# Hope as a local practice

D A N I E L   N .   S I L V A [a] , L E T I Z I A   M A R I A N I [b]  A N D
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A B S T R A C T

This article discusses communicative strategies enacted by participants of Fa-
veladoc, a documentary-making workshop that the first author attended in
2021. It examines how the participants, who are residents from Rio de Ja-
neiro's Complexo do Alemão favelas, grappled with a shootout that broke
out during a meeting. Based on textual analysis and our ongoing dialogue
with participants, we unpack their semiotic and rhetorical work of avoiding
despair by reorienting knowledge, building socialites, and pursuing resourc-
es. They mobilized generic resources (i.e. discursive and listening genres),
pragmatic strategies (e.g. collective singling out of the area of risk), and meta-
pragmatic moves (e.g. contextual recourse to humor) to assess security.
Through further enacting a distributed embodiment—collective commit-
ments beyond a bounded body—participants facilitated hope as a modality
of action. Finally, their recourse to humor in spite of potential danger reflect-
ed an enactment of communal care that we call a poetics of hope. (Sociolin-
guistics of hope, favelas, distributed embodiment, generic resources, humor).

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Imagine you are attending a community-based documentary production workshop
designed for young people interested in film and its applications to social justice
initiatives. It is March 2021, and Covid-19 continues to spread rapidly because vac-
cines and medication are not yet available. Due to lockdown and social gathering
restrictions, the workshop takes place online, and each participant follows the
class separately from their own device. Wearing a facemask, one of the students
is joining from his mobile phone, sitting on a bench near the adjacent outdoor mar-
ketplace. All of the other participants are connected from their homes. Imagine the
workshop takes place in your neighborhood, and the teacher and students live scat-
tered in the area—if you were to identify each participant on a map, there would be a
wide distribution of their present location. Suddenly, a student interrupts the class to
ask if anyone else hears gunshots. The student sitting on the bench outdoors seems
to be the most vulnerable as being outside increases the risk of being caught in the

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crossfire. Excited about his comment on the topic of discussion, he says he heard nothing. But other participants soon reply affirmatively—they heard the gunfire.

Within seconds, the teacher and students take (overlapping) turns in class, mobilizing semiotic resources, digital literacies, and networks of solidarity to map out where the shots are coming from and check on the safety of the group. One participant claims to be in the area where sounds of gunfire were especially intense. Another participant suggests a different location as the origin of the shots. Asked by the teacher what evidence she has about the point of origin, she responds that it was her colleague, another participant, who told her this, and jokes that the gunshots were all his fault. The shooting seems to have ceased, and the student sitting outside resumes his commentary on the lesson. He notes that his mobile device is running out of battery, and he doesn't want to miss the opportunity to finish his contribution. But he soon hears another blast of gunfire. Everyone once again tries to map out the shots. The noise ceases. A few minutes later, they seem to have singled out the conflict area. Just five minutes after the shots have ceased, the teacher asks: 'Folks, can we go on, are you worried about this shooting, how's it going?' After a few seconds of silence, combining unease and jest, a student says, 'It is ok for me to continue'. Other students alternate in confirming that, yes, the class should go on.

The thought experiment we proposed above describes a situation witnessed by Daniel during fieldwork in Complexo do Alemão, a group of favelas (low-income neighborhoods built by residents) in Rio de Janeiro. If such an extraordinary episode were to happen in most neighborhoods, the frameworks of interpretation and action that the group of young students in this thought experiment relied on would probably not be as 'trained' to deal with the shootout as those described above. It is quite possible that a student sitting outdoors in the given scenario would have lacked the composure to continue providing commentary on the lesson, and might have instead mobilized their interpretive resources to seek shelter indoors, potentially disconnecting from class. Participants in the hypothetical scenario might also have lacked the lightness of mind and foot to 'play' with the unexpected situation during the interpretive work of mapping and weighing risk and safety. Further, many groups would likely reach a different decision about continuing the class. We suppose the interest in the workshop would give way to concerns about the violent event interrupting a routine activity. However, as we discuss below, shootings are a routine occurrence in favelas, emerging as something of a structural heuristic of both violence and everyday life (Cavalcanti 2008; Menezes 2015; Machado da Silva & Menezes 2019; Feltran 2020). By contrast, *favelados/as*[1] have become acclimated if not inured to such quotidian encounters with violence. At the same time, they have developed unexpected—unexpectedly hopeful—ways of coping, surviving, and indeed thriving in spite of such violence through the recalibration and deployment of communicative modes and resources (Menezes 2015; Facina 2022; Lima 2024; Silva & Lee 2024).

In this article, we engage with communicative strategies and reflexive semiotic models enacted by the participants of Faveladoc, the grassroots social activist

documentary workshop that Daniel attended during the Covid-19 peak in 2021. Drawing on an analysis of key moments in the class where the shooting broke out, we suggest that the manner by which the teacher and students in that specific class relied on already conventionalized semiotic and embodied strategies to deal with a situation that is rather recurrent in the neighborhood—that is, the crossfire between police and members of the 'world of crime' (see Franco 2014; Menezes 2015; Machado da Silva & Menezes 2019)—is reflective of a regularly performed rhetorical work of hope. These semiotic and embodied practices, which can be observed in the peripheries of Rio de Janeiro and other spaces made precarious by capitalism and colonialism, gestures to a sociolinguistics of hope (Silva & Lee 2021). In this article, we aim to emphasize that the decision to continue the class in a situation of uncertainty and tension is motivated by a communicative work of hope that has been already at play in this group of favelas. Grounded in Alastair Pennycook's (2010) theory of language as a local practice and the growing work on (in)securitization and language (Rampton & Charalambous 2019; Khan 2022; Milani & Levon 2024; Rampton, Silva, & Charalambous 2024), we analyze the workshop participants' engagement with hope as a collective and embodied mode of survival that is facilitated by specific semiotic practices, including listening and discursive genres, humor, and collective care. These semiotic practices, conducive to what we call *hope as a local practice*, allow residents to navigate spaces that are disproportionately affected by (in)securitization, as we unpack below.

