Living with Insecurity in a Brazilian Favela

Urban Violence and Daily Life

R. BEN PENGLASE

Rutgers University Press
New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London

Contents

1

"To Live Here You Have to Know How to Live"

> There are lots of things here that you can't tackle straight on. But you also can't walk around with your head down all the time. That's what's important: knowing what you can directly challenge and what you can't, while keeping your head up.
> —Sônia

On one hot and drowsy day, I was sitting in Dona Carmen's backyard. Dona Carmen was one of my neighbors in Caxambu, a *favela* (squatter neighborhood), in the northern part of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.[1] Dona Carmen supplemented her husband's retirement pension by selling meals to people in the neighborhood. The food could be taken home on paper plates wrapped up in tinfoil (known as *quentinhas*) or eaten under the shade of a mango tree in Dona Carmen's backyard, where her chickens, grandchildren, and a large pet German shepherd named Hulk chased each other in circles, creating an atmosphere of friendly chaos. I was sitting on a concrete

stool next to Dona Carmen's open-air kitchen, and had just finished a plate of chicken with rice and beans, when Dona Miriam, a woman from the neighborhood, came into the yard and began to talk with Dona Carmen. Dona Carmen listed to the woman's complaints but also had one eye on the television, which was showing an evangelical Protestant talk show.

Though I had been living in Caxambu for several months, I had never met Dona Miriam.[2] It was clear that barely concealed underneath her flow of complaints to Dona Carmen—her husband had lost his job, the police had recently tried to extort money from her son—Dona Miriam was curious about what I was doing in a neighborhood that few wealthier people, and even fewer foreigners, visited. After a while Dona Miriam began to talk with me and with another couple sitting nearby. Dona Miriam already knew who I was, not an unusual occurrence in a neighborhood where almost everyone knows everyone else, and where despite my ability to speak Portuguese, my wife and I stood out for our obvious foreignness, making us objects of intense local gossip from the moment we moved in.

Dona Miriam began our conversation by asking me how I liked the neighborhood. This was not a naïve question, simply aimed at making pleasant conversation, and it was one that I had been asked more than once. Residents of Rio's favelas, as I show in more detail throughout this book, are highly attuned to the stereotypes that outsiders have of their neighborhoods as dangerous and violent areas. Without quite realizing how deeply I had internalized the opposite trope that favela residents use to counter these negative stereotypes—that favelas are actually safer and friendlier than Rio's crowded streets and anonymous middle-class apartment buildings—I answered, as I often did, that I liked how friendly everyone was.

Dona Miriam looked at me skeptically, perhaps wondering if I really knew what I was talking about or whether I was being honest with her. She persisted, asking: "But don't you think it's difficult to live here?" I agreed, and again dodged the issue that neither of us was openly acknowledging. Instead, I remarked upon what favela residents often hold out as the real challenges to their daily lives: that sometimes the house where I lived had no water, and that it was irritating that the only way to get home at night was by foot, as there was no public transportation and taxis would never drive up the hillside on which Caxambu was built.

My reference to the difficulty of entering the neighborhood at night had, as I had intended, caught her attention. Without openly saying so, I had touched upon a raw nerve: the difficulties created by exclusion of favelas from regular urban infrastructure (such as water and sewage systems), the poverty of many of the neighborhood's residents and their social and racial marginalization were compounded by the violence that resulted from favela-based drug trafficking and corrupt policing. The drug trade, which uses favelas as stockpiling points for a citywide trade in cocaine and marijuana, creates the all-too-frequent possibility of shoot-outs between the police and drug dealers, especially at night as sales heat up and as many residents take to their homes. Drug trafficking also deeply influences how favelas are represented in the media, as they become depicted as "fortresses for drug dealers."

Dona Miriam looked surprised at my answer, and turned to Dona Carmen, exclaiming: "This guy comes and goes in the neighborhood at night?" "Sure," Dona Carmen replied, winking at me, "everyone here knows him. He's friends with everyone." The young man sitting at the nearby table joined in the conversation, saying, "See, in order to live here, you have to know how to live."[3] Dona Miriam chuckled, seemingly satisfied with this exchange, and then went on to ask me more personal questions about where I was from, how long I'd lived in Caxambu, and where my wife was working.

