter II.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the history and politics of CIAM Márcia Lyra, see Chapter V.

<sup>18</sup> The MMOB and the Almerinda Gama House is not the only site in which women are organizing around perceived gaps in the network of gender-specialized services in Rio de Janeiro. During my time in Rio, I came across dozens of other efforts that have tried to fill this gap including neighborhood associations (Redes da Maré), NGOs (Mapa do Acolhimento), digital communities on social media (Superação de Violência Doméstica and Vamos Mulherar), and direct action networks (Coletes Rosas).

<sup>19</sup> Including members of movements for housing (*Movimento de Luta nos Bairros, Villas, e Favelas—MLB*, *Movimento de Luta de Classes—MLC*), student movements (*Correnteza, União Estadual dos Estudantes, União da Juventude Rebelião*), racial justice movements (*Movimento Negro Perifa Zumbi*), and representatives and affiliates with several leftist political parties (*Partido de Socialismo e Liberdade—PSOL, Partido dos Trabalhadores—PT, Unidade Popular—UP*).

<sup>20</sup> When someone pulls energy from a neighboring source so as to avoid incurring costs to themselves. This is very common in underresourced neighborhoods in Brazil.

<sup>21</sup> *Trabalho de formiga/formiguinha*.

<sup>22</sup> A woman of African origin (Mahi) who is thought to have participated and even led the organization of uprisings of enslaved people in the Brazilian state of Bahia in the nineteenth century, including the Malê Revolt in 1835. Her son Luis Gama is a famous abolitionist poet (Arraes 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Paulo Freire is a Brazilian educator and philosopher whose most famous work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), espouses the notion that social and economic liberation could be achieved through education.

<sup>24</sup> Dandara of Palmares was an Afro-Brazilian fighter who defended Brazil’s most famous quilombo, Palmares, from the Portuguese in the late 17th century. She fought alongside her husband, Zumbi or Zumbi dos Palmares (Soares 2023).

<sup>25</sup> Brazilian public intellectual, educator, anthropologist, and pioneer of afro-latin-american feminism (Gonzalez 2020).

<sup>26</sup> This brings to mind the phrase “doing the work” that has come to signify investing in unlearning racist, misogynist, classist, ableist, homophobic, transphobic behaviors.

<sup>27</sup> Similar to a state representative in the U.S. House of Representatives.

<sup>28</sup> Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>29</sup> The Municipal Secretary for Women’s Policy.

---

<sup>30</sup> For more on Rio's women's centers, see Chapter V.

<sup>31</sup> People consistently pointed out that occupations for housing, in which many members of MMOB participated, are very different. The state resists this much more strongly.

<sup>32</sup> The article can be found here in Portuguese: <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-61487111>.

<sup>33</sup> *Assistencialismo* is a term used in activist circles to refer to the way in which social services cultivate dependency and practice charity among vulnerable populations, rather than providing the conditions necessary for people to "help themselves." As one member of MMOB put it, "you can't expect people to need what you think or want them to need."

<sup>34</sup> The MMOB founded 13 women's centers in the cities of Belo Horizonte (MG), Porto Alegre (RS), São Paulo (SP), Salvador (BA), Florianópolis (SC), Recife (PE), Rio de Janeiro (RJ), Fortaleza (CE), Belém (PA), Distrito Federal (DF), and Campinas (SP). Of these centers, two have been repossessed by the state, while the other 11 continue to operate.

<sup>35</sup> People use the acronym BH to refer to the city of Belo Horizonte.

<sup>36</sup> The *festa junina* is a celebration that was introduced during the Portuguese colonial period, which celebrates the nativity of St. John the Baptist in the month of June. They are primarily associated with the north and northeast of Brazil, where the month of June brings the end of the rainy season, and are an opportunity for people to give thanks to St. John for the rain. The celebrations are infused with narratives and iconography from Brazilian folklore, with indigenous and African influences.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

In this dissertation research, I examine the gaps between the goals and vision of the Maria da Penha Law, Brazil's world-renowned domestic violence legislation, and its everyday application and impacts in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Specifically, I investigated the network of gender-specialized services—including women's police stations, women's centers, and specialized courts—mandated by the Maria da Penha Law and their efficacy in addressing and preventing violence against women.

Gender-specialized services represent a crucial intervention in social services for women experiencing gender-based violence in Brazil. Prior to the Maria da Penha Law, women experienced many barriers to accessing rights related to justice and care. The reform is the product of years of advocacy and activism by social movements and governments at multiple scales and signaled a departure from this history of dismissing and delegitimizing violence against women. Not only did the Maria da Penha Law intervene in deep-rooted culture of impunity for VAW, it also opened new avenues of justice and care for women through the creation of gender-specialized services. Today, the network in Rio de Janeiro serves upwards of 100 thousand women per year and the Maria da Penha Law is often heralded as the “3<sup>rd</sup> best domestic violence policy in the world.” Nevertheless, as this dissertation illustrates, passing progressive reforms is only the start of a much longer and complex process of implementation. Indeed, while these reforms have undeniably provided many women with increased access to justice and care at critical stages in their lives, VAW in Rio de Janeiro continues to rise and the network is, in the words of many of my interlocutors, “falling to pieces.” Leading many to wonder, “if we have the third best law in the world, why do we have so much violence?” (pers. comm. Elen de Freitas, 2021).

This work builds on a growing body of research that has problematized the effectiveness of the Maria da Penha Law for various reasons, not limited to partial and uneven implementation, failure to equally protect women of diverse backgrounds, and the vulnerability of services for women in conservative and neoliberal political contexts. Together these studies suggest that the Maria da Penha Law and the gender-specialized services that it mandated have been far less effective in practice than data and (inter)national narratives might suggest. Given this disconnect, I set out to understand the relational, political, and multi-scalar processes that shape how and why “gaps” between gender reforms on paper and in practice come to be, and how they limit the efforts of the state to effectively address VAW. It investigates the complex “social worlds created by policy interventions,” such as those surrounding the gender-specialized services that resulted from Maria da Penha Law (Tate 2020, 84). Through the stories of differently situated stakeholders—those who administer services, organize around them, and utilize them—this research sheds light on the cracks and fissures that belie larger gaps in the implementation of the law, which in turn provide important lessons about reforms in other places and contexts.

### **Services That Misalign with Women’s Needs and Ideas of Justice**

Gender-specialized courts are a critical site in which the Maria da Penha Law is applied and illustrate the incredibly subjective decisions and policies that together produce “justice.” While judges are eager to work with the Maria da Penha Law, Chapter III shows that what the courts see as justice does not always align with the needs and epistemologies of justice that diverse women hold. They force women into lengthy legal processes, with little to no orientation; they limit their agency over their own cases and often result in outcomes that render women more vulnerable over time; they are mistrusted due to years of misogynistic practices and their role in a criminal justice system that disproportionately targets and incarcerates people of color; and in doing so they can

even exacerbate barriers to meaningful justice and care. In this way, the law and its applications misalign with the needs or interests of women, producing “gaps” between what the law is supposed to do (protect and deliver justice to women) and it actually does. In this process, judges and other actors within the courts exercise significant amounts of discretion as they determine when and how to apply particular provisions outlined in the law. The case of the grandmother whose grandson was being held in preventative prison for her protection, for example, illustrates that the process of adjudicating the Maria da Penha Law is far from objective; that justice is negotiated in everyday ways that are profoundly consequential for women. The outcome is that courts continue to struggle with their reputation and women are actively circumventing such spaces.

### **Neoliberal Politics and the Dismantling of Women’s Services**

Women’s centers and other sites of care in the network were designed to fill in some of these gaps in the justice system. They were created to address and mitigate distrust in the judiciary and provide alternative avenues for care that did not necessarily involve courts, police, or lengthy legal proceedings. Nevertheless, in the eyes of many women, women’s centers are not discernable from courts and police, the primary faces of the network, effectively undermining the work they set out to do. Despite their critical intervention, women’s centers face many challenges. They are under-resourced and struggling with persistently high demand and they were inserted into a political and cultural landscape that continues to politicize women’s rights and “gender ideology.” In effect, the visibility of the Maria da Penha Law and gender-specialized services has rendered them vulnerable to amendments and budget manipulation in Brazil’s conservative political contexts. In legislatures at the national and state level, the term “gender” itself has become politicized. While services for women are rarely eliminated outright, they can be constrained such that they no longer function. One of the ways this happens is through extreme budget cuts, which

make it impossible to pay workers and maintain a physical space. At scale, this neoliberal austerity politics leads the public to believe that public services do not work—not because they are under-resourced, but because they are public.

### **Varied Commitments to Women’s Services within State Institutions**

This is further complicated by the reality that anti-gender backlash politics are not just carried out in legislatures, but also within the very institutions that are supposed to be providing women’s services. Despite the widespread perception that the state is a homogenous entity, this research illustrates that there is in fact a large amount of variation within and across state institutions, in terms of interests, power, and commitment to gender reforms. This variation can produce partial or ineffective reforms. My research found that many of the professionals that administer gender-specialized services are dedicated public servants. They care deeply about the work they do and feel that if they do not provide care for women that no one will. Indeed, they constitute a sort of “front-line” in care for women in situations of violence and they are proud of the work they do. The same cannot be said of all state actors involved in delivering gender-specialized services. As Chapter IV illustrates, service administrators have political motivations that do not always align with the goals of the services they oversee. This is particularly problematic in Rio de Janeiro, where conservative administrations at the state level have incrementally hollowed out services for women and other minorities. In this way, service administrators can conflict with the intended outcomes of their roles, and service professionals—and women in need of services—are the ones who suffer. But even within these categories “service administrators,” and “service professionals” there are important differences. Among professionals, judges have more power than women’s center directors. Some women’s center directors have more power than

others, depending on the availability of resources and the stability of the service. These variations create conflict and almost always push services into further precarity.

