“The Location of Danger: Perceptions of (In)Security in Morumbi”

Abstract

This paper reports on people’s perceptions of security and insecurity in the Morumbi district of São Paulo City, Brazil, and specifically explores where people locate the locus of danger in the area where they live and / or work. The Morumbi district is ideal for this study of people’s perceptions because it contains some of Brazil’s poorest and richest, all living within a region of approximately six square miles. This neighborhood study is based on interviews with a sample of fifty-six residents that was stratified by gender, income, location of residence, and occupation. Starting with the assumption that people’s perceptions powerfully impact both individual and group behavior, this study explores the proposition that in fearing violent crime, people respond to their perceptions with a range of cognitive, discursive, and behavioral strategies. This research augments a growing body of research on neighborhood dynamics and the physical and symbolic boundaries that people erect between themselves and others as they negotiate physical proximity while maintaining social distance.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores people’s perceptions of security and how they define and manage danger within the highly unequal and violent urban context of São Paulo City’s Morumbi district. The residents of São Paulo report living with high levels of fear and seek to avoid being victims of street- and state-perpetrated violence, two sources of violence that are often difficult to disaggregate. Starting with the assumption that people’s perceptions powerfully impact both individual and group behavior, this study explores the proposition that in fearing violent crime, people respond to their perceptions with a range of cognitive, discursive, and behavioral strategies. This paper will explore where a diverse informant sample of fifty-six people who live or work in the Morumbi neighborhood locate the locus of danger.

Illustration 1:

Map of São Paulo Districts in Southwest Area of City, Including Morumbi

Source: Guia Quatro Rodas: Ruas São Paulo 2004 Civita, Roberto, Editor (Abril: São Paulo) 2004

In Morumbi, some of the richest Paulistanos, as residents of São Paulo City are known, live next to two squatter settlements – the Real Parque and Paraisópolis favelas. These shantytowns stand in the shadows of the Morumbi neighborhood’s wealthy high-rise, gated, communities. The visible manifestation of the extremes of wealth and poverty in Morumbi are also expressed in income disparities. The Morumbi district has the largest number of São Paulo City household heads (about 44%) making monthly more than twenty minimum salaries. At the
same time, seventeen percent of the Morumbi population makes monthly less than three minimum salaries – or about two hundred and fifty dollars.\(^2\)

**Illustration 2:**

Real Parque *Favela* Flanked by Three Affluent Condominium High-rises

![Image of favela and high-rises](image)

*Source: Photograph by Xelajú Korda, July 2004*

Some argue that such income disparities show up most violently in the Morumbi neighborhood’s murder rates: Morumbi’s poverty-stricken residents, in contrast to its richest inhabitants, are eighteen times more likely to be murdered than their fellow impoverished citizens in the less sharply stratified Jardim Paulista district.\(^3\) Jardim Paulista also contains wealth and poverty within one regional neighborhood, but the incomes of the population there are less sharply stratified than in Morumbi. In other words, it may not be poverty or wealth, per

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\(^3\) Huggins, Martha “Urban Violence and Police Privatization in Brazil: Blended Invisibility” *Social Justice*, V. 27, Number 2, Summer 2000 pp. 113-34.
se, that spawn violence and insecurity in Morumbi, but the sharp and visible disparities in income and security in that neighborhood. The urban landscape of inequality and the physical proximity of people from disparate socio-economic backgrounds make the Morumbi neighborhood a model location for examining people’s perceptions of, and techniques for coping with, violence as a socially normative part of daily existence.

While this study is not about actual levels of violence, understanding something about the violent realities that people live with appropriately contextualizes this study. I will briefly discuss rates of violence in Latin American and Brazil before moving on to relevant literature and an extended discussion of one key finding – where people locate danger in Murumbi.

VIOLENT REALITIES: LATIN AMERICA AND BRAZIL

Latin America is characterized by high levels of violence. In 2003, as reported by The Economist, Mexico and Brazil’s countrywide homicide rates were at or above thirty per hundred thousand.4 Other Latin American nations, such as Venezuela and El Salvador, have numbers that exceed even these Latin American giants’ already high numbers, with approximately forty homicides per hundred thousand each. At the lower end of the spectrum are countries Argentina and Chile, whose rates of eight homicides per hundred thousand and two homicides per hundred thousand, respectively, are equal to or lower than the rates recorded in the United States and many European nations.5 According to statistics, violent crime in Latin America is overwhelmingly concentrated in urban areas, although urban crime accounting is in most cases better than for rural areas. Setting aside this statistical reality, even within urban areas crime rates vary according to urban district, and by neighborhoods within these districts.

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4 The Economist October 2, 2004 p.36 Brazil = 30; Mexico = 37.
5 Ibid.
Within Latin America, Brazil’s urban homicide rates are among the highest, and are intertwined with larger national problems – such as routinized human rights violations, an ineffective legal system, and pandemic levels of both violent crime and fear of being victimized by violent crime. Human rights abuses are particularly pernicious in Brazil, where on and off-duty police regularly murder Brazilian citizens – usually the poor, such as street kids and urban slum dwellers – without impunity.

Notorious for its egregious inequality – in terms of both economic and social indicators – many Brazilians rely on private and extra-legal solutions to mitigate the state’s weaknesses, abandonment, or persecution. High levels of inequality, violence, and fear are concentrated in Brazil’s urban areas, where an estimated eighty-four percent of the population resides. São Paulo, Brazil’s largest city, exemplifies the realities of inequality, high crime rates, and a population that fears violent victimization. Some regions in Brazil have rates of homicide that are commensurate with that associated with low-level civil war – at or above 140 homicides per 100,000 of the population. At fifty homicides per one hundred thousand in 2003, São Paulo City’s homicide rate significantly outpaced the country’s average of thirty homicides per one

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8 Huggins, Martha and Jessica MacTurk “Armed and Dangerous: Where the Military and Police Can’t Keep Order Private Security Takes Over” Connection to the Americas, Resource Center of the Americas, Fall 2000

9 UNICEF online reports that 84% of the Brazil’s population lived in urban areas in 2004, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/brazil_statistics.html#16 [accessed January 2006].
hundred thousand. 10 Within Brazil’s urban areas, certain people are at much higher risk for being victims of violent crime – whether because of such social markers as race, class, and gender, or because they live in a certain area marked by higher levels of crime. A 2000 study on crime in São Paulo found that the highest rates of crimes against property are in the city’s wealthier districts, while the highest homicide rates are in the city’s poorest districts. 11 Another study in 2000 found that in Brazil, the majority of homicide victims are “poor, young, and black.” 12 Thus, certain neighborhoods within São Paulo City have among the highest recorded homicide rates in the Center South / southern Brazilian region, while other neighborhoods have relatively low rates. Whatever the region and its crime rates, certain people are at far greater risk for being the victims of violent crime than others.

Given the high rates of violent crime in many Brazilian cities, it is no surprise that urban dwellers modify their lives and living spaces, sometimes in extreme ways, to avoid the risks that they perceive to be inherent in carrying out the most mundane activities – walking to work or to catch a bus, walking the dog, buying groceries, or enjoying a cup of coffee at a café. For many, the city is a danger-laden urban mine-field of potential assailants and/or threats to be avoided. The bitter irony to this violent reality is that those most vulnerable to urban violence, the poor, are least able to protect themselves from the daily potential of being violently victimized.