Social Tactics and States of (In)security

This snapshot from my ethnographic research is unremarkable in and of itself. But it opens a window onto a major theme of this book: the experience of living in what I call a state of (in)security. When Dona Carmen commented that I could come and go in the neighborhood at night because I was "friends with everyone," she was referring to the security that comes from living in a neighborhood where almost everyone knows everyone else and where most forms of crime are severely repressed by the local drug traffickers. The friendliness of Caxambu's residents, and the broader network of reciprocal support and mutual aid, produced a context of stability. As we will see in later chapters, local drug traffickers participate in social networks of mutual assistance. At the same time, though, drug dealers also deliberately manipulate fear of crime in an attempt to legitimate their authority. As a result, in one sense, the neighborhood was secure. But Dona Carmen, Dona Miriam, and I all knew that this security was

predicated upon a larger context of unpredictable and all-too-often lethal violence, as well as a larger context of exclusion.

The multiple types of violence that mark everyday life in Caxambu have produced a social universe that is deeply contradictory and ambivalent, both safe and dangerous, familiar and unpredictable. Residents of favelas such as Caxambu are distinctly aware that their neighborhood is the product of generations of social and economic marginalization. Living in such a neighborhood stigmatizes the residents of Caxambu as *favelados*. They also know that living in a favela exposes them to the risk of being caught in the cross fire of gun battles between police and rival drug gangs. Yet Caxambu, like all favelas, is a self-built neighborhood (Gilbert 1998; Holston 1991), and residents are often justifiably proud of the generations of sweat and hard work that they have put into building the neighborhood's homes, stores, corner bars, streets, alleys, and sidewalk stoops.

The neighborhood is thus a deeply intimate place, or what Caxambu's residents often call a *morro familiar*, meaning a morro (hillside, the term locally preferred to *favela*) that is both familiar and family-based.[4] Yet people in Caxambu are confronted with the paradox of living in a space that is both deeply familiar and yet also often unpredictably dangerous. The conversation that I described above—acknowledging the difficulties inherent in daily life without directly stating what those difficulties are—is one example of "knowing how to live" in such a neighborhood.

This book addresses these "ways of knowing"—what I refer to, following Michel de Certeau, as "social tactics"—that residents of one favela neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro use to address the multiple forms of violence and the resulting social contradictions that impinge upon their daily lives. Certeau's distinction between *tactics* and *strategies*, and his emphasis on identifying "ways of operating" or focusing on how people actually make use of what they have, provide crucial analytical tools to understand daily life in neighborhoods such as Caxambu (1984, 34–42). For Certeau, strategies are the schema used by the powerful: they seek to produce regularity and stability; they are predicated on the ability to establish relations of exteriority by which social actors can produce, manipulate, and control situations. Tactics, on the other hand, are the ways of operating of the powerless: they are ruses or tricks that do not necessarily challenge or resist systems of power but function within them. Tactics are aimed at carving out temporary spaces of autonomy and seizing momentary opportunities to create, however briefly, advantages for those who can "seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment" (1984, 37)

Knowing how to live in Caxambu demanded a tactical approach to social life. It was predicated, perhaps above all, on using the neighborhood's spaces and social relations in ways that did not *bater de frente* (hit straight on, or directly challenge), the more powerful. Daily social life in this neighborhood did not necessarily mean resisting the will of the more powerful or fighting against structures of exclusion such as racism and class exclusion. Instead, knowing how to live meant maintaining a constant attentiveness to how to dodge, evade, or turn to one's advantage the obstacles that life placed in one's path.

The residents of Caxambu pay close attention to knowing how to live, not only because their daily margins of survival are often slim and the obstacles that confront them powerful but also because of where they live—in a neighborhood classified as a favela. As squatter neighborhoods, favelas can be seen as tactical spaces: as I explain in more detail below, though residents did not own the land that they lived on, shanties were often tolerated and unofficially accepted. In most cases, favela residents did not collectively demand title to their land; thus favelas were, themselves, "ruses" or "tricks" that allowed the urban poor to carve out improvised spaces where they and their families could live. At the same time, in such a tactical space daily life was characterized by a deep insecurity and vulnerability, and residents did seek unofficial and informal connections to local politicians, employers, and elites.

