



Smokeable cocaine and crack in Brazil

A quick scan of the market

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The first large crack consumption market in Brazil appeared at the end of the 1980s in São Paulo, reaching its peak halfway through the 1990s. Crack use spread to other regions in Brazil, in particular among young adolescents from low-income population in urban areas. A 2002 survey among young street dwellers in all the state capitals revealed that crack had spread to 22 of the 27 states of Brazil.¹

There is still some confusion about how crack is produced in Brazil and what the market trends are.² Local circumstances such as the availability of precursors and knowledge of the production process seem to have an impact on how smokeable cocaine and crack variants are produced in Brazil. Sources often mention that it is made of the residue of cocaine hydrochloride (powder cocaine) refining process. However, some of these sources also erroneously think cocaine base paste is the residue or 'dirty cocaine'. Names for the substance also differ, such as *crack*, *bazuco*³, *merla*, *mela*, or *oxi*.

Most of the smokeable cocaine and crack appears to be made on the basis of cocaine base paste, as distinct from freebase and crack cocaine that is produced from cocaine powder in the United States and Europe. Crack made on the basis of base paste poses a challenge for the producers. Unlike cocaine hydrochloride (powder cocaine), cocaine base paste cannot easily be dissolved in water. An acid or ethanol (ethyl alcohol), acetone or diethyl ether is needed.⁴

In São Paulo crudely dry cooking a mixture of cocaine base paste and sodium bicarbon-

ate (baking soda - NaHCO_3) apparently solves the problem.⁵

Prevalence among young and poor street dwellers is significantly higher than the average. Base paste and crude manufacturing techniques make the drug cheap to produce. Crack on the basis of cocaine base paste can be considered to be the "poor man's crack" of the underprivileged developing world, with the disadvantage of harmful chemical impurities.

1. Brazil has 26 states and a Federal District with the capital Brasília. Carlini, Elisaldo Luiz de Araujo et al., *Levantamento nacional sobre o uso de drogas entre crianças e adolescentes em situação de rua nas 27 capitais brasileiras 2003*, Centro Brasileiro de Informações sobre Drogas Psicotrópicas (Cebid), São Paulo, 2003, p. 54. (http://www.cebrid.epm.br/levantamento_br2003/Levantamento2003.zip)

2. According to a country profile by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "there are neither technical studies nor reliable data from which to infer the trends of commerce and use of this drug [crack] in Brazil in the next few years." Crack is produced locally from coca paste or cocaine base ("a cocaine by-product"). As it is inexpensive, crack is the drug of choice of the low-income population. See: *2005 Brazil Country Profile*, UNODC Regional Office Brazil, p. viii/p. 19-20. (http://www.unodc.org/pdf/brazil/country_profile_eng.pdf)

3. Like in other Latin American countries, the term *bazuco* is mainly used for cocaine base paste smoked with marijuana or tobacco.

4. Vladimir Antonini, *Farmacologia e Comportamento Humano*, Curitiba 1993 (<http://antonini.psc.br/estagio/farmacologia - 1993.pdf>)

5. Guaracy Mingardi and Sandra Goulart, *Drug trafficking in an urban area: The case of São Paulo*, in *Globalisation, Drugs and Criminalisation*, Economic and Social Transformations connected with the International Drug Problem, volume 2, UNESCO, Paris, 2002 (http://www.unesco.org/most/globalisation/drugs_vol2.pdf), p. 106.



Precursors found in a lab raided on July 21, 2004 in Embu (Greater Metropolitan Area of São Paulo). The lab manufactured crack and refined cocaine. Some 300 kg of cocaine and crack were found, as well as 50 kg of maconha (marihuana). The cocaine and cocaine base paste came from Colombia by boat and were delivered over land in the State of Rondônia. From there it was transported by a lorry in a cargo of lumber to São Paulo. In the lab industrial mixers, presses, balances and cookers were found, as well as baking powder (probably sodium bicarbonate), bottles of ether and acetone, and lidocaine to 'cut' the cocaine. The lab had an estimated capacity of 400 kg of cocaine per month.

Source: Denarc estoura laboratório de produção de drogas, Denarc, July 21, 2004; Polícia descobre laboratório de produção de drogas, Folha Online, July 21, 2004; Polícia descobre laboratório de cocaína em SP, Folha de São Paulo, July 22, 2004.

Crack in São Paulo

The first large crack consumption market in Brazil appeared in São Paulo at the end of the 1980s and expanded during the 1990s reaching its peak halfway the decade. The crack boom has been slowly diminishing since, although it is still very visible in one part of the city centre, which has been nicknamed *Cracolândia* or 'Crackland'. The area consists of some six dilapidated blocks in the district of Santa Efigênia. Despite ambitious plans to upgrade the area, not much has changed until now.

