Chapter 1

The Decline of Poverty and the Rise of Violence

The Marvelous City

Squeezed between the ocean and the mountains of Rio de Janeiro are beautiful, well-kept areas that are known throughout the world. They provide a spectacle of sandy beaches, deep-blue ocean waters, and impressive condominium complexes with carefully maintained garden plots and unforgettable views. These are the everyday delights for the wealthy residents of Barra da Tijuca, Botafogo, Copacabana, Gávea, Ipanema, Jardim Botânico, Lagoa, Laranjeiras, Leblon, Leme, and Urca, who live in the so-called bairros nobres (noble districts) of the Zona Sul (Southern Zone). The residents include some of the richest people in the world. Their children go to state-of-the-art private schools and may complete their university educations in Europe or the United States. They live in apartment buildings covered in marble, some with swimming pools and private sports areas and balcony gardens that call to mind the fabulous hanging gardens of Babylon. Of course, maintaining these marvels requires many invisible hands. They belong to the doormen, the drivers who care for the vehicles, the gardeners, and the building maintenance personnel. Each family also has an abundance of household help, from humble housecleaners, carefully picked nannies, cooks, and houseboys to serve at table to well-trained butlers who rival the British "gentleman's man," for discretion and propriety.

The topography of Rio is peculiar, indeed. There is very little land space between the blue ocean and the steep granite mountains that tower up in the

Zona Sul. This has led to the construction of ever higher residential and hotel buildings along the beach, despite some architects' and urban planners' wishes to set limits on the height of construction to keep the mountains visible from the beaches. Urban development in Rio de Janeiro has also involved large-scale destruction of mountain terrain. In the 1950s and early 1960s, an entire mountain was torn down to build the Aterro de Flamengo—a park built on filled land that buried a good part of Guanabara Bay. The enormous tract was then landscaped by the architect Roberto Burle Marx, who had gained fame for laying out the grounds around the Ministry of Education's building in downtown Rio de Janeiro and for landscaping Brasília. One of the interesting points of the vast park is that it contains only native Brazilian trees and is thus an important botanical garden. Leme, Copacabana, Ipanema, and Leblon were also transformed when reclamation projects extended the original beach areas farther into the Atlantic Ocean to provide room for new multilane highways, much to the detriment of swimmers, who can face strong ocean currents almost immediately when they enter the water. Barra da Tijuca was the biggest landfill engineering project of all. Originally an area occupied by numerous lakes and lagoons that joined the sea, this vast extension of land has probably been the largest urban development project for the middle and upper classes in Rio de Janeiro.

The development of Rio de Janeiro is closely associated with the enormous accumulation of wealth based on the export of coffee from the vast *fazendas* (plantations) of the aristocracy in the nineteenth century and the fact that the city was the national capital from 1763 until 1960. The social and economic contrasts can be seen in areas of the urban landscape. Different worlds exist side by side. One is rich and well educated; its people live in buildings with world-class architecture in neighborhoods with paved streets, sewage systems, electricity, cable television, and the most modern communication systems, including Internet and wireless satellite communications. Government services such as trash removal and street cleaning are provided, as are financial services and convenient access to legal documents in registry offices. The other world—that of the favelas—crawls up steep hills that look down on the middle-class and upper-class condominiums, beaches, restaurants, hotels, and shops that one sees in postcards of Rio de Janeiro. In this other world, the streets are not paved; in fact, some are not even streets but alleys. This is the reason residents of the hilltop favelas refer to those down below as the "people of the asphalt." Infrastructure and services have largely been left to favela residents themselves to provide. They did this by organizing into a tight community, with collective work being the norm. They built their own roads, collected garbage, and even distributed mail. Electricity

arrived in homes by "hanging" cables—that is, connecting cables to larger electrical outlets of those residents who are better off and have electrical service. This is known as a "*gato* (cat)," in reference, perhaps, to the animal's known ability to "hang" from anywhere. Water pipes are also interconnected down the hill in self-built systems that eventually connect to the city's potable water system down on the asphalt. Fuel for cooking is provided through the use of bottled gas. With the development of cable TV and broadband Internet, a new sort of *gato* arrived called "gatonet" or "gatocablenet." These "services" may be provided to "customers" by drug lords and, increasingly, by the members of militias—mostly police or former police officers—who are displacing the drug lords in many areas. They charge a fee to install their gatonet or gatocablenet, then also charge a fee per month for their use. Bottled gas is usually provided by the same people, and customers are charged both for the gas and for delivery up the hills. In the past few years, another service has become available to the favela residents in the form of alternative transportation by minibus vans that also are usually run by drug lords or members of local militias.[1]