Many favela residents responded to these challenges by emphasizing creativity, improvisation, and the ability to carve out zones of temporary autonomy and pleasure while not engaging in a potentially costly battle with larger and more powerful structures of authority. Paying attention to how social tactics are used by favela residents to live with insecurity also complicates answers to a series of simple dichotomous questions about the effects of violence and insecurity in Latin America. Debates about whether favela residents accept or reject violence, whether they cooperate with drug traffickers or are coerced into assisting them, seem to miss the point. A tactical approach to insecurity—predicated upon, as Seu Lázaro once told me, "não se metendo em briga de cachorro grande" (not getting in the middle of a fight between big dogs)—means not taking sides, deliberately, so as to maximize one's longer-term survival.

The social tactics deployed by Caxambu's residents as they live with insecurity are, in this sense, an elaboration of a deep cultural repertoire, a way of living with insecurity that Rio's urban poor have elaborated for generations. Although neoliberal economic reforms and the drug trade have produced new forms of insecurity, Rio's poor and nonwhite citizens have long lived in a context where many larger aspects of their lives are often beyond their control. Many of the residents of Caxambu, for instance, are the descendants of slaves who had little control over their own labor. Living with insecurity by elaborating social tactics is thus in part a response to the built urban form of favela neighborhoods and to the deep historic forms of racial and class exclusion. But it is also a response by residents to the symbolic place that favelas have occupied in Rio's social imaginary. Since squatters first erected shacks on Rio's hillsides more than one hundred years ago, favelas have come to symbolize difference and disorder, pockets of racial and class difference located within the center of Rio.

Favelas and the Social Imaginary of Rio: From Terror to "Pacification"

Because many favelas in the city of Rio are located near, or even within, wealthier neighborhoods, they have had a visibility that many other poor neighborhoods have not had. They have come to symbolize both the best and worst of Rio—both its "authentic" Afro-Brazilian traditions such as samba and carnival, since many favela residents are the descendants of slaves, and Brazil's savage class and racial inequalities. Caxambu, then, was not just a neighborhood with its own particular history of occupation and specific sets of social relations, but a favela, a mythical or hyper-real place laden with symbolism and conveying larger sets of meanings about the nature of Brazilian society.[5] Two moments from the relatively recent history of Rio capture the place that favelas have occupied in the city's social imaginary.

On Monday, September 30, 2002, large parts of the city of Rio were brought to a standstill as panic spread throughout the city. Shop owners closed their doors, claiming that young men armed with AK-47s had appeared at their doors early in the morning, identifying themselves as members of a favela-based drug gang and ordering them to shut down. As rumors spread, schools closed and sent students home, bus drivers refused to drive their routes, restaurants, banks, and shopping malls closed. News

reports claimed that the shut-down had been ordered by the imprisoned drug trafficker Fernandinho Beira Mar in retaliation for having been transferred to a more secure prison facility. Regardless of the specific motives, a more general fear that violence was spilling beyond the confines of Rio's favelas triggered a cascade of panic. The owner of a bakery in the upper-middle-class neighborhood of Botafogo explained why he closed down this way: "Some people stopped working because of rumors that armed criminals would come down from the favelas; others shut down because they saw that the neighboring stores had closed" (*Estado de S. Paulo*, September 30, 2002).

In what quickly came to be called the holiday of terror, the boundaries that had seemed to contain Rio's violence appeared to be collapsing. Images of heavily armed drug traffickers in the city's favelas were common on television or in newspapers. But young men armed with AK-47s were never seen downtown or in the city's chic beach-front areas. It was also common practice for drug traffickers to order businesses in favelas to close when a powerful drug dealer was killed. But drug traffickers had never exercised this influence in the "regular" city (Penglase 2005).

Favelas had become iconic symbols of a broad sense of insecurity and concern with personal safety shared by many residents of Rio, and this shutdown would not be the last time that violence appeared to spill beyond the borders of the city's favelas. Later in 2002, drug traffickers reportedly threw a hand grenade at the Rio Sul shopping center, one of the city's fanciest, and machine-gunned the Palácio de Guanabara, the state governor's office. These events were associated with favelas in press reports, and favelas seemed to symbolize a broader collapse of public security. Favelas were territories beyond the control of the state and yet in the center of the city, a safe zone for drug-trafficking gangs whose violence threatened the city as a whole.

