Lost Bullets: Fetishes of Urban Violence in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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Abstract

This article contrasts how stray bullets are spoken about by residents of a poor neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with how they are depicted in the media and by residents of wealthier neighborhoods. In order to examine the role that stray bullets play in cultural constructions of violence and insecurity, it uses the theory of fetishism to analyze the implications of speaking of bullets as if they were alive. It argues that representations of urban violence are often centered upon concerns with transgression and often contain elements which resist fixation, thereby producing greater anxiety and fear. Analyzing how residents of Rio talk about stray bullets reveals that collective understandings of violence often contain elements which resist naturalization, producing a state of both security and insecurity, or a state of (in)security. [Keywords: Violence, Brazil, favela, fetishism]

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This article examines how stray bullets shape experiences of violence and insecurity in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It is based upon ethnographic fieldwork in a *favela* (squatter neighborhood) in Rio de Janeiro, and contrasts how stray bullets are spoken about by favela residents with how they are depicted by the media and other residents of Rio.[1] Juxtaposing talk about stray bullets with the analysis of fetishism allows for an examination of the mechanisms by which insecurity is produced and experienced, in very different ways among different social groups in Rio. Stray bullets symbolize violence at its most unpredictable, uncontrollable, and excessive. It is tempting to state that stray bullets order a discourse about disorder. However it is more accurate to say that stray bullets shape experiences of insecurity and produce anxiety because of how they "unfix" representations of violence.

The anthropological analysis of violence has often examined how violence becomes naturalized and normalized, understood as an unavoidable part of everyday life (Schepher-Hughes 1992). An alternative approach argues that experiences of terror are built upon alternating states of order and disorder, normalcy and a "state of emergency" (Taussig 1991). Analyzing stray bullets presents another perspective on how senses of insecurity are constructed. In this case, violence is not "normalized," nor is it particularly useful to interpret the situation as an alternation between normality and a state of emergency. Rather, analyzing how residents of Rio talk about stray bullets reveals that collective understandings of violence may often contain within them elements which resist naturalization, producing a state of both security and insecurity, or what I call a state of (in)security.

Examining talk about stray bullets—"*bala perdidas*" or "lost bullets" in a more literal transition—allows for an examination of the relationship between perceptions and experiences of violence. According to several public opinion surveys, stray bullets are one of the major sources of fear and anxiety regarding personal safety in Rio de Janeiro. According to a recent study by the non-governmental organization Rio Como Vamos, the risk of being a victim of a stray bullet was the number one fear of residents of Rio, cited by 36 percent of those interviewed (*O Globo* 2009a). Incidents where people have been killed by stray bullets produce widespread media coverage and often spark vocal protests. In a recent case, the July 2010 death of Wesley de Andrade, an 11 year-old boy killed by a stray bullet while at school, led to protests by students on the downtown beach of

Copacabana, several days of primetime television coverage, and the dismissal of the commander of the local police battalion.

Yet deaths by stray bullets seem to be, statistically, a rather rare cause of homicides. The Instituto de Segurança Pública (ISP), a research branch of the Rio state government's Department of Public Security, has attempted to quantify the number of victims of stray bullets. Researchers for the ISP note that "bala perdida" does not refer to any juridical category. As a result, they base their analysis on police reports (*registros de ocorrência*), and categorize as "victims of stray bullets" people described in police reports as having been killed or injured in shootings in which they were not involved.[2] The ISP found that in 2009 there were eight deaths attributed to stray bullets in the state of Rio, and there were 185 non-fatal victims (Teixeira et al. 2009). Eight people killed by stray bullets is, obviously, eight too many. But according to the ISP report, the eight people killed by stray bullets represent 0.2 percent of the total number of people killed by fire-arms during 2009 (a total of 4,134 deaths).

Rather than dismissing fear of stray bullets as a misguided perception of the reality of urban violence, it is more accurate to see the bullets as the link between "acts of violence and their imagination and anticipation" (Whitehead 2006:232-233). Various Brazilian social scientists have argued that it is essential to examine urban violence not only as an empirical phenomenon, but as a widely-shared cultural representation (Da Matta 1994, Machado da Silva 2004, Soares 1996, Zaluar 1985). In an influential analysis, Luiz Antonio Machado da Silva argues that "urban violence" is a collective representation which emphasizes two features: threats to bodily integrity and threats to private property (Machado da Silva 2004:57). Urban violence provides Brazilians with a "map" which they can use to interpret their daily lives and organize their social practices.

Stray bullets are a disruptive element in this map. João Trajano Sento-Sé (1998) has drawn attention to the role of fantasy and fear in discussions about security. He has written: "The debate about public security, because it has to do with images of order, and strategies of action of the public authorities," mobilizes "fantasies, fears, and diverse symbols" (Sento-Sé 1998:48). Stray bullets are both central to debates about order, and the objects of fear and fantasy. They produce terror not so much because of the injury they produce, but because of how they transgress established social boundaries, linking fear of the violation of bodily integrity to a broader anxiety about social insecurity.

As Michael Taussig (1998) argues, transgression does not eliminate boundaries, nor do away with taboos. Instead, boundaries rely upon their violation for their very existence, and transgression is inter-connected to the imposition of order (Taussig 1998:350). The transgression of stray bullets provokes increased attempts to monitor and reinforce the very boundaries that they transgress, encouraging attempts to segregate and control urban space. But the possibility of stray bullets also serves as a reminder that such segregation is never entirely successful, and that boundaries which anchor social hierarchies are inevitably arbitrary and fragile. As a result, stray bullets make life seem more capricious and uncertain.

Turning the analysis around and looking at how residents of Rio talk about "live" and "lost" bullets can complicate ideas of fetishism. In different communities, talk about stray bullets is linked to two different "public secrets." For middle-class residents of Rio, talk about stray bullets is linked to the public secret of the highly uneven distribution of violence. For favela residents, talk of stray bullets is linked to a different public secret: that drug dealers who claim to "protect" the community and respect its residents are actually a source of violence and frequently violate their own rules.

But examining talk about stray bullets challenges the idea that fetishism serves to mystify people regarding the true causes of oppression. Instead, residents of Rio actively use discourses of "lost" bullets for particular ends. For middle-class residents of Rio, talk about stray bullets contributes to the "active unknowing" (Taussig 1998) of the uneven distribution of safety and danger. Favela-residents use talk of "lost" bullets strategically, engaging in what I call "strategic fetishism" which allows them to voice a critique of drug-trafficker and police violence. This analysis, I will argue, challenges the commonly-held idea that favela residents accept violence in their communities.