Cariocas, or residents of Rio de Janeiro, 73 percent of whom said they were proud of their city in a survey conducted in 2008, are, of course, aware not only of Rio's many marvels, visual and otherwise, but also of its paradoxes. These paradoxes include some of the world's highest homicide rates in certain areas of a city that, *Forbes* magazine reported in September 2009, is nevertheless the world's "happiest," due mainly to the spectacular Carnival and the presence of a festive, communicative people.

The city of Rio is just one of twenty municipalities that officially make up metropolitan Rio de Janeiro, a region first recognized in 1974. Rio de Janeiro, with more than 6 million inhabitants, was the largest municipality in 2008, while Tanguá, with slightly more than 30,000 residents, was the smallest, according to estimates by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. The population of the entire metropolitan region is more than 11 million. Two million people are said to live in favelas. The favela population grows at a much faster rate than the rest of the population. During the 1990s, it grew an estimated 2.4 percent annually, while the populations of other areas (which takes into account the middle and upper classes) grew by 0.4 percent. Also, while the state of Rio de Janeiro as a whole has had one of the lowest rates of economic growth since 1980 of any state in the Brazilian federation, there is a dynamic region of population and urban growth centered in the Baixada Fluminense, a flat interior area between the Zona Sul and the interior mountain towns of Petropolis, Teresopolis, and Nova Fiburgo.[2] The most important of the cities in the Baixada, and one that represents the new Rio

economy, is Duque de Caxias. Rio de Janeiro and Duque de Caxias rank second and sixth, respectively, in economic output among Brazilian cities, making the metropolitan region second only to São Paulo in economic importance in Brazil and third in importance in South America. The Baixada is now the main area of economic and population growth in metropolitan Rio de Janeiro.

Economic Growth: The Decline of Poverty and the Rise of Violence in Rio de Janeiro

The diversified economy of metropolitan Rio de Janeiro and surrounding cities provides employment for a large working class while maintaining prosperous middle and upper classes. The region therefore continues to attract poor migrants from the Brazilian north and northeast and from the neighboring state of Minas Gerais. From the point of view of these migrants, Rio de Janeiro is always welcoming. It has communities in which to live with friends, relatives, and other migrants from the same region, as well as educational and employment opportunities that outstrip what they knew. The migrants' comparative youth, in turn, helps keep the region robust and attractive for investment, leading to the creation of jobs. Barra da Tijuca, Ipanema, Copacabana, Botofogo, Laranjeiras, and Gloria in the Zona Sul and downtown Rio contain highly mixed commercial and middle- and upper-class residential areas but depend heavily on the commercial activities and backyard production of working-class areas and favela populations.

Textiles, clothing, cosmetics, shoes, furniture and other products are important components of the growing economy in the Baixada Fluminense. Economic development is built on the idea of different growth poles and industrial clusters centered in different municipalities, each with at least a dozen factories or production units. Duque de Caxias is a gas, petrochemical, and plastics pole; it also has one of Brazil's largest refineries. Campo Grande has Brazil's largest shirtmaker, Fred Vic, which produces 35,000 shirts a month. The different municipalities in the Baixada have their own mayors, city assemblies, and govenment agencies. The 2010 census is expected to show that nearly 4 million people live in the municipalities of the Baixada Fluminense. The level of development and the industrial and commercial importance of the Baixada Fluminense are outstanding features of the socioeconomic reality of greater Rio de Janeiro. However, as in the history of urban development elsewhere in Brazil, extreme income concentration in the Baixada has generated low human development indices in terms of life expec-

