

## 1 The Narco-Traffic

Beto is wearing a hooded sweatshirt with the words “Thug Life” (in English) printed on it.<sup>1</sup> A small caliber handgun is tucked into his shorts. His bodyguards stand a few feet away sharing a large joint and admiring the panoramic view of the city before them. The lights are coming on and twinkling. “Turn on your tape recorder,” he says. “I am happy to get a chance to talk, to communicate with the outside world.”<sup>2</sup>

At twenty-eight, Beto was considered a veteran. Responsible for Rocinha’s security, he oversaw the punishment of those who violated the rules for proper conduct as determined by his boss, the *dono*. This meant that he had been intimately involved with torture and murder, topics we never directly discussed. Once he told me, with a pained look, that he had done horrible things, worse than what I could imagine. Things he wasn’t proud of. I didn’t ask for details. In his capacity as a security agent, he was also a bodyguard for traffickers above him in the ranks, trained the soldiers under him, and worked to establish gang strategy vis-à-vis the police. Sometimes he handled police payoffs, delivering large sums of money to dirty cops. His girlfriend, Katia, eyes wide with excitement, recounted how she had once rolled naked on a bed covered with R\$30,000 (about US\$15,000) before it made its way to police coffers.

Tall and dark-skinned, Beto at first didn't look much different from other favela residents his age. However, his perpetual smile showed off the braces that adorned his teeth. Close examination showed other signs of wealth out of reach for most ordinary people in the community. The diamond studs he wore in both ears and his designer clothes were real, procured from boutiques in the city. Unlike most residents, Beto would never buy knock-offs from the open-air market that sprawled across the entrance to the favela.

Before entering the traffic, he had spent six years in the Special Forces wing of the military, learning from the government how to kill. One year of military service is officially obligatory for men in Brazil, but most people do not serve. Those who do are often from the lower classes and see the military as a career option. Beto took this path. He stayed on past the first year, advancing through the ranks until he left to join the traffic.

Beto's military background points to entanglements between the state and its supposed enemies, the "marginal" elements of society. In a striking example of what Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider call the *intreccio*, or intertwining of the Mafia and the state, Beto symbolizes "that vast gray area where it is impossible to determine where one leaves off and the other begins" (Schneider and Schneider 2003: 34). Beto is at once soldier, cop, and criminal. Violent laborers, like Beto, traverse the dividing lines between legitimate and illegitimate modes of production, where they perform more or less the same sort of "work," as Beto describes it, for different bosses. Reminiscing about his military service, he explained, "I learned a lot of stuff: to shoot, to survive, to work on guns. I came out of the army like Rambo. I knew a ton. And what was I going to do with this? Who could I teach it to? I had all this knowledge inside of me and I wanted to see if all the stuff I learned about war would actually work. I already knew what my methods would be. It just took someone to say, 'Hey dude, come work with me and do these things!'"

And that's what happened. Beto was not from Rocinha but from a neighboring favela controlled by the same gang.<sup>3</sup> He knew someone who knew someone who said, "Hey, you want a job?" There was no deep allegiance to faction or favela here—those would come later—but rather a pragmatic desire for a different life, what he called a better *parada* (venture, adventure).

In our conversations, Beto evoked a global repertoire of images of violent, militarized masculinity. He routinely framed his own struggle against the police as similar to that of other soldiers engaged in what he described as “just” or “legal” wars worldwide. He talked constantly about the U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which he followed closely on television and in the newspaper. He fantasized about hiring himself out as a mercenary for these war efforts, where he could don desert fatigues, which he described as “beautiful,” and where he could employ the most advanced technologies for killing.

Beto’s awareness of the world outside the favela illustrates how traffickers are not somehow isolated from the larger society but deeply embedded in wider social spheres, consumer groups, and media cultures. In fact, global geopolitics and things like new electronics, fashion brands, or international travel were all far more interesting conversation topics to Beto than my questions about local favela and trafficker politics. He was not unique in this regard. The hunger to talk about and experience something new—to break what was described as the “monotony” of favela life—was typical of both traffickers and residents alike.

For a time, the neighborhood boca de fumo was located in the alley underneath the window of my bedroom, providing me with (often unwanted) access to the sights and sounds of trafficker business twenty-four hours a day. To my surprise, nearly every morning one particular trafficker would go to the newsstand and buy a paper. He would spend the next several hours reading articles aloud to his colleagues, pausing every so often to sell drugs to one patron or another. International news, in particular, was of interest. During the U.S. presidential election season in 2008, John McCain and the practice of waterboarding was the center of debate.<sup>4</sup>

For someone like Beto, who described himself as a youth “in love with war” and “in love with hand-to-hand combat and killing in cold blood,” trafficking was not the only game in town. He admitted that when he left the Special Forces he could have taken the police exam, or perhaps worked in private security. These would have been appropriate venues for him to practice the skills he had acquired in the military. He laughed aloud at the irony that he could have ended up fighting for the other side, hunting a parallel version of himself. But his experiences with the government—shaped by his marginalized class and racial status—led him to believe that

the drug economy actually represented a more stable and honorable employment opportunity than the police force.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond his unabashed proclamation that he wanted to see what it felt like to actually hurt a person and to confront a real enemy, Beto framed his decision to become a trafficker in terms of necessity: “I knew I had to make this choice because I knew what it was like to feel hunger. Other people I know, they are still hungry because they didn’t have the courage to make the choice that I did. The state didn’t give me any other options. “ While it is somewhat difficult to believe the dire picture Beto paints here—after all, he was employed by the government and *left* to join the traffic—his use of the idiom of state neglect to explain his choice is significant. For Beto, the state itself is responsible for the ever growing number of armed youth in Rio.

This is a line of reasoning one hears frequently in the favela, as residents cite the lack of state-sponsored education and employment programs as a motivating force, if not *the* motivating force, behind the ongoing migration of young men into the traffic or into a life of crime beyond the narco-regime.<sup>6</sup> Trafficking, in this view, becomes a natural response to the actions of the state. The discourse of government abandonment helps to maintain trafficker power in the favela by framing trafficking as a form of politicized resistance to state oppression and placing traffickers on the front line in a battle against state tyranny.

