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Guarding the Urban Elite: Hospitality Security in São Paulo

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Abstract

In the past decade, Brazil's largest city, São Paulo, has witnessed an exponential growth in private security. In this article, we contribute to understandings of how security shapes urban life by focusing on what we call *hospitality security*, which takes place in elite spaces of residence and leisure such as high-end neighborhoods, gated communities, and shopping malls. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, we argue that hospitality security is a specific urban formation that combines protection with care for spaces and clients. As such, it is not just another paid protection service, but is viewed as a necessary force for creating a desirable quality of life and fostering an ease of urban circulation that is seen as absent from public spaces due to high crime and ongoing eruptions of police violence. Hospitality security thus attempts to produce urban stability and predictability by maintaining harmony in residential and commercial environments and ensuring foreseeable social interactions while requiring security guards to uphold an unequal, racialized status quo.

KEYWORDS
Brazil, hospitality, policing, security, urban space

> "The first thing I learned when I was hired as a residential access controller was how to wave to all the residents who entered and exited through the gates of the condominium," Fran, a private security guard, explained. "They want us to be nice and look happy. I have automated the gesture in such a way that even when I am at the bus station, I say goodbye to strangers who pass by in their cars! Sometimes people even stop. Then I am so embarrassed." *Portarias*, or residential checkpoints like the one Fran worked at, are along the most common setting for private security in Brazilian cities. The *portaria* can take on different forms. The more established kind features a gate house, usually located at the front of an enclosed, walled complex of houses or apartments, where guards control access. Larger enclaves have fancier gate houses, with better infrastructure, including a water cooler, hot plate, refrigerator, locker, a desk and a chair, fan, a coffee thermos, etc.
>
> —Durão fieldnotes, São Paulo, March 2017

Whether in peoples' homes or in semi-public spaces like shopping malls, country clubs, office buildings, and event venues, security is an expected, and often welcomed, part of Brazilian urban life. In cities with high levels of urban violence and crime, the work of caring for middle- and upper-class clients, patrons, or residents is produced primarily through the constant, daily labor of security guards. Despite claims that security is a universal human right, a discourse that has been prevalent in Brazil since the transition to democracy in the 1980s, in practice there is a stark social and geographic distribution of security in Brazilian cities (Alves, 2018), and an "unfinished democratization" marked by the persistent violations of rights (Zaluar, 2007). Violent and corrupt public security is directed

at marginalized low-income people and symbolically Black spaces, while legions of private guards cater to largely white middle- and upper-class urban environments (Robb Larkins, 2023). In contrast to the violence typical of public forces, guards like Fran are expected to do care work: politely and courteously creating pleasant, secured spaces for those who can afford them.

As with other forms of domestic labor such as cleaning, cooking, ironing, gardening, driving, and looking after children, security care work reflects wider conditions of structural racism in Brazil and is generally performed by low-income Northeastern migrants in São Paulo, many of Afro-Brazilian descent. As a mode of protection, it draws on both on long-standing cultural notions of cordiality and on the racialized, gendered, and classed labor of low-level security guards themselves (Durão, Robb Larkins, and Fischmann, 2021, 14). We call this variety of security *hospitality security* (Robb Larkins, 2017), defining it as a combination of infrastructure, technology, and human labor deployed to produce a certain kind of urban space for middle- and upper-class subjects. For those who purchase it, hospitality security is viewed as a necessary force for creating a desirable quality of life and fostering an ease of urban circulation absent from public spaces due to high levels of violent crime. As we will explore in this text, hospitality security attempts to produce feelings of stability and predictability by maintaining harmony in residential and commercial environments and ensuring predictable social interactions among hosts and guests.[1]

In this article, we draw on ethnographic research conducted between 2016 and 2020 in São Paulo, the largest security market in Brazil, focusing specifically on how security guards produce hospitality security in two key settings: the residential gated condominium and the upscale shopping mall. While we see hospitality security as also produced through technology and the built environment, we focus here specifically on the quotidian labor of guards. The two settings highlighted capture distinct dimensions of hospitality security work. In gated condominiums, where the focus is on access control, guards must carefully and courteously ascertain who should be allowed to enter and who must be kept out while also catering to the needs of the condominium's residents. The mall, by contrast, requires guards to navigate a constant flow of people in a space with more porous borders, managing potential suspects and maintaining an aura of comfort for patrons. Both settings are symbolically white spaces, mostly frequented by white people, and so we must also understand hospitality work as a technique for protecting and promoting whiteness (Patterniani, 2022; Pinho, 2021; Robb Larkins, 2023; Roth Gordon, 2018).