### **Women’s Social Movements and Alternative Approaches to Justice and Care**

When women cannot access public services—be it due to the reduced capacity of services or ideas about and even experiences of the inefficacy of public services—women seek alternative sources of justice and care. In Chapter V, this research followed the Olga Benário Women’s Movement (MMOB) as they worked to establish a semi-autonomous women’s center: the Almerinda Gama House. Their efforts were explicitly aimed at calling attention to and addressing what they perceived as a “gap” in the services for women in situations of violence, particularly for women of color, living in low-income, peripheral neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro. Tapping into a highly coordinated coalition of progressive movements, the women of the MMOB occupied an abandoned public building in downtown Rio de Janeiro, crowd-sourced resources, and began building a new women’s center from scratch. While they relied on rhetorical strategies which largely critiqued the state, they ultimately aimed to integrate the Almerinda Gama House with the rest of the state network—with the caveat that the service would be administered by their movement. The concept of an integrated, yet autonomous service was not new. In fact, it was tested as early as the 1980s by the women who formed SOS Mulher, a series of non-governmental centers for women in situations of violence in urban Brazil. While SOS Mulher only lasted through the late 1980s, many of the women involved in this early effort at popular women’s services now oversee contemporary gender-specialized services in Rio de Janeiro. In this way, feminist activist genealogies spanning decades continue to shape women’s rights in Brazil albeit with different relationships to and ideologies of the state. The MMOB was entangled in this broader history even as they tried to differentiate their approach to feminism.

Indeed, while many members of the MMOB were not familiar with SOS Mulher, they did have other models for the Almerinda Gama House. The most important was the Tina Martins House, the MMOB's first women's center, in Belo Horizonte. In operation for six years, the Tina Martins House was fully integrated with the city's gender-specialized service network receiving triages from women's police and service professionals at state women's centers. Despite this model and vision, the women of the MMOB struggled to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the state—the singular authority that oversaw the network of services for women in Rio de Janeiro. Given that state women's centers themselves were on the brink of collapse and investment in women's centers on the decline, support from state service professionals and administrators was and continues to be hard to come by. They were in the same struggle for resources in parallel worlds—to provide care for women in need as the women dedicated to providing state services for victims of violence. But they didn't perceive it as such. Nevertheless, they opened their doors to women in situations of violence, serving upwards of 30 women and children in their first year.

Now, about a year and a half later, they are still negotiating with the state and the future of the Almerinda Gama House is uncertain, but their efforts offer important takeaways about the relationship between progressive policy reforms and social movements. Indeed, the Maria da Penha Law was created by social movement pressure—to fill in gaps in the policies and laws that existed, which had the effect of curtailing women's citizenship rights. And just as the law was created by social movements, so too is it monitored by them. As new gaps open, movements of women are quick to intervene. Organized groups of women are important stakeholders in the passing and implementation of the Maria da Penha Law. In the words of Fernanda, women's movements “are with, against, and beyond the state,” oftentimes all at once.

## **Closing Remarks**

Today, the outcomes of the Maria da Penha Law are largely mixed. While the law has provided recourse for some, many women—especially low-income women of color—continue to have minimal access to their rights. Their stories suggest that while passing progressive gender reforms is an important step, it is just the beginning of a longer process of affecting meaningful change. Together the findings of this research suggest that to be effective, policies must account for the cultural and political contexts in which they will be implemented. It is not enough to write progressive legislation or adopt international human rights protocols if they are met with fragmented systems, uneven enforcement and protection of rights, and scenarios in which the state enables and even actively commits violence against women. Further, it is critical that the implementation of laws, like the Maria da Penha Law, be monitored and maintained, such that they sustainably and reliably function across place and time.

But this research is about more than just identifying and critiquing a gap between a law in theory and in practice—in fact one would be hard-pressed to find a law that didn't stray from the original vision of its creators in some way. Rather, this research is about what happens in this gap—where it comes from, what it signals, and how it permanently reconfigures the political landscape. Indeed, the Maria da Penha Law and gender-specialized services have fundamentally changed the world of women's rights organizing and legislating in Brazil. They emerged from a historical moment at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which groups of women sought to redefine violence against women through the logics of gender-based violence and women's human rights. After many long years of authoritarianism, the Maria da Penha Law was the culmination of decades of feminist organizing and marked the history of women's rights in the country and in the world.

Despite this hard-fought victory, many women were skeptical of legal avenues as a vehicle through which to advance women's rights, particularly those among historically underserved communities. Indeed, laws like the Maria da Penha Law reify particular ideas about what qualifies as violence and what constitutes justice and care; ideas that may conflict with the lived experience of some. For many residents of Rio de Janeiro, the state is not understood as a site of justice or care, but rather as an antagonist. The idea that all women would want to appeal to the state as an arbiter of rights is an assumption that is baked into the Maria da Penha Law and which continues to constrain its effectiveness among women of diverse race, class, and geosocial backgrounds. In this way, the Maria da Penha Law of today is a product of social and political inequalities of decades past; it is inextricably bound to the historical, political legacies of dictatorship, of hegemonic feminism, and of social, economic, and racial exclusion. Thus, I argue that the gap between the Maria da Penha Law in theory and in practice is a manifestation of a much more profound and persistent social and cultural chasm. One that is marked by strongly diverging ideas of what constitutes justice and care, and increasing disparities in who has the power to define them. Today, diverse women's movements such as the Olga Benário Women's Movement (MMOB) are driven by the pursuit of the *power* to define justice and care for women.

As with feminists who organized around the creation of the Maria da Penha Law, the women's movements of today will continue to shape the outcomes of women's rights in Brazil and beyond. They will continue to organize local, regional, and national movements to push for rights unfulfilled and agitate to expand them further. And, like their predecessors, their efforts and approaches will continue to reverberate in the lives of women for generations to come. *É pela vida das mulheres* (For women's lives)!

## APPENDIX A

### FULL TEXT OF THE MARIA DA PENHA LAW – 11.340/2006

Presidency of the Republic  
Office of the Chief of Staff  
Sub-Office on Legal Affairs

Creates mechanisms to restrain domestic and family violence against women, in compliance with paragraph 8 of article 226 of the Federal Constitution, the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women; provides for the creation of the Courts of Domestic and Family violence against women; alters the Penal Procedure Code, the Penal Code and the Law of Penal Execution; and establishes other provisions.

The PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC I hereby make it known that the National Congress decrees and I sanction the following Law:

#### TITLE I PRELIMINARY PROVISIONS

Article 1. This Law creates mechanisms to restrain and prevent domestic and family violence against women, in compliance with paragraph 8 of article 226 of the Federal Constitution, the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women and other international treaties ratified by the Federative Republic of Brazil; it provides for the creation of the Courts of Domestic and Family Violence against Women; and establishes measures for assistance and protection of women in a situation of domestic and family violence.

Article 2. All women, regardless of class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, income, culture, educational level, age and religion, enjoy the basic rights inherent to the human person, and are ensured the opportunities and facilities to live without violence, preserve their physical and mental health and their moral, intellectual and social improvement.

Article 3. Women are ensured the conditions for the effective exercise of the rights to life, security, health, food, education, culture, housing, access justice, sport, leisure, work, citizenship, freedom, dignity, respect and family and community living.

Paragraph 1. The public power shall develop policies aimed at guaranteeing the human rights of women in the scope of the domestic and family relations, with a view to protecting them against all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression.

Paragraph 2. It belongs to the family, society and the public power to create the necessary conditions for the effective exercise of the rights listed in the heading.

Article 4. In the interpretation of this Law, its social purpose and, especially, the peculiar conditions of the woman in a situation of domestic and family violence shall be taken into account.

## TITLE II DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### CHAPTER I GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 5. For the effect of this Law, domestic and family violence against women is defined as any action or omission based on gender that causes the woman's death, injury, physical, sexual or psychological suffering and moral or patrimonial damage:

I - in the scope of the domestic unit, understood as the permanent space shared by people, with or without family ties, including people sporadically aggregated;

II - in the scope of the family, understood as the community formed by individuals that are or consider themselves related, joined by natural ties, by affinity or by express will;

III - in any intimate relationship of affection, in which the aggressor lives or has lived with the abused woman, regardless of cohabitation.

Sole paragraph. The personal relations listed in this article are independent of sexual orientation.

Article 6. Domestic and family violence against women constitutes one of the forms of human rights violation.

### CHAPTER II FORMS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Article 7. The forms of domestic and family violence against women, are, among others:

I - physical violence, understood as any behavior that offends the woman's bodily integrity or health;

II - psychological violence, understood as any behavior that causes emotional damage and reduction of self-esteem or that harms and disturbs full development or that aims at degrading or controlling the woman's actions, behaviors, beliefs and decisions, by means of threat, embarrassment, humiliation, manipulation, isolation, constant surveillance, constant pursuit, insult, blackmail, ridiculing, exploitation and limitation of the right to come and go or any another means that causes damage to the woman's psychological health and self-determination;

III - sexual violence, understood as any behavior that forces the woman to witness, maintain or participate in unwanted sexual intercourse, by means of intimidation, threat, coercion or the use of force; that induces the woman to commercialize or to use, in any way, her sexuality, that prevents her from using any contraceptive method or that forces her to marriage, pregnancy, abortion or prostitution, by means of coercion, blackmail, bribe or manipulation; or that limits or annuls the exercise of her sexual and reproductive rights;

IV – patrimonial violence, understood as any behavior that constitutes retention, subtraction, partial or total destruction of the woman's objects, working instruments, personal documents, property, assets and economic rights or resources, including those intended to satisfy her needs;

V - moral violence, understood as any behavior that constitutes slander, defamation or insult.

