



SECURING THE MALL: DAILY HOSPITALITY SECURITY PRACTICES IN SÃO PAULO

Susana Durão^a

^a*Professor of Anthropology at the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences of the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), Campinas, SP, Brasil. E-mail: sdurao@unicamp.br*

Orcid: 0000-0001-8096-6806

Erika Robb Larkins^b

^b*Associate Professor of Anthropology and Behner Stiefel Chair of Brazilian Studies at San Diego State University. California, USA. E-mail: erika.larkins@sdsu.edu*

Orcid: 0000-0002-6710-7799

Carolina Andrei Fischmann^c

^c*Junior fellow and research assistant on the "Policing and Urban Imaginaries: New Security Formats in Southern Cities" project, funded by FAPESP: IFCH, Unicamp. Campinas, SP, Brasil.*

E-mail: carolfischmann@gmail.com

Orcid: 0000-0002-8298-5442

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Introduction

On a relatively calm afternoon in December, we accompanied a security guard named Carla to the bookstore, located inside the Rivertown Mall, where she worked.¹ A few minutes earlier, the radio had crackled and the monitoring center operator alerted Carla to a "Code 17" in progress. A 70-year-old white man was stuffing merchandise under his jacket and had been caught

¹ To protect the anonymity of the mall and all the respondents, we have used pseudonyms.

by the cameras. Carla intercepted him in the hallway outside the bookstore and politely invited him to explain himself: “Good day, sir. Did you forget something?” she said, smiling.

The man’s face immediately tensed. Somewhat agitated, he hastily removed the hidden books and offered to hand them over. Instead of taking the books, Carla asked him his name. Julian. To keep Julian from feeling cornered, and seeing that he was sweating with nerves, she began speaking to him in a low voice: “Are you feeling sick? Do you need anything?” Her tone was calm and kind. She sought to avoid a crowd forming around the man and, above all, to avoid anyone filming the interaction. Making small talk, occasionally glancing anxiously from side to side, she bought time until the supervisor arrived to lend support. Soon after, the bookstore manager arrived as well. Overall, the interaction was smooth and attracted little attention from passerby. Carla had done her job.

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Since the “victim” here was not the mall, but the bookstore, it fell on the store manager to decide what course of action to take. He spoke discreetly with the mall’s security supervisor, indicating his desire to file a police report. Julian had committed previous thefts at the store.² This time, ironically, he had stolen two law books: one on business law and one on administrative legal codes. As it turned out, he was a lawyer. Escorted by Carla, Julian was taken to an unmarked office on the ground

² According to the 20th Brazilian Supermarket Retail Loss Assessment Survey, published in 2020, the sector suffered 6.9 billion in losses in 2019, which corresponds to 1.82% of the sector’s gross revenue. The survey was carried out with 204 shopping center chains. Among the top causes of losses in the sector cited by participants are operational breakdown (39%), external theft (17%), inventory errors (12%), administrative errors (11%), internal and supplier theft (with 7% each). Theft by customers, therefore, does not occupy the central position in losses. Although thefts comes second in terms of losses, in total they do not represent a high percentage figure. According to the data, the biggest problem in the sector is at various points in the supply chain. If we think of the gross loss values for Brazil, one billion caused by external theft is not particularly significant.

floor adjacent to the garage. As the mall security team had a pre-arranged relationship with the neighborhood military police, reinforcements arrived quickly. Two police officers entered, dressed in plainclothes. Uniforms, which attract attention, are not a welcome sight in the mall's commercial environment. Julian, head hanging low in apparent humiliation, was taken to the nearest police station.

Security guards call the type of approach Carla adopted with Julian the “social approach,” or the social stop (*abordagem social*). In Brazil, the term “abordagem” is used mainly in reference to military police officers. It implies taking an aggressive and confrontational attitude towards the police-citizen encounter, and is often associated with posturing by novice officers, who usually occupy the lowest status in the corps. In this situation, the “social” aspect restrains the aggression inherent in the confrontation, implying a dimension of tact and care. Guards identify this approach—and the delicate negotiation between addressing security issues while maintaining a level of calm and tranquility in the encounter—as one of the most important tactics used in mall security. As Carla explained after the incident with Julian: “We approach these situations carefully, cautiously, so that others around us don’t get scared. We have to stop the person, but never arrest them!” Or as the mall’s supervisor, Gilson, explained, “You don’t touch the person at any time. We are surrounded by the general population, there among all the shopping guests [referring to the costumers], and we have to be very careful.” In the mall under study, security guards preferred the term “guest.”

As Emmanuel, a successful mall security consultant, told us, the social stop has become a standard practice of private security work, especially in retail settings, being adopted even with customers who act disrespectfully. The social stop is revealing of two central dynamics explored

in this paper, both of which are relevant to understanding how private security works in commercial establishments in Brazil and abroad. First, it suggests that mall security relies on the unspoken agreement that the mall space must be preserved as a peaceful, tranquil, and hospitable place, even when thefts and other disturbances occur. Hospitality is not just a manage trend (Clifton, 2012; Yoel, Pizam, 2006), but socially and politically produced. If crimes are committed, they must be kept hidden from the public. Hentschel and Berg (2010), writing about Cape Town (South Africa), propose thinking about the securitized places they call “governance bubbles” as places where urban governance and private regulations converge. We propose to extend this idea to encompass what we call “hospitality security bubbles.” In cities with high levels of urban violence, places with well-developed security like the mall have a comforting effect on consumers, which is produced primarily through the constant, daily work of security guards. Such private operators, usually outsourced or with precarious in-house contracts, are the preferred intermediaries for this feeling of well-being. In São Paulo, more so than in any other Brazilian city (Moura, 2010; 2012), the experience of residential and leisure spaces considered quiet and pleasant, especially for middle-class, mostly white residents, is directly linked to the presence of private securitization and access control services, but also to a sense of security based on hospitality strategies and tactics.

Second, the social stop, as described above, shows how the work of maintaining this desired calm is accomplished largely by the labor of guards themselves, who create security in and through small-scale social encounters such as the one between Carla and Julian. These two elements together, we argue, reflect a distinct form of private security work we called “hospitality security,” a mode of protection that draws both on long-standing cultural notions of cordiality

and also on the racialized, gendered, and classed labor of low-level security guards themselves.