After deserting the army, Beto advanced quickly through the ranks of Rocinha’s traffic. “I never started at the bottom,” he says with obvious satisfaction. “I went straight *“ao lado do cara”* (to the “guy’s” side, meaning he immediately began working directly for the boss). He attributes this to the value of his skill set; his knowledge of police and army strategy meant that he could train those already involved in the traffic. After all, he asked me, was there really such a big difference between the state and narco armies? Shortly thereafter, his work in Rocinha earned him a mention in an article that appeared in Rio’s main daily newspaper, *O Globo*, as well as in the *New York Times*. It was just a few months after he entered the traffic. “My mom kept the clipping if you want to see it,” he told me proudly. “The publication made up my mind. They had my name. Now I was on the other side [the traffic], the wrong side maybe, but there wasn’t any getting out.”<sup>7</sup>

Beto was arrested in late 2009. According to news reports, he was guilty of recruiting members of the armed forces on behalf of the traffic.

Media coverage was especially sensationalist, not because his actions were particularly shocking, but because his arrest was a painful reminder of the intimate relationship between the state and the traffic. His girlfriend, Katia, told me in a tearful phone conversation that he would get a lengthy sentence and that he was locked up in Bangu I, Rio de Janeiro's infamous high-security prison. He had a cell phone, though, and computer access, so the two were still able to instant message through their Facebook accounts.<sup>8</sup> Even though they had broken up a few months before, prison made Beto nostalgic for the happy times they had shared. He called often.

When I returned to the newly "pacified" favela in 2012, Beto was, inexplicably, free.<sup>9</sup> By coincidence we were dining in the same restaurant, I with my husband and toddler and he with a large group, many of whom I recognized as traffickers, or former traffickers. In the tenuous, high-security climate of the recent pacification, several BOPE officers were standing outside the restaurant. Beto pretended not to recognize me. He commented loudly on how cute the little blond baby was, but he would not meet my eyes. The shifting configuration of the conflict and the advent of "peace" made conversation impossible.<sup>10</sup>

In this chapter I examine the quotidian mechanisms of trafficker governance, in which discourses of legitimacy are forged through interwoven spectacles of violence and wealth. Rocinha's traffickers make the rules; they determine the law in the favela. When they are crossed, they respond with spectacular violence, overt displays of force enacted for the consumption of the favela audience. But trafficker power is predicated on more than the display of high-powered weapons or the direct physical violence they perpetuate. Traffickers also author and participate in a rich civic life, enhancing their legitimacy in the local milieu by attaining (and publicly flaunting) the trappings of Brazilian (and global) consumer culture. Yet, like any other governing force, traffickers experience periodic lapses in control. Trafficker "states of exception" are resolved through the same governing mechanisms—spectacle, violence, and commodification—and reveal how power is reasserted through both coercive and symbolic channels.

In exploring the manufacture of forms of trafficker "capital"—meant here in the broadest sense—I highlight the fact that while the trafficker state often appears much like an inversion of larger Rio society, it is in fact deeply intertwined with mainstream Brazilian and global cultures. Even

as traffickers appear to subvert the order of things by claiming to be the kings of the morro, crowned with the glittering gold of their many necklaces, watches, and gilded pistols, their power is in fact developed in much the same ways and through the same mechanisms as those of the “legitimate” state and in dialogue with the conventions and norms of wider society. The purposeful dialogue with mainstream governance and culture signals that despite the favela’s economic and social marginalization, it is integrated with the dominant logics of neoliberalism and consumption at the core of larger state and civic governance.

As Beto suggested, ongoing poverty and discrimination in Rocinha provided fertile ground for the development of the trafficker governance.<sup>11</sup> Persistent social segregation and lack of opportunity produce a steady stream of alienated youth like Beto willing to take up arms in search of respect and economic solvency. Though favelas have been the consistent target of police throughout their history, important changes after the fall of the military dictatorship exacerbated the situation. Gangs, forged from an unlikely collaboration between political radicals and criminals, changed the landscape of organized crime in the city. Under the military dictatorship that ruled from 1964 to 1985, leftist radicals and common criminals, many of whom came from favelas, were imprisoned together in a penitentiary called Cândido Mendes, located on an island on the Costa Verde, a few hours from Rio. These two very different “threats to the nation” formed an unlikely alliance, with the political prisoners organizing the criminals into politicized gangs (Amorim 1993; Penglase 2008).

This alliance, which Ben Penglase aptly dubs “the bastard child of the dictatorship” (2008), called itself the Comando Vermelho (CV), in reference to the communist ideologies of the political prisoners. It became a governing force within the prison.<sup>12</sup> Prisoners, upon release or escape from the island, brought their newfound organizational skills to the street, where they orchestrated organized bank robberies, stickups, car thefts, and so forth (Lima 1991). Already on the margins of the city, favelas became their strongholds. Community oriented and political, the early faction leaders of the CV built basic infrastructure in many favelas and initially presented the group as a kind of welfare state for poor residents (Penglase 2008).

In the 1980s, with an expanding market for cocaine in the North, the CV turned to drug trafficking. Rio became a transshipment and packaging

location for drugs coming from neighboring Colombia and Bolivia. Cocaine provided a more lucrative and stable source of income to the factions than did random criminal acts (Leeds 1996; Gay 2005: 55–56; Gay 2009; Perlman 2010). According to local drug consumers interviewed by Alba Zaluar and Alexandre Ribeiro, the trade took off mid-decade, with 1984 jokingly referred to as the “year it snowed in Rio de Janeiro” (1995: 95). Furthermore, the movement of narcotics fostered a semantic shift: gangs were no longer composed only of *marginais* (marginal characters), *bandidos* (bandits), or *criminais* (criminals) but now also of *traficantes* (traffickers).<sup>13</sup>

The rise of the narcotics market, which for the first time brought significant capital to the gangs, led to the subsequent introduction of the powerful weapons of war needed to protect drug-selling sites from rebellious up-and-comers as well as rival gangs (Amorim 2003; Barcellos 2003). With more and more money to be gained from drug sales, the CV splintered into several different factions. Turf wars began to pose a real threat to everyday safety.<sup>14</sup> During my residence in Rocinha (2008–10), however, the reigning faction of traffickers was so entrenched that not a single resident ever expressed concern to me that another faction might take over the favela territory.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the Rocinha that I describe here is in my mind emblematic of the pinnacle of established trafficker power.

### *Drug Bureaucracies*

Favelas, under the control of a local drug boss, became ideal sites for the refinement of cocaine. After processing, drugs are weighed, measured, and packaged for sale, for both the internal and external markets (Leeds 1996; Dowdney 2003: 258).<sup>16</sup> The boca de fumo, where drug dealers gather to ply their trade, is the economic center of the drug trade and the public face of the traffic in favelas like Rocinha. It usually looks like few guys (maybe one woman) sitting around on plastic chairs or on top of wooden produce boxes. Drugs are kept in faded leather fanny packs or in backpacks set on the ground beside their chairs. Boca dealers typically carry guns, but usually no weapons are visible since the focus is more on commerce than force. The boca features small quantities of drugs at prices favela residents can afford, around R\$5 (US\$2.50). Packets of cocaine and

marijuana of various quantities are laid out on a table for all to see, as are the large quantities of cash that the dealers handle.<sup>17</sup> They frequently pull out large rolls of money and grandiosely count them on the table, in an obvious show of wealth.

