Received: 4 May 2021 | Revised: 9 December 2021 | Accepted: 27 January 2022

DOI: 10.1002/jid.3636

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WILEY

Militias going rogue: Social dilemmas and coercive brokerage in Rio de Janeiro's urban frontier

Nicholas Pope

Department of Development Studies, SOAS, University of London, London, UK

Correspondence
Dr. Nicholas Pope, Department of Development Studies, SOAS, University of London, London, UK.
Email: nicholastpope@gmail.com

Abstract

Examining Rio de Janeiro's *milícias* ('militias') through a 'coercive brokerage' concept can reveal how they are central to how states and markets function. By tracing their emergence through moments of political and economic rupture, this article reveals how *milícias* responded to the social dilemmas of marginalised populations. Drawing from archival documentation, interviews, and ethnographic fieldnotes, this article argues that by brokering solutions to collective action problems and attempting to level-up inequalities, *milícias* gained access to the political system and were able to shaped the urban political economy. However, their coercive force also stimulated fresh contradictions, leading to a new set of structural, symbolic, and physical violences.

KEYWORDS
coercive broker, militia, Rio de Janeiro, urban frontier, violence

1 | INTRODUCTION

Milícias (or 'militias'), as they are known in Brazil, are parastatal formations composed of 'off-duty' policemen, firemen, army soldiers, and other security sector-linked actors, as well as civil society leaders, politicians, and civilians. These groups, with their local systems of rule, are active across much of the city of Rio de Janeiro (RJ). One recent study claimed that as much as 57.5% of RJ is under *milícia* control (GENI/UFF et al., 2020), falling predominantly in the city's West Zone (WZ) (which makes up 73.97% (885.74 km^2) of the city's landmass). The WZ is a region of RJ city, some 60 km from the downtown, once known to city residents as the 'Wild West'.

Despite the dominance of *milícias* in RJ's WZ, and similar groups emerging in other Brazilian states and Latin American countries, there has been surprisingly limited scholarly focus on this phenomenon, when compared, for example, to drug trafficking organisations (DTOs). Until the mid-2000s, although media narratives and public discourses acknowledged the violent nature of *milícias*, they were also subtly sympathetic towards them, noting how they acted in self-defence against DTOs. There were collaborative relationships and a relatively easy co-existence between *milícias* and RJ's political and business elites, some of whom defended them as a 'lesser evil', compared to DTOs (Phillips, 2018). However, these discourses obscured the exploitative, unaccountable, and violent nature of *milícias*, drawn into sharper focus in recent years following the brutal assassination of City Councillor Marielle Franco in March 2018, for which *milícias* are assumed to be responsible (Otavio & Araújo, 2020); together with ongoing speculations about the shadowy political relationships between President Jair Bolsonaro and RJ's *milícias* (Manso, 2020).

Of the few studies that do exist on RJ's *milícias*, there has been a tendency to understand the phenomenon in terms of complex partnerships and collaborations between the distinguishable categories of 'criminals' and political elites or state actors (e.g., Arias, 2017; Cano & Duarte, 2012; Hidalgo & Lessing, 2014; Zaluar & Conceiçao, 2007). These conceptualisations build on an important body of urban violence literature in Latin America, much of it developed through studies in RJ. These ideas have emerged through, and are in keeping with insights from historically important and contextually specific studies of Latin American clientelism, including *coronelismo* in Brazil (Chandler, 1978) or *caciquismo* in Mexico (Roniger, 1987), which paved the way for thinking about how armed groups can hinge around a central political patron (or set of patrons) (Auyero, 2002; Hilgers & MacDonald, 2017).

However, during the 1980s, the disorder provoked through restructuration—including democratisation and economic liberalisations—encouraged community leaders, 'criminals', and state elites to develop even closer relationships, as they sought out solutions to new sets of problems (Burgos, 2002; Gay, 1998; Leeds, 1996; Zaluar, 1985). An important advance in the literature highlights an array of partnerships, collusions, collaborations and compromises emerging between these diverse actors, presented by O'Donnell (1993) as 'shades' of relationships, which can be mapped onto communities. These ideas have been particularly insightful for highlighting how states distribute resources and establish order in uneven ways. Studies of clientelism in RJ's *favelas* ('slums') have been particularly useful for thinking about how different types of clientelism are the result of skilful forms of negotiation of brokers navigating between illicit and licit worlds, or state systems and local communities (Arias & Goldstein, 2010; Burgos, 2002; Machado Da Silva, 1967). Importantly, the literature highlights the centrality of violence for brokers maintaining a grip over these chains of interactions and for maintaining support from populations (Penglase, 2009).

Whilst these nuanced insights facilitate useful reflections on RJ's *milícias*, there is much more to say about how these micro-systems of violent rule function when the distinction between 'state' and 'non-state' is not clear-cut. Although contemporary *milícias* encompass a broad range of actors, they began as off-duty policemen. This history is one of the reasons they have enduring tentacles deep into the networks and institutions of the state. This article makes the case for thinking about *milícias* as never fully 'criminal', nor of the state. Although *milícias* are mostly physically present in marginal spaces, they have far-reaching influence into RJ's centre and even the national capital, Brasilia; they connect, thread together, and shape licit and illicit flows of capital; they oscillate between serving the interests of marginalised populations and elites in centres. Importantly, and unlike DTOs, due to their roles shaping political and economic structures with the support of populations, *milícias* are political actors, commanding their own support from populations and have political capital.

