MEDIA NARRATIVES OF CRIME AND THE FAVELAS
OF SÃO PAULO AND RIO DE JANEIRO

BY

TIFFANY WU

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
BACHELOR OF ARTS IN LEGAL STUDIES
IN THE COLLEGE OF LETTERS AND SCIENCE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY
MAY 2012
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ABSTRACT

Brazil’s two largest urban metropolises, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, have traditionally received drastically different treatment on the world stage and in global as well as domestic media. Though the cities differ in terms of geography, historical development, and the roles each plays in the national economy, favelas—lower-income squatter settlements—have arisen in both. This work is a comparative case study of media narratives of crime and criminality in and around São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, employing framing analysis to tease out the representations embedded in domestically produced media. I find that the cities’ favelas are treated very differently, and propose an explanation based on variation in the spatial organization of the favelas: while São Paulo’s favelas are located in the periphery of the city, Rio’s favelas are dispersed throughout, juxtaposed with wealthy neighborhoods.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am immensely grateful for the guidance and insight of my advisor, Professor Michael Musheno, without which this thesis would never have been possible. I would also like to thank Jamie Rowen for her help in preparing my research question and proposal, and my friends Tammy Gilden, Michael Durfey, and Andrew Park for their moral support and editing prowess.
INTRODUCTION

The mention of Brazil conjures up a variety of images: bronzed, beautiful people on sunny beaches, the delirious excess of Carnival, World Cup soccer wins, and cities plagued by crime and violence. Films such as four-time Academy Award nominee Cidade de Deus (City of God), action blockbuster Fast Five, and animated feature Rio, all set in the shantytowns of Rio de Janeiro, serve to disseminate and implant these images into the global consciousness. Varying representations of Rio de Janeiro’s lower-income squatter settlements, or favelas, abound in news reports, documentaries, and academic scholarship. Located in the wealthy southeast region of the country, Brazil’s “Cidade Maravilhosa” (Marvelous City), as Rio de Janeiro is often called, has captured international attention, due in part to its unique topography, rich historical significance, and natural beauty. Rio’s attractiveness has resulted in its favelas being “among the most studied low-income neighborhoods in the world” (McCann 2006:149). In 2003, sociologists Lícia do Prado Valladares and Lídia Medeiros compiled a “selective list of 668 books and articles” on the favelas, most published between 1980 and 2000 (150).

Behind the metaphorical pile of books and articles on Rio de Janeiro lies a much smaller body of literature on Brazil’s largest city, São Paulo. Despite this fact, the “other” urban metropolis is not without representations in public media, as domestic films such as Carandiru, chronicling a prison riot that led to the massacre of over 100 unarmed inmates, documentaries, and reports have been produced about the economic powerhouse as well. However, despite having the largest number of favelas and the largest number of favela residents in the country, São Paulo’s marginalized communities have received relatively little focus in international scholarship (Fitzpatrick 2011).
After two decades of military dictatorship, the rough path to redemocratization that Brazil undertook in 1985 has left its mark on citizens, cities, and all levels of government. Criminal organizations arose from the mixing of political prisoners and petty criminals in the country’s overcrowded prisons and, as the cocaine trade flourished, overtook the favelas in the nation’s urban centers. In Brazil’s collective conscience, the favelas have become associated with crime and violence, and the media has played a crucial role in reinforcing this connection. The power of the news to shape perceptions of reality allows it to contribute significantly to the flow of communal discourse.

Placing São Paulo in a comparative context with Rio de Janeiro, this work is a case study of representations of crime and the favelas in a cross-section of news reports drawn from two of Brazil’s largest newspapers. I use a critical and interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the text of public narratives to discern how crime in the favelas is contextualized in socio-geographical history, and how favelas are treated in the public discourse of criminality. Since interpretations of media discourses are culturally dependent, I ground my reading in anthropological and sociological texts on the nature of the favelas and their residents. These studies provide valuable depth of perspective, particularly local ones, which are often conspicuously absent in media narratives.

From a socio-geographical standpoint, the physical distribution of “legitimate” and “illegitimate” spaces in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro differs drastically. Rio de Janeiro’s favelas are ever-present and pervasive. Perched on hills overlooking the city’s wealthiest areas, and often adjacent to them, their presence cannot be ignored. In contrast, the favelas of São Paulo are located in the periphery of the city, out of view of the general populace. Decades of urbanization and development have created these disparities, and I find in this study that
representations of illegality in the two cities are proportional and inextricably linked to the spatial organization of the two cities.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE CITIES

Geographical studies of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo reveal powerful insights into the roles that the two cities have played in Brazil’s history. Brian Godfrey and Preston E. James are among the few scholars to have drawn a direct comparison between the two metropolises. In 1933, James observed that the two cities followed two distinctive models of urban growth: Rio de Janeiro exemplified the Luso-Brazilian style of irregular coastal urbanization and São Paulo embodied a more “uniform, modern type of inland commercial-industrial expansion” (James 298).

Rio de Janeiro’s storied history has certainly contributed to its importance on the world stage. Founded by Portuguese colonists in 1565, it became a major port city in the mid-seventeenth century with the discovery of gold in neighboring Minas Gerais, and the resulting economic vibrancy made it the capital city in 1763. During the Napoleonic wars of the early nineteenth century in Europe, the Portuguese court fled Lisbon and established Rio as the seat of its empire. Urban development flourished during this period, with the construction of elegant buildings that fit the city’s new status as the center of the Portuguese empire, and well-planned streets in the style of Haussman’s Paris (Perlman 2010:xviii). The city remained the national capital after Brazil’s independence in 1822 and maintained its political and cultural dominance for over a century, hitting its peak of cultural vibrancy in 1958 with an outflux of uniquely
Brazilian music (*bossa nova* tunes such as “Girl from Ipanema), dance, sport, and culture. In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, Rio de Janeiro “lost the status and patronage of the national capital with the inauguration of Brasília in 1960, just as the city also lost its demographic primacy and economic hegemony to São Paulo” (Godfrey 94). Its relative political-economic decline was accompanied by increases in levels of crime and violence, which have come to the forefront of international media. Despite these factors, Rio maintains its rich colonial history, breathtaking cityscapes, and famous beaches, as well as a trove of cultural and artistic treasures; the *Cidade Maravilhosa* (Marvelous City) undoubtedly endures as the nation’s most world-renowned visual symbol.

If Rio de Janeiro is Brazil’s ambassador city, then São Paulo is its economic powerhouse. In the late nineteenth century, the rise of coffee as a major cash crop, the construction of railroads to transport it, and São Paulo’s strategic position between the country’s interior and the narrow coast combined to shift the center of economic prosperity firmly southwards. Enormous growth and commercial expansion accompanied this transfer, and by 1960, São Paulo’s population had surpassed that of Rio de Janeiro to become Brazil’s largest city. Today, São Paulo is the center of tertiary services in Brazil, with vast numbers of headquarters of national and multinational corporations within its borders. Godfrey observes, “As a center of global corporate activity, São Paulo ranks number 11 globally, in a tie with Zurich and just below Mexico City, Madrid, and Seoul” (Godfrey 99). This modernization came at a price: few of the city’s historic landmarks remain, as most of the early mansions built with coffee profits have been torn down to make way for office high-rises. While São Paulo lacks the natural charm of Rio, “it is precisely the Paulista economic dynamism that serves as the civic identity and pride of place” (Godfrey 117).
However, like Rio de Janeiro in its heyday, São Paulo’s rapid economic growth is unevenly spread among its population, leading to deeply-rooted social and economic disparities. The favelas of both cities are the most marked embodiments of these issues, with inadequate infrastructure and social services, absence of the rule of law and proper policing, and violence stemming from institutionalized poverty, the drug trade, and organized crime.