Larger favelas host a multitude of bocas; Rocinha has around fifteen, or one in almost every major neighborhood, each with varying degrees of business. The traffic thus maintains a physical and symbolic presence in almost every part of the favela. In Rocinha, customers simply approach the dealers and exchange money for drugs. The transaction is done with complete transparency; there is no separation between payment and handoff as in big-city drug corner sales in the United States (Bourgeois 1995; Ventaktash 2008). Consumption is similarly open. Wafts of marijuana smoke give the favela one of its characteristic scents, and I frequently saw cocaine users snorting in the alleys adjacent to the boca.<sup>18</sup>

As the public face of the traffic, the boca also reflects the security climate of the favela at any given moment. A functioning boca stocked with ample drugs and several dealers signals that all is well. An empty or non-functioning boca indicates that something is amiss, such as an impending police invasion, which is one of the only things that can shut a boca down. When Brazilian president Lula visited during my fieldwork, the main boca continued to operate the entire time he was in the favela, despite the presence of ample presidential security.

Though the boca serves the internal favela-based market, Beto explained that the majority of the drugs that move through Rocinha actually supply members of the middle and upper classes. These consumers usually avoid the boca because of the stigma of crime and violence (Misse and Vargas 2010: 103). As Carolina Grillo (2008) has shown in her research on middle-class traffickers, large-scale deals are negotiated directly between middle-class traffickers and their favela-based suppliers and usually take place outside the borders of the community.<sup>19</sup>

Though roles and the division of labor can vary according to favela, faction, and demeanor of the local dono, trafficking within Rocinha was characterized by a high degree of hierarchy and structure. On the lowest rung are the lookouts, or *olheiros*, usually teenagers, who sit at strategic points around the favela and monitor the passage of cars, motorcycles, and people. If there is something amiss, they ignite dynamite-like sticks of



firecrackers to notify their comrades and the community at large of impending danger. Above the *olheiros* are the *vapores*, who work in the boca and sell drugs directly to consumers.<sup>20</sup> Both *vapores* and *olheiros* are paid monthly stipends and are supervised by a boca manager, who takes a percentage of sales from his subordinates. Precise breakdowns of boca profits are hard to determine, but Barcellos reports that in the favela he studied, 10 percent of the profit went to the *vapor*; 30 percent to the manager of the boca, and the remaining 60 percent to the *dono* (2003: 145).<sup>21</sup> Like any other kind of commission-based business, there is a spirit of competition between bocas, thereby generating greater overall profit for the “business.” Team morale, if you will, is forged through the development of strong corporate identities. In the pre-pacification favela at least, the main competing bocas each had their own graffiti tag that were used to mark territory. The boss also hosted an annual soccer tournament where teams of players from different bocas competed for the championship.

Lower-rank employees are supervised by several types of managers, depending on which part of the business they work in. The manager of the white (cocaine) and the manager of the green or black (marijuana) oversee drug supplies and supervise the boca managers (Raphael 1998; Dowdney 2003). In theory, an employee starts at the bottom as an *olheiro* and gradually moves up through the ranks to be a manager and maybe someday even the boss. The whole apparatus, replete with a “hard work produces promotion and advancement” ethic, resembles the corporate business world, a point to which I return shortly.

Beyond those employed in the commercial wing of the trade, a security manager (like Pelé) oversees a legion of *soldados*, or soldiers, whose job it is to protect the boca and the favela territory from rival gangs. The security manager is in charge of gathering intelligence on police activities and delivering police payouts, as well as keeping the *dono*, the head of the entire operation, informed about potential threats to his control. *Soldados* are also on the front lines of the gang’s expansion and are periodically called upon to invade other favelas in an effort to seize their bocas, as was the case with Rocinha’s soldiers several times during my fieldwork (see also Dowdney 2003: 48–54).

The *dono do morro* is the most important member of the trafficking hierarchy. He is protected by a special security force, comprising trusted

members of his inner circle. The most important member of the inner circle is the *fiel*, or confidant (like the consigliere of the Mafia), who is the second in command and in line to inherit the dono's position should he be killed.<sup>22</sup> As the richest man in the favela, the wise boss relies on the loyalty of his *fiel* to keep him informed about potential threats to his reign. Hierarchy aside, when a boss is killed or incarcerated, power struggles among the various managers and the *fiel* typically ensue.

A successful dono commands the entire organization with a mixture of respect and fear and sets the tone for the offensive and defensive strategies of the favela. The demeanor of the boss affects the behavior of subordinates and influences residents. For example, people often talked about one of the most beloved bosses of the 1980s and 1990s. Even residents who were opposed to the traffic would praise him, saying that he required his employees to respect the general population and did not permit them to brandish weapons or use drugs in front of children or the elderly.<sup>23</sup>

Donos also cultivate varying kinds of relationships with the world outside of the favela. The kingpin, especially of a large and important favela like Rocinha, is an explicit object of media fetishization. Some donos exploit this status more than others. The dono whose reign immediately preceded my residence in Rocinha was an infamous publicity hound. He was forever giving interviews to journalists catering to the large tabloid market for glimpses of trafficker wealth. The spectacle of his illegal affluence was the product of a larger cultural fascination, but even his behavior inside the favela reflected a penchant for attention. He made special guns for his inner circle, plated (reputedly) with gold from jewelry stolen in assaults around the city. He was a prolific ladies' man and was always parading around with an entourage of admiring women.

Beto did not approve of this dono. He claimed such attention-seeking traffickers were the first to be killed. This was precisely what happened. The boss was shot at point blank during a surprise police invasion. The dono proved as flamboyant in death as he had been in life: his funeral was attended by scores of wailing, grief-stricken women, all of whom claimed to be his *primeira dama*, or first lady.<sup>24</sup> His demise was an important reminder that even though traffickers sometimes appear larger than life in the context of the favela, there are limits to their autonomy. Caught up in larger webs of power, they must be careful not to overstep the bounds of

“acceptable” trafficker behavior or risk being taken down by someone they have offended.