In this paper, we argue that hospitality security is a private security assemblage that combines architectural and aesthetic elements with security guards careful behavior. Guards must be able to create in clients an overwhelming sense of security (*sensação de segurança*), a comforting feeling separate from that characterized by traditional elements of force and control. While working to maintaining the physical space as a safe, orderly, and clean space, guards must also hone their self-control to not show any signs of aggression, impatience, or indifference. This is no small task, as the dominant security modalities in Brazil are defined by the uncontrolled and unregulated excessive use of violence. Hospitality security therefore represents a counter current—and a fragile one at that.

Managers and guards describe the smooth, subtle, and embodied tactics of hospitality security as part of a larger historical turn related to what Loader and Walker (2003) defined as a move towards “civilizing security.” Most surprising, perhaps, is that this process is occurring in private security environments, rather than as a government-led public policy. Besides, commercial security is not shaped by a rhetoric of human rights, even as managers and guards actively work to distance themselves from the violent images associated with security in Brazil. As Rivertown’s executive manager told us: “A few years ago, the guard wanted to be like a cop: rugged, strong, tall, with an aggressive, tough look. Today it is exactly the opposite. He must know how to talk to people and make them feel welcome on site. The guard is the business card of the mall. What we sell is a *sensação de segurança*.” Consequently, the development of hospitality security rests on the understanding that a certain restraint of a supposedly “natural” state of violence

by security personnel is necessary (Salem; Larkins 2021), not because of moral or ethical parameters, but because violence is seen as antithetical to selling goods.³

Theorizing Hospitality Security in the Brazilian Context⁴

Despite the prevalence of hospitality security in São Paulo, and the importance of private security as a management tool for controlling urban milieu in general, the anthropological and sociological literature is much more focused on public security actors, such as police. The presence of private security in the Brazilian cityscape is ubiquitous. Notably, the number of security guards tends to increase relative to the number of police officers in Brazil, following trends observed in nations of the Global North (Manzo, 2004). In 2019, the total registered number of guards in private security was 545,447, while the number of police officers was 592,605, counting all state Military and Civil Police forces (cf. Public Security Yearbook, 2020). The private security market consists of businesses of all

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³ The public image of police in São Paulo is intrinsically related to urban violence and conflict. Violence workers, perpetrators and facilitators of police atrocities committed during the military dictatorship (1964-1985) still reverberate in police behavior and public consciousness (Huggins et al, 2002). Even the focus on human rights since the 1990s has not reduced continued urban segregation, incarceration and police killings, especially of Black youth (Alves, 2018). In cities like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, killing is a shared common practice (Willis, 2015), and police officers often perform what Salem and Robb Larkins call a form of “wild masculinity” (2021). Cases of extreme violence perpetrated by private security guards in supermarkets, malls and other commercial spaces are also not uncommon. More recently, however, they have attracted widespread negative repercussions. The “Carrefour case,” involving the death of João Alberto Silveira at the hands of security employees in the city of Porto Alegre, is an example of how security workers operate through an anti-black framework, whether in public or commercial settings (Durão; Paes, 2021).

⁴ This text is based on research results from the “Policing and Urban Imaginaries: New Security Formats in Southern Cities” project, coordinated by Susana Durão and where Carolina Andrei Fischmann worked as an assistant. The Project is the result of a cooperation agreement between the Foundation for Science and Technology of Portugal / FCT and the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP, 2014/19989-5), lasting from 2015 to 2019.

types and sizes.⁵ Although largely national, we see a growing presence of multinational players such as G4S, Securitas, GPS, etc. These official numbers, however, do not capture the huge unofficial and clandestine private security market, which is estimated to be double the regulated one (Durão, Paes, 2021). Not surprisingly, the debate on private security in Brazil focuses on discussions about the political system, as the emergence of private security is often framed as a direct consequence of failed public security and a broken judicial system (Caldeira, 2000). The pervasive presence of private security and technological surveillance is seen as an extension of violence and lack of state regulation (Firmino et al, 2013; Huggins, 2010; Lopes 2014; 2015; 2017) and excessive use of force by guards (Lopes, 2020). Private security thus is most often examined through an absence prism, as insecurity, as violence, as unregulated action (Abrahamsen; Leander, 2016; Kim et al, 2018).

As Gluck and Low (2017) noted, however, security is produced and productive, not merely an absent aspect of a system. In Brazil, public and private security reflects and is produced within contexts of long-standing colonial ideas about social order. At the same time, security is an important route for reproducing contemporary social and racial hierarchies. The produced and productive elements of the security field in Brazil are not limited to the performance of ostensible, armed labor that is conducted with recourse to violence or the threat of violence. Rather, more overt or

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⁵ Today, legally recognized private security in Brazil is divided into five sectors: property protection, transport of valuables, armed escort of cargo, personal security and major event security. Property security, which mobilizes the most resources and workers, is characterized by protection of tangible and intangible assets (people, goods, and image) of companies and can be subdivided into commercial, industrial, residential, and banking. Armed escort, valuables transport and industrial property security certainly focus on preventing theft of cargo, goods, or valuables. In settings such as malls, however, this purpose is diluted. Guards must protect commercial property, but describe their main goal as related to creating a sense of security for customers.

aggressive forms of security are complemented by a set of practices that comprise what we call hospitality security.

Building on this framework, we focus on private security not as an absence or lack of security, but rather by examining it on its own terms, without invoking more conventional narratives of insecurity. In recent years, a subfield of security anthropology has been gaining traction (Samimian-Darash; Stalcup, 2017), focused particularly on studying policing as it happens in everyday practice (Garriott, 2013; Karpiak, 2016). Despite the several ethnographic accounts of “security providers,” such as gangs, militias, or vigilantes, operating outside the state or on its margins, ethnographic attention to commercial and local security entities, and especially engaging with security employees perceptions and daily practices, are still scarce (Grassiani; Diphooorn, 2017). We seek to bridge this gap in the literature.

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Simultaneously, hospitality security cannot be divorced from the growth of specific urban environments in Brazil—whether residential condominiums, high rise offices, or retail spaces—that rely on security managers and workers. Security is integral to the formation and desirability of these spaces, and thus our focus on hospitality security shows how security itself is more than overt social control. In recent years, we see this at play in the emergence of a managerial literature promoting “security as a lifestyle.” As one author notes: “Security must protect the pleasures life affords us. It is not a mere case of asset protection” (Lucca; Costa, 2016). Protection, in this formulation, is no longer an external element. Rather, it is embedded in feelings, an omnipresent presence evidenced by the guard’s apparent friendliness, disposition, care, and altruism as it is marshalled to protect the desired pleasure. When understood as such, hospitality security is a macro process that reflects the increasingly micro-entrepreneurial experiences. As security becomes more curated and tailored, it is incumbent on companies

to produce “gourmet security,” whose provision relies on “the entire organization to act as one big customer service department” (Só e Silva; Mesquita, 2017, p. 96).

