

Foreword

On January 24, 2014, my wife and I welcomed our second child. This baby—a boy—arrived in a private hospital room in Canada, surrounded by a midwife, a midwifery student, an obstetrician, a pediatrician, a medical student, at least three nurses, and his dad. He arrived in a secure and safe world, with exceptional care paid for by a tax regime favorable to those with low income, beginning a life defined in large part by his citizenship, his skin color, his gender, and the capacity of his parents and extended family to “make” money. He is, in many ways, the picture of privilege.

Not that it had to be quite that way. For seven of the nine months he spent in his mom’s tummy, this baby existed in a Brazilian slum—a *favela*—on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. There he was surrounded by a much different world—one defined by poverty, by historically deadly police, organized crime, a drug trade run amok, and a public health system that could scarcely be worse—unless one found oneself abandoned by the handful of tireless and resourceful workers that nonetheless exist in places within it. It was a community with a per capita household income of around \$200 USD a month, standing in contrast to Rio’s lagoon and beachside neighborhood of Lagoa with its per capita household income of \$2,700.

While his mom carried out her own doctoral research, his dad wrote most of this book, and his sister played with the neighborhood kids, he grew slowly and, thankfully, soundly. Not that we were sure. At least

one of our friends from the neighborhood lost her daughter under questionable circumstances five days after a premature childbirth at thirty-four weeks. After the baby died, the mother was kept in the same shared room in the maternity ward surrounded by the consistent arrival of new lives and laughter, until someone determined she could leave the ward and go home days later.

Six weeks after the birth of our boy, I participated in a workshop in São Paulo on comparative security sector reform. For a couple of days, my colleagues and I talked about most of the things that this book is about—violent police, prison gangs, shifting homicide patterns, and what can be done to improve the conditions of people who suffer under the brutal disparity of urban violence.

At the end of the workshop, a small group of us visited a local women's penitentiary on the outskirts of the city. This penitentiary was semi-open, serving to house women with short sentences, as well as those transitioning from months or years in maximum-security units. Women could go out to work during the day, if adorned with an electronic anklet, as long as they returned at night. In this prison with a little more than a thousand inmates, 95 percent were serving time for drug-related sentences. In the words of the staff, though, these were not the drug traffickers that you may conjure in your mind's eye. Though almost universally from the poorest parts of São Paulo, most found themselves in jail on behalf of someone else—a husband, a boyfriend, a son, a brother, a father—whose engagement in the drug trade had left them holding the bag as mules, scapegoats, or the only person in the house when police raided and found drugs or guns. They are, by and large, the proxy victims of a drug war formulated, carried out, legitimated, and most deadly for men. But though most of these women—thousands of them in São Paulo alone—are defined by the sacrifices they are making for men, most have been abandoned by them. While women line up and wait for hours or days to see their men in prison in order to bring them food, clothes, medicine, drugs, or other contraband stuff like cell phones, visitation lines at women's prisons are virtually nonexistent.

But if these women are guilty by association, their suffering stretches far further. As I write about in the pages that follow, these are the same women that would arrive at the homicide division in the aftermath of a police shooting. They are the ones who welcomed me with food and offers of a room to sleep in during my research in the *zona leste*—the West Side. They are the ones whose red eyes plead with detectives to finish the incident report, already, so they could take the bullet-riddled

bodies of their husbands, boyfriends, sons, fathers, or brothers to the cemetery for burial. They are the ones who cheered my daughter on to make her first steps in their living room—which she did. They are the ones who sit for hours in the waiting room at the police station, not exceptionally opposite the police who killed their loved ones, a seemingly unwavering testament to unconditional love. That this book does not come closer to the lives of these women is its biggest failure.

Toward the end of our visit we stopped by the mother and baby unit. There a handful of rooms about ten by twelve feet and split into two, that house women with newborns. On the walls were tones of purple and yellow, bordered with patterns of teddy bears and painted ribbon. The cribs were padded and adorned with colorful and frilly sheets. Under the Brazilian penal code, incarcerated women may keep newborns with them until they are six months old—a policy that while nonetheless tragic puts many Northern countries to absolute and total shame. At six months, the mothers must give their children to relatives on the outside. If none are available, they are put up for adoption—mother willing or not. At the end of the hall, past the group of visitors were a group of mothers with their infants. Some were tiny little boys just weeks old.

This visit was the most emotionally destabilizing moment of my time studying police, violence, and organized crime in and around this city. Perhaps it was my personal sensitivities at the moment, but the tragic condition of these lives seemed much more disturbing than the legitimations of death on the part of both the police and the criminal organization known as the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* that I had seen for years. In my implicit acceptance of those legitimations—by that I mean, my comparative sensitivity to the innocence of little lives and the lives of women over the lives of young men—I stared back at my own category of valuable life.

This book is not about the hopefulness and innocence of life. I wish it were. But it *is* very much about these babies, especially the fragile little boys. With their current trajectories, these young “men” will be “killable” when my own son is in grade nine, if not earlier. But really, these future men are undeniably already the product of a horrifying configuration of (de)valued life and death. They are already at the heart of a criminalized population, beginning their lives without security, with the “wrong” skin color, without the safety net of wealth or social status and living in a world where citizenship means almost nothing more than voting every four years.

There is no better place to begin building the just society that I have to believe most Brazilians desire than the room at the end of that hall.

