

# The deliveries cannot stop: Ecological (dis) advantages and socio-spatial safety tactics against predatory crimes among Brazilian couriers

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**Abstract** In this article we discuss the reactions and responses of Brazilian motorcycle couriers (*motoboys*) to the risk of predatory crimes. We show that they work two simultaneous and overlapping “shifts”: the first involves carrying out their professional responsibilities, and the second, reducing the opportunities for victimization presented by those responsibilities. We analyse the socio-spatial tactics they adopt with a view to optimising security. These involve restricting their interactions and negotiations with neighbours and customers, as well as with criminals to guarantee that the deliveries are made and also to manage the various risks associated with working in different ecological areas. We explore the effect of these tactics on their activities, on labour relations and on attitudes to their customers in the delivery business. It concludes that both negotiation types point towards a process of expanding interactions, creating alternative distribution networks and seeking methods of protection against risks that cannot be overcome simply by the couriers protecting themselves.

## Introduction

Motorcycle couriers (*motoboys*) are a prominent feature in urban settings in Brazil. More numerous and less discrete than their North American and European equivalents, motoboys not only transport documents but deliver a vast range of other consignments, ranging from medicine to groceries, including bottled mineral water, and even cash, credit cards and mobile phones. The growth of these services make this job highly attractive for young adult males in particular.

However, it is a fatal attraction, or nearly so, due to the characteristics of this activity. The tremendous pressure brought to bear on motoboys by businesses and

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individual customers to deliver fast [9, 15, 16] leads these workers to engage in risky behaviour that, together with conflicts with motorists, contributes to fatal and non-fatal accidents [9, 15, 16] making motoboys the leaders in the national accident rankings [27].<sup>1</sup>

Although the anxiety caused by these accidents overshadows the risks of victimization by predatory crime in the actors' narratives, the risks constitute a second burden because motoboys are attractive targets—because of their vehicles, consignments and personal belongings—as they lack the means to protect themselves. In this sense, the handling and carrying of cash, working in traffic, the wide radius of trips made daily [32], public stigmatization and a lack of police protection create a chronic deficit in vigilance that they must make up for in order to do their job and deliver consignments. What defences do they use? What are the possibilities and limitations of the repertoire of defences used to protect themselves from theft, robbery and assault?

This is a line of questioning that harks back to the role of vigilance in the prevention of predatory attacks aimed at exploiting opportunities created by the routine activities of individuals and social groups [6]. Considering that these opportunities involve the availability of valuable targets and the presence of capable guardians, the lack of the latter leads to the more frequent victimization of targets that are most vulnerable to attack [4, 6] unless they vary their routines [14]. According to this situational approach, individuals who take care of a house, family members, co-workers, friends and even strangers in the street are more likely to act as 'capable guardians', because they are more frequently present than law enforcement [6, 13].

One of the limitations of this theoretical approach is that although it recognizes the importance of social bonds, common interests and shared responsibilities to engage in capable guardianship [6, 14], it does not deepen the discussion of the effects of changes in these bonds of security among individuals and groups in different social and spatial contexts. This aspect, outlined by the theory of social capital [7], was further expanded in the theory of collective efficacy [41]. They affirm that the level of crime in neighbourhoods depends on the willingness to act on behalf of social control. According to this line of reasoning, the theory of ecological advantages [45] qualifies the influence of collective efficacy on the basis of the ecological or spatial position of places in terms of opportunities and means of social crime prevention. In addition, this theory highlights two other aspects that are important in this study: the processes of negotiation between licit and illicit actors regarding expectations of retaliation and willingness to take action to stop crime [45].

The activity of vigilance includes primary and secondary defences aimed at making crime less attractive, riskier and more difficult for the perpetrators [14]. These defences are carried out before or after the presence of a threat is detected through the procedures of hiding, dissuasion, overcoming, discouragement and direct opposition of adversaries [14]. While most of these defences depends on one's own resources, and is therefore confused with what the literature calls self-policing [38, 42], other defences depend on the resources of peers or even the resources of other groups as happens in secondary symbiotic defence [14].

<sup>1</sup> There were 130,526 accidents with victims involving motorbikes in Brazil in 2004 [12].

Our argument in this paper is that motoboys seek to satisfy their need for capable guardianship through multifaceted interventions on the levels of individual, inter-individual and inter-group defences, which vary according to the places where consignments are delivered. To the extent that the ecological advantages and disadvantages of each of these places for the perpetrators and victims of predatory attacks [45] that shape the need and form of capable guardianship, these defences can be viewed as restrictive and expansive socio-spatial tactics [25]. These tactics are based on pragmatic adaptation to situations, the exploitation of existing possibilities for vigilance and the construction of alliances between licit and illicit actors that can play the role of capable guardians.

## Fieldwork

The fieldwork for this paper was conducted in 2004 and included 53 interviews (sub-divided into 32 semi-structured and 21 unstructured interviews) and 15 h of observation of situations involving the work routines of motoboys, union meetings and rallies, public hearings, technical conferences and meetings with traffic police. The individuals interviewed included motoboys, three owners of motorcycle delivery businesses, the president of the motorcycle couriers' union and the commander of a special traffic police unit.

The criteria for selecting motoboys for this study were: the length of time they had been on the job, the type of labour relations involved, and the products they deliver. In addition, we established a minimum time of six months on the job and a maximum of one year away from this kind of work to get more up to date accounts. As for labour relations, we included both informal workers and workers from the formal market—either subcontractors or motoboys directly hired by a company. With regard to deliveries, we contacted workers from markets, pharmacies, car spare part shops, retailers, post offices, notary offices, and areas in the vicinity of establishments where they tend to gather when waiting for consignments, engaging in an active social life, in several parts of the north-east Brazilian city of Salvador, Bahia.

Contact with the motoboys was made in three different ways: approaching them in the street and conducting unstructured on-the-spot interviews, getting recommended names from their union, and using the 'snowball method': asking interviewees to name colleagues who could be contacted for further interviews. The interviews were either conducted in one of the researchers' cars or in shopping centres, and averaged 90 min. The names of the interviewees and the places they mention in statements quoted in this paper have been changed for their own safety.