To develop this further, this article draws insights from RJ's clientelism literature into dialogue with contemporary literature on brokerage (e.g., Goodhand et al., 2016; Marten, 2012; Meehan & Plonski, 2017). Specifically, it develops the idea of 'coercive brokerage' (Sanín 2019, p. 16) to recognise the mediation functions of *milícias* and the centrality of coercion to fulfil those functions. It also sets out how aspects of brokerage dynamics can be unique to urban frontiers (McGregor & Chatiza, 2019; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018) before reflecting on how coercive brokerage can shape the urban political settlement (Khan, 2010; Mitlin, 2020). With insights from historical state formation literature, demonstrating how the evolution of modern states depended on symbiotic relationships with 'criminal'

groups (Andreas, 2013; Tilly, 2017), this article understands coercive brokers as political actors who are central to the formation of states capital accumulation processes. Reflecting on studies about the violent intermediation practices of the Sicilian mafia (Blok, 1974) and post-Soviet gangs in Russia (Volkov, 2002), this article understands coercive brokerage as *an effect* from the contemporary moment of states and markets, which characterises the urban frontier.

The coercive brokerage concept is particularly salient for examining parastatal formations in the urban margins of large metropolises in developing countries (e.g., Rio de Janeiro), operating in close proximity to elites with access to the levers of power. Coercive brokers are well positioned to lobby, influence, and direct capital flows. This article complements studies of coercive brokerage in other marginal contexts, such as national borderlands (e.g., Meehan & Lawn, forthcoming; Sanin, 2019), by focusing on the uniqueness of urban frontiers and the importance of coercive brokerage for understanding urban politics. By situating coercive brokerage within broader discussions of urban politics and development, this article explores how coercive brokers can affect urban social, political, and economic outcomes. But the central argument of this paper is more temporal in nature. It argues that there is a set of twin and contradictory processes at play. Although coercive brokers may offer immediate remedies to the collective action problems of marginalised urban populations, the new forms of social order that emerge around them can have long-lasting, negative consequences as they can generate (and normalise) newer inequalities and violences. This paper examines the interplays between these processes.

Recognising the structural effects of coercive brokerage demands a methodological approach that places experiences from urban margins at the centre of the analysis. This paper, therefore, draws on a dataset generated by ethnographic fieldnotes and qualitative interviews with 125 residents, community leaders, police and security agents, politicians and lawmakers, and civil society representatives who experienced structural transformations during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, conducted during fieldwork between October 2015 and April 2017. With an initial focus on two neighbouring communities, the research embeds micro-level case studies within an urban political, security, and development landscape; linking them directly into the political economy dynamics highlighted through analysis of over 30 000 pages of primary archival documentation obtained from the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro regarding the Parliamentary Commission Inquiry on RJ's *milícias*.

This article is organised in the following ways. First, it sets out a framework for thinking about *milícias* as coercive brokers in the urban frontier. Second, it describes the historical antecedents of coercive brokerage dynamics in the WZ to demonstrate that contemporary *milícias* are iterations of pre-existing structures. Third, I examine how *milícias* emerged through demands for protection by WZ populations. Fourth, I explore how these practices enabled *milícias* to consolidate power and encroach physically, politically, and economically RJ's centre. A final section offers some concluding thoughts.

2 | COERCIVE BROKERAGE IN URBAN FRONTIERS

The dialectical relationship between intermediation and political economic structures have been observed in classical studies of brokerage (e.g., Wolf, 1956) and a growing body of contemporary development studies literature (e.g., Meehan & Plonski, 2017). However, less has been said about the ways that brokers deploy violence. A growing literature has acknowledged the comparative advantage of brokers with access to the means of violence, also conceptualised as 'violent entrepreneurs' (Volkov, 2002), 'brokers of a violent type' (Blok, 1974), and 'violent intermediaries' (Jackman, 2019). Importantly, this literature demonstrates how a violence specialism enables brokers to access and maintain hard-to-reach positions in political, social, and economic systems, and to hold onto these positions by threatening and deploying coercion in the face of competition and threats.

This section sets out a framework for understanding coercive brokerage as an effect of state and market structures in urban margins. It does so, first of all, by situating coercive brokerage within the political settlements framework (Khan, 2010) in order to connect brokerage dynamics to political economic structures. Political settlements are

defined as the balance, or distribution of power between contending social groups, classes, and their representatives (including an array of brokers), often transcending analytical boundaries such as state and society, public and private, legal and illegal, and licit and illicit. Importantly, political settlements highlight the processes through which coalition formations (involving coercive brokers) emerge through bargaining processes. It also usefully highlights how those with the greatest 'holding power' (the ability to 'hold out' and succeed in the face of competition) are typically those with the greatest access to resources, knowledge, and violence (Khan, 2017).

However, much of the urban focus of political settlements literature has been, so far, on the role of cities in shaping national political settlements (Goodfellow, 2018; Goodfellow & Jackman, 2020; Mitlin, 2020). But there has been less focus on the subnational dimension of political settlements (Meehan & Goodhand, 2018). However, there is scope to engage the political settlements framework to understand complex urban political systems in cities, such as RJ, given the importance of bargaining processes between competing coalitions and social formations in urban political life. Political settlements in the urban context, or 'urban political settlements', can reveal a great deal about the patterns through which resources are distributed across urban space; often, in disproportionate and uneven ways.

Political geography literature on frontiers can offer additional clarity on the spatial dynamics of urban political settlements. They can reveal how frontiers are important and influential for shaping political settlements because they are simultaneously sites of innovation and exploitation (Cons & Eilenberg, 2019; McGregor & Chatiza, 2019; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018; Sivaramakrishnan, 2019). They also reveal how securitisation is a fundamental character of the urban frontier given how security is a 'key moment' in the production of space (Sarma & Sidaway, 2020). To facilitate processes of capital accumulation and statebuilding in the urban frontier, favourable dynamics of the frontier are, thus, prioritised and protected for (and by) states and markets; and the negative dynamics are suppressed.