Crime realities are one part of the backdrop for people’s perceptions of crime and danger; equally important is whether and how people perceive the chances of their victimization and where they perceive the threat to be emanating from. This paper reports on people’s socially

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10 The Economist October 2, 2004 p.36.


constructed perceptions of security and insecurity within the violent urban context of one neighborhood in São Paulo City, Brazil, and examines people’s reported responses to their perceptions of danger.

LITERATURE: TYING TOGETHER THEORY AND RESEARCH

The larger patterns of violence in Latin America and Brazil, as well as people’s responses to these realities, suggest a number of avenues for inquiry. I focus first on “space and place” and the mediating structure of an urban neighborhood. I then turn to studies of Brazilian patterns of police and gang violence. Associated with all of the prior research are such variables as subjective perceptions of violence, social exclusion and poverty, fear of violence, community norms, and deviance.

SPACE AND PLACE

The social construction of space and place plays a central role in this study. As a study of people’s perceptions the importance of the physical environment cannot be overstated. Realities of race, class, gender, and occupational position do not play out in a vacuum; they play out in specific times and places. Space and place, especially in an urban context, have been objects of study going back at least as far as the early twentieth century and continue to be subjects of study to this day. Many people have contributed to theories of spatial analysis, perhaps most notably Henri LeFebvre\(^\text{13}\) who sought to develop “a unitary spatial language that [would] give coherence

to the analysis of space.”

Lefebvre’s theory, called “spatiology” includes both material and conceptual components in the study of space.

[s]patiology as a mode of inquiry makes possible spatial analysis, which combines the social and the physical in an interrogation of spatial production as ongoing relations that are not just reflections of a way of life but instead are its projections [because] the production of space is inseparable from the operation of culture and the functioning of the social order.

LeFebvre established analytically distinct social and physical categories for conceptualizing space which are still used by scholars today. This study is primarily concerned with the last spatial category: The symbolic meanings that are embedded in space through social processes. This category takes into account that people do not just react to their environment – they are also responsible for shaping it. Thus, any study of urban semiotics must recognize that everything in the city serves both a denotative and a connotative (symbolic) function and “that the urban milieu is a rich source of signification and symbols indissolubly connected with urban life.”

This study takes its cues from studies that recognize the symbolic and socially constructed nature of space and place, and from such geographers as David Sibley and Tim Cresswell who study transgression and exclusion as they relate to socio-symbolic aspects of geography more particularly. In Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West (1995), David Sibley approaches marginality, exclusion and boundary-making from the point of view of a geographer. That is, as primarily concerned with the symbolic rules involved in meaning-making in physical spaces. Cresswell takes a similar approach in In Place / Out of

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14 Ibid. p. 2.
16 See Livesey, Graham and Liggett, Helen C. and Perry, David C.
Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression (1996), states that “space and place are used to structure a normative landscape – [and through this landscape] ideas about what is right, just, and appropriate are transmitted through space and place.”

In the construction of a “normative landscape,” almost invariably people or activities are excluded – “marginalized” – that are considered to be non-normative and “deviant.” Actors with the most socio-cultural and political power are able to construct and enforce what they have deemed “normal.” As Howard Becker noted long ago, “social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infractions constitute deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders” [italics in original]. This study looks at the ways that deviance is perceived and “managed” in one geographic area and how people’s perceptions form an indivisible part of their physical environment.

The preconceptions that people carry with them influence their perceptions of safety or insecurity, and their behavior in response to the perceptions. This is easily demonstrated in the case of Morumbi, where something as seemingly mundane and unremarkable as drinking a cup of coffee in a café becomes a dangerous and anxiety-ridden experience if you are the “wrong” kind of person (poor and dark skinned) in an affluent and mostly white neighborhood. Whether or not a person is actually in imminent danger is secondary to whether they perceive themselves to be in danger. What they believe to be true will dictate their behavior, in this case, simply avoiding cafés considered to be in “dangerous” territory.

NEIGHBORHOODS & VIOLENCE

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Several studies of neighborhood interactions are relevant to understanding how individuals negotiate security in their lived environments. Sociologist Elijah Anderson’s ethnographies, *Streetwise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community* (1990), about New York City and *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (1999), about Philadelphia’s Germantown Avenue, demonstrate many of the complex elements at work in two different neighborhoods. Anderson’s research provides insight into how actors from different social classes negotiate their shared and overlapping environments.

Frequently, Anderson notes, it is the most impoverished who are unable to “act out of script” (“code switch”), in contrast to those who grew up in, or in contact with, a higher socio-economic class. In Morumbi, as this research will demonstrate, “code-switching” is an important skill for negotiating higher class areas and for securing and maintaining employment positions that require dexterity at “blending in.”

Anthropologist Philippe Bourgois’ work with Puerto Rican immigrants in New York City provides a compelling Marxist critique of conditions in *El Barrio*. In his study, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (1996), Bourgois focuses on the macro-structural factors that are intimately involved in the daily lives of those in the illegal drug industry. Taking the analysis a step further, Bourgois explores how macro-structural and local activities figure into the construction of local public spaces.

Particularly concerned with the historical legacies of colonialism, racism, and exploitation, Bourgois situates the Puerto Rican diaspora in New York City within a long history of exploitation and domination. He identifies these extreme structural constraints as powerful enough to determine Puerto Rican immigrants’ fates, arguing that they have undermined the individual potential of this population. Thus, unlike Anderson who emphasizes human agency,
Bourgois focuses in part on constraints on such agency: The “system” creates a loss of human potential in urban ghettos everywhere.

In contrast to Bourgois, who studied mainly male Puerto Rican immigrant drug dealers, Donna Goldstein, a Brazilianist, studied working class women in a *favela* (ironically given the pseudonym “Felicidade Eterna” or “eternal happiness”) in Rio de Janeiro. In her ethnography, *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown* (2003), Goldstein explores the coping strategies and the weapons of resistance available to poor women. She discovered that they call upon whatever resources they have to survive the hardship and deprivation of daily life. Like Bourgois, Goldstein aims to give voice to a frequently excluded population; unlike Bourgois, Goldstein – like Anderson – explores the agency of her informants. Goldstein explores “…power relations and how they are experienced by the poor.” 20 In the tradition of Bourgois, Goldstein also examines the power structures and historical trajectories that the urban poor are embedded within, and the many ways that the poor both resist and are complicit with structures of domination. Goldstein recognizes that the people with whom she works are aware of the injustices they live with; they continue to both resist and collude in the reproduction and maintenance of their marginalized position.