In what follows, we first provide relevant background information to the Faveladoc and the social, political, and economic conditions that the workshop is responsive to. Afterwards, we outline a theory of hope as a local practice based on an engagement with various ethnographic and philosophical approaches to hope. We then present the moment during which the Faveladoc workshop was interrupted by gunfire along with ensuing collaborative discourse represented in the 'hypothetical' scenario above. Afterwards, we analyze how various modes of reorienting knowledge, recalibrating talk, and forging embodied sensibilities were locally productive during this class.

## FAVELADOC

Our study is based on a workshop on documentary filmmaking called Faveladoc. To understand the epistemological and political claims of this activist project, we must briefly describe the ways in which life in favelas is intertwined with racial, economic, and urban inequities in Brazil. Favelas are neighborhoods in Brazil built by their own residents—usually on the outskirts of cities but sometimes also in central areas, like Rio de Janeiro's hillsides favelas. Following the abolition of slavery in 1888, no form of redress was offered to formerly enslaved peoples and their descendants, who therefore relied on squatted land to build their own homes and neighborhoods throughout the country (Valladares 2019). Favelas, as territories inhabited mostly by a Black population, have endured both Brazil's notorious anti-Black racism (Alves 2018), and the related stigma of being 'the dwelling place of criminals who interrupt, actually or

potentially, the routines that constitute ordinary life in the city' (Machado da Silva 2010:297). While before the growth of transnational drug trafficking in the 1970s and 1980s favelas were discussed in elite and political decision-making circles through the register of rights (i.e. residents must be integrated into the city through rights of citizenship), these spaces began to be narrated in the 'language of violence' (Machado da Silva & Menezes 2019), that is, as an existential threat to the 'security' of the city, and as a problem to be 'securitized' (Feltran 2020).

Brazilian sociologist Luiz Antonio Machado da Silva (1999) pioneered the idea that a normative regime emerged in favelas connected to the very dynamics of the 'world of crime'. According to Machado da Silva, who dedicated his life to studying favelas, 'the most stable and powerful part of the drug traffickers in *bocas* ['drug-selling points'], which are almost always based in favelas, have built an autonomous way of life, different from that of ordinary residents, and have become responsible for a social order that subjugates the residents. In this order, actions are coordinated almost exclusively by reference to the scale of physical force' (Machado da Silva & Menezes 2019:532). In response, the state has employed a logic of combat based on a 'war' regime (Feltran 2020), largely constituted of sporadic police raids. The conflict between 'crime' and state yields a permanent state of tension between armed agents, which interferes with the routine and political participation of residents (Machado da Silva & Menezes 2019). In her work on policies of security vis-à-vis the racialization of favela residents, Marielle Franco (2014) argues that the logic of 'security' in Brazil resonates with the 'penal state' (Wacquant 2009), a system of government that disproportionately exposes Blacks and other minorities to policing, incarceration, and marginalization in ghettos. Franco, a Black councilwoman from a Rio de Janeiro favela, would herself be assassinated in 2018, in an act of violence planned and executed by politicians, a civil police chief, and former military police officers in *milícias*, a branch of the 'world of crime' that controls some favelas (Phillips 2024).

Brazil has a majority Black population (56.1%), and wealthier neighborhoods are disproportionately white. In (upper) middle-class areas, residents respond only to the normative regime of the state. Shootings in these places are less frequent, because armed disputes between 'crime' and state tend to be concentrated to the peripheries (see Fogo Cruzado 2023; Silva & Lee 2024). Following the current vocabulary of critical security studies and sociolinguistics, favelas as places inhabited by poor and racialized populations are more vulnerable to *(in)securitization*, a term that designates a set of policing and surveillance practices based on the exceptional logic of fighting an 'enemy' (Bigo 2002; Huysmans 2014; Rampton & Charalambous 2019). In Brazil, historically, this prototypical 'enemy' of security has been the young Black *favelado*, framed as participating in the 'world of crime'.

Part of a grassroots initiative from a favela collective, Faveladoc is a direct response to the cultures of (in)securitization and the criminalization of predominantly Black, low-income communities in Brazil. Faveladoc is a film-making workshop geared toward favela residents, or *faveladas/os*. The workshop culminates in the

making of a documentary on a topic of local interest. It is one of many initiatives implemented by Instituto Raízes em Movimento, an NGO created by residents of Complexo do Alemão that aims to generate knowledge and economic opportunities for favelas, and gather scholars studying peripheries (Instituto Raízes em Movimento 2017). This NGO has been a facilitator for Daniel's entry into the field.

In our analyses, we have tried to engage with the perspective of *faveladas/os* on the politics of knowledge production about peripheries (see Silva & Lee 2024). Usually described as *Nós por nós* 'We for/by ourselves', this perspective suggests that *faveladas/os* themselves want to produce knowledge about their practices (Fabrício & Melo 2020; Souza 2020). One of their aims is to dismantle the longstanding hierarchy between those who produce research and those who are seen only as sources of 'data'. As we are not *faveladas/os,* our adherence to this perspective has meant an intense dialogue with activists, to position them as interlocutors instead of informants. As Tommaso Milani & Michelle Lazar (2017:314) forcefully put it, we are not 'claiming to speak on behalf of "them"'; instead, we are interested in 'fostering research WITH, ABOUT and BY the people involved in our research'. We try to achieve this through a series of initiatives, such as including our interlocutors in the research design, discussing our inferences with them, citing works produced by *faveladas/os*, and even co-authoring works with them (e.g. Lopes, Silva, Facina, Calazans, & Tavares 2017).