In Crackland the users that attract the public eye are the homeless street kids using crack openly on the streets. The average user, however, is older, generally young adults or adolescents, and not necessarily underprivileged. Crack is smoked in a homemade pipe or *cachimbo* in combination with ash from a cigarette. The drug produces the euphoria in the moment it is consumed, and each rock lasts around fifteen minutes. Among some users a condition of addiction develops quickly and leads to rapidly deteriorating physical and mental conditions.⁶

In São Paulo, crack is made mixing sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) and cocaine base paste or powder cocaine – although the latter is rarely used. A typical manufacturing process would be to mix 500 grams of cocaine base paste and 250 grams of sodium bicarbonate in a fruit mixer and dry cook it in a small pan to obtain just under 750 grams of crack (some is lost during the process). From the vapour and ashes resulting from this process, the *pedras* or 'rocks' are formed, that produce a cracking sound when heated for smoking. Apparently, in particular women are the ones involved in the cooking process and in the initial contact with buyers.⁷

6. For patterns of use and data about the early user population, see: *The Natural History of Cocaine Abuse: A case study endeavour*, Programme on Substance Abuse, World Health Organisation (WHO), September 1995, (<http://www.tni.org/drugscoca-docs/naturalhistory.pdf>)

7. Mingardi and Goulart, p. 106. In the WHO study (that was done in 1994), users either made crack themselves on the basis of cocaine hydrochloride, or (and this was preferred) bought it directly from dealers because it was stronger. They suspected the crack from the dealers was made on the basis of 'coca paste'. See: *The Natural History of Cocaine Abuse*, op. cit., p. 145; *O tráfico seduz a mulher*, Correio Braziliense, December 11, 2005.

In some labs that were raided by the police, acetone and diethyl ether were found. Both chemicals can be used to dissolve cocaine base paste. In the raided labs cocaine as well as crack and cocaine base paste are found. However, that does not necessarily imply that crack is the rest product of cocaine production, since the rooms used as labs also function as storage for all kind of drugs for further distribution to the *boca de fumo* (retail selling point). Large refineries only producing powder cocaine have been dismantled in and around São Paulo.

The crack in São Paulo is produced from cocaine base paste mostly imported from or through Bolivia and Paraguay. One trafficking route concerned a mid-level dealer who was arrested carrying 200 kg of cocaine base paste in a truck heading for São Paulo. Bolivian traffickers had dropped the shipment from an airplane flying at low altitude delivering the cargo at a plantation in the interior of the State of São Paulo. Typically the base paste is sold wholesale to small dealers who produce their own crack. Between 700,000 and 1 million crack stones could be produced from 200 kg base paste.

However, most of the trafficking is on much smaller basis, picking up 20-30 kg at the borders with Bolivia and Paraguay.⁸ Since the *Lei do Abate*⁹ air drops are much more difficult and trafficking now seems to go over land in cars, lorries, pick-up trucks and regular line buses, according to reports in local newspapers in the states of Mato Grosso, Rondônia, Paraná and Mato Grosso do Sul. Seizures of 5, 10 or 20 kg of pasta base are quite common.

The police are often involved in the crack business in São Paulo's Crackland. In December 2001, five police officers of the narcotics division Denarc (*Departamento de Investigações sobre Narcóticos*) of the *Polícia Civil* were arrested. They used prostitutes and addicts to sell crack on the streets. Regular dealers had to pay protection money.

In November 2005, five members of the *Polícia Militar* (PM) were arrested for killing seven street dwellers and brutally wounding eight at the Praça da Sé in August 2004 – an outrage that made international headlines. The victims had dealing debts and operated in a scheme organised by the PMs who also extorted street vendors and fenced goods stolen by addicts to support their habit. In both cases more police officers were probably involved.¹⁰

Other areas and other crack

In the capital Brasília and the centre-west and north of the country a variant of smokeable cocaine on the basis of cocaine base paste with similar effects as crack is quite popular. It is called *merla* or *mescla*, *mela*, *mel*, *melado* and is made from cocaine base paste, *barrilha* or sodium carbonate (also known as washing soda or soda ash – Na_2CO_3) and battery acid (sulphuric acid –



H_2SO_4) or boric acid (H_3BO_3 – often used as an antiseptic and insecticide) to dissolve the cocaine base paste.¹¹

Merla is sold as a paste in small emptied aluminium soda cans containing 40-50 grams for US\$ 10 to US\$ 15 and is usually smoked with marihuana or tobacco.

8. Guaracy Mingardi, *O estado e o crime organizado*, IBCCrim, São Paulo 1998, p. 153-55; Mingardi and Goulart, p. 96-98. In 2000, a kilo of cocaine paste could be purchased in Bolivia for US\$ 400; once turned into crack rocks, it could be sold for US\$ 4,000-6,000. The purchasing price of powder cocaine was more than double that of base paste in Bolivia. However, it can be resold at a higher price, mainly because it increases in volume as each buyer "baptizes" (dilutes) it, so that one kilo may turn into as many as four by the time it reaches the end-user.

9. In July 2004, a so-called shoot-down law (*Lei do Abate*) was passed that authorises Brazil's air force to shoot down any unidentified aircraft suspected of smuggling drugs if it does not respond to inquiries and repeated warnings.

10. *Policiais controlam cracklândia em SP*, Folha de São Paulo, December 14, 2001; *PMs voltam a ser acusados por chacina na Sé*, Folha de São Paulo, November 4, 2005. In a house of one of the relatives of a PM, 300 wrappings with cocaine were found. The PM probably also controlled a *boca de fumo* in a favela in the East of São Paulo (*Mais PMs são investigados pelo massacre do centro*, Folha de São Paulo, November 4, 2005).