THE RISE OF THE FAVELAS

The geographical history of both cities includes distinct patterns of development of their favelas, also called morros (hills) in Rio, and collectively, the periferia (periphery) in São Paulo. The favelas of Rio de Janeiro emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century as rent-free housing for displaced migrants. After the demolition of the cortiços (tenements) originally used to house low-income families, displaced workers squatted on neighboring hillsides, forming clustered settlements of self-built houses that “grew upward and outward as the city grew” (Perlman 2010:55). After decades of existence, the favelas became well-established in the urban landscape, acquiring “tenure,” as it were, even as infrastructure and government support remained subpar.

Rio de Janeiro’s social geography reveals a north-south segregation by economic level as well as race. The upscale Zona Sul (South Zone) is home to the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema as well as Rio’s wealthy elites, whereas the poorer neighborhoods are situated in the Zona Norte (North Zone). However, an exception to this geographic divide and an “enduring part of the urban imaginary in Rio” is the presence of favelas embedded in the hills of the middle- and upper-class neighborhoods of the Zona Sul (Leu 345). According to Janice Perlman, who conducted a multigenerational study of Rio’s favelas over forty years, “The
Figure 1. Map of Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, marked in red. While found in a higher concentration in the north, the favelas are spread diffusely throughout the entire municipality, even in the affluent Zona Sul. The city center is located in the east, near the narrow mouth of the Bay of Guanabara. Source: IPP, 2004 (Instituto Municipal de Urbanismo Pereira Passos).

Favelas, as they grew, were seen as blight on the urban landscape, a menace to public health, and a threat to urbane civility. The incoming migrants, and even those born in favelas, were seen as dangerous intruders” (Perlman 2010:xviii). This position motivated the government’s multitude of attempts to “cut out the cancer” that was the favelas, relocating residents to projects in the suburbs of Rio.¹

With outward expansion constricted by the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Serra do Mar mountain range on the other, residential segregation continued to increase within the city.

¹ Cidade de Deus, immortalized in the Oscar-nominated film of the same name, was one of the neighborhoods built to house displaced citizens.
After the fall of the military dictatorship in 1985, the government made several attempts to improve the favelas and integrate them into the larger society. Despite these efforts, improvements were sporadic, crippled by bureaucracy, and insufficient to overcome deeper issues of scarce economic opportunities for residents, the social stigma of living in a favela, and the entrenched drug trade. In 2008, the Secretary of Public Security began to implement *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora* (Police Pacification Units, or UPPs), which occupy favelas in order to dismantle criminal organizations (drug traffickers or police militias) that had been using them as bases. This process of establishing UPPs in favelas is still ongoing.

Figure 2. Map of São Paulo’s favelas, marked in red. Source: *Secretária Municipal de Planejamento Urbano, Prefeitura do Município de São Paulo.*
The favelas of São Paulo arose in the 1940s, some forty years after the first favelas appeared in Rio de Janeiro. As they did in Rio, government demolition of cortiços forced poor workers out of existing low-income housing. Unlike Rio, however, São Paulo lacked topographic restraints on outward expansion, and displaced residents were forced into the city periphery. The city’s resultant “center-periphery spread” is a key feature of its urban landscape (Caldeira 2000).

There are two major differences between the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The first, laid out in the previous paragraphs, is the spatial distributions of the communities themselves. Rio’s favelas are concentrated near the city center, abutting some of the priciest real estate in the city, whereas São Paulo’s favelas are scattered throughout the city periphery. The second difference is the size of the favela populations in both cities. Rio’s favelas are some of the largest, with a majority of favelas housing over a thousand residents; on the contrary, the majority of São Paulo favelas are home to less than a thousand residents. In addition, a peculiarity unique to Rio is its complexos (complexes), made up of adjoining favelas that have merged together due to their physical proximity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan Region</th>
<th>Population Living in “Subnormal Agglomerations“</th>
<th>Proportion of Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>São Paulo</td>
<td>2,162,368</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>1,702,073</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.** Favela populations of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. São Paulo has the highest number of favela residents in the nation, but a higher percentage of cariocas (people from Rio de Janeiro) live in favelas. *Source: IBGE, 2010 Census (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística).*

Favelas in both cities are ever-present symbols of poverty, social inequality, and marginalization. Rooted in Brazil’s history of slavery and military dictatorship, these social problems will take decades to remedy. Almost four million people live in the favelas of Brazil’s
two richest cities by per capita GDP, living in daily fear of the *bala perdida* (stray bullet) from firefight between rival drug factions, or between drug factions and the police (Jaguaribe, Penglase). Although social programs have attempted to restore rights to *moradores* (residents) of favelas, rampant police and state corruption undermine these same rights. Interview-based studies with residents reveal that some are less afraid of traffickers than they are of police—and a legacy of police violence that traces back *centuries* (Caldeira 2000; Perlman 2010).

**CRIME AND THE DRUG TRADE**

With the vast majority working in Rio de Janeiro, scholars of favela studies have covered extensively the nature and impact of crime in these communities. Beatriz Jaguaribe comments, “The mappings of social disarray tend to locate the favelas, the main terrain of the drug trade and a zone of scarcity, as crucial areas of violence” (220). Most of Brazil’s middle- and upper-classes see the favelas as loci of violence and sources of criminality. State officials and law enforcement perpetuate this view with “repressive action, from the almost daily police raids to the removal of entire populations and the razing of shacks, … often justified in the name of the fight against crime” (Santos 162). Scholars have proposed a multitude of explanations for the elevated levels of violence in Brazilian favelas, citing a combination of government shortsightedness, police unaccountability, and scarce opportunities for favela youth (Zaluar 1995; Leeds 1996; Adorno 2002, 2007; Dowdney 2003; Human Rights Watch 2009; Perlman 2010).

A “vacuum” of state power within favela boundaries contributes to the daily occurrence of grave human rights abuses (Arias 2004:1). Decades of willful ignorance on the part of the government have led communities to lose faith in the state’s ability to uphold the law and
provide social services. The lack of public schools, an adequate welfare system, and checks on violence are all testaments to state indifference.

In the state’s absence, alternate actors have stepped in to take its place. Historically, powerful members of criminal organizations, called donos, provided services to the needy. In the mid-twentieth century, these were the bicheiros (leaders of the illegal numbers racket) (Dowdney 52). However, with the escalation of the drug trade in the 70s and 80s, drug traffickers fill this vacuum today (Leeds 1996). They implement informal systems of justice to maintain order in the favelas, often seen by local residents as demonstrating a “more practical interest in the well-being of the community than the police” (Dowdney 58).

The relationship between drug factions and favela communities is complex and multifaceted, and scholars have debated the exact nature of criminal governance in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas. In her seminal article, “Cocaine and Parallel Polities in the Brazilian Urban Periphery: Constraints on Local-Level Democratization,” Elizabeth Leeds argues that drug dealers have deliberately created a system of “forced symbiosis” between themselves and favela residents, “undermining the authority of legitimately elected local leaders” (77). In exchange for residents’ silence, protection, and cooperation, drug dealers offer various alternative welfare services, sometimes including daycare centers (Leeds 77; McCann 157). Drug factions essentially constitute a parallel power structure in a space that is absent of state intervention, with the exception of highly repressive police action. Leeds observes that the favelas of other Brazilian metropolises (São Paulo, Porto Alegre, and Belo Horizonte) have similar systems of criminal leadership (50).