Methodologically speaking, Durão's research focused on gated communities in cities in São Paulo state, including São Paulo itself, in addition to Campinas and Osasco. This work entailed participant observation in four different residential condominiums (both with houses and apartments) and in numerous shopping centers. Durão also conducted research with professionals across the entire chain of operations of dozens of formal and informal companies. Robb Larkins conducted long-term ethnographic research in private security in elite spaces primarily in Rio de Janeiro, including luxury shopping malls, elite country clubs, soccer stadiums, and guard training facilities. While this particular article focuses on our São Paulo data, the dynamics described here reflect those observed in Rio as well. As white foreigners, one from the United States and the other from Portugal, we were often treated as guests when we accompanied the work of our interlocutors, be it with the guards, those training the guards, or the company managers and owners. Our ability to occupy a guest position of the "good stranger" (Simmel, [1908] 1971, 143) reflects our perceived privilege and suggests that those who received us saw us as similar demographically to their clients. Not being Brazilian also created space for discussions in which our interlocutors sought to explain things that we were not presumed to know or understand as foreigners. As women academics researching private security topics, we were consistently seen as students needing teaching, not only in terms of the technical learning needed for security work but cultural and urban learning as well.

Academic treatment of insecurity and policing in Brazil has largely focused on more violent and overtly oppressive forms of racialized security (Adorno, 1993, 1999, 2002; Adorno and Cardia, 1999; Campos and Alvarez, 2017; Kant de Lima, Misse, and Miranda, 2000; Lima, 2011; Soares, 2019; Willis, 2015), which are so widespread that what constitutes routine police work in Brazil might be classified genocide or ethnic cleansing in other places (Willis, 2015, 65). And while the severity of the levels of violence has logically produced a robust literature seeking to address underlying dynamics, it has also led to the occlusion of other less overt forms of security, including the hospitality practices we describe here. Concordantly, despite the prevalence of hospitality security in cities all across Brazil, we still know very little about how it protects both property *and* the social order.[2] This article makes a long overdue intervention by providing an ethnographic portrait of guard work in reproducing this important feature of life in urban Brazil and by showing how hospitality is fundamental to the country's functioning as a "status society," that is, a society where social groups have developed "rights" to certain privileges in relation to the state and other social groups (Guimarães, 2004, 25).

Guard behavior, as we will show, is the fundamental ingredient in hospitality security, as workers must demonstrate good will, gratitude, and deference towards their bosses and clients. This practice is rooted in Brazilian cultural traditions around "cordiality." Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, one of the most well-known early sociologists and analysts of Brazilian society, argued that conventions dictating cordial, or polite, behavior are part of the Portuguese Iberian colonial legacy and are connected to the predominance of rural traditionalism, which continues as a dominant force today (Candido, [1968] 2016; Monteiro and Schwarcz, 2016). Being cordial means performing amicably and humbly, as well as masking forms of interpersonal animosity when dealing with strangers. It entails politely glossing over deep-seated class and racial tensions that inform everyday interactions between people occupying different social positions.

Hospitality security, as we observed it, consistently draws on these cultural repertoires around cordiality. In doing so, it normalizes

its role as a form of urban social control. Furthermore, by evoking these long-standing dynamics, hospitality security is experienced by its privileged clients as familiar—both comfortable and comforting. And because hospitality security is perceived as welcoming as much as it is controlling, as a "normal" feature of the social order, it can actually neutralize resistance to the ever-growing security and surveillance apparatus. Therefore, hospitality security in contemporary Brazil is indicative of how security is not only—or not merely—a response to fear of crime, insecurity, and violence. It is simultaneously a material, social, and symbolic apparatus that signals care for spaces and consideration for certain clients, visitors, and customers, based on colonial understandings of how social life should work. Hospitality security in Brazilian cities, as we will show, is assembled precisely in such a way as to confuse and mix security with care. It operates as part of the larger grammar shaping daily urban life, complementing the "harder" forms of security that are more typically studied in the field. As such, hospitality security, like other elements of the security scape such as border walls, design fortresses, cybersecurity, security cameras, and security warning systems (Ghertner, McFann, and Goldstein, 2020), is part of the contemporary aesthetics and management of urban life.

In what follows, we provide a brief historical overview of the emergence and consolidation of private security in Brazilian cities, and then present an analysis of the everyday work of guards. The condominium offers us a privileged look into how hospitality security is based on practices of access control; the shopping mall illustrates how guards must cultivate specific forms of interaction with guests to maintain the calm and comfort associated with the mall as a space.

PRIVATE SECURITY AND THE STATE

The expansion of private protection in Brazil (and beyond) has been analyzed from two dominant angles: one is the failure of the state to provide security and the consequent erosion of the monopoly of legitimate use of force; and the second is the privatization of public spaces resulting in an increase in urban spatial segregation and closed enclaves, producing a weakening of democratic citizenship and creating a new market for protection. In the first approach, which remains a dominant one, much of the academic analysis is centered on the state, often problematizing private security in relation to it (Loader and Walker, 2007).[3] In this line of analysis, the state is weakened by the privatization of the economy that is accompanied by the commodification of violence. The expansion of private security companies is understood as one of the most striking examples of this global process (Adorno and Oliveira, 2019, 399). In the Brazilian case in particular, bureaucratic failings within the police are also often seen as contributing to the rise of private security, and competition among the many different police forces—civil, military, municipal, federal—is cited as contributing to a lack of integration that makes policing less effective (Costa and Lima, 2019; Durão and Coelho, 2020).