11. Kerosene and quicklime are also often mentioned as ingredients. Both are used with the production of cocaine base paste. See: *Merla, o lixo da coca invade Brasília*, Istoé, November 17, 1999 (<http://www.terra.com.br/istoe/brasileiros/1999/11/13/002.htm>); *Garoto constrói patrimônio de R\$ 2 milhões com venda de merla, que comercializava em Goiânia*, Diário da Manhã, November 24, 2005; *Laboratório de merla que bacteria stores de Parricide de Goiânia é desbaratado*, Polícia Militar do Estado de Goiás, September 4, 2006 (<http://www.pm.go.gov.br/2007/index.php?i=libs/onoticiap&id=10020>).

Table 1
Annual prevalence of crack, merla, cocaine, marihuana
and solvents in Brazil (2001)

	North	North-East	Centre-West	South-East	South	Brazil	
Crack	0,2	0,4	0,4	0,4	0,5	0,4	189 000
Merla	1,0	0,1	0,8	0,1	0,1	0,2	92 000
Cocaine	0,8	1,4	1,4	2,6	3,6	2,3	1 076 000
Marihuana	5,0	5,5	5,0	7,6	8,4	6,9	3 249 000
Solvents	3,0	9,7	4,6	5,2	4,0	5,8	2 710 000

Source: Cebrid

Table 2
Monthly and annual prevalence of adolescents
and children living on the street (2003)

	North		North-East		Centre-West		South-East		South		Brazil	
n	695		958		358		401		395		2807	
Prevalence	M	Y	M	Y	M	Y	M	Y	M	Y	M	Y
Crack	0,9	2,2	6,4	9,4	1,7	5,9	9,5	13,7	10,6	15,4	5,5	8,6
Merla	2,3	5,0	2,9	4,4	6,7	11,7	0,7	1,5	0	0	2,5	4,5
Cocaine	4,3	6,6	3,7	6,5	4,7	12,0	13,7	22,2	2,5	7,1	5,2	9,5
Marihuana	14,7	20,3	27,4	32,8	29,1	39,3	40,1	48,4	21,5	27,3	25,4	32,1
Solvents	18,0	26,6	36,7	43,1	20,9	32,7	39,9	47,6	23,8	31,9	28,7	36,8

Source: Cebrid

Figures in red above the national average, in green below the national average.

The first seizures of *merla* in Brasília occurred in 1984. According to a newspaper report, *merla* was first sold as rocks (*pedras*) before it became customary to sell it as paste.¹² The drug became quite popular in the mid 1990s. The process does not entail cooking the ingredients. Kitchen labs are discovered frequently in the States of Goiás, Rondônia and the Distrito Federal (DF).

In the State of Acre, in the northwest bordering with Peru and the north of Bolivia, there is yet another variant, called *oxi* or *oxidado* (rust), which was hailed as a drug even more lethal as crack in newspaper ar-

ticles in 2005. It is not entirely clear how *oxi* is made. As with *merla*, kerosene and quicklime are mentioned as ingredients, but these are precursors that are also used to produce cocaine base paste. A rock of *oxi* is smoked, like crack, out of an aluminium can pierced with holes. Sometimes it is grounded and smoked in cigarettes, together with marihuana or tobacco, or even snorted as powder.¹³

Researchers of the Acre Harm Reduction Network (REARD in its Portuguese initials) expected to find *merla*, but were confronted with *oxi*. They were shocked witnessing *oxi* smoking. The euphoria was quick and short, and each rock lasted around 15 minutes. Alcohol was used in between smokes to maintain the high, in a ritual that went on for more than six hours, usually at night. When the user had finished smoking the rock, "he fell down vomiting and defecating, and had his high in the middle of his vomit and faeces, until he got up to smoke another."¹⁴ The vomiting and defecating might be caused by the consumption of denatured ethyl-alcohol – generally used as a household disinfectant¹⁵ – mixed with fruit juice, which is used more often in stead of the Brazilian liquor *cachaça* or beer that are more expensive.