It was with this collaborative ethic that Daniel participated in the Faveladoc workshop in 2021. The ultimate goal of this edition of the workshop was to produce a documentary about neighborhood elders. To achieve this, students were socialized into a sequence of classes on the technique of documentary filmmaking and on sociopolitical themes, such as film aesthetics, religion, gender, sexuality, public security, and the history of Complexo do Alemão. Due to the high rate of Covid-19 infections in Brazil in 2021, the first six months of Faveladoc classes were almost entirely taught online. Over the following six months, the students, activists, and other professionals went into the field to shoot the documentary, which is currently being edited. Daniel accompanied the first six months of Faveladoc.

As we argue below, the Faveladoc workshop is exemplary of hope as a local practice. In the class that we analyze, workshop participants engage in collective knowledge production in a time and space where the armed conflict between State and 'crime' is so local and immediate to interrupt and derail their classes. Their orientation and response to violence is localized; that is, it produces hope in the present through networks of collaborative meaning-making, reconfigurations of embodiment, and humor, and in so doing, they produce time-space as an alternative for survival in the here-and-now. This orientation to and production of hope is reflective of what we describe as hope as a local practice.

## HOPE AS A LOCAL PRACTICE

Hope as a local practice involves rhetorical work centered on valorizing local signs (Agha 2007), engaging with practical reason (Bloch 1959/1986), recalibrating

communicative resources (Silva & Lee 2024), reimagining temporality (Borba 2019; Borba, Fabrício, & Lima 2022), and building a collective perspective on survival and flourishing (Lear 2006) that in various ways reframes conditions that would otherwise lead to despair. For Hirokazu Miyazaki (2004:2), hope is a 'methodological problem for knowledge and, ultimately … a METHOD of knowledge deployed across a wide spectrum of knowledge practices'. In discussing different Fijian knowledge practices, in particular the Suvavou people's grappling with bureaucracy and other resources in reclaiming their ancestral land, Miyazaki suggests that hope is a 'radical temporal reorientation of knowledge' (see also Crapanzano 2003). These emphases on methodology and reorientation reimagine static descriptions of the affect and its associations with escapism, wishful thinking, or naive optimism. Indeed, hopeful sentiments are sometimes dismissed as forms of what Lauren Berlant (2011:2) describes as cruel optimism, a relation in which 'something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing'. Though hope in this sense might be inherently irrational, our engagement with hope is not simply beyond reason but instead an active, imaginative, and ultimately practical (cf. Bloch 1959/1986) work of reason. Lear (2006:104) echoes this in his study of the collapse of the Crow Nation, an indigenous peoples in the US, whose community, to withstand the undoing of their way of life, planned modes of survival according to ways of thinking and being 'that [are] at once Crow and [do] not yet exist'. Conceptualized together, Miyazaki and Lear provide the basis of an approach to hope that imagines a mode of survival and thriving against regimes of violence and capitalist exploitation, particularly through discourse and metadiscourse.

Critically, in Monica Heller & Bonnie McElhinny's (2017:260) account of sociolinguistics in the era of late capitalism, they invite their readers to practice the reimaginations of time predicated in hope, particularly by 'walking backward into the future', on a path that changes 'as we reimagine language, land, love, and much more'. The sociolinguistic concept of languaging is of use here to understand hope as produced by communicative practices. Languaging has been theorized in response to the Saussurean understanding of language as a stable system with fixed normative rules. In Humberto Maturana's (1997) pioneering work on the biology of knowing, languaging refers to meaning-making that arises from 'interactions that are historic, recurrent, collaborative, recursive, and contingent' (Magro 2002:217). Through interaction, subjects engage with their (human and other-than-human) interlocutors in emergent communicative and embodied practices that both rely on conventionalized tropes (e.g. genres and rituals) and recalibrate them (see Li Wei 2011, 2018; Canagarajah 2013; Pennycook 2017; Lee & Dovchin 2019).

Following this line of inquiry, Daniel Silva & Jerry Won Lee (2024) propose 'languaging hope' to describe the often unstable and communicative aspect of hope. This view of hope is in alignment with Claudia Blöser's (2019) conceptualization of hope as that which is multiply realizable at the empirical level. That is, '[w]e hope in a great variety of ways' (Blöser 2019:212). As we are engaging

with an educational experience, Ernst Bloch's (1959/1986) description of *docta spes* or 'educated hope' is noteworthy. Educated hope, of course, does not imply that only those who have access to formal education are able to hope. Instead, Bloch (1959/1986:146) frames educated hope along a more general pedagogical sense of educating oneself and others to a 'participative, cooperative and processual attitude'. Educated hope is a practical form grounded in the ethical cultivation of sensibilities and dispositions necessary for the 'intelligence of hope' (Bloch 1959/1986:146).

In secular social formations, hope is typically viewed as merely aspirational; we, by contrast, describe it as practically and empirically consequential. As such, we situate our project in relation to sociolinguistic accounts of what Theodore Schatzki (2001) has described as the practice turn in contemporary theory. For Claire Kramsch (2005:20), practice 'explores not the conditions that make the real world possible, but the conditions that make possible the very exploration of the real world. It is a reflexive form of knowledge on the conditions of possibility of the research itself'. Echoing the appeal of the practice turn, Pennycook (2010) calls for a reframing of language as a social activity that 'constructs locality'. According to him, 'language as a local practice' means 'bundles' of repeated and re-localized communicative activities (composed of both thought and action) that come to constitute the time and space in which, by which, and through which they occur (Pennycook 2010:78). The local then is not a backdrop to the practice, but part of the practice itself. In other words, understanding the complex relationship between language and society can be facilitated by treating locality not as that which shapes language practice, but that which can be produced by language practice.