Among the 53 workers interviewed, the socio-demographic data for 32 individuals shows that they were predominantly male, black/mixed-race, had finished secondary school and were married with children. Just 6 of the interviewees were unmarried. The average age of those interviewed was 30 to 38 years. Nine subjects were under 30, and 6 were over 38. The youngest interviewee was 22, and the oldest was 49. All the motoboys interviewed worked with their own motorcycles, and just 4 had vehicles which were insured. All of them lived in low-income districts in the city of Salvador. As regards their working relationships, 17 were directly hired by a company, 11 were freelancers and 4 were subcontractors. Three of the interviewees worked at night as mototaxi drivers.

As for motoboys who have been crime victims (56% of the sample), two had had their motorcycles stolen, eight had been the targets of attempted robberies and eight had been robbed. Two of the latter had been robbed more than once. Instead of feeling powerless because of this high level of victimisation [36], motoboys expressed self-confidence and faith in their own defences to confront the dangers and threats of daily life.

### **Salvador; an overview**

The city of Salvador is the capital of the northeastern state of Bahia. It has a population of 2.4 million, the third largest Brazilian city after São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Salvador covers an area of 706,8 km<sup>2</sup> and is located on a broad peninsula between the All Saints Bay and the Atlantic Ocean and is divided in three zones: the Bay area (the area of poor, older suburbs running along the coast inside All Saints Bay); the Coast line (the area of rich, newer suburbs running along the ocean coast outside All Saints Bay); the Middle area (the large strip of land between these two waterfronts, much less densely inhabited, and characterized by new, poorer suburbs).

Home to three industrial parks (all of which lie outside the city limits), metropolitan Salvador is the largest industrial center in the northeast of Brazil and has the largest petrochemical complex in the southern hemisphere. The state of Bahia is known throughout the country for its African Brazilian heritage, its colonial architecture, its beautiful beaches, and its characteristic food and music. Despite its somewhat exotic reputation, the city is in many ways like the rest of the country and has one of the largest gaps between the rich and the poor of any country in the world. Thus, economic inequality is a major feature of life in Salvador: the number of people living below the poverty line is very high, 30.9% in 2004, higher than the rate of 25% for the country as a whole. The unemployment rate was 26.0% and the number of workers in the informal sector was estimated at 44.9%, between 2003 and 2004. The poor population suffer from infant mortality, substandard housing, poor education, child labor, disease, and violence

Indeed the levels of violence are very high in Salvador and its surrounding area. The homicide rate reached 49.3 per hundred thousand in 2010 and these acts tend to prevail in the poorest areas (the Bay and the Middle areas) and among black adolescents and young adults (85.0%). Armed robberies, car theft, express kidnapping and other kinds of predatory crimes are common, increasing objective and subjective insecurity and reinforcing the use of self-policing and private security and the social approval of police violence. In such an environment, the development in the last two decades of illegal drugs and fire arms markets has taken off and disseminated the use of lethal violence.

### **The work of motoboys**

Introduced in 1984, the work of motorcycle couriers, or motoboys, has increased dramatically in Brazilian cities. It is estimated that there are currently about 7,000 motoboys in Salvador alone, whereas in São Paulo, there were 160,000 motoboys on the streets in 2000 [31].

This surge in growth has resulted from the convergence of the need for deliveries on congested roads, and the possibility of meeting this need cheaply. If these services were expensive, the supply and demand would be smaller, more selective, and focused on specific items, as is the case in North America and Western Europe.

Effectively, high unemployment rates and the ease with which motorbikes can be purchased (a small down payment and the rest in up to 60 installments), associated with the possibility of increasing one's income by moonlighting and working overtime, has encouraged male workers to take part in this activity.

Unlike other activities in which employers provide the tools of the trade, most companies employing motorcycle couriers require them to own their own vehicles and equipment [31, 47]. Labor relations include a direct formal contract with the main company, outsourcing and freelancing. Although it is forbidden by law, chain subcontracting is a common practice and contributes to the precarious nature of the job because it is based on the absence of legal labor obligations and low wages. Most motoboys are not officially registered as employees of the courier company, preferring to work freelance with all the risks that this entails; no medical cover, sick pay, etc.

Their work routine is divided into four stages: waiting for consignments, receiving them, driving to their destination and making the delivery [33, 40]. While waiting for orders from the establishments they work for, they make minor repairs to their vehicles or do odd jobs at the business establishments. The deliveries are assigned as a job lot or as individual deliveries and are generally accompanied by pressure to do the job quickly. The third and fourth stages are the most likely to involve victimization through accidents and crime.

Speed and risky maneuvers on the road are part of the third stage. The need to make speedy and punctual deliveries, increasing their incomes through higher productivity, and the thrill of high-speed driving characterize this stage. Conflicts with motorists are also inherent to this type of work. Conflicts arise from the differences between motorcycles and cars [40] and the behavior of drivers and motoboys. Driver conduct is related to frustration with sluggish traffic and the nuisance caused by motorbike riders who flout the rules of the road [15, 16]. In turn, the motoboys' conduct results from their assertive and aggressive driving style and an occupational culture that glamorizes everyday dangers and traffic violations [15, 16, 31, 47].

As we will show in this study, this sort of activity also helps structure opportunities for the victimization of motoboys by criminal elements. Despite the dangers they face and the services they provide, motoboys are stigmatized and demonized for their behavior on the road, as well as for violent crime and drug trafficking involving bikers. Therefore, workers express serious distress at being mistaken for or seen as criminals, and view this and the abuse they suffer at the hands of the police as the cruelest aspect of their occupation.