Building on brokerage literature—in which brokers address collective action problems, challenge social impasses, and mitigate violence for populations—frontiers, with their complex ecologies of constraint and opportunity, are conducive to coercive forms of brokerage. Positioned uniquely across structural and spatial synapses (Meehan & Plonski, 2017; Wolf, 1956), brokers with access to the means of coercion can muscle their way into Intermediation and managerial roles in frontiers. Because of this, coercive brokers can be convenient allies for ruling elites as they are able to act in liminal and illegible ways that evade scrutiny and accountability. This liminality enables brokers to profit from protection rackets and control trade, housing, territory, or state-subsidised goods and services. This means coercive brokerage has implications for how states manifest, and capital accumulates in frontier spaces (Wheeler, 2014, p. 73).

A great deal of power and influence, thus, sits in the hands of the coercive broker who has a hand in determining how power is exercised in the urban frontier. Coercive brokers depend on legitimacy and relevance, meaning their practices and behaviours are also, in part, shaped by the decisions, agency, and motivations within the communities where they function (Wenner et al., 2016). When there is alignment between the ideas and beliefs of the coercive broker and those of the community, these types of brokers have the means to push back on the interests of political and business elites from the central state in favour of local communities (Holston, 2009). For example, communities may demand protection and provisions in the face of food shortages, external threats of violence, or economic hardship and coercive brokers can threaten violence in order to fulfil these demands. These processes can generate bonds of trust, shared political subjectivities, and spatial identities (Santos in Melgaço & Prouse, 2017), which, ultimately, can reshape how states and markets unfold in the frontier (Murray Li, 2002), and fundamentally change the nature of the political settlement. The following section describes the historical evolution of coercive brokers in the WZ.

3 | COERCIVE BROKERAGE IN THE WZ: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Coercive brokerage has characterised RJ's margins for decades, entangled with structural inequalities, histories of colonialism, unequal race relations, and physical, direct, and symbolic forms of violence. The various manifestations

have emerged through key moments of transition, social transformation, and shifting political settlements as contestations over, and protections of rents, resources, and flows of capital have manifested through these fractured and complex moments.

One of the earliest and most significant forms of coercive brokerage in the WZ emerged during Brazil's transition to a Republic in the late nineteenth century. At this time, power outside the urban centres were decentralised and negotiated with implicit, informal, and unwritten agreements between *coroneis* ('rural barons'), oligarchs, and state governors. *Coroneis* were not part of the formal political bureaucratic state. Instead, they brokered power below the state apparatus. They were part of an amalgam of rural authorities and were a representative channel for local citizens, standing up for them, particularly, against the assertions of wealthy landowners (Leal, 1977). Rural policing was controlled by the *coroneis*, demonstrating clear links between local politics, coercive practices, and establishing order (Singelmann, 1975). However, the alignment of local policing with local vested interests and politics meant that police and the *coroneis* worked together through a partnership. However, the fluidity and interchangeability of their relationships, especially with newly emerging alliances with other violence specialists such as *capangas* (privately contracted violence specialists) and *cangaceiros* (social bandits) (Chandler, 1978), meant it was often difficult to determine who was aligned with who, and for what purpose. The nature of these rural groups was relational, and they responded, to an extent, to the politics of the day. State governments struggled to control them and as a result, political and economic institutions were restructured in the 1940s and power was reigned back into the urban centre.

During the 1960s, death squads attempted to stamp out social disorder that had arisen surrounding economic instability and food shortages. These groups were contracted by elites from the authoritarian military government to repress political dissidents, rivals, and pro-democracy activists, especially in marginal urban spaces (Souza Alves, 2003). These groups were formed through alliances between commanding officers and local military officers and policemen who lived in the marginal regions of cities. Whilst the majority of the death squads benefited from an anonymous status, often working in neighbourhoods where they could not be identified, during the 1970s a form of death squad emerged who lived in the communities they also worked in, known locally as the *polícia mineira* (mineira police). In contrast to the death squads of the 1970s, the *policia mineria* depended on support from local populations.

Popular support for the military government declined during the 1980s due to a renewed economic crisis and rising social unrest. At the same time, imaginaries of a 'global', more liberal Brazil gained traction and like many Latin American countries emerging from authoritarian rule, the democratisation process, structural reforms, and decentralisation led to a turbulent realignment of state and society relations. One set of material changes involved the retraction of some state institutions and investments in marginal urban neighbourhoods, as well as the privatisation of vast state-owned enterprises in RJ. These changes had enormous consequences and created mass unemployment and a sense of abandonment from the state amongst marginalised populations. This, simultaneously, provoked the expansion of diverse unregulated informal economies, including informal transport and security, as residents attempted to find solutions to service rollbacks and shortages of food.

One of the most socially influential transformations was the expansion of illicit drug markets through RJ's *favelas*. New domestic drug markets opened up in the glitzy South Zone (SZ) neighbourhoods, whilst the maritime ports of São Paulo and RJ facilitated trading routes from Bolivia and Colombia through to Western Africa, before redirecting to Europe. In an attempt to manage these unregulated, illicit markets, violence emerged between competitive DTOs in conflict with one another, in the *favelas* neighbouring the city's SZ and downtown. Once all of these communities had been occupied by DTOs, they began to expand into the WZ.

However, the ambition of these groups to territorialise and expand their trafficking operations collided with the death squads and *policia mineira*, which were prevalent in the WZ. Competition between these different armed groups led to spiralling cycles and explosive episodes of revenge attacks. As a result of the increasingly lucrative profits and competitiveness for space, the DTOs became increasingly fragmented and unable to monopolise the drug markets. This created opportunities for social ordering and consolidation of power across the WZ.

Coercive brokers reproduced themselves through these fragmenting conditions, not as instruments of the political settlement, but as political actors themselves with a hand in shaping the political settlement from the margins. The next section examines how *milícias* emerged through these fragmented and churning frontiers.