Talk of stray bullets contributes to the reification of violence as an out of control "thing," and the essentialization of Rio as a "violent city." This process is a local manifestation of an international pattern of violence becoming entangled with economic exchange, producing a context where global flows of commodities (such as drugs and guns) fuse with preoccupations with the fantastic, the magical, and the grotesque (Comaroff and Comaroff 1998, Mbembe 2001). But it is important to insert a note of caution: while talk of lost bullets might seem surreal, it can reflect an acute awareness of a context where the circulation of life and death is fantasti-

cal. The fetishism of stray bullets can be seen as an attempt to make reality "strange to itself," revealing an attempt to manage or control insecurity. Rather than mystification, talk about stray bullets can produce a space where critiques of violence and inequality are possible.

Stray Bullets as Fetishes: A Disavowal in the Form of a Displacement

> "*As balas já não mais atendem ao gatilho*" ("The bullets no longer obey the trigger") —Chico Science

In Portuguese, stray bullets are called "*balas perdidas*," literally lost bullets. In this metaphor, "lost" bullets are seen as possessing a life-force: they are alive, even if confused and misguided. To what extent can theories of other apparently animate objects—fetishes—help to shed light upon how people talk about and experience lost bullets? Marx used the idea of fetishism to examine how capitalism shapes relationships between people, commodities and value. Can pursuing the fetishistic implications of the trope of lost bullets reveal how urban violence is reshaping relationships among residents of Rio and altering the value of life?

William Pietz's overview of theories of fetishism provides a useful framework to explore how stray bullets construct senses of (in)security (Pietz 1985, 1987).[3] Modifying Pietz's argument slightly, representations of stray bullets in Rio de Janeiro can be juxtaposed with four themes in theories of fetishism: the disavowal and displacement of social relations; the fixation and ordering of a moment of crisis; the organization of systems of exchange and the creation of value; and relationships between objects, desires, and bodies (Pietz 1985:10).

Like classic analysis of the fetish would lead us to believe, talk about stray bullets displaces agency from the social forces which produce the bullet onto the bullet itself. In Marx's formulation, fetishism leads to a reversed perception of the relationship between commodities and social relations: instead of commodities being seen as the product of socially-constituted relationships, social relations are seen as produced by commodities. As Taussig (1991:138) has stated, "the powerful phantasmagoric character of the commodity as fetish depends on the fact that the socioeconomic relations of production and distribution are erased from awareness, imploded

into the made-object to become its phantom life force." Pietz argues the fetish's disavowal of social relations takes the form of a displacement: the social relations which produce a commodity are displaced onto the object itself. As Pietz argues, value-consciousness is displaced "from the true productive movement of social labor to the apparent movement of market prices and forces" (Pietz 1985:9).

This disavowal-displacement relationship is often apparent in depictions of stray bullets. An example is an article in *O Globo*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Rio:

> The scene of a four year-old boy, injured when a bullet grazed his head, laying on top of the body of his fatally wounded mother, and asking her to wake up, made many people in the favela of Jacarezinho cry yesterday. The victims were caught in the middle of a shoot-out between policemen and drug-dealers, during which other people were also injured by lost bullets…In the confrontation, two bandits were killed, another ended up shot in the chest and a fourth was arrested. The police incursion in the favela at noon, at a time when many parents and children circulated in the streets, revolted the residents. …The mother of the boy…was killed with a bullet in the head. The same projectile apparently crossed through (*teria atravessado*) her skull and grazed the boy's forehead. (*O Globo* 2007a)

According to the article, residents of Jacarezinho tried to take the wounded woman to the hospital, but the police blocked their rescue attempts until it was too late. It is probably this allegation and the macabre trajectory of the bullet that made this incident worthy of reporting. A photo accompanying the article showed two boys with an automatic weapon made out of styrofoam, highlighting how bizarrely "normal" such an event was in a neighborhood such as Jacarezinho.

In the *O Globo* article, the disavowal and displacement are fairly obvious: the article did not describe the boy and his mother as injured by the police or drug-dealers, but by the lost bullet. The bullet, the article stated, "*teria atravessado*" ("would have crossed," with the verb *ter* used in the conditional tense) through targets which, presumably, it had not intended to hit. Like other forms of fetishism, discourse about stray bullets engages in what Emily Apter has called "a subversive logic (future anterior) of retroactive agency" (Apter 1993:5). The social relations which

sustain urban violence disappear as the bullet itself is retroactively imbued with agency, even if it is an agency that "misfires."

This disavowal-displacement relationship parallels how some middle- and upper-class residents of Rio perceive poverty and inequality. Elisa Reis notes an apparent paradox in elite attitudes: on the one hand, many sectors of the Brazilian elite identify poverty and inequality as major national problems (Reis 2000:148); but at the same time, large segments of those interviewed did not feel that they were personally responsible for these problems (Reis 2000:149). Instead, responsibility was displaced onto the state, which was seen as unable or unwilling to provide for the social welfare of the population. As with stray bullets, the failure of the state displaces responsibility from society at large: if the state regularly "misses" its target, then there is no need for redistributive policies or a more fundamental restructuring of society.

Unlike journalists and middle-class residents of Rio, when residents of the city's favelas speak about stray bullets this disavowal-displacement relationship takes a different form. When I conducted fieldwork in Caxambu, a favela in the northern zone of Rio de Janeiro, residents would often speak of stray bullets. One day, for example, Anacleto told me about life in the favela in the late 1970s when there was intense competition among local drug-dealers. He said:

> They were…there were forty of them. I mean, three leaders who were really determined, and the group split up, and it got wild (*o bicho pegou fogo*), there were several deaths. I mean, thank God there were no lost bullets (*balas perdidas*). But here in the *morro* (the favela)[4] people have been killed by lost bullets. There are others who…who have been injured. But all…there have never been any massacres. It simply happens, and someone gets hurt. I've had several lost bullets hit my house.

For favela residents such as Anacleto, stray bullets also displace and disavow. But in this case, a fairly straightforward disavowal attempts to displace much more complicated social relations. Beginning in the late 1970s, drug-dealing groups came to power in Rio's favelas (Arias 2006, Gay 2005, Misse 2006, Penglase 2008). These organizations—which rapper and activist MV Bill has argued are best conceived of as *narco-varejo* (narco-retail) operations, rather than gangs or mafias (Athayde, Bill, and

Soares 2005)—arose in the context of a boom in cocaine production in Colombia and an increased demand for the drug in Brazil and abroad. Groups such as the *Comando Vermelho* (CV, or the Red Command) inserted themselves into this broader flow of illegal commodities by using favelas as a "stock-piling" point in an attempt to monopolize control over retail sales of cocaine in the city of Rio (Amorim 1993, Penglase 2008).