### **Restrictive socio-spatial tactics**

Individual and inter-individual restrictive defences used by motoboys are designed to prevent forced interactions [23] with hostile individuals and environments and, in

extreme cases, counter-attack threats and dangers presented by those individuals and environments. These restrictive defences are suited to specific ecological areas, such as routes to and from delivery sites and places with escape routes. In such areas the criminals are not in full control of the situation or their actions can be neutralized through different tactics. Restrictive defences aimed at preventing the theft or robbery of the motorbike, consignment or personal belongings include using anti-theft devices, disguising motorbikes to make them look older, screening recipients' addresses, the selective use of uniforms, making deliveries in pairs, taking special precautions with more valuable consignments, making planned and unplanned changes in their routes (escape routes) and suspending deliveries in high-risk urban areas.

In addition to being careful where they leave their bikes, motoboys use devices to prevent the theft of their vehicles, such as alarms, locks and chains. They sometimes even remove engine parts to prevent their bikes from starting. These procedures, which hamper theft and make the vehicles less attractive targets [6], are fed by two important aspects: first, the existence of an illegal market for stolen motorbikes and spare parts which is driven by predatory consumption [31, 49] by other bikers and even the motoboys themselves. To reduce the cost of those goods, these actors encourage predatory activities against individuals and groups that own them [34]. Second, as is the case of three-quarters of car owners in Brazil, most motoboys do not insure their bikes against partial or total loss, and run the risk of losing their jobs if they cannot buy another vehicle because, as some interviewees stated: 'no bike, no job'. However, taking such precautions is not enough to prevent motorbikes from being stolen and carted off in a utility vehicle, or even 'bikejacked' in traffic.

I was always really careful to avoid getting robbed...for example, I kept my bike dirty all week, I'd take off the side covers and the tail [part of the motorbike], I'd leave just one rearview mirror on or buy an old one...but when I went out with my girlfriend, I'd clean it all up and give it a wax job...then it'd look real pretty.... Because when a bike attracts too much attention, it's a target for thieves (Carlos, 30).

A second measure commonly used to prevent motorbike theft and robbery is reducing the target's relative value and visibility by imitating [14] older, worn-out vehicles. This is done by covering them with stickers and decals, removing parts and keeping them dirty [31]. The aim is to reduce the value of the opportunity [4] so they are less tempting to thieves, even if it means giving up—albeit temporarily—the social status and narcissism associated with owning a shiny new vehicle. However, these strategies do not put off criminals interested in dismantling motorbikes and selling their parts.

Screening customers' addresses is a common practice among both the businesses and the motoboys themselves and also works as a proactive measure [22, 42] against robbery. Screenings are carried out by checking the telephone book, phone companies, consulting co-workers, telephoning customers to locate their addresses, verifying identities and doing an in-depth background check to determine risks associated with certain users [42]. However, this procedure can be neutralised by bogus customers and imitators [14, 18, 42] who place orders and supply addresses that seem correct, but then rob motoboys through a practice known as *troles* (hoaxes or cons): *sometimes we're also robbed on deliveries involving trotes. It happens a*

*lot. A guy places an order, gives the right address, and when we get there, the guy is waiting in the street to rob us (Edu, 23).*

Manipulating identity through camouflage is a defence that is often used when carrying high-value consignments. This sort of camouflage involves the selective use of uniforms and equipment with a view to reducing visibility [14, 25], avoiding identification and hiding associations [42] with establishments that deliver cash, cheque books, telephone cards, tickets and other items. However, this practice is not devoid of ambivalence. Although workers feel proud and safer when wearing uniforms and rucksacks bearing their companies' logos, they prefer to wear their own clothes instead of their work uniforms when transporting more valuable consignments so they look like other motoboy and thereby less obvious to would be aggressors [14].

While this practice is a good way of not attracting the unwanted attention of criminals, the same cannot be said of the general public and the police. Un-uniformed motoboys attract suspicion and are discriminated against by passers-by. As for the police, whose presence pose an added risk for these workers [40, 42] because of the stigmatization of motoboys and abuse of authority by law enforcement, they are more likely to stop and search un-uniformed motoboys, causing them to waste time and subjecting them to abuse [40]. This strategy for reducing visibility includes the unadvisable habit of stopping at home for lunch whilst carrying consignments, which is still common practice in this part of Brazil.

I have a friend who works at Bank T. Some guys staked her out for a week, and when she got home, they broke in through the front door and threatened her. She was going to have lunch—it was noon—and then she was going out to deliver checkbooks and bank cards. She said she didn't have anything [of value] but they knew she did. They just took the backpack full of checkbooks and cards.... She called the police and they managed to catch three of them and found out that they were a gang of swindlers. She had to move out the same day and get a new haircut, change her number, because those guys knew everything [about her] (Edu, 23).

Working in pairs, where a motoboy is accompanied by an acquaintance riding behind him on the bike, is a form of group defence [14] against motorcycle theft by duos of criminal bikers. Because these criminals often have faster vehicles, mobile phones and firearms to carry out their activities these types of crimes have been termed 'violência pau de fósforo' ('matchstick violence'). Even if the motoboy has to pay someone to accompany him, this practice—which dramatises the fear many people feel when seeing two on a motorbike—would ward off criminal elements by signalling that the motoboy is prepared to fight back. However, working in pairs has the same disadvantage of raising the suspicions of the public and attracting the unwanted attention of the police:

There are some activities where we work in pairs, and this is how: sometimes, when I'm delivering invitations at night, I phone a friend of mine, give him some money, and he goes along with me on my delivery route... Why do I do it? For my own safety. I might be stopped a thousand times [by the police], but I'll also be safe... Because robbers will think I'm one of them, and they won't want to stop me, and they won't rob me... The criminals out there won't touch me! (Luis, 30).



In addition to this form of group defence, motoboys also use the so-called emerging social support defence mechanism [14]. Based on solidarity—derived from working conditions, stigmatization and a sense of vulnerability, and a reactive concept of masculinity—the emerging social support defence mechanism is expressed by forming support groups for co-workers involved in conflicts in the streets: *This profession is very united, and if a motoboy is involved in a fight with a driver, [all the other motoboys in the vicinity] will side with him* (Renato, 26). This sort of behaviour makes motoboys particularly fearsome. However, despite being a common occurrence in conflicts with drivers, the emerging social support is not a significant defence against violent and sudden attacks.