Hospitality security, centered as it is on upper middle-class spaces of consumption and leisure, such as high-end shopping malls, gated condominiums, country clubs and sports venues, is a material, social and symbolic apparatus that should signal care for the spaces and consideration for clients, visitors, and customers. Hospitality security in São Paulo, as we will be discussed, is set up precisely to confuse and mix security with care. It operates as part of the larger grammar shaping everyday urban life, complementing both the “tougher” forms of security more typically studied in the field (policing and militarism) and the broad realm of services (maids, nannies, gardeners, doormen, drivers) that provide for the well-being of the affluent. Hospitality security in 21st century Brazil, therefore, is indicative of how security is not only—or not merely—a response to fear of crime, insecurity, and violence; it is produced through urban segregation: On one end, low-income communities of color are violently policed; on the other, private security contributes to creating hospitable bubbles for white elites. Hospitality security is also an integral part to cultivating a certain lifestyle and way of being in the city.

Like other elements of security escapism, such as border walls, design fortresses, cybersecurity, security cameras, and security alert systems (Ghertner et al, 2020), hospitality security is part of contemporary aesthetics and the management of urban life. City dwellers not only want access to safe spaces for consumption, but also a sense of freedom from the violence they see as characteristic of the streets. As we heard a customer comment one day, speaking to the friendly, smiling guard: “Here, I can just focus on shopping. I don’t need to think about protecting my purse, looking around, dealing with the feeling that I can be

robbed at any time, like outside, on the street.” Consumers are thus transported to a time space of consumption and fun where São Paulo’s violence and social inequality can be temporarily forgotten. Awash in the malls’ golden light, in aisles or inside stores, consumers experience a sense of tranquility that frees them from social constraints and the fear of being targeted by crime.

This sense of selective freedom, of course, is the direct result of security tactics and mechanisms. Hospitality thus always operates against and in reference to fear, violence, and harsher policing tactics. It exists in a generative and symbiotic relationship with more violent forms of security.

Urban security bubbles in their multiple formats (for housing, shopping, work) have become a status symbol and are the object of escapism and desire for everyone—from the elite, who can afford these services, to the low-income and middle classes who aspire to access them. Production of these spaces, however, depends on the precarious labor of underpaid private security guards who come from the bottom of the social structure.

As illustrated by Carla’s encounter with Julian, as the primary agents of hospitality security, guards are asked to do delicate work: categorize different mall patrons into categories and take different approaches with them depending on that categorization, while keeping the encounter discreet and invisible to the establishment’s wider public. In these micro-encounters, security is entangled with hospitality, as hospitality becomes a technology for maintaining social and spatial relationships that preserve an aesthetic of care and attention while working as a form of crime prevention. Hospitality security, thus, entails not only reducing opportunities for theft, but also reducing the possibilities for any form of tension, manifestation of violence, or physical threat that might disrupt the tranquility of the bubble.

Hospitality security, and its success or failure, is directly tied to the reputation of the space in question. Breaches in the unspoken agreement that the mall be preserved as a peaceful place impact not only the shopping where a particular episode took place, but extend to all others. As Emmanuel, the mall's security consultant explained it: "There is no competitiveness between malls in terms of security. If something bad happens in a mall and the news gets out, for example, about let's say, a case where the guards get overly aggressive, we all lose. The entire sector. It is the mall, any mall, that is no longer seen as a peaceful place." As such, there is great pressure from the industry to toe the line, providing top-notch hospitality security by requiring guards to perform the constant work of micro-negotiation to avoid seeming unprofessional or unchecked.

Studying the Mall

This paper draws on our long-term fieldwork on private security in Brazil from 2014 to the present. We focus on empirical data collected during fieldwork in one of the largest, busiest, and most well-known malls in São Paulo for five consecutive months between October 2017 and March 2018. During this period, we closely monitored the work of guards, supervisors, and managers, including employees of the mall's electronic surveillance center, in their daily activities.⁶ Finally, at various points in the project, we attended professional development courses for security supervisors and managers and participated in the initial training course for security guards working in property protection.

Rivertown, the mall chosen for analysis, opened in 1981 and was one of the first shopping center in São Paulo. Architecturally, its building stands out in the city: resembling a

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⁶ Besides a more observational work, we also conducted more than 50 interviews with employees and owners of various private security companies. The interviews lasted between 2 and 3 hours.

giant cruise ship, it is covered by glass roof windows. Located in an upscale neighborhood, with easy access by car, bus, train and subway, the mall is quite busy and has a relatively socio-economically diverse clientele. The mall employees we spoke with said that the mall mainly caters to middle and upper class customers during the week, as the establishment is close to the commercial center of São Paulo. They added that most customers would identify as white. At mealtimes, when guests flock to the many restaurants, Rivertown is at its most crowded. On the weekend, however, the clientele is mixed, with people from all social classes circulating in the mall space. On average, 40,000 people visit the mall per day.⁷ Rivertown has three floors, 340 stores, and hosts many high profile cultural events.

148 The mall is part of a commercial management group with more than 24 malls in its portfolio, most of them concentrated in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The group runs both elite and more humble establishments. Although all the group's malls share the same corporate security plan and risk analysis, have a security CEO to whom local security managers report, and operate as a well-oiled administrative machine, the mall under study also had what Emmanuel, the security consultant, called a "cordiality plus" policy: guards are specially trained to be "courteous" and even to anticipate guests questions and desires. Details matter, he explained. For example, if the guard patrolling on a Segway is stopped by someone, he will get off the vehicle, and if it is a child, he will bend down to the child's level to address them.

Private security in malls has received little attention in the anthropological and sociological literature. One of the first essays on the advance of private security in commercial venues, based on a Foucauldian perspective, "From the

⁷ Estimate based on the number of cars entering the parking lot and the number of people connecting to the free Wi-Fi network through registration.

