

sharkification

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Rio de Janeiro has been in the spotlight last year and will be present also during 2016 after the World Cup and the coming Olympics. This generated a sudden domestic interest for cleaning the international perception of the city; an image that could hardly avoid the recent “cleaning” campaign from the government in the favelas.

The UPP (Unidade de Policia Pacificadora) was created back in 2007 as a result of the change in the strategy to fight the increasing violence in these neighbourhoods known to be controlled by drug traffickers. It was the response from the government to the recent move of the narcos from the North to the much more visible and fashionable South Zone (Zona Sul) and the attractive territories where some of the most popular favelas, like Rocinha and Vidigal are located. What sounded like a perfect solution with the integration of the police force in the streets (avoiding a military approach to the problem) became a make-up trap for the inhabitants of the favelas. Now considered suspects by default, their daily routine has become even more insecure and constitute a muted voice.

The debate around the legitimacy and benefits of the UPP is open more than ever in Rio de Janeiro. It is a classical debate between rich and poor, legal and illegal, good and bad; and with this project, Sharkification, my intention is to open up that stalled discussion. I decided to compare the dynamics of the favelas to a coral reef, focusing on the complicated but logical ecosystem forged between divergent forces.

I used a blue handmade plastic filter and placed it in front of the lens to add an underwater effect that could convey my approach. Turning the police into sharks, hunting for survival, and the civilians into small fish that use camouflage strategies to survive; supporting my aim to bring some fresh air to the debate but also to build a portrait of the community that does not feed the black and white cliché of the favelas that we are used to consume.

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