Although Dowdney concedes that even Brazilian politicians refer to drug factions as a “parallel power,” he challenges the claim that drug factions have superseded the state’s power in
the favelas. Rather, “they have simply filled a space that the government has failed to occupy” (71). They present no threat to the preservation of state government and authority because their power is based on the state’s failure to protect its own citizens. Nevertheless, they constitute a de facto socio-political power, a “narco-dictatorship” of “forced reciprocity” that is upheld through mutual support and enforced by violence (54).

Enrique Arias demonstrates that while drug factions do exercise control over favelas, they neither act as “parallel powers” nor replace the state. Pointing to evidence that reveals networks of cooperation between “government officials, civic leaders and drug dealers” that allow traffickers to engage in political activities, he shows that drug traffickers are “integrated” into local systems by means of clientelist practices that have “historically dominate Rio politics” (2006:294). In his recent analysis of favela literature, Brian McCann returns to the “parallel powers” point of view, claiming that favelas “constitute separate city-states within the city. An accurate political map of Rio would show a quasi-medieval patch-work of overlapping and conflicting zones of authority” (162).

DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE INSTITUTIONS OF ORDER

Social activists and scholars studying Brazil’s criminal justice system emphasize the magnitude of its human rights abuses. A study conducted by Human Rights Watch in 2009 outlines the impunity of rampant police killings conducted in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, usually without any negative repercussions for the police involved. Rio and São Paulo police officers carry out extrajudicial executions, form death squads and militias that terrorize favela communities, and cover up evidence of official wrongdoings. Investigations are conducted by the
Civil Police—creating innumerable conflicts of interest—and are generally perfunctory and ineffective.

“Violence and arbitrariness” has characterized the Brazilian police since its inception in the early 1800s (Caldeira 2000:145). During the military dictatorship, “the rigid hierarchy and strict adherence to order that are central to military training become part of the police culture” (Perlman 2010:167). And, though the nation peacefully transitioned from over twenty years of military rule to electoral democracy in 1985, a strong military culture remains. Public security policies are highly repressive; the tendency is to fight violence with violence. In this context, the police become an agent of repression and social control—not of public security. “In [the] whole history [of the Brazilian police],” Caldeira writes, “the only element consistently lacking is a strong will on the part of state authorities and the citizenry to check the abusive power of the police” (2000:145).

Today, there are two kinds of police in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo: **Polícia Militar** (PM; Military Police) and **Polícia Civil** (PC; Civil Police). Both forces answer to the state secretary of public security, who reports to the state governor but is paid by the federal government. The PM, true to its name, is subordinate to the army. Military police are heavily armed and conduct uniformed street policing, including the apprehension of suspects. The PC is responsible for investigation and processing of suspects after they have been arrested by the PM. A **Polícia Federal** (Federal Police) exists as well, which is “in charge of defending the nation’s interests, serving as its judiciary police, controlling drug traffic, and guarding the frontiers” (Caldeira 2000:150). Both arms of the police have elite squadrons; the **Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais** (BOPE; Police Special Forces Battalion) is part of the military police and is specially trained to conduct operations in the favelas.
Aside from a history of violence, rampant corruption marks the Brazilian police. Accounts abound of police seizing the arms of drug traffickers in one favela, then turning around and selling those same arms to traffickers in a different one. The same happens with confiscated illicit drugs. Perhaps the most common act of corruption is the receipt of payment from drug traffickers in return for “turning a blind eye” to their illegal activities (Dowdney 87, 88). Both military and civil police in Rio and São Paulo have very low salaries “that do not reflect the challenging nature of their jobs and aggravate problems of corruption and abuse” (Human Rights Watch 11). In an interview with Human Rights Watch, a military police colonel in Rio said that a military police officer makes less than a low-ranking scout in the drug trade: “A fogueiro (scout) … gets paid R$1300 per month [roughly US$650]…. A soldier of the military police, R$1090 [roughly US$545]” (11-12). In 2011, when police officers discovered the chief drug lord of Rocinha, Rio’s largest favela, being smuggled out of the favela in the trunk of a car, they were offered R$1 million to let him pass.

According to official statistics, police in Rio and São Paulo have killed “a combined total of more than 11,000 people since 2003” (Human Rights Watch 20). In nearly all of these cases, the shootings were reported as or lawful acts of self-defense in response to gunfire by criminal suspects, or “resistance killings” (20). Human Rights Watch’s study reveals, however, that the majority of these are actually extrajudicial executions (2). Also common are extrajudicial criminal gangs made up of police officers, called milícias (militias) in Rio de Janeiro and grupos de exterminio (death squads) in São Paulo. Militias are vigilante groups of off-duty policemen that exert control over communities and extort arbitrary sums of “taxes” and “fees” from residents in exchange for protection and services such as pirated cable TV (Perlman 2010:183-184). Death squads often target public officials who are investigating reports of police abuse. It
is easy to see how favela residents feel caught in between the state and the drug trade, not knowing which side will do more harm, and having no one to turn to for help.

Brazilian bureaucracy is infamous, with case backlogs clogging not only police investigations but also court cases. Sérgio Adorno argues that extensive “penal impunity” is the manifestation of the crisis in the Brazilian criminal justice system (2002:50). The Brazilian populace, poor and wealthy alike, lacks faith in the justice system, and “popular sentiments that crimes are increasing in number and violence are accompanied by sentiments that these same crimes are left unpunished, or, when they are punished, are not done so proportionally to the severity of the crime” (2002:50). While police make many arrests, few crimes are actually processed and decided, and conviction rates are in the “single digits” for crimes against both property and persons (2002:51).

While trust in political systems and elected officials remains low, harsh policing endures because it enjoys widespread popular support: “Police behavior seems to accord with the conceptions of the majority, who not only believe that good police are tough (i.e., violent) police and that their illegal acts are acceptable but also have been unwilling to support some governors’ attempts to enforce the rule of law and respect for individual rights” (Caldeira 2000:139). This is the case even for working-class citizens who themselves suffer at the hands of the police. The simultaneous presence of political democracy and lack of respect for citizenship rights that is prevalent throughout Brazil has been called a “disjunctive democracy,” where electoral democracy is insufficient to enforce a democratic rule of law (Caldeira and Holston 692). Authoritarian leaders spearheaded the country’s peaceful transition from military rule to democracy. Consequently,

the rule of law, the legal system and the institutions responsible for protecting and promoting civil and political rights retain authoritarian characteristics, and fail to
ensure respect for civil and political rights, even for members of organizations that are responsible for protecting those rights—police and prison officials, prosecutors and judges. (Adorno 2007:5)

This disjunction between democracy “on the books” and “on the ground” is most clearly seen in the favelas. While the national polity is a *prima facie* democracy, some argue that the breakdown of democratic structures at the local level make national democracy “meaningless” (Leeds 77). The Brazilian paradox is that democratization has resulted in surges of “new kinds of violence, injustice, corruption, and impunity,” and the denial of citizenship to entire tracts of the population, rather than increased public participation and a just society (Holston 13).

**THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

**THE NEWS AS PUBLIC DISCOURSE**

Most of society experiences crime through the media. Mediated images of violence shape public discourse, and these “public narratives” create understandings of crime and criminality that pervade the popular consciousness. News is reality, but filtered, retold, and represented through the eyes of reporters. Although most readers of the news readily acknowledge this point, many of us still accept—unless given reason not to—what we read in the paper as fact. What is actually happening is reality construction, where the “reality” of the world that we see is shaped by what we are told about it.