When carrying cash and more valuable consignments, these workers use techniques to hide and throw off pursuers which are similar to those used to disguise themselves and their vehicles. Aside from wanting to avoid the loss of personal property and injury, motoboys are held responsible for their consignments [36] by the establishments they work for: they are considered suspects and run the risk of losing their jobs and receiving negative references which would make it very difficult to get another job in that business [40]. As said the Presidente of the Motoboys'Union:

When something like that happens [the cash a motoboy is carrying is stolen], there is a huge chance that the motoboys will be accused of faking the robbery and even lose his job. We're going through a "saidinha bancária" epidemic [a type of crime where people are followed and robbed after making a bank withdrawal] and companies insist on exposing motoboys to that risk [10].

This line of defence is expressed in the special precautions taken when handling and transporting cash inside and outside banks and to and from business establishments, which are the most dangerous sub-activities involved in deliveries according to these workers. They try not to attract the attention of criminals who are usually on the lookout in banks, keeping an eye on withdrawals in order to rob potential victims, such as motoboys and other customers as soon as they leave the bank. With their employers' consent, motoboys who handle this sort of delivery tend to set a limit on the value of each cash consignment. This practice, which means that they have to travel multiple routes, both fragments and increases the time it takes to complete their tasks and the cost.<sup>2</sup> The third procedure involves hiding cash in several compartments, such as pockets, rucksacks, etc., to prevent a total loss if robbed. This and other solutions are summed up in this statement:

Lots of times, when I deliver cash, I put the consignments in rucksacks, and have someone ride along with me to throw people off; I also set out at different times so I don't attract too much attention. And I never wear the shirt with the company logo, or carry the company's rucksack (Paulo, 49).

One of the drawbacks of this, which has so far been overlooked by the specialized literature [14] involves one of the dangers the motorbike delivery services fear the

<sup>2</sup> Motorcycles do an average of 33 km per liter of petrol, which is a 100% saving compared with the most economical Brazilian cars [33].



most: infiltration of predators inside the company who pass on information that enables their cohorts to rob other motoboys.

The motorbike couriers who carry the most cash usually get to the bank between 3 or 4 pm, near closing time. What happens is...when they leave the company, you'll see a biker pull out in front of them and [think] nothing of it... [then] further ahead, when they're about to overtake him, he says it's a robbery.... That's because he already knows you're carrying cash because somebody told him and said which days you carry the most money, understand? (Lucas, 27).

One solution is keeping secrets from one's co-workers. Another involves ingenious tactics that are a combination of speed, surprise and audacity when driving motorbikes and manoeuvring on public roads.

Like other groups that move about in high-risk areas [25], motoboys also change their routes so that they do not become easy targets for predators during their runs. These changes include making planned changes in their itineraries to alter their routine activities [14] or make their schedules and destinations less predictable [25], as well making unplanned changes to avoid dangerous encounters [24, 35] and armed confrontations.

If driving cars enables motorists to overcome the risks of violence associated with spatial divisions [25], this does not apply to the use of vehicles in professional activities [18]. In the case of motoboys, despite the greater mobility and better view of the surroundings afforded by their vehicles, they carry valuable items and follow more rigid and identifiable routes than non-professional drivers [25]. However, the very routines that facilitate the organisation of labour can become a risk factor. Thus, the greater the restrictions on changing these routines due to business hours, and the more risk there is of infiltration by criminals, the greater the need to change the motoboys' itineraries. The business may even decide to transport sensitive consignments by car.

In these cases [robberies], they already know what we're carrying. That happened to a co-worker of mine at the company. So I had to change my entire itinerary and schedule...every day I'd take a different route at different times, sometimes I wouldn't take the mail pouch...sometimes I'd just carry documents, [and the] cash and cheques would go by car, because those guys knew all the ins and outs. The crook would give them the motorbike license, the colours of the bike, a description of each one of us, what we were carrying, the exact schedule, everything...sometimes it's an inside job, especially where bank workers are involved (Edu, 23).

Motoboys' spatial competence and street wisdom [1] and sophisticated knowledge of the urban ecology [45] help them to identify the movements of suspicious bikers and inform unplanned route changes in a game of what can be called hide-and-seek with would-be robbers. The motoboys' motto here is 'better safe than sorry': *We get suspicious when we see two guys on a bike...anything out of the ordinary, anything that seems suspicious, you really have to change your route, you have to drive into a place, pretend you've stopped, that you're going to talk to someone, ask for directions...do anything to avoid being robbed...* (Carlos, 30).

The idea is to discourage attacks while mobilizing the defences of other actors, including security guards and police officers, to ward off attackers [14]. When they spot motorbikes with two riders idling near a traffic light in an area where many motoboys have been robbed [40], they either slow down or speed up to avoid stopping beside the suspicious bikers. Other socio-spatial tactics used in these situations include entering side streets, approaching a group of people, stopping and pretending to ask for directions, going to the other side of the road and even going through red lights [40]. Whilst driving, motoboys also stay away from bikes with two riders, and do not go to their aid in case of accidents, despite the strong solidarity with their co-workers mentioned before [31]. When they have the slightest suspicion they are being followed, they head for areas where security guards or police officers are present. In addition to increasing the risk of accidents, these manoeuvres are useless when criminal bikers ride faster vehicles, have the same sophisticated knowledge of the urban ecology and use the cover of night to ambush – sometimes stretching wire across the road to trip them up.

The biggest dangers are robbers and working at night. It's tricky because you can't see who's hiding behind a [street] pole, for example. The risks are even bigger in the daytime. They'll string a wire across the street to catch the courier by the neck, and when we crash they take the bike, or there are two men on a bike near a traffic light, one points a gun at you and the other robber jumps off of the pillion and onto the courier's bike and takes off with it. It happens all the time (Milton, 35).