4 | REACTIONS AND RESPONSES: THE EMERGENCE OF *MILÍCIA*

> *Who is the saviour? Who will protect me from that terror? Police, state, militia … Legal or illegal; I want you to protect me, I'm only going to complain if it's the same guy who protects me comes and does something with me or one of my people; but if in my head he's protecting me from this terror, basically, anything goes*.– Interview with a Policeman, March 2017

The aforementioned patterns and cycles of violence and conflict between the WZ armed groups stimulated popular support for increasingly creative ways of establishing order during the 1990s. However, because police were at the centre of many of these conflicts, and linked to the *policia mineira* and death squads, many residents felt unable to turn to formal institutions.[1] Searching for antidotes and alternative ways to mediate the disorder, residents turned to community leaders, friends, and relatives within and nearby their communities, many of who were violence specialists, and who typically had connections with state security services. Many of these individuals were current or ex-police or military officers with state security training and with access to state weapons and ammunition.

Initially compelled by motivations to protect their communities, friends, and family, these actors stepped in to provide security and basic services. In one WZ neighbourhood, Anderson and Rafael, two residents and former policemen, responded to requests from neighbours to patrol the streets and manage the conflicts and in-fighting between competing DTOs.[2] Exhausted by the effect it was having on the lives of their families, Anderson and Rafael organised a group of ex-colleagues and friends from the police to *invadir* ('takeover' or 'take back') the community.

These security motives were often intertwined with economic incentives. One ex-*miliciano* ('ex-militiaman') explained how the owner of the local bar he frequented had placed a jar on the countertop into which customers could contribute cash. The cash was used to pay the bar tab of the police to incentivise them to stay and deter DTOs.[3] Similarly, minibus drivers driving in the informal transport networks across the WZ paid these same police to guard their vehicles as they passed through their communities and at the pick-up points.[4]

However, as they dedicated more time to these practices, these groups ended up depending on their status and newfound economic benefits for their own survival. Without checks and balances of the formal state or legal system, they began to use coercion to regulate the informal markets, manage processes of extraction, and implement protection rackets.[5] They were mediating between a lucrative security market, the threat of violence from DTOs, and demands from populations to soften the effects of structural inequalities.

At first, these practices were isolated and contained to a small number of communities, typically those neighbouring DTO-run *favelas*. However, as revenge attacks and DTO violence intensified during the 1990s, and competition for urban space ramped up, the coercive practices of these police-linked security groups became more severe and widespread. This had profound effects for spatial patterns of coercive brokerage. Minibus drivers, for example, began to contract these actors to ride inside the vehicles with them during the journey to deter assault from DTOs. But because the routes traversed large distances, threading through different WZ neighbourhoods, it challenged the established fixed-territorial logics of these groups. This began to generate conflict between security actors from different communities as they competed for security contracts along the routes. However, as different groups realised they had a common enemy in the DTOs and a shared interest in the security market, conflict between them decreased. This helped facilitate loose coalitions between security agents, which ultimately saw their functionality as individuals and small clusters of security and market brokers transition into organised groups, later known as *milícias*.

The dependence of WZ populations on *milícias* as a primary source of authority and security gave these groups license to offer services as diverse as medical treatment, eye care, and vocational training. *Milícias* embraced

community needs, interests, ambitions, and grievances, which played a fundamental role in building legitimacy, support, and shaping relationships with residents.

In one example, *milícias* coordinated *invasões* ('occupations') for landless, homeless, or renting populations in the WZ. Irene, an elderly resident, now in her late 60s, explained to me that during the 1990s a local *miliciano*, Wellington, helped her during a difficult period of her life when she was in a state of destitution with no money to pay rent or buy food. She explained how, 'Wellington took the land, and gave it to the poor people … Then he took care of the people'.[6] Irene's neighbour, Ana, also explained how at the start of the occupation Wellington said to her that they could 'make [their] homes here […] because it's an *occupação* (land occupation). We're not "invading". We're not stealing anything from anyone because it's ours […] if it's the government's, then it's ours'.[7] *Milicianos* appeared to front occupations on behalf of the residents; with the help of their political connections, they were able to navigate the bureaucratic processes of land transfer, from irregular land plots to formal ownership. They used this knowledge to cultivate and sustain relationships with residents.

Although the construction of new communities seemed to open up possibilities for residents for a sense of control and a future of self-determination, the eventual outcome was entangled with long-term interdependencies on *milícias*. When conducting this fieldwork in 2017—over 25 years after the lands were first occupied—negotiations and bureaucratic battles over land were on-going and without an end in sight, highlighting the ways that *milícias* deal with collective action problems, only ever in *partial* ways, but never full resolve them in order to maintain relevance. Importantly, *milícias* connect their brokerage initiatives to broader networks of support with police, politicians, community leaders, and state officials to enable them access to resources, information, and formal rights, just enough to keep community residents on side. Locally embedded *and* networked through the broader urban political economy, *milícas* took advantage of their unique vantage point to broker between different spaces. For example, they were able to understand the local effects of external threats from DTOs and call on police networks for support; or they were able to pre-empt the effects of macro-political change, such as new legislation, for their local communities by soliciting information and knowledge from contacts within the state system. It is through these functions and the process of making populations *more* (but not completely) legible to the state that *milícias* were able to cultivate dependencies and facilitate constructions of belonging, meaning, and identity for a marginalised population.

An elusive effect emerged around *milícas* that obscured (but also legitimised) their violent practices and helped them maintain personal connections with populations. Heroic and spiritual imaginaries of *milicianos* cemented their roles in local communities. In one WZ neighbourhood, *milicianos* (and they were nearly always men) Anderson and Rafael were known by women in the community as 'guardian angels'.[8] These protection imaginaries helped to establish collective imaginations, linking authority of the *milicianos* to a higher and inexplicable power, stretching out *milícia* practice to spiritual and mythical spatio-temporalities. Through hierarchical ordering and subordination, residents situated themselves in relation to others and created meaning by understanding the world in relational to God, brokered through these characters. Residents of WZ communities regularly referred to 'his protection' and the 'will of God' in reference to *milícias* and their fate and future. Authority was more than a projection of rules upon a population and the use of violence as a form of discipline; it was a historically embedded process with legitimacy underpinned by cultural registers of belonging and religion.