All sources of media produce some kind of distortion, manipulating the perception and significance of particular events in the eyes of the public (Peelo 26). In media studies, this practice is called framing, defined by Robert Entman as “select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a
particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (1993:52). As journalists select and report the stories they deem “newsworthy” and relevant to the interests of their target readership, they form enduring narratives that inevitably shape the ways in which their audience relates to the world. The significance of examining media as a lens for society lies in the fact that “the language of the media is one of the most pervasive and widespread discourses that people from all sorts of literate societies are exposed to” (Caldas-Coulthard 272-273). Critical analysis of media and the news provides an understanding of the kinds of issues at the forefront of public discourse.

“News,” writes Caldas-Coulthard, “is a cultural construct that encodes fixed values” (273). People often receive and subsequently internalize the attitudes, priorities, and concerns embedded in the news. Studies measuring the magnitude of agenda-setting, the way in which the media defines which issues are salient, indicate that voters “tend to share what the media defines as important” (Kuypers 1). In Brazil, as the upper classes have traditionally controlled news production and constitute the majority of readers as well, the language of the news is essentially the language of the dominant class (Leu 346).

In this context, public narratives of crime reveal “how societies discuss and make sense of crime issues and images, and by which to recognize the socially constructed nature of our understanding of crime” (Peelo 21). Media discourse analysis also exposes the boundaries of societal awareness of crime, when one takes into account the kinds of narratives that are included and excluded from public notice (23).

Along with violent crime, the “talk of crime” rose dramatically in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in recent decades. A proliferation of everyday narratives, commentaries, and even jokes that have crime as their subject,“ the talk of crime provokes perpetual feelings of fear (Caldeira
This fear, in turn, combines with polarizing narratives of crime to create stereotypes that actually exacerbate violence by fostering a specific social order with the dominant class at its apex and the dominated classes at its base. Narratives of crime are simplistically divided into “good” and “evil,” “perpetrator” and “victim,” with certain social categories identified as either one or the other. The talk of crime legitimizes violent repression of the lower classes that are seen to be the source of criminality, and turns a blind eye to police brutality, death squads, and rights abuses. Caldeira and Holston have argued that the spiral of fear and violence perpetrated by the talk of crime is a major contributor to Brazil’s “disjunctive democracy,” the rift between democratic policies and democratic processes.

CRIME, MEDIA, AND THE FAVELAS

My study attempts to isolate the most prominent public narratives about crime proximate to the favelas of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, as well as the discourse surrounding criminality in general. Many have arrived before me at the intersection of crime, media, and the favelas. In 2007, Ramos and Paiva conducted quantitative studies of Brazil’s main daily newspapers, finding that “the journalistic report about Brazil’s favelas and low income suburbs, especially in Rio de Janeiro, almost always regards these territories as ‘exclusive spaces of violence,’ and the voices and perspectives of favela dwellers are under-represented” (Ramos and Paiva 77; Baroni 50).

Qualitative studies of press narratives provide meaningful support for the talk of crime’s existence and effects. Leu’s 2004 study documents the press response to a spectacular kind of violence that has erupted in Rio de Janeiro in recent years (343). While incidents of violent crime confined to the favelas is easily downplayed in the news, the attempts by criminal groups
to “lay claim to public space” also meant “making advances on the ideological territory of the media” (345). The press’s reaction, labeled a “moral panic,” has been to rationalize these intrusions by redrawing the lines between accepted and prohibited practices and behaviors. In this process, they have conflated innocent civilians and drug traffickers, classifying the favelas as spaces of lawlessness (351). Ben Penglase’s study of Rio de Janeiro media identifies two incidents in the early 90s as key moments in the shift towards a “neo-racist” discourse of violence. Like Leu, he finds that the media presents the “transgression of former social and urban boundaries” as a very real danger (Penglase 321). The framing of these two events by the media is that of a city under attack: the undesirable underclass “invading” the “legitimate” spaces of the wealthy (Zona Sul beaches), bringing violence with them. The new enemy becomes the *marginal* (favela-based criminal), a new neo-racial category that overwhelmingly includes darker-skinned favela residents yet avoids employing overtly racial specifications; instead, it is “oriented around spatial criteria such as being in a favela or carrying the symbols of being a favela resident [emphasis added]” (320-321).

**METHODODOLOGY**

My data consists of 119 newspaper articles published between January 2011 and December 2011, inclusive. These articles were drawn from the two largest daily newspapers by circulation in the two cities of interest: *Folha de S.Paulo*, based in São Paulo, has an average circulation of 286,398, and *O Globo*, based in Rio, of 256,259 (Associação Nacional de Jornais). I conducted a search of all articles that mentioned “crime,” “favela(s),” and “São Paulo” or “Rio de Janeiro” from both newspapers. The inclusion of “favela” in my search terms necessarily
excluded any articles that referenced the favelas using alternative terminology (e.g., *morros* or *periferia*) or by their specific name. However, due to the comparative nature of this project, using the more general term of reference was necessary in order to pick up approximately the same types of stories across both cities. Upon initial review, I eliminated articles that merely mentioned the favelas in passing (e.g., in a description of a public figure who had once worked with a favela-based NGO), but left articles that had as their main focus police corruption which had involved activities in the favelas. My goal was to encompass all references to the favelas in relation to crime, taking care to include representations of incidents in which favela residents and organized crime travel beyond the physical boundaries of the favelas to interact in the public space.

In his overview of media-made criminality, Robert Reiner notes that research on media and crime has been primarily focused on the “*content, consequences, and causes* of media representations of crime” (303). This study will examine the *content* of media representations of crime and propose *causes* by juxtaposing these findings with socio-political history and social science literature. The first portion of my findings is quantitative, breaking down the distribution of journalistic reports by context. The second portion provides a qualitative exploration of the data, identifying key narrative trends and subjecting them to critical analysis.

My qualitative evaluation incorporates the framing analysis methodology that Entman developed in order to analyze U.S. news media coverage of two international air bombing incidents (1991). Entman argues that in framing, sizing is key—increasing or decreasing parts of a depicted story in order to adjust their salience, as well as the relative importance of any particular story in the news as a whole. In addition to sizing, his analysis consists of four stages: agency (the causal force, usually a person, that is responsible for the newsworthy act),
identification (given to actors in the story), categorization (the use of labels to “elicit or omit” certain ways of thinking), and generalization (from the newsworthy story to the nature of stereotypes or social systems) (1991).

Unlike Entman’s focus on similar incidents of passenger airplanes downed by national governments, my study includes articles that cover a range of subject matter. Thus, I have added an additional layer to my analysis: narrative, or conscious awareness of the presence (and absence) of the “voices” of internal and external actors. These actors are key, whether they reside within the favelas (residents, drug traffickers, etc.) or come from outside to act within and on the favelas (politicians, scholars, etc.).

**QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS**

I first took a cross-sectional snapshot of the data on two levels: between cities, and between newspapers. I divided the articles topically, categorizing them based on the nature of the specific event or issue that was reported. In this section, I am making observations about the salience of specific types of stories in the media, or Entman’s “sizing” stage. The most prominent category is, as can be predicted from existing writings on the favelas, “Favelas as Source of Criminality,” and includes incidents that identified the perpetrator of the crime as a favela resident (e.g., a hotel robbery in Rio’s affluent Santa Teresa neighborhood and the murder of a student at the prestigious University of São Paulo). The next largest set of articles, “Police Crime and Corruption,” includes stories about the arrest of police officers involved in the murder of a judge and the well-publicized shooting of an 11-year-old boy by military police. “Internal Crime” covers stories in which both perpetrator and victim are favela residents, such as deaths
resulting from drug-related inter-faction conflict. “Occupation & UPPs” refers to stories that cover police operations in and occupations of the favelas, as well as coverage of Rio de Janeiro’s UPP program. “International Awareness” includes articles about international (often American) media coverage of crime and/or the favelas. “Human Interest” stories are local case studies of celebrities who grew up in the favelas, community programs set up to help favela youth, and so forth. “Critique of System” comprises reports of low policing levels on the streets, case resolution rates, and the like.