tancy, educational attainment, and income. Pockets of poverty in the Baixada contribute to the formation of many new favelas, following patterns originally set by the Zona Sul and center-city favelas. It is a largely silent and underpaid labor force that makes the accelerated rate of development of the industrial, service, and commercial sectors possible. Differences in income, education, and housing availability are present, as they have been in the Zona Sul favelas. However, public security is much worse in many areas of the Baixada. Statistical studies since 1991 show homicide rates for the Baixada run 20 percent to more than 40 percent higher than for the city of Rio de Janeiro.[3] Zona Sul residents enjoy a high human development index that has had the effect of raising standards of behavior of both police and drug-gang bandidos. As the police reporter Dimmi Amora has noted, the human development index in Zona Norte (Northern Zone) is much lower, and the level of violence is much higher. He observed how bandidos of the Zona Norte tend to live shuttered in favela ghettos, except when they emerge in early morning hours to rob people riding to work on buses. They burn people alive in what becomes an act of cremation using a technique called "microwaving," in which old tires are fit over an individual and then set on fire. They are known to have decapitated a police officer. The police in turn take revenge and kill many more people in proportion to the population in the Zona Norte than in the Zona Sul. Meanwhile, Zona Sul bandidos, having infiltrated the police, remain well informed about planned police actions and can act to protect themselves.[4] The homicidal and sadistic violence found in parts of the Baixada and some other areas of metropolitan Rio has largely been absent from the Zona Sul.

A Broken or Integrated City?

The dramatic rise of violent crime in the favelas coincided with the appearance of drug-trafficking gangs in the 1980s. Together with the police, the gangs disrupted community life that, in turn, led to a new era of stigmatizing favelas by the media and by many in the middle and upper classes. In the 1960s and 1970s, state policies had called for the removal of favelas to suburban areas. However, removal did not improve living conditions for the people who were resettled. Many could not afford the new public housing. At the same time, social protest grew. The restoration of democratic politics shifted government policy away from removal toward urbanization. When Leonel Brizola was elected governor of Rio de Janeiro State in 1982, he proclaimed that the favela was the solution, not the problem.

By the 1990s, the favelas were being identified with crime and violence

almost to the exclusion of anything else. The media portrayed the violence of drug-trafficking gangs at war with one another, or with the police, as if homicide and drug dealing were endemic to favelas. This encouraged the public to draw sharp distinctions between the favelas on the hills and the middle-class and elite communities on the asphalt. At its simplest, this meant a media narrative of crime-infested favelas dominated by well-armed bandidos, in contrast to the rest of law-abiding society below. The police were seen as entering favelas to repress bandidos, which often involved gunfights that ended in deaths and casualties. However, the police themselves were not well regarded. Some reporters wrote about recurrent *chacinas* (police massacres), and well-informed people knew that the police also went into favelas to extort money from traffickers and that some police sold guns to bandidos. Thus, a perverse structure of crime involving drug traffickers and the state's police agents was being built. Casualties were high on both sides, although many more bandidos and innocent young men died than police officers. According to one news report in 2007, forty-one civilians were killed for every Rio de Janeiro police officer, four times the international average.

The media's pursuit of a narrative of police war against the drug gangs and other criminals seemed to satisfy the public, but it may also have contributed to escalating the violence. The Rio de Janeiro press has been faulted for giving excessive coverage to violence compared with the press in São Paulo and Belo Horizonte, two cities that also have suffered from drug gangs and violent police actions against them. It has been argued that such coverage increased the sense of public insecurity in Rio that, in turn, helped to establish conditions favoring greater state repression and leading to human rights violations and unnecessary loss of lives. A more sinister argument has it that police conduct these wars as part of a largely successful strategy to prevent police institutions themselves from being reformed. A frightened public applauds a police war against drug-trafficking bandidos in poor neighborhoods as long as the war does not extend into the middle- and upper-class bairros nobres.[5] It therefore was not surprising when Zuenir Ventura, a prominent journalist with *O Globo,* published *Cidade Partida* (*The Broken City*) in 1994, using the word "broken" to convey the idea of a city severed into two parts.