This conceptualization of localities as entailments of practice is especially evident in various strands of the sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert 2010). Jan Blommaert (2010) notes the importance of viewing language as a set of mobile resources that can recalibrate scales of time and space (e.g. a given language/register/variety can have translocal valuations). Li Wei (2011) presents a theory of translanguaging space to conceptualize how everyday speakers can produce spaces that are conducive to the fluid movement between languages, even in contexts that are conventionally deemed monolingual. Likewise, Suresh Canagarajah's (2013) translingual practice foregrounds how speakers in cosmopolitan contexts draw on a collaborative, community-based ethic while embracing an embodied experience of communication (e.g. drawing on gestures and spatial repertoires) to produce spaces that are amenable to the creative adaptation of language resources (see also Canagarajah 2018). Ultimately, interlocutors in these studies showcase how locality is not constituted by a series of givens (e.g. a given language or variety is spoken in a given locale) but rather how such givens are radically reimagined, which in turn results in the constitution of reimagined social space. If hope, too, can be conceptualized as practice in its repeated reorientation of knowledge, then the spaces that feature this practice are also spaces produced by it: spaces

of hope. In the section that follows, we examine a key moment in the Faveladoc workshop that is exemplary of hope as a local practice.

## BUILDING HOPE AT THE CROSSFIRE

The class we focus on took place on March 20, 2021. It was a Saturday morning. Ten students, the teacher João, plus Daniel connected via Google Meet.[2] The theme was the history of Complexo do Alemão. João initially provided an overview of the social movements in favelas established in the 1960s. The activist commented at length on the impacts on the favelas of the 'Alliance for Progress', an initiative created by the US John F. Kennedy administration to bolster capitalism in Latin America against the advance of communism, including the removal of some communities and the urbanization of others. Currently planned favelas such as Vila Kennedy and Vila Aliança are a result of this anti-communist policy. Alexandre, the only student following the class from outdoors, asked to comment on the influence of the United States on Brazil's war on drugs. While he spoke, Katia interrupted him, asking if a shootout was occurring. Excerpt (1) is our description of the first interruption of the class by the sound of gunshots.[3]

(1)

| 1 | Alexandre: | É, e eu queria dar uma dentro ((*explosão: som de bomba ou tiro*)) |
|   |   | 'Um, and I would like to jump in ((*explosion: sound of bomb or gunshot*))' |
| 2 |   | pra puxar- fazer esse mesmo (.) paralelo né, geral-particular |
|   |   | 'and pull- draw the same (.) parallel, right, general-particular' |
| 3 |   | ou seja, Estados Unidos (.) Brasil (.) Brasil-favela |
|   |   | 'that is, United States (.) Brazil (.) Brazil-favela' |
| 4 |   | (0.7) |
| 5 |   | É, a questão das drogas nessa época (.) |
|   |   | 'Um, the issue of drugs at that time (.)' |
| 6 |   | porque:: (.) um dos planos ((*gritos aos fundos*)) dos dos Estados Unidos nessa época='because:: (.) one of the plans ((*shouts in the background*)) of the United States at that time=' |
| 7 | Katia: | =gente |
|   |   | '=guys' |
| 8 |   | (1.2) |
| 9 | João: | Oi |
|   |   | 'Yeah' |
| 10 |   | (1.0) |
| 11 | Katia: | Tá dando tiro? (.) |
|   |   | 'Is there a shooting?' |
| 12 | Alexandre: | Não, aqui na Grota não |
|   |   | 'No, not here in Grota' |

As seen in line 1, a sound of gunfire (or an explosive) could be heard while Alexandre talked, yet he did not notice it. After Katia's interruption to ask the group if anyone had heard the shots (line 7), he confirms not having noticed the shots in Grota, the favela where he was located (line 12). Yet as documented in excerpt (2) below, there is an immediate reaction by the participants to collectively attempt to single out the location of the gunfire.

(2)

| 13 | Katia: | Falaram que já tem    [duas pessoas baleadas |
| | | 'They said    [two people have already been shot' |
| 14 | João: | ((*olhando para o celular*)) [mas quem falou que é na Central? (.) Quem falou que foi na Central?'((*looking at the cell phone*)) [But who said it is on Central Street? (.) Who said it was on Central Street?' |
| 15 | | (1.7) |
| 16 | Katia: | o- o- Lu- (.) o Luan (0.6) |
| | | 'Lu- Lu- (.) Luan (0.6)' |
| 17 | Manu: | Eu tô ouvindo daqui, cara. Eu moro em frente à Central |
| | | 'I hear it from here, man. I live in front of Central Street' |
| 18 | Katia: | ((*conversando com interlocutora em casa*)) O João perguntou quem foi que falou que tá dando tiro na Central'((*talking to some interlocutor at home*)) João asked who was the one who said they were shooting on Central Street' |
| 19 | Katia's interlocutor: | foi o Luan, tudo culpa do Luan (.) ((*som de clique*)) |
| | | 'it was Luan, it's all Luan's fault ((*a click sound*))' |
| 20 | Manu: | Acho que se fosse na Fazendinha eu não ia tá escutando tão alto assim não aqui onde eu moro'I think if it was in Fazendinha I wouldn't be hearing it that loud, here where I live' |
| 21 | | em frente à Grota |
| | | 'in front of Grota' |
| 22 | Alexandre's phone: | ((*Voice coming from the fair*)) |
| 23 | Katia: | Pega a visão na Grota, hein ô Lu- ô Alexandre |
| | | 'Watch the view in Grota, you Lu- you Alexandre' |
| 24 | Alexandre: | Tá bom (cara), eu tô tranquilo aqui |
| | | 'It's okay (man), I'm calm here' |
| 25 | | É:: (.) vou continuar porque minha bateria tá acabando ((*half-laugh*)) e eu tô sem carregador aqui'Um:: I'm going to keep going because my battery is dying ((*half-laugh*)) and I don't have a charger here' |

Excerpt (2) exemplifies a moment when participants collectively mobilized their geographical knowledge about the neighborhood alongside other semiotic resources to identify the area of risk. As we discuss below, establishing the 'referent' (i.e.

the origin of sound) of the sign (i.e. gunshots) was an essential survival strategy. To perform this, they relied on sharing information via online and offline networks and on semiotic strategies, including the perception of sound across the hilly neighborhood. Examples of their resorting to online and offline networks are João's looking at his cellphone (line 14)—most likely interacting with Danilo, another activist from Raízes em Movimento, whose input would appear later in the interaction—and Katia's interaction with a colleague at home who was not a participant of Faveladoc (lines 18–19). As for the first attempts to single out the origin of sound of gunshot, we see Manu suggesting that the sound could not have come from locations like Fazendinha (lines 20) because in places like Grota (line 21) and Avenida Central (line 17) the sound had been more perceptible to him. Further, as they tried to single out the shooting area (lines 14–21), participants performed other actions, such as joking about a person who was to be blamed for the shootings (line 19, see description later in this section), and expressing concern for a more vulnerable participant (i.e. in line 23, Katia warns that Alexandre should be careful about potential shots in Grota).