As they waged a violent campaign against other criminals, the police, and any favela-based opposition, groups such as the Comando Vermelho sought to legitimate themselves by implementing a policy known as the *lei do morro* (law of the hillside). Taking advantage of the Brazilian state's inability, or unwillingness, to provide public security in Rio's poor neighborhoods, traffickers associated with the CV proposed a bargain to favela residents: in exchange for their silence, traffickers would "protect" favela residents, repressing petty crime and enforcing norms of sociability and respect (Leeds 1996).

The "law of the hillside" which guides the social relations between drug-dealers and favela residents is often described—by residents, traffickers and some social scientists—as a relatively stable normative system. Relationships between traffickers and favela residents are based upon reciprocal exchanges between parties conceived of as separate and distinct: as many residents of Caxambu told me, "*bandido é bandido, trabalhador é trabalhador* (criminals are criminals, and workers are workers)." As long as "workers" (non-drug-trafficking residents of the favela) stay out of the "business" of the bandidos (a local euphemism for drug-dealers), then the bandidos will "respect" and "protect" favela residents.

Anacleto, however, uses the metaphor of the lost bullet to imply that the situation is far more complex than an exchange of complicity for protection. He can be seen as engaging in what, borrowing from Spivak, can be called "strategic fetishism" (Spivak 1988). By shifting from talking about drug-dealers to bullets, Anacleto appears to be carrying out a simple disavowal: it is not drug-dealers who kill people, but lost bullets, which "simply happen." The responsibility for violence—the agency, as it were—is retroactively displaced from the dealers onto the bullets which, alive, "hit houses."

Anacleto's comments could be seen as a perfect example of the favela's *lei do silêncio* (law of silence). Prohibited from speaking about trafficker violence, Anacleto shifts responsibility onto the bullets themselves. But Márcia Leite and Luiz Antonio Machado da Silva have convincingly argued that the "silence" of favela residents should not be seen as a sign that they

are complicit with drug dealing. Instead, the inability or unwillingness of favela residents to speak about the coercion and violence that traffickers exert within their communities should be seen as a "defense mechanism (*dispositivo de defensa*)" (Machado da Silva and Leite 2007:67).

Rather than interpreting Anacleto's comments as an example of silencing, it is possible to view him as engaging in a double-displacement. Like most residents of Rio's favelas, Anacleto is aware that the bala perdida is a metaphor which disguises the fact that someone, whether intentionally or not, pulled the trigger of a gun. He, of course, does not believe that bullets are alive, just as we do not believe, despite metaphors of strength or weakness, that the dollar is alive. The first displacement in Anacleto's comments removes agency, and hence responsibility, from traffickers and displaces it onto bullets. This is matched by a second displacement: a critique of drug-trafficker violence is displaced onto a linguistic metaphor, onto grammar itself.

Anacleto's refusal to directly state that drug-dealers kill people can be seen as an example of the "public secret" (Taussig 1999) which pervasively structures relations between drug-dealers and residents of Rio's favelas (Penglase 2009). When he talked to me about balas perdidas, Anacleto knew that I understood that he was talking about drug-dealers. By using the image of lost bullets, he publicly performed the act of "hiding" the secret that we both knew.

Marx's basic argument about fetishism—that by speaking of commodities as "alive," people misperceive how commodities are the product of social relations—thus becomes much more complex. Rather than being mystified about relationships between favela residents and drug-dealers, and having this mystification reinforced by the fetishism of bullets, Anacleto is engaging in strategic fetishism. The fetishism of "lost bullets" is a resource which Anacleto can use to critique hierarchical relationships within his community. This more nuanced interpretation calls into question a common assumption made by many analysts that poor Brazilians tacitly accept, or even condone, violence committed against members of their own communities (Caldeira and Holston 1999, Goldstein 2003).

The Fixation of a Moment of Crisis

Talk about "lost bullets" marks a moment of crisis, when safety is radically ruptured. Pietz likewise argues that the fetish emerges as the "meaningful

fixation of a singular event" (Pietz 1985:12). Pietz traces the emergence of both the fetish as an object and also European discourses about fetishism to the clash between European, African, and Arab cultures along the west coast of Africa in the 16th and 17th centuries during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In the space of the slave trade, different societies, social relations, and notions of exchange and commodification met and clashed (Miller 1988:40-70). Such crisis moments, Pietz argues, lacked "any adequate formal code to transform them into meaningful communications or coherent narrations" (Pietz 1985:12). The fetish emerged as a way of connecting incommensurable social worlds. It connected European and West African notions of divinity, and also structured novel social relationships, such as those between slave traders, intermediaries, and enslaved Africans.

Turning to the Brazilian context, the question is: what moment of crisis, or what clash between incommensurable social worlds, produced the fetish of the bala perdida? And how does the stray bullet then come to structure novel social relations? Luiz Eduardo Soares argues that a broad concern about urban violence in Brazilian society was consolidated after three historical moments of crisis, or what he calls three "wounds" (Soares 1996). In each case, it was not the violence of the acts that drew attention, but how they symbolized ruptures of the social order.

The first event was the killing by off-duty policemen of eight young people sleeping in the streets in front of the Candelária Church in downtown Rio in July 1993. This massacre symbolized various forms of transgression of appropriate social norms: children, who should have been at home under the protection of their parents, were living on the street, a public space; the police, who should be in charge of protecting children, were responsible for carrying out the violence; and the Candelária Church, a traditional gathering point for political protests and elite weddings, became a site of violence.

The second "wound" which Soares highlights was the killing of 21 residents of the favela of Vigário Geral in August 1993. Here too, various forms of "improper" mixture were displayed. Most obviously, crime mixed with the law, as it soon became known that off-duty policemen had carried out the killings. In addition, among those killed in Vigário was a family of evangelical Christians, seen as innocent of involvement in crime and wrongly targeted by the police death-squad.

The third wound was the *arrastões* (mass-muggings), which took place in the southern-zone beaches during the Brazilian summer of 1992-1993.

In this case, poor and dark-skinned youth were said to have carried out mass-muggings in the wealthier, and whiter, Zona Sul beach area. Again, the "normal" social order—with beaches being implicitly upper-class and white areas where lower-class residents should act with respect and deference—was up-ended.