Panopticon to Disney World: The Development of Discipline” (Shearing; Stenning, 1984) describes the “Disney order” as an example of modern private corporate policing, combining safety, comfort, and technological fetish. Similarly, scholars studying malls as regulated and policed structures in the US argue that the sense of “community” rather than “public” stifles political opposition and criticism in the name of civility (Staeheli; Mitchell, 2006), creating a “consumerist citizenship” (Chevalier, 2015; Hobden, 2014; Voyce, 2006). Others have studied how moralizing discourses attempt to create “friendly” exclusions and managed inclusions of Black youth in US malls (O’Dougherty, 2006).

Shopping malls are important for human geography (Goss, 1993). Described as inspiring awe in consumers by combining architecture with emotional and affective sensibilities (Miller; Laketa, 2019), malls have their own political workings and can be seen as places for resisting center-margin relations, and the public social orders represented by the security apparatus. Malls have also been treated by scholars as places of encounter or even resignification of social practices of differentiation, as shown in cities like Johannesburg and Bosniak (Aceska; Heer, 2019). In several Latin America cities, for example, poor urban Black dwellers enter and strategically appropriate regional, middle-class, white-dominated malls (Stüllerman; Salcedo, 2012), such as the “*rolezinhos*” (little stroll) in São Paulo and other Brazilian cities. In 2014, Black teenagers from low-income communities began gathering in large numbers to hang out together (“*dar um ark*”) and have fun in the malls of their cities. The practice caused moral panic and some malls won the judicial right to ban such events, which in turn led to a broad debate on segregation in Brazilian society. *Rolezinhos* have been interpreted as part of the urban struggle for rights, including the right to access predominately white middle-class environments for leisure (Pinheiro-Machado; Scalco, 2014; Larkins, 2015, 2017, 2018).

The Emergence of Hospitality Security in São Paulo

Over the past two decades, we have seen an evolution in the style of private security provision in São Paulo and other urban centers. Until the 2000s, guards in São Paulo were colloquially known as “B21s”: a 21-year-old from Bahia.⁸ The term refers to young people from northeastern Brazil (narrowed into a single state, Bahia, in the public imagination) who arrived in São Paulo with little schooling, but given their knowledge on how to fight and handle weapons, were integrated into the surveillance sector. Security company owners and employees of private security firms often told us that during the 1980s, a van drove through the city center recruiting these young people and taking them directly to work for security companies. Starting in the late 1990s, the industry began to change. Guards who knew how to handle and diffuse tense situations through conversation and not just physical force were increasingly favored. Today, we see a clear trend to hire more women and people with a higher schooling level, especially to work in elite leisure, residence, and consumption spaces, as these people are considered to be calmer and kinder to customers.⁹ Such new emphasis on these characteristics mark a transition in the field of private security from a more militarized style and aesthetic to a way of providing security that is often characterized as a “modern” or “professional” alternative.¹⁰

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⁸ During the second half of the 20th century, São Paulo attracted many emigrants from the poorer northeaster states of Brazil, especially Bahia. “Baiano” (person born in Bahia) is a São Paulo slang for northeastern born people, who are discriminated against by residents of the wealthier southern and southeaster states.

⁹ Although legislation requires only primary education, it is very rare nowadays to find a guard without a high school diploma.

¹⁰ The “professionalization of the sector” thus dominates the discussions in the continuing education courses offered by SESVESP (Union of Private Security Companies, Electronic Security and Training Courses of the State of São Paulo, cf. LOPES, 2012.), also held in the main security congresses, EXPOSEC (organized by ABESE – Brazilian Association of Electronic Security Companies) and ISC – International Security Conference and Exposition (organized by ABSEG – Brazilian Association of Security Professionals).

Cordial/Polite Guards

To fulfill the promise of tranquility malls offer to customers, a certain security experience must be curated, based on peaceful hospitality and ideals of mitigating crime and everyday annoyances (such as street beggars, threatening motorcycles, fast, possibly armed robbers) that life in a violent city can generate. Importantly, the notion of a sense of security, which guards claim to produce, should not be confused with theories that advocate advancing security as an apparatus for arketes deviance and crime (Lianos; Douglas 2000) or the unlimited extension of the “policing fetish” (Garriot, 2013). In this case, the sense of security is anchored in the human presence—the guard themselves—and how they conduct their interactions, with care for the commercial and social environment, both considered part of a “security ecosystem” (Pena, 2020).

Producing a sense of security implies attention and care for capitalism itself on the part of the guard, where environments must function unhindered by the flow of goods and consumption (Gould et al, 2010). In this dimension, cordial relationships are not just cosmetic, but are key components of hospitality security.

Besides these types of specific ongoing interactions, the vast majority of guard work involves performing activities related to mall maintenance or providing information at the request of customers. The “security man” must walk around the mall and think “like a customer”—and not only like a criminal, as he was encouraged to do early in his career—but also check for irregularities that might cause discomfort. Guards pick up litter from the floor, notify the cleaning staff if a trash can is full, ask teenage couples to be more discreet in their public displays of affection, provide information about store locations to customers, check that the air conditioning and lights are working properly,

help people who are sick, help people pay for parking at the machines, and help older adults or people with reduced mobility, among other functions associated with maintaining the mall as a well-kept and peaceful space. More than an “aesthetic turn” (Hentschel; Berg, 2010) or a “pseudo-state organization” (Garmany; Galdeano, 2017), private security takes over management of the spaces and social relations therein and thus becomes a central ally of the real estate market and insurance companies—in short, of the neoliberal management of global cities.

152 During the field work carried out in this large and representative mall in São Paulo, we noticed that guards assume a moralizing role in the power relations—the violence that characterizes unequal social relations is either hidden or sympathetically disguised. This is how the mall draws a contrast with the dreaded street environment and offers an “exemplary” security model. The zero-tolerance policy for carelessness adopted in these environments stems from the idea that subtle disorder (an unadjusted air conditioner or a paper on the floor) is an invitation to criminality (Berg, 2010). As the security guard becomes responsible for the aesthetic maintenance of the space, private security simultaneously asserts itself as an agent responsible for protecting customers from all kinds of bad influences.