These imaginaries were capable of hyping-up emotion and securing a role in the community for *milícias*. Even though they position themselves as protectors, 'there will be a gun around the waist, and there will still be good vibes with them in the community; the men end up winning the will of women, because women in the community like the bad guys'.[9] The gendered nature of this relation shows how women in the community entrusted *milicianos* to protect them, despite (or perhaps, *because of*) their means of coercion reinforcing masculine dominance.

Herein sits an important theoretical and empirical twist. *Milícias* simultaneously embodied roles of protectors *and* violators, with one lurking in the shadows and the other in full view. As protectors, *milícia* take on 'state-like' characteristics as protectors of citizens and enforcers of violence through an illusory social contract and a feigned exchange. But by professing to protect against violence and harm more widely, *milícia* practices also evolved with their own structural, every day, institutionalised, and symbolic forms of violence, that may be more refined than that

of DTOs, but still is dominating and controlling.[10] These old and new forms of violence, therefore, are layered on top of others in messy, deceiving, and disorientating ways. Structures and institutions are constantly being churned and disordered. The next section examines the effects of these processes.

5 | EMPOWERED BROKERS AND NEW POWER 'CENTRES' IN THE MARGINS

Leveraging the support created through their brokerage practices during the 1990s, *milícias* accumulated political capital across the WZ that was able to influence the ways that state institutions worked and statebuilding projects played out.

One of the most visible signs of this was the creation of Community Policing Stations (DPOs), which were part of RJ's Military Police (PMERJ). This was an initiative championed by RJ's Security Secretary in the early 2000s, Marcelo Itagiba, who was appointed by Anthony Garotinho, the Governor of RJ at the time in 2001, to take a tougher stance on law and order. Itagiba's appointment was part of a response by Garotinho to growing criticisms of his government about rising levels of criminal violence and the lack of effective policing. In his flagship policy, Itagiba suggested the government, 'create DPOs to try to make sure the policemen could stay with their families in their homes',[11] noting how police officers had to go to and from work in civilian clothes so as not to attract the attention from DTOs. Itagiba explained how WZ police-residents organised themselves in the DPOs so they 'would not have to flee anymore'.[12]

Mario, a WZ resident from a community with a DPO, explained how his community had been *invadido* by a *milícia* in 2003 and the DTO expelled. A few weeks later, he explained that a PMERJ DPO had been built.[13] Mario told me how the DPO later became the headquarters for the local *milícia* and that it was impossible to distinguish between *milícia* and police. Anita, a neighbour of Mario, confirmed this when she explained how, 'they are all the same [...] the police here have all done deals with the local bosses, it's all the same shit'.[14] The leader of this community also explained how Garotinho had visited the community by helicopter in the weeks following the *invasão*, and that his government had equipped resident-policemen with weapons to help them build 'a very powerful faction' that could protect the community from an expected reinvasion by drug traffickers.[15]

Milícia—positioned between state security objectives and local demands—was a quick and cheap alternative for the government of the day; compared to building new police stations that would have required significant investment in recruitment and training of new police officers. DPOs required fewer resources as they depended on the contributions of free or cheap labour of policemen outside their formal working hours. But whilst the pathway was different, they led to the same desired objective of reducing DTO violence and increasing state-linked security presence.[16]

Although these police-trained actors had territorial control over their communities, the long-term effects of this dependency on free labour meant there was a trade-off for the central state as these policemen turned to increasingly coercive means to dominate markets, establish protection rackets, and collect informal taxes to finance their operations and lives (not dissimilar to the processes mentioned in the previous section). Coercive brokerage characteristics began to surface at the point at which the policemen politicised their access to uniforms, weapons, state networks, and resources, at the same time as engaging their community networks and relations to control and monopolise local markets.[17] The DPO provided a spatial meeting point and confluence for these illicit activities. Despite their hand in illicit economic activity, *milícias* genuinely believed their function—as police-trained officers and 'protectors' of law and order—was to establish order where DTOs and 'criminality' dominated.

Presenting themselves as an economically viable alternative to police 'absence', *milícias* sought out new spaces from which to establish order (and, thus, extract capital). They began to expand outside the WZ and move into more central spaces, such as leafy middle-class neighbourhoods in the SZ. It was clear that when a flyer posted in the communal spaces of a residential block in Botafogo 'strongly advising' residents that a 'new security company' would be

taking over the security of the building, *milícias* were attempting to expand and cross-over into the private security market in the urban centre.[18] But whilst residents of middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods in RJ were used to not depending on police, paying police bribes, and paying for private security, the intrusion of *milícias* alarmed residents who were more used to making their own choices about their security.

Most alarming for residents of the SZ, however, was the realisation that these encroachments were not just about security; they were symptomatic of an urban politics in transformation and the power that WZ *milícias* within the urban political settlement. Ideas, practices and discourses typically associated with the marginal WZ were encroaching into *their* central space. This attempt to encroach into the SZ was an attempt by *milícias* to step out of their brokerage role and consolidate their own power centre. If it had of been successful, this encroachment would have had tangible consequences for how markets were organised, how the state security functioned, and how ideas and beliefs about how individuals should be imagined, organised, and governed within society.