TITLE III  
ASSISTANCE TO THE WOMAN IN A SITUATION OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY  
VIOLENCE

CHAPTER I  
INTEGRATED PREVENTION MEASURES

Article 8. The public policy aimed at preventing domestic and family violence against women will be implemented by means of an integrated set of actions by the Federal Union, the States, the Federal District and the Municipalities and nongovernment actions, according to the following guidelines:

I - operational integration of the Judiciary Branch, the Prosecutor's Office and the Public Defender with the areas of public security, social assistance, health, education, work and housing;

II - promotion of studies and research, statistics and other relevant information, with a gender and race or ethnicity perspective, on the causes, consequences and frequency of domestic and family violence against women, for the systematization of data, to be unified nationally, and the regular evaluation of the results of the adopted measures;

III - respect, in the social communication media, for the ethical and social values of the person and the family, avoiding stereotyped roles that legitimize or encourage domestic and family violence, in compliance with item III of article 1, item IV of article 3 and item IV of article 221 of the Federal Constitution;

IV - implementation of specialized police assistance for women, in particular in the Police Offices for Assistance to Women;

V - promotion and holding of educative campaigns to prevent domestic and family violence against women, directed to the school public and society in general, and dissemination of this Law and of the instruments of protection of women's human rights;

VI - establishment of accords, protocols, adjustments, terms or other instruments of promotion of partnership between government bodies or between them and non-government entities, with a view to the implementation of programs to eradicate domestic and family violence against women;

VII - permanent training of the Civil and Military Police, Municipal Guard, Fire Brigade and of the professionals belonging to the agencies and areas listed in item I, on gender and race or ethnicity issues;

VIII - promotion of educational programs that disseminate ethical values of unrestricted respect to the dignity of the human person with a gender and race or ethnicity perspective;

IX - emphasis, in the school syllabus of all levels of education, on contents related to human rights, gender and race or ethnicity equity and the problem of domestic and family violence against women.

CHAPTER II  
ASSISTANCE TO THE WOMAN IN A SITUATION OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY  
VIOLENCE

Article 9. Assistance to the woman in a situation of domestic and family violence will be provided in an integrated manner and in compliance with the principles and guidelines provided for in the

Organic Law of Social Assistance, in the Unified Health System, the Unified Public Security System, among others protection norms and public policies, and on an emergency basis when necessary.

Paragraph 1. The judge shall determine, for a defined period of time, the inclusion of the woman in a situation of domestic and family violence in the registry of assistance programs of the federal, state and municipal government.

Paragraph 2. The judge shall ensure to the woman in a situation of domestic and family violence, to preserve her physical and psychological integrity:

- I – priority access to transfer, when the woman is a civil servant in the direct or indirect administration;
- II - maintenance of the working links, when it is necessary to remove her from her place of work, for up to six months.

Paragraph 3. The assistance to the woman in a situation of domestic and family violence will include access to benefits resulting from scientific and technological development, including emergency contraception services, prophylaxis of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and of the Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and other necessary and appropriate medical procedures in the cases of sexual violence.

### CHAPTER III ASSISTANCE BY THE POLICE AUTHORITY

Article 10. In case of imminent or actual domestic and family violence against women, the police authority that learns of the occurrence shall immediately adopt the appropriate legal measures.

Sole paragraph. The provision in the heading of this article applies to failure to comply with urgent protective measure that has been determined.

Article 11. In assisting the woman in a situation of domestic and family violence, the police authority shall, among other measures:

- I - guarantee police protection, when necessary, communicating the occurrence immediately to the Prosecutor's Office and the Judiciary Branch;
- II - direct the victim to the hospital or health center and to the Legal Medical Institute;
- III - provide transport to the victim and her dependents to a shelter or safe place, in case of risk of life;
- IV – if necessary, to accompany the victim to assure removal of her belongings from the site of the occurrence or from the family home;
- V - inform the victim of the rights conferred to her in this Law and the available services.

Article 12. In all cases of domestic and family violence against women, after registering the occurrence, the police authority shall immediately adopt the following procedures, without loss to those provided for under the Penal Procedure Code:

- I - hear the victim, register the police report and take the representation to term, if presented;

- II – collect all the evidence that can serve to clarify the fact and its circumstances;
- III - send, within 48 (forty-eight) hours, separate communication to the judge with the victim’s request, for the concession of urgent protective measures;
- IV - determine the victim’s examination of body of the offense and request other necessary expert examinations;
- V - hear the aggressor and the witnesses;
- VI – command the identification of the aggressor and the addition of the aggressor’s criminal record to the judicial proceedings, indicating the existence of arrest warrant or record of other police occurrences against him;
- VII - send, within the legal period of time, the judicial proceedings of the police inquiry to the judge and the Prosecutor’s Office.

Paragraph 1. The victim’s request shall be taken to term by the police authority and shall contain:

- I - qualification of the victim and the aggressor;
- II - name and age of the dependents;
- III – brief description of the fact and the protective measures requested by the victim.

Paragraph 2. The police authority shall attach to the document referred to in paragraph 1 the police report and copy of all the available documents of the victim.

Paragraph 3. The medical findings or records provided by hospitals and health centers shall be accepted as evidence.

## TITLE IV PROCEDURES

### CHAPTER I GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 13. The norms of the Codes of Penal Procedure and Civil Procedure and of specific legislation on children, adolescents and elderly people that are not in conflict with the provisions of this Law shall apply to the process, the judgment and the execution of the civil and criminal causes derived from the practice of domestic and family violence against women.

Article 14. The Courts of Domestic and Family Violence against Women, Ordinary Justice bodies with civil and criminal competence, may be created by the Federal Union, in the Federal District and the Territories, and by the States, for the process, judgment and execution of causes derived from the practice of domestic and family violence against women.

Sole paragraph. Procedural acts may be carried out at night, as provided for in the norms of judiciary organization.

Article 15. By the victim’s choice, for the civil processes ruled by this Law, the following courts are competent:

- I – of her domicile or residence;
- II - of the place where the fact that generated the claim occurred;

III - of the domicile of the aggressor.

Article 16. In the public penal lawsuits conditional to the representation of the victim provided for in this Law, the renunciation of the representation shall only be admitted before the judge, in a hearing especially assigned for such purpose, before receiving the denunciation and after hearing the Prosecutor's Office.

Article 17. In the cases of domestic and family violence against women, it is forbidden to sentence payment of basic food basket or other pecuniary penalty, as well as substitution of sentence that implies in isolated payment of a fine.

## CHAPTER II URGENT PROTECTIVE MEASURES

### SECTION I GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 18. Having received the communication with the victim's request, the judge, within the period of 48 (forty-eight) hours, shall:

- I - know the communication and the request and decide upon the urgent protective measures;
- II - determine that the victim be directed to the judiciary assistance body, when appropriate;
- III - communicate with the Prosecutor's Office so that it adopts the appropriate measures.

Article 19. The urgent protective measures may be granted by the judge, upon request by the Prosecutor's Office or by the victim.

Paragraph 1. The urgent protective measures may be granted immediately, regardless of hearing with the parties and of manifestation of the Prosecutor's Office, the latter being communicated as soon as possible.

Paragraph 2. The urgent protective measures shall be applied isolated or cumulatively, and may be replaced any time by others of greater effectiveness, whenever the rights acknowledged in this Law are threatened or violated.

Paragraph 3. The judge may, upon request by the Prosecutor's Office or by the victim, grant new urgent protective measures or review those already granted, if deemed necessary for the protection of the victim, her family and her property, after hearing the Prosecutor's Office.

Article 20. In any phase of the police inquiry or the criminal instruction, the preventive custody of the aggressor may be decreed by the judge, ex-officio, upon request by the Prosecutor's Office or by means of representation of the police authority.

Sole paragraph. The judge may revoke the preventive custody if, in the course of the process, he or she verifies lack of reason to maintain it, as well as decree it again, if reasons that justify it arise.

Article 21. The victim shall be informed of the procedural acts related to the aggressor, especially those related to entry and exit from prison, without loss to the summon of the constituted lawyer or public defender. Sole paragraph. The victim may not deliver the summons or notification to the aggressor.

## SECTION II URGENT PROTECTIVE MEASURES THAT COMPEL THE AGGRESSOR

Article 22. Having established the practice of domestic and family violence against a woman, in the terms of this Law, the judge may immediately apply on the aggressor, together or separately, the following urgent protective measures, among others:

I - suspension of ownership of weapon or restriction of weapon carrying license, with communication to the competent agency, in the terms of Law n. 10.826, of December 22, 2003;

II - removal from the home, domicile or place of relationship with the victim;

III – prohibit certain behaviors, among which:

a) approaching the victim, members of her family and the witnesses, establishing a minimum distance between them and the aggressor;

b) contact with the victim, members of her family and witnesses through any means of communication;

c) going to certain places in order to preserve the physical and psychological integrity of the victim;

IV - restriction or suspension of visits to dependent minors, after hearing the multidisciplinary assistance team or similar service;

V – provision of provisional or temporary alimony

Paragraph 1. The measures referred to in this article do not rule out the application of others provided for under the legislation in force, whenever the safety of the victim or circumstances require so, the measure having to be communicated to the Prosecutor's Office

Paragraph 2. In the event of application of item I, the aggressor being in the conditions mentioned in the heading and items of Article 6 of Law n. 10.826, of December 22, 2003, the judge shall communicate to the respective agency, corporation or institution the urgent protective measures granted and shall determine the restriction of the weapon-carrying license, the immediate superior of the aggressor being responsible for the fulfillment of the judicial order, otherwise incurring in the crimes of disobedience or prevarication, as the case may be.

Paragraph 3. In order to guarantee the effectiveness of the urgent protective measures, the judge may request, at any time, the aid of the police force

Paragraph 4. The provisions in the heading and in paragraphs 5 and 6 of Article 461 of Law in. 5.869, of January 11, 1973 (Code of Civil Procedure) apply to the hypotheses foreseen in this article.