In 2011, a very different image of favelas was splashed across newspapers and television screens. On Sunday morning, November 13, approximately three thousand police officers and soldiers moved into the favela of Rocinha and also occupied the neighboring favelas of Chácara do Céu and Vidigal. Not only is Rocinha one of the largest favelas in the city of Rio, and perhaps all of Latin America, but its location near wealthier neighborhoods meant that the drug business there was highly lucrative. The massive police occupation had been anticipated for weeks. In a prior operation, soldiers and police had occupied the favelas of the Complexo do Alemão,

opaque: the police and the drug dealers can be allies, can work together against other police or other drug dealers, or can quickly switch sides.

Anthropology of Violence in Latin America's "Age of Insecurity"

The increase in violent crime in Rio during the 1990s was part of a larger regional trend. According to Diane Davis, "violence could even arguably be considered the central—if not defining—problem in contemporary Latin America" (2006, 178). Across the region, as the Cold War ended in the 1980s, countries emerged from civil wars or authoritarian dictatorships. With the advent of democracy, Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt argue, "one might cynically state that violence is being democratized in Latin America" (1999, 11). For twin processes were taking place: there was a turn from protectionist economic policies to those favoring global free market competition, and rates of crime and interpersonal violence dramatically escalated. Violence has long been integral to state formation in Latin America. In the 1980s and 1990s, though, several new factors influenced the shape of violence. First, economic policies implemented throughout the region led to greater inequality. Second, one of the legacies of decades of civil war and dictatorship was a broad pattern of impunity for violent acts committed by the police and other security forces. Third, the expanded cross-border trade of goods enabled by neoliberal economic reforms also created new opportunities for drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime.

As Desmond Arias and Daniel Goldstein note, "violence pervades much of Latin America, but the configuration and politics of that violence differ substantially from place to place" (2010, 21). An overview of several countries presents the larger pattern. In El Salvador, for instance, the number of homicides in 1995 matched, or perhaps even surpassed, the annual death rate during that country's civil war (Moodie 2010, 46). Likewise, when Guatemala's civil war officially ended in 1996, violent crime dramatically increased in many rural areas. Shockingly, Guatemala's homicide rate in 2005 exceeded the average number of people killed each year by political violence during the country's armed conflict (O'Neill and Thomas 2011, 11). As David Stoll has observed, for many Guatemalans, the end of the genocidal civil war coincided with a situation of greater anxiety about violence, though this time the perpetrators were criminals and not soldiers (2008, 188). Ellen Moodie likewise noted that in postwar El Salvador, life was characterized by a "new climate of risk" that some Salvadorans felt was "worse than the war" (2010, 21). Overall, Latin America is experiencing what Davis has called an "age of insecurity" (2006).

As crime rates have increased, so has the scholarly examination of violence. Scholars from a wide variety of fields have noted the negative impact that violence has upon citizenship, politics, and the nature of democracy. Guillermo O'Donnell, for example, has argued that some Latin American states have been unwilling or unable to extend full rights and citizenship to all their inhabitants. This has produced what he calls a "low-intensity citizenship," where poor and marginalized people live in a formally democratic state, yet cannot expect fair treatment in the courts or by the police (1993, 1361). In a similar formulation, Teresa Caldeira and James Holston have argued that Brazil can be characterized as a "disjunctive democracy," where citizens are free to vote in free and fair elections and yet cannot count on the state to guarantee civic rights such as the access to a fair trial, protection from arbitrary arrest or police abuse, or even the right to life (1999).