Although small clusters of residents voiced concerns, broader public discourses continued to tolerate *milícias*. However, in May 2008, a highly visible event sparked off a legitimacy crisis for *milícias* and their political allies. A journalist, a photographer, and a chaufer from the *O Dia* newspaper were kidnapped in the community of Batan after they embedded themselves in the community as undercover reporters to investigate *milícias*. The journalists were tortured and beaten for several hours before being released. Once word got out, front page headlines condemned the treatment of the journalists, portrayed as an 'attack on democracy'.[19] However, despite decades of violence and repression against residents in marginalised regions by similar coercive actors, a public crisis was only picked up by the newspaper media when white, middle-class journalists from the SZ became victims of violence. Evidently, practices, ideas and beliefs of *milícias* were not suddenly feared by middle- and upper-class SZ residents simply because they existed. They were feared because they represented an expression of power from the WZ so pervasive (and powerful) that it had become capable of reaching into spaces (and affecting bodies from central urban spaces in violent and intrusive ways) that had been previously inaccessible and unthinkable.

This triggered a legitimacy crisis, not only for *milícias*, but for political and state elites in coalitions with *milícias* and who depended on them to manage the WZ. This provided the discursive narrative that opposition elites needed to unravel some of these political and economic relations with *milícias*. It allowed these elites within a newly emerging political settlement to mobilise state and federal resources to 'combat' *milícia* structures and (partially) extract them from the dominant political coalitions. On 8 June 2008, the President of RJ's State Parliament approved a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission into the *Milícias* (CPI).

A cross-party panel of lawmakers was appointed to the CPI. The CPI Vice-President, Paulo Ramos (an ex-Military Policeman) resigned almost immediately, claiming the 'complexity of the CPI of the so-called *milícias*', and the 'various manifestations and manipulations, depend on the power eventually held by those who are interested in producing certain results',[20] had forced him to resign. Ramos elaborated in an interview, claiming there was 'a deal to [cap the investigation and] protect the rulers and governors'.[21] He suggested the outcome of the CPI had been determined before it had even begun. He explained how, 'the rulers and their corporate and media backers', played an influential role in shaping, framing and guiding the narrative that 'tended to produce results that led to further criminalisation of poor populations'.[22]

A focus for the news media was a list of 218 named individuals who were 'indicted' as *milicianos*. This was published at the end of the CPI process. Although it was not a judicial inquiry, many of the 'indicted' individuals were subsequently investigated, prosecuted and tried in a court of law. However, importantly, this 'indicted' list was drastically different from a list of 'suspected' individuals compiled at the beginning of the CPI.[23] Whilst the 'suspected' list contained 14 politicians, the published 'Indicted' list had just one (Figure 1). Decisions about which politicians to investigate were seemingly political (Pope, 2020, pp. 209–214). There was reductions of indictments for most individuals with state-linked social titles, including Civil Policemen, Military Fireman, Prison Guard, and Armed Forces; the only state-linked role that increased was of Military Policemen, which rose by four. Most stark, however, was the rise in the number of 'Civilians', many of whom were residents of WZ communities, which increased by 47.

Person type	Suspected	Indicted	+/- change
Politician	14	1	**-13**
Civil Police	13	8	**-5**
Military Police	63	67	**+4**
Military Fireman	5	3	**-2**
Prison Guard	3	2	**-1**
Armed Forces	3	2	**-1**
Civilian	83	130	**+47**

FIGURE 1 Differences in numbers of 'suspected' and 'indicted' *Milicianos*. *Source*: CPI of the Milícias, Archive File, P4477, pp. 717–728; CPI Relatório Final

Changes are clearly to be expected as a result of an investigation. However, the broad shape of these changes reveals patterns about the underlying inequalities characterising the political settlement, the way the CPI was directed, and the limitations to the CPI's outcomes. It also demonstrates the hierarchies within *milícia* networks, with some individuals and titles—such as Civilians, Military Police, or 'poor residents', as alluded to by Ramos—in more fragile and less privileged positions than others, with fewer political allies and higher chances of incrimination.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

This paper has argued there are complex and mutable relationships between micro-level dynamics of coercive brokerage in urban frontiers, and inequalities that are sustained and accentuated through macro-level urban politics. These observations speak directly to broader comparative questions at the core of this Special Issue about how brokers accentuate or reconcile power imbalances, and *how* and *why* there may be variations.

By demonstrating how RJ's *milícias* emerged during a structurally fragmented, insecure, and physically violent moment in the city's history, it has revealed that coercive brokerage can emerge as a response to short-term social dilemmas, survival needs of marginalised populations, and immediate collective action problems. But it has also shown how these dynamics can have long-lasting consequences for social order. As *milícias* consolidated their power through coercive means, they became dependent on the support of marginal populations for their economic survival. And as the demand for protection and ways of navigating the complex environment of the frontier support continued to grow, these twin processes gave rise to the economic success of *milícias*, which enabled them to consolidate their own power base and exercise influence within the political settlement.

Political and state elites in the urban centre, aware of the provocative and reactive formations emerging in the WZ, were faced with a conundrum. They could either (i) resist the emerging alliance with *milícias*, which would leave a vast part of the city untapped by the state structures and licit markets, perpetuated in cycles of turmoil, tumult, and disorder, and which would risk their assets, investments, and lifestyle in the centre; or they could (ii) consolidate these relationships, extend the ruling coalition of the political settlement to include *milícias*, and, thus, facilitate extensions of state and market structures into the WZ. The latter path materialised and a 'tie-in' (Sanin, 2019) developed between central elites and *milícias* (i.e., necessary relationships between elites in the centre and *milícias* in the margins to 'make things happen'). However, this also involved trade-offs. It depended on the distribution of resources (e.g., weapons, finance, information, and knowledge) to WZ populations through an uneasy coalition with

an unpredictable set of coercive brokers, the *milícia*. In return, *milícias* were allocated violence rights to keep WZ populations (and the threat of violence from DTOs) in check and to maintain a basic level of social order. This insight demonstrates that power in the margins is less accountable, more despotic, experimental, and raw.