**Figure 4.** *Folha* (São Paulo) newspaper coverage. *Globo* (Rio de Janeiro) newspaper coverage.

This is not to say, however, that reporting in both papers is identical. *O Globo* is more liberal and reports on a wider range of issues than the *Folha*, which, based in São Paulo, has a heavy economic bent. This contrast is not unlike that between the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* in the United States. This bias shows in the absolute number of articles on crime and the favelas in *O Globo* and the *Folha*—I found twice as many articles in the Rio de Janeiro-
based *Globo* as the São Paulo-based *Folha* (*O Globo’s* 80 to the *Folha’s* 39). This breaks down proportionally by city in a roughly 2-to-1 ratio as well: 21 to 10 articles mentioning crime and the favelas of São Paulo, and 59 to 29 articles on crime and the favelas in Rio. As the *O Globo* sample is twice as large as that of the *Folha*, more variation in stories is expected and observed. *Folha* coverage of São Paulo spans only two categories, “Favelas as Source of Criminality” and “Police Crime and Corruption,” whereas *Globo* coverage of the same city encompasses five. In addition, for both cities, *O Globo* devotes more news space to stories that paint the favelas as more than their typical characterization as sources of criminality. However, it is notable that despite differences between papers, treatment of the favelas varies greater by city. *O Globo* covers “Police Crime and Corruption” heavily in Rio de Janeiro, but not in São Paulo. Though Rio’s police corruption problems are graver, the reporting disparity is not so easily resolved, as studies show that corruption in São Paulo is rampant as well.

**Figure 5.** Newspaper coverage of Rio favelas. Newspaper coverage of São Paulo favelas.
Comparison of story distribution across cities provides more insight into the differences examined in this study. The larger sample size involved in charting stories on Rio’s favelas (88 articles) allow for patterns to be easily seen in the data: article topics show a very similar pattern regardless of newspaper source. The largest topical area for both papers is “Police Crime and Corruption,” with 48% of Folha stories and 37% of Globo stories; the second largest, “Favelas as Source of Criminality,” with 17% of Folha stories and 22% of Globo stories. The remaining topic areas display a similar distribution, with “Occupation & UPPs” as the next largest (Folha: 21%, Globo: 14%), followed by “Internal Crime,” “International Awareness,” “Human Interest,” and “Critique of System” each adding less than 10%. This pattern is less pronounced for stories on São Paulo’s favelas, in part due to the smaller sample size (31 articles). However, “Favelas as Source of Criminality” is the major topic area covered by both the Folha and O Globo. Notably, O Globo devoted 62% of its articles to this category—a far cry from the Folha’s 90%. Overall, treatment of the cities by both newspapers is analogous enough that for the purposes of this study, I will move to look at differences between cities as opposed to distinctions by paper.

Figure 6. Combined coverage of Rio favelas. Combined coverage of São Paulo favelas.
Coverage of crime and the favelas of Rio de Janeiro contrasts markedly with coverage of the same in São Paulo. In Rio, “Police Crime and Corruption” is the most-covered topical area, yet is not the majority, and the remainder of stories are spread between the other areas. The association of the favelas and crime is strongly drawn in São Paulo, with almost three-quarters of stories covering this link. In Rio de Janeiro, only 20% of all stories identify favelas as sources of crime. In the following section, I will elaborate further on these qualitative findings.

**Qualitative Analysis**

**Representations of São Paulo’s Favelas**

An overwhelming majority of media narratives of crime and the favelas in São Paulo revolve around middle- and upper-class victims of favela criminality. Single-article incidents are often simple retellings of the crime, be it robbery, burglary, or assault, with the added remark that the perpetrator fled from police into a favela or that the suspect’s car was left abandoned at the entrance to a favela.

The murder of a student at the prestigious University of São Paulo (USP) was an event that spanned several articles. On the whole, USP students come from middle- and upper-families, as it is extremely difficult to pass the qualifying exams unless one has attended a costly private high school. The slain student had been returning to his car after withdrawing money from an ATM when he was assaulted. On May 20, 2011, *O Globo* reported, “Easy access to USP could have facilitated escape of student’s killer, police says [my translation].” The article expresses worry over the lack of security at the university’s entrances, as its border abuts one of
the city’s smaller favelas. According to the school’s rector, “There is this mystique that the territory of the Cidade Universitária (University City) is free of police. And it’s obvious that thugs will concentrate there. This is what is happening.” While in the past the Military Police were banned from school grounds due to fears of repression, school leaders increasingly embrace security forces in the face of fear. Later news reports identify the killer’s partner in crime as a favela resident, painting an ugly portrait of the 22-year-old youth. A police delegate claims that the suspect, who turned himself into the police and was released after testimony, was wholly unrepentant: “He is a thug with a history of other crimes. He does not have prior contacts with the police, but he himself said that he had carried out robberies in the region before.” After giving his testimony, he allegedly “left the jail laughing.” The suspect also blames the student, saying, “If he had stayed calm, without reacting, he wouldn’t have been shot.” This event exemplifies criminal narratives in both São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in which suspects are often called bandidos (thugs) and criminosos (criminals), usually portrayed as “career criminals” who have committed crimes in the past and are unrepentant of their actions.

The murder of a taxi driver by a favela resident received space in the press as well, likely due to a protest of 250 taxi drivers who parked their taxis in front of Pacaembu Stadium. The media humanizes the victim and tells his story:

The violence interrupted Eduardo Alves Pereira’s plans. Eduardo’s wife stated that he was working nights to pay for his daughter’s second birthday party, and that he began to work in a collective for more security. ‘He loved being a taxi driver. Everyone has fear, but we never think that it will happen to us,’ she said. *(Folha de S.Paulo 07/12/2011)*

Victims’ family members, police delegates, and government officials generally are the voices in these accounts of favela criminality. The inclusion of the victim’s story allows the paper’s audience to identify with the victim, to believe that the same kind of violence is just around the

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2 USP’s location in the western area of the city results in its proximity to the favelas on the periphery.
corner, and to fear anyone who looks like they may be a favela resident or displays the visual cues of being one (e.g., having dark skin or wearing inexpensive flip-flops).

When favela residents are victims of favela criminality, only *chacinas* (shootings with multiple deaths) make the São Paulo news. In the first half of 2011, several shootings resulting in four or more deaths occurred within the favelas, but details are slim and suspects unknown.

The strong implication is, however, that the victims are not innocent:

Near the alley in where the *chacina* occurred, portions of marijuana, crack and cocaine were found, in addition to a notebook. A bench used by a lookout for drug traffickers was also found. . . . Police believe that the *chacina* may have been motivated by a feud between drug gangs. This is the fifth *chacina* this year in Greater São Paulo. Altogether, 17 people have died. (*O Globo* 04/20/2011)

According to Military Police officers, neighbors who witnessed the killings are too afraid to comment. Victims internal to the favelas are left anonymous and faceless, given neither story nor name.