The effects of constitutional deadlocks on police reform have also had an adverse impact, essentially maintaining structures and operations identical to those in the pre-democratic military regime period (Costa and Lima, 2019; Soares, 2019). The democratic constitution of 1988 not only failed to replace the old concept of "internal security" with public security but reinforced the model that it itself sought to eradicate (Lima, 2011). In sum, the inability of the police to effectively perform their expected tasks has encouraged the introduction of private security patrols in neighborhoods, businesses, and homes.

Brazilian cities are dominated by an array of security services, organized along a public/private security continuum (Shearing and Stenning, 1981, 196; 2017).[4] In Brazil, as has been the case globally, when private security gained a foothold in the urban milieu, it became increasingly difficult to define the boundaries of what constituted public security and what was private enterprise (Diphoorn and Grassiani, 2019). This blurring was in large part due to issues of poor regulation. Consequently, much of the existing literature on Brazilian private security is focused on demarcation—attempting to define what is public and what is private (Abrahamsen and Leander, 2016; Da Silva, 2014, 2015, 2017; Zanetic, 2009, 2013).

Notably, private security in Brazil is conceived not in opposition to police but rather as a complementary form of protection that operates outside of the scope of public policing, focusing primarily on protecting assets. With the exception of specialized areas that include security on the move, such as protection of cargo and valuables and personal security (bodyguards), the vast majority of security laborers are not authorized to take action in public places. Officially, the use of firearms is also tightly controlled. Private security guards are restricted to low-caliber weaponry, which must be kept strictly inside the establishment they are assigned to protect (Durão and Paes, 2021). Boundaries between private and public are also regulated through requirements placed on uniforms. Intentional semiotic confusion between private security guards' uniforms and police uniforms is prohibited (Durão and Paes, 2021). Private security remains highly subordinate to public security and its expansion is carefully monitored and policed to make sure it does not encroach on police territory, while still leaving sufficient unregulated or unenforced gray areas for individual police officers to operate as security entrepreneurs.[5] The expansive extralegal market is highly flexible and easily adaptable to new markets and opportunities.

The participation of the police and high-ranking military in private security markets is so extensive, and operates in so many forms, that in practice it often produces an assemblage not only of public and private security, but also of urban and national security (Abraham, 2009; Durão and Paes, 2021), with all sorts of actors collaborating for the "well-being of citizens," citizens that are viewed as consumers deserving of caretaking forms of hospitality security. However, despite the widespread participation of police and military, the entrepreneurial private security market presents itself as a response to an historically tainted field where police are considered violent and untrustworthy. By showing they care about clients' well-being through an architecture of hospitality, and hiring progressively more cordial guards, private firms aspire to be seen as the ones who do security right, performers of an elite or boutique way

of doing security—even if the companies are run, owned and managed by the same police that oversee violent raids on low-income neighborhoods and who are generally cast as inept and ineffective.

Security companies that focus on hospitality, particularly in places like residential condominiums and shopping malls, are more concerned with training guards that can attend to clients' needs than to make sure they have skills to prevent and minimize risks. What emerges here is a bifurcation of security forms, divided not by public versus private but by who is on the receiving end of the security. Violent, truculent police and hardline tactics are the norm for low-income Black communities, whereas polite helpfulness and hospitality security is the privilege of the middle- and upper-class light-skinned elite.

SECURITY AND THE PRIVATIZATION OF URBAN SPACE

The second framework for the analysis of private security in the established literature is focused on the expansion of semi-private or private spaces, a global urban shift associated with the neoliberalization of cities. In her foundational study *City of Walls*, Teresa Caldeira (2001) explains how a new pattern of urban spatial segregation, especially in São Paulo, emerged in the context of the explosion of violent crime and widespread mistrust in the efficacy of the judicial system and the police. The condominiumization of social life and the emergence of what Caldeira refers to as fortified enclaves—closed, monitored spaces intended for residence, leisure, work, consumption, and production—was one of the most visible phenomena of Brazil's "disjunctive democracy." The basic argument here is that when São Paulo elites and the middle class realized the police were not reforming and that they were not able to contain the surge of violence in the 1990s, they created all sorts of private protection mechanisms to protect themselves from crime. This included "secured" communities, which proliferated during the late 1980s and through the 1990s, creating new security scapes that gradually replaced other kinds of housing with fortress-like features (Glück and Low, 2017; Low 2019). The financialization and militarization of everyday life was visible in the growth of security aesthetics (Ghertner, McFann, and Goldstein, 2020; Goldstein, 2017; Low, 2019, 143–44).

What was first a domestication of contemporary fears and anxieties as described by Caldeira (2003) rapidly became a perpetual need for a more sophisticated security apparatus. Today, the Brazilian urban elite is permanently investing in, taking care of, and refining (*aprimorando*), as they say, the common areas and the security systems of buildings and houses. Fortified spaces are also part of contemporary consumption culture in urban Brazil. The sumptuous lobbies of high-end condominiums and their lavish concierge areas and services convey residents' wealth and status. They are themselves markers of social distinction. Such spaces necessitate investment by a building's residents. Residential security is also now directly linked to the valorization of residential properties; infrastructural transformations are related to the implementation or upgrading of the socio-technical security apparatus. As we take up in greater detail below, hospitality security guards are at the heart of this work. By keeping wages low, fortified spaces can affordably be guarded and also cleaned, manicured, maintained, and upgraded on a regular basis.