Stray bullets, however, did not emerge as a media fixation at these moments when one would imagine that symbols of the breakdown of order would be common. Instead, they appeared when the state government of Rio engaged in a forceful "law and order" attack on crime. After the killings at Candelária and Vigário Geral, there was a widespread sense that the government of the state of Rio was no longer able to control its own police force or ensure public safety. In 1994, the federal army assumed temporary responsibility for law and order throughout the city of Rio in a military action called *Operação Rio* (Operation Rio).

As Operation Rio was occurring, Rio's Governor, Marcello Alencar, and his secretary of public security, General Nilton Cerqueira, called for an explicit militarization of approaches to crime (Cerqueira 1996). General Cerqueira stated that Rio was experiencing an "undeclared war," and that restrictions upon the use of force by the police should be eliminated. Cerqueira implemented a policy of rewarding policemen for "acts of bravery," which came to be known as the "*gratificação faroeste*" (the Wild West payments). Not surprisingly, police killings of civilians dramatically increased: from 3.2 per month, police killings jumped to more than 20 per month after General Cerqueira took office (Human Rights Watch 1997:15).[5]

César Caldeira argues that it was when the military and Governor Alencar sought a harsh and militarized return to "order," that news reports on so-called "balas perdidas" became a constant topic in the press (Caldeira 1997:118). My analysis of media reports in Rio substantiate Caldeira's claim. For instance, a cover article in *Veja* magazine (1994) during Operation Rio featured interviews with people who lived in high-rise apartments in the city's wealthier southern zone that abutted favelas. These people had taken various measures to avoid becoming victims of stray bullets, including placing bullet-proof covers over their windows. The article reported that bullets had been found at an elementary school located two kilometers from the nearest favela. This was proof, the article stated, that the drug-dealers' weapons "do not respect distances" (*Veja* 1994:64). An article in the *Jornal do Brasil* newspaper from the same time period stated: "Tired of hearing shoot-outs and, not rarely, being caught

in the line of fire of confrontations with traffickers, many residents of areas near favelas agree that its best to experience a confrontation and resolve the problem, rather than living with lost bullets—the second most frightening type of violence for residents of Rio" (*Jornal do Brasil* 1994).

Yet homicide—and perhaps other forms of violent crime, although the statistical evidence is less clear—is highly unevenly distributed across the social landscape of Brazil. Victims of homicide are disproportionately male, poor, black or non-white, and young. Particularly striking is how homicide is unevenly distributed according to age and gender. According to a study by Julio Weiselfisz, nation-wide, and with little regional variation, the great majority of homicide victims in Brazil (92 percent) are male (Waiselfisz 2007:24). Likewise, a disproportionate number of homicide victims are young: in the state of Rio de Janeiro, for instance, the homicide rate for those aged 15-24 in 2004 was 102.8 per 100,000 people, more than double the average homicide rate (Waiselfisz 2007:8). In fact, the proportion of young victims of homicide is so large that, according to Waiselfisz, if victims aged 15-24 were not included in the calculation of homicide rates, Brazil's nation-wide homicide rates would have actually fallen slightly between 1980 and 2004 (Waiselfisz 2007:69). Homicide is also sharply spatially concentrated. For instance, according to a study by ISER (Instituto de Estudos da Religião), in 1996 the homicide rate for the upper-class neighborhood of Leblon was 12.7 deaths per 100,000 residents. By comparison, the homicide rate in working-class Bangú was 120 per 100,000, ten times higher (ISER 1997).[6] It also appears that after a steady increase since 1980, homicide rates in Rio leveled off or even began to fall in 2004.

For most middle- and upper-class residents of Rio—and especially for those who are over 25, wealthier, female, and white—homicide is a relatively unlikely occurrence. Being a fatal victim of a stray bullet, since such deaths are such a small percentage of overall fire-arm related fatalities, is even less likely. Thus, for many residents of Rio being killed by stray bullets is a "low-probability high-consequence" risk (Giddens 1990:133). But stray bullets produce disproportionate amounts of anxiety because they combine concerns about the collapse of social hierarchies with an embodied fear of transgression, as "lost" bullets accidentally enter the homes and bodies of the wealthier and lighter-skinned residents of Rio. Various authors have noted that concerns about transgression and violation of boundaries are often mapped onto concern about bodily integrity (Borneman 1998). Perhaps this explains the powerful emotional

response to balas perdidas: a socio-political problem comes to be perceived as an embodied, and perhaps even sexualized threat. For some residents of Rio, stray bullets contribute to the "active unknowing" (Taussig 1998) of the highly unequal distribution of violence. Instead, middle- and upper-class residents of Rio can imagine themselves as all equally vulnerable to violence, reified as an "epidemic" and spatially located in favelas and other neighborhoods of the urban poor.

Media reports about—and a widespread fear of—stray bullets also reveal a widespread fear that the state itself is no longer capable of guaranteeing personal safety. Stray bullets highlight a widespread skepticism about the state's ability to patrol the lines between legality and illegality, and hence a wider concern that the lines dividing safety from danger are blurred or unclear. The army's Operação Rio, for instance, was initially aimed at addressing corruption in Rio's police, though the target quickly shifted to the city's favelas. Media reports attacked the policy as ineffective and arbitrarily violent, noting how few drugs or drug-dealers the army apprehended. Sento-Sé notes, however, that although Operação Rio was a spectacular failure in terms of repressing crime, it was also a spectacular success: while the policy failed to have any impact upon crime or drug-trafficking, it inaugurated the uncontested reign of the militarized, hard-line approach to crime (Sento-Sé 1998:69).

In the favela context, stray bullets also signal a moment of crisis when incommensurable worlds clashed. In this case, though, stray bullets point to a more local crisis, and often refer to changes in relations between drug-dealers and favela residents. For example, Anacleto told me:

> They (the local drug-dealers) have always been polite with residents. There was even a difficult time when the drug-dealers would tell grownups: "don't go out in the street at such-and-such a time, because some idiots might come around to stir up trouble, and a lost bullet might happen." But that was at a time when…a time of less powerful weapons. Back then the guns weren't as powerful. A thirty-eight, a forty-five, shoots and kills. But it's not like today, with bullets that go through walls.

Anacleto uses the metaphor of lost bullets to contrast current relations between drug-traffickers and favela residents with a (perhaps mythical) prior pattern of less coercive interaction. Like residents of many favelas,

residents of Caxambu compared earlier, "older" drug-dealers with the younger generation which was running the illegal trade in their neighborhood (Alvito 2001). According to residents of Caxambu, after an initial period of intense conflict over drug-trafficking in the early 1980s the Comando Vermelho imposed "peace" in the neighborhood. This first generation of dealers affiliated with the Comando Vermelho sought to minimize conflict with favela residents and emphasized strategies of control anchored in claims of "protecting" favela residents from violence. Hence Anacleto's reference to "a difficult time," when the dealers attempted to minimize the impact of violence.