## SECTION III URGENT PROTECTIVE MEASURES FOR THE VICTIM

Article 23. The judge may, when necessary, without loss to other measures:

- I – direct the victim and her dependents to an official or community program of protection or assistance;
- II - determine the return of the victim and her dependents to the respective domicile, after removal of the aggressor;
- III - determine the removal of the victim from the home, without loss of rights related to property, custody of the children and alimony;
- IV - determine separation from bed and board.

Article 24. For the patrimonial protection of the property of the conjugal society or of the private property of the woman, the judge may determine, through preliminary order, the following measures, among others:

- I - restitution of property unduly subtracted from the victim by the aggressor;
- II - temporary prohibition to enter acts and contracts of purchase, sale and rent of common property, except in case of express judicial authorization;
- III - suspension of power of attorney conferred by the victim to the aggressor;
- IV – provision of temporary bond, by means of judicial deposit, for material loss and damage resulting from the practice of domestic and family violence against the victim.

Sole paragraph. The judge shall officiate to the competent notary's office for the purposes foreseen in item II and III of this article.

### CHAPTER III ACTION OF THE PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

Article 25. The Prosecutor's Office shall intervene, when not a party, in the civil and criminal causes resulting from domestic and family violence against women.

Article 26. It shall belong to the Prosecutor's Office, without loss of other attributions, in the cases of domestic and family violence against women, when necessary:

- I - to request police force and public services of health, education, social assistance and security, among others;
- II - to inspect the public and private establishments that provide assistance to women in a situation of domestic and family violence, and to adopt, immediately, the appropriate administrative or judicial measures with regard to any irregularities detected;
- III - to register in a registry the cases of domestic and family violence against women.

### CHAPTER IV JUDICIARY ASSISTANCE

Article 27. In all procedural acts, civil and criminal, the woman in a situation of domestic and family violence shall be accompanied by a lawyer, except as provided for in Article 19 of this Law.

Article 28. Every woman in a situation of domestic and family violence is entitled access to the services of Public Defense or Free Judiciary Assistance, in the terms of the law, at police and judicial headquarters, through specific and humanized assistance.

TITLE V  
MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSISTANCE TEAM

Article 29. The Courts of Domestic and Family Violence against Women that are created may rely on a multidisciplinary assistance team made up of professionals specialized in the psychosocial, legal and health areas.

Article 30. It belongs to the multidisciplinary assistance team, among other attributions reserved to it by the local legislation, to provide inputs in writing to the judge, the Prosecutor's Office and the Public Defense, by means of expert written opinions or verbally in hearing, and to develop guidance, forwarding, prevention activities and other measures directed to the victim, the aggressor and the family members, with special attention to the children and the adolescents.

Article 31. When the complexity of the case requires more in-depth evaluation, the judge may determine the manifestation of a specialized professional, upon indication by the multidisciplinary assistance team.

Article 32. The Judiciary Branch, in the elaboration of its budget proposal, may provide for resources for the creation and maintenance of the multidisciplinary assistance team, in the terms of the Law of Budgetary Guidelines.

TITLE VI  
TRANSIENT PROVISIONS

Article 33. While the Courts of Domestic and Family Violence against Women are not structured, the criminal courts shall accumulate the civil and criminal competences of knowing and judging the causes resulting from the practice of domestic and family violence against women, observing the provisions of Title IV of this Law, with inputs from the pertinent procedural legislation.

Sole paragraph. The right of preference shall be guaranteed, in the criminal courts, for the process and judgment of the causes related in the heading.

TITLE VII  
FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 34. The Courts of Domestic and Family Violence against Women may be instituted together with the establishment of the necessary curatorship and judiciary assistance service.

Article 35. The Federal Union, the Federal District, the States and the Municipalities may create and promote, within the limits of their respective competences:

- I - centers of comprehensive and multidisciplinary assistance to women and their dependents in a situation of domestic and family violence;
- II - home-shelters for women and respective minor dependents in a situation of domestic and family violence;

- III - police offices, public defense offices, health services and medical-legal examination centers specialized in assistance to women in a situation of domestic and family violence;
- IV - programs and campaigns to fight domestic and family violence;
- V - education and rehabilitation centers for the aggressors.

Article 36. The Federal Union, the States, the Federal District and the Municipalities shall promote the adaptation of their agencies and programs to the guidelines and principles of this Law.

Article 37. The defense of the trans-individual interests and rights foreseen in this Law may be exercised, concurrently, by the Prosecutor's Office and by association active in the area, regularly constituted for at least one year, in the terms of the civil legislation.

Sole paragraph. The requirement of pre-constitution may be waived by the judge if it is found that there is no other entity with appropriate representation to file the collective demand.

Article 38. The statistics on domestic and family violence against women shall be included in the databases of the official agencies of the Justice and Security System in order to provide inputs to the national system of data and information on women.

Sole paragraph. The Public Security Secretariats of the States and the Federal District may send their criminal information to the database of the Ministry of Justice.

Article 39. The Federal Union, the States, the Federal District and the Municipalities, within the limits of their competences and in the terms of their respective laws of budgetary guidelines, may establish specific budgetary allocations, in each fiscal year, for the implementation of the measures established in this Law.

Article 40. The obligations provided for in this Law do not exclude others derived from the principles adopted by it.

Article 41. Law n. 9.099, of September 26, 1995, does not apply to crimes practiced with domestic and family violence against women, regardless of the penalty provided.

Article 42. Article 313 of Decree n. 3.689, of October 3, 1941 (Code of Penal Procedure), enters into force with the addition of the following item IV:

"Article 313.....  
 IV – if the crime involves domestic and family violence against women, in the terms of the specific law, to guarantee the execution of the urgent protective measures."  
 (New Language)

Article 43. Line f of item II of Article 61 of Decree n. 2.848, of December 7, 1940 (Criminal Code), enters into force with the following language:

"Article 61.....  
 II -.....  
 f) with abuse of authority or taking advantage of domestic relations, cohabitation or hospitality, or with violence against the woman in the form of the specific law;

....." (New Language)

Article 44. Article 129 of Decree n. 2.848, of December 7, 1940 (Criminal Code), enters into force with the following alterations:

"Article 129.....

Paragraph 9. If the injury is practiced against ascendant, descendant, sibling, spouse or partner, or someone with whom the agent has or had a relationship, or if the agent has taken advantage of domestic relations, cohabitation or hospitality: Sentence - detention, 3 (three) months to 3 (three) years

.....

Paragraph 11. In the event of paragraph 9 of this article, the sentence shall be increased by one third if the crime is committed against a person with special needs." (New Language)

Article 45. Article 152 of Law n. 7.210, of July 11, 1984 (Law of Penal Execution), enters into force with the following language:

"Article 152.....

Sole paragraph. In the cases of domestic violence against women, the judge may determine the obligatory attendance of the aggressor in recovery and re-education programs." (New Language)

Article 46. This Law shall enter into force 45 (forty-five) days after its publication.

Brasilia, August 7, 2006; 185th day of the Independence and 118th day of the Republic.

LUIZ INÁCIO LULA DA SILVA

Dilma Rousseff

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDANCE

#### **Structured Interviews with Professionals at Gender-Specialized State Services**

*Historical Context* Why do you think this service was created? Who was it meant to serve? What was the service gap you were addressing? What were some of the challenges that arose while trying to implement this service? What has changed since the implementation of this service?

*Contemporary Moment* What are the official objectives of this service? What specific services do you offer here? Why are these services important? Can you talk about the relationship between this service and other social services for women in situations of violence (specialized courts? women's police?)? What are some of the biggest challenges you face? What were some of your biggest achievements here? How do you measure the success of this service? Do you gather data about the effectiveness of your work? What is the role of the state in overseeing these resources (both federal and state)? How do you think this oversight shapes the services you provide?

*Accessing Services* Why do you think women come here? What do they expect when they come here? Why do you think they denounce the violence they have experienced? Who are the women who usually come here (race, class, education level, civil status, sexuality)? How does the process of accessing services work? Do they have to provide IDs or other documentation? Do they have to recount the abuse? What happens when a survivor isn't sure about what kind of help they are looking for? Have you encountered or worked with any non-governmental women's organizations or anti-violence projects? If yes, which groups? What do you think of them?

*Personal Trajectory* Could you speak briefly about your career trajectory? When did you start working at this service? How did you start working here? Did you receive any specific training? What is your role in this service? Could you describe an average day's work here? How do you, personally, define gender-based violence—can you give me some examples? How do you define justice—examples?

#### **Life-History Interviews with Women in Situations of Violence**

*Family Background* Where were you born? How old are you? What is your ethnic identity? Where were your parents from? Where were your grandparents from? Do you have any siblings? If so, how many? Do you have children? If so, how many? How old are they? Do you have family in other parts of Brazil?

*Childhood/Young Adulthood* What are some of your earliest childhood memories? What was the nature of your relationship with your parents? Grandparents? Siblings? Did you have any good friends growing up? What were they like? Did you attend school? What types of things did you learn? When did you experience your first romantic relationship? What was it like?

*Migration* Did you move? Where from/to? When did you move to Rio de Janeiro? What was the reason for your move? How did you feel about moving? Did you like Rio de Janeiro when you arrived? Why or why not? Do you like living in Rio de Janeiro now? Why or why not?

*Labor History* At what age did you start working? What was your job? Did you enjoy this work? What was it like? What was your salary? Have you had other jobs between now and then? What is your current job? Do you earn enough to support yourself? Your children? How would you characterize your living conditions? Do you receive support from Bolsa Família?