When they are ambushed, the motoboys only option is submission or flight [8, 14, 28, 48] or later refuse to make deliveries in high-risk areas in the first place. The determining factors underlying escape attempts, whether successful or otherwise, include fear of being held responsible by their companies, which leads workers to take rash action to protect their consignments [40]. They also include perceived chances of success, as well as unexpected emotional responses [35]. Let us take a look at four escapes from dangerous encounters. In one, the fact that the would-be robbers showed little power of dissuasion [8, 28, 48] led a pair of motoboys to attempt an escape that could have got them shot. In the second and third encounter involving the same motoboy, he attempted two risky escapes from the same pair of robbers. The first attempt was frustrated when they fired a warning shot, and in the second, seeing no way out and apparently desperate, he ran his bike into a ditch. During his fourth escape attempt, a motoboy who had withdrawn nearly USD 5,000 from the bank was chased as far as a gas station by two men on a motorbike armed with two guns. He hit two pedestrians and fell, at which point the criminals threatened and robbed him [10].

Flight is also the main defence used when workers inadvertently enter a high-risk ecological area that has been transformed into a battleground between criminal gangs, or between gangs and the police. In high-risk situations like these, the workers find a safe place to hide and/or return to the company without delivering the consignment.

### **Suspending deliveries**

High-risk behaviours are socially modelled by relationships of power and negotiations between actors with unequal powers to impose, accept or avoid certain

behaviours codified as risky [39]. Thus, among the complex dynamics involving the presence of and responses to risks [3], we should also turn our attention to the resistance by individuals and groups to risk.

In the context studied here, the focus is on the behaviour of motoboys who refuse to do deliveries to ecological areas where they have already been the targets of attacks or threats of predatory assaults. While there is some consensus between workers and business establishments with respect to the other socio-spatial tactics used, this is not the case with suspending deliveries altogether. Because this tactic threatens the flow of consignments and the precarious balance between risk-accepting and risk-avoiding behaviours, workers usually avoid suspending deliveries, and their establishments frown on that practice. In the spirit of their activity, the key is to ensure that consignments are delivered on a regular basis so as not to lose customers, no matter what methods or sacrifices may be required. The motoboys' audacious stance of taking risks and undergoing predatory attacks is reinforced by the threat of losing their jobs. Therefore, although most of the interviewees expressed a desire to stop making deliveries in high-risk ecological areas, they generally try to overcome their fears and keep working.

In TD1 [district], when I went there for the first time, I went into a bar and they warned me that I couldn't ride through there with my bike because they [the criminals] didn't allow it. If I tried to, they'd kill me or take my bike.... So when the bar owner told me that, I got scared. I almost didn't go ahead, either on foot or on my bike...I nearly took a hike.... But because this is the job we have to do, and it's our responsibility to find [delivery points].... I couldn't give up, I had to serve the customer, I had to go there.... That's because sometimes the supervisor will call the company and ask, "Was the salesman there?" And if the customer says, "No," that's it! Then my head is practically on the line [he could lose his job]... (Jose, 34).

However, this approach can change depending on the seriousness of the dangers and threats, leading workers to openly or surreptitiously suspend deliveries. Taking the line of day-to-day resistance [43], motoboys use plausible lies, such as claiming that they were unable to find their customers' addresses due to the rough and irregular urban layout in order to avoid confrontation with their delivery establishments. *When it's in a dangerous area, I make up an excuse. I say I couldn't find the house, and the company calls the customer up and asks them to pick up the consignment* (Marcelo, 22).

In contrast to this surreptitious procedure, several interviewees were more assertive: *I refuse to make deliveries in dangerous places. The company doesn't do anything about it* (Zivaldo, 28). This stance could also be viewed as a form of resistance to the establishments' refusal to accept responsibility for the risk of employee victimisation [36]. This was the case with one interviewee, already mentioned, who stopped making deliveries in an area where he had been threatened with robbery.

As for the establishments' positions, the continued resistance of their workers and negative public visibility of high-risk areas could induce them to agree to suspend deliveries.

Some pizza parlors refuse [to make deliveries] when the area is too dangerous. In some cases, even the delivery man says he won't go there because he might

not come back, or at least his bike won't. He tries to explain, but if the boss wants him to make the delivery and he's on the payroll, he has to do it (Fábio, 22).

We've been in situations where we drove into a neighborhood and smack into a shootout between crooks.... We go straight back to the drugstore and don't make the delivery. We do the same thing with pizza deliveries, because I think our lives come first and our jobs second. Most of the time, our bosses don't think that way....they get upset when we do that, but when they see the newspaper report the next day, they decide not to make any more deliveries to those neighborhoods.... Because we stood up for ourselves and refused to go there, they preferred not to accept the orders so we wouldn't have to say no... (Ramon, 33).

Taking a proactive line in risk management, some companies—such as pizza delivery chains and pharmacies—not only suspend deliveries to less safe areas but produce computerised risk maps of hot spots, marking some areas with skulls to help with delivery decision-making.

The company won't make deliveries to dangerous areas, and makes up some excuse like a flat tire or says the bike broke down until the customer gives up and stops ordering (Durvalnilton, 32).

I worked for a bus company, and there were some places I have managed to cut [from my route] and not deliver tickets to, because I was afraid to go there. We'd talk it over with the manager, and he'd eliminate some places and flag them as dangerous... In P., there was a place that was a drug den and we had to steer clear of it because it was too risky... Once I went to deliver a bus ticket and there was a shoot-out between cops and robbers going on when I got there. From then on we started charting the risky areas of Salvador and stopped making deliveries there. Today the people who work there are real lucky, because they don't have to go to certain places thanks to the work we did, eliminating the danger zones (Valdir, 31).

Unfortunately, the latter initiatives are not commonplace. First, this is because of the major differences between companies in terms of sales strategies, risk management and the availability of security technologies. Secondly, refusing to make numerous deliveries makes motoboys lower their defences, underestimate the seriousness of the risks involved and because of the survival imperative make deliveries in areas that are just as dangerous as the ones they had refused to enter, or even more so [18].