In his dissertation, *To Live Here You Have to Know How to Live: Violence and Everyday Life in a Brazilian Favela* (2002) Richard Benjamin Penglase examines how people confront urban violence and socio-spatial exclusion in a *favela* (fictitiously called Caxambú) in Rio de Janeiro City. His findings contradict mine in a number of ways. In contrast to the *favela* informants that I worked with who, openly talked about dangers in their living spaces, Penglase’s informants saw Caxambu as a space of safety and freedom – even while proclaiming that outsiders discriminate against them because of where they live. Also in marked contrast to the

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20 Goldstein, 45
favela population that I worked with, who intentionally did not fraternize with other favela residents because of the potential vulnerability created through association, the residents of Caxambu refer to their neighborhood as a “big family” – while admitting that some “family members [are] capable of committing acts of violence against them.”

Penglase argues that “the residents of this neighborhood experience and speak about their neighborhood as distinctly double: .... a place of social intimacy and familiarity, yet also a neighborhood [that] singles them out for discrimination and exposes them to multiple forms of violence.”

My informants did not express a similarly positive side to living in São Paulo’s Real Parque favela.

At the same time, Penglase’s study also recorded similar dynamics to mine, especially in regards to the informal “codes” governing favela life. For example, in Caxambú, as in Morumbi, an outsider has to know someone to safely visit the favela – if you wander in alone you are the proverbial “stranger out of place” and therefore in danger. For residents of Caxambú, Penglase notes, police violence is more troubling than drug dealers’ violence. Police violence often violates the “social code” of the favela because it is “unpredictable,” disruptive to established social relations in the favela, and often perpetrated as a “war” in “enemy territory.”

The “code of the favela” refers to implicit rules that govern social relations and the use of violent force in Caxambú, and which are distinctly different to the “rules” which govern the “official” city.

In sum, Anderson, Bourgois, Goldstein, and Penglase all do research on specific neighborhoods in the United States and Brazil. Aside from Anderson, these scholars all focus exclusively on poor and marginalized populations, bringing in discussions of other classes and people only to elucidate the position of their subjects more clearly. While these works are

\[21\] Penglase (iii & 42).
\[22\] Ibid, 2.
\[23\] Ibid, 56.
\[24\] Ibid 217.
important to my research, I maintain that there needs to be more research on how people who live in a multiple class populated space negotiate the shared areas that they use, as does the work of Elijah Anderson, in Brazilian settings. My study is one that looks at this dynamic.

BRAZIL’S URBAN POOR

In Brazil, commonly held negative stereotypes about the urban poor provide ample justification for their treatment as less than human. These stereotypes – that the poor are parasites on the rest of Brazilian society, socially and morally “backwards”, and the product of a physically and morally unclean environment – allows the poor to be blamed for their own poverty and exclusion. Though the urban poor are frequently thought of and dealt with as “marginal” to Brazilian society, evidence clearly illustrates that the poor are not marginal to Brazilian society. In fact, favelados (residents of favelas) are highly integrated and essential to the functioning of Brazilian society in economic, social and political spheres. For example, scholars Janice Perlman, working in Rio de Janeiro, and Teresa Caldeira, working in São Paulo, have documented extensively the negative preconceptions that people in these two cities have about the urban poor. These researchers show how little has changed in the nearly thirty years between each study.

At the other end of the socio-economic spectrum is the worldwide phenomenon of “fortified enclaves”\(^{25}\) where the affluent live sequestered away to protect themselves against the ‘dangerous classes’ among them. In her work *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and

Citizenship in São Paulo, Teresa Caldeira investigates the shifting form and class content of São Paulo City, Brazil’s largest urban metropolis, linking the increasing levels of fortification locally with both global fortification trends and with Brazilian social patterns. She argues that the fear of violent crime is causing changes in the spatial patterns of cities all over the world, where the affluent are able to isolate themselves from sectors of the population they have deemed “undesirable,” by fortifying their living spaces with walls, electronic devices, and private security guards. While Caldeira claims that São Paulo’s transformations are neither unique, classically Latin American, or “postcolonial,” she also asserts that the fortification of São Paulo by its middle and upper classes reveals much about Brazilian society’s relationship to itself, to democracy, to human rights, to the state, and to urban violence.  

Furthermore, noting the complex relationship between “urban…and political forms,” Caldeira posits that spatial segregation may “indicate that the built environment [is] the arena in which democratization, social equalization, and expansion of citizenship rights are contested” and, I would add, won or lost.

Also central to the way the city is configured, according to Caldeira, are the symbolic “walls” that people erect through discursive means – what she calls “talk of crime.” In Caldeira’s words, “talk of crime feeds a circle in which fear is both dealt with and reproduced, and violence is both counteracted and magnified.” She explains that “[t]he fear and talk of crime [has the ability to] not only produce certain types of interpretations and explanations (usually simplistic and stereotypical) [but also to] organize the urban landscape and public space. [This talk] shap[es] the scenario for social interactions, which acquire new meanings in a city

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27 Ibid.
becoming progressively walled.” 29 Thus, symbolic social barriers erected through discursive means are complementary and supportive of the built environments’ physical walls in shaping patterns of interaction, and in structuring social relationships between different social classes, particularly directed against groups perceived to be dangerous or threatening.

This study builds on Caldeira’s work, taking as its focus one neighborhood to examine various groups in the population’s responses to living with real and / or perceived high levels of violence. While this study is complementary in certain ways to Caldeira’s, it also adds something new -- a more elaborate breakdown of the responses of various sectors of the population to perceived and / or real violent crime. In her work, Caldeira focuses on the middle and upper classes in São Paulo, neglecting the defensive discourses and behaviors of the lower classes. This omission is all the more glaring because she claims to draw from all classes. In this study I include the voices of men and women, and of people from many different classes and occupational backgrounds.

Even with the rich past research on the responses of the poor to their environments, it is still difficult to get an idea of what the urban poor do to protect themselves from violence, especially given that they are usually exposed to, and statistically victims of, higher levels of street violence than more privileged classes. What actions, attitudes, and behaviors do people employ when they cannot choose to live in “fortified enclaves,” an option open to their more affluent neighbors? This study explores this question, as an indivisible and relational element of the physical and symbolic walls constructed in Morumbi.

29 Ibid.
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study was based on a two-stage field research process. The first stage, in Fall, 2003, involved formulating and pilot-testing the research design. The second stage, in Summer 2004, constituted the formal data collection.

Illustration 3:

Map of Morumbi, Area of Focus for this Study


INFORMANT CHARACTERISTICS

Age & Gender: Among those in the informant sample, there were thirty-one men and twenty-five women. These informants ranged in age from seventeen to fifty-four, with only one informant, a woman, above fifty-five.
Income: Informants’ incomes ranged between zero and approximately US$5,000 dollars a month. Nineteen informants made three hundred or less reais (approximately US$100 or less) per month (according to currency exchange rates at the time of this study), eighteen informants made between three hundred and seven hundred reais (approximately US$100 to US$225) per month, fourteen informants made between seven hundred and three-thousand five-hundred reais a month (approximately US$225 to US$1,120 per month), two informants made over three-thousand five-hundred reais (approximately US$1,120 or more) a month, and the incomes of three informants are not known.