Despite external reports of its prevalence, I found only a single article on police brutality in the favelas. A profile of a vicious Military Police officer, or “soldier,” the article begins:

On the streets of the north zone of São Paulo, the Military Police soldier Pascoal dos Santos Lima, 35, is known as ‘Monster,’ for being considered a violent killer. Now, the list of deaths attributed to the officer, detained in Romão Gomes Military Prison, is 17 names long. (*Folha de S.Paulo* 08/11/2011)

Three of these killings were conducted while he was working in uniform, and labeled “resistance killings,” a phrase the article treats with extreme skepticism, calling it “a nonexistent legal term used by members of security forces to claim that they killed a suspect because he resisted arrest” (*Folha de S.Paulo* 08/11/2011). Clearly, the media does not deny the existence of human rights violations by police; however, they are treated as isolated incidents rather than as a widespread, systematic crisis.
“Human Interest” stories are the rare instances in which voices of favela residents dominate. Often accounts of favela residents who have “risen” in society to become successful, these individuals give firsthand accounts of their experiences in the favelas. Paulistano rapper Emicida is interviewed in *O Globo*:

> For a time, I studied in a rich neighborhood, near the house of my mother’s employer. I was the only black person in my class, and even the teacher laughed when they made fun of me. That filled me with hatred, and I turned into a violent teenager. I was ready to fight with everyone. In a different school, the neighborhood was poorer. The police came into classrooms with sniffer dogs to search students. You couldn’t study. I ended up skipping school for months at a time and even begged on the street. (*O Globo* 03/22/2011)

Emicida portrays himself as a sort of representative of “his people” and the neighborhood from which he came. Traditionally, Brazilian media has tended to gloss over the root causes of social inequity; rarely do we see the socially constructed environments that lead to violence in favela youth. Marginalization is never clearer than when whole swaths of society feel invisible, as do the favela residents. Emicida says, “I sing about the forgotten. There are a ton of invisible people on the streets. I came from this crowd, I’m here because of them" (*O Globo* 03/22/2011).

Critiques of public policy and the justice system, while uncommon, are insightful. *O Globo* featured a study by sociologist Sérgio Adorno which revealed that the majority of crimes without known suspects is left unsolved. In addition, like the victims of unreported crimes, the victims of these unsolved cases come from poor neighborhoods in the periphery and favelas (*O Globo* 09/03/2011).

**REPRESENTATIONS OF RIO’S FAVELAS**

Rio de Janeiro’s favelas do not want for media narratives of crime. However, favelas in Rio enjoy a more prominent role in public discourse, with more coverage and a greater variety of
stories than in São Paulo. Even in narratives with middle- and upper-class victims of favela criminality, alternative representations of the favelas arise. For example, after a multi-article run on a bus hijacking in the city center, a top government official discusses pacification and social progress in response to criticism of police handling of the crisis:

Pacification was undertaken in determined territories. This doesn’t mean that the city will be free of crime; there are still many criminals in the city, fruits of years and years of abandonment. What is missing are efforts toward social projects, principally for youth. (O Globo 08/10/2011)

In media reports of the robbery of a high-end hotel, favela residents who commit crimes are depicted as attacking the city itself, implying that favelas are not part of the city—or, at least, significant. The five-star Santa Teresa Hotel was lodging Nike representatives and other foreign tourists when it was robbed. A hotel employee was involved in the heist, and the newspaper is quick to point out the employee’s criminal past. Two police operations were conducted in favelas around Santa Teresa and Rio de Janeiro, although the suspects were not located.

Narratives of police crime and corruption are much more pervasive in Rio de Janeiro than in São Paulo. Operation Guillotine exposed a massive corruption scheme in the Rio Civil Police, in which 30 police officers were arrested for various crimes, such as diverting apprehended arms for sale to traffickers. The Federal Police-backed operation ultimately led to the resignation of the head of the Civil Police, after his right-hand man was implicated in the scandal.

Acknowledgement of police corruption and human rights abuses also came when the Public Ministry accused eight Military Police officers of false “resistance killings”:

The evidence, without a doubt, reveals an extremely grave situation in which military police officers in service performed activities typical to an extermination group (“death squad”). The unlawful conduct of the accused, who are agents of public security, violates fundamental principles of human rights and demands reproach, as it threatens the credibility of the democratic state of law. (O Globo 07/11/2011)
In July 2011, the high-profile murder of an 11-year-old child by Military Police officers was brought into the media spotlight and turned the “traditional” form of framing the favelas on its head. A selection of headlines from the case follows:

- Body found in Botas river, originally identified as being a girl’s, is Juan’s (O Globo 07/06/2011)
- Military Police will expel police officers involved in Juan case if their participation in the boy’s death is confirmed (O Globo 07/06/2011)
- Caso Juan: Thursday was filled with homages and protests (O Globo 07/07/2011)
- Preliminary analysis of Caso Juan indicates that capsules came from PM weapons (Folha de S.Paulo 07/14/2011)
- Rio Justice Department decrees imprisonment of four PMs in Caso Juan (Folha de S.Paulo 07/21/2011)

Caso Juan (the Juan case) brought the story of an innocent favela youth to the forefront of public consciousness. The boy’s father, interviewed in O Globo, says, “When they called me, I came straight to the Medical-Legal Institute to confirm. I was in despair. When I came up against the story about the girl, I already thought that it was my son. Fathers know these things, don’t they?” (O Globo 07/06/2011) Local NGO Rio de Paz contributed to the story’s publicity through protests, extending banners over city landmarks with the question “Who killed Juan?” to pressure authorities to investigate and solve the case. The NGO’s actions give “voice” to traditionally disregarded residents. Rio de Paz president Antônio Carlos Costa announces,

> We affixed this banner to say goodbye to Juan, and to also seek forgiveness from him. The city needs to seek forgiveness for allowing this to happen to him. We let it happen because we have been dealing with indifference to the crimes that occur in Rio’s poor communities, without giving a voice to people who don’t have a voice. (O Globo 07/07/2011)

The victim internal and culprit external to the favelas is a unique narrative that has only recently entered public attention. While, ideally, neither police nor favela residents should be demonized
or portrayed in mere binaries (as either good or evil), more varied representations serve to increase the depth and humanity of both groups in the public eye.

Unique to Rio, or perhaps original to Rio, is the concept of the “war of the favelas” or “war on the favelas.” After the proliferation of crack cocaine in the 1980s and the arms trade and violence that accompanied it, the term “war” was used in the context of the favelas to refer to territorial battles fought between rival drug factions, with the police conducting only intermittent operations (Leu 350). Increasingly, however, the “war” has come to be fought between drug factions and the police—and often, favelas used as bases for drug factions have been treated as “victimless spaces,” with blatant disregard for “civilian” life. When the police enter a favela, they act as if they are crossing enemy lines: “Policing tactics within the favela are differentiated from those in other urbanized regions and police actions within favelas are treated in a similar fashion to those of a military unit entering an enemy territory during a war” (Dowdney 80). The special operations unit of Rio’s Military Police, BOPE, owns army-grade weapons and is trained to fight favela warfare. Police incursions into favelas are labeled “invasions,” “operations,” and “occupations,” and “a regular and uncompromised policing presence is not a reality” (79).