An overview of this and the other restrictive defence tactics examined in this article demonstrate the diversity, flexibility and adaptability of motoboys given the ecological (dis)advantages of the perceived dangers and threats in certain urban spaces. Furthermore, it shows that despite the tremendous burden shouldered by these workers, their defences are compromised by expected and unexpected outcomes [42]. The sporadic and unpredictable nature of restrictive individual and inter-individual defence mechanisms stands in contrast to the greater continuity and predictability of expansive inter-group defences.

## Expansive socio-spatial tactics

While the specialized literature on crime reduction stresses the role of restrictive defences and vigilance by licit actors [14, 44], the social world of motorbike delivery activities in major Brazilian cities like Salvador points towards less orthodox defences. These involve complete interactions [19] and negotiations with illicit actors to manage random crime [45] or prevent attacks by lone predators. Such negotiations, which aim to achieve capable guardianship by illicit actors, are very much present in ecological areas where the other, the criminal controls the territory and restricts the movements of people, goods and services. Given these circumstances, individuals who want to enter and move around a gang-controlled area must comply with some obligations and requirements imposed by the gangs in order to gain their trust ('respect'), special authorization [5] or protective credit.

If on the one hand suspending deliveries is hard on motoboys and the companies they work for, on the other, gang members also suffer, they are interested in keeping up the flow of deliveries because both they and the local residents depend on them. In turn, the need for territorial control requires restricting access and the movements of strangers, particularly drivers of cars and motorbikes, to provide protection from attacks by adversaries. The 'guys' protect themselves from rival gangs by using efficient observation and communications devices, firepower, and in some cases, curfews.

From the motoboys' standpoint, arrangements to receive protective credits are a bold initiative, but at the same time they represent submission to the lopsided relationship between the actors and the type of concessions made. These arrangements can also be viewed as a break with the principle of restrictive, individual and inter-individual defences, due to the fact that motoboys are reliant on vigilance provided by 'the guys'. The search for safety is not linear but involves gains and losses. Permission to enter gang-controlled areas involves accepting restrictions on one's freedom to come and go at will, on the use of safety equipment and way of riding motorbikes. Consequently, motoboys are not allowed to go about wearing helmets and motorbikes and must pay for protection. In some cases, only motoboys who live in or are already known in gang-controlled areas are allowed to make deliveries there.

Stripping themselves of their main means of individual protection—their helmets—is the first requirement to be met. In these ecological areas, motoboys must meet the same requirements as they do when entering financial and commercial establishments and residential buildings [9, 40]. The risks involved in riding without a helmet; accidents, fines and getting wet are viewed as being less serious than failure to comply with traffic laws and regulations. Ironically, the headgear that ensures protection for some is viewed as a threat by others, because it favours anonymity [21], and can therefore be dangerous to its wearers.

In a dangerous area, the first thing you have to do, what I do, is go in without a helmet... When I reach the entrance to the main street, I take my helmet off. It doesn't matter if you get a ticket or have an accident... I do that right away to protect my own health [meaning his life] (Márcio, 33).

In [districts] O, T and X you can't drive around with a helmet—you have to sling it over your arm.... If you wear a helmet [that covers] your face, to them, you're the enemy.... So every time I went there, right at the entrance, I'd sling my helmet over my arm.... Even when it was raining, we had to wear our helmets on our arms, or wait for the rain to stop so we could do our route... (José, 34).

In some areas this justification is not entirely groundless for the local gangs which control them because a helmet could disguise an enemy, a police officer or a member of a rival gang.

In one place, before they let me in, the crooks made me take off my helmet because they thought I was a cop... Sometimes they'll frisk you, like the cops do, and make you lift up the seat [of the bike].... They have guns in their belts.... All the time I'm praying to God.... Then you really lose it [get nervous]... They don't even draw their weapons, they just show them to you, so I'm less nervous around crooks than with cops.... But it makes you want to go home and never go out again...it ruins your day.... You remember that gun; it sticks in your mind. It takes a good while to forget that (Caio, 30).

Despite these restrictions, several interviewees observed that the local gangs are more flexible about deliveries of prescription medicine. The gangs do not want to be held responsible for any harm that might come to ill people due to a lack of medication, because it could hurt their image in the eyes of local residents. After checking the motoboy's credentials, inspecting their rucksacks and determining that their documents are in order, they will allow them to make their deliveries and even help the workers find their customers' addresses.

You just have to wait till they come out and see what the problem is.... you open your satchel and show them you're working. When we can prove that we're working, it makes things easier. Especially when it's medicine...it's easier to work that way because they treat you with respect when [you're delivering] medicine.... Then they let you through right away, they even take you to the [customer's] house and everything, they even help out... They even helped me out once, helped me find an address late at night, but it was scary! (Valdir, 31).

Payment extorted by gangs to allow motoboy to enter, move about in and stay in certain urban spaces is a widespread pattern in many Brazilian cities [29, 35, 37]. The agents of such extortion could be beggars, street vendors, informal car-watchers, clandestine guards and neighbourhood gangs. In the latter case, the cultural capital represented by reputations based on violent crime [46] is used as part of a strategy of diversified activities that includes obliging individuals and groups that live in or move about in the areas they control to pay them for protection.

In these high-risk ecological areas, people's freedom to come and go depends on their ability to pay a *pedágio* (toll) or protection rent [46] in the form of cash, food stamps, bus passes, etc. Many people set aside some money for that purpose [18, 35], which is called 'dinheiro do ladrão' ('mugger's money'). Refusal to pay is

viewed as an offence and a pretext for the extortionists to go ahead and rob their victims or even physically assault them.

Sometimes we'd be on our way to visit our customers and we'd hear that familiar line: 'Gimme some money!' Then they'll let you through. Sometimes they're armed.... That's what it's like, you see? So sometimes we couldn't say no, because they're waiting for us to say no as a sign of disrespect, and they could even rob you, take everything you have... So it's better to pay up, you see? At least, now they know me a bit better in that area, in case I have to go back (Ari, 30)

This sort of extortion is such a common part of the motoboys' daily routines that it is even viewed positively: a way of becoming better known, winning people over and making their jobs easier. In the process, demands for payment sometimes cease, or the amounts are reduced and even replaced by requests for favours.