Occupation: The occupational distribution of informants falls into three categories: (a) service industry, (b) security forces, (c) white-collar professionals/other. The majority of informants are employed in service industry jobs, most of which are low paid. This category of twenty-three informants includes maids, delivery boys, hairdressers, taxi drivers and anyone involved in services. The second largest group, security forces, is people employed in the security industry and includes nine police officers and six private security (“vigias”) guards. The third category, white-collar professionals/other is working professionals, business owners, independent or self-employed consultants, one retired social worker (a woman) and a priest.

A Note on Race: I saw it as inappropriate and contrived to impose a color categorization scheme on my informants; I did not ask people to self-identify their color in my interviews. However, when an informant indicated his or her race, or the race of another, as an important factor in their or another’s security, I included it. My intent is not to have murky “marked” and “unmarked” categories, but to allow the complexity of race to emerge from my informants’ responses. Some of my informants were explicitly concerned with their own color, others were

\[30\] I interviewed people from as many positions in society as possible to best represent Morumbi’s diversity and complexity. See Appendix A for a more detailed discussion of informants.
not. Several young *favela* men explicitly referred to the social consequences of their “blackness.” Several others referred to skin color as “important,” even though they made no reference to their own color. One informant pointed out that my own light skin color would at times afford me certain privileges while at other times make certain places more dangerous for me. In any case, I learned that my color, as a light-skinned blond, rendered my own anonymity impossible — with consequences for better or worse depending on the environment.

**Employment or Place of Residence:** All of the informants included in this study were familiar with, and circulated in, the designated (“mapped”) area regularly. Some informants lived in the mapped area, either in the Real Parque *favela*, or in another part of the neighborhood. Other informants lived elsewhere but commuted daily to the area to work. Twenty-five of my informants reside in the neighborhood sample included in this study — sixteen in the *favela* and nine outside the *favela*. Many of these area residents also work somewhere in the mapped area, while some travel out of the sampled area in other parts of the city. Thirty-one of the informants reside outside the sampled area, commuting to the designated area for work.

**FINDING: LOCI OF DANGER**

In this section I discuss one main finding from my fieldwork: *where* informants located the locus of danger in Morumbi. Do informants see danger as residing in a specific location, in particular kinds of people, in a combination of these? To investigate this theme, I analyzed answers to the following questions on the interview schedule: “What is the most dangerous region on the map, in your opinion?” If the informant identified one or more places on the map, I then asked, “Why did you identify that region?” This information was supplemented by each informant’s “mental map” of the district’s areas of danger and security. Analyzing the responses
of fifty-six informants with respect to the two questions, I was able to classify these into five smaller responses. From most to least frequently cited, danger is:

- "In the favela,"
- "Everywhere,"
- "At the borders,"
- "in the favela but moves outside,"
- "In affluent areas."

Taking each of these designations as a locus of danger, I begin with those who saw danger as fixed within the favela.

**In the Favela.** The majority of informants (N = 38), or seventy-three percent, saw danger as residing in the favela. According to this group, the Real Parque favela itself is dangerous because of the activities that happen there or because of the people who live there. As one male private security guard, who patrols the Praça de Cunha Bueno, a small park in a very affluent section of Morumbi, stated: The favela is the most dangerous region “because in the favela there is a concentration of marginal people. It’s not because of poverty, it’s [because of] the criminal element.” 31 Another informant, also a male private security guard based in the condominium where I lived, also advanced this perception: “A faction of the PCC [Primeiro Comando Capital, a Brazilian gang] is running the favela. They are very active [so] it’s always dangerous [in the favela].” One favela-based male police officer stated, “there is a lot of drug trafficking in the favela. Many [people] have died already in shoot-outs with the police. It is dangerous [there] twenty-four hours a day.” A female police officer saw the favela as the most

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31 Marginal in Portuguese indicates both delinquency and criminality in addition to peripheral or excluded (as its English cognate “marginal” indicates).
dangerous place in the Morumbi neighborhood “because of [the high number of] homicides and robberies [there and] because [the favela] is in a rich neighborhood.”

Other informants not involved in public or private security also expressed similar perceptions about the favela’s dangers. One woman, a middle-aged store clerk, proclaimed that it was “very dangerous” in the favela and that as an Evangelical Christian she would only set foot inside the favela if “God” told her she must. A taxi driver, a male resident of the Morumbi neighborhood stated that, “In the favela it’s dangerous for everyone that lives there. Even the rich areas are more dangerous for rich people because they live next to the favela.” This informant stated that the Morumbi neighborhood is more dangerous today because:

There is a huge commando of the PCC [in the favela]. The gang members are very dangerous. They operate like a mafia – an alternate, parallel government. I would only go [into the favela] very rarely [and] during the daytime.

As these informants’ assertions suggest, whether due to the kind of people who reside in the favela, or because of the activities that take place there, most informants saw danger as somehow fixed in the favela. Among those who saw the locus of greatest danger in the favela, twenty informants had a global conception of the favela’s danger – seeing the entire slum as insecure and dangerous. However, eighteen other respondents were precise in their designations, identifying certain spaces within the Real Parque favela as more dangerous than others.

Those who were most specific about the locus of danger in the favela pointed to the favela’s lower street, Paulo Bourroul, as being the most dangerous area of the favela and of the Morumbi district itself. This assessment was as true for favela residents as non-residents. While one might assume that Paulo Bourroul Street had earned a reputation for being dangerous because of its relative underdevelopment within the poor slum area, in fact, of Real Parque favela’s two main roads, Cidade de Itaguáí and Paulo Bourroul, Paulo Bourroul is the most
physically and commercially developed. Paulo Bourroul Street is paved, lighted, has sidewalks, a large community center, and several businesses. One side of this street is lined with low-income, municipally-built, five-story apartment buildings called “Cingapurâs,” in reference to the housing project’s roots in a similar system constructed in Singapore’s slums.

Paulo Bourroul Street contains the largest area within the favela of municipally regularized housing and businesses – these having postal addresses and utility services. Poor people without such services who reside near Paulo Bourroul Street make arrangements with the ‘regularized’ structures on Paulo Bourroul to have their mail delivered there and to siphon off power (illegally) from their power lines. In contrast to Paulo Bourroul Street, the favela’s other main road, Rua Cidade de Itaguai, has fewer shops, no addresses, is very poorly lighted, and has makeshift houses of cardboard and wood. These shantytown shacks snake along dirt and lumpy concrete walking paths. Interestingly, however, Cidade de Itaguai Street was very unlikely to be identified as the favela’s “most dangerous” location. Clearly, municipal underdevelopment and ‘blight’ were not in and of themselves a danger ‘aesthetic’ for informants in this study.

In contrast, the residential “Cingapura” projects and the commerce that dots the ‘most developed’ side of Paulo Bourroul Street – particularly the street’s bars and small dance hall – seem to contribute to people’s anxieties about the street’s danger. Several favela residents remarked that they avoided Paulo Bourroul at night because of the “drunk and disorderly” who hang out there; they avoided Paulo Bourroul even during the day because of the “kind of people” who congregate there. As one twenty-three year old woman, who was born in and still resides in Real Parque favela, remarked, Paulo Bourroul Street is the most dangerous place in Real Parque “because there are more people [there] and [therefore] more confusion.” Where there’s smoke,

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32 For Brazilians confusão, “confusion,” often points to an embodied form of street chaos or danger, signifying a more dangerous condition than the English “confusion” does.
there's fire!" Another longtime female resident of Real Parque favela pointed to a specific area of Paulo Bourroul Street as the most dangerous, "because marginal elements, gang members, and dangerous people [hang out there]."