Another by-product of integrating *milícias* into the ruling coalition was that these actors had a significant degree of political influence and were closer than ever to the levers of power. Coercive brokerage arrangements generated opportunities for the politicisation of actors from the WZ, to establish a power base for themselves, and to access the formal political system. It facilitated the emergence of a set of WZ elites who later sought to challenge the hegemony of urban elites. During the 2000s, *milícias* and their political elite allies from the urban centre, although highly influential in the state and municipal politics of the day, never achieved full control of the political settlement, but there was always a threat and possibility that political elites may lose control, which kept them on their toes. More recent analyses of linkages between *milícias* and the Bolsonaro government may lead to alternative conclusions about the role (and dominance) of *milícias* in political settlements.

In the long term, and because *milícias* were able to extend power beyond their immediate community boundaries, coercive brokerage dynamics ended up further entrenching structural inequalities, as well as direct forms of violence and insecurity in the urban margins. These co-productive processes inadvertently, and unintentionally, extroverted the urban 'margins' into a budding 'centre' of its own; complete with its own set of structural, every day, institutionalised, and symbolic forms of violence. Over time, coercive brokerage had the effect of reshaping trajectories of statebuilding and development in the margins, as exemplified in the provision of new forms or security and social order, which led to greater inequalities. Elites within the state system seemed to have a threshold to the infringement of 'their' coercive brokers; they stepped in as soon as the *milícia* became too bold and demanding power. They kept these coercive brokers in-check and re-committed them to brokerage functions, which was preferable to *milicianos* than no power at all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Jonathan Goodhand for his comments, and the Guest Editors of the Special Issue and the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions and careful reading of the manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Not available.

ORCID

Nicholas Pope https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0019-5931

ENDNOTES

[1] Interview with João, Campinha resident, April 2017.

[2] Interview with Benice, Cosmos resident, April 2017.

[3] Interview with Rogério, former *miliciano* and Military Policeman, Duque de Caxias, June 2016.

[4] Interview with a transport union worker, September 2016.

[5] Interview with Antonio, Military Policeman, September 2016.

[6] Interview with Irene, resident of Floresta da Campinha, March 2017.

[7] Interview with Ana, resident of Floresta da Campinha, March 2017.

[8] Interview with Benice, Cosmos resident, April 2017.

[9] Interview with Renato, Civil Policeman, January 2017.

[10] Interview with Marielle Franco, Politician, March 2016.

[11] Interview with Marcelo Itagiba, former Policeman, Security Secretary for Rio de Janeiro State Government, and Federal Lawmaker, January 2017.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Interview with Mario, December 2016.

[14] Interview with Anita, December 2016.

[15] Interview with Pedro Paulo, Community Leader, December 2016.

[16] Interview with Coronel Antonio, Civil Police, July 2017.

[17] Interview with Renato, Civil Policeman, November 2017.

[18] CPI of the Milícias, Archive File, RO No.010-03575/2008, P4484, p. 663.

[19] CPI of the Milícias, *Relatório Final*.

[20] O Dia (2008) 'Rio: Paulo Ramos pede desligamento da CPI das Milícias', *O Dia*, 31 July 2008. Available at: http://noticias.terra.com.br/eleicoes/2008/interna/0,,OI3042465-EI11830,00-Rio+Paulo+Ramos+pede+desligamento+da+CPI+das+Milicias.html.

[21] Interview with Paulo Ramos, April 2016.

[22] Ibid.

[23] CPI of the Milícias, Archive File, P4477, pp. 717–728.

REFERENCES

Andreas, P. (2013). *Smuggler nation: How illicit trade made America*. Oxford University Press.

Arias, E. D. (2017). *Criminal enterprises and governance in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316650073

Arias, E. D., & Goldstein, D. M. (2010). Violent pluralism: Understanding the new democracies of Latin America. In *Violent democracies in Latin America* (pp. 1–34). Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822392033-001

Auyero, J. (2002). Clientelismo político en Argentina: doble vida y negación colectiva. *Perfiles Latinoamericanos: Revista De La Facultad Latinoamericana De Ciencias Sociales, Sede México*, *10*(20), 33–52.

Blok, A. (1974). *The Mafia in a Sicilian Village, 1860–1960: A study of violent peasant entrepreneurs*. Basil Blackwell.

Burgos, M. B. (2002). *A utopia da comunidade: Rio das Pedras, uma favela carioca* (Vol. 5). Edicoes Loyola.

Cano, I. and Duarte, T. 2012. No Sapatinho: A evolução das milícias no Rio de Janeiro (2008–2011).

Chandler, B. J. (1978). *The bandit king: Lampião of Brazil*. Texas A & M University Press.

Cons, J., & Eilenberg, M. (2019). *Frontier assemblages: The emergent politics of resource frontiers in Asia*. John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119412090

Gay, R. (1998). Rethinking clientelism: Demands, discourses and practices in contemporary Brazil. Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe/European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies, pp. 7–24.

GENI/UFF, Fogo Cruzado-RJ, NEV/USP, Disque Denúncia e Pista News Data. (2020). Apresentação ao mapa dos grupos armados do Rio de Janeiro.

Goodfellow, T. (2018). Seeing political settlements through the city: A framework for comparative analysis of urban transformation. *Development and Change*, *49*(1), 199–222. https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12361

Goodfellow, T., & Jackman, D. (2020). Control the capital: Cities and political dominance, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3716843

Goodhand, J., Klem, B., & Walton, O. (2016). Mediating the margins: The role of brokers and the Eastern Provincial Council in Sri Lanka's post-war transition. *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, *1*(6), 817–836. https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2016.1302816

Hidalgo, F. D., & Lessing, B. (2014). Endogenous state weakness: Paramilitaries and electoral politics in Rio de Janeiro. *NBER Summer Institute, July*, *24*, 24–25.