In line 24, Alexandre responds to Katia's concern by saying that he feels safe. As we document in excerpt (3), he then decides to resume his comment about the influence of the US on the urbanization of favelas. Between excerpts (2) and (3), we omit one minute and fifty seconds of his resuming the explanation, which is interrupted in line 27 below.

(3)

| 26 | Alexandre: | Então na década de 1970 a gente tinha em média 20 mil ((*olha para o lado*)) viciados nos Estados Unidos ((*abaixa*)) (1.0)'So, in the 1970s we had on average 20 thousand *((looks to the side))* addicts in the United States *((bends down))* (1.0)' |
|---|---|---|
| 27 | | Olha aí o tiro, rapaziada ((*olha para o outro lado*)) <br> 'Watch out the gunshots, fellas *((looks to the other side))*' |
| 28 | | O tiro tá pegando <br> 'There is shooting' |
| 29 | | ((*2.22 minutes omitted*)) |
| 30 | João: | oi, oi Alexandre, fala= <br> 'Hey, hey Alexandre, you can talk=' |
| 31 | Alexandre: | =minha bateria tá acabando, só pra eu finalizar aqui <br> '=my battery is running out, just so I can finish up here' |
| 32 | | ((*4.12 minutes omitted*)) |
| 33 | João: | É:: gente, dá pra continuar <br> 'Um:: folks, can we go on' |
| 34 | | vocês tão tenso com esse tiroteio, como é que tá? <br> 'are you worried about this shooting, how is it going?' |
| 35 | | ((*5 segundos de silêncio*)) <br> '((*5 seconds of silence*))' |
| 36 | Manu: | ah aqui tá suave pra mim ((*riso*)) (1.5 sec) continuar <br> 'it is okay (lit: smooth) for me ((*laughter*)) (1.5 sec) to continue' |

| 37 | Katia: | [Pra mim também |
| | | '[For me too' |
| 38 | Branca: | [Pra mim tá de boa continuar |
| | | '[For me it's okay to keep going' |
| 39 | João: | Perfeito, então eu vou continuar |
| | | 'Perfect, so I will continue' |
| 40 | | É:: na aula passada eu tinha falado um pouco, voltando pra dentro do |
| | | Complexo do Alemão, especificamente…'Um:: in the last class I had |
| | | talked a little bit, going back to Complexo do Alemão, specifically…' |

Alexandre was sitting outside, with his cell phone running out of battery, and didn't want to miss the opportunity to discuss a subject that was important to him. But he was then surprised by the noise of a new burst of gunfire (visible as he bent down, line 26, and by his alerts of danger in lines 27–28). In the following 2.22 minutes (line 29), which we omit for the sake of brevity, participants resumed the collective practice of mapping the geographic scope of the shooting.

In lines 30–31, we note that the sound of gunfire had now ceased, and Alexandre once again asked João if he could resume his remarks. The following 4.12 minutes that we omit (line 32) are an exchange between Alexandre and João about US actions in policies for favelas. João then decided to ask the class if it would be okay to continue (line 33). Note that by asking if the students were 'worried about this shooting' (line 34), he acknowledged that the group had been facing a destabilizing event. The seconds of silence that followed (line 35) seem to indicate both the habitual time that students take to respond to questions by teachers and an additional moment of personal assessment about risks and emotional conditions for concentration. Manu broke the silence (line 36), and his somewhat playful comment, that it is *suave* 'smooth' to continue, invokes the liminal space of humor to deal with everyday uncertainty and precarity, as we elaborate on below. Immediately after his comment, Katia and Branca overlapped their talk, both stating that it is okay for them to continue the class too. As we describe below, the engagement of participants with these semiotic strategies, alongside generic resources and digital technologies, entailed a collaborative ethic of care, which is at the heart of hope as a mode of survival, as we outlined in the theoretical section above.

### Generic resources of hope

If we return to excerpt (1), it is important to note that what follows Katia's interruption is an attempt to collectively single out the area where the shooting might be occurring. In empirical terms, participants interactively mobilized their geographic knowledge about the hilly and sprawling landscape of the twelve favelas that make up Complexo do Alemão, alongside other semiotic resources—including their perception of the shape, duration, and intensity of sound, digital literacies, and

evidence gathered from their solidarity networks—in order to circumscribe the area of risk. We want to suggest that generic and habituated forms of listening that had already been cultivated in favelas allowed them to act quickly before a dangerous scenario. By 'generic forms' we refer to both speech genres (Bakhtin 1979/1986) and listening genres (Marsilli-Vargas 2022) that *faveladas/os* have crafted over the years to deal with the crossfire between the state and the 'world of crime' (see also Menezes 2015; Silva 2022). Mikhail Bakhtin (1979/1986:60) defined speech genres as 'relatively stable types of … utterances' that grow in complexity as a given social field becomes more intricate. In addition to their relative thematic, formal, and stylistic stability, genres 'consist of orienting frameworks, interpretive procedures, and sets of expectations that are part of … the ways actors relate to and use language' (Hanks 1990:135).