Rua Paulo Bourroul is a wide paved street, with sidewalks, businesses, and a line of colorful, uniformly built "Cingapura" public housing buildings. This stands in stark contrast to the rest of the favela where single- or double-story self-built houses are constructed virtually on top of one another, each with different materials tacked on in a seemingly random fashion -- actually in fact, materials are added as they are found or purchased by a resident. There is precious little space in the favela itself for residents to gather socially, making it somewhat ironic that, instead of being esteemed for its spaciousness and the social opportunities offered there, many of the informants for this study found Paulo Bourroul Street more threatening than the crowded favela.

One police officer, when asked what favela areas he would avoid when he was policing alone, cited Paulo Bourroul Street, pointing to its combination of deviant people and a particular kind of built environment: "Inside the favela, [I avoid its] lower street Paulo Bourroul...[where] I might have a confrontation with the drug traffickers." If the traffickers run from me to the Cingapurans, "they could get me, [because the Cingapuras] are tall [and] made of concrete. It's easy for [drug traffickers or criminals] to shoot me [through the windows]." In this police officer's mind, the favela's new low-income housing -- intended to eliminate squatter shacks and regularize housing under São Paulo's municipal government -- made him feel less safe. The tall, concrete fortresses where criminals "are less visible" and where the criminals' enemy -- the police -- are rendered more visible and thus vulnerable to being shot at from a tall building, creates a kind of a Benthamian Panopticon in which criminals have an advantage over the police.
**Danger is Everywhere.** The second largest cluster of informants (N = 5), or nine percent, designated danger as “everywhere’ in the Morumbi district. According to these informants, the neighborhood has no area that is more dangerous than any other one. In these respondents’ minds, danger resides throughout the neighborhood. Some informants in this group felt that the Morumbi neighborhood was equally dangerous everywhere and for everyone. As one affluent male resident, who works and lives in the neighborhood, stated unequivocally, The Morumbi neighborhood is “dangerous for everyone, and in all places.”

A subset of the group that saw danger as everywhere in Morumbi, felt that certain people – for example, young people or strangers – were more prone to “attracting” danger than others. As one female *favela* resident explained, while danger is everywhere, it is “more dangerous for young people in all areas.” Another informant, a young male *favela* resident and community leader, stated that:

It used to be [most] dangerous in the *favela*, but not anymore. The only difference [between the rich and the poor areas] is that [the rich areas] have private security. The [greatest] danger now is drugs, and they are everywhere. There was a time when there weren’t drugs. [Now] the PCC controls the east and the north [and] there is a [PCC] Chefe (boss) in the *favela*. There are people that kill and exploit the dealers. [There is] a war to be in control of the *favela* and the drug trade.

**Danger At the Borders.** Four informants identified the border between the Real Parque *favela* and the rest of the neighborhood as Morumbi district’s “most dangerous” sections. Among the four respondents who saw danger as lurking within the neighborhood’s geographic ‘borders,’ three were female and one was male. While none of these respondents lived in the Morumbi neighborhood, they all worked there every day or were there with great frequency; when there, they had consistent or daily contact with Real Parque’s *favela* population. All the informants in this category have middle class incomes in the range of R$2,300-5,000 reais a month.
The only male in this category, a police officer who works in the neighborhood, stated that danger is greatest in "the favela and [on] all the streets that access it." He was the only informant to include all the streets that access the favela as dangerous "border regions." Perhaps this is due to his occupational familiarity with these back roads – sometimes the police will enter the favela using this route. A different male police officer, although specifically identifying the favela as the most dangerous location, told me of his intense fear one night when he was left alone in this 'border region' to fend for himself. On this particular night, this officer explained, "at three in the morning [...] [several police officers] entered the favela via César Vallejo street. I was left in the patrol vehicle [parked outside the favela] alone [while the others went in] and I was the most terrified that I have ever been in my life!" Being alone on the edge of the favela in the middle of the night was one of the worst things this twenty-two year old armed policeman had ever experienced.

In contrast to this police officer’s conception that all the streets that border the favela are dangerous, the other three informants, all women, identified only one of the streets that borders the favela, Rua Duquesa de Goias, as the "most dangerous." As one of the three female informants who designated 'border zones' as most dangerous stated, "[this street is] the border between the rich and the poor [and that’s why it’s dangerous]." In her conception, the geographical position of Duquesa de Goias Street as a ‘borderland’ was what made it dangerous. As this informant put it, the rich and poor neighborhoods “meet...[at Rua Duquesa de Goias]...a dark street,” [on which] cars...pass [near the favela] and this makes “drivers...afraid.” Another woman explained that Duquesa de Goias Street, which separates Morumbi’s rich and poor neighborhoods, causes insecurity because it is “between the two [neighborhood extremes].” In the assessment of the third female in this category, the most dangerous places in Morumbi are
“in the favela and on the border [of it].” According to this informant, the interstitial zone represented by Duquesa de Goias Street is most dangerous, because “people are afraid to be [near the favela and as a consequence] they drive by really fast [on this street].”

For these informants, the Morumbi border region between the rich and the poor, is a clear source of “danger.” Uniformly among the four informants who identified this space as the neighborhood’s “most dangerous,” their designation was tied to ideas about the area’s poverty, criminality, and other lurking dangers. Although the number of informants in this category is small, I believe that borders may be perceived by many other people as “dangerous.” For example, the four “borderlands” informants noted the fear that they sensed in the drivers who sped up as they passed by the favela, or remarked that their friends and families would talk about the danger of passing so close to the favela as they were driving along a “borderland” route. One wealthy male informant, although he did not identify the borders as the “most dangerous” place, did state that he would not take Duquesa de Goias past the favela under any circumstances. He would rather take a less convenient route through side streets that do not border the favela, than, “risk his life and safety” using this particular segment of Duquesa de Goias Street. This ‘border zone’ is a constant reminder of just how close the rich and the poor are, and it reveals people’s behaviors in response to their fears and perceptions. As one scholar, David Sibley, who studies geographies of exclusion, including what I call “border regions,” states:

For the individual or group socialized into believing that the separation of categories is necessary or desirable, the liminal zone is a source of anxiety. It is a zone of abjection, one which should be eliminated in order to reduce anxiety, but this is not always possible.33

People often see liminality as a source of danger or unpredictability; the border between the Real Parque favela and other parts of Morumbi is no exception. In Morumbi, there is a clear

33 Sibley, David Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West (Routledge: London) © 1995 p. 33
division between the affluent and the poor, even while they live side-by-side. In some cases, liminality -- as a state of being, or status -- clashes with geographic work location. For example, many poor maids, private guards, and delivery-motorcycles (motoboys) spend all their working hours in affluent houses or regions of the neighborhood where their poverty is managed to allow their presence where they should not be. This liminality reinforces their 'place' as insider and outsider. As Social Anthropologist Mary Douglas maintains, "[d]anger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable." Morumbi’s Duquesa de Goias Street, a dangerous in-between-zone, represents a border for some that cannot be classified as clearly “wealthy territory” or as the turf of the impoverished. Other authors, such as Yoshida, also identify the association between danger and liminality by pointing to a transitional time of day – dusk – as inherently dangerous because it is neither night nor day.