Ventura wrote the book in the wake of one of the most dramatic *chacinas* by the Military Police in a Rio de Janeiro favela. In retaliation for the murder of two of their colleagues by bandidos in 1993, several military policemen went into the Vigário Geral favela and shot to death twenty-one people who had never been shown to have any connection to drug trafficking. It was an act of savage reprisal against the entire community. Ventura was shocked by

the event and decided to investigate. He spent several months in the favela interviewing residents. In the resulting book, he describes a community ignored by the state in which people live in the shadow of a powerful drug gang. At the same time, they do not despair or surrender. A majority of residents aspire to join the more affluent part of Rio. This, he found, was especially true of young people. He suggested that the city's elites could help by supporting urbanization and cultural projects, as well as the work of NGOs, in the favelas. *The Broken City* was part of a movement of the Rio de Janeiro elite that led to the establishment of the NGO Viva Rio in 1994 with its headquarters in the traditional Zona Sul area of Gloria. Viva Rio became a presence in Vigário Geral, and, to complete the circle, residents of Vigário Geral got involved in the work of the NGO.[6]

The concept of the "broken city" emphasizes the wide gap between the middle-class and upper-class bairros nobres and the more than 900 favelas of metropolitan Rio de Janeiro. The economic, sociological, and political realities of metropolitan Rio, however, suggest a far more integrated city. Much has been written that questions the broken city paradigm and argues that Rio is in fact integrated economically and socially—that is, the asphalt world and the favela world depend on the each other. The labor of the supposedly ignored and abandoned poor is crucial to the maintenance not only of the lifestyle of the rich but, more substantially, to the overall functioning of the economy of metropolitan Rio de Janeiro.

Social scientists who work directly with favela communities, such as Jailson de Souza e Silva, coordinator of the Observatório de Favelas, an NGO with many projects in Maré and other poor areas of the Baixada Fluminense, strongly defend this line of thought. His article "Adeus a Cidade Partida (Farewell to the Broken City)," published in 2003 on the NGO's website, defends the idea of an integrated city—the rich with the poor, the developed with the underdeveloped.[7] The article begins by recalling an event that shocked the city of Rio de Janeiro: On September 30, 2002, the drug-trafficking kingpin Fernandinho Beira-Mar, though in prison at the time, ordered Rio de Janeiro businessmen to close their establishments as a sign of obedience and "mourning" after the police killed some of his colleagues. Rio de Janeiro then witnessed something incredible: commercial activity ceased in as many as forty city neighborhoods, including in many bairros nobres. This demonstrated the drug traffickers' enormous capacity for intimidation and brought to the fore an old specter that supposedly haunted Rio's elite: that of people coming down the hills to demand compensation for the enormous social inequality and injustice that is part of daily life in the city. It fit the "broken city" idea that geographic, economic, and cultural distinctions mark-

ing the territories of different groups were sufficient to break the city apart. The media had endorsed and reinforced this idea. Souza e Silva then posed a question: How it is possible for a city to be broken when favela residents continue to produce in ways that, economically and culturally, are very much a part of the city's identity and development? In fact, Rio de Janeiro was pluralistic, not broken. Souza e Silva's analysis of 2003 remains relevant today.

Urbanization. From the 1950s to the 1970s, elite and expert opinion denigrated the favelas. In one extravagant metaphor, they were compared to sores on the body of a beautiful woman. The first census of the favelas in 1948 described them as having "infested" the city. The solution was removal, at least from the Zona Sul. This was tried in the 1960s and 1970s. However, by the late 1970s, perspectives had changed, and favelas started to be seen as occupied by people seeking to better themselves through hard work, thrift, and education.[8] Governor Leonel Brizola turned his government's attention to building schools in favelas and linking them to utilities that supplied water and electricity.[9] Urbanization continued in the 1990s, as the state developed sewer systems, day-care centers, health clinics, public squares, and leisure areas in the favelas. A growing number of favelas began to have access to some public services, and the issue of quality of services became important.

Commercial activity. Especially in the food, clothing, and entertainment sectors, commercial activity has grown in the favelas. Internet centers arrived in the late 1990s, a decade that also saw the development of social organizations founded by individuals and groups within and outside the favelas. NGOs and, in smaller measure, private enterprises flourished. The major exception to this progress was public safety which did not advance at all.