HOSPITALITY SECURITY IN THE CONDOMINIUM

It is Monday, 6:45 a.m., and Fran looks nervously out from the *portaria* (see Figure 1), from the residential checkpoint's big window, at the line of cars exiting the condominium. From early morning until

FIGURE 1 Gatehouse and entrance of a closed condominium. The sign points to different lanes for different people: residents, visitors, and service people. Photo: Susana Durão.

the start of the evening, she guards the gate of the Calm Lake condominium in Campinas (São Paulo), home to over 170 residents living in 50 individual houses.[6] In contrast to the night shifts, staffed by two male armed response officers, the morning and afternoon work is hectic.[7] Fran barely has time to go to the bathroom. The *portaria* cannot ever be empty.

In the morning, most residents are taking their children to school or leaving for work. As they pass, Fran performs a series of simultaneous rapid gestures: she waves, she smiles, she efficiently presses the button that opens the gate, preventing residents from having to stop the car and wait, and she manages the mail and packages that will later be distributed before the shift ends. She also remotely opens the gate for each of the domestic workers that arrive on the bus, and, if the pace of entry and exit eases, she catches up on personal and condominium gossip with other staff.

Fran must also answer the phone, which rings constantly. Many families use the *portaria* switchboard services to reach each other, to talk to neighbors, or to make the kinds of complaints they do not have the courage to register in person. While attending to these calls, Fran always has an eye on the visitors' gate, which demands heightened attention. Through the intercom, she asks the visitors, usually arriving to provide a service, to get out of the car so she can see them, and intuitively assesses if there are any signs of danger. She says that she can tell who is who by carefully observing their behavior. She will know if a man really is a plumber, for instance, or a guy with bad intensions anxious to get inside the condominium. If the man is jumpy, she will pay more attention, and may even call her supervisor asking for guidance in those rare moments. Fran records their ID numbers, registers the license plate in the computer, and asks which house they will work at and what service they will provide. Before opening the gate, she confirms the resident's authorization by phone. Once inside the condominium complex, service providers are escorted by security staff to ensure they reach their destination and do not deviate from their approved trajectory. During all of this activity, Fran must constantly monitor the 20 CCTV images she has in front of her on a big screen, making sure there are no strange movements in the communal parts of the condominium or in the surrounding streets and avenues outside the gates and walls, which are also captured on cameras.

Observing and being observed

Despite the fact that Fran's job entails surveilling others, she knows that she herself is under constant observation. In residential, commercial, industrial, and even in prison settings, electronic monitoring systems coexist alongside older methods of control based on direct observations and intersubjective interactions (Campelo, 2019). The guardhouse is no exception. Firms monitor guards in various ways, including through the interpersonal impressions of their clients, the residents, or her 170 "bosses," as Fran calls them. In many condominiums, the fragmented and sometimes haphazard surveillance technology is often unsystematically updated over time and is not entirely effective. But most *portarias* are equipped with trackers that sound an alarm if guards forget to confirm their presence at their post. This is combined with regular check-ins and oversight by supervisors, a feature that is hailed as a "best practice" when selling security services to potential clients (Silva and Mesquita, 2019).

Fran is also aware that the color of her skin and accent reveal her migratory story, as she relocated from Paraíba to São Paulo in search of work and a better life in which to raise her two children. Like the condominium's housekeepers, who all have very similar biographies, the women guards are used to living under the microscope. Fran feels scrutinized in every interaction she has with the residents. Constant attentiveness and vigilance are essential to the security-as-a-commodity that is being sold.

Of all the tasks that guards like Fran must carry out—controlling access, monitoring the entrance and exit gates, keeping a record of visitors and service providers, distributing mail and parcels, routing telephone calls, and keeping records of the work of other guards who patrol the inner streets of the condominium—the interface with residents and visitors is the most crucial. Although it is quite common to go through monitored turnstiles, verification processes, and registration systems in cities like São Paulo, these procedures generate discomfort and stress. Guards must ensure that correct access processes are followed while simultaneously trying to mitigate stress and annoyance by being pleasant and friendly, even when people grow impatient or angry with them. As Fran explained to us, dealing with the line of visitors who would enter the condominium was complex. "It's pressure. Sometimes the line is almost on the avenue and we need to register everyone quickly to avoid congestion, but we also need to do it carefully. We already know some of the service providers, so it's easier. But if I have never seen them before, then it becomes more difficult, because I have to analyze and record everything."

Daytime work in the guard house brings not just the stress of filtering legitimate service providers from potential suspects, but also assessing people as they approach the entrance to ascertain where they fit in the social hierarchy and how they should be received as a result. This work necessitates closer and more intimate relationships with the condominium's residents. All the guards, without exception, confirmed to us that a central part of their work entailed creating and maintaining ties with residents and their invited guests.