No one identified the territorial edges of the Real Parque favela that cannot be accessed by motor vehicle as “dangerous borderlands.” While there are countless foot paths in and out of the favela, toward that boundary between the favela and the “outside,” where relative isolation could make a user vulnerable to assault, only one informant even placed that area on the mental map as a conceptual border. Perhaps Duquesa de Goias is a paved modern street that divides São Paulo City and the Morumbi district and modern city and slum, or the rich and poor within Morumbi itself. Or maybe Duquesa de Goias is more likely to be seen as a ‘borderland,’ designated as “dangerous” because of its being a point (actually a traffic strip) where sets of perceived morally distinct categories are imperfectly separated from one another.

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34 Douglas, Mary Purity and Danger © 1966 p. 97
Danger is in the favela but moves outside. Another three informants identified areas outside the favela, usually affluent ones, as “most dangerous,” because “criminals leave favelas to perpetrate crimes there.” Thus, instead of being geographically fixed in the favela, danger is embodied in “border-crossing” agents who are bred in the favela itself. The three informants who adopted this perspective did not indicate the favela itself as physically dangerous, but rather as a “breeding ground” for criminals who prey upon others. As one upper-class Morumbi resident stated, the “most dangerous place is wherever there is money. [Because the criminals] don’t rob inside [the favela], they go out[side of it] to rob!” This is also echoed in the interview of a thirty-year old female police officer who stated that it is most dangerous to be in “the rich areas because criminals leave the favela to perpetrate crimes.” As a male police officer who works in Morumbi, stated: “The moleques (rowdy dark-skinned kids) of the favela go outside to perpetrate crimes. The favela is the pedaço negro (literally ‘black / dark piece’) of the neighborhood.” This policeman’s conception the Real Parque favela is that of a dark breeding ground for rowdy and delinquent youth. These criminals then go to better areas to rob and in the process pollute and contaminate other people and their neighborhoods. According to these informants, criminality has a transitory, unpredictable character.

Danger is in the affluent areas. Closely tied to the above category, two informants indicated that the “greatest danger” in Morumbi lay in the neighborhood’s more affluent areas. While the neighborhood’s Real Parque favela is part of this perception, it is placed second to the neighborhood’s richer areas. As one male informant, an apartment building’s security manager explained, “The rich areas [are subject to kidnappings]. there aren’t kidnappings in the favela!” This informant also explained that the neighborhood’s richer areas have more police security, without seeing the possible contradiction between this assertion of greater security and his
simultaneous claim that residents in richer areas also suffer greater vulnerability to kidnapping and being held hostage for a ransom. This informant went on to explain that he would increase neighborhood police patrols on the lower street of the favela, near Paulo Bourroul Street. This informant’s image of danger and security is complex. While he states that “most danger” lies where the rich live, he implies that there are also problems in the favela when he indicates the greater need for police presence on Paulo Bourroul Street, where the poor live and do business. Perhaps some of his wealthy clients have businesses there, an issue I did not explore.

The second informant in the group, a seventeen year-old dark-skinned male favela resident, sees danger as existing when someone from one race and class is in the geographical space of a higher status race and class. In such a situation, the person of lower status who enters the geographical space of a higher status group, is – as Schepper-Hughes has pointed out for Rio de Janeiro – “matter out of place.” As this informant from the Real Parque favela stated:

> It’s very spooky there [on several streets in Morumbi’s affluent areas]. There are lots of private security guards and [if they saw me there] they would call the police. There is a lot of prejudice. [When they see me they think to themselves] ‘he comes from the favela.’ I went [to these areas] once and they were looking at me strangely. They discriminate against [boys like me from the favela with dark skin]. There is a lot of social prejudice [if you don’t have] Nike’s (the ‘fashionably correct’ name brand gear at the time) and imported clothes. Everyone is white. They look more at my skin than my clothes. [Rich people] have plastic surgery to look white, to be accepted....[In the affluent areas and outside the favela], it’s dangerous for [people from the favela]. I can’t drink coffee or [go for a] walk because the private security [...] will go after us.

At another point, this same informant stated that he would never go to the Morumbi areas Praça de Cunha Bueno (a small park in a wealthy area of Morumbi) because, “Lots of people do drugs there [at night and] even if I wasn’t doing anything the police would think that I was guilty because I am from the favela.” This young man feels he cannot venture outside of the favela because it will just cause him trouble and literally put him in harms way. In his experience, the

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36 This informant specifically referenced his own skin color many times. Please see note on race, page 20.
37 Scheper-Hughes, Nancy & Daniel Hoffman “Kids Out of Place” NACLA, 27 (6) May/June © 1994
combination of his skin color and his poverty automatically brand him as a suspect in the neighborhood's more affluent areas.

Social scientists Mary Douglas, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, and Martha Huggins look at the treatment of marginalized people who are in transitional states, or outside certain social norms, such as street kids, to gain insight into the symbolic rules governing societal inclusion and/or exclusion, and into the mechanisms of boundary maintenance. As Douglas explains it, "[p]erson's in a marginal state...are people who are somehow left out in the patterning of society, who are placeless. They may be doing nothing morally wrong, but their status is indefinable." A person from the favela or a lower class person who is working in a more affluent area is tolerated, as long as they are there for an accepted purpose. If the person enters the same areas for pleasure, for a leisurely cup of coffee, or to look for a friend, this person would immediately be seen as an ambiguous "other" with no clear and 'legal' purpose for being there. In other words, he would be seen as "matter out of place," and therefore subject to constant surveillance or immediate removal, as my prior informant clearly recognized.

Now that I have identified the various loci of "danger" designated by the informants, I will now go examine these data disaggregated by gender, income, occupation, and place of residence. Given the small sample size, future research with a larger number of informants is needed to confirm or deny the following patterns which emerge suggestively from the present data.

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40 ibid
Table 1

N=52
Morumbi Areas Identified as Dangerous:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Danger</th>
<th>Total: N=52</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed in <em>favela</em></td>
<td>73% (N=38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everywhere</td>
<td>9% (N=5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>8% (N=4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the <em>Favela</em> and Moves</td>
<td>6% (N=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affluent Areas</td>
<td>4% (N=2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interview schedule from “Aesthetics of Security: Mapping (In)Security in Morumbi,” from author’s research July 2004
*Two informants had “no response” or incomplete data
**Two informants fall into an “other” response category because they indicated areas off my mapped area as “most dangerous”.

Gender and Danger.