The establishment of UPPs in Rio is a continuation and ramping up of this “war on the favelas.” Essentially, the Rio government is attempting to “retake” control of the favelas from drug traffickers, and pairing quasi-military action with local social programs. After “pacification” by Military Police—and occasionally backup troops from the army—a UPP is implemented in the favela. UPPs are supported by permanent police presence, and as of 2011, 8% of Rio’s police officers are stationed in the favelas. Partner program UPP Social “is attempting to promote citizenship, economic, urban, and social development in ‘pacified’ favelas
by combining civil society, secretaries, and the private sector” (Baroni). In-depth studies of the long-term efficacy of both UPPs and UPP Social have not yet been conducted.

Favela pacification is currently a major issue in Brazilian media, acting as a test case for potential “pacification” in other cities. In early 2011, media framing of UPPs was optimistic, with numerous articles on decreasing crime rates: “Car robberies drop 19% in the entire state” (O Globo 03/15/2011); “Rio has lowest number of homicides in March since 1991” (O Globo 05/16/2011). In the latter article, Subsecretary of Planning and Operations Roberto Sá remarked that the government’s goal was to cut in half the number of homicides in the state by the 2014 World Cup (compared to 2007 rates). Yet as the year continued, favela residents’ complaints of delayed implementation of public services began to reach the press, and media narratives of the occupation of favela conglomerate Complexo do Alemão are doubtful. Headlines from this period include “General admits that traffickers still sell drugs in Alemão and affirms that army will remain until June” and “Residents report being forced to bring arms and drugs to traffickers in Alemão” (O Globo 09/07/2011, 09/08/2011). The public’s impatience and desire for short-term solutions is apparent in these accounts, and Rio Secretary of Security stresses, “I have been very emphatic in saying that, after 30, 40 years of abandonment of some areas and the complete domination of drug trafficking, no one will resolve this in a short period of time. We opened a window for public services and local society to fill their role in these communities.” This kind of public recognition of government faults in favela policy is unique to Rio de Janeiro; I did not see it in São Paulo. However, the military presence in Alemão draws concerns from the president of Brazil’s Organization of Lawyers:

The first lesson to be extracted is recognition that the army has functioned as a force of military occupation and not as integrant of a social pacification project. One cannot accept the substitution of one “state of exception,” supported by armed bands, by another “state of exception,” organized by the army” (O Globo
Later reports show that mere “pacification” is not sufficient to eradicate drug traffickers from the favelas—while areas with UPPs show reduction in crime rates, investigations reveal elaborate corruption schemes by UPP commanders. The perseverance of police corruption indicates that Rio needs reforms not only in favela policy, but their system of policing.

The occupation of Rocinha in preparation for a UPP, titled Operation Shock of Peace, is key to Rio’s security policy, and the media successfully highlights its significance. The war-like aspects of the occupation are evident in the articles analyzed, from helicopter-dropped pamphlets saying “Your community is being pacified” to photographs of tanks rolling through favela streets. After a bloodless occupation, a Brazilian flag is hoisted in the favela, a symbol of the government’s successful takeover. Beltrame comments, “We are shifting a paradigm and liberating these communities from the yoke of drug trafficking” (Folha de S.Paulo 11/14/2011).

Figure 7. Pamphlet distributed by police in Rocinha, Vidigal and Chácara do Céu, in Rio; tank circles Rocinha streets after its occupation by security forces. Source: Folha de S.Paulo (11/13/2011).
With the World Cup and Olympic games looming, Rio’s public are highly aware that a global spotlight is focused on them. News reports bemoan Rio’s high crime rates and international reputation as a city of violence. One article remarks,

If the president of the United States, Barack Obama, were to read the most recent State Department report about Brazil—specifically the references to Brasília and to Rio de Janeiro, cities that he will be visiting on the 19th and 20th of this month—he would certainly request increased attention from the Secret Service agents responsible for his security. (O Globo 03/08/2011).

Whereas sociologists and public officials voice articles that critique favela policy—or the lack thereof—in São Paulo, a myriad of local favela residents and NGO voices are found in Rio. “Governments lack policies for youth who leave drug trafficking” incorporates interviews with several youths who are struggling to find their place in a post-occupation society:

In the eyes of the police, the ex-trafficker doesn’t exist. They’ll keep hunting and extorting you. Even with the occupation, it’s very difficult for a youth to leave crime. First, it’s hard to convince him that, instead of R$600 per week, he’ll make the same amount for a month of work. A lot of them are minors as well, and they can’t work. Without support, they’re left adrift in the favela. (O Globo 12/04/2011)

Problems with the Justice System arise in Rio, as they do in São Paulo. A national goal intended to combat impunity leads to mass archival of homicide cases open since 2007. 96% of homicide inquiries are left uninvestigated, and the majority of these involve victims from low-income backgrounds.

THE CRIMINALS: FAVELA RESIDENTS OR THE POLICE?

In a study on media reports of crime and the favelas, or on crime in any context, the narratives examined will tend to deal in binaries: good/evil, innocent/guilty, offender/victim, cop/criminal. I find that these major players drive each story in the “reality” crafted by the media, and favela residents and police each fall on both sides of the good/evil dichotomy.
The primary actors in media representations of crime and the favelas are favela residents and police officers, operating both within and outside favela boundaries. Categorizing individual actors as being internal and external to the favelas, as they are the locus of my study, I have created a narrative framework of both offenders and victims. The traditional narrative of criminality and the favelas is offender internal/victim external (“Favelas as Source of Criminality”). In this narrative, the police are virtuous, protecting “legitimate” society from incursions by favela criminals. Its approximate counter-narrative is offender external/victim internal (“Police Crime and Corruption”). Criminality fully contained within the favelas—offender internal/victim internal—makes up a small minority of reporting (“Internal Crime”). Offender external/victim external, with all actors coming from outside the favelas, is outside the scope of this study.

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<th>Victim</th>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>Police Crime and Corruption</td>
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<td>Favelas as Source of Criminality</td>
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**Figure 8.** Internal/external actor framework.

In this narrative framework, both favela residents and police officers are alternately (and quite absolutely) viewed as being either on the side of the “good” (or “innocent”) or on the side of the “bad” (or “guilty”). Negative representations of favela residents include articles on *quadrilhas* (gangs), depictions of “career criminals,” and stories on drug traffickers and organized crime. Almost all social scholars working in Rio’s favelas have detected these
narratives: “The new markers of social stigma, then, depend upon . . . the assumption that those who live in favelas are real or potential criminals” (Penglase 315). In positive representations, favela residents are framed as hard-working, innocent families—just like families in the upper classes—who have been unfairly subject to the brutal violence of the drug trade; or as marginalized members of society, victims of inequitable social forces and police impunity. In this way, the physical territory of the favelas becomes, paradoxically, both separate from and yet intimately connected to crinosos, bandidos, and drug traffickers.

The other major actor in these narratives is the police, represented in the media as either law keepers or the accused—law breakers—sometimes in much more horrific ways than favela criminals. Federal Police, Military Police, and Civil Police are easily conflated, and the three branches suffer from varying levels of corruption. Federal Police are generally portrayed as “good”: cracking down on local corruption rings, assisting in favela pacification, and so forth. Military Police and Civil Police are alternately presented as protectors of the upper classes and corrupt, underpaid officers colluding with drug traffickers. As criminals, Military Police form quadrilhas, grupos de exterminio (death squads) and milicians that realize gross human rights violations. The constant shifting of narratives produces uneasiness and confusion in the populace, exacerbating the distrust of government that is already pervasive in Brazilian society. As “the boundaries between the police and [criminals] fall away,” narrative separation of society’s civilian and criminal elements becomes increasingly difficult (Penglase 316).