As I have attempted to understand how these processes impact the daily lives of the residents of Caxambu who I came to know, three arguments from the anthropological analysis of violence in Latin America have been guideposts for the analysis that follows. First, anthropologists have shown that the lived experience of violence is often one of deep ambiguity and uncertainty. Ellen Moodie, for instance, demonstrates how postwar violence in El Salvador was characterized by "radical uncertainty" (2010, 15). During the civil war, the structural causes of conflict were relatively clear. Postwar life in El Salvador, Moodie argues, is characterized by a pervasive sense of "not knowing," where daily life is characterized by individual risk taking in the face of an unpredictable social world. Likewise, Linda Green argues that one of the pervasive effects of the conflict in Guatemala was the creation of a state of fear, where the lines between combatants and civilians were increasingly blurred. For instance, young men who served in the army returned to their natal villages, populated by indigenous people similar to those whom they had been ordered to kill (1998). Aldo Civico, in his research with Colombian paramilitaries, notes an analogous way in which violence produces profound ambiguity. Paramilitaries are not formally part of the military, yet cooperate closely with the Colombian army in its war against leftist guerrillas. Paramilitaries, Civico states, "arise, grow, and

poor neighborhoods in El Salvador, Guatemala, or Bolivia, daily life in Caxambu was not permeated by feelings of insecurity. Instead, most residents generally felt, most of the time, safe and secure. Life in a poor neighborhood where people had few resources and worked long hours was also often boring and tedious. But at the same time, the drudgery of daily life was sometimes punctuated by moments of joy and pleasure, and intense moments of danger. The inhabitants of Caxambu all knew that their daily routines could be suddenly interrupted by potentially lethal violence from the police or drug dealers.

João do Rio's challenge is to show how this unpredictability also contained a certain type of order, had its own logic. I would add that a further challenge is to show the disorder in the order: to show how a larger context of racial and class exclusion, a deeper structure of invisible structural violence, established the often unquestioned parameters of daily life in Caxambu. Safety and danger, unpredictability and order, violence and peace, were inextricably linked in daily life, producing a state of (in)security. In what follows I do not try to explain this state, but portray it, describe it, and perhaps give a sense of what it felt like. In particular, I turn to storytelling, narrating how I experienced (in)security but also letting the residents of Caxambu tell their stories.

In this book, I keep the analysis focused on daily life in Caxambu as I experienced it. My guiding concern is to explore how favela residents view their lives and worlds, how police and drug traffickers affect them, how other less visible forms of violence shape their lives, but also to show the joy and resilience of the people I came to know. In doing so, I have been guided by what Michael Jackson called "radical empiricism" (1989). That is, empiricism in the sense that I have focused on what I saw and heard, on the actual events that occurred, radical in the sense that what I saw and heard was the product of my own specific positioning. Another observer at a different time, and of a different gender, race, or social class, would probably have seen and heard otherwise. My focus has been a classic anthropological question: how do people in Caxambu understand their lives? What does violence mean to them, and how does it fit with all the other aspects of their daily struggles and joys?

The methodological challenges here are two: first, how to depict both order and disorder in ways that do not reify one as the normal counterpart to the other; and second, how to depict a situation of uncertainty and unpredictable violence when I myself was part of the story. Kay Warren has suggested one approach. She argues that ethnographers should present "narratives of absence and displacement that capture the contradictory currents of change" (2002, 391). This is the approach that I have pursued, centering each chapter in this book around particular narratives, or ethnographic vignettes, that do not present a stable, coherent social world disrupted by violence, nor do they show a chaotic world where no rules apply. Rather, I have tried to present stories that can show how both security and insecurity, order and disorder, coexist, as people struggle to make sense of and cope with the instabilities they experience. It has become fairly common, in the analysis of urban violence, to argue that violence produces "epistemic murk" (Taussig 1986) or "everyday states of emergency" (Scheper-Hughes 1992). A radically empiricist approach leads me not to simply evoke these tropes, as powerful as they are, but to examine the particular social interactions where these states were generated and describe, as best I can, the meanings and emotions that they generated—to examine as precisely as possible how the residents of Caxambu experienced and understood the order in the disorder.

Ethnographic Representation and the Paradoxes of Daily Life

Though this is a book about urban violence, most of the more violent incidents that I examine happen off stage. There are several reasons why this is so. I am not interested in describing violent acts to shock the reader, engaging in what Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois have called a pornography of violence that both attracts and repels the reader, yet that disables critical analysis (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, 1). As Bourgois argues, harrowing descriptions of violence can "reinforce negative perceptions of subordinated groups," while failing to reveal "the chains of causality that link structural, political, and symbolic violence in the production of an everyday violence that buttresses unequal power relations" (Bourgois 2004, 433). Instead, I am interested in the lingering effects of more traumatic events, in what happens after the shooting is over, so to speak.