Once, a patient ordered some medicine and I had to go and deliver it, and I came across these guys: "Where are you going?" "Man, I'm delivering some medicine..." "No! Turn around.... To get past us you have to leave two reais [Brazilian currency] here so we can buy some bagulho [drugs]..." I went and did what they said, because by cooperating with them, I was doing my job... (Rui, 46).

Once he has become a familiar face to a certain gang, the motoboy begins to merit 'consideration' and enjoy the protection that acts as a means of dissuasion and protection against others, including gang members and lone predators:

When I started working down here, I didn't know anybody, so I'd drive by and the kids [would say]: 'Gimme some money so I can buy weed, gimme a real [Brazilian currency] so I can buy some more weed here...' I didn't know many people there, so I was scared of being mugged... I saw them smoking weed, and I was scared, so I'd pay up... But now that I know them, they all know me, so now I don't have to pay any more...and they don't ask anymore...and if they see somebody try to mess with me, they don't let them... That's because I know all of them now. I've made friends with everybody. Kids, adults, everybody likes me... (Pedro, 31).

Initial contact between the motoboy and the gang paved the way for a mutually beneficial relationship that could have resulted in further extortion [46] but resulted in the acquisition of capable guardians that reduced the motoboy's vulnerability.

Finally, when 'the guys' only allow known or trusted motoboys into a given area, those who are not allowed to enter inform their establishments of the problem and, under their direction, find and make contact with those with the right qualifications for the job. The consideration and trust derived from familiarity replaces the other mechanisms for giving motoboys protective credentials and even dispensing with the need for paying protection money, thereby helping stabilize transactions and benefiting the actors involved: *I've escaped several times because I know the guys where I live and they don't rob me. When I saw they were going to mug me I'd say hi and 'what's up?' so they didn't rob me because I'm local* (Cassandro, 22). Here, as in many social realms, informal relationships that have been either casually established



or are based on a third party's recommendation, are one of the most efficient credentials [30] for obtaining the protection of capable guardianship.

The availability of capable guardians to make crime less attractive, more risky and difficult for its perpetrators is broader and more varied than that predicted by the theory of routine activities [6]. In addition to licit actors, as we will later see, the demand for guardians by potential victims, such as motoboys, can be met by illicit actors, such as criminal gangs, as long as they have other priorities, do not view the workers as a threat or can turn that demand into a source of income. For the potential victims, pragmatic adaptation to the ecological disadvantages represented by the presence of these or other illicit actors involves negotiating capable guardianship without regard to whether those guardians are licit or illicit.

### **Protective social network**

Considering the chronic deficit of guardianship for motoboys, the expectations and obligations created and cemented by social ties with local residents also play an important role in providing security for them. Although the influence of these expectations and obligations on crime prevention should not be overstated—particularly crimes considered serious, such as robbery and drug trafficking [45]—they are effective when providing guardianship for other activities, such as deliveries, without incurring the risk of retaliation by criminal elements [45].

The mobilization of this type of social capital takes the form of obtaining and communicating information, providing guardianship for individuals and assets, and direct or indirect aid for deliveries in areas where workers are prevented from doing their jobs. Neighborhood social networks are the main source of information for charting risks, assessing threats and determining the rules for moving about in a given space, such as the previously mentioned requirement that motoboys are not to wear helmets. This was the case with a motoboy who also works as a public sanitation inspector. When he entered an unsafe neighbourhood, a passerby warned him to remove his helmet so he would not be confused with an enemy, which could have been fatal.

Taking these and other restrictions imposed by criminal gangs into account, life would be hard or even impossible without protection of property [45] that neighbours also provide. As a result, when motorbikes are banned from entering certain areas, the motoboys also turn to the local residents they trust to put their vehicles and personal belongings away out of sight for safekeeping. Meanwhile, they have to make their deliveries on foot, which means spending more time on each task, losing money and enduring physical and psychological stress.

In addition to this logistic support, motoboys can also count on local residents for help in redistributing deliveries to their neighbours [17]. As banal as it might seem, this practice works as an informal socialisation of risks, responsibilities and tasks that alters the characteristics of the motoboys activities and changes their role in the realm of supply and demand. Following this logic of flexibilizing the delivery chain, motoboys delegate some of their activities to trusted local residents, merchants and leaders, who become links in the chain of communication with clients and, in many cases, asset guardians. In this case, residents voluntarily take on tasks typically

performed by motoboys, such as identifying and contacting customers, and storing and delivering consignments. It is worth repeating that making deliveries through local residents ensures that deliveries get through, saves time and prevents criminal attacks.

In the M district there's a school that's off-limits to us. So we have to deliver supplies to that school to the principal of another school because a teacher [from the off-limits school] goes there every afternoon....so we leave an additional number of pamphlets there and the teacher fetches them and does our work for us...takes them [to the other school] (Luis, 30).

Deliveries are similarly dealt with in a flexible way in the case of items requiring proof of receipt, such as registered letters. Because experiences of co-workers who have been robbed make it inadvisable to deliver these items directly, motoboys send messages to the recipients, asking them to pick up their orders or correspondence at the establishment's headquarters, which is yet another innovation in this field of activity [9, 15, 16, 47].

In the Q neighbourhood, there is a residents' association where I leave unregistered mail. When a letter is registered, I leave a note asking the customer to pick it up at the post office. The postal service does not deliver them [directly to customers] because several bike messengers have been held up.... If we do go [to make the delivery], we will have to ask for directions and run the risk of being robbed (Edvaldo, 43).

This type of risk socialization does not end here, as both the recipients and their acquaintances also come into play. In the case of residents in the areas mentioned here, faced with the choice of being blacklisted by business establishments because they live in high-risk areas or having to wait longer for deliveries or leave home to collect them, customers prefer the second option. More specifically, these arrangements, which can be made over the telephone or through third parties, involve establishing delivery sites considered satisfactory from the standpoints of safety and distance, or using intermediaries from whom the recipients can pick up their deliveries—shops, residents' associations and even representatives of government agencies.

