

**SARAH BALDWIN:** From the Watson Institute at Brown University, this is *Trending Globally*. I'm Sarah Baldwin.

Nick Barnes is a postdoctoral fellow at the Watson Institute. He studies how organized criminal violence affects communities. A lot of his work has focused on Complexo da Maré, a district in Rio de Janeiro that contains 16 interconnected favelas.

**NICK BARNES:** It's close to the International Airport. Any of the listeners have ever been to Rio, they've likely driven past Maré without even knowing it.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** In Maré and in many other parts of Rio, gangs do a lot of the work we expect the government to do, from social welfare to public safety. But in the late 2000s, Rio was chosen to host the World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics. After that, things began to change.

**NICK BARNES:** There were sort of 24 hour patrols by the military, and these would be marine and army soldiers riding up and down the main streets, especially in trucks with a lot of weapons. And at night, they would they would use tanks.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** I talked with Nick about the formal and informal ways Rio's favelas are governed, and how these marginalized communities might be better served going forward. We started by talking about the surprising path that led him to his research in Brazil.

**NICK BARNES:** I grew up in Iowa. I went to college in Iowa. And I was interested during college as well as after in questions of identity and collective violence. So I lived for a time and did a masters in Ireland, where I studied the troubles in Northern Ireland. And then I lived in Israel for a year and did a peace and conflict studies program where I continued to study these topics of violence and identity.

And when-- in grad school, you have to search around for a dissertation project. And I was looking around, and I did a program in Portuguese, and I started to get into know some Brazilians. And I started to do more research about Brazil.

And I quickly understood that there is really so much violence going on in Brazil, but we don't think about it in the same way that we do, say, other types of political conflict. We consider it criminal in its orientation or its nature. And I think that that distinction between political forms of violence over here and criminal forms of violence over here has been over-exaggerated, and that what is happening in Rio is very much about politics. And it's very much about collective

violence and identity.

And so I used a lot of the tools that I learned thinking about Ireland, and Israel, and other places where there is conflict going on and applied them to places like Rio de Janeiro, where there's also organizations which are interested in sort of controlling territory and populations. And you have the state coming in and trying to impose its use of force within those areas.

So I think that there's a lot of commonality between them that can be productive intellectually and theoretically. And so that's how, really, the project began. And then once I went to Rio and I started studying favelas, and started visiting them, and getting to know those communities and their histories, I never looked back. I was fascinated by that.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** So what sort of questions are you contending with in your research in Rio de Janeiro?

**NICK BARNES:** Generally my research focuses on public security, urban violence, and alternative forms of governance or non-state forms of governance within impoverished and marginalized communities. And so far, my research has focused on Rio de Janeiro, but it looks at Brazil more generally.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** So when you say alternate forms of governance, you can mean organized crime, but also, you can mean military occupation, right?

**NICK BARNES:** So my research focuses on alternative forms of governance to the state. So I would consider the military or the public security apparatus police to be one arm of the state that is intended to sort of govern life within cities or within states.

I look at non-state forms of governance. So that could be religious movements, social movements, local activists communities. But my research has focused on criminal forms of government. So that's usually gangs, other types of organized crime, including drug cartels, drug trafficking organizations, paramilitaries and militias.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Do you look at these organizations from the inside or do you study the people that they are quote, unquote, "governing?"

**NICK BARNES:** I do both. So I don't join these organizations. So I get access to them from their members, right? I interview a lot of different gang members in my research. So I get access to the organizations themselves and how they function internally, how they're organized, how and why they may engage in violence, and how they engage in different types of illicit or illegal

markets.

But I also interview a lot of residents who live in areas where these groups operate. So that's an important dimension, because you'll often hear one particular story from gang members or criminal organizations as to how those relationships function with people who live in those areas. And then you might get a different story from the residents who live in that area. So I think it's really important to get both sides of that relationship.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Well I have a question about the gangs. Are they-- is this identity based? Or are they getting some financial gain? Are they extorting people? Are they selling drugs?

**NICK BARNES:** They almost exclusively make their money off of the drug trade, the gangs. There's three main drug trafficking factions throughout the city, and they're all sort of competing with one another over all these hundreds of favela territories that they control.

They seldom extort residents. However, there is a different type of criminal organization that is also present in Rio de Janeiro, and these are called militias. And what these organizations are-- they're generally comprised of off-duty police or firefighters, and they're connected to the public security apparatus.