While avoiding too high a profile, a successful dono must still cultivate numerous external contacts within the larger shadow network. Political allies are especially important to enabling continued leadership and control.<sup>25</sup> People say that a dono is killed or arrested only when a confluence of forces align against him: new political and economic alliances may demand his sacrifice, public pressure might necessitate a government response, perhaps residents no longer support him, or a jealous bodyguard might not protect him. The dono is usually taken down in spectacular style. His demise well documented, he is led away in handcuffs or photographed for the newspapers, with police standing triumphantly over his lifeless, bullet-ridden body.

Sometimes the time is right not only for a new dono, but for an entire faction change. In smaller favelas, this might be achieved through the tenacity of a group of invading soldados successfully seizing their rivals' bocas. Faction changes in larger and more complex places like Rocinha are generally protracted affairs. The one faction change in recent Rocinha history was widely described to me as the product of an elaborate, long-term strategy. Beto said that his faction (the winners) had sought out the help of the police. “Help” didn’t just mean direct bribery but also involved exploiting the police presence as part of a larger military-like strategy of takeover. In light of such limitations, trafficker power must be situated within the ever-shifting dynamics of security in Rio. Individual traffickers might have the agency to influence the overall climate and tenor of the kingdom they construct, but the parameters of their rule are shaped by broader relationships, with each other, with residents, and with outside forces.<sup>26</sup>

#### DISCOURSES OF LEGITIMACY

Rocinha’s traffickers make reference to two principal legitimating discourses when describing their activities. On the one hand, they employ validating paradigms of state government; they frame themselves as a parallel state. On the other hand, they talk about themselves as a successful corporation operating in a competitive marketplace. Claiming proximity to these other institutions is an exercise of self-validation. But in want-

ing to be like the state and the corporation, traffickers also implicitly reveal a vision of statecraft and market capitalism largely reliant on violence, spectacle, and commodification. By evoking parallels here, it is not so much that traffickers are questioning the use of these qualities of governance as envisioning that the state and the corporation are able to use these tactics *legitimately* while they cannot. In claiming to be operating in the same way, traffickers seek to claim some of the state and corporate world's "righteous" use of spectacular violence.

Discourses of statehood and corporation were not so much distinct as complementary and overlapping. Recalling Charles Tilly's (1985) famous formulation of statecraft as the epitome of organized crime, what is notable here is perhaps not the flavor or effectiveness of these discourses but rather the manner in which they are welded together; their fusion invokes a wider reality of the enmeshment of regimes of state and corporate governance. Just as it drives the global proliferation of neoliberal approaches to government, deregulated, financialized capitalism lends an ethos of market competition—and market discipline—to the emergent trafficker state.

Legitimizing parallels are forged through everyday discourse. Beto explained, "We work as if we are another state, with another president, another secretary of defense, of health, a secretary of culture." "Listen," he said, pounding his fist on the table for emphasis. "It's as if it [the favela] was another city, with another mayor, another police station." The institutions he described are not just discursive constructs, but real entities (if a bit exaggerated) that function within the favela. For example, the "minister of health" refers to the dono's practice of subsidizing medicine for sick residents or paying for operations for disabled children, both of which are commonly cited as evidence of the benevolent nature of trafficker governance.<sup>27</sup> A "secretary of defense" like Beto works to keep the favela safe from outside gang members and acts as local law enforcement. Thus, these and other narco-institutions do provide some services to residents. By filling roles traditionally deemed to be the purview of the state, traffickers solidify their claim to authority in the favela.<sup>28</sup>

Likewise, trafficker evocations of the state are connected to their control of a discrete territory. In Rocinha, though this was different in other favelas, police did not enter trafficker territory except during large-scale raids, which occurred but three or four times per year during my research.

The rest of the time, the narco-state was left to rule over the favela as it deemed appropriate. In fact, the rhythm of daily life in the favela was so clearly established and controlled by the traffic that when the police ruptured the border between the two “states,” it was spoken of in terms of an invasion, which implicitly suggested that the police were the intruders and the traffickers the rightful sovereigns.<sup>29</sup>

Alongside the discourse that frames the traffic as a state is a set of related assertions that frame trafficking as a business venture. Traffickers’ awareness of the saliency of the corporation as a metaphor again points to the way in which they are not isolated actors but “professionals” who understand the workings of the world system. Beto explained, “This is a company. A multinational company. Why? It imports and exports and works with all of Rio. It’s a business that functions almost worldwide. There is a guy that does the finances, an accountant. Don’t companies have security guards like we do? It has everything! And it’s all very well run.”<sup>30</sup>

Ideas about the traffic as a corporation are so engrained that they spill over into the everyday. I frequently heard remarks that rendered criminal activity as ordinary wage labor—“I have to go to work,” “I work for the firm”—and job descriptions—managers, treasurers—all of which presented trafficking as having the same basic properties as employment in the corporate world, despite the fact that “work” might involve invading the territory of a rival gang or selling cocaine.<sup>31</sup> Through the idiom of work, murder, torture, and other acts of violence are transformed into essential labor. The use of business metaphors imbues trafficking with a neutrality that masks the atrocities carried out by people like Beto. The great irony here is that in drawing such “legitimizing” parallels between trafficking and corporations, traffickers actually understand and even appreciate the manner in which the corporate world can yield sanctioned, socially acceptable violence and spectacle in the name of advancing capital.<sup>32</sup> Their attempts to borrow from this repertoire are indicative of the tenuous and arbitrary boundary between legitimate and illegitimate forms of power, coercion, and violence.

Like any other company, the traffic is often the object of worker dissatisfaction. One trafficker went so far as to complain to me that he had to work long hours with no vacation time. Beto himself regularly complained that the business never allowed for “time off.” “Even when I’m not working, I can’t really be relaxed,” he said. “Because your head is always think-

ing, maybe worrying a little about how this is all going to turn out. You can go crazy. You have to find distractions.” Part of the worry that Beto is referring to is the fear of being fired, which would mean losing not only his livelihood but also his life. To be sure, the corporate discourse of the traffic is laden with euphemisms, but it also suggests that people—perhaps even Beto—are not really drawn into the traffic because they have an inherent interest in violence, danger, or criminality. Rather, like everyone in a capitalist society, they have to sell their labor in order to survive, and this is one of the only options available to them.<sup>33</sup> This reality is reflected in the tendency to talk about trafficking as a form of wage labor or employment that should come with social benefits.