In the informant sample of twenty-two women and thirty men, fifteen women (68%), and twenty-three male informants (77%), designated the *favela* as the “most dangerous” place in Morumbi. In other words, the majority of both men and women identified the Real Parque *favela* as the locus of danger, although men were proportionally slightly more likely than women to make such an indication. Both men and women were close to equal in designating that danger is “everywhere,” with ten and nine percent, respectively, of each gender making this designation. Women were more likely to designate ‘borderlands’ (with fourteen percent) or to identify the ‘*favela as a breeding ground*’ (nine percent) for danger than the men (with just three percent for both categories). Two men and no women identified ‘affluent areas’ as “most dangerous.”
Table 2

N=52
Morumbi Areas Identified as Dangerous by Gender:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Danger</th>
<th>Male N=30</th>
<th>Female N=22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed in favela</td>
<td>77% (N=23)</td>
<td>68% (N=15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everywhere</td>
<td>10% (N=3)</td>
<td>9% (N=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>3% (N=1)</td>
<td>14% (N=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Favela and Moves</td>
<td>3% (N=1)</td>
<td>9% (N=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affluent Areas</td>
<td>7% (N=2)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two informants had “no response” or incomplete data
**Two informants fall into an “other” response category because they indicated areas off my mapped area as “most dangerous”.

Occupation and Danger.

Twenty-three informants in the service industry either saw the favela (83%), or everywhere (13%), or affluent areas (4%) as “most dangerous.” Many of those in service positions -- working as maids, delivery boys, and taxi drivers -- live in the favela or are very familiar with the neighborhood because they circulate there often for work. One hypothesis is that their proximity to the favela leads to images of its danger. Another might be that their liminal status, in which they work for the rich but live with the poor, positions them to observe different levels and types of danger that the poor are subject to in the favela as compared to people in other areas of the district.

In contrast to the service industry group, three out of the four security force informants identified the favela as “most dangerous.” The second largest group of security force informants (12%), indicated that the favela bred danger that then and moved outside it. One police officer designated ‘borderlands,’ as associated with crime and danger.
The police, as the people who respond to crime and emergency calls, perhaps have a heightened awareness of danger as rooted in certain areas of the neighborhood. Many police officers that I interviewed expressed concerns that they were virtually the only arm of the state for the favela population. With limited resources, the police must respond to anything from someone needing help getting to the hospital, to domestic disputes, to civil disturbances or crimes. As one male police officer exclaimed, in frustration: “When there’s a problem, people [in the favela] think of God and call the police. When there [is no problem], they forget God and curse the police!” The police are expected to fill diverse roles – they provide services to a needy population, on the one hand, and serve as the repressive arm of the state, on the other. The police are frequently implicated in corrupt and illegal dealings with this same population. Given a long history of violent repression of the poor by the police, distrust goes both ways; many police are afraid to even entering a favela.

The informants in the category, ‘white-collar professional/other’, also saw “danger” in four areas. Unlike the first two groups, however, this group’s responses cluster more and are more evenly distributed among the various categories. For example, although also the largest response category for this group, only fifty percent identified the favela as the “most dangerous” – well below the average for the entire informant total. The second largest cluster for professionals, ‘borderlands,’ in a proportion (25%) much higher than the other groups. The third largest categorical response, ‘danger is everywhere,’ was indicated by seventeen percent of the total. The last category, ‘danger is bred in the favela and moves outside it,’ was only given by one informant. The informants in the professional sub-sample have varying levels of familiarity with the neighborhood. Some in this category have regular contact with, or work in, the favela,
while others live in wealthy Morumbi apartments and have little to do with life in the community outside it.

Table 3

N=52
Morumbi Areas Identified as Dangerous by Occupation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Danger</th>
<th>Service Industry (N=23)</th>
<th>Security Forces (N=17)</th>
<th>White-Collar Professional/Other (N=12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed in favela</td>
<td>83% (N=19)</td>
<td>76% (N=13)</td>
<td>50% (N=6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everywhere</td>
<td>13% (N=3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>17% (N=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td></td>
<td>6% (N=1)</td>
<td>25% (N=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bred in Favela and Moves</td>
<td>12% (N=2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8% (N=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affluent Areas</td>
<td>4% (N=1)</td>
<td>6% (N=1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Interview schedule from “Aesthetics of Security: Mapping (In)Security in Morumbi,” from author’s research July 2004
*Two informants had “no response” or incomplete data on this question.
** Two informants fall into an “other” response category because they indicated areas off my mapped area as “most dangerous”.

Socio-Economic Status and Danger.

All income groups were most likely to identify the locus of danger as fixed in the favela. Only people from the highest income bracket (N = 4) identified “borders,” as the place where danger was most likely to be lurking. As for seeing “danger” in affluent areas, no higher income informants indicated this. Only those in the middle income group (N = 2) indicated that danger was “bred in the favela and moves.” In other words, if informants did not indicate that danger was fixed in the favela, they often indicated that it was fixed somewhere they did not reside (on the borders of the favela if affluent, in affluent areas if associated with or living in the favela), or that it was ubiquitous or unpredictable (everywhere, circulating outside the favela). While these are not conclusive results, perhaps they do indicate a tendency for people to cope with the
knowledge that danger exists by discursively distancing themselves from the ‘source.’ This is supported by the informants who indicated the borders as the locus of danger – four people who work in the favela but do not live there. Having developed a familiarity with the favela through work, perhaps it would have produced a kind of cognitive dissonance to indicate the favela as most dangerous. On a certain level they had to believe it was safe enough to go there to work each day, while still being mindful of the fact that they were not immune to neighborhood violence.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Danger</th>
<th>$0-300 U.S. monthly (N=18)</th>
<th>$301-700 U.S. monthly (N=16)</th>
<th>$701-5,000 U.S. monthly (N=16)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed in favela</td>
<td>77% (N=14)</td>
<td>75% (N=12)</td>
<td>69% (N=11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everywhere</td>
<td>17% (N=3)</td>
<td>6% (N=1)</td>
<td>6% (N=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25% (N=4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bred in Favela and Moves</td>
<td></td>
<td>13% (N=2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affluent Areas</td>
<td>6% (N=1)</td>
<td>6% (N=1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interview schedule from “Aesthetics of Security: Mapping (In)Security in Morumbi,” from author’s research July 2004

*Four informants had “no response” or incomplete data for income

** Two informants fall into an “other” response category because they indicated areas off my mapped area as “most dangerous.”

Place of Residence and Danger.

Not surprisingly, the largest proportion of respondents of all income levels designated the favela as the ‘most dangerous’ location in the Morumbi district. However, those who only worked in the Morumbi district were least likely (70%) to designate danger as “in the favela,” while those who lived in the region but outside a favela were most likely (83%) to so designate.
In fact, those who live in the region but outside a favela only identified the favela or the borderland (N = 1), and no where else as “most dangerous.” Those who live in the Real Parque favela were most likely to indicate that danger was “everywhere” (N = 3) and least likely to indicate that it was at the “borders” (N = 0). Only those who work in the region but do not live there indicated that danger was “bred in the favela but moves outside it” (N = 3). And only those who live in the Real Parque favela or work in the region indicated that danger was in the affluent areas (N = 1 for each group).