By the late-1990s and early 2000s when I was conducting my research, there had been a shift in drug-trafficking in Rio, and a younger and more conflictive generation assumed control of drug-dealing in Rio's favelas. Part of the reason for this shift may have been the dramatic increase in police violence under Marcello Alencar's governorship. Alencar's policy of rewarding police for "acts of bravery" increased the incentive for police to react to drug-dealers with violence, while decreasing their incentives to negotiate with drug-dealers through bribery. As a result, seeking to impose "law and order" meant, at the favela level, disrupting a long-established market whereby, as Michel Misse (1997) argues, police and other state agents could "sell" selective law enforcement. An increase in conflict between traffickers and the police also meant a rapid turn-over in drug-gang leadership, as dealers were arrested or killed.[7]

Anacleto depicts this moment of crisis by displacing the agency onto the guns themselves: it wasn't the traffickers who changed, but the power of their weapons. Anacleto connected the time of more "polite" drug-traffickers with a time of "less powerful" weapons; today, however, there are "bullets that go through walls." This invocation of the past can be seen as an example of what Michael Herzfeld (1996) has called "structural nostalgia." That is, nostalgia for the "good" trafficker of the past is not necessarily an accurate historical comparison to contemporary conditions. Rather, Anacleto attempts to make the collective representation that drug-dealers "respect" residents match his knowledge that such relations are often more unpredictable and dangerous. But he does not state directly that despite their claims to "respect" favela residents, traffickers sometimes coercively intervene in the domestic affairs of favela residents—for instance, forcing favela residents to allow traffickers to use their homes to store weapons or drugs, or as hide-outs. Instead, Anacleto states that it is

the weapons which no longer respect the privacy of the home, as they produce bullets which penetrate walls.

Again, this apparent "mystification," should not be read at face value. For Anacleto the shift in drug-gang tactics was personally deeply troubling. At the time of our conversation, the head of the drug-trafficking organization in Caxambu, a man I call Dê, had recently been arrested. Dê and Anacleto had been childhood friends, and Anacelto often relied upon his personal relationship with Dê to influence the behavior of other drug-dealers. This was particularly important for Anacleto since he was deeply involved in the local samba school, and often had to mediate in conflicts over issues such as the distribution of free carnival *fantasias* (costumes) or attempts to discipline unruly members of the school's *bateria* (drum corps), some of whom were also drug-dealers. By shifting the subject of his utterance from traffickers to guns, Anacleto also points to the broader crisis disrupting the social life of the favela: a transnational flow of commodities and technologies—especially the global weapons trade—is depicted as disrupting a community structured around face-to-face relations of trust and respect. The stray bullets symbolize the violence that results from the failure to peacefully mediate the clash between these incommensurable social worlds.

Fetishism, Exchange, and the Mystery of Value

The disruptive nature of stray bullets—and how "lost bullets" depart from classic Marxist analysis of commodity fetishism—is most apparent when stray bullets are seen in the context of exchange and value. In Marx's formulation, fetishism is the product of, and serves to reinforce, capitalist social relations of exchange. Because money is a universal measure of value—allowing objects with incommensurable use values to be seen as having comparable exchange values—it is central to how exchange is organized. Hence the money-form is also the commodity at its most abstract and fetishized. Money allows for the two aspects of exchange (giving and receiving) to be differentiated. Pietz calls this process "differal-distantiation through differentiation": once it is possible to sell things for money and then buy other things with money, the moments of exchange can separated in both time and distance. The "spatial and temporal separation of the moments of exchange," Pietz states, "generates the logistical (financial) instruments enabling a modern economy" (Pietz 1985:146).

The parallels between the money-form and bullets are fairly easy to draw. Bullets organize a system of exchange which is crucial to the logistical infrastructure of urban violence. Like money, bullets differentiate elements in the chain of violence, even if, in this case, the exchange is characterized by "negative reciprocity" (Sahlins 1972). That is, bullets separate the "giver" of violence from the "receiver." In this unequal exchange, one person takes another's life. Likewise, bullets allow for commensurability: if guns and bullets are involved, cases of violence occurring in different contexts—a domestic quarrel in which a man kills his wife, a police shooting of an alleged criminal, and a robbery which results in death—can all be compared and evaluated as "gun-related deaths." Urban violence thus becomes measurable and controllable at the level of knowledge and subject to "governmentality" (Foucault 1991).

With stray bullets, however, exchange has gone awry, and questions of distantiation and difference become highly problematic. For the middle- and upper-classes, bullets spatially separate "violent" favelas from the safety of wealthier neighborhoods. Indeed, as Anthony Giddens notes, differential exposure to risk is often "what is actually meant by 'privilege' and 'underprivilege'" (Giddens 1990:126). But stray bullets radically disrupt exchange: they are seen as inappropriately targeting the "wrong" recipient, ignoring the "proper" distantiation between different social groups.

For middle-class residents of Rio, this is a central reason why stray bullets are the source of such anxiety: the person who "received" the bullet was not the intended recipient. In the process, the distance between "proper" and "improper" zones of violence—areas where violence is "allowed" and where it should not occur—is seen as collapsing. The article from *Veja* magazine quoted above, for instance, stated that bullets found at an elementary school were proof that drug-dealers "do not respect distances," as if there were a barrier protecting schools that the bullet ignored (*Veja* 1994).

In many media depictions of incidents where middle-class residents have been killed in such shootings, the source of stray bullets remains mysterious and opaque. In these cases, the "recipient" of the bullet is depicted as having no relationship to the "sender." This disruption of the normal exchange of bullets also fails to respect "normal" forms of differentiation: the distance between safe spaces and dangerous ones, between criminals who "deserve" violence and "innocents" who do not, vanishes.

For example, a recent story in the *O Globo* newspaper reported on a case where the window of an apartment was hit by a bullet. According to police

experts, the bullet could have come from any one of three favelas, although the closest was located a kilometer away. The daughter of the owner of the apartment told reporters that after she heard that a bullet hit her mother's home, she rushed to the apartment. Once there, she found a bullet hole in the wall above the desk which she used while growing up. She stated: "I could have been killed, imagine that, and in Alto Leblon, without even leaving my home" (*O Globo* 2007b). For this woman, the stray bullet allows for an "imaginative rehearsal of certain forms of death" (Whitehead 2006:231). The emotional impact of this imagined outcome in turn fuels a blind-spot: in an example of what Bourneman has termed "defensively motivated ignorance," the article fails to critique the reasoning behind the police's assumption that the stray bullet came from a distant favela, rather than a neighboring apartment (Bourneman 1998:265).