The realization that he is but one expendable worker among many felt to Beto like a denial of his humanity. “The system,” as he called it, seemed to discourage meaningful human relationships among employees. In a moment of great irony, given his particular role in “firing” other unsatisfactory employees, he complained to me, “If shit gets fucked up, and they decide you’re over, your ‘friends’ are going to execute you without even thinking twice.” The feelings of social isolation that this created often left Beto melancholic and depressed. Residents feared him, and his colleagues would kill him if ordered, yet he would do, and likely did do, the very same to them.<sup>34</sup>

Analogies between traffickers, states, and corporations do not point simply to how traffickers legitimate their behavior or increase their individual power. Rather, trafficker imaginaries of the criminal state and of the murderous corporation pose profound questions about the entities that are the object of traffickers’ self-conscious mimicry. Observed similarities between the traffic and the state, or the traffic and the multinational, are suggestive of how dominant neoliberal ideologies are legitimated by both states and corporations in pervasive discourses that thereby come to inform the character of other domains, including trafficking. In this light, the line between legal and illegal forms of governance and commerce is very thin indeed.

### *Spectacle and the Right to Punish*

For traffickers, a key part of being a recognized governing force is having the ability to use violence and to punish legitimately. At numerous times

during our conversations, Beto reminded me, “Rocinha is not a violent place.” It “has no crime,” he said, and children, women, and researchers are always protected and safe. The relative absurdity of this claim was punctuated by the presence of his platoon of bodyguards and his cache of weapons sitting next to him on the sofa. What Beto was so eager to point out, however, is the efficacy of something called the *lei do tráfico*, or law of the traffic: law and order both made and maintained by traffickers.<sup>35</sup>

In what Dowdney describes as a system of “forced reciprocity,” traffickers maintain some semblance of law and order in exchange for residents’ silence about their criminal activities (2003: 56–57). Reciprocity is an apt characterization. As has been noted in analogous contexts where armed, nonstate actors guarantee public order (Galeotti 2002; Gambetta 1993; Venkatesh 2008; Bourgois 1995; Taussig 2003), the law of the traffic is not founded on traffickers’ altruism but rather on the fundamental premise that the maintenance of order is necessary to establish an optimal climate for their criminal activities. The law of the traffic does not, as Beto insisted, extinguish violence in Rocinha. Instead, it imbues traffickers with the right to order and control violence according to a set of norms that enhance their business interests and their personal power.

Making and upholding the law, particularly in light of the state’s relative inability to do so or disinterest, is an important part of what traffickers do in the communities they control. But trafficker law, like that of the state, does not operate simply as a discourse or disembodied set of codes; its *performance* is equally important as a mechanism for the elaboration of trafficker power. Transgressions of trafficker law, far from undermining it, actually create important opportunities for performances of violence.

This is complicated by the fact that traffickers often fail to enforce the law or selectively violate it themselves as they see fit. The lack of consistency was not necessarily delegitimizing, since traffickers’ ability to transcend the law if they so desired was actually an important feature of how the law was used. The right to make the rule and declare the exception—or to institute a “state of exception” in the favela as deemed necessary by the dono—is crucial to understanding how trafficker power is forged through discourses and performances of law and punishment. What should be clear here is that trafficker law is the outcome of a negotiation between several different competing interests: keeping residents happy, protecting

trafficker business, and providing the trafficker state with an avenue through which to enact violence, thereby symbolizing their power and reinforcing their control.

Under the law of the traffic, murder, rape, child abuse, theft, domestic violence, and assault are forbidden in the community and in areas immediately surrounding it.<sup>36</sup> Residents are also prohibited from talking about traffickers' criminal activities in contexts that could lead to their arrest or capture by law enforcement. Internal discussion about trafficker violence, however, was commonplace and in some ways even encouraged, as it functioned to create a climate of deterrence. Stories and gossip about the law, and about breaches of it, were a common topic of conversation. While most people I spoke with felt somewhat appreciative of the degree of safety and protection traffickers provided, a sentiment that I shared since I was rarely afraid for my personal safety in the favela, they were quick to point out inconsistencies in the laws. Generally speaking, prohibitions against theft, assault, and other forms of (nonsexual) violence were aimed at keeping a sense of order in the favela that was amenable to ongoing trafficker business interests. Maintaining order was particularly important as a way of not attracting the attention of the police, whose invasions could shut down the boca. Beto explained, "The dono, he hates a thief. Sure the guy might steal a couple hundred worth of stuff, but this act, well, it might cost the dono a couple hundred *thousand*. No, he doesn't like thieves."

The laws most fraught were those that centered on regulating the private, or domestic, sphere of residents. For example, rape, child abuse, and domestic violence are explicitly forbidden under the law of the traffic. But these laws seem to be relics developed during the time when the traffic was more overtly political. Residents value them, and so traffickers pay lip service to them, but they were not consistently enforced. When they were punished, rapists and child abusers were usually singled out for the most spectacular punishment (see Goldstein 2003: 190–98). During my fieldwork, one alleged child abuser was tied to a telephone pole in the middle of one of the busiest thoroughfares and beaten with metal chains until he was no longer recognizable as human. His body was left on display for several hours. This extreme act of brutality highlights how the law of the traffic, like many state-backed legal systems, paradoxically employs inhumane forms of punishment to enforce its morality.<sup>37</sup>



Traffickers sometimes violated their own rules, especially in the domestic sphere. For a time, I lived next door to a trafficker who savagely beat his wife on a regular basis. Because of his social position within the favela, there was little I could do to speak up in defense of his spouse without risking my own safety, making this one of the most challenging and depressing times of my fieldwork. Beto himself had allegedly broken the law. Though I never discussed the incident directly with him, another trafficker told me that Beto had raped a prostitute at gunpoint. His colleagues disrespected him for it, but he was not punished as he might have been had he been someone else or had his victim been a more “upstanding” member of the community (cf. Arias and Rodrigues 2006). Punishing Beto was clearly not in the business interest of the *dono*, a calculation that Beto most likely made when weighing whether or not to commit the crime in the first place. Furthermore, the incident, though it made Beto unpopular with his peers, inadvertently bolstered his personal power. It showed that he could break the very laws that he was employed to enforce.

The idea that those who transgress the law deserve punishment, however brutal, is common among residents.<sup>38</sup> I once encountered traffickers marching a handcuffed and sobbing man up into the trees at gunpoint. I returned home deeply upset at what I had witnessed, but my neighbors were quick to tell me not to be scared. Yes, it’s complicated, one said, but surely the man had broken a law. Another person interrupted, adding that the captive must have been a “marginal” who was probably involved with drugs and maybe gambling too (in ways that violated the gang order). Traffickers had a legitimate right to punish him. He should have known better.