Guards must be extremely careful not to confuse residents, their neighbors, their friends, or their visitors with service providers. This would be a cardinal sin and one about which Fran was constantly worried. A scene at the resident's entrance gate that we witnessed one afternoon serves to illustrate. A man approached on a motorcycle. As he was not a resident, he was stopped by Francisco, the night guard, who was just starting his shift. The man was asked to present his personal identification to the guard prior to entry. At the request, the man started shouting that what was happening was unacceptable. Immediately concerned about repercussions, Fran opened the gate and the biker entered the condominium, quickly and noisily. Francisco, the guard who was working that day, explained the situation: "That guy was a 'doctor' [that is, someone who thinks he's

important].” With a worried look, he continued, “I didn't know that the guy is a resident's brother. I might have screwed myself this time.” Especially in the case of those working the day shifts, the guards who fail to treat residents with permanent deference will be fired without question. No labor laws or union advocacy can save them.[8]

To avoid this fate, guards said that it was important to study the residents and their lives. They explained even needing to know what foods residents consume, so as to verify the takeout deliveries they get. They also described monitoring what services residents use, in order to ascertain if they would logically be receiving pool cleaners, gardeners, piano teachers, or school tutors. They familiarize themselves with the family members that visit. Francisco, on another occasion, explained his work this way: “Having personal information about the residents' routines, and knowing who visits them so as not to stop the wrong person by accident, is more important than knowing how to handle a weapon. The family driver cannot be treated as a ‘doctor,’ nor can the son of one of the residents be treated as a driver just because he arrives in a run-down car. Generally, only rookies make these mistakes.”

Smiling guards

The guards and the maids who work inside the houses see their work as intertwined, often sharing observations about the worlds of those they work for. At the end of the day, we often heard guards talking to the maids, asking for information to inform their work: “So, how are things in the house? Any meetings? What is the doctor up to?”

During the night shifts, when the fear is focused on home invasions and the patrols are reinforced, the preference is to hire men with weapons, sometimes with bulletproof vests. Night guards have less contact with residents and greater autonomy. As Josué, a 12-year veteran of Calm Lake, explained: “I like to work at night because I don't have to worry about the residents' quirks. During the day they annoy us and if we lose our temper, we easily lose our jobs. At night I have more independence.”

The centrality of affective interactions with residents in this particular setting is further illustrated by the fact that, while at least one-third of all private security work is outsourced work, residential condominiums are one place where hiring the guards in-house (not from a third-party service) is more common. This is precisely because it facilitates the creation of long-term relationships between guard and resident, potentially providing better, more seamless hospitality service. As we learned in talking with guards, the practice of in-house hiring comes with both a reward, since it gives them job security, and an obligation, since it keeps them feeling indebted to residents in a way that isn't as common with outsourced hospitality workers.

After working at the condominium for a year and a half, Fran was suddenly fired. She was shocked. She believed her work was impeccable. At first, she thought that one resident who did not like her had perhaps complained about her “ways.” But it turned out that Fran had made the worst mistake: She was told by her superior that she had not been smiling enough. Workers like Fran are asked to serve residents with joy, even while they labor under conditions of subtle, yet cruel, racial and class humiliation. Fran had not been sufficiently cheerful and therefore had not adequately maintained the appearance of the polite, subservient guard dictated by the power relationships that govern social interactions in the gatehouse. At the time, Fran was experiencing serious troubles at home. Her older son was unemployed, and her brother with whom she shared the rent was unable to pay his bills. Exhausted and worn out, her smile slipped from her face.

In reflecting on Fran's experience, we see how the failure to comply with this set of hospitality security labor norms had a devastating, effect, leaving her unemployed. As we have argued, condominium guards must perform gatekeeping and domestic caretaking at the same time, simultaneously surveilling the space, controlling who enters and exits, and giving detailed attention to social standing and social relationships, and their place within them. In their daily work, Fran and other guards experience the ambiguities of hospitality security, where to be successful means to gracefully and cheerfully oscillate between control and care. Although their official job description is focused on typical security activities such as staffing the guardhouse, controlling who can legitimately enter, or watching the cameras for any signs of disturbance, keeping the residents and their valued guests feeling comfortable and at home, and performing in such a way as to transmit an elusive sense of security, is actually at the core of hospitality work.

HOSPITALITY SECURITY IN THE SHOPPING MALL

As we have suggested above, insecurity, whether perceived or real, impacts the organization of urban space in myriad ways. Concerns about crime have evacuated many of the city's public spaces. In response, the shopping mall has grown up as an oasis of secure consumption and social interaction (Durão, Robb Larkins, and Fischmann, 2021; Robb Larkins, 2023). In the high-end malls that we studied, one of which we feature here, hospitality guards are mainly concerned with two tasks. They perform an important customer service function, orienting and guiding customers as needed. But they also carefully and delicately manage the constant threat posed by criminal suspects, who are commonly referred to over the radio as Code 2's (*Codigo 2*).