*Histories of Violence* What are your first memories of violence? When did you first witness and/or experience violence (of any kind)? What was it like? How did it make you feel? Who was perpetrating the violence? How did you cope? With what frequency would you say you have confronted violence throughout your life? Is there recurring violence in your community? What types of violence? Where does this violence occur? Have you ever used violence? In what context? How do you, personally, define gender-based violence—can you give me some examples?

*Seeking Help* What made you decide to seek services? How did you arrive at the service? Have you been to a social service for women before? If not, what are some obstacles that prevented you from seeking help through state services until now? If yes, what was the context of your situation? What was your initial perception of that service? Could you describe the process of utilizing the service? How has your view of these services changed since you utilized them, if at all? Do you feel safe in the spaces of these services? If not, why not? What do you hope to gain from your engagement here? Do you feel as though the professionals at these services act in your best interest?

*Community Supports* Are there are forms of support that you have found outside of these formal services? Do you have friends or family that are also in situations of violence? Are you aware of any anti-violence organizations near you? Have you ever engaged in community organizing yourself? If so, what did you organize around? Why did you decide to organize? What was the experience like? How do you define justice—can you provide examples? Would community services be more effective?

\*Questions subject to change depending on the narrative style of my interlocutor.

## **Semi-Structured Interviews with Women in Situations of Violence**

*Demographic Information* Where do you live? Are you married? Do you have children? How do you identify racially/ethnically?

*Experiences of Violence* What are your first memories of violence? When did you first witness and/or experience violence (of any kind)? What was it like? How did it make you feel? Who was perpetrating the violence? How did you cope? With what frequency would you say you have confronted violence throughout your life? What are the sources of violence in your community? Has the violence in your community changed in your lifetime? If so, how? Have you ever used violence? In what context? How do you, personally, define gender-based violence—can you give me some examples?

*Perceptions of Gender-Specialized State Services* Have you been to a social service for women before? If not, why? If yes, which? Why did you decide to seek support at a social service? How did you learn about it? What was your initial perception of that service? Could you describe the process of utilizing the service? What was the experience like? What did you think of the professionals that work there? How did you feel afterwards? Did your view of these services change after you used them? Did you feel safe in the spaces of these services? If not,

why not? What did you hope to gain from going there? Do you think they helped you? Would you pursue assistance again through another women's service?

*Community Supports* Are there are forms of support that you have found outside of these formal services? Are you aware of (or involved in) any anti-violence organizations near you? Do you have friends or family that are also in situations of violence? What kind of support do you need? How do you define justice—can you provide examples?

### **Supplementary Questions for Interviews with Women Organizers**

*Community Anti-Violence Strategies and Initiatives* When did you start organizing? How did you get involved in community organizing? What were the issues that you organized around? When did you begin to campaign against GBV? What was that like? What were/are the central outcomes of these campaigns? Why are they important? What specific impacts do you think this organizing has had on women in your community? What do you think the state's role should be in addressing the issue of GBV? Do you think the state fulfills this role? If yes, how? If not, why not? How could the state (and its institutions) better support you and your community?

## REFERENCES CITED

- Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- . 2021. *Complaint!* Durham: Duke University Press.
- Almeida, Eliane Vieira Lacerda, Clara Mazzei Sobral, Gabriel Rodrigues de Lima, and Cecilia Maria Bacellar Sardenberg. 2023. “Religious Fundamentalism and Insitutional Violence Against Rape Victims in Bolsonaro’s Brazil.” *Revista Feminismos* 11 (1): 1–19.
- Alvarez, Sonia E. 1990. *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women’s Movements in Transition Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- . 1999. “Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO ‘Boom.’” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/146167499359880>.
- AMAERJ. 2021. “Mutirão Na Leopoldina Visa Reduzir Processos de Violência Doméstica.” Associação Dos Magistrados Do Estado Do Rio de Janeiro (AMAERJ). 2021. <https://amaerj.org.br/noticias/forum-da-leopoldina-recebe-mutirao-para-reduzir-processos-de-violencia-domestica/>.
- Amnesty International Publications. 2008. *Picking Up the Pieces: Women’s Experience of Urban Violence in Brazil*.
- Antunes, Leda, and Renata Izaal. 2020. “Por Que Dizemos Que Uma Mulher é ‘sobrevivente’ e Não ‘Vítima’ de Violência.” *O Globo - Celina*. 2020.
- Aragão, Thêmis Amorim, Ana Carolina Maria Soraggi, and Filipe Souza Corrêa. 2021. “Ocupações Urbanas Como Repertório Confrontacional Dos Movimentos de Luta Por Moradia.” *Cadastro Metropole* 23 (52): 1165–92.
- Arraes, Jarid. 2020. *Heroínas Negras Brasileiras: Em 15 Cordéis*. Editora Seguinte.
- Assis, Isis Mustafa de, and Livia de Tommasi. 2018. “As Mulheres e a Luta Por Casa de Referência: A Experiência Do Movimento Olga Benário e o CRM Helenira Preta.” *Revista Íandé: Ciências e Humanidades* 2 (1): 27–41.
- Auyero, Javier. 2011. “Patients of the State: An Ethnographic Account of Poor People’s Waiting.” *Latin American Research Review* 46 (1): 5–29.
- Ávila, Thiago Pierobom de. 2018. “Facing Domestic Violence Against Women in Brazil: Advances and Challenges.” *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 7 (1): 15–29.
- Barbosa, Maria Clara de Arruda, Lilian da Conceição Oliveira, Fernanda Alcantara Guimarães,

- Vivian Pinheiro dos Santos, and Lailade Oliveira Costa. 2016. “Gênero, Classe e Raça e Acesso à Justiça: Aportes Para o Debate.” In *V Seminário Internacional Enlaçando Sexualidades 10 Anos*.
- Beck, Erin. 2021. “The Uneven Impacts of Violence against Women Reforms in Guatemala: Intersecting Inequalities and the Patchwork State.” *Latin American Research Review* 56 (1).
- . 2023. “Violence against Women and Specialized Justice in Guatemala: Advances and Limitations.” *Law and Social Inquiry*, 1–31.
- Beck, Erin, and Lynn Stephen. 2021. “From Legislation to Everyday Practices in Guatemala’s Violence Against Women Courts.” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X21000511>.
- Bens, Jonas. 2022. *The Sentimental Court: The Affective Life of International Criminal Justice*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bhattacharjee, Anannya. 1997. “The Public/Private Mirage: Mapping Homes and Undomesticating Violence Work in the South Asian Immigrant Community.” In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, edited by M Jaqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 309–29. New York: Routledge.
- Biroli, Flávia. 2016. “Political Violence against Women in Brazil: Expressions and Definitions.” *Direito & Práxis* 7 (15): 557–89.
- Biroli, Flávia, and Mariana Caminotti. 2020. “The Conservative Backlash against Gender in Latin America.” *Politics & Gender* 16 (1).
- Blackwell, Maylei. 2006. “Weaving in the Spaces: Indigenous Women’s Organizing and the Politics of Scale in Mexico.” In *Dissident Women: Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas*, edited by Shannon Speed, R. Aída Hernández Castillo, and Lynn Stephen, 115–54. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Boito, Armando, and Tatiana Berringer. 2014. “Social Classes, Neodevelopmentalism, and Brazilian Foreign Policy under Presidents Lula and Dilma.” *Latin American Perspectives* 41 (5): 94–109.
- Bourgois, Philippe. 2001. “The Power of Violence in War and Peace: Post-Cold War Lessons from El Salvador.” *Ethnography* 2 (1): 5–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14661380122230803>.
- Caldwell, Kia Lilly. 2010. “Advocating for Citizenship and Social Justice: Black Women Activists in Brazil.” In *Women’s Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean: Engendering Social Justice, Democratizing Citizenship*, edited by Elizabeth Maier and Nathalie Lebon, 175. New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press.
- Campos, CH. 2015. “Desafios Na Implementação Da Lei Maria Da Penha.” *Revista Direito GV2*

11 (2): 391–406.

- Cardozo, Soraia Aparecida, and Humberto Martins. 2020. “New Developmentalism, Public Policies, and Regional Inequalities in Brazil: The Advances and Limitations of Lula’s and Dilma’s Governments.” *Latin American Perspectives* 47 (2): 147–62.
- Carmona López, Adriana, Alma Gómez Caballero, and Lucha Castro Rodríguez. 2010. “Femicide in Latin America and the Movement for Women’s Human Rights.” In *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, edited by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, 157–76. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Chaguri, Mariana Miggiolaro, and Oswaldo E. do Amaral. 2023. “The Social Base of Bolsonarism: An Analysis of Authoritarianism in Politics.” *Latin American Perspectives* 50 (1): 32–46.
- Chaves, Isabella A. M., and Loreley G. Garcia. 2019. “O Celular o a Vida: A Casa Abrigo Sob a Ótica de Mulheres Em Situação de Violência.” *Revista Ártemis* 27 (1): 423–42.
- Chinchilla, Norma Stoltz. 1992. “Marxism, Feminism, and the Struggle for Democracy in Latin America.” In *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy*, edited by Arturo Escobar and Alv, 37–51. Boulder, San Francisco, and Oxford: Westview Press.
- CNJ. 2018. “Manual de Rotinas e Estruturação dos Juizados de Violência Doméstica e Familiar Contra a Mulher.” Brasília.  
<https://www.tjrj.jus.br/documents/10136/0/Manual+de+rotinas+13.9.18+-+Versão+com+os+últimos+ajustes.pdf/75dc424d-7c75-8f71-255f-c550cfcdbef>.
- . 2022. “O Poder Judiciário Na Aplicação Da Lei Maria Da Penha.” Brasília.  
<https://www.cnj.jus.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/relatorio-violencia-domestica-2023.pdf>.
- “Condições de Aplicação Da Lei Maria Da Penha Nas DEAMS e Nos Juizados/Varas de Violência Doméstica e Familiar Nas Capitais.” 2010. Salvador.
- Cox, Aimee Meredith. 2015. *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- “Dados Estatísticos.” 2022. Rio de Janeiro: Observatório Judicial de Violência Contra a Mulher - Poder Judiciário do Estado do Rio de Janeiro - Secretaria-Geral de Governança, Inovação, e Compliance - Departamento de Informações Gerenciais.  
<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiaZjA5ZTAwNjYtZDdiMC00YjI1LTllMWMtNzNhNTZlYzlxMTlhIiwidCI6ImNlNGUxMTY0LTk4NmYtNDEzMi04NWQxLTFIM2MxN2NmN2Q2ZSIsImMiOjR9>.
- Das, Veena. 2006. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. University of California Press.