Reflecting on these explanations, I realized that residents (including me) needed the law of the tráfico. Even with its inconsistencies and contradictions, it provided an explanatory framework within which to understand violence that would otherwise be too monstrous to bear. Residents themselves, by constantly locating those who transgress trafficker law at the margins of favela life, help traffickers transform these others into “bare life,” which can then be extinguished.<sup>39</sup> By explaining the “who” and “why” of trafficker justice, residents replicated and validated the disordered order of the law in minutia. The law then became a series of mutually reinforcing understandings about who is punishable, and these under-

standings both reflect and reproduce wider social divisions within the favela.

Transgressions provide traffickers with valuable opportunities to perform their power through the enactment of punitive rituals, using blatant displays of force and consolidating power through fear and spectacle. When an offense is committed, traffickers act as judge, jury, and executioner (Arias and Rodrigues 2006; Goldstein 2003). Offenders are bound and gagged, often with duct tape, paraded through public thoroughfares, and then taken “up there” (*lá em cima*, a euphemism for the place(s) where killing is performed). The places of punishment fall outside the boundaries of the civilized favela, with “up there” referring to nominally secret areas of death located in the forested, more mountainous areas above the favela. Like the favela itself, which is constantly conjured by the state as a zone of lawlessness threatening larger society from within, these spaces of death and execution are similarly hinted at in everyday discourse. The fear such spaces provoke emerges in the way people talk about them. In hushed tones, they say that “up there, unpaved earth can be excavated into shallow graves,” or “up there, the deep forest muffles screams.”<sup>40</sup>

That extremely violent punishment is not hidden but rather celebrated indicates that traffickers do not fear retribution from the state. They are confident in their right to govern and to mete out punishment as they see fit. When I encountered people being marched “up there,” I felt, in addition to a terror from which it took me several days to recover, that I had violated some taboo, that I had seen traffickers doing something that I wasn’t supposed to see. But my presence never seemed to produce any concern. In some cases, having an audience provoked additional violent performance, as was the case when my husband ran into a prisoner being transported one morning. When the primary guard (and probable executioner) saw that he had a gringo audience, he looked my husband in the eye, grinned, and began to beat his prisoner with the butt of his gun.<sup>41</sup>

Given the number of gruesome stories I heard from residents about public beheadings, beatings, and torture, punishment itself was spectacular (Goldstein 2003: 190–97). One gruesome story that I heard from several people involved the public beheading of two young thieves for assaulting and kidnapping a woman in the area just outside the favela. More recently, a woman was burned alive for cheating on her trafficker

boyfriend with a policeman. Traffickers are well aware of torture and execution techniques employed elsewhere, such as beheading, a form of execution used by insurgents in the war on terror, or “necklacing,” made famous by Tontons Macoute death squads in Haiti and widely practiced in South African townships (Scheper-Hughes 1995b). Called “microwaving” in Brazil, the practice, which involves stacking tires around the offender and then lighting them on fire, has become iconic of the brutality of the leis do tráfico. Traffickers thus construct order through law and maintain it through spectacular violence. Their violence is not hidden, and they seem to fear no retribution. They see their use of force as legitimate, as essential to creating a climate of deterrence and terror.

### *Spectacle and the Ability to Consume*

Traffickers do not depend on the threat of physical force alone. The establishment of power over the population entails consumptive spectacles as well. The neighborhood kids told me about Maggie while we ate popsicles on my front stoop, açai and guava staining our lips purple. “She’s a monkey,” they said in excited voices, “the dono’s monkey.” Then, like most people do, they looked around and added, “The dono! You know, the dono? The president! The boss!” Like her owner, Maggie the monkey was a criminal. She stole a lipstick here and spare change there, weaseling her thin arms through the window bars and running off with things left on windowsills. Maggie also had bling; when I finally saw her jumping from rooftop to rooftop and skipping along the telephone wires, she was wearing a huge gold medallion around her neck that read “Rocinha” and bore the initials of the gang faction. While the kids were excited about the presence of the exotic pet, the medallion was less remarkable to them. The dono’s outrageous wealth, which enabled him to give a pet monkey a solid gold necklace, had long since become a normal part of life for them.

While many accounts of favelas tend to gloss over important internal class distinctions, differentiating oneself from less fortunate neighbors through conspicuous forms of consumption was a common aspect of daily behavior in Rocinha. Favela residents employed in the legal economy are avid consumers of luxury goods. Many own flat screen television sets and designer watches and wear expensive perfume. Traffickers are even more

conspicuous consumers.<sup>42</sup> They throw lavish birthday parties for their children, their mothers live in the nicest houses, and their girlfriends and wives wear designer clothing and expensive jewelry. The desire to acquire such goods often provides the motivation for entering the traffic in the first place, as it is common knowledge that working in the drug economy is the highest-paying option for local youth.

After receiving their first paychecks, young traffickers usually begin to accumulate the signs of wealth, according to their own specific aesthetics and style. Bodies are adorned with heavy gold jewelry, medallions in the shape of dollar signs, and guns hang from heavy braided chains. High-ranking traffickers carry golden handguns, their glittering presence drawing attention both to weaponry and to wealth.

Guns, machine guns especially, are objects of prestige and tools for conversion. Beto described how young kids follow an older trafficker like him around, doing favors and looking at him with starry eyes: “They latch onto you. Even though the guy is not making any money, he just hangs around. He feels powerful being around you. And then, at some point, you get fucked up, drinking or something, and your gun is heavy and maybe you don’t feel like holding it, and so you hand it to him. ‘Here! Take it!’ That’s it. It’s a done deal. Holding your gun makes him really happy.”

The dono, as the wealthiest man in the favela—the CEO, as Beto called him—is expected to be the most outrageous consumer of material goods.<sup>43</sup> Rocinha’s dono loved imported Johnny Walker whiskey (Blue Label, which retails for \$175 in the United States but costs nearly triple that in Brazil) and drove a bright yellow imported motorcycle. He wore designer clothing and had a pool dug in his backyard during an especially hot summer. Living in a “mansion” hidden high up in the favela, he enjoyed playing video games on his gigantic flat screen television. His girlfriend, who reportedly had extensive plastic surgery, frequented the fanciest shopping malls in the city and had a fleet of cars and drivers. The details of the fabled couple’s high-rolling lifestyle were regularly reported in the city papers. Trafficker wealth, it seems, was not only being performed for those within the favela but for those outside it as well.

While putting food on the table is a practical concern that drives some to find work in the illicit economy, many are also attracted by the promise of yet another commodity: women. “This is one of the main motivations for

the guys that walk around with six or seven bodyguards, all full of guns, and who buy tons of gold chains,” Beto remarked, smiling. “This attracts attention, and then they can get more ladies. There are guys who get into this business just for that reason.” Beto said that most youths can’t really be blamed for this behavior. After all, they learned that women care about money from television shows, produced by mainstream Brazilian culture. “How else are poor guys from the favela going to get women?” he asked me.