Security as customer service

As we observed during fieldwork in one mall, which we call “El Paraíso,” and in various other *shoppings*, much of the guards' work in the mall entails creating a friendly and welcoming environment for clients. The gap between the enormous, four-story space and the limited personnel—470 stores but only 28 guards per shift—is bridged by the ubiquitous presence of surveillance cameras staffed

by security supervisors, who in turn orient their guards on the ground about potential issues.

No matter the situation, guards must smile constantly and should kindly point the right way to stores or to the restroom when queried by customers, all the while striving to make the client experience as pleasant as possible. Customer service work here is care work, where guards need to anticipate and react kindly to the needs of patrons to communicate the impression that the mall is an inviting, calm, clean, and secure space. As one of the supervisors in El Paraíso put it, "You need to think like a guest. Would you be comfortable if you were sitting there as a guest? Would you feel good doing that as a guest? Security needs to think of everything, do everything. Maintenance, cleaning. Everything." Indeed, we regularly observed guards on patrol throughout the mall stopping to pick up litter. In other cases, they approached teenagers who were overzealously making out, asking them to be more subtle with their affections. As one guard told us, "If the girl was sitting on the guy's lap, for example, we might go over and remind them that people are here to have lunch, to conduct business with colleagues, and to be with their families. This sort of behavior was not okay for children to witness." Thus, guards in hospitality roles are not just protecting the space from criminal threats but from moral ones as well, all the while maintaining the mall as a place that reflects family values and making sure that it is distant from the perceived dirty, immoral, and loose space of the street outside.[9]

Beyond providing traditional forms of customer service, guards also told us about conducting other kinds of hospitality security. For example, we accompanied Silva, a 30-year-old white guard, as he patrolled the first floor of the shopping mall. Stopping in front of the automatic sliding door that connects the mall to the parking lot beyond, he focused his attention on the three people seated on the sofas in front of the door. When we asked him what he was looking at, he replied that his patrol always brought him to this spot, adorned with velvet sofas and leather footrests. Here, he could keep an eye on the *vulneráveis* (vulnerable ones). When asked what he meant by *vulneráveis*, he explained, to our surprise, that he used this term to refer to the *objects* that people leave unattended or unwatched as they relax on the couches or in the food court—shopping bags with newly acquired purchases, open handbags. He gestured and said, "That girl is in another world on her phone, talking with someone. She isn't paying any attention to her bag, which is *largado ao seu lado*. It would be so easy for someone to walk by, grab it, and leave through the parking lot, hop on their motorcycle and be off. She wouldn't even notice and security wouldn't have time to help." He moved a little closer to the girl as he talked. Eventually she unplugged from the phone and picked up her bag. "She's back to reality," Silva noted and continued his patrol.

Guards told us that they generally avoid giving security advice to clients, who they fear could react rudely. For example, Leandro, another guard at El Paraíso, explained that when he was new on the job he once told a woman in a café to be mindful of her purse, which was open and hooked carelessly on the back of a chair. "She responded extremely rudely to my advice, acting as if *I* was trying to take her purse myself!" Instead of potentially provoking reactions like this or risking the related danger of undermining the sense of security of the shopping mall by pointing out that perhaps the interior of the mall was not as safe as clients believed it to be, guards often preferred Silva's approach, keeping a silent watch over the clients' vulnerable items. As such, they guard against the negligence of guests, who can continue to be leisurely and naive precisely because someone is quietly watching over them and their at-risk possessions (See Figure 2). By protecting against guest carelessness, hospitality security allows guests the luxury of not paying attention to their surroundings or their belongings, and in doing so promotes the illusion of the shopping mall as a place defined by tranquility and safety.

FIGURE 2 Security guard outside of a high-end shopping mall. Photo: Guito Moreto.

Hospitality security and the social stop

A second set of actions is at the heart of guard work in the shopping malls we studied. Above all else, maintaining the space as a pristine environment means managing social interactions and conflicts as they arise. In mall hospitality work, there is widespread pressure to maintain a tranquil atmosphere because what happens in one mall can impact public impressions about the general safety in all malls, thus complicating work across the whole sector. Much like Fran's labor in the *portaria*, mall guards must manage an environment that is defined by suspicion while also avoiding seeming unprofessional or lacking in control. Guards explained that the most useful tool they had for this was what they called the "social stop" or the "social approach" (*abordagem social*).

The social approach is used by guards when they believe that someone is acting "suspiciously." Two different moments with Silva serve to illustrate the dynamic. In one case, Silva noticed a well-dressed, attractive girl (he commented several times on her beauty) who was rapidly descending the staircase instead of using the escalator. Finding this odd, he met the girl at the bottom of the stairs and politely asked if she was looking for a certain store or if he could help her with anything. "I immediately felt the girl freeze when I approached," he said. "Looking nervously at the security identification card around my neck, she asked me where she could pay her parking ticket before leaving the mall." Silva, finding her behavior strange, offered to accompany her to the kiosk where she could pay the parking fee, but as she looked for the ticket in her purse she was unable to find it, eventually claiming that she must have left it in her car and scampering off into the garage. Reflecting on the event, Silva considered this a good outcome, explaining to us that her nervous behavior confirmed that she was up to no good. He also noted that suspects could only really be identified by their behavior: "Look this was an attractive well-dressed blond woman, but she was clearly up to something. Sometimes we think that if the person is well dressed and looks nice that they are a good person. But it is not so."