In another recent case, Vitor Emanuel Muanis was killed by a stray bullet while sitting at a bar in Lapa, a neighborhood famous for its nightlife (*O Globo* 2009b). Friends told reporters that Vitor, a university student, had been celebrating having passed a final exam when he suddenly fell on the ground. They said that they thought that he'd passed out from drinking too much, but soon realized that he'd been hit by a bullet. One friend told the reporter: "As much as we are used to violence in Rio, we never thought that something could happen to someone so close to us. He went to Lapa to celebrate and died." In the online commentaries that accompanied this report, several readers posted messages on *O Globo's* site calling for police action against favelas. One reader noted, though, that there was no indication that the bullet came from a favela and that there was no way of knowing whether it had been fired by a drug-dealer, a policeman, or a "*traficantezinho de classe média*" (a little middle-class drug-dealer).

The ontological insecurity produced by fear of stray bullets—the fear that even sitting at a childhood desk in Alto Leblon or drinking beers with friends in Lapa one might be hit by a mysterious lost bullet—creates such anxiety that it displaces awareness of the more complex social relations which enmesh the middle- and upper-classes in mutual responsibility for urban violence. Stray bullets help middle-class residents to "forget," for instance, how their appetite for cheap cocaine is entangled with urban violence. The "excess" emotion produced by of stray bullets—the shock of: "how could that happen here, of all places!"—disguises, by making natural, the different values attached to lives of poor or wealthier residents of Rio.

Favela residents also face a similar predicament posed by stray bullets. Because favela residents are so intimately linked to drug-dealers—many of whom are their kin, neighbors or childhood friends—favela residents have to work hard to generate forms of symbolic and social distantiation. Bullets and guns separate bandidos (criminals) from other favela residents, a division central to favela social identities (Zaluar 1985, Alvito 2001). Favela residents are also under little illusion that they are safe from violence, and work hard at separating zones of peace from zones of violence. But stray bullets collapse the spatial and social separation between drug-dealers and non-drug dealing residents, turning peaceful street-corners into potentially lethal spaces.

This disruption of exchange, in turn, leads to a breakdown in basic processes of ascertaining value: the possibility of stray bullets leads to questions about what value life might have if it is at the mercy of such unpredictable forces. Clara, one of my closest friends in Caxambu, often spoke about the death of Tio Cabeludo, one of her favorite uncles. She told me that he was killed by a bala perdida while at a backyard *churrasco* (barbeque). Clara spoke of the impossibility of knowing where the bullet came from: "One moment he was talking, carrying on and making jokes like always. The next moment he fell over. No one even knew what had happened until they saw blood coming out of his head." For Clara, not knowing the source of the bullet was connected to the larger mystery of why Tio Cabeludo might have died, and led her to ponder the unknowability of fate: "He was a great person, fun, had lots of friends, never bothered anyone. How could such a thing happen?"

Determining the lines between safety and danger, legality and illegality was a particularly vexing problem for Clara: her father was a retired policeman and several people in her family were deeply involved in drug trafficking. At one point, her brother had to flee the favela because he owed money for cocaine that he had been given to sell. Clara's brother could not return to the favela until his debts were settled. On the other hand, the brother of the father of one of Clara's children (and this child's *padrinho*, or godfather, and hence Clara's *compadre*, or ritual co-parent) assumed the leadership of the drug-dealing gang in the favela after Dê was arrested.

Like many favela residents, Clara tried to symbolically separate herself and her family from drug-dealers, many of whom she was tied to through long-term propinquity since she was born and raised in Caxambu, or kin-

ship or pseudo-kinship structures such as her compadre. At the same time, Clara also sometimes relied upon connections to drug-dealers to try to moderate their violence or seek access to certain resources. The "lost bullet" which killed Tio Cabeludo, though, pointed to the impossibility of drawing such lines: as much as Clara might try to control, or at least understand, the structures which made her vulnerable to violence, stray bullets were a reminder that safety, and hence ontological security, were ultimately impossible to secure.

Materiality and the Subjection of People to Things

The fourth theme in theories about fetishism is that the fetish is characterized by what Pietz calls an "irreducible materiality" which is seen as exerting control over people (Pietz 1985:10). Here again, stray bullets only partially match this classic understanding of fetishes. Pietz argues that Europeans were first curious about fetishes because they believed them to be material objects which had power over "the desires, actions, health, and self-identity of individuals whose personhood is conceived as inseparable from their bodies" (Pietz 1985:10). It was this early idea of the fetish as a magical object which possessed an embodied control over people that Marx picked up on in his analysis. For Marx, the materiality of the fetish and its influence over social relations were intimately intertwined: in *Capital*, Marx repeatedly emphasized that the reification of the fetishized money-form was what allowed to be seen as controlling social relations.

Like the European image of the fetish, bullets are depicted as exerting power over people, and this influence is intimately connected to embodied fears and anxieties. Yet rather than possessing an "irreducible materiality," stray bullets are signified by their absence. When people talk about, document, or photograph balas perdidas, it is the holes or wounds—the "removal" affected by the bullets—that are depicted. These bullet holes become powerful markers of a singular event—usually when someone was killed, or just barely missed being killed—exactly because they dramatize the absent presence of the bullet. In the terms of Peircian semiotics, the holes left by stray bullets are characterized by "secondness": they index the presence of something that is absent.[8] The stray bullets are "there" even though they are not. Or more accurately, stray bullets are present because the holes they produce index a void, a removal. This leads to lost bullets possessing a distinctly paradoxical and phantasmagorical character.

The anxiety produced by the "removal" affected by stray bullets has a deep impact upon how residents of Rio experience stray bullets. For example, one Sunday morning while I was conducting fieldwork and living in Caxambu, the police raided the neighborhood. After an extended shoot-out, the police arrested Dê, the local drug boss, and shot and killed a local man. The following day, I went to talk with the director of the *crèche* (child-care center) which was run by the municipal government in a building just below the top of the hillside where the shoot-out had occurred. As I was speaking with the director of the school, children came out of crèche and pointed to bullet-holes, insisting that I look at them. The director, a middle-class white woman, was very worried, both about bullets being fired near school, but also about kids drawing attention to bullet holes. She yelled at the kids and told me that she worried that the drug-dealers, or police, would see. She confessed to being "*muito abalada*" ("very shocked") upon seeing the bullet holes on the wall of the crèche, and said that they were proof that the creche wasn't, as she'd hoped it would be, some sort of neutral ground. The "emptiness" of the bullet hole was a powerful symbol of the experience of violence, the hole pointing to the erasure, the subtraction, affected by violence. Further up the hill, where the shoot-out had occurred, the local drug-dealers spray painted red circles around the bullet holes pock-marking the walls, indexing an absence.