And these organizations generally, although occasionally, will engage in drug trafficking. They don't usually. And how they make money is by engaging in protection rackets. What that means is they force local residents to pay them a sort of monthly fee in exchange for security. So these are very different types of organizations, those that are sort of off-duty , police and then those that are gang members, which look very different in their orientation and engage in the drug trade.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** What changes were made in preparation for the World Cup? Because I imagine that the government thought well, we can't have this going on.

**NICK BARNES:** You're right. There were a lot of changes that happened ahead of the World Cup and the Olympic Games. So the World Cup happened in 2014 and the Olympic games in 2016. And I moved to Rio and lived there from 2012 to 2015, so I got to see a lot of the preparations for these mega events as they were occurring.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Was that deliberate?

**NICK BARNES:** That I moved there at that time?

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Mm-hmm.

**NICK BARNES:** More coincidence.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Mm-hmm.

**NICK BARNES:** So I was doing my graduate work, my PhD at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. And I went into the field, right, to research this topic at sort of a very interesting moment in the history of Rio.

So when the city knew that it was going to host the Olympic Games in 2016, which was, I believe, around the end of 2007, 2008, the city started a very large public security program called Pacification or Police Pacification Units. And what these were was an attempt by the city to retake control of favela territories which, for the most part, had been sort of left for drug trafficking organizations, gangs, to maintain control of.

So what the state would do is they would come in a sort of massive show of force, a massive invasion, military-style invasion, and they would kick out or find as many gang members as they could find. And then proceed to do a month or so of sweeps where they would find as many weapons and gang members as they could.

And then they would implement a Community Policing Unit where police would be stationed within the community. And the idea here was that they would develop better relations with residents and they would keep the gangs out. And so that program started in 2008, and it slowly moved throughout the city, gaining more and more and more favelas. And by the end, there were about 250 separate favela communities that had been-- in which these pacification units had been implemented.

But over the course of this expansion the dedication, you might say, to this community policing idea was left a little bit behind. And it was more just this imposition of force that, for the short term, reduced violence within the communities. But slowly there started to be more and more bad behavior by police, and residents really lost faith in the pacification units.

And by 2014, and then definitely by 2016, a lot of these Community Policing units had deteriorated. And the relationship between the police and the residents had returned to what it had been before. And now the Pacification Units have virtually disintegrated.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** And when did the military occupation sort of--

**NICK BARNES:** So there were a set of communities in which I was living. It's a place called Complexo da Maré. It's in the northern zone of Rio. It's a huge complex of favelas. There's 16 contiguous but separate favela neighborhoods.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** And comprising about how many people?

**NICK BARNES:** It's about 140,000, all in this space of 1 and 1/2 square miles. So that's a very densely populated area. Just to give you some idea, that's more densely populated than Manhattan. So these are very tightly packed communities.

And it's an important area of the city strategically, because it's located very close to the International Airport. Any of the listeners have ever been to Rio, they've likely driven past Maré without even knowing it. It's also located at the intersection of three of the busiest highways in the city.

So the state, the Brazilian state, Rio de Janeiro, decided to, instead of implementing these Pacification Units there, they sent in 2,500 Marine and Army soldiers to occupy Maré for 14 months beginning in 2014. And the military stayed on the streets, engaging in 24-hour patrols. They put up different areas of Maré where they would stop residents as they were walking, or driving their motorcycles, or cars and search them. So they made a really constant presence there.

And so the dynamics of Maré are slightly different than all of the other Pacification Units, and that was the military that was doing that, not the police.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** How did you make your way to Maré in the first place?

**NICK BARNES:** So as I said, Maré is an area with 140,000 residents. And it has a long history of social mobilization within that area. So there are several powerful and well-funded NGOs that do work within these communities-- a lot of education and culture work. They also engage in different types of research projects. So through some contacts I had there, I started to visit these NGOs. And then eventually I engaged in a longer term project and moved into the neighborhoods.

And so I moved in about eight months before the military arrived. So I got to see sort of life

before military occupation. And then I stayed there for another 10 months or so while the military was on the streets.

And life under military occupation was quite different from what life under gang control, so to speak, was like--

**SARAH BALDWIN:** How is it different?

**NICK BARNES:** Well, obviously there were a lot fewer gang members on the streets. But instead, there were sort of 24-hour patrols by the military. And these would be Marine and Army soldiers riding up and down the main streets, especially in trucks with a lot of weapons. And at night, they would they would use tanks to move through the community and continue to look for gang members.

Now a lot of their focus was on young Afro-Brazilian or black men. And they would stop them frequently, frisk them, and occasionally apprehend them if they had any illicit substances on them. But that focus really caused a lot of problems with these young men. They didn't-- they weren't used to this type of treatment by-- at least in their own neighborhoods. And so there was a lot of tension between those young men and the military soldiers.