MARGINALIZATION

In her seminal book The Myth of Marginality, Janice Perlman asserts that favela residents, long seen as marginal to society, are actually
tightly integrated into it, albeit in an asymmetrical manner. They give a lot and receive very little. They are not on the margins of urban life or irrelevant to its functioning, but actively excluded, exploited, and ‘marginalized’ by a closed social system. (Perlman 1976)

She argues that favela residents are not marginal but marginalized, drawing a key distinction between socio-economic and socio-political marginality. Thus, in the first sense, marginality is a “myth,” but that does not indicate that favelas are not marginalized by “legitimate” society. It is marginality in the second sense (socio-political) that I observe in my study, measured by assessing the salience of favela “voices” in both cities.

São Paulo’s favelas are heavily marginalized. Where favela residents are victims, they are devalued—nameless statistics, without life stories or testimony from survivors to humanize them. The voices heard in media accounts are of the dominant, ruling class: government officials, law enforcement, police chiefs. Victim internal-type stories, whether offender external or internal, are only given space in the news if multiple killings occur, such as in the story of “Monster.” Single murders of favela residents are, in and of themselves, not newsworthy.

Rio de Janeiro media reports show divergence from this pattern. In multiple topical areas, favela residents are interviewed and allowed to voice their opinions and concerns to the public. In addition, alternative narratives offer the idea that favelas are a product, and not a source, of Brazilian social problems. The ongoing implementation of UPPs and international awareness seem to spur public discourse towards positive reform of the favelas, allowing for more humanity in depictions of the favelas—even when referring to them in the context of crime.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPACE**

In the case of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, varying spatial distributions have had a significant impact on the ways in which favelas are represented and marginalized by the media—
and, in turn, by the greater population. These range from simple differences in terminology used to refer to the favelas—*morro* (hill) in Rio and *periferia* (periphery) in São Paulo—to contrasts in the ways in which each city fashions favela policy. Modern media narratives of Rio’s favelas have begun to diverge from the patterns observed by sociologists and anthropologists in earlier decades, thanks to the groundbreaking work undertaken by these same social scientists.

Narratives of São Paulo’s favelas, however, fall behind. The literal periphery of the metropolis is doubly marginalized: socio-political marginalization, and physical marginalization to a greater extent than in Rio. The favelas seem to be “out of sight, out of mind,” except for instances in which upper- and middle-class citizens are affected, or incidents occur which cannot be ignored (e.g., mass killings).

The coexistence of wealthier, “legitimate” neighborhoods and lower-class favelas in Rio de Janeiro has traditionally led to unique methods of law enforcement designed to keep crime and other “illegitimate” acts where they belong—that is, within the borders of the favelas, in “illegitimate” space. This division acts along all lines of society, not merely physical ones; favela residents are treated as *gente diferenciada* (differentiated folk, also used to refer to drug addicts and the homeless). These social and racial hierarchies are ingrained in the public consciousness, “underpinned by the force of national myths of racial democracy and social harmony” (Leu 345). The media panics witnessed by both Leu and Penglase in the 1990s were a backlash to the perception that the social order had been violated and challenged by violence’s intrusion into “legitimate” spaces. The fear most clearly chronicled in previously studied media reports, as well as the ones that I have reviewed, is not of the mere existence of violence, but of violence exerted on the dominant class.
In almost every Brazilian city, walls and fences separate neighboring homes from their streets and from each other. These security measures are often augmented with privately hired security forces. While Caldeira (2000) has chronicled this phenomenon in São Paulo, it has a long history in Rio de Janeiro as well: James (1933) posited that Brazil’s tradition of defensive architecture, where “every house is surrounded by a wall: it is a stronghold, a castle, a self-contained unit, to large extent isolated from its neighbors,” enabled wealth and poverty to exist in such close proximity (290-291).

It is impossible to say with certainty which specific socio-historical factors have led to the current state of affairs in São Paulo and Brazil; however, space has played a key role. Rio de Janeiro was founded for its defensible hills and vicinity to Guanabara Bay, and these same hills later restricted the city’s expansion and caused favelas to begin climbing up its many hills. São Paulo, located past the natural barrier of the Serra do Mar, had plenty of space to expand into its role as Brazil’s economic center and push poorer communities to its fringes. Rio’s spectacular natural surroundings and famous beaches have drawn thousands of researchers to the city’s favelas, which rise conspicuously on hillsides overlooking five-star hotels. Many NGOs are based in Rio, providing services and voicing social concerns on behalf of favela residents. It is not surprising, then, with the sheer amount of public attention and scrutiny, that the city of Rio de Janeiro is responding and adapting. São Paulo, while teeming with life and culturally rich, fades when placed next to its northeastern neighbor. Most of the visitors that pass through its hotels come for business, not tourism. While attention to the favelas of Rio and São Paulo has always been unbalanced, my study shows that Rio de Janeiro’s favelas are no longer regarded as “exclusive spaces of violence.” The abundance of alternative representations, as well as
perspectives external to newspaper media, such as film, music, and literature, have contributed to more balanced treatment of the favelas.

CONCLUSION

The most pronounced distinctions between media narratives of the two cities are the increased recognition of human rights abuses by police and the more humanized treatment of favela residents in Rio de Janeiro. These differences reflect a shift in the “talk of crime” in Rio, marked by the recognition of favela residents, and not only the dominant classes, as potential victims of criminality.

The “talk of crime,” as presented by Caldeira, refers to the prominence and ubiquity of crime in ordinary public discourse. Traditionally, this talk has been confined to depictions of favelas as being spaces from which criminals emerge to wreak havoc upon the upper classes. Viewing the favelas as “sources of criminality” stigmatizes, dehumanizes and marginalizes favela residents, and as the dominant class struggles to exercise control over these “illegitimate” spaces, repressive security policies and severe human rights violations result. These effects are apparent in both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and also lead to the relative lack of reporting on internal favela crime (offender internal/victim internal).

Spatiality has key effects on these narratives. Media reports often point out proximity to a favela as enabling crime, as close distances enable offenders to easily escape from police. In Rio, where poor areas are embedded among richer ones, increased contact with favelas and higher levels of crime are correlated. This organization is more conducive to producing offender
internal/victim external narratives, yet we see that these kinds of representations are not the majority in Rio as they are in São Paulo.

The new “talk of crime” that is emerging in Rio de Janeiro has undergone a perspective change. I observe that Rio de Janeiro, with its unique spatial geography, extensive body of social science literature, high levels of NGO participation, and increased presence on the world stage as a result of Brazil’s hosting of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games, have led to steady progress on the part of its leaders and population in humanizing and recognizing the contributions of favela residents, detaching them from the stigma of the marginal (criminal), and including their stories in the city’s social history. The Juan case, for example, starkly conveys the story of a father’s pain and the real consequences of police impunity. The humanization of favela victims—of both police corruption and governmental neglect—creates new narratives that counteract more traditional negative representations.

In contrast to Rio de Janeiro, the media easily and often ignores São Paulo’s favelas, localized in the literal periphery of the city. Decreased visibility and the added lack of supplementary narratives have resulted in a more black-and-white framework of crime and reporting that is limited to stories on favela criminality. In São Paulo, the physical marginalization of the favelas contributes to their rhetorical marginalization as well. We see the “talk of crime” to which Caldeira refers in the 71% of narratives that portray favelas as sources of criminality.

Increased visibility and positive attention to Rio de Janeiro’s favelas have given favela residents “voice” and humanity. These representations have enabled favelas to carve out positive spaces in the symbolic territory of the media, playing a crucial role in the production of alternative discourses on the favelas, and, in turn, positive social change.
REFERENCES

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