While stray bullets are indexed by their absence, not their materiality, they do have a powerful effect on bodies and emotions. Discourse about fetishes, Pietz argues, emerges at moments of crisis when "the identity of the self is called into question, put at risk, by a sudden encounter with the life of the outside world" (Pietz 1985:12). Bala perdidas are clearly spoken of and experienced as a force which can unpredictably and without consent penetrate one's home and one's body. For many middle-class residents, this unpredictable risk takes the form of a disruption of class (and civilizational-racial) order. For the middle-class director of the crèche, for example, the bullet-holes on her school violated a principle that education and child-care should be exempted from the surrounding context of violence, poverty, and inequality.

For favela residents, stray bullets are also perceived as violation of embodied and gendered identities. For example, Seu Vander told me:

> We're pretty safe here. I've lived here for sixty-three years and I've never been shot, I've never been beaten up. If you go to other hillsides

around here, people of my age, their houses are all machine-gunned (*a casa deles tá toda metralhada*).

Seu Vander clearly connects his safety to his own ability to preserve his physical integrity, stating "I've never been shot." He then ties his own identity to his home: unlike in other neighborhoods, Seu Vander's home is not "all machine-gunned." Indeed, the fear of being hit by stray bullets leads favela residents to change which rooms they sleep in, modify their daily routines, and sometimes even alter the shape of their homes. Older residents of Caxambu told me, for instance, that the large brick and mortar walls surrounding homes on the hillside were relatively new. Until the time of "wars" between drug gangs, most homes had windows that opened directly onto the street. When I interviewed residents who were re-building their homes—an almost-constant practice in a neighborhood characterized by extensive "autoconstruction" (Holston 1991)—they often remarked on how they had moved the location of their bedrooms to avoid exposure to streets or alleyways. This attempt to make homes more defendable, though, came at a cost: "safer" homes were often coveted by local drug-dealers as places to store drugs and weapons or to hide from the police.

Exchange Goes Awry: The Surreal and Spaces of Critique

As might be expected, fixation upon stray bullets, in both the media and in the everyday talk of many residents of Rio, quickly leans toward the surreal and phantasmagorical. "Lost bullets" which defy order and rationality, which transform homes and schools into spaces of death, appear to violate the most basic divisions that structure existence itself. It is perhaps inevitable that the surreal quality of lost bullets culminated in the following news report:

The corpse of Clenilda da Silva, 50 years-old, was hit by a lost bullet when she was being mourned this afternoon in the cemetery of São Francisco de Paula, in Catumbi, in northern Rio. "This has never happened before. The cemetery has been here for 150 years and this is the first time that someone has died twice. Can you believe it? We live in a surreal city, Rio is wild (*o Rio tá brabo*)," said Elinaldo Manoel da Silva, who works in the administrative sector of the cemetery. (*Agência Estado* 2005)

The lost bullet hitting a corpse, killing it twice and failing to recognize (perhaps "losing") the difference between life and death, provokes a sense of unreality which leaks into how Elindaldo Manoel da Silva views Rio itself. Rio, he says is a "surreal city" one that's "*brabo*," comparing the city to a wild animal. And if the city is surreal, then reality itself is unreal. Lost bullets can have the effect of allowing Rio to "make itself strange to itself" (Apter 1993:6).

In the years since this event, occasions where there have been stray bullets in Rio's cemeteries have been repeated topics of media stories (see Globo On-Line 2007), as if returning to this moment of "unreality" could provide some coherence to a narrative about life in Rio de Janeiro. In reminding residents of Rio that their city is "wild," the surreal fetishism of lost bullets may remind them that the social relations that produce violence are equally irrational. Talk about lost bullets may be an attempt, inevitably futile, to use a "magical" object to make sense of a fantastic reality.

At times, the surreal quality of stray bullets leads to jokes, as residents of Rio turn to humor in an attempt to rescue the spirit of irreverence which is seen as a "truly Carioca" trait. In Portuguese, as in Spanish, the word *bala*, means both bullet and candy. Thus, in the on-line commentary accompanying the article about the student killed by a stray bullet while drinking in Lapa, one reader wrote the following: "*Aqui no Rio de Janeiro não precisa chegar o dia de São Cosme e Damião para ganhar bala*" ("Here in Rio we don't have to wait for Saint Cosmas and Damian's Day [celebrated by giving candy to children] to get balas/candy").[9]

Humor is also sometimes used to critique the social relations which are displaced from view by casting bullets as "lost." For instance Valdir, an artist from Vigário Geral, seized upon the punning metaphor of balas perdidas in his artwork. Several years after the death-squad massacre in Vigário Geral, Valdir organized what he called a "bala exchange project": for every bullet or bullet-casing that children brought him, he gave them a candy. Valdir then welded the bullet casings together to create statues commemorating the people who died in the 1994 massacre.

Because the term "bala perdida" does not index the person who fired the bullet—because of the fetishism of the "lost bullet"—it contains a semantic ambiguity which can be used to mobilize protests against urban violence. Various powerful forces conspire to silence outrage against police and drug-dealer violence in favelas. Although many favela residents are critical of police activities in their neighborhood, they general-

ly support the police as an institution (Machado da Silva and Leite 2007). Because of a sustained pattern of impunity, protests against the police also run the very real risk of reprisal. Favela residents are also aware that local drug-dealers have a vested interest in encouraging animosity toward the police, and sometimes fear that protesting against police violence might be seen as supporting drug-dealing. And protesting violence by drug-dealers carries a very real threat of retribution.

The "indexical opacity" of stray bullets opens a space where violence itself can be the explicit object of protest. Thus protests against killings in favelas often single out "balas perdidas" rather than critiquing the police or drug-dealers. A recent example was a protest organized after Ágatha Marques dos Santos, an 11 year-old girl, was killed in the favela of Rocinha by a stray bullet during a shootout between traffickers and the police on February 15, 2008. Residents of Rocinha organized a major march through the streets of Rio to the cemetery where Ágatha was buried, temporarily shutting down much of the city's traffic.