Pierre Bourdieu writes that “cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education” and that this “predisposes tastes to function as markers of ‘class’” (1984: 1). Taste is directly related to class status in that the things we desire and consume reflect our place in the wider system of social stratification. Beto was especially eager to distinguish himself from regular residents and from “lower-class” traffickers. This was accomplished largely through the acquisition and display of material goods and through drawing distinctions between his “refined taste” and their “poor taste.”

Unlike many of his peers, Beto claimed to understand how consumption is linked to social status and thought he had a more accurate reading of the items that bring prestige. He complained that gold worn in such generous quantities, the brandishing of guns, and walking around with an entourage were “tacky” and “unsophisticated” behaviors and that the women this attracted would “claw you to death” because they “just want the bling-bling” (said in English).<sup>44</sup> Thus, just as Beto considered lower-class traffickers’ personal adornment to be beneath him, so too were shallow, cloying women..

Beto would only date *patricinhas*, wealthy girls from the city.<sup>45</sup> As one resident explained, “The patricinha represents that ultimate trafficker fantasy. Favela women will do everything they can to try and look like these girls, to attain the look of money. Their trafficker boyfriends pay for their designer labels, breast implants, and high-priced blonde weaves and hair extensions.” Just as Beto aimed for upward mobility through the strategic accumulation of high-class goods and lovers, so also did women in the favela attempt to craft status through similar self-fashioning, although the transformations required of their bodies were more drastic and painful. In the end, as Beto suggested scornfully, these women were still just girls from the favela, and they could only rise to a certain height as long as they lacked the worldly experience and culture that come from wealth.

The obvious irony here is that Beto's descriptions of these women were true of himself. He lived almost like a prisoner in the favela since to leave too often was to risk arrest.<sup>46</sup> He too couldn't use his money to attain experiences that would bestow real status.

Therefore, a real *patricinha* carries a currency beyond the beauty that money buys. She is a door to another world. Beto's *patricinha*, Katia, his companion for nearly two years, was from a wealthy family. She worked part-time for fun, making elaborate wedding cakes and pastries for parties at a ritzy beachfront hotel, and took classes in literature and poetry at the university at night. She taught Beto English words and phrases, which he laughingly, clumsily, sounded out. When she was planning a trip to Argentina with a few girlfriends, he begged her for an international phone call. "Come on, girl," he said to her while I was interviewing him. "I just want to be able to tell my buddies that I am getting a phone call from another country!" Experience beyond the borders of Brazil, symbolized here by foreign language and travel, is obviously a valuable commodity for Beto. Katia offered him education and mobility, though both are vicarious since his criminal status keeps him prisoner in the favela. He dreamed about getting out of the business, about living the life she represented.

Under Katia's guidance, Beto learned to recognize a different language of wealth. He explained, "I was never able to dress nicely before. My mother didn't have money to give me nice clothes, cool clothes. And then when I got money, I was able to buy the clothes that I had always wanted—designer labels like Diesel jeans [US\$400 in Brazil] and expensive cologne." He pointed his iPhone at me. "In the favela no one notices them because they haven't ever heard of them. They attract the attention of different people." To Beto, the phrase "different people" signified those who, like Katia, are sophisticated enough to recognize the subtle symbols of upper-middle-class wealth. Therefore, power and status result not from the overt display of raw gold, which he associates with poor taste, but from having the label of his jeans recognized by the right person.

Ironically, Katia herself was not so different from those "clawing women" that Beto despised. She fetishized his trafficker status. Her brushes with the danger that he represented made her the hippest and edgiest of her friends, and she took obvious pleasure in violating social taboos by coupling her whiteness with his blackness, a blackness that she

said enhanced his trafficker persona for her. It was not Beto the person but rather Beto the trafficker that she found attractive, a fact that became clear when she eventually left him for a more important trafficker in another favela that was controlled by a rival gang.

The spectacle of wealth is so central to the performance of trafficker governance that it cannot stay behind closed doors. Displays of trafficker power are played out in public venues—in the street, at the boca, and especially at the baile funk. Invented in Rio de Janeiro's favelas in the 1980s, funk is a genre of music that draws heavily on Miami bass styles and sampling. Funk has replaced Carnival and samba music, once transgressive cultural products born in the favela but which have long since become commercialized staples of mainstream Brazilian culture, losing their radical edge along the way (Vianna 1999). Though some funk albums have gone mainstream and are now played in trendy European nightclubs (Sansone 2001), funk has its roots in favela-based performances, at funk dances.<sup>47</sup> These local venues are the only places where uncensored funk songs are performed, those that are deemed too sexual for mainstream recording (*funk erotica*) or that praise and extol the virtues and exploits of drug lords (*funk proibidão*) (Sansone 2001: 139).<sup>48</sup>

Since most traffickers were not able to leave the favela to attend social events for fear of arrest, the baile took on added importance as one of their only recreational outlets. The performance and consumption of the trafficker persona is central to the baile itself and became a venue through which wealth was displayed for the larger community. Indeed, “the culture of funk music is one of the principal ways through which the legitimacy of the drug traffickers is produced and lived” (Sneed 2003: 61). At the baile, the lifestyle of the favela's traffickers was presented in spectacular fashion. Because the spectacle was of their making, they were able to craft a role for themselves as the guests of honor. With their entourage of beautiful women, bodyguards, and shiny weapons, they were the center of attention. They appeared onstage with the performers or designated special VIP boxes exclusively for their entourages. Their economic and social importance was further extolled in the lyrics of the music and inscribed on the bodies of thousands of favela youths as they traced out synchronized dance steps. Huge speakers pumped bass at a deafening volume, which washed over the entire favela like waves, shaking windows and floors as it

traveled.<sup>49</sup> Even if residents did not attend the baile, the thumping bass performed a sonic spectacle that dominated the landscape.

If funk proibidão is the national anthem of the trafficker state (Sneed 2003), the parties themselves are sites of a new “carnavalesque,” as conceptualized by Bakhtin (1968). The carnivalesque is a process that subverts the dominant social order and offers up a new one through the laughter, irreverence, and grotesque quality of the carnival as a social celebration. Brazilian *carnaval*, as Roberto DaMatta (1991) has noted, is a central venue for the development of the carnivalesque. But under the sponsorship of the drug boss, who paid for the bailes, the carnivalesque process was repeated at hyperspeed, with bailes taking place once or twice a week rather than once a year like Carnaval. “The liminar [*sic*] function of the funk dance is celebrated if not exaggerated” (Sansone 2001: 140), and the possibility to break free from the oppressive social conventions was part of the baile’s allure. At the baile, it seemed, anything was possible. Beto could show Katia off as his status symbol to his favela friends, and Katia could show Beto off as her status symbol when her “city” friends came up the hill to attend the baile. Just as she was an affirmation of his status and a symbol of his wealth, so he became a commodity for her enjoyment.