Guards say that if a person does not have nefarious intentions, the social stop will only be perceived as helpful, as customer service at its best. The guard will be viewed as merely anticipating a potential client need and helping without even being asked. But if the person has sinister intentions, then just saying a polite "good afternoon" as they descend the escalator can signal that security is onto them and discourage crime. In theory, then, every time that a guard asks a client if they need any help, the interaction is about separating honest patrons from potential suspects. But it is up to the guard to convey the simple question in such a way as to make it appear multivalent—helpful to those who are innocent and as a veiled warning to those who are not. "In El Paraíso," Silvio explained, "people don't usually get upset about the social stop. But there is always a risk that the person will feel persecuted, and this is why the *vigilante* has to have the sensibility to choose the right moment and the right tone to make it seem like it isn't about persecuting them, even if it is."

Silva further elaborated that not all social stops required speaking with the suspect. Sometimes the *Codigo 2* comes from the main command and control center. For example, guards frequently profile those they refer to as *Bolivianos*, a generic and racist term for immigrants from other Latin American countries including not just Bolivia but also Peru, Chile, Mexico, and Ecuador. Guards characterize these places as low-income countries "from which people come to Brazil just to steal." Despite being in opposition to Silva's statement about not being able to judge a person by their appearance but by their behavior in the case of the attractive blond suspect, Bolivianos are immediately profiled and judged based on their appearance and must prove that they are *not* suspect by exhibiting what guards see as proper client behavior. Guards explained that they must take care not to approach Bolivianos in such a way as to trigger accusations of racial profiling, which can create an unwanted scandal, with loud arguments or worse, with passersby filming the encounter. In these cases, the social stop is less a stop than it is a carefully orchestrated choreography of placing guards in the suspect's path. Silva explained, "Everywhere the guy goes, command and control will follow him on the camera and then tell the guards to walk that way until they are right next to him. When he rides the escalator down, there will always be a guard there at the bottom waiting for him."

Beyond the cases of mere suspicion, when someone is caught on CCTV trying to steal something, guards are instructed to proceed in a careful approximation, without touching the person and all the while maintaining a polite interaction until out of the public eye. It is likely that the guard's approach will make the person feel pressured and visibly upset. But to defuse the situation, guards are instructed by their superiors to simulate a form of concern and say phrases in a low voice like: "Are you okay? Are you feeling sick? Do you need anything?" The idea is to simulate care to divert attention from the crime so as not to generate an abrupt reaction on the part of the perpetrator, which would surely draw attention to the situation and undermine the image of tranquility that the mall seeks to project. "The shopping can't hit anyone," Silva explained.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have shown how hospitality security reflects and reproduces the social order through daily interactions and racialized hierarchical relationships that link protection to everyday care and well-being of middle- and upper-class elite Brazilians. Furthermore, we have sought to highlight how hospitality security work illustrates the entanglement between the maintenance of elite environments and the relational interactive labor required of security guards. Since the main objective of this work is to maintain the appearance of absolute serenity in guarded spaces, guards must prioritize the sanctity of the place even in the face of potential conflict by minimizing disruptions that could inconvenience residents or consumers.

Hospitality security in residential condominiums depends on an incredibly subtle and nuanced understanding of relationships and an evaluation of people across the social hierarchy. Guards labor to avoid the crucial mistake of misidentifying someone or stopping the "wrong" people, that is, residents, their relatives, and their friends.

The same is true at the mall, where security guards study people and employ the multivalent social stop so as not to accidentally alienate the desirable potential customer. If, in the case of access control in condominiums, the suspicion is channeled towards types of people, service providers, and visitors who are strangers to the place, in the mall, suspicion is carried out at a distance, directed towards the bodies and behaviors of people in movement.

Guards remain on the razor's edge between correcting and disciplining behaviors according to the differential status of visitors and contributing to a general climate of well-being and safety for residents and customers in commercial settings. They must be a neutral and pleasing part of the environment. As a security guard once explained to us about his work in an elite condominium: "To be a guard you have to *mold* yourself. You have to forget who you are if you don't want to be fired. There's a lot of people ready to replace you. The slightest complaint from the boss or the client, if he thinks bad about you, you are out." As this guard suggested, the formal job market for security positions is saturated, with a surplus labor pool waiting in the wings. According to the Brazilian Association of Security Guard Training Courses (ABCFAV), more than one million guards are licensed to work, but only 50 percent hold formal jobs in the sector (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2021). As we have demonstrated, to guard a place the social order must first be guaranteed. And this social order is reliant, dependent even, on the precarity of guards' employment.