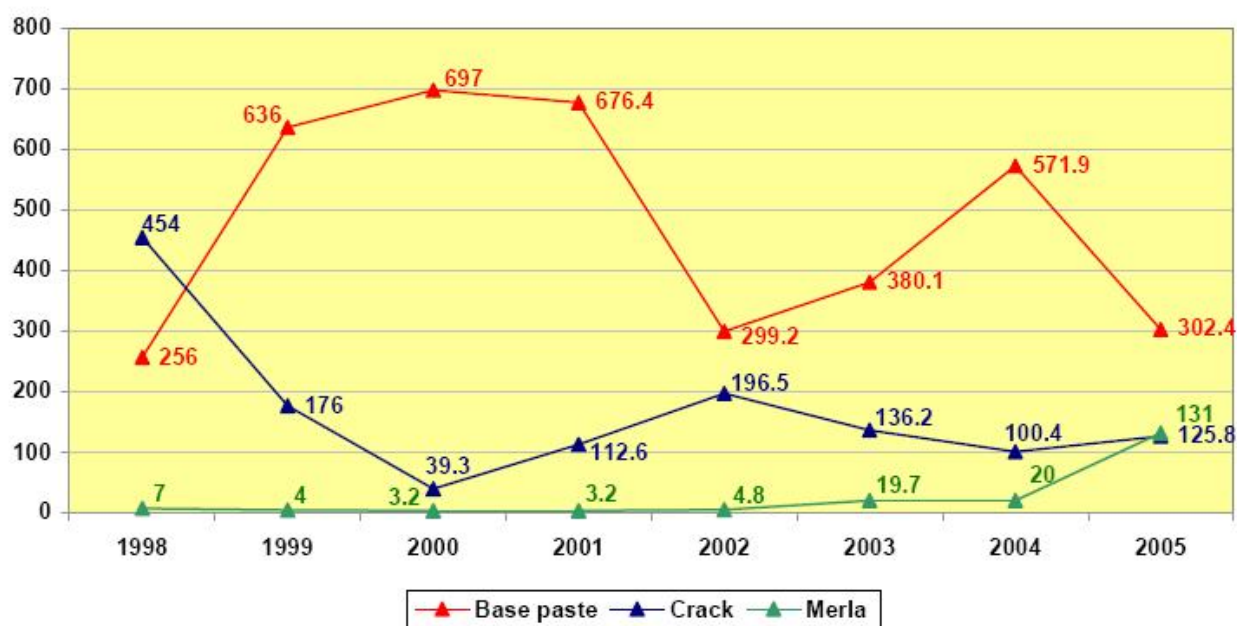
12. *Polícia desmonta laboratórios*, Correio Braziliense, May 7, 2003 (http://www2.correioweb.com.br/cw/EDICAO_20030507/pri_cid_070503_179.htm)

13. *Pesquisa detecta droga mais devastadora que crack no Acre*, Agência Folha, April 14, 2005; *Oxi: A New Drug in the Amazon*, The Narco News Bulletin, May 13, 2005; *Novas fórmulas, velhos vícios*, Correio Braziliense, May 18, 2005.

14. *Oxi: A New Drug in the Amazon*; Audiência pública promovida pela Comissão de Educação, Cultura e Desporto, Saúde Pública, Legislação e Assistência Social, State Assembly of Acre, November 1, 2005 (<http://www.ccjr.ac.gov.br/files/audiencias/REARD.doc>)

15. Ethanol blended with various additives to render it unfit for human consumption. These additives, called denaturants, are generally toxic (such as methanol).

Figure 1: Cocaine base paste, crack and merla seizures in Brazil (1999-2005) in kg



Sources: National reports 1999-2004 of CICAD and the 2004 and 2005 Annual Reports of the Polícia Federal (PF)

The effects were devastating: around 30 percent of those interviewed died within one year – the great majority from the effects of the drug, although some had also died participating in robberies or smuggling. Many users were involved in smuggling, acting as mules carrying cocaine base pasta over the border from Peru and Bolivia. At the Peruvian side of the border is the town of Pucallpa in the Loreto-Ucayali region where coca is cultivated. According to some sources most of the refining into cocaine takes place in labs in the State of Acre.¹⁶ In a small lab that was raided in March 2004, *barrilha* and battery acid were found, which might indicate that the *oxi* of Acre is in fact very similar to or a further elaboration of *merla* into a crack-like rock.¹⁷ Most sources describe *merla* as a paste and *oxi* as a *pedra* or rock.

A 2001 survey by the *Centro Brasileiro de Informações sobre Drogas Psicotrópicas* (Cebid) on drug use in Brazil, showed an annual crack use prevalence of 0.4 % which would mean some 189,000 users would have used crack at least one time a year (149,000 male and 40,000 female). For *merla* the annual prevalence was 0.2 % or 92,000 (62,000 male and 30,000 female). However, the report warns that the figures on crack and *merla* have to be interpreted with extreme caution because of the low in-

dex of precision.¹⁸ It also shows that the use of solvents is a much bigger problem: use of solvents is 14 times higher than crack use.

According to the Polícia Federal (PF) the use of crack has expanded to 19 of the 27 states of Brazil, particularly in the north-east in the states of Bahia, Rio Grande do Norte and Maranhão.¹⁹ The statistics about seizures (see Figure 1) do not support an increase in availability nationwide. However, seizure statistics alone do not say much about trends if they are not accompanied by street availability, price and purity studies – which

16. Even the former Governor of the State of Acre, Orleir Camili, seems to have been involved in cocaine base paste trafficking from Peru and setting up labs in Acre, see the report of the Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito (CPI) do Narcotráfico, Brasília, November 2001, p 64 a.f.

17. *Polícia estoura laboratório de refino de coca no Taquari*, Página 20 (Rio Branco-AC), March 4, 2004 (http://www2.uol.com.br/pagina20/04032004/c_1102_032004.htm) In this particular case *água sanitária* (sodium hypochlorite or bleach - NaClO), frequently used as a disinfectant and as a bleaching agent was also found, probably to 'whiten' the *oxi*.