I was also not present when some of the more extreme incidents of violence occurred. Like most residents of Caxambu, I was careful about protecting my safety, generally avoiding the neighborhood late at night and going indoors when the police were raiding the neighborhood or

when a contentious drug deal was happening. I felt that it was more important to participate in the strategies that residents used to avoid violence than to attempt to be an eyewitness to dangerous incidents. Directly witnessing violence might have made me seem more heroic, yet it would have been extremely dangerous and would have made my neighbors think I was a fool.

Throughout the book, then, the focus is mainly on residents of Caxambu who do not directly participate in the drug trade, and upon the small, mundane ways that violence shapes their lives. I have focused every chapter around particular "moments of crisis," or what Sally Falk Moore called diagnostic events, which help to convey what it is like to live in a state of (in)security. These moments do not reveal smooth functioning of a social order, but instead the "ongoing contests and conflicts and competitions and the efforts to prevent, suppress, or repress these" (1987, 730). At these moments the established social order and senses of security and predictability are called into question, and indeterminacy is most apparent. These are also moments when tensions in the relationship between large-scale structures and individual agency is most acute, when conditions seem impossible and yet the imperative to do something is unavoidable. These moments, though, present no easy resolution, no clear guideline into knowing how to live in Caxambu. Instead they are moments of absence and displacement that exemplify the challenge of living in a state of (in)security.

In Chapter 2, I compare two such moments from my fieldwork to describe how discourses of insecurity shaped both my research and daily life in Caxambu. The first moment of crisis was the first time that I was stopped and searched by the police. Being searched by the police was an almost archetypal ethnographic moment, one which seemed to give me a deeper rapport with residents of Caxambu, and which seemed to make tangible larger forces such as policing and the drug trade. The second incident, when I was embroiled in a long-simmering dispute, shows how daily social life is also often full of uncertainty, ambiguity, and danger. To make sense of these two incidents, I show how they were shaped by a discourse of insecurity that takes favelas to be prime symbols of disorder and danger.

Chapter 3 examines how the built space of the neighborhood mediates local social relations. This chapter is organized around another fieldwork moment, a discussion between Seu Lázaro, an older man and local community leader, and Tubarão, a drug dealer, over whether or not Tubarão should wear his gun while sitting with me in Seu Lázaro's backyard. Here the focus turns from the citywide discourse of insecurity to a more local context, examining how Caxambu's local history is reflected in the stories that residents tell about their neighborhood. I show how lived experiences are founded upon an older, larger contradiction between the neighborhood's officially illegal yet unofficially tolerated status, what Boaventura de Sousa Santos has called the basic insecurity of Rio's favelas (1977, 91). This local context produces profound ambiguities, as the space of the hillside is deeply familiar, literally the product of generations of work by Caxambu's residents, yet also a zone of exclusion.

I also explore how this contradiction enables the emergence of drug traffickers, who flourish in this "alegality" or "extralegality." Social relations between people who inhabit the morro of Caxambu, especially young men involved in drug trafficking, are paradoxical, as these young men are both well known to everyone, yet are seen as dangerously seduced by a world of crime. I call these young men dangerous intimates. The way that residents of Caxambu speak about their neighborhood as a big family, though, does not simply reflect its history or disguise actual inequalities. Instead, I show how the discourse of a familiar hillside is also a tool that residents can use as they attempt to manage relationships with local drug traffickers.

In Chapter 4, the focus turns more directly onto the relationships between residents of Caxambu and local drug dealers, examining the structures of authority that drug traffickers create. This chapter examines what happened when the drug dealer Tubarão shot a local man and also shot and killed Seu Lázaro's pet dog. Building upon the analysis of the relationship between order and disorder, I argue that drug traffickers in Caxambu do not impose their power through brute coercion, nor by establishing a clear statelike structure of rules. Instead, they rely upon what I call a strategy of abnormalization as they both insist upon a set of rules that determine how favela residents must interact with them, yet also consistently violate these rules. As drug traffickers attempt to appropriate security and insecurity, they have a profound impact on local understandings of gender and authority.