### *Spectacle and Rites of Mourning*

Both the law of the traffic and traffickers’ consumptive rituals rely on performances of violence and wealth. But spectacle also features centrally in moments when this carefully constructed legitimacy threatens to erode. The public face of the traffic is one that is all-powerful and fully in control of the favela population. How, then, does the narco-regime react in the aftermath of obvious breaches in security, such as when the police kill important members of the hierarchy or when they are taken out in skirmishes with rival gangs? Responses involved both controlling the discourse in the larger community and crafting explanations that affirmed the power of the dono. In cases of high-profile deaths, elaborate funerals were staged to give fallen traffickers a hero’s memorial.

Living with the everyday presence of death required the construction of an explanatory system of how, why, and who dies. This was useful for both traffickers and residents, who were continuously worried about getting



caught in the middle of the trafficker-police conflict. Generally speaking, people accepted that trafficking is a high-risk profession that carries with it the probability of untimely death. Some traffickers will be killed by intimates—people they know well and work with—for some specific violation, such as rape or using crack, prohibited by the dono. Others will be in the wrong place at the wrong time during a police invasion.

In death, as in life, lower-ranking traffickers remained unnamed and largely unmemorialized by the business. However, the death of a higher-up was followed by an elaborate ritual of public mourning. Funeral and memorial practices were used to reinforce hierarchy, to reassert control, and to perform power for the population. If a trafficker was killed while invading another favela, he was presented as a hero who died in the line of duty. Such was the case with the trafficker whose funeral was held at the indoor soccer court next to my house. Hundreds of serious-faced onlookers, including scores of sobbing women, sat on the hood of the hearse and huddled around the entrance to the court. Black flags hung over the metal fencing that usually served to keep soccer balls in play, and several had been hoisted up the wires over the road.

In the days that followed, more flags appeared all over the favela, especially around the bocas. The favela was plunged into an uncanny silence, as residents strained to hear explanations that would enable them to evaluate the gravity of the situation and assess whether it posed a threat to their personal safety. The coffin contained the body of Zidane, the second in command in the trafficking hierarchy, who took his name from the French head-butting soccer player of 2006 World Cup fame. He was young, with a baby face, or so I gathered from the hundreds of T-shirts bearing his image and the word *saudades* (eternally missing you) sported all over the favela in the days and weeks after his death. An enormous mural with his face, a lion, and a starry sky was erected above the main boca. As rebellious as his namesake, Zidane had not heeded the dono's orders and had attended a baile funk in a favela called Monkey Hill. Monkey Hill had been involved in a protracted war with the neighboring community ruled by the rival gang. Enemy soldiers crept into the favela, opened fire on the baile, and killed Zidane.<sup>50</sup>

In explaining Zidane's demise, residents emphasized the fact that the dono had explicitly warned him not to attend the baile; his death, while

unfortunate, could have been prevented if he had followed orders. The incident was thereby reframed, not as evidence of the weakness of the faction, but of its power. Beyond the political repercussions of Zidane's death, the public way in which he was mourned attests to the way in which traffickers are embedded in favela communities. They are the husbands, sons, nephews, brothers, fathers, grandchildren, and lovers of residents. Though people often lament their fall into a life of crime, for many in the favela, they are not just traffickers, but people with complex histories and multiple subjectivities.

In the summer of 2010, another spate of trafficker deaths ruptured the otherwise tranquil environment of Rocinha. Police invaded the favela from the woods one afternoon and, while storming the dono's house, interrupted a meeting attended by most of the top leadership of the favela. While numbers two, three, and four in the hierarchy were killed, the dono managed to escape. The invasion was exceptional in that it broke with an otherwise established pattern of police activity. It occurred in the afternoon, whereas most invasions took place at dawn. It involved only a small group of elite police forces, instead of the hundreds that usually participated in invasions. Clearly, the police had received valuable, accurate intelligence, since they were able to eliminate important figures in the hierarchy.

The dono did not initially appear to have had advance warning of the invasion, as he usually did with other police actions in the community. Such an exceptional event caused considerable panic among residents. Was this the beginning of a protracted war? Could a rival gang be financing the police effort? Almost immediately, however, an alternate explanation began to emerge. Since the dono himself had escaped, it had clearly been *he* who had ordered the invasion and tipped the police off as to the location of the meeting. Furthermore, he had probably done so in order to eliminate powerful subordinates who were perhaps conspiring against him. The police were simply a tool with which to reorganize his leadership cadre.

The repackaging of this event into something that added to rather than detracted from the power of the traffic dovetails with the use of public performance to communicate trafficker dominance to the wider community. Both are important strategies for (re)asserting power in the social context of the favela. Ironically, these strategies are not so different from

those of the Brazilian state of exception, where discourses about the disordered and violent favela are developed in order to legitimate acts of state terror, acts that are highly performative and intended to carry the message of state omnipotence to a larger citizenry.

## CONCLUSION

As I have suggested throughout this chapter, the nature of trafficker culture suggests that traffickers do not so much seek to establish a regime outside of or separate from the larger social order as to seek power and recognition in a society that has disavowed them. Traffickers use discourses of statehood, of the corporate world, and of consumer culture to form a distinct vernacular expressed through registers of violence and spectacle. Trafficker power is forged through the performative construction of order, and when that order fails, through violence. Justice as administered by traffickers is not driven by altruism but reflects the ways traffickers negotiate multiple interests in the social, political, and economic realms so as to maintain a favorable climate for the continuation of their criminal activities. Inconsistencies in trafficker law, rather than detract from their control, reflect their understanding of the utility of the “exception” in solidifying governance.

Performances of power extend beyond violence to the realm of consumption. Traffickers use consumer goods to distinguish themselves from poorer residents and to communicate that they too can acquire the signs of success. However, they misread the signs of status and the symbols of wealth. As Beto pointed out, the “tacky” gold they wear actually works to affirm, not advance, their place in the larger social order. While traffickers are prisoners in the favela, they desire encounters with people and cultures beyond it, as Beto’s interactions with Katia demonstrated. Because of the constant threat of imprisonment and death at the hands of police, traffickers’ options for these kinds of interactions are limited; they learn about the world vicariously—through television, the newspaper, the Internet, and talking to foreign anthropologists.