18. Carlini, Elisaldo Luiz de Araujo et al. (2002), op. cit., p. 43/78.

19. *Crack se expande e já atinge 19 Estados*, Folha de São Paulo, January 20, 2005; see also: *Perfil do tráfico muda e violência cresce*, O Globo, September 10, 2006; *Consumo de crack cresce e se alastra no país*, O Globo, September 11, 2006.

are not available. Furthermore, the statistics of the Federal Police do not include seizures by the state police forces (*Polícia Civil* and *Polícia Militar*) of the 27 states of Brazil.²⁰ Nevertheless, after the emergence of crack in São Paulo at the end of the 1980s, crack has spread to other regions in Brazil, in particular to youngsters from low-income population in urban areas (see Table 2).

A 2003 survey among young street dwellers in all the state capitals revealed that crack had spread to 22 states.²¹ Large cities such as Recife (Pernambuco), Curitiba (Santa Catarina), Natal (Rio Grande do Norte), Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais)²², Fortaleza (Ceará), Salvador (Bahia)²³ and Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul) have a significant crack problem, while Brasília, Goiânia (Goiás), São Luís (Maranhão) and Boa Vista

20. The statistics should be looked at with extreme caution. Two academics interviewed considered them useless. The Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) of the Organization of American States (OAS) "notes with concern the lack of relevant data available pertaining to laboratories and seizures of organic drugs from the state police of the 27 states of Brazil. The extent to which the information provided by the federal police is adequately representative of the country's actual drug supply problems, is of concern to CICAD." See: *Brazil: Evaluation of Progress in Drug Control 2003-2004*, Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), p. 8 (http://www.cicad.oas.org/MEM/ENG/Reports/Progress_2003-2004/Brasil-ENG.pdf)

21. Carlini, Elisaldo Luiz de Araujo et al. (2003), op. cit., p. 54.

22. See for instance a series on drug trafficking in the newspaper *Hoje em Dia* in Belo Horizonte, in particular: *Guerra do tráfico cria "monopólio da morte" em MG*, *Hoje em Dia*, June 18, 2006, and *Pedreira, as piores vielas de drogas e tiroteios*, *Hoje em Dia*, June 19, 2006.

23. On the emergence of crack in Salvador, see: Tarcisio Andrade et. al., *The Opening of South America's First Needle Exchange Program and an Epidemic of Crack Use in Salvador, Bahia-Brazil*, *AIDS and Behavior*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2001 (<http://www.citizen.org/documents/1555a.pdf>).

24. *RN é o maior produtor de pasta de crack do NE*, *Tribuna do Norte*, September 3, 2006.

25. *The Natural History of Cocaine Abuse: A case study endeavour*, op. cit., p. 25.

26. The first seizures of crack rocks in Rio occurred in 1991. Marihuana mixed with cocaine base paste, *ba-zuco*, has been available as well. See: *O crack? Como não entra? Já entrou*, op. cit. In 1997, a container was seized at the Ilha do Fundão with 'crackonha' according to a note found at the site, possibly a mixture of cocaine base paste or crack with marihuana (*PM acha contêiner com 50 kg de drogas*, *Folha de São Paulo*, September 16, 1997).

27. Personal communication September 2006. De Oliveira is a delegado (superintendent) of the *Serviço de Repressão a Entorpecentes* (SRE-Oeste) in Nilópolis in the GMA of Rio de Janeiro.

(Roraima) in the centre west and north are struggling with *merla* (see Table 3). Rio Grande do Norte appears to be a production area for the North-East, according to the local *Polícia Federal*. About 60% of the cocaine base paste is imported from Peru.²⁴

Rio de Janeiro: the exception?

The odd one out regarding the crack market in Brazil seems to be Rio de Janeiro. Use appears to be low in comparison to other major cities. Prevalence among young street dwellers is significantly lower while cocaine use is higher, according to the 2003 survey (see Table 3).

The conventional explanation is that the organised gangs that control drug distribution in the *favelas* did not allow the sale of crack. An explanation that is often provided is that crack was considered too harmful to users, which would deteriorate mentally and physically and the traffickers would lose their market. Pure cocaine does not have that disadvantage. However, that would apply to other cities as well. A study on crack and cocaine use undertaken by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1994 concluded that "[c]rack is not widespread because of the workings of the market." There seemed to be no street market. The traffickers rejected the users of crack "because their violent behaviour could put their activity in jeopardy."²⁵

Nevertheless, crack has been available in Rio for at least fifteen years,²⁶ but it never gained the popularity it acquired in São Paulo. Why, is an open question. The agreement of the drug bosses might be part of the explanation. Or it might have been not that easy to find. It was not really prohibited by the gangs but was not encouraged either, according to Superintendent Ronaldo de Oliveira of the narcotics division of the *Polícia Civil* in the east of the Greater Metropolitan Area (GMA) of Rio.²⁷

He and others say it might have to do with the different setting of Rio. The *cidade maravilhosa* (beautiful city) is warmer both in climate and atmosphere than the business-like and sometimes frenetic São Paulo. The beach, sun and open skyline in Rio, the music such as the *chorinho* (a melancholic version of the samba), and the character of a *carioca* is different from a *paulista*. However, this is mere speculation.