Conclusion

> "…the fetish is situated at the space of cultural revolution, as the place where the truth of the fetish as object is revealed" (Pietz 1985:11)

Marx insisted that fetishism was not the product of individual consciousness, but of a larger structure of social relations. It was not an individual's "deluded" perceptions that gave rise to fetishism. Rather, historically-determined capitalist social relations presented individuals with a dissimulated reality. As a result, Marx argued that fetishism will only disappear when the social relations which produce a dissimulated perception of reality are fundamentally altered. Similarly, until the social relations which produce and sustain urban violence are altered, there will likely be bullets which "miss" their targets. But examining the implications of the metaphor of lost bullets can help to dismantle these relations by drawing attention to the larger social context that generates and sustains urban violence.

This article has sought to draw attention to two implications of the metaphor of fetishized lost bullets. First, in both favela and non-favela communities, the transgressive "lost" bullet exposes a public secret: in

middle-class communities, the unequal distribution of violence; in favelas, the social relations by which drug-dealers are simultaneously "protectors" and also agents of violence. Yet rather than eliminating these secrets, lost bullets reinforce them by symbolizing the tenuousness of life: they signal that beneath safety and predictability lies danger and uncertainty, beneath life lies death, and beneath the appearance of order lies violence.

It is overly simplistic to interpret conversations about "lost bullets" as mystification. Discourses about stray bullets can be manipulated by residents of Rio for a variety of purposes. For middle-class residents of Rio, fear of stray bullets helps them to "actively unknow" the distribution of violence. Anacleto, the resident of the favela of Caxambu who I quoted above, used the fetishism of bullets strategically, to voice a critique of how drug-dealers establish social relations with favela residents. In this context, stray bullets serve as a reminder that the value of life for poor, non-white residents of Rio is subjected to a calculus determined by forces—stretching from slavery, through the military dictatorship, to what many in Latin America call "savage neoliberalism"—located beyond the individual's control. Lost bullets dramatize how abstract systems can suddenly disrupt "ontological security" (Giddens 1990).

The second implication is that stray bullets are provoking new anxieties about transgression and unpredictable contact with otherness. Lost bullets transgress multiple boundaries. They ignore not only the socio-economic and racial boundaries which divide the neighborhoods of the poor and dark-skinned from those of the wealthy and lighter-skinned, but also ones which delimit the borders between public and private, external to the body and internal to the body, and life and death. This has led to a significant shift in how the urban landscape of Rio is organized and divided, as favela neighborhoods are increasingly militarized and violence is mapped onto neighborhoods seen as "war zones."

It may also be altering how residents of Rio see themselves and their city. From a city which has reveled in transgression and mixture—made most famous in Rio's annual carnival—Rio is increasingly characterized by attempts to limit zones of unpredictable boundary-crossing. The mixing of difference, the transgression and boundary-crossing of spaces such as the beach or carnival, may no longer be seen as thrillingly pleasurable, but as dangerous. At risk may be the ability to deal with unpredictability, the ability to improvise, or possess *jogo de cintura*, seen as a quintessential Brazilian trait. As Soares has argued, one of the greatest effects of

urban violence may be the loss of the "collective capacity of living with the risks of uncertainty" (Soares 1996:247).

What is occurring in Rio de Janeiro is a local manifestation of larger global context of insecurity where economic flows are connecting with forms of violence. This process highlights concerns about the state's monopoly over legitimate forms of violence, and broader anxieties about the loss of structures which provide intelligibility to everyday life. As Achille Mbembe notes: "war situations force a renegotiation of the relations between the individual and the community, the foundations on which authority is exercised, and the relationship of the individual and community to time, space, profit and the occult" (Mbembe 2001:89). In Rio de Janeiro, lost bullets contribute to a perception of (in)security which, rather than being a common collective representation, defies easy containment, losing itself and misrecognizing its targets while reproducing and reinforcing an increasingly divided and militarized urban space.

Ultimately, examining talk about fetishized lost bullets helps us understand how senses of insecurity are constructed. Lost bullets anchor an unstable set of representations: they "unfix" representations of urban violence because they defy order. Lost bullets mark an "excess," a surplus-value of violence which ruptures normative structures of exchange and produces deep anxieties about the value of life, the inviolability of the home and body, and the difficulty of maintaining a sense of ontological security. Apter notes that in various examples of fetishism, "a consistent displacing of reference occurs, paradoxically, as a result of so much fixing. Fetishism, in spite of itself, unfixes representations even as it enables them to become monolithic 'signs' of culture" (Apter 1993:3). The very discourse about "urban violence" contains within it a disruptive element which resists order, refusing to allow violence to be "domesticated." For that very reason, violence becomes so much more an object of fear, fantasy, obsession, and anxiety.

ENDNOTES

[1]I conducted ethnographic research in the neighborhood that I call Caxambu for over a year in 1998-1999 and for two months in 2001. I have altered the name of the neighborhood and its residents to ensure that my descriptions do not inadvertently cause harm to my informants.

[2]It is worth pointing out that this narrower category does not quite match the much looser popular usage of the term "bala perdida." It is also not unfair to wonder whether police reports are an accurate source of data, given both the high levels of police shootings of civilians and the very low rates at which Brazilians report crimes to the police.

[3]For anthropological overviews of Marx's theory of fetishism, see Godelier 1977:152-165, 169-185 and Ellen 1988. For an overview of fetishism in medical discourses, see Nye 1993.

[4]Like many residents of Rio's poor neighborhoods, Anacleto used the term *morro* (hillside), instead of the more pejorative term favela.

[5]With the end of the "Wild West" policy, the number of people killed in confrontations with the police dropped by almost 50 percent (*Jornal do Brasil* 1999.)

[6]Leonarda Musumeci, Gabriel da Silva, and Greice Conceição point out that although violence is unevenly distributed, indicators of violence in Rio are high when compared to Europe and the US. For example, in 2004, the lowest homicide rate in Rio was in the Zona Sul area, where the homicide rate was 16.7 per thousand. This homicide rate was five times greater than the homicide rate in London (2.8 per thousand), and more than twice as high as the homicide rate in New York (7 per thousand) (Musumeci, Silva, and Conceição 2006:1).

[7]Changes in relations between traffickers and favela residents may also have been the product of structural shifts in the drug trade. By the mid-1990s, most of the original generation of favela-based drug bosses had been imprisoned or killed, and structures of control within the drug trade fractured and gave rise to multiple competing and internally-fragmented groups.

[8]I thank Veve Lele for this insight.

[9]As is perhaps inevitable, there is at least one blog entitled "Bala Perdida." There are also at least two songs called "Bala Perdida," one by Gabriel o Pensador and another by Facção Central.

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