Table 5

N=52
Morumbi Areas Identified as Dangerous by Place of Residence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Danger</th>
<th>Live in Neighborhood:</th>
<th>Live in Neighborhood:</th>
<th>Work in region only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In favela N=16</td>
<td>Outside a favela N=6</td>
<td>N=30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed in favela</td>
<td>75% (N=12)</td>
<td>83% (N=5)</td>
<td>70% (N=21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everywhere</td>
<td>19% (N=3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7% (N=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td></td>
<td>17% (N=1)</td>
<td>10% (N=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bred in Favela and Moves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10% (N=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affluent Areas</td>
<td>6% (N=1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3% (N=1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interview schedule from “Aesthetics of Security: Mapping (In)Security in Morumbi,” from author’s research July 2004

*Two informants had “no response” or incomplete data on this question (#’s 30 & 56).

** Two informants fall into an “other” response category because they indicated areas off my mapped area as “most dangerous”.

In conclusion, using a portion of my field data I have discussed where informants located danger in the Morumbi district. The majority located the locus of danger in the favela. Of those who identified the favela as “most dangerous,” some had generalized conceptions, while others conceived of the favela’s dangers with more specificity, designating precise locations within the
favela as “most dangerous.” Other informants stated that they thought danger was everywhere equally, on the border between the favela and more affluent areas, in affluent areas, or located in certain types of people. While some people identified the location of highest danger as being near to where they live and/or work, others situated danger in locations that they were less familiar with. Beyond the scope of the present paper, further analysis will include who people identify as being the most vulnerable to danger in the areas identified, and what strategies people report that they use to avoid being the victims of violence and crime in their neighborhood.

DISCUSSION

Above all, Morumbi can be characterized by the physical proximity and socio-economic extremes of its residents. The socio-economic characteristics of the Morumbi neighborhood, where the wealthy enjoy economic and physical security, while others have almost no income and live with all kinds of insecurity, proved to be a fertile location for studying what I call “aesthetics of insecurity.” By “aesthetics of insecurity,” I refer to my informants’ subjective perceptions of security and insecurity, and to their behaviors in response to these perceptions. These perceptions are usually tied to specific locations, or “geographies,” and to particular types of people whom they have designated as likely victims or assailants.

My definition of “aesthetics of security” is more complex and inclusive than, for instance, what Kelling and Coles labeled the ‘broken window’\(^\text{41}\) phenomenon or what Caldeira calls “aesthetics of security.”\(^\text{42}\) These authors, albeit in different ways and in different contexts, are identifying purely physical aspects of the built environment as the starting point for a larger


discussion about security, crime, and the symbolic aspects of property. The informants in my study were reporting their perceptions of safety and danger in the area, and did not usually reference specific qualities of the built environment as having this kind of significance.

In their theory, Kelling and Coles assert that ‘disorder’ in public places – by which they mean broken windows, graffiti, or areas with streets, sidewalks, or buildings in disrepair – encourages criminal activity in those places. They contend that eliminating manifestations of ‘disorder’ in public places will cause crime levels to drop in those areas. In their conception, people’s sense of insecurity and their behavior are based on physical characteristics of the built environment.

In contrast to Kelling and Coles’ work, the responses of my informants indicate that people do not simply designate a place as ‘insecure’ or ‘dangerous’ because of broken windows or because there is blighted housing. In fact, many of my informants have ideas and perceptions about what happens in certain areas of the neighborhood near to those where they live and/or work even if they have never actually been to these areas. The feeling that a person gets that there is danger may be based on something less physically visible and/or less easy to put into words, perhaps stemming from other sources – such as word of mouth, stereotypes commonly held about certain people or places, or the media’s coverage of violent crime in the city. In other words, people’s perceptions may be based on any number of sources, and may not include a direct knowledge of place.

In certain cases, then, actual physical characteristics of an environment may be irrelevant, even as specific areas are identified as dangerous. In any case, people’s perceptions powerfully

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43 Kelling & Coles
44 The broken windows theory has been convincingly refuted elsewhere, and the results of my study corroborate the evidence undermining its validity. For example, see Sampson, Robert J. and Stephen W. Raudenbush “Seeing Disorder: Neighborhood Stigma and the Social Construction of ‘Broken Windows’” Social Psychology Quarterly 2004, Vol. 67, No. 4, 319-342
influence their behavior, regardless of the existence, or not, of physical disorder. For the purposes of this study, ‘aesthetics of insecurity’ is used to mean more than people’s perceptions of and reactions to the physical environment. It includes people’s subjective perceptions of security and insecurity, and their behavior in response to their perceptions, whether or not their perceptions or behavior are informed by direct contact with the environment.

Several areas for further research are suggested by this study. First, more research needs to be undertaken that addresses traditionally excluded populations – such as the poor, the regionally and/or racially stigmatized, women, and children – in identifying how they perceive and negotiate violent urban contexts. Second, there is great value in undertaking research that incorporates perspectives of people from different socio-economic backgrounds – from the most affluent to the poorest residents – so that no population is excluded, or worse, used as a proxy to speak for populations with very different sets of circumstances and social realities. Third, there is a growing core of research within Sociology and Social Anthropology devoted to boundary creation and maintenance (both symbolic and physical); this nexus of scholarship devotes empirical weight to investigating identity, zones of liminality and marginality, and agents considered to be “boundary-crossers”. This literature should be critically brought to bear on how bridge individuals – such as police, taxi drivers, and people who live in the favela but work outside it – must employ complex strategies of “code-switching” to successfully enact a non-ambiguous identity in each place, and therefore avoid any danger associated with being perceived as “out of place.” Finally, more research should address the disconnect between how individuals perceive their neighborhoods’ dangers, and how neighborhood groups do not act in tandem to address universally identified problems.
This research indicates that while both the affluent and the poor have similar perceptions of safety and danger, they ultimately resort to different forms of fortification and boundary-making as central to their strategies for avoiding personal harm—mainly due to the different resources they are able to marshal in their own defense. Wealthy residents see fortified living spaces and highly managed physical movement and self-presentation as the most effective response to an unpredictable urban environment, fear of the poor and of criminals, a corrupt police force, and a discriminatory judicial system. The poor also resort to urban fortification, albeit in different and much less secure forms than the rich, with urban ghettos that have their own mechanisms of exclusion and surveillance.

An examination of perceptions of security in Morumbi shows that the needs of the most vulnerable populations—those that actually experience the most dangerous conditions (the poor)—are usually given a back seat to demands made by more powerful social actors. While the existence of class domination in a highly stratified society is akin to tautology, understanding fresh perspectives on the mechanisms through which these power dynamics operate may help us to theorize fresh solutions to minimizing inequalities. When we critically pair geography (space and place) with individual-level perceptions (social meaning), it becomes clear just how much they influence one another. Sampling perceptions from a range of physical and structural positions in society allows us to critically interrogate individual and collective symbolic meaning making. Any study of people’s perceptions, especially as nested in a particular community or neighborhood, must include an interrogation of the physically and socially constructed geography they inhabit as indivisible from their perceptions of place. Inclusion, exclusion, barriers, boundary maintenance, perceptions, and behavioral habits all conspire in the creation and maintenance of the Morumbi neighborhood.
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