- Datta, Ayona. 2012. “‘Mongrel City’: Cosmopolitan Neighbourliness in a Delhi Squatter Settlement.” *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 44 (3): 745–63.
- Deer, Sarah. 2015. *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Delmar, Rosalind. 1994. “What Is Feminism?” In *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, edited by Anne C. Herrmann and Abigail J. Stewart, 5–25. Boulder, San Francisco, and Oxford: Westview Press.
- Diniz, Simone G. 2006. “Violência Contra a Mulher: Estratégias e Respostas Do Movimento Feminista No Brasil (1980-2005).” In *Vinte e Cinco Anos de Respostas Brasileiras Em Violência Contra a Mulher (1980-2005): Alcances e Limites*, edited by Simone G. Diniz, Lenira P. Silveira, and Liz A. Mirim, 15–44. São Paulo: Coletivo Feminista Sexualidade e Saúde. [https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/58821858/CEFES-2006-25-anos-de-respostas-brasileiras.pdf?1554678624=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DCEFES\\_2006\\_25\\_anos\\_de\\_respostas\\_brasilei.pdf&Expires=1677530916&Signature=E7c~gp2QZpJMIwY3KADhOZHL](https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/58821858/CEFES-2006-25-anos-de-respostas-brasileiras.pdf?1554678624=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DCEFES_2006_25_anos_de_respostas_brasilei.pdf&Expires=1677530916&Signature=E7c~gp2QZpJMIwY3KADhOZHL).
- Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, Héctor, and Patricia Ravelo Blancas. 2010. “Obedience without Compliance: The Role of the Government, Organized Crime, and NGOs in the System of Impunity That Murders the Women of Ciudad Juárez.” In *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, edited by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, 182–96. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- “Dossiê Mulher 2021.” 2021. Rio de Janeiro. [http://arquivos.proderj.rj.gov.br/isp\\_imagens/uploads/DossieMulher2021.pdf](http://arquivos.proderj.rj.gov.br/isp_imagens/uploads/DossieMulher2021.pdf).
- Eisenberg, Ann M. 2011. “Law on the Books vs. Law in Action: Under-Enforcement of Morocco’s Reformed 2004 Family Law, the Moudawana.” *Cornell International Law Journal* 44 (3): 693–728.
- Ellis, Colter, and Kelly E. Knight. 2018. “Advancing a Model of Secondary Trauma: Consequences for Victim Service Providers.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36 (7–8): 3557–83.
- Enríquez, Laura J., and Tiffany L. Page. 2018. “The Rise and Fall of the Pink Tide.” In *The Routledge Handbook of Latin American Development*, 11. Routledge.
- Escallón, Maria Fernanda. 2023. *Becoming Heritage: Recognition, Exclusion, and the Politics of Black Cultural Heritage in Colombia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Escobar, Arturo, and Sonia E. Alvarez. 1992. “Introduction: Theory and Protest in Latin America Today.” In *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy*, edited by Arturo Escobar and Sonia E. Alvarez, 1–15. Boulder, San Francisco, and Oxford: Westview Press.

- Evaristo, Conceição. 2016. *Insubmissas Lágrimas de Mulheres*. 2nd Editio. Malê.
- Falcón, Sylvanna M. 2016. “The Particularism of Human Rights for Latin American Women of African Descent.” *Feminist Formations* 28 (1): 190–204. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2016.0021>.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. “Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.” Pantheon Books.
- Franceschet, Susan. 2003. “‘State Feminism’ and Women’s Movements: The Impact of Chile’s Servicio Nacional de La Mujer on Women’s Activism.” *Latin American Research Review* 38 (1): 9–40. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2003.0006>.
- . 2007. “From Persuasion to Power? Women’s Policy Machineries in Latin America.” In *Women in the Americas: Paths to Political Power*.
- . 2010. “Explaining Domestic Violence Policy Outcomes in Chile and Argentina.” *Latin American Politics and Society* 52 (3): 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2010.00088.x>.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1990. “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” *Social Text*, no. 25/26: 56–80.
- . 2007. “Feminist Politics in the Age of Recognition: A Two-Dimensional Approach to Gender Justice.” *Studies in Social Justice* 1 (1): 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v1i1.979>.
- Fregoso, Rosa-Linda. 2023. *The Force of Witness: Contra Femicide*. Duke University Press.
- Fregoso, Rosa-Linda, and Cynthia Bejarano. 2010. “Introduction: A Cartography of Femicide in the Américas.” In *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, 1–42. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Garcia, Leila Posenato, Lúcia Rolim Santana de Freitas, and Doroteia Aparecida Höfelmann. 2013. “Avaliação Do Impacto Da Lei Maria Da Penha Sobre a Mortalidade de Mulheres Por Agressões No Brasil, 2001-2011.” *Epidemiologia e Serviços de Saúde* 22 (3): 383–94.
- Gattegno, Mariana V., Jasmine D. Wilkins, and Dabney P. Evans. 2016. “The Relationship between the Maria Da Penha Law and Intimate Partner Violence in Two Brazilian States.” *International Journal for Equity in Health* 15 (138): 1–9.
- Gervais, Christine, and Betsy Estevez. 2013. “Security through Solidarity: Honduran Women’s Post-Coup Strategies of Support and Survival.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies*.
- Giannini, Renata A., Peter McNamee, and Giovanna B. de Miranda. 2017. “Fragile Cities and Gender Based Violence: The Case of Rio de Janeiro.” In *Women, Urbanization and Sustainability: Practices of Survival, Adaptation and Resistance*, edited by Anita Lacey,

- 199–219. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- “Gini Index.” 2022. World Bank, Poverty and Inequality Platform. 2022. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>.
- Goldstein, Donna. 2013. *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*. First Edit. University of California Press.
- Gonzalez, Lelia. 1988. “Por Un Feminismo Afrolatinoamericano.” *Isis Internacional - Mujeres Por Um Desarrollo Alternativo* 9: 133–41.
- Gonzalez, Lélia. 2020. *Por Um Feminismo Afro-Latino-Americano: Ensaio, Intervenções, e Diálogos*. Edited by Flavia Rios and Márcia Lima. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.
- Hale, Charles. 2005. “Neoliberal Multiculturalism: The Remaking of Cultural Rights and Racial Dominance in Central America.” *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 28 (1): 10–28. <https://doi.org/10.1525/pol.2005.28.1.10>.
- Haney, Lynne A. 2000. “Feminist State Theory: Applications to Jurisprudence, Criminology, and the Welfare State.” *Source: Annual Review of Sociology*. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.641>.
- Hautzinger, Sarah. 2007. *Violence in the City of Women: Police and Batterers in Bahia, Brazil*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.
- Heng, Geraldine. 1997. “‘A Great Way to Fly’: Nationalism, the State, and the Varieties of Third World Feminism.” In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, edited by M Jaqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 30–45. New York: Routledge.
- Hernández Castillo, R. Aída. 2002. “Zapatismo And The Emergence Of Indigenous Feminism.” *NACLA Report on the Americas*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2002.11724567>.
- . 2006. “Between Feminism Ethnocentrism and Ethnic Essentialism: The Zapatista Demands and the National Indigenous Women’s Movement.” In *Dissident Women: Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas*, edited by Shannon Speed, R. A. Hernández, and Lynn Stephen, 57–74. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Hlavka, Heather R., and Sameena Mulla. 2021. *Bodies in Evidence Race, Gender, and Science in Sexual Assault Adjudication*. New York: New York University Press.
- Holmes, Megan R., C. Robin Rentrope, Amy Korsch-Williams, and Jennifer A. King. 2021. “Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Posttraumatic Stress, Grief, Burnout, and Secondary Trauma of Social Workers in the United States.” *Clinical Social Work Journal* 49: 495–504.
- Holmes, Seth. 2013. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

- Holston, James. 2009. "Insurgent Citizenship in an Era of Global Urban Peripheries." *City and Society* 21 (2): 245–67.
- Honig, Bonnie. 2017. *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Hopkins, Peter, and Liz Todd. 2015. "Creating an Intentionally Dialogic Space: Student Activism and the Newcastle Occupation 2010." *Political Geography* 46: 31–40.
- Horton, Sarah Bronwen. 2016. *They Leave Their Kidneys in the Fields: Illness, Injury, and Illegality among U.S. Farmworkers*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Htun, Mala, and S. Laurel Weldon. 2012. "The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975-2005." *American Political Science Review* 106 (3): 548–69. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000226>.
- Hume, Mo. 2008. "The Myths of Violence: Gender, Conflict, and Community in El Salvador." *Latin American Perspectives* 35 (162): 59–76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X08321957>.
- . 2009. *The Politics of Violence: Gender, Conflict and Community in El Salvador*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hunter, Wendy, and Timothy J. Power. 2019. "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash." *Journal of Democracy* 30 (1): 68–82.
- INCITE!, Women of Color Against Violence. 2006. *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Kiss, Ligia, Ana Flavia Lucas d'Oliveira, Cathy Zimmerman, Lori Heise, Lilia Blima Schraiber, and Charlotte Watts. 2012. "Brazilian Policy Responses to Violence against Women: Government Strategy and the Help-Seeking Behaviors of Women Who Experience Violence." *Health and Human Rights*.
- Krais, Beate. 1993. "Gender and Symbolic Violence: Female Oppression in the Light of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Practice." In *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone, 156–77. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Krenzinger, Miriam. 2018. *Dores Que Libertam: Falas de Mulheres Das Favelas Da Maré, No Rio de Janeiro, Sobre Violências*. Edited by Editora Appris.
- Krenzinger, Miriam, Patricia Farias, Rosana Morgado, and Cathy McIlwaine. 2021. "Violência de Gênero e Desigualdade Racial Em Uma Pesquisa Com Mulheres No Território Conflagrado Do Conjunto de Favelas Da Maré/Rio de Janeiro." *Revista Trabalho Necessário* 19 (38): 266–89.