Chapter 5 examines how policing shapes daily life in Caxambu. Here, too, I do not look at the more extreme cases of violence in Caxambu. Instead, I examine mundane interactions between the police and favela residents, showing how militarized forms of policing reshape experiences of racism and social discrimination. Using the idea of criminalization—or the

attempt to redefine everyday practices as crimes—I argue that prior interpretations of police violence in poor neighborhoods have failed to truly understand how police practices affect daily life. The police, I argue, produce a new form of prejudice, the prejudice of criminalized space, which overlaps with and also reshapes older forms of racial and social discrimination. An ethnographic look at police practices on the ground also shows that the police are neither absent from poor neighborhoods like Caxambu nor do they simply cordon off the wealthy from the poor. Instead, I show how policing often works symbiotically with drug-trafficker violence as they both produce forms of disorder that both try to turn to their advantage.

Chapter 6 concludes the analysis of Caxambu's state of (in)security, not by offering a sense of closure but by juxtaposing the meanings and memories attached to three different parts of the top of the hill that Caxambu is built on: a sidewalk where a girl named Estela was killed; a bust of Brazil's former president Getúlio Vargas; and a large cross that sits in front of Caxambu's long-abandoned Catholic church. In each of these three cases, it is possible to see the productive qualities of Caxambu's state of (in)security by examining how violence, in Allen Feldman's term, "semiotizes" spaces and objects (1991). The meanings and memories attached to these three places are opaque, contradictory, and in many ways phantasmagorical. They serve as final reminders of how the transnational drug trade, broader flows of legal and illegal commodities, clashes between the police and drug dealers, and competing notions of security or the lack of it reshape local places and social relations. At the same time, as the residents of Caxambu attach their own meanings to their neighborhood, they engage in social tactics that help them navigate the wider state of (in)security, not challenging more powerful forces such as the police or local drug dealers, yet quietly insisting on their own agency, identity, and pride.

Participant-Observation, Narcocultures, and the Law of Silence

Rio's drug trade has undergone significant changes since the time I conducted my fieldwork in Caxambu. The late 1980s and early 1990s were, perhaps, the high point of the consolidation of the drug trade in the hands of the CV. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, when I did my fieldwork,

serious rivalries within the CV led to a splintering of the organization. As the CV splintered, rival organizations (the Terceiro Comando and the Amigos de Amigos) took advantage of the group's divisions and fought for control over favelas, becoming major forces in their own right.

By the early 2000s, new actors emerged: elements of the police and other agents of the state moved directly into organized crime, establishing groups called *milícias* (McLeod-Roberts 2007; Zaluar and Conceição 2007). Unlike the CV, milícias do not focus exclusively upon drug trafficking, but pursue a wider and more traditional strategy of organized crime, demanding payments by favela residents for the provision of safety and seeking to profit by regulating and organizing favela-based forms of extralegal economic enterprises, from drug trafficking to unregulated transportation. The more recent UPP policy of permanent police occupation of favelas will, no doubt, provoke even more changes in the structure of drug dealing.

Though the drug trade in Rio is highly dynamic, the CV and Terceiro Comando have left a deep legacy on daily life in Rio's favelas, producing what might be thought of as a narcoculture. As one aspect of this legacy, Rio's drug-trafficking organizations have had a profound impact upon language, which filters through the rest of this book and deeply shaped my research. Marguerite Fietlowitz has shown how the violence unleashed by Argentina's military dictatorship produced a new lexicon, one that distorted and reshaped perceptions of reality and that remains one of the most profound and lasting legacies of the dictatorship (1999). Rio's drug-trafficking organizations have similarly reshaped the language used in the city's poor hillside neighborhoods, producing a linguistic culture where reality is often opaque and ambiguous.

The terms used to talk about drug trafficking and drug traffickers, for example, are highly ambivalent and characteristically amorphous, drawing variously upon imagery of warfare, the language of corporate management, romanticized folk legends, and much more diffuse imagery. The most common term used to describe drug dealers, and which the drug dealers use to describe themselves is *bandido*, meaning bandit and evoking the famous outlaws whose exploits defying the police and elite delight Brazil's poor, especially in the northeast. A particularly famous example was Lampião (Chandler 1978), whose legends have become the stuff of Brazilian folklore (Slater 1982). Rio de Janeiro also has its share of famous Robin Hood–like bandits, such as the mythical Charles 45, made famous by a song by pop

singer Jorge Ben. Drug traffickers are also often called *malandros* (hustlers), evoking the romanticized image of the stylish rogue or man-about-town often celebrated in samba songs for his ability to live at the margins of the legal world, creatively avoiding the discipline of wage labor. An array of other terms used describe drug dealers include *a rapaziada* (the guys), and *o pessoal* (the group).