And the thing about military occupation there was that even though they were sort of attempting to develop good relations with the local community, the Brazilian government decided to transfer all of the soldiers out every two months. So there wasn't a real opportunity for a relationship to develop between the military and the communities, because you would have to be dealing with an entirely new set of soldiers, a new leadership. And that leadership would sometimes implement very different types of strategies.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Was that deliberate on the part of the government?

**NICK BARNES:** That was.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Did they not want those relationships to develop?

**NICK BARNES:** Yeah. So the government, I think-- I can't speak for certain, although I had several meetings with some of the leadership of the military while they were there-- and the idea was that they wanted to prevent any sort of illicit relationships from developing between the military soldiers and the gangs themselves. So they wanted to prevent any types of corruption or bribery from occurring.

In addition, these military soldiers needed to be transferred out. They were stationed there 24 hours a day, and they were living sort of within the area of Maré. So a lot of these soldiers needed to get breaks.

But in the end, they decided that they were going to transfer all of the soldiers out each time. So it was an entirely new set of 2,500 soldiers every two months, which is a difficult environment in which to live, because you don't know how that new group is going to behave on the streets, how much they're going to use force and threaten local residents. And I think this was very problematic during the 14 months of occupation.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Was there any positive reception for the military? I mean, I can imagine that some people-- maybe older people, I don't know-- welcomed this sort of semblance of order or this imposition of order, at least.

**NICK BARNES:** Yes, yes. That's absolutely right. It's difficult to know how many people within the community welcomed the military. The military, at least within Brazil, is a very respected institution, far more than Rio de Janeiro's public security apparatus or the police.

First, it's not an institution like the police that engages in high levels of corruption. The soldiers generally don't engage in the sorts of behaviors. But in addition, what happened when the military came in is that a lot of the violence that had been occurring between the different gangs that operate in Maré-- there's several different gang organizations that control territory there. That violence went down to almost nothing.

So in many ways, life, for certain members of the community, got a lot better. But for other members of the community-- maybe specifically young men and adolescents-- it got far more insecure. So it sort of depends on who you are within these communities and the experience that they had during military occupation.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** You said that the occupation lasted 14 months. Why did it come to an end?

**NICK BARNES:** Well, originally the idea was that the military would occupy for a period, and then they would implement one of those community policing units afterwards by Rio's police. But the policing unit, the community policing unit, never materialized. And when the military left after 14 months, the gangs were quickly back on the streets within a matter of hours.

In this, we can see the sort of lack of longer term vision of these types of policies where the state comes in, and imposes its force, and doesn't develop any of the mechanisms through

which these communities can deal with these problems, violence, criminality, these sorts of things longer term.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** You've written, though, that the use of military occupation is a threat to Brazil's democracy. So I guess that's what you're talking about--

**NICK BARNES:** Yes.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** --when you say that.

**NICK BARNES:** Yes. So in Rio, since the end of the Olympic Games, the military has, in fact, intervened in Rio de Janeiro state where they've taken over-- they took over the public security apparatus for about a year. And I think this is problematic for democracy in Brazil more generally.

And you see a willingness of current president, Jair Bolsonaro, to engage the military even more. He's been very supportive of even the military dictatorship from the '60s to the '80s.

And it's problematic on a couple of different levels. The first is that the military is not democratically accountable to the people living in Rio. So there are a few mechanisms through which-- if the military behaves badly, the citizenry can bring charges or bring these issues to be dealt with. And the more that the Brazilian government relies on the military, the further you get away from that accountability that needs-- really needs to happen, especially in areas that-- in which Rio's favelas-- areas in which the civil and political rights of residents have always been sort of limited.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Talk to me about the people in the favelas. You must have developed relationships over time. Who is there? Why does one live in a favela? How are you born into that or do you end up there?

**NICK BARNES:** So I think it's very difficult to generalize across all of Rio de Janeiro's favelas. There's about 20% of the population of Rio de Janeiro lives in favelas. That's more than a million residents. There's 1,100 of these communities across the entire city. And generally what these are-- informal and impoverished communities.

Historically they looked a lot more like squatter settlements or shanty towns. But today, they've sort of developed into semi-formalized neighborhoods in a lot of cases. So a lot of the homes have multiple levels. There can be restaurants, and shopping centers, and supermarkets within themselves. So they don't look like maybe what they did 50 years ago.