Therefore, it can be said that the mobilization of capable guardianship from out-group actors makes the motoboys' expansive socio-spatial tactics relatively more enduring, continuous and predictable than the restrictive socio-spatial defences and tactics based on individual and in-group resources.

In short, if the theories of routine activities [6], social capital [7], collective efficacy [41] and ecological advantages [45] call attention to the positive influence of social ties in the supply of capable guardians, the results of our study show that that influence is generalised and widespread in the activities of motoboys in Salvador. The extensive presence of this influence, which is surprising by European and American standards, is due to the availability of social capital and the importance of deliveries for residents of the ecological areas analysed here and the lack of retaliation by criminal elements present in those areas against the capable guardianship of motoboys. In this regard, their situation stands in contrast to that of workers [18, 20, 42] for whom this sort of capital is less available, either due to

greater self-sufficiency or less mutual support among individuals [2, 7, 11], which leads them to rely on their own resources and occasionally those of the State's social control agencies for protection.

## Conclusions

The motoboy occupation is plagued by uncertain and dangerous working conditions that include perpetual fear of traffic accidents and public disdain. Yet also importantly and of central interest to this study, is the ever present risk of victimization by marauders seeking to harm them in a variety of ways. In this paper through the ingenious solutions and multiple informal defensive strategies devised by motoboys to prevent predatory crime, we have discussed the possibilities and limitations of the effectiveness of such defenses in reducing the number of attractive opportunities available for the perpetrators of such crimes.

Attesting to the importance of this focus, our interviews with motoboys have shown that that they work two simultaneous and overlapping "shifts": the first involves carrying out their professional responsibilities, and the second, reducing the opportunities for victimization presented by those responsibilities. In addition to involving additional effort and professional and financial losses that are not compensated by their employers—which therefore represent a pernicious form of exploitation in the service industry—this second "shift" also has important and unique characteristics that lie at the heart of some of today's criminological debates about crime prevention [14, 45].

Given the centrality of the concept of space in studies of crime, part of this debate focuses on defenses related to the use, organization and recognition of urban space by perpetrators and potential and actual crime victims [6, 41, 45]. Along these lines, and going against normative and hegemonic statist approaches, our argument has underscored the significance of informal defenses for the capable guardianship of these workers. Within a broader view of policing—seen here as a tool for maintaining collective arrangements that may be desirable or undesirable, illegal or legal—some of these defenses fall into what has been categorized as self-policing [38, 42].

Taking into account the spatial references that influence attractive opportunities for predatory criminals, we classify these multiple informal defenses as restrictive and expansive socio-spatial tactics. Notable for their sensitivity, potential for coverage and supplementary nature, these tactics depend on creative measures taken by actors in response to the ecological (dis)advantages of urban spaces in the course of their activities. Therefore, restrictive socio-spatial defenses are appropriate in areas such as thoroughfares and places with escape routes where the other, the criminal, "is out there" and either does not control the situation completely or can be neutralized by the motoboys' strategies. In turn, expansive socio-spatial tactics are used in two other types of spaces: areas where the other, the criminal, "is right here"—and due to their "ownership" of the territory can control the entry and movements [5] of people, goods and services; and areas where the criminal is also "right here" but competes for control of the territory—either with other criminals or law enforcement.

In addition to these criminogenic characteristics, the collective efficacy or ability of networks of residents to provide capable guardianship in the second and third types of urban space makes an enormous difference to the validity and success of anti-crime defenses [41]. From this standpoint, our findings about the negotiation of spatial practices with possible attackers [25], the fluidity of boundaries and agreements reached between legal and illegal actors to prevent random crime [45] demonstrate the presence of complementary actions among these actors that harks back to the concept of symbiotic defenses [14].

Although we have not studied neighborhood gangs, an analysis of the *motoboy*s' statements and the results of other studies permit us to conclude that they play a positive role in ensuring their safety. This is true when gangs prioritize different criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, and either do not see the *motoboy*s as a threat or extort "advantages" in exchange for protection. Although this social control provided by criminal gangs is not foreseen in the criminal justice system and some criminological theories, this arrangement is consistent with the street *realpolitik* of paying more attention to the micro-politics of ecological (dis)advantages than to law and order. On day-to-day agendas, following the adage that "a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush," those who require capable guardianship prioritize a good-neighbour policy and the construction of a *modus vivendi* [37], as well as obtaining protection credits from "the guys" who lay down the law about who can enter, move about and stay in their spheres of activity, even if that protection comes at a price.

In turn, the important role of community networks in ensuring the safety of *motoboy*s is consistent with theories on the positive influence of social ties [7] and collective efficacy [41, 45] in ensuring safe conditions, as well as the availability of capable guardianship [6] for crime prevention. It should also be noted that, in the context of Salvador and probably other Brazilian cities too, this positive influence takes on a generalized and diffuse nature that contrasts with the more limited Anglo-American standards on which these theories are based. In this regard, the situation of these Brazilian actors stands in sharp contrast to that of vulnerable service industry workers in the West Northern Hemisphere countries [18, 42], where this type of capital is less available—due to greater individual self-sufficiency [2, 7, 11]—who rely more on their own forces and occasionally those of the police for protection.

In short, the results of this study shows that socio-spatial tactics are useful for creating ecological buffers and reducing dangers and threats to *motoboy*s through the negotiation and mobilization of the guardianship of gangs and community networks, which, whether through their "ownership" of or familiarity with the territory can ensure that such threats are either carried out or averted.

Finally, despite the preliminary nature of this study, we believe that it will give rise to further investigations into the ecological variations in criminality and social control in urban spaces—particularly low-income neighborhoods—which, despite evidence to the contrary, are still viewed as homogeneous [26]. Furthermore, this study could contribute to more in-depth discussions of informal methods that—inspired by the maxim that "the best defense is offense"—invest in social capital/collective efficacy and the negotiation of guardianship with disparate groups in order to improve the safety of service industry workers, ensure the flow of deliveries and

resist the pernicious impacts of predatory crime on the living and working conditions of blue-collar urban communities.

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