Table 3
Monthly and annual prevalence among adolescents and children
living on the street in some major Brazilian state capitals (2003)

	pop	reg	n	Crack		Merla		Cocaine		Marihuana		Solvents	
				M	Y	M	Y	M	Y	M	Y	M	Y
Brazil			2807	5,5	8,6	2,5	4,5	5,2	9,5	25,4	32,1	28,7	36,8
São Paulo SP	10,4	SE	42	26,2	35,7	7,1	9,5	14,3	35,7	73,8	81,0	90,5	90,5
Rio de Janeiro RJ	5,86	SE	135	3,7	6,7	0	0	25,9	35,6	59,3	67,4	51,1	61,5
Salvador BA	2,44	NE	141	8,5	14,2	0	0	7,1	10,6	30,5	41,4	19,9	30,5
Belo Horizonte MG	2,24	SE	204	9,3	13,2	0	1,0	6,4	11,8	22,0	30,9	22,5	30,9
Fortaleza CE	2,14	NE	151	9,3	11,9	0	0	6,0	9,3	23,8	26,5	29,1	32,5
Brasília DF	2,05	CW	88	2,3	9,1	19,3	30,7	8,0	17,0	52,3	70,5	59,1	72,7
Curitiba SC	1,59	S	161	16,1	19,9	0	0	1,2	6,8	21,1	29,8	23,0	36,0
Recife PE	1,42	NE	64	20,3	31,3	0	0	9,4	10,9	50,0	56,3	87,5	92,2
Porto Alegre RS	1,36	S	216	6,9	12,5	0	0	3,2	6,9	21,3	25,5	25,5	30,6
Belém PA	1,28	N	165	0	0	0	1,2	0	0,6	3,0	4,8	12,1	13,9
Goiânia GO	1,09	CW	41	2,4	7,3	17,1	26,8	7,3	9,8	34,2	48,8	22,0	41,5
São Luís MA	0,87	NE	174	0,6	1,1	15,5	23,0	0,6	4,0	27,6	33,3	36,2	41,4
Natal RN	0,71	NE	97	11,3	15,5	1,0	2,1	2,1	6,2	21,6	24,7	25,8	37,1
Campo Grande MS	0,66	CW	95	2,1	4,7	0	0	5,3	13,7	16,8	26,3	7,4	16,8
Manaus AM	0,41	N	232	0,9	1,3	3,0	6,9	3,4	6,5	13,8	22,4	20,3	31,9
Rio Branco AC	0,25	N	71	1,4	2,8	0	1,4	5,6	8,5	7,0	11,3	9,9	14,1
Boa Vista RR	0,20	N	68	4,4	5,9	10,3	19,1	16,2	20,6	38,2	47,1	26,5	41,2

Source: Cebrid

Population in millions of inhabitants

Figures in **red** above the national average, in **green** below the national average

According to the lawyer/criminologist Cesar Caldeira – who is a prison inspector in the State of Rio de Janeiro – this *mistério carioca* as it has been called, is becoming an ‘urban legend’ that needs to be discarded.²⁸ The legend is based on the killing of dealers that tried to sell crack in the Morro do Chapéu Mangueira in 1994,²⁹ in the Leme district of Rio. Even more important were the declarations of one of the leaders of the *Comando Vermelho*, Márcio Amaro de Oliveira, alias Marcinho VP, and the boss in the Morro Dona Marta in Botafogo.

Interviewed the night before director Spike Lee and pop star Michael Jackson recorded the clip *They don't care about us* in the Morro Dona Marta in February 1996, Marcinho VP told reporters of the main newspapers of Rio, the *Jornal do Brasil*, *O Globo* and *O Dia*: “Crack causes a lot of damage. If I want to I could earn a lot of money with it. But I don't want to hurt people even more. Apart from that, it would be very difficult to control my men crazy on crack.” Years later, in April 2000, while imprisoned, he repeated his statement before a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into drug trafficking, the so-called *CPI do Narcotráfico*.³⁰

The drug market in Rio is organised quite differently from the one in São Paulo.³¹ Several gangs in Rio – like the *Comando Vermelho* (CV/Red Command), *Terceiro Comando* (TC/Third Command) and the *Amigos dos Amigos* (ADA/Friends of Friends) – control the distribution of the main drugs, *maconha* (marihuana) and cocaine, from *bocas de fumo* in the *favelas* that are located all over the town. When crack appeared in São Paulo there was no such control of the market. It was more disorganised and fragmented.

28. Cesar Caldeira, *O crack? Como não entra? Já entrou*, Revista Inteligência, no VI - 27, October/November/December 2004 and personal communication (September 2006). (<http://insightnet.homeip.net/insight/inteligencia/pdf/27/01> – Cesar Caldeira.pdf) The ‘carioca mystery’ is a chapter in the book *Crack: o caminho das pedras*, by Marco Antonio Uchôa (São Paulo: Editora Atica, 1996) who first provided this explanation about the situation in Rio.