Other terms associated with the drug trade are vague and polysemic. One of the most common terms used to describe the drug dealers was the impersonal noun, *o tráfico* (the traffic), meaning both the drug trade and drug traffickers themselves. Another widely used term was *o movimento*, literally the movement. Both terms evoke impersonal, evanescent, yet omnipresent forces. They partially erase the social identities of particular people, merging them into larger and almost nonhuman forces. A *movimento* is not a person, but can be interpreted as having an ambiguous political reference—a movement for what, organized by whom?—or referring to the physical state of movement itself. *Tráfico* also evokes circulation, movement, and a lack of ties to any one place. Other terms used to describe drug dealing and the drug gang share this abstraction and placelessness. For example, the drug purchasing or stockpiling point in Rio's favelas is known as the *boca de fumo*, literally the mouth of smoke.

Drug trafficking affects not only the lexicon of Rio's favelas, but also how language is used in practice. One crucial aspect of knowing how to live in Caxambu is abiding by the law of silence, which mandates that residents of the neighborhood must not speak to outsiders, and especially not to the police, about the activities of the drug dealers or, more broadly, about any negative aspects of living in Caxambu. Ellen Moodie argues that Salvadorans were often encouraged to "not know" the structural conditions that led to increased crime rates in postwar El Salvador (Moodie 2010). An analogous process took place in Caxambu, but on a more local scale, as residents had to "not know" about local drug dealers. As Dona Carmen once told me: "Here you have to pretend that you're blind, deaf, and dumb. You can't see anything, hear anything, or write anything." Another resident demonstrated how to do this when he told me about how the current drug gang was different than former ones: "Now this *pessoal* (personnel) . . . this *rapaz* (guy) who is here is smarter, more cunning. He doesn't let anyone invade anyone else's house. Do you understand? He doesn't let the *pessoal* . . . because he already has what he wants from the residents, and the residents need him, so we . . . understand? Not that . . . not that I'm in favor. But I'm also not against. I'm neither for nor against. I have . . . I have my own opinion, right?"

This conversation is typical of the use of semantically broad terms—such as *pessoal* (personnel), *rapaz* (guy), and simply *ele* (he)—to talk about particular individuals who are known to both speakers. This semantic ambiguity was not only common in taped interviews but was also a constant feature of everyday talk, and this interview is only unusual for the frankness with which the resident addressed the drug trade's impact on the neighborhood. In the conversation that opened this chapter, for instance, when Dona Carmen referred to me being "friends with everyone," she may have been alluding to the local drug traffickers (or maybe not).

Navigating the law of silence, or knowing how to speak about the unspeakable and understand the unspoken, presents distinct challenges for an ethnographer committed, as I am, to both critiquing oppression and also not violating the trust that my neighbors and friends in Caxambu placed in me. Though this is not a book about the drug trade per se, and it is certainly not an exposé of any hidden secrets, I am aware that speaking openly about the contradictions of daily life and the radical ambivalence produced by violence means violating local social norms. I worry that I risk portraying residents of Caxambu as themselves violent.

At the same time, my friends and neighbors in Caxambu constantly urged me to "tell it like it really is." In the pages that follow, I strive to present both the difficulties and also the creativity, spontaneity, and joy with which the residents of Caxambu lived their lives. It is, of course, tempting to present them as victims of the police or of local drug dealers or, on the contrary, to present a counternarrative of peaceful coexistence. Yet knowing how to live in neighborhoods like Caxambu—and thus the immense daily creativity and skillful social tactics of favela residents—is far more complex. It means navigating the state of (in)security, a social world characterized by both friendship and rivalry, quotidian normalcy and sudden danger, exclusion from formal channels of influence, and yet deep integration into flows of goods and commodities. I hope that presenting the complexities of daily life in Caxambu, and highlighting the perseverance and creativity shown by its residents, allows me to violate the law of silence.