A direct response to regular armed conflicts, residents have developed a discursive genre based on collaborative knowledge-making referred to as 'digital rockets', coined by Complexo do Alemão activists Mariluce Mariá and Kleber Silva (see Silva & Maia 2022). Digital rockets are quick signals (e.g. a warning on social media or on an instant messaging app) that residents relay to others to warn that a shootout is taking place and that further action is required. The phrase draws on the rockets that drug traffic lookouts would fire into the sky when a police raid was imminent. Upon noticing the rockets, residents know that it is necessary to be cautious. Mariluce and Kleber use their Facebook page to signal warnings about areas of risk, but residents and activists also organize WhatsApp groups and other digital resources to warn residents all while mounting evidence of potential human rights violations by the state (Silva & Lee 2024).

In this Faveladoc class, participants relied on a similar set of 'orienting frameworks' yielded by digital rockets, swiftly mobilizing the generic 'interpretive procedures, and set of expectations' that this genre affords. Further, participants demonstrated having mastered a particular listening genre (Marsilli-Vargas 2022), namely the habituated assessment of the proximity, shape, and duration of gunfire. Xochitl Marsilli-Vargas (2022:38) explains that a listening genre is a framework of relevance 'that surfaces at the moment of reception and orients the apprehension of sound'. Contextually, participants differentially perceived the explosions as 'gunshots' and performatively produced apt modes of acting, feeling, and speaking.

Our point is that, given these generic resources, Faveladoc participants demonstrated disposing affordances for dealing with the risk situation in practical ways. In other words, these generic and routine affordances were critical for participants to quickly assess that risk was relatively manageable and that continuing with a collectively beneficial routine was more important than ending the class in the face of uncertainty. Thus, the participants enacted a politics of relational work based on what Cheryl Mattingly (2010:216–19) names 'hopeful plot', that is, a 'temporary' and 'tenuous' narrative framework where despair is avoided and practical ways of collective flourishing amid precarity are devised (see Fabrício & Borba

2024). In this hopeful plot, Faveladoc participants tailored communicative affordances to yield an ethic of collective care. They thus rendered the scenario of precariousness and uncertainty into a backdrop from which further modes of reorienting knowledge, building collective socialites, and pursuing material and symbolic resources could emerge.

### Distributed embodiments of hope

It might seem paradoxical to engage with the theme of embodiment in an analysis of a primarily virtual workshop. Participation in technology-mediated communication or interaction, after all, whether a phone call or even a virtual meeting with 'cameras on', will perhaps feel 'disembodied', especially when compared to an in-person alternative. Yet we are aware of scholarship that has long attended to the possibilities of alternative embodiments in digital spaces (e.g. Taylor 2002; Dovchin 2022). In our present analysis, our excerpts compel us to treat embodiment as a central element of language and communication (Bucholtz & Hall 2016). As Mary Bucholtz & Kira Hall (2016) note, dichotomous framings of the 'virtual' vis-à-vis the 'real' as they shape digital communication contexts do not account for the overlapping relationships between the two realms. Reasoning along similar lines, Rodney Jones (2009) argues that digital media are not merely representations of embodiment but can in turn have a reflexive impact on embodiment (cf. Scollon 1998).

More recently, scholars have noted the agentive role of digital technologies in shaping human embodiment as a distributed phenomenon within social interaction (Pennycook 2017; Canagarajah & Minakova 2022). In other words, by treating embodiment as distributed, it is understood to be not merely experienced within an individual's physical body. Embodiment is rather treated as ecologically diffused across a range of bodies, objects, and digital technology affordances. This collective embodiment is evidenced, for example, in the sequence of interaction that follows a moment when João asks Alexandre, the ostensibly most vulnerable participant in the group, to tell him exactly where he is located. In the exchanges of talk we transcribe in excerpt (4), observe the collective construction of Alexandre's location (simultaneously) performed by himself and his colleague Katia.

(4)

| 41 | João: | Aonde você tá, Alexandre? (.) |
| | | 'Where are you, Alexandre?' |
| 42 | Alexandre: | eu [tô na boca da Grota |
| | | 'I [am at the mouth/entrance of Grota' |
| 43 | Katia: | [o Alexandre tá na Grota |
| | | '[Alexandre is in Grota' |
| 44 | | (1.6) |
| 45 | João: | Tão entrando na Grota, ô Alexandre? |
| | | 'Are they entering Grota, hey Alexandre?' |

| 46 | Alexandre: | Não, [eu tô na feira |
| | | 'No, [I'm at the fair' |
| 47 | Katia: | [O Alexandre tá na boca da Grota, na feira |
| | | '[Alexandre is at Grota's entrance, at the fair' |
| 48 | Alexandre: | [Eu tô na boca da Grota na feira |
| | | '[I'm at Grota's entrance at the fair' |
| 49 | | (2.0) ((*indecipherable voices/noises in the background*)) |
| 50 | | Eu tô tranquilo aqui |
| | | 'I'm calm here' |
| 51 | | aqui tá meio seguro ainda |
| | | 'It's a bit safe yet' |
| 52 | Katia: | Em frente a antigas Casas Bahia, o Alexandre tá |
| | | 'Alexandre is in front of the old Casas Bahia' |
| 53 | Alexandre: | É, eu tô aí mermo |
| | | 'Yeah, I'm right there' |

Katia reveals knowing Alexandre's precise location—the entrance of Grota, at the fair, in front of the old Casas Bahia store. It is important to emphasize that excerpt (4) refers to one of the tensest moments of the class, that is, the seconds immediately following Katia's question, or indirect announcement, about the shooting in the neighborhood. The fact that Alexandre did not mind the superimpositions to his speech by Katia—who sometimes produced a specular talk (de Lemos 1985) by uttering the same locative signs that Alexandre did (e.g. lines 42–43 and 46–48)—suggests that he heard her intervention not as an interruption of his talk but as a co-construction of the reference about the risk area. Further, the fact that she had privileged information about Alexandre's location—which neither João nor Daniel possessed by just viewing the student's Google Meet screen—shows that Alexandre and Katia are on their mobile devices contacting their networks. Note that in line 52, Katia provided an even more precise account of Alexandre's location—in front of the former Casas Bahia store. Alexandre, in line 53, confirmed that this was exactly where he was. Interestingly, Katia herself initiated the speech act in line 52—which we could describe as a performative act of singling out a precise referent.