29. *O crack? Como não entra? Já entrou*, op. cit.; *Tráfico do Rio derruba embargo à droga*, *Jornal do Brasil*, February 20, 2005.

30. Caco Barcellos, *Abusado: o dono do Morro Dona Marta*, Editora Record: Rio de Janeiro 2005, p. 343; CPI do Narcotráfico, op. cit., p. 928; ‘Marcinho VP’ acusa a banda *podre*, *Jornal do Brasil*, November 28, 2000.

31. Mingardi (1998), p. 133/145; Mingardi and Goulart (2002), p. 96.

Since then, the *Primeiro Comando do Capital* (PCC) has emerged, but they are not as narrowly focused on drug trafficking as the Rio gangs and are very active in other criminal enterprises such as bank robberies and kidnappings.³² Marcinho VP has died, however, and the agreement between the leaders of the different drugs gangs in Rio not to sell crack might be dead as well. The 'crackless' days in Rio seem to be over. Outreach workers report a rise in use, and the *Conselho Estadual Anti-Drogas* (Cead) of Rio reports an increase in persons looking for treatment.³³

32. Like the Rio gangs, the PCC was organised inside the prison system around 1993. One of the reasons prisoners organised themselves in São Paulo was the widespread use of crack in the prison system which made conditions even more appalling. The PCC prohibited crack inside the prisons. (*Prestes a explodir*, Revista Epoca, June 3, 2004; *Como nasceram as facções*, Istoé, May 24, 2006; *Marcola: crime banca rede de apoio em prisões*, O Globo, July 4, 2006)

33. *Tráfico de crack, a nova ameaça*, O Globo, December 19, 2004; *Tráfico do Rio derruba embargo à droga*, Jornal do Brasil, February 20, 2005; *Crack começa a invadir as favelas*, Jornal do Brasil, April 15, 2006.

34. *PCC fornece crack para o Rio, diz polícia*, Folha de São Paulo, November 5, 2002.

35. A series of articles appeared quoting the study of Cesar Caldeira in Revista Inteligência to illustrate that crack had entered in Rio: *Tráfico de crack, a nova ameaça*, O Globo, 19 de dezembro de 2004; *Crack se expande e já atinge 19 Estados*, Folha de São Paulo, 20 de janeiro de 2005; *Crack vence resistência e se infiltra nas favelas do Rio*, Jornal do Brasil, 20 de fevereiro de 2005.

36. *O crack? Como não entra? Já entrou*, op. cit. and personal communications with social workers that work in favelas.

37. See for instance: Tarcisio Andrade et. al., *The Opening of South America's First Needle Exchange Program and an Epidemic of Crack Use in Salvador, Bahia-Brazil*, AIDS and Behavior, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2001 (<http://www.citizen.org/documents/1555a.pdf>).

38. A study showed that 68% of crack users were successful in abrogating crack habits over the course of nine months through the use of cannabis. See: Eliseu Labigalini et. al., *Therapeutic use of cannabis by crack addicts in Brazil*, Psychoactive Drugs, Vol 31, No. 4, Oct-Dec 1999 (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=10681113&dopt=Abstract)

39. *Homicídio responde por 60% das mortes no crack*, Jornal da Paulista, February 2001 (<http://www.Unifesp.br/comunicacao/jpta/ed164/pesq3.htm>); Marcelo Ribeiro et. al., *High mortality among young crack cocaine users in Brazil: A 5-year follow-up study*, Addiction, Vol. 99, No 9: September, 2004 (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uid=15317633&dopt=Abstract).

40. *PMs voltam a ser acusados por chacina na Sé*, Folha de São Paulo, November 4, 2005.

Ironically, it could have been yet another Marcinho VP who introduced crack in the mid-1990s – Márcio Nepomuceno dos Santos, the boss of the *tráfico* in the Complexo do Alemão and a leader of the *Comando Vermelho Jovem* (CVJ) – a one-time break-away group of the original CV that appears to have been integrated again.

The Complexo do Alemão is a cluster of *favelas* in and around the neighbourhoods of Ramos, Penha, Olaria, Inhaúma and Bonsucesso in the north of Rio. It is an important entry point for drugs and guns and one of the more violent areas of the city. The *favela* Jacarezinho (Little Alligator) in the Complexo is often mentioned as one of the distribution centres for crack.³⁴ Another is Beira Mar in the municipality of Duque de Caxias, in the Baixada Fluminense, which is part of the Rio de Janeiro GMA. This is the territory of Fernandinho Beira-Mar (Seaside Freddy), one of the few *favela* bosses that matured into an international trafficker.

Police authorities seem to be running behind the facts. In November 2004, a transport of 5 kg crack and 15 kg cocaine base paste was intercepted in the Favela do Lixão in the Baixada Fluminense. At the time the chief of the Polícia Civil, Álvaro Lins, still maintained that crack "is not sold in Rio because it costs less, it is causing a rapid addiction and kills the user in a few years. That way, the drug trafficker is losing his clients." Lins thought the shipment might have been a trial. However, the newspapers saw the seizure as a proof that crack was entering the Rio drugs market.³⁵

In the following months, next to small seizures, bigger ones became more frequent. In July 2005, 10 kg of crack and 40 kg of cocaine were seized during raids in the *favela* Rocinha. And in July 2006, 200 kg cocaine in 208 bricks and 30 kg in 50 bricks of what was called crack (but actually looked more like cocaine base paste) were seized in the favela Beira-Mar in a pick-up truck coming from Foz do Iguaçu (Paraná). The seizures of cocaine and cocaine base paste in one shipment indicate production in Rio itself.