In a cruel irony, guards contribute to assessing who can enter certain spaces and who is "suspicious," even while they themselves have little status. Hospitality security is therefore part of the reproduction of a profoundly unequal social and racial order in which guards are asked to play an active role in their own subordination, as Fran's case vividly illustrates. If we amplify the scope of analysis, we note that hospitality security for the elite and middle classes operates in devastating contrast to how the urban "periphery" is policed. Security as care, as the producer of a pleasant sense of security, is the polar opposite of policing practices in low-income communities, which may close schools, prevent people from getting to work, and terrorize the population with armed violence. Residents face the daily threat of being caught in the crossfire between police and armed groups, where ongoing casualties do not prevent the military style of police operations from continuing.

Our ethnographic analysis of how hospitality security works on a daily basis in condominiums and shopping malls shows that, while the security apparatus is certainly repressive, it is also productive of certain social relations (Fassin, 2020, 273). Yet hospitality security as a phenomenon that requires material investment and demands guards' intersubjective work represents a critical line of research that has been absent from the literature on security and policing. The sensation of security that is the object of desire in hospitality settings is only obtained by the integration and entanglement of infrastructure, technological surveillance, and janitorial and cleaning services in common spaces (Robb Larkins, 2023). The guard, however, is the most fundamental piece. Fran waving from the gate, Silva protecting the *vulneráveis*, are at the heart of hospitality security.

Hospitality security deserves attention both in terms of what it suggests for interdisciplinary studies of security and policing, and for what it contributes to our understandings of urban inequality. We argue that hospitality security is a critical analytical framework for understanding urban security and the global trend of private security, a globalizing form of security in and of itself. In Brazil, as we have demonstrated, it is precisely the way hospitality security is a form of security that is made palatable, agreeable, and comforting, performed by kind guards, which makes it such a widespread commodity that almost nobody thinks to question. It is precisely through the seemingly innocuous tenor of hospitality that private security becomes such a ubiquitous, naturalized presence in cities across Brazil and beyond.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Drawing on Pitt-Rivers's reading, we argue that the hospitality guard is the *guest* who controls the access of other guests and denies entry to hostile strangers, suspects, and perpetrators who might threaten or rob the places they are hired to protect. In this line of argument, the status of guests lies midway between that of hostile strangers and that of community members (Da Col and Shryock, 2017, 166). In other words, the guard becomes the "good stranger," "the man who comes today and stays tomorrow" (Simmel, [1908] 1971, 143). In Simmel's formulation, the stranger does not change status, but changes *places*, calling attention to the positive relation of that particular form of interaction.

[2] Brazil's cheap labor market sustains the continuous growth of the private security market. Guards earn around USD 322 a month for full-time work. To increase earnings, it is common for guards to work double shifts or in the informal security market.

[3] Despite the preponderance of literature that takes this viewpoint, a handful of authors writing in different contexts across the globe have also critiqued this state-centered approach to understanding the dynamic interplay of state and non-state security actors. Their efforts have created new and useful frameworks for security analysis, including security quilts (Ericson, 1994), policing webs (Brodeur, 2010), security networks (Dupont, 2004), security assemblages (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2011; Samimian-Darash and Stalcup, 2016; Williams, 2017), security regimes (Dupont, 2014), twilight policing (Diphoorn, 2016), security blurs (Diphoorn and Grassiani, 2019), nodal frameworks (Shearing and Wood, 2003), plural policing (Hentschel and Berg, 2010; Jones and Newburn, 2006; Wakefield, 2003), and liquid security (Zedner, 2006a, 2006b). We join these attempts by proposing hospitality security as a valuable and innovative new framework for understanding urban security that has been missing from the literature.

[4] In 1990, there were 82 companies. In 2000 the number grew to 284. By 2012 it was 2,282, and by 2019 the number reached 2,388. The number of security guards almost equals the number of police officers in Brazil: 545,447 (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2021).

[5] See Diphoorn and Grassiani (2019) for an analysis of the power dynamics and the productive blurring of public and private security in global context.

[6] While we have chosen to recount Fran's story here, her trajectory is representative of many of the women and low-level workers we encountered in the field. We therefore assume that her experience is

generalizable to other instances and working conditions in private security more broadly.

[7] Day shifts are often carried out by unlicensed women who can be paid lower wages, which is often deployed as a money-saving strategy.

[8] Recent data suggests that women working in the private security sector make up only 9.7 percent of the workforce (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2021). Company owners who have been in the market for a long time say that just a few years ago female guards were a real rarity. As we have analyzed in related contexts, invisible institutional limits are imposed on hiring women in security professions (Durão, 2021). However, looking closely at some areas of hospitality security—such as residential and commercial condominiums, hospitals, and malls—it appears that the presence of women has been increasing. According to data collected by the Brazilian Association of Security Guard Training Courses (ABCFAV), 15.6 percent are women. Note that hospitality security is, to some extent, seen as a feminized job even if performed by men, different from armed response and paramilitary security work "naturally" seen as masculine (Salem and Larkins, 2021). As in other professions mostly performed by men, Black and Northeastern women working as access controllers or guards tend to earn less than their male colleagues.

[9] Despite the existence of ethnographic studies about the centrality of shopping malls in Latin America, reflections on how guards impact constructions of social class, race and space are not common (Cf. Davila, 2016).

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