Security is impossible without guards, as they provide the mall environment with a caring and humane service that costumers enjoy and that cannot simply be replaced by cameras and other technologies. Physical violence in the hospitality environment is reconfigured and considered an arrow in the heart of private security, since displays of violence is precisely what it most wants to avoid: the mall is meant to be seen as something different from everyday urban life full of crime and visible inequalities. Letting those undesired aspects of life

into the mall could tarnish its reputation and potentially topple the entire structure.¹¹

Buarque de Holanda, one of the best known sociologists and early analysts of Brazilian society, argued that conventions dictating cordial, or polite, behavior are part of the Iberian Portuguese colonial legacy and are linked to the predominance of rural traditionalism, which continues as a dominant force today (Candido [1968] 2016). Being cordial means acting amicably and humbly and hiding forms of interpersonal animosity when dealing with strangers. It also means politely glossing over the inevitable class and racial tensions that inform everyday interactions between people occupying different social classes. Hence, hospitality is fundamental to Brazil'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, p. 25).

In the name of a alleged harmony and "cordiality," the mall security can be seen as a symbolic construction of a fallacious and also extremely fragile "racial democracy" (Guimarães, 2002; 2021; Hanchard, 2001). Inequality and racism are disguised under the veil of hospitality, but become incredibly evident whenever a violent public case, generally involving a Afro-Brazilian victim, comes to public. If the eyes of many, such cases are commonplace and are clear evidence of the embedded racism and anti-Blackness prevalent in Brazilian society. In the perspective of private commercial security, however, these are often seen as exceptional,

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¹¹ Some cases of private security violence has attracted a lot of media attention in recent years, badly impacting the industry. For example, the case of the 13-year-old João Victor, who died after being assaulted in front of a Habib's store in 2017 and the case of João Alberto Silveira, a black customer at Carrefour who was beaten to death by security guards in 2020. In both cases, the population protested and both Habib's and Carrefour had serious image problems that required them to change their staff training, marketing campaigns, etc. (cf. Durão; Paes, 2021).

the work of a “few bad apples” rather than evidence of more systemic issues in the industry (Durão; Paes, 2021).

Hospitality security, as observed in the mall and other protected spaces in São Paulo, is thus consistently based on existing cultural repertoires around cordiality, which normalizes its role as a form of urban social control.¹² Drawing on these long-standing dynamics, security is experienced as familiar, both comfortable and comforting. And because hospitality security is seen as welcoming as much as it is controlling, it can actually work to neutralize resistance to the ever-increasing security and surveillance apparatus. Naturalizing security by making it literally part of the mall’s “environment” requires ongoing work to diminish resistance to the very idea of control. Hence, guards do their job without looking like security.

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Guards are simultaneously instructed by their security managers to be nice and friendly professionals, but also harsh when the situation demands it. They are expected to be “cordial”: always maintaining a vivid ambivalence when performing security. Such ambiguous interactions simulates intimacies that, precisely due to the ambiguity generated, are sometimes characterized as violent intimacies (Durão, 2018). Urban violence and the so-called peaceful commercial environment, created as being suspended in an urban context considered criminal and violent, make up this modernity of security designed for large enclosed commercial spaces in São Paulo. Hospitality security is not just a response to urban violence; it is an integral part of it.

¹² In his classic anthropological work on the role of the stranger in society, Pitt-Rivers argues that the status of guest lies midway between that of hostile stranger and that of community member (Da Col; Shryock, 2017, p. 166). Drawing from this reading, we see the hospitality guard as the guest who controls the access of other guests and denies entry to hostile strangers, suspects, and perpetrators who might invade or rob the home. In other words, the guard becomes the “good stranger”, “the man who comes today and stays tomorrow” (Simmel, 1908, p. 143). In Simmel’s formulation, the stranger does not change status, but *places*, calling attention to the positive relation of that particular form of interaction.

Daily work of hospitality guards: Deterring crime

Physical interaction and the coercive use of force can only occur in extreme cases, as a reaction to forceful assault—a last resort. As a security manager explained it: “A situation with military police in here shooting would end in one day all the decades of success of our business project. It would make everything fall apart.” According to the security guards, Rivertown experienced only two armed robberies in the last decade and neither involved shooting or resulted in media attention. Security guards stationed inside the mall do not carry firearms, as this would pose a risk to customers and, in the manager’s language, “are not worth the cost-benefit ratio”. But since the city is considered extremely violent, anything can happen in the mall. The guards stationed in the external underground area (garage) are armed, well equipped and trained, being called in critical situations, such as robberies, to “provide support.” While firearms are absent from the customers eyes, they are always available for use in more threatening situations. Some customers would like to see armed guards in the mall corridors, said one of the security managers, suggesting that while this is not currently the norm, it is not a closed issue.

Generally speaking, however, even in the riskiest situations, use of explicit violence by guards in spaces like the mall is seen as a thing of the past. Direct violence is associated with militaristic trends in private security in the 1980s, which have fallen into disuse and are considered unsuitable to manage “modern” businesses. Security militarism brings no commercial advantages. Quite the opposite: it threatens this image of a secure bubble that is being cultivated. Instead, what we see proliferate is a culture of discrete exchange of favors with the police. When there is a more serious occurrence, the mall simply calls on its police contact and gets a much quicker response than regular citizens. In return, supervisors hand over the case

“all lined up” (*todo mastigado*) to the police, as they say, not to waste the cops time. Meaning that they take on the job of providing the written reports, witnesses, and whatever else is needed. Both the police chief in the area and the mall have a shared interest in discouraging the publicizing of crimes that do occur by preventing them from being picked up by TV reporters, as this tarnishes the image of both.

Petty crimes, such as shoplifting in stores, in the food court, or theft from vehicles parked in the garage, however, happen on a daily basis. When the theft is of a low value (which is defined by each store), most store owners do not file a police report, as this means not having a salesperson in the store for several hours, since someone will have to go and take care of the bureaucratic paperwork, losing important potential sales revenue. At the same time, those who intend to commit crimes in this space face a fair amount of security designed to inhibit their actions. The key tactic is to deter crime, that is, to show the “bad guy” (conceived as someone lazy) that committing a crime in that place will be very difficult. In private security parlance, this is explained by the “crime triangle”: the criminal commits a crime according to motivation, technique, and opportunity. An external agent cannot change the subject’s knowledge or will to commit a crime, but they can make its execution far more difficult by effectively reducing the opportunity. Opportunity reduction is the end goal of mall hospitality surveillance. Much of the guard’s efforts are thus focused on deterring the opportunities for crime execution in this particular space.