- Lagarde y De Los Rios, Marcela. 2010. "Preface: Feminist Keys for Understanding Femicide: Theoretical, Political, and Legal Construction." In *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, edited by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, xi–xxv. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Laó-Montes, Agustín. 2016. "Afro-Latin American Feminisms at the Cutting Edge of Emerging Political-Epistemic Movements." *Meridians* 14 (2): 1–24.
- Lara, Ana-Maurine. 2020. *Streetwalking: LGBTQ Lives and Protest in the Dominican Republic*. Rutgers University Press.
- Leandro Pereira Gonçalves, Odilon Caldeira Neto. 2022. *Fascism in Brazil: From Integralism to Bolsonaroism*. Routledge.
- Lei Maria Da Penha. 2006. Brasil. [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2004-2006/2006/lei/111340.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2004-2006/2006/lei/111340.htm).
- Leu, Lorraine. 2020. *Defiant Geographies: Race and Urban Space in 1920s Rio de Janeiro*. University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Lynn Stephen, Shannon Speed, ed. 2021. *Indigenous Women and Violence: Feminist Activist Research in Heightened States of Injustice*. University of Arizona Press.
- Macaulay, Fiona. 2000. *Getting Gender on the Policy Agenda: A Study of a Brazilian Feminist Lobby Group*. Edited by Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneux. *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1128/AAC.03728-14>.
- . 2006. "Judicialising and (de) Criminalising Domestic Violence in Latin America." *Social Policy and Society* 5 (1): 103–14. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746405002782>.
- . 2022. "Brazil's Maria Da Penha Domestic Violence Police Patrols: A Second-Response Innovation in Preventing Revictimization." *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 38 (1): 72–87.
- MacDowell Santos, Cecília. 2004. "En-Gendering the Police: Women's Police Stations and Feminism in São Paulo." *Latin American Research Review* 39 (3): 29–55. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2004.0059>.
- . 2005. *Women's Police Stations: Gender, Violence, and Justice in São Paulo, Brazil*. New York: Palgrave Publishers.
- . 2010. "Da Delegacia Da Mulher à Lei Maria Da Penha: Absorção/Tradução de Demandas Feministas Pelo Estado." *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 89: 153–70. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rccs.3759>.

- Magaña, Maurice. 2016. "Spaces of Resistance, Everyday Activism, and Belonging: Youth Reimagining and Reconfiguring the City in Oaxaca, Mexico." *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 22 (2): 215–34.
- Marinis, Natalia De. 2013. "Indigenous Rights and Violent State Construction: The Struggle of Triqui Women in Oaxaca." In *Gender Justice and Legal Pluralities: Latin American and African Perspectives*, edited by Rachel Sieder and John Andrew McNeish, 156–79. New York: Routledge.
- Mazur, Amy. 2005. "The Impact of Women's Participation and Leadership on Policy Outcomes: A Focus on Women's Policy Machineries." In *Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with Particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership*, 1–18.
- Medeiros, Luciene. 2011. "'Quem Ama Não Mata': A Atuação Do Movimento Feminista Fluminense No Enfrentamento Da Violência Doméstica Contra a Mulher Perpetrada Pelo Parceiro Íntimo." In *XXVI Simpósio Nacional de História - ANPUH*. São Paulo.
- . 2016. *Em Briga de Marido e Mulher, O Estado Deve Meter a Colher: Políticas Públicas de Enfrentamento à Violência Doméstica*. São Paulo: Editoria Reflexão.
- Medeiros, Luciene Alcinda de. 2012. "O Processo de Criação e Implementação Do Cedim: A Institucionalização Das Demandas Dos Movimentos de Mulheres e Feminista." *Cadernos Do Desenvolvimento* 7 (10): 103–23.
- Mello, Adriana Ramos de. 2018. *Feminicídio: Uma Análise Sociojurídica Da Violência Contra a Mulher No Brasil*. 2nd Editio. Rio de Janeiro: GZ Editora.
- Meneghel, Stela Nazareth, Betânia Mueller, Marceli Emer Collazoil, and Máira Meneghel Quadros. 2011. "Repercussões Da Lei Maria Da Penha No Enfrentamento Da Violência de Gênero." *Ciência e Saúde Coletiva* 18 (3): 691–700.
- Menjívar, Cecilia. 2011. *Enduring Violence: Ladina Women's Lives in Guatemala*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.
- Menjívar, Cecilia, and Shannon Walsh. 2016. "Subverting Justice: Socio-Legal Determinants of Impunity for Violence against Women in Guatemala." *Laws*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws5030031>.
- Menjívar, Cecilia, and Shannon Drysdale Walsh. 2017. "The Architecture of Femicide: The State, Inequalities, and Everyday Gender Violence in Honduras." *Latin American Research Review* 52 (2): 221–40. <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.73>.
- Merry, Sally Engle. 2006a. "Human Rights and Transnational Culture: Regulating Gender Violence through Global Law." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 44 (1): 53–75.

- . 2006b. “Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle.” *American Anthropologist* 108 (1): 38–51. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4710-4\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4710-4_10).
- Millar, Kathleen M. 2018. *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and Labor on Rio’s Garbage Dump*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Mirchandani, Rekha. 2006. “‘Hitting Is Not Manly’: Domestic Violence Court and the Re-Imagination of the Patriarchal State.” *Gender & Society* 20 (6): 781–804.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 2003a. “Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity.” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 19: 312. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2004.106.3.627>.
- . 2003b. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Molyneux, Maxine. 1998. “Analysing Women’s Movements.” *Development and Change* 29: 219–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00077>.
- Molyneux, Maxine, and Nikki Craske. 2002. “The Local, the Regional, and the Global: Transforming the Politics of Rights.” In *Gender and the Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America*, edited by Nikki Craske and Maxine Molyneux, 1–31. New York: Palgrave Publishers.
- Morais, Lecio, and Alfredo Saad-Filho. 2011. “Brazil beyond Lula: Forging Ahead or Pausing for Breath?” *Latin American Perspectives* 38 (2): 31–44.
- Morgen, Sandra. 2002. *Into Our Own Hands: The Women’s Health Movement in the United States, 1969-1990*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press.
- Nadar, Laura. 1972. “Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained From Studying Up.”
- Naples, Nancy A. 2002. “Changing the Terms: Community Activism, Globalization, and the Dilemmas of Transnational Feminist Praxis.” In *Women’s Activism and Globalization: Linking Local Struggles and Transnational Politics*, edited by Nancy A. Naples and Manisha Desai, 1–14. New York and London: Routledge.
- Neumann, Pamela. 2017. “When Laws Are Not Enough: Violence Against Women and Bureaucratic Practice in Nicaragua.” *Social Forces* 95 (3): 1105–25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sow082>.
- Neves, José Anael, Mick Lennon Machado, Luna Dias de Almeida Oliveira, Yara Maria Franco Moreno, Maria Angélica Tavares de Medeiros, and Francisco de Assis Guedes de Vasconcelos. 2021. “Unemployment, Poverty, and Hunger in Brazil in Covid-19 Pandemic Times.” *Revista de Nutrição* 34: 1–7.

- Oliveira, Elisângela, Camilla Pereira, Carolina Medeiros, Nathalya Moreira, Priscila Marques, Taís Figueiredo, and Vanessa Cardozo. 2022. “Dossiê Mulher.” Rio de Janeiro.
- Olivera, Mercedes. 2010. “Violencia Feminicida: Violence Against Women and Mexico’s Structural Crisis.” In *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas*, edited by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, 49–58. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Pasinato, Wânia. 2015. “Acesso à Justiça e Violência Doméstica e Familiar Contrás as Mulheres: As Percepções Dos Operadores Jurídicos e Os Limites Para a Aplicação Da Lei Maria Da Penha.” *Revista Direito GV* 11 (2): 407–27.
- Peixoto, E. M., V. M. Azevedo Oliveira Knupp, J. R. T. Soares, D. G. Depret, C. Oliveira Souza, M. E. D. Messina, L. M. Mello Andrade, et al. 2022. “Interpersonal Violence and Passing: Results from a Brazilian Trans-Specific Cross-Sectional Study.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37 (15–16).
- Penglase, R. Ben. 2014. “Living with Insecurity in a Brazilian Favela.” New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press.
- “Percepções Da População Brasileira Sobre Feminicídio.” 2022.
- Perry, Keisha-Khan Y. 2013. *Black Women against the Land Grab The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil*. University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2022. “Housing Justice in the Americas: Struggle and Solidarity.” *NACLA*. <https://nacla.org/housing-justice-americas>.
- Pitanguy, Jacqueline. 2019. “A Carta Das Mulheres Brasileiras Aos Constituintes: Mémoires Para o Futuro.” In *Pensamento Feminista Brasileiro: Formação e Contexto*, edited by Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda, 81–98. Rio de Janeiro: Bazar do Tempo.
- “Políticas Públicas e Garantia de Direitos.” 2023. Brasília.
- Ramos, Alcida Rita. 1992. “The Hyperreal Indian.” *SÉRIE ANTROPOLOGIA* 14: 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X9401400203>.
- Ramos, Silvia. 2023. “A Ordem é Matar: 1.327 Pessoas Foram Mortas Pela Polícia Do RJ Em 2022.” Rede de Observatórios Da Segurança. January 27, 2023. <http://observatorioseguranca.com.br/a-ordem-e-matar-1-327-pessoas-foram-mortas-pela-policia-do-rj-em-2022/>.
- Richie, Beth E. 2000. “A Black Feminist Reflection on the Antiviolence Movement.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 25 (4): 1133–37.
- Rocha, Luciane O. 2020. “Judicialização Do Sofrimento Negro. Maternidade Negra e Fluxo Do Sistema de Justiça Criminal No Rio de Janeiro.” *Sexualidad, Salud y Sociedad* 36: 181–205.