In line with our take on embodiment, Katia's initiative, alongside the specular discourse (de Lemos 1985) she co-produces with Alexandre, suggests that, in that moment, his body, so to speak, is part of a collective body that all participants needed to care for. In that moment of tension, the notion of individual bodies taking care of themselves appears to be of little validity. The embodiment of the group was, in other words, distributed, so that the vulnerability of one participant triggered Katia's simultaneous engagement in delineating his geographical location. As we have discussed, this practice is coupled with other equally important practices, including the generic assessment of risk and decision on further action. The simultaneous specular discourse we described in excerpt (4), in addition to other moments of interaction in this Faveladoc class, reflect how, for participants, hope is a mode of

survival practiced as a necessarily embodied phenomenon, collectively realized through a shared commitment of collaborative care. Further, the distributed work of swiftly singling out the geographical location of a vulnerable participant builds on the aforementioned collaborative knowledge-making strategies and reflects an elaborate ethic of care.

### Humor as a poetics of hope

The analysis of the swift singling out of the area of risk, the distributed embodiment, and the discursive and listening genres mobilized by the participants suggests that these subjects were equipped with important means of grappling with this extraordinary situation. Yet an intriguing semiotic resource, humor, also emerged frequently in that nervous scenario. While normally we would not expect laughter during a shootout, we infer from our description above of the generic resources for coping with the incident that the group's habituated practice of hope made room for humor to emerge as a relational element in some specific contexts. In other words, contextually, humor and laughter were employed as relational strategies that, through the deliberate reconfiguration of verbal messaging, turned '[t]he zone of laughter [into] the zone of contact' (Bakhtin 1976:36). For example, when the sound of gunshots first interrupted João's lessons, the workshop's participants began to check in on each other, inquiring about the location of the shooting and one another's safety. In the midst of the commotion, João asked, 'Folks, can we go on? Are you worried about this shooting, how is it going'? (lines 33–34). The question was followed by five seconds of silence before Manu responded, 'It's okay for me ((laughter)) (1.5 sec. pause) to continue' (line 36). Manu's affirmation—which the group echoes in their uptake—is heralded by laughter, which here creates cohesion and makes it possible for others to chime in and affirm that they, too, are willing to continue, bound together by a collective sociality produced by laughter.

It is important to note that, in line 36, Manu pauses for 1.5 seconds after laughing, suggesting that the ambivalence of the decision still had to be worked out, and adds *continuar* 'to continue'. It is only after his addition that an uptake of other participants (Katia and Branca, lines 37–38) emerges matching his bright and lively, albeit ambivalent, tone. Indeed, Bakhtin (1976:36) explains that laughter combines 'the contradictory and incompatible … and they come to life as a linkage'. Not only, then, do workshop participants themselves assemble on the occasion of Manu's laughter, but the time and space they inhabit itself is reformulated through it—by laughing halfway through his thought, Manu inserts syncope into his affirmation, linking together the threatening present with the potentiality (Agamben 1999) for survival. While danger and safety appear 'contradictory and incompatible', Manu combined them when he laughed before his affirmation to continue, and in so doing, he forged a space of hope that his companions could inhabit. Importantly, it was humor that carved out the space for participants to echo Manu's agreement to

proceed. It is not, then, just a component of his affirmation, but the condition for the affirmation to be spoken—laughter dispelled tension, facilitated relations, and made continuing possible.

But laughter and humor should not be mistaken for passive coping mechanisms, and they may rupture, as Donna Goldstein (2013:4) describes in her ethnography of violence and resistance in a Rio de Janeiro favela, 'the rigidness of … hierarchies and tightly woven webs of power'. Manu was thus not laughing to escape from a dire reality, but projected his laughter as oppositional, 'directly into the teeth of suffering' (Goldstein 2013:16). Likewise, humor functions similarly to subvert the grip of power and confront the uncomfortable. When João asked Alexandre to mute himself so that Jean may speak, he teased, 'Turn down the microphone a little because the fair is coming in here'. Phrasing his remark as a joke allowed him to soften his reminder to Alexandre that the virtual workshop is a collective space where the voices of others should be heard. But more subtly, the joke empowered João to give voice to the unspeakable demand for the outer threat to stay at bay.

Thus, his humor adopts the attributes of a performative, whereby, as Judith Butler (1997:145) says, 'Language takes on a non-ordinary meaning in order precisely to contest what has become sedimented in and as the ordinary'. This, according to Butler, gives performatives their political potential. By talking in jest about keeping 'the fair' from entering their shared space, João charged his speech with an extra-ordinary contestation to the ordinary—the power to continue despite the pressure of the circumstances.

In this sense, while Michael Billig (2005:202) distinguishes between two forms of humor, 'disciplinary' and 'rebellious', the former which maintains social order through ridicule and the latter which seeks to challenge it, the constitutive power of humor as seen in the workshop seems to be something otherwise. While rebellious humor for Billig aligns itself with rebelliousness by mocking 'the rules' (2005:202), Manu and João orient humor relationally, forming community through banter and laughter and, in so doing, producing a space where hope and survival are possible. In this sense, we are inspired by Pedro Silva Rocha Lima's (2024:3, 10) proposal to focus 'on what humorous practices do for the performer, rather than the target of humor', building on his configuration of laughter and mockery as tools to 'uplift the [subordinate] performer' as the 'knowing subject' in power hierarchies. To this function we would add that humor can additionally be a tool to form communities of performers at the margins of power. The humor in question in Faveladoc, then, performs the reversal and resignification of its object—the very production of this space into one of hope is possible when Manu and João, through laughter and humor, reclaim it as such.