Identification of suspects cannot be made solely on the basis of a person’s physical appearance – which includes both race and status markers, such as clothing and jewelry, as this would be not only be biased but would also be an ineffective judgment in the guards evaluation. As we were often told, “there are many well-dressed people who come to the mall to shoplift.” Guards are therefore trained to notice

suspicious behavior, such as looking away from the guard, looking up at the ceiling for cameras, entering and leaving several stores without buying anything, holding a bag from a store that does not exist in the mall, using stairs instead of the elevator or escalator. The guard needs to develop “malice,” “he has to think like the criminal” and always be aware of the subtle signs. Such attention to malice develops over time on the job, getting to know the mall and its customers, observing the work of other guards, attending daily lectures where supervisors share crime stories and the successful or unsuccessful guard reactions.

Even so, most of the suspects are predominantly black men, or people identified as coming from poor “communities” and therefore seen as out of step with those who frequent a place designed to provide leisure for middle and upper classes. Another targeted group is what the guards call “tango lima,” immigrants from Latin America with an indigenous appearance, regardless of gender or age. As one of the mall’s long-serving security guards told us: “All these people come to Brazil only to steal.” Given the central place occupied by discussions on racism in the public debate, private security guards know they must be careful not to take actions that might imply racism, but seeing as Latin American immigrants occupy a more vulnerable situation, as many of them are illegal and usually do not carry firearms, their harassment in the mall is a bit more overt, although still subtle enough that other clients don’t notice it.

After a suspect is identified, the guard announces it on the radio so that everyone is on the loop and begins discreetly following the suspect, staying about twenty feet away. Since this is a form of non-verbal communication, the suspect quickly realizes that he is being followed and watched, which is the goal. This attention ultimately dissuades him from committing a crime. If the suspect turns out to be a shopper at the mall, said one guard,

following them is usually not a problem. Customers are looking for comfort and security, so when they see a security guard nearby, they get the impression that the mall is well secured, which makes them feel good and makes the mall look good as well.

As mentioned above, in some suspicious cases, the guard may choose to perform the social stop. Sometimes the order comes over the radio from the monitoring center itself. In this case, the guard approaches the suspect discreetly and asks if they are looking for a store or needs some information, using a respectful tone. If the suspect is a customer, they will likely be pleased with the customer service. But if the suspect is a criminal, they will realize that the security guard understands their intentions. During the approach, the guard must be aware of the subtle signals in the person's response to confirm whether their suspicion is founded or not. This will determine whether to continue or interrupt the social approach.

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The approach is an interactive procedure involving several transversal tactics designed to avoid visible confrontations and conflicts and to prevent the spectacularization, filming, and dissemination of conflicts that might even require the police. Guards use the notion of social stop as part of their work, but they also refer to it with a certain irony, for they know exactly what “social” means in these cases. It is a preventive moralizing action and therefore carries with it a veiled threat.

In one notable interaction, one of the researchers asked how a guard named Manuel had understood a particular incident. He was told over the radio to approach a young black man at the mall exit. At first, he tried telling us that the incident was of no consequence, simply a suspected robbery and that the supervisor asked him to make the approach, which he did in a “confident” manner—showing confidence is key to “*pegar o mala*” (slang for delinquent). After some insistence on our part, he provided more

details on how he spoke to the young man: “From his looks and attitude, I knew I had to get in there and speak in a certain way.” In this case, he said, his approach was forceful. He arrived on the scene, ordering the young man to stop and move to the corridor, announcing: “I want to talk to you for two minutes.” Once alone with the suspect, he began shouting “I caught you, I caught you,” meaning that Manuel knew he had stolen. At that moment, the young man realized that “there was nothing else he could do. Manuel told him to open his bag and lift up his shirt. Having found no stolen goods on him, Manuel released him, but not before telling the young man that the guards were keeping an eye on him, they know “what he was up to” (“*sacado ele*”), and he shouldn’t come back to shoplift. Although he found no evidence of theft in the body search, at no point did Manuel or his supervisor admit that the young man might be innocent and that they made a mistake. We continued talking about other possible scenarios. “If I had found something in the bag, I would have taken the suspect to a private room and given him “*uma prensa*” (slang for interrogation that would make him confess; it is ambiguous whether a “prensa” involves physical or moral violence), he explained. “No hitting, because hitting a minor can get us into big trouble. But in the small room, we threaten to call the police and child protective services.” The form of embarrassment varies greatly according to the situation and the person, but is preferably done in an isolated area, far from the eyes of customers who might interfere and defend the suspect. Manuel then simulated his intervention. With a very loud voice and a stern face, he yelled “I won!” and “Loser!” He raised his radio, pretending to be talking to a captain or a sergeant: “The sergeant is coming to get you!”, “At this point, young people always start begging to let them go and say they will never come back.”

As Manuel's account shows, in situations like these, it doesn't really matter whether the crime was committed or not. A successful "moral approach" was cited simply as one that prevented the suspect or criminal from committing future crimes and spreading the news on the streets that it was a bad idea to commit crimes in that particular mall.

Social Stop as Anti-Blackness

160 Since the abolition of slavery, Brazil has denied and failed to address the ongoing racism that pervades its social structure. Instead, adherence to the myth of racial democracy, in which everyone supposedly enjoys the same rights regardless of skin color, has prevailed. Black patrons, however, know security guards view them as suspicious, and when a guard watches them, they know they are being followed without words or overt violence required. Conversely, white people do not think of themselves as potential suspects. If they are followed or even confronted with a "social stop," they do not realize they were seen by the guard as a suspect; they believe instead that the guard was just being nice and solicitous. As has been pointed out by critical whiteness scholars, whites see themselves as racially neutral, meaning that they do not have to think about how whiteness affect their daily lives (Schucman, 2020), unlike Black Brazilians who are taught from a young age to deal with security forces that treat them as suspects and fully understands long-distance tracking and social stop as a threat. Thus, these moral weapons cannot be understood as having the same effect on everyone, even if they are supposedly applied to all "suspects" at the mall.

A guard who used to work in a big mall located in a lower middle class and mostly black neighborhood explained that the social stop did not work well there, because customers often felt as they were being followed and disrespected. Cordiality is successful in places where whiteness and buying power are

almost synonyms, and the exceptions to this rule only reinforce the myth of open and democratic spaces. For the guards – mostly black and low-income workers –, their job of keeping order in a white, upper middle-class mall is also contradictory. They are continually taught that the “customer is always right,” even if this results in them being humiliated.