Land values. A housing shortage (800,000 units in 2009) and the relative lack of attention by urban planners to meeting the needs of the popular classes are two of the reasons that have caused buildings to grow upward in older favelas. Many of the small homes on the steep hillsides are built solidly enough to support heavy concrete-slab lajes, and additional stories that can be used to generate rental income. Renting rooms and houses has become a big favela business. Some community entrepreneurs built small efficiency-apartment buildings in better established favelas, such as the large and still growing Rocinha which overlooks the elite neighborhoods of São Conrado and Barra de Tijuca. As the owners of such properties have prospered, some have moved out of the favelas into upscale neighborhoods. The same process has accelerated occupation in other areas of the city, particularly in the Jacarepaguá flatlands, the Baixada Fluminense, and the Zona Oeste (Western Zone). As they have spread, and as incomes within them have grown, favela

communities have become more visible in the general landscape of Rio de Janeiro. The investigative series by *O Globo* in 2008 estimated that the 2 million inhabitants of Rio's favelas earned 5 billion–10 billion *reais* (roughly $2.5 billion–$5 billion in early 2009) annually, and that $3 billion *reais* were spent in the favelas—enough to attract the interest of a wide range of businesses and investors. It was difficult to determine how many of the favelas' residents were truly poor. An estimated 8 percent (or one in twelve) had a middle-class income. In fact, the favelas have always included a small middle class. Finally, the series reconfirmed that a majority of favela residents—from 65 percent to 90 percent—did not want to leave. They wanted better security and urban services or, in other words, better favelas.[10]

Educational and cultural production. Community courses to prepare students for university entrance examinations have exploded in the favelas. Furthermore, theater, music and dance groups, courses in cinema and video, and computer and Internet courses became available to young people in the 1990s. The introduction of internationally popular music genres such as funk and hip hop brought on a silent revolution in the favelas of Rio. Taken together, this process formed new social attitudes, particularly among young people, who generally have become more critical of social inequality.

Residents' Associations. Residents' Associations have had an important historical role in the favelas as the institutions that articulate residents' demands. In the 1980s, however, their leaders began to develop strong ties to political parties and, in effect, became "professional" community leaders. In the 1990s, this leadership was forced to yield to the power of drug-trafficking gangs and formed other kinds of partnerships with municipal and state power structures. The Residents' Associations stopped holding elections, began to lose their legitimacy, and eventually became more like organizations that provide local services—functioning in some ways like NGOs.

Drug trafficking. The aspect of favela life that is most emphasized in the media is the influence of drug-trafficking groups, a result not only of the confrontation among different criminal gangs but also of police activity devoted exclusively to repression. The police are ineffective in the face of drug gangs that play complex roles within a favela, which can range from mediating community disputes and relations with state power to recruiting labor for public works projects, sponsoring public entertainment, mobilizing support for political candidates, and maintaining shadowy links with the police. There are many examples of accommodation, but little trust, between the drug gangs and corrupt police. The police are also ineffective when faced with the armed power of the criminal gangs. The police may enter favelas and fight gun battles, but they do not stay to win the war.

Militias. Since 2002, militias composed mostly of current and former police officers have grown dramatically in the favelas. This has introduced something the drug dealers never achieved: a structure of organized crime. The militias promise security and impose a stern regime of law and order on residents, and on the drug dealers by setting rules for the sale and use of drugs in the community. Militias are economically motivated. They bring a type of death-dealing security; monopolize certain economic activities, such as the distribution of bottled gas; become clandestine providers of cable television; and control transportation via fleets of vans. For all of this, residents must pay. In 2009, militias were said to dominate some two hundred of metropolitan Rio's more than nine hundred favelas, and their annual income was estimated at $140 million.[11] Their reach extended into politics, to elected representatives in the Rio state legislature and member of the City Council. In an interview for this book, Rio de Janeiro's Secretary of Public Security José Mariano Beltrame stated there was no organized crime in the favelas except for the militias. Sensing a growing threat, the Rio state government finally appeared to move in earnest against certain militias in 2008 and 2009. Claudio Ferraz, who headed the anti–organized crime unit of the Rio state police, has described the militias as ten times worse than narco-traffickers: They are embedded in party politics, control votes, and win elections. In 2009, Ferraz predicted that, if something were not done, "half of the legislative assembly [would] be members of militias. The political class already sees this happening."[12]

All of these arguments make evident that there have been changes in the favelas of Rio that go beyond the homogeneity implicit in old explanations that centered on poverty. Nor is it possible to understand favelas via a monolithic perception of the residents as potential criminals or passive victims. Criminal violence—in particular, that connected to drug trafficking and the militias—is not intrinsic to the favelas; it is a part of the social dynamic of the city and its political and police structures. Residents of the favelas are citizens of Brazil and must exercise their rights and duties as *cariocas*. In fact, the favelas make Rio de Janeiro ever more *carioca*.