Hilgers, T., & MacDonald, L. (Eds.). (2017). *Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: Subnational structures, institutions, and clientelistic networks*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108140553

Holston, J. (2009). Insurgent citizenship in an era of global urban peripheries. *City & Society*, *21*(2), 245–267. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-744X.2009.01024.x

Jackman, D. (2019). Violent intermediaries and political order in Bangladesh. *The European Journal of Development Research*, *31*(4), 705–723. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-018-0178-8

Khan, M. (2017). Political settlements and the analysis of institutions. *African Affairs*, *117*(469), 636–655. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adx044

Khan, M. H. (2010). *Political settlements and the governance of growth-enhancing institutions*. School of Oriental and African Studies.

Leal, V. N. (1977). *Coronelismo*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511759802

Leeds, E. (1996). Cocaine and parallel polities in the Brazilian urban periphery: Constraints on local-level democratization. *Latin American Research Review*, *31*(3), 47–83.

Machado Da Silva, L. A. (1967). A política na favela (reedição). *Dilemas: Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social*, *4*, 699–716.

Manso, B. P. (2020). *A República das Milícias: dos Esquadrões da Morte à Era Bolsonaro*. Todavia.

Marten, K. (2012). *Warlords: Strong-arm brokers in weak states*. Cornell University Press. https://doi.org/10.4000/pipss.4050

McGregor, J., & Chatiza, K. (2019). Frontiers of urban control: Lawlessness on the city edge and forms of clientelist statecraft in Zimbabwe. *Antipode*, *51*, 1554–1580. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12573

Meehan, P., & Goodhand, J. (2018). Spatialising political settlements. *Accord*, *4*, 14–19.

Meehan, P. and Lawn, D. S. forthcoming. 'Brokered Rule: Militias, Drugs, and Borderland Governance in the Myanmar-China Borderlands'.

Meehan, P., & Plonski, S. (2017). 'Brokering the margins: A review of concepts and methods'.

Melgaço, L., & Prouse, C. (2017). *Milton Santos: A pioneer in critical geography from the Global South*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53826-6

Mitlin, D. (2020). The politics of shelter: Understanding outcomes in three African cities, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3661561

Murray Li, T. (2002). Local histories, global markets: Cocoa and class in upland Sulawesi. *Development and Change*, *33*(3), 415–437. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00261

O'Donnell, G. (1993). On the state, democratization and some conceptual problems: A Latin American view with glances at some postcommunist countries. *World Development*, *21*(8), 1355–1369. https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(93)90048-E

Otavio, C., & Araújo, V. (2020). *Mataram Marielle: Como o Assassinato de Marielle Franco e Anderson Gomes Escancarou o Submundo do Crime Carioca*. Intrinseca.

Penglase, B. (2009). States of insecurity: Everyday emergencies, public secrets, and drug trafficker power in a Brazilian favela. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, *32*(1), 47–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1555-2934.2009.01023.x

Phillips, D. (2018). 'Lesser evil': How Brazil's militias wield terror to seize power from gangs. *The Guardian*. 12 July ed.

Pope, N. (2020). Brokering an urban frontier: Milícias, violence, and Rio de Janeiro's West Zone (Doctoral dissertation, SOAS, University of London). https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00034168

Rasmussen, M. B., & Lund, C. (2018). Reconfiguring frontier spaces: The territorialization of resource control. *World Development*, *101*, 388–399. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.01.018

Roniger, L. (1987). Caciquismo and Coronelismo: Contextual dimensions of patron brokerage in México and Brazil. *Latin American Research Review*, *22*(2), 71–99.

Sanin, F. G. (2019). *Clientelistic warfare: Paramilitaries and the state in Colombia (1982–2007)*. Peter Lang. https://doi.org/10.3726/b11179

Sarma, J., & Sidaway, J. D. (2020). Securing urban frontiers: A view from Yangon, Myanmar. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *44*(3), 447–468. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12831

Singelmann, P. (1975). Political structure and social banditry in Northeast Brazil. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, *7*(1), 59–83. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X00016667

Sivaramakrishnan, K. (2019). Framing essay: Assembling frontier urbanizations. In *Frontier assemblages: The emergent politics of resource frontiers in Asia* (pp. 131–137). John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119412090.part3

Souza Alves, J. C. (2003). *Dos Barões ao extermínio: uma história de violência na Baixada Fluminense*. APPH', CLIO.

Tilly, C. (2017). *War making and state making as organized crime* (pp. 121–139). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315205021-8

Volkov, V. (2002). *Violent entrepreneurs: The use of force in the making of Russian capitalism*. Cornell University Press.

Wenner, M., Schlitz, N., & Poerting, J. (2016). Ruling an unruly space: "Petty sovereigns" and challenges to state sovereignty in Darjeeling/India. *Geographien Südasiens*, *5*, 25–28.

Wheeler, J. (2014). Parallel power'in Rio de Janeiro: Coercive mediators and the fragmentation of citizenship in the Favela. *Mediated citizenship* (pp. 72–89). Palgrave Macmillan.

Wolf, E. R. (1956). Aspects of group relations in a complex society: Mexico 1. *American Anthropologist*, *58*(6), 1065–1078. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1956.58.6.02a00070

Zaluar, A. (1985). *A máquina ea revolta: as organizações populares eo significado da pobreza*. Brasiliense.

Zaluar, A., & Conceiçao, S. (2007). Favelas sob o controle das milícias no Rio de Janeiro. *São Paulo Em Perspectiva*, *21*(2), 89–101.

How to cite this article: Pope, N. (2022). Militias going rogue: Social dilemmas and coercive brokerage in Rio de Janeiro's urban frontier. *Journal of International Development*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3636