In the next meeting, we learned how norms differ for “valuable” customers (also called “*cidadãos de bem*”) who do not comply with the rules. Customers with dogs (typically well-behaved pedigree dogs) are not allowed in the food court. The guard’s job is to warn them of such prohibition, but in practice he cannot do anything if the customer refuses to leave. At no time, would the guard dare follow a customer with a dog as he follows a code 2 (code for a suspicious person) or subtly harass them until they leave the mall as he does a code 22 (code for street children). João, one of the guards interviewed, said that sometimes customers accepts his orientations and leave, but 10 minutes later he will inevitably find them walking the dog again. When the customers see the guard, they tries to dodge him. A more complicated case, João said, was when another customer came to complain arkets a person with a dog in the food court and he had to inform them that this was not allowed. The person did not want to hear it. All he could do was show them a sign attached to the side of the food court advising such prohibition, since the sign had greater power than the word of a guard. João concluded that it was a real “tightrope walk” (“*sinuca de bico*”).

Even when a customer gets angry and “loses it,” the guard must remain calm and treat them well, trying to solve his problem. Just as that flight attendants are used to sell a good image of airlines and their main duty is to smile (Hochschild, 2012), at the mall the guard is also expected to treat customers well. Both are encouraged to think and act as an arm of the company’s marketing apparatus. In mall security, a job of intense interaction with people and

problems, the guard is required to perform emotional work, ...which “requires employees to induce or suppress their feelings in order to sustain a countenance that produces the right mood in others—in this case, the feeling of being cared for in a safe and pleasant space” (Hochschild, 2012, p. 40). The invisibility of violence towards the unwanted and the show of friendliness with the customer is what defines the guard’s cordiality. Cordiality is this mixture of friendliness and violence, a structuring framework that organizes social relations and social inequality.

Daily work of mall guards: Moral weapons

From the start, one should note that private security is not focused on mitigating violence in the city as a whole. This kind of charge is beyond its scope and jurisdiction. Rather, private security concerns itself with keeping urban violence at bay by maintaining it outside the mall’s walls. Although the mall appears to be a semi-public space where anyone can, in theory, enter to shop, it is also a private investment. As part of protecting this investment, unwanted people—whether panhandlers or potential criminals—are consistently targeted by security guards who seek to dissuade them from entering in the first place or convince them to leave the venue peacefully. Discerning who should be deterred from using the space and who should be welcomed into it is at the heart of guard’s job. Their success in doing so will determine whether or not the company they work for is able to keep the contract to protect the mall.

One of the major problems identified by both guards and supervisors identified is the presence of panhandling children. Interestingly enough, panhandling children defy the boundaries of the social stop, a tactic that works just fine with most suspects, shoplifters, and isolated threats. The “problem” with panhandling children is that they show no fear before guards and even confront them, screaming,

causing the attention and spectacle that guards seek to avoid at all times. Hospitality security strategies and tactics must therefore become more complex. According to the guards, as these minors circulate around the mall for hours asking for food, money, diapers for hypothetical younger siblings, and other goods to sell on the streets, there comes a time when they have to intervene. The supervisor told us: “These children know the judicial system pretty well and also how to get the attention and protection of customers”. One of them said to me: “Put your hand on me and you’ll see, I will start screaming and a dozen people will come to help me.”

After several months of field work, during which we noticed a decrease in the number of panhandling children that normally gathered in the food court, we asked Valter, one of the supervisors, for his opinion on the matter. Valter replied that this was due to the new procedures implemented by the mall: “Now guards are trained to explain to panhandlers that they are not allowed in here. They are now able to stop most of them on the first floor.” He also commented on how guards were instructed not to physically touch the panhandlers, especially those who are minors. Instead, the guard approaches them and say something like: “Hey, you there! Skipping class again?!” If the minor is accompanied by their parents, the same strategy is used: the idea is to shame the mother for using her children for begging, which makes it impossible for them to attend school. Valter explained that this approach ends up embarrassing the child and halting the goodwill of any client who overhears the exchange, as the latter will easily agree with the guard that children should be in school. Thus, by operating through a clear moral discourse that positions it as fundamentally wrong to use one’s child for begging and unethical to prohibit them from attending school, the expulsion of minors from public view occurs without recourse to physical coercion, sparing the customer

from the embarrassment and inconvenience of having to witness a heated exchange.

According to Valter and other guards we spoke with about this issue, the tactic of threatening to call child protective services is also frequently used and works effectively to scare minors and their parents. But this technique is not to be used in front of other costumers as it could be perceived as potentially heavy handed or unsympathetic. After calling child protective services (*Conselho Tutelar de Menores*) a few times, the mall security managers concluded that most of these children were not, in fact, homeless. They lived with their poor relatives. Thus, they took advantage of the minors greatest fear: being taken away from home and institutionalized. For a few months, the mall formed a “partnership” with two professionals from the child protective services who quickly showed up when called.

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Another tactic adopted involved trying to convince customers that panhandlers pose a threat. When someone “sponsors” the panhandling child (i.e., stands up for them) at a security intervention, guards try to convince them that the child is actually a real threat by showing images of infamous cases, such as video footage stored in their private cell phones of children charging at guards, throwing chairs and threatening objects. Some customers are discouraged by the videos and leave, but others continue to support the child and refuse to watch such videos. In short, the social imagination associated with mall panhandling is always under construction, and sometimes guards take advantage of this.

Conclusion

Within Rivertown, costumers are freed from the need to be vigilant in what they often describe as a violent and chaotic city. Commercial venues like the mall are places for more than just consumption and leisure. In São Paulo especially, they are places for deploying

security, a deployment that turns a mall like Rivertown into a source of symbolic capital for the city, where the comfort of the social experience is associated with an imagined safety. The absence of crime is not always real, but the guards play an important role in disguising it.

Hospitality security is an active component of the infrastructure, social relations, and daily operation of the mall. Security bubbles protect not only the physical space of the commercial establishment, but the clientele's feelings – providing an important, if ethereal, “sense of security,” as the guards often call it. Hospitality security, therefore, is an ethos and aesthetics that must constantly produce well-being for costumers. As such, it requires us to broaden our conceptualization of security in consumer and leisure spaces to encompass not only modern technological sophistication and the creation of “modern” safe commercial spaces, but also to understand how security is enmeshed in the process of transforming costumers into guests. Such transformation, which is at the heart of commercial success, depends on the guards themselves, their behavior, and their social and emotional skills. But, as shown in this article, this is far from a simple task.