The continuous wars over territory between the main gangs in Rio – *Comando Vermelho*, *Terceiro Comando* and the *Amigos dos Amigos* – to control the *bocas de fumo* appear to be one of the reasons why crack availability

Harm reduction and crack

In July 2005, the Ministry of Public Health issued decree 1028 that formalized harm reduction policies in Brazil. Since 1993-94 harm reduction strategies have been established in most areas of Brazil. Initially it entailed needle exchange programmes for Injecting Drug Users (IDUs) that injected cocaine. Although recognized as effective policies that were implemented by municipalities and civil society organisations, harm reduction workers were often harassed by police and were accused to aid and encourage illicit drug use. However, cocaine injection has diminished while crack use is expanding.³⁷

With the Government decree, harm reduction strategies are now recognised and provided with some degree of financial backing. The decree officially approved needle exchange but is not limiting harm reduction strategies. For crack users other strategies are needed. When sharing homemade pipes or *cachimbos* – which is often part of the ritual of crack usage – crack users get wounds on lips and gums and are susceptible to diseases such as herpes, tuberculosis, hepatitis and the HIV/AIDS virus. Crack use often also implicates risky sexual behaviour in exchange for crack or as a means to earn some money to buy crack. Among some groups of sex workers, crack use is often high.

Harm reduction workers dispense condoms, pipes, pipe stems, tissues, vaseline and lip

balm to counter infections and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), as well as providing information on how to prevent unsafe crack smoking habits.

The decree does not require abstinence as the basis for harm reduction strategies. That opens the possibility to initiate user rooms with medical supervision and substitution treatment. User rooms were originally part of the proposed measures in the decree, but after two years of intergovernmental negotiations and much debate, they were removed because of the resistance of the National Antidrug Secretariat (*Secretaria Nacional Antidrogas* – Senad), which is more oriented to law enforcement.

Nevertheless, experiments with user rooms are expected, as well as the introduction of marijuana substitution treatment for crack users that are based on spontaneous accounts by crack abusers that started using cannabis in an attempt to ease withdrawal symptoms.³⁸ These strategies in combination with social projects among street dwellers might help to reduce the high mortality rate among crack users due to violence that is associated with use and dealing. The mortality rate among crack users in São Paulo is more than 7.5 times higher than among the population of the same age and sex group, and violence accounts for 56.5% of deaths, AIDS for 26.1% and an overdose for 8.7%.³⁹ The police is frequently involved with the violence in the crack business.⁴⁰

is increasing. There is a need for money to finance arms and ammunition and incursions in enemy territory. Many of the old leaders of the gangs are either dead or in prison and a new generation of younger and less experienced ones seem to have lost moral qualms about allowing crack.³⁶

On the other hand, according to one source, one should not overrate the control of the overall gang leadership on local gangs in the *favelas*. Although allied in business enterprises and to offset attacks from rival gangs, each local boss is pretty much autonomous

in handling his affairs in his territory. Police and the media exaggerate the level of coordination and hierarchy within the gangs. This might explain why one Marcinho VP banned crack while the other introduced it.

Some mention the alliance between *Comando Vermelho* and the *Primeiro Comando do Capital* (PCC) in São Paulo as the source for crack in Rio that goes back to 2002. Seizures of crack shipments often involve cars with SP number plates from São Paulo. Others say that the PCC is not exclusively supplying the CV, but other factions as well. The drug trade at the level of supply is not the business of the gangs; other more independent traffickers, so-called *matutos*, are involved. However, the link with São Paulo is likely to be the source of crack in Rio.

41. 'O PCC é um perigo para a soberania', O Globo, May 16, 2006

42. *O crack? Como não entra? Já entrou*, op. cit.

According to the police inspector Marina Maggessi, former head of the intelligence division of the *Delegacia de Repressão a Entorpecentes* of Rio de Janeiro (DRE-RJ), there is no pact between the factions in Rio not to sell crack. Crack is supplied by independent *matutos* jointly with other drugs.⁴¹ A typical route for crack or cocaine base paste, according to De Oliveira, is via Pedro Juan Caballero in Paraguay and Ponta Porã in Matto Grosso do Sul (over the BR-163 highway that connects Ponta Porã with Campo Grande), through Paraná to São Paulo and then to Rio.

Crack in Rio is not only imported but also produced in the *favelas*.⁴² According to one often well-informed source there are at least ten kitchen labs, but this could not be

confirmed. However, the import of cocaine base paste indicates that it is likely to be produced in small kitchen labs. A sophisticated lab is not needed. The source said that left-overs of the cocaine refining process were dissolved in high degree alcohol before it was turned into crack. As mentioned before alcohol is often used to dissolve the cocaine base paste which can not be dissolved in water.