At play is what we might term a 'poetics of hope'. Poetics has long focused on the features of aesthetics and their consequences (Culler 1975; Jakobson 1987). Roman Jakobson pioneeringly singled out the 'poetic function of language', one of several linguistic functions he identifies as constitutive of verbal messaging, which does not operate on its own but entails the form of the message itself

(Jakobson 1987:72, 73). Our attention to poetics takes to heart José Esteban Muñoz's (2009:1) claim that aesthetics is a mode by which to glimpse and enact alternative temporalities of hope through 'being … [and] doing toward the future'. We additionally acknowledge the dimension of *poiesis*, or creation, immanent in what Fred Moten in *A poetics of the undercommons* (2016:24) calls 'social poetics: a constant process where people make things and make one another'. To describe the strategies of survival of Faveladoc participants as a poetics is to recognize the aesthetic conventions that make hope possible, and the deliberate discursive and creative choices made in its production.

The intentional deployment of humor in the workshop requires particular attention to form, as laughter hinges on the composition and delivery of a joke to produce, as we saw, a social space of hope and subversion of power. For instance, when Faveladoc participants first attempted to locate the shooting, João asked, 'Who said [the shooting] was on Central Street?' (line 14) to which Katia responded, 'Lu-Lu-Luan' (line 16). She then turned to address an interlocutor at home, 'João asked who was the one who said they were shooting on Central Street' (line 18). In response, her interlocutor gave evidence of the person who had provided the information and joked about his responsibility, 'It was Luan. It's all Luan's fault' (line 19). The joke is a hyperbolic assertion. To be humorous, Katia's interlocutor toyed with the poetic function of her response, first answering the original question, 'it was Luan', and then enlarging her answer, changing it to the present tense and scaling up to credit Luan for 'all'. This move deliberately introduces humor into the workshop space not by digressing, but by changing the way in which participants may address the threat of the shooting—and notably, Katia's colleague did this poetically, shifting her communicative purposes from content alone to the form of her delivery.

All in all, Manu, João and Katia's interlocutor enacted what Goldstein (2013:5) calls 'humor [a]s one of the fugitive forms of insubordination'. The joke and the laugh function as rhetorical interruptions in the otherwise linear mode of normative communication; they disrupt temporal and spatial orders, performing hope that gestures to the fringes of an oppressive reality and that, channeled by laughter, refuses subjugation. Through humor, these participants calibrated hope in the present. They further transgressed the threatening enclosure of reality without escaping it, reconfiguring it instead into a locus of survival that can be believed in.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we examined how young students and their teacher, residents of the Complexo do Alemão favelas in Rio de Janeiro, performed a set of discursive and metadiscursive moves in a situation of imminent risk. The group was caught off guard by a shootout during a meeting of the documentary film workshop they were attending online in 2021, during the peak of Covid-19 in Brazil. Based on an analysis of excerpts from this meeting and our ongoing dialogue with the participants, we found that they deployed generic resources to make sense of the extraordinary

event. To assess the safety of the group and gauge the duration and proximity of gunshot sounds, participants mobilized discourse and listening genres (e.g. 'digital rockets'). To circumscribe the shooting area, they engaged communicative resources that facilitated mapping the geography of risk. To reorient affective dispositions, they made recourse to humor as a 'zone of contact' (Bakhtin 1976:36). Further, they collectively produced a distributed embodiment, that is, a mode of action in the face of danger that did not mean individual decision-making about risk, but collective commitments that went beyond a bounded individual body.

An important inference about this generic, local, and relatively stabilized framework of action in dealing with an unexpected and potentially dangerous situation is that it facilitated hope as a modality of embodied action that has had important political impacts in the peripheries of Brazil. Ethnographic studies in Rio de Janeiro have illustrated that the permanent tension between armed regimes in favelas brings to residents' feelings of immobility (Menezes 2015) and silences their political demands (Machado da Silva & Menezes 2019). Mariana Cavalcanti (2008:37) suggests that stifling of political action also results from the temporality of the shootouts, as residents experience time 'as nearly waiting for the next incident'. Yet, instead of an incapacitating temporality characterized by the anticipation of fear and despair epitomized by the shootout as an effect of Brazil's necropolitical (Mbembe 2019) realities, the discursive and metadiscursive action of the Faveladoc participants yielded a temporality experienced as an *encruzilhada* or crossroads (Borba et al. 2022) between embodied creative action and the generic shielding from crossfire. As may be noted both in the humor that emerged in moments of tension and in the collective decision-making about continuing an important class, the Faveladoc participants sidestepped despair (Lear 2006) and reoriented knowledge (Miyazaki 2004). They thus opened up a timespace of hope amidst precarity—that is, while critically assessing the safety of the group, they expanded their affective and cognitive capacities, rather than succumbing to despair. Their production of communicative and affective localities of care is exemplary of the rhetoric work of hope.

## APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

We have utilized Jefferson transcription conventions throughout.

| | |
|---|---|
| (.) | micropause |
| (0.7) | timed pause, long enough to indicate a time |
| (( )) | analyst comments |
| - | cut-off |
| = | indicates that there was no pause between sentences |
| [ ] | overlapping talk |
| :: | stretched sound |

## NOTES

[1]*Favelado* (male), *favelada* (female), and *favelade* (nonbinary) are terms that have been reclaimed by favela residents. Literally, they mean 'resident of favela', but historically they have also been used as offenses in (upper-)middle-class contexts. At the same time, in contexts outside the favela, the word *comunidade* 'community' has been used euphemistically to refer to the favela (Birman 2023). However, residents and activists, despite having used them in the past, have increasingly avoided the terms *comunidade* and *morador de comunidade* 'community resident', instead using the terms *favela* and *favelado* (and their morphological inflections). This can be seen in the academic production (Franco 2014; Souza 2020) and everyday languaging of residents and activists. Further, in response to demands for linguistic resignification from *favelados/as*, IBGE, the institute that carries out the demographic census, adopted the term *favela* in 2023 (Athayde 2024).

[2]All participant names in this study have been anonymized at the request of the workshop leader and other participants.

[3]Transcription conventions can be found in the Appendix.

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