Mall guards must provide comfort and care to guests while also inhabiting a highly ambivalent space. On the one hand, they cannot deploy the ostensive and aggressive security methods that are the purview of police officers – not only due to the legal boundaries that shape their world, but also because doing so would be unacceptable within the institutional norms of private security as it exists today. Instead, guards behavior must be used to promote corporate spaces as security bubbles; they must work tactfully to minimize the presence of unwanted people while protecting guests from experiencing anything triggering, which could remind them of the urban inequality that must remain unseen inside the mall. By combining human and environmental elements to maximize capital flow in

commercial environments, hospitality security is a key tool for managing populations. Violence is made invisible in the name of commercial profit.

As we have discussed in this paper, one of the key characteristics of hospitality security is its absolute emphasis on maintaining a clean and pristine environment, providing impeccable customer service, and preventing crime and “anti-social behavior”. Unlike in other countries, such as the UK, in the Rivertown mall open enforcement of rules and the use of public sanctions is almost entirely absent (Wakefield, 2003). Not that crime control is unimportant – quite the opposite –, as control is increasingly becoming a behind-the-scenes and invisible activity, forged via silent connections between armed guards (strategically positioned underground), the police, and judicial institutions. The client, or at least certain clients, must never feel the presence of control, only a sense of security and well-being.

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Social stop, as described at the beginning of this text, is how guards commonly practice everyday hospitality security. Such security tactic, among the others examined here, suggests the ways in which policing is occurring via modes other than the overly reactive approach. This represents a marked change in the Brazilian context, where extremely violent policing is the most dominant and common style. Similarly, our findings suggest the need to overcome the security/service and violence/care dichotomies that often characterize the study of plural policing. Hospitality security is more than just being discrete. It is a highly localized activity carried out in commercial space, but also a living social and political project where security is a permanent desire forged across multiple spheres.

Hospitality security consists of maintaining moral and public orders while also securing social orders (Robb Larkins and Durão, in press). Consequently, private guards

do not wield any personal authority that places them above the guests; they remain low-status workers laboring to support the social order. To do so, however, they must accept their roles as protectors of the mall's space, brand, and good image. They must be constantly convinced of their need to resist the temptation to act as pseudo-cops in a city dominated by narratives about crime and violence – a city in which so much is expected of security. As we have seen, for guards, hospitality security involves a constant effort to produce a pleasant atmosphere for guests and to control their own behavior. The market and Brazilian society place an enormous burden on each guard and their behavior. As low-income wage workers, they are asked to humanize security by performing emotional labor. They “take care” of customers and citizens.

If we consider security as a response to an accumulation of constructed urban and social threats (Fawaz et al, 2012), we can better understand hospitality security as a fundamental management style among others. Private security does not simplify the roles of security guards (Loader; White, 2018; Wakefield, 2008). The heterogeneity of guards work is most visible in a policing style that overvalues hospitality, reception, and friendly interactions in security. What we may be seeing here is confirmation of a global form of security where the guards themselves must act not only professionally, but primarily as “civilized” workers in a “professional” security market. The bodies of low-income guards should not threaten – by using authority or other policing tools – the aesthetic tranquility of consumers frequenting commercial spaces (Larkins, 2018). As discussed, the demands placed on guards performance are numerous and often intangible. This is why both managers and guards state that it is difficult to endure many years of working at the mall. The wear and tear of hospitality work is reflected on their own bodies and manifests itself in their

professional trajectories. Hospitality work also generates high turnover (Durão; Paes, 2021).

We need further comparative studies on how hospitality security works in other environments in Brazil and other countries. Comparative ethnographic findings should go beyond surveys and interviews. Observing and describing daily security interactions between guards and city residents in malls and other venues reveals the many ways that security operates as a soft stabilizer of inequality and directs our attention to policing styles beyond more traditionally violent and dramatic performances of force. We now have decades of sustained private security presence in contemporary urban centers, but we still require more knowledge on how this security works.

Susana Durão

Current research focuses on urban anthropology, public and private security, policing governance and practices, issues of race and violence in Brazil. She has published about proximity policing in Portugal, and also on transnational cooperation between national police forces in Lusophone countries (<https://www.susanadurao.org/>).

Erika Robb Larkins

Research and teaching focuses on violence and inequality in urban settings. Her first book, *The Spectacular Favela: Violence in Modern Brazil*, explores the political economy of spectacular violence in one of Rio's most famous favelas. She has also published on issues of race, gender, and politics in Brazil.

Carolina Andrei Fischmann

Research focuses on fear and private security in Brazilian urban spaces. She has participated in research projects as junior fellow.

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SECURING THE MALL: DAILY HOSPITALITY SECURITY PRACTICES IN SÃO PAULO

SUSANA DURÃO

ERIKA ROBB LARKINS

CAROLINA ANDREI FISCHMANN

Abstract: Security—whether public or private—is a key tool for managing populations and integral for creating urban spaces. This paper examines how mall security practices in São Paulo work to create safe and clean worlds for customers, distinguishing it from an cityscape that is seen as violent, dangerous, and populated with criminals. Drawing on five months of ethnographic research and interviews with the security team of the “Rivertown” shopping center in São Paulo and various private security employees, we show how the mall is secured by means of a set of practices based on “hospitality security,” paying special attention to the key role that security guard behavior plays in this process.

Keywords: security; shopping mall; capital; hospitality; violence

PROTEGENDO O SHOPPING: PRÁTICAS DIÁRIAS DE SEGURANÇA HOSPITALAR EM SÃO PAULO

Resumo: *A segurança – seja pública ou privada – é uma ferramenta fundamental para a gestão das populações, assim como é parte integrante da criação dos espaços urbanos. Neste artigo analisamos o modo como funcionam as práticas de segurança em shopping centers em São Paulo, visando criar um mundo seguro e limpo para os clientes, distinguindo-o de uma paisagem urbana que é vista como violenta, perigosa e povoada de criminosos. A partir de cinco meses de pesquisa etnográfica e entrevistas com a equipe de segurança do shopping center Rivertown, em São Paulo, e vários funcionários da segurança, demonstramos como o shopping é*

garantido por meio de um conjunto de práticas que fazem parte do que chamamos de “segurança como hospitalidade”, dando atenção ao papel central que os comportamentos dos agentes de segurança desempenham nesse processo.

Palavras-chave: *segurança; shopping center; capital; hospitalidade; violência*

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