- Rodrigues, Antonio Edmilson Martins, and Juliana Oakim Bandiera de Mello. 2015. "As Reformas Urbanas Na Cidade Do Rio de Janeiro: Uma História de Contrastes." *Acervo: Revista Do Arquivo Nacional* 28 (1): 19–53.
- Rosaldo, Michele Z. 1974. "Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview." *Woman, Culture and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>.
- Rosten, Keith A. 2008. "The Scaffolding for Legal Infrastructure: Developing Sustainable Approaches." *Tulane Journal of International and Comparative Law* 16 (2): 395–418.
- Roth-Gordon, Jennifer. 2017. *Race and the Brazilian Body: Blackness, Whiteness, and Everyday Language in Rio de Janeiro*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Roure, Jodie G. 2009. "Domestic Violence in Brazil: Examining Obstacles and Approaches to Promote Legislative Reform." *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 41: 67–97.
- . 2011. "Gender Justice in Puerto Rico: Domestic Violence, Legal Reform, and the Use of International Human Rights Principles." *Human Rights Quarterly* 33 (3): 790–825. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2011.0042>.
- Rowbotham, Sheila. 1992. *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action*. Routledge.
- Rubin, Gayle. 1975. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2064070>.
- Saad-Filho, Alfredo. 2020. "Varieties of Neoliberalism in Brazil (2003–2019)." *Latin American Perspectives* 47 (1): 9–27.
- Sagot, Montserrat. 2005. "The Critical Path of Women Affected by Family Violence in Latin America: Case Studies From 10 Countries." *Violence Against Women* 11 (10): 1292–1318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801205280189>.
- Sandoval-Cervantes, Ivan. 2017. "Uncertain Futures: The Unfinished Houses of Undocumented Migrants in Oaxaca, Mexico." *American Anthropologist* 119 (2): 209–22.
- Sanford, Victoria. 2008. "From Genocide to Femicide: Impunity and Human Rights in Twenty-First Century Guatemala." *Journal of Human Rights* 7: 104–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754830802070192>.
- . 2023. "Textures of Terror: The Murder of Claudina Isabel Velasquez and Her Father's Quest for Justice." University of California Press.
- Sanford, Victoria, Katerina Stefatos, and Cecilia M. Salvi. 2016. "Introduction." In *Gender Violence in Peace and War: States of Complicity*, edited by Victoria Sanford, Katerina Stefatos, and Cecilia M. Salvi, 1–18. New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press.

- Santiago, Vinícius, and Marta Fernández. 2017. "From the Backstage of War: The Struggle of Mothers in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro." *Contexto Internacional* 39 (1): 35–52.
- Santos, Cecília MacDowell. 2015. "Curto-Circuito, Falta de Linha Ou Na Linha? Redes de Enfrentamento à Violência Contra Mulheres Em São Paulo." *Revista Estudos Feministas*. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-026X2015v23n2p577>.
- Savell, Stephanie. 2021. "The Right to Public Security Policing and Activism in a Rio de Janeiro Favela." *American Ethnologist* 48 (4): 418–31.
- Schild, Verónica. 1994. "Recasting 'popular' Movements: Gender and Political Learning in Neighborhood Organizations in Chile." *Latin American Perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X9402100205>.
- . 1997. "New Subjects of Rights?: Gendered Citizenship and the Contradictory Legacies of Social Movements in Latin America." *Organization Novidades Aquí y de Allá* 4 (4): 604–19.
- Schmidt Camacho, Alicia. 2010. "Ciudadana X: Gender Violence and the Denationalization of Women's Rights in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico." In *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas*, edited by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, 274–89. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Sieder, Rachel. 2017. "Introduction: Demanding Justice and Security: Indigenous Women and Legal Pluralities in Latin America." In *Demanding Justice and Security: Indigenous Women and Legal Pluralities in Latin America*, edited by Rachel Sieder, 1–25. New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press.
- Sieder, Rachel, and Anna Barrera. 2017. "Women and Legal Pluralism: Lessons from Indigenous Governance Systems in the Andes." *Journal of Latin American Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X16002273>.
- Snyder, Cara K., and Cristina Scheibe Wolff. 2019. "The Perfect Misogynist Storm and The Electromagnetic Shape of Feminism: Weathering Brazil's Political Crisis." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 20 (8): 87–109.
- Soares, Márcio de Sousa. 2023. "Os Percursos de Dandara: Entre a Ficção, Os Movimentos Sociais e a História." In *Escravidão, Seus Temas e Problemas Em Aulas de História*, edited by Isnara Pereira Ivo and Roberto Guedes, 43–68. Recife: Edupe.
- Speed, Shannon. 2006. "Rights at the Intersection: Gender and Ethnicity in Neoliberal Mexico." In *Dissident Women: Gender and Cultural Politics in Chiapas*, edited by Shannon Speed, R. Aída Hernández Castillo, and Lynn Stephen, 203–21. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the*

- Interpretation of Culture*, 271–312. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-44501999000200012>.
- Stephen, Lynn. 1997. *Women and Social Movements in Latin America*. University of Texas Press.
- . 2015. “Gender Violence and Female Indigenous Guatemalan Refugees.”
- Sutton, Barbara, and Nayla Luz Vacarezza. 2020. “Abortion Rights in Images: Visual Interventions by Activist Organizations in Argentina.” *Signs* 45 (3).
- Tarlau, Rebecca. 2019. *Occupying Schools, Occupying Land: How the Landless Workers Movement Transformed Brazilian Education*. Oxford University Press.
- Tate, Winifred. 2020. “Anthropology of Policy: Tensions, Temporalities, Possibilities.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 49: 83–99.
- Tenório, Patrícia Cibele da Silva. 2021. “‘Assim Eu Sei Que Viverei Para a Posteridade’: Depoimentos Orais de Almerinda Farias Gama, Uma Pioneira Do Feminismo Brasileiro.” *História Oral* 24 (1): 171–90.
- Thayer, Millie. 2009. *Making Transnational Feminism: Rural Women, NGO Activists, and Northern Donors in Brazil*. Routledge.
- Thelen, Tatjana, Larissa Vettters, and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann. 2014. “Introduction to Stategraphy: Toward a Relational Anthropology of the State.” *Social Analysis* 58 (3): 1–19.
- Trevisol, Joviles Vitório, and Rosileia Lucia Nierotka. 2015. “‘Lei Das Cotas’ e as Políticas de Democratização Do Acesso Ao Ensino Superior Público Brasileiro.” *Quaestio: Revista de Estudos Em Educação* 17 (2): 573–93.
- Trujillo, Hilda Morales. 2010. “Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala.” In *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas*, 127–37.
- Waiselfisz, Julio Jacobo. 2015. “Mapa Da Violência: Homicídio de Mulheres No Brasil.” Rio de Janeiro. [https://www.mapadaviolencia.org.br/pdf2015/MapaViolencia\\_2015\\_mulheres.pdf](https://www.mapadaviolencia.org.br/pdf2015/MapaViolencia_2015_mulheres.pdf).
- Walsh, Shannon Drysdale. 2008. “Engendering Justice: Constructing Institutions to Address Violence Against Women.” *Studies in Social Justice* 2 (1): 48–66.
- Walsh, Shannon Drysdale, and Cecilia Menjivar. 2016a. “Impunity and Multisided Violence in the Lives of Latin American Women: El Salvador in Comparative Perspective.” *Current Sociology Monograph* 64 (4): 586–602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116640474>.
- . 2016b. “‘What Guarantees Do We Have?’ Legal Tolls and Persistent Impunity for Femicide in Guatemala.” *Latin American Politics and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/laps.12001>.

- Waylen, Georgina. 1994. "Women and Democratization Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics." *World Politics* 46: 327–54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2950685>.
- Weber, Max. 1948. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. The Free Press.
- Weissman, Deborah M. 2010. "Global Economics and Their Progenies: Theorizing Femicide in Context." In *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, edited by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, 225–42. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Wekerle, Gerda R. 2013. "Framing Feminist Claims for Urban Citizenship." In *Mapping Women, Making Politics: Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography*.
- Whittier, Nancy. 2004. "The Consequences of Social Movements for Each Other." In *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, 531–51. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Wilding, Polly. 2010. "'New Violence': Silencing Women's Experiences in the Favelas of Brazil." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 42: 719–47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X10001343>
- . 2012. *Negotiating Boundaries: Gender, Violence and Transformation in Brazil*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2014. "Gendered Meanings and Everyday Experiences of Violence in Urban Brazil." *Gender, Place and Culture* 21 (2): 228–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.769430>.
- Willis, Graham Denyer. 2015. *The Killing Consensus: Police, Organized Crime, and the Regulation of Life and Death in Urban Brazil*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Wright, Melissa M. 2010. "Paradoxes, Protests, and the Mujeres de Negro of Northern Mexico." In *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, edited by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, 312–30. Durham and London: Duke University Press.