But, I mean, there's a lot of diversity within these communities as well. It's not exclusively black or Afro-Brazilians who live within these communities, although that comprises a large majority of them. In many cases, they're sort of impoverished migrants from the rural areas of Brazil who have moved into these communities over time.

The very first favelas emerged shortly after the abolition of slavery, and these were mostly comprised of former slaves that lived in these areas because they had little access to available housing. But some favelas have developed into sort of middle class neighborhoods, even. So it's very difficult to give one characterization of Rio de Janeiro's favelas, despite the fact that we talk a lot about favelas as-- we just refer to them--

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Monolithic.

**NICK BARNES:** Just assume. Yeah. We assume they're sort of monolithic.

The thing to remember about favelas is that they're located in every corner of the city. So some of them are located in and amidst the wealthiest and most touristy neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro. In fact, many of the most famous favelas are those that overlook the very picturesque beaches. So, again, it's very difficult to describe life in Rio de Janeiro's favelas in one particular way, because the circumstances within any one of these communities and where exactly it's located and its connection to the rest of the city is going to vary pretty dramatically.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Are they generally stigmatized populations? Is it accepted as part of Rio de Janeiro? Or are favelas and favela dwellers sort of looked down upon?

**NICK BARNES:** There are powerful stigmas and prejudices that are largely, though not exclusively disseminated through mainstream media that characterizes the residents of these communities and these communities themselves as very violent places. So in a lot of times you know when you watch the news, the only way in which they're talking about favelas is through the levels of violence that's occurring in them.

And this is it is problematic for a couple of reasons. First, it gives the impression that the people within these communities are also violent, right? And then it directs public security policy to use violence to pacify them. That's the only thing that they will understand. And I think that we need to get away from that type of thinking about favela communities. And there's a

variety of NGOs and social movements which have been doing this work for a long time, but it's still not reaching many residents of the rest of the city.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Well, to that point, you have brought to the Watson Institute not only an exhibition of 60 photographs, but also a photographer and two social activists that you, I guess, worked with and befriended. And in that way you're making visible this sort of alternate discourse about the favelas for us, at least. What was the impetus for this exhibition?

**NICK BARNES:** When I was living in Maré, I had the opportunity to watch-- or I worked with local NGOs and social movements within Maré, of which there are many. And I had the opportunity to witness and observe several of these movements as they engaged in sort of public art projects.

And so the idea was to bring some of that to the United States, to also help educate the American population about what's going on in Brazil, specifically what's going on in Rio. Especially given the current moment that we have where it seems like a lot of people in the United States-- maybe for the first time-- are paying attention to Brazil.

The effort was a collaborative one. I worked with these artists and local activists to create this larger photo and film exhibit. And the idea was to bring them up as well, to have them speak directly to American college students and faculty. And the idea is that this exhibit will travel around the country and do some of that work before it hopefully goes back to Brazil and continues to do some of that work.

And I see this as you know part of my role as an educator. So I'm not just interested in educating college students in the classes that I teach, but having a larger discussion with the public about what types of public security policies we're engaging in, how we think about drugs, and how we can deal with the problems that come along with them.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** What is your hope for those people that you got to know going forward?

**NICK BARNES:** Brazil right now and Rio de Janeiro is at a very difficult moment. I was there until 2015, and then I've gone back every subsequent year to visit Maré and stay and talk to some of the people that I worked with again. And things have not changed for the better in Maré.

So the public security apparatus-- this last time when I was there and during the summer-- has started to shoot into the community from helicopters itself, and they've killed a couple of schoolchildren over the last year.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** I'm sorry. They're shooting at people from helicopters?

**NICK BARNES:** Yeah. So this is not something that they do every day, but they have started to engage in more violence. So this past year in Rio de Janeiro the police killed 1,532 citizens in Rio. And this is more than they had ever killed in any previous year.

So the situation has gotten much worse in Rio de Janeiro since I have left. And at this particular moment, I and a lot of my colleagues are not particularly optimistic about the coming years. And there's a lot of fear that the state will continue to use violence against people living within these communities to engage in more violent policing tactics.

And there's even fear that some of the social movements and activists that are doing really important work within these communities are going to be targeted specifically. So I'm not particularly optimistic at this time. And the hope is that those policies will change in the near future. But it looks like they're here for at least a little while.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Nick, thank you so much for coming in today and talking with us about your research--

**NICK BARNES:** It was a pleasure to be here.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** And your work.

**NICK BARNES:** Thank you very much.

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**SARAH BALDWIN:** This episode of *Trending Globally* was produced by Dan Richards and John Maza. Our theme music is by Henry Bloomfield. I'm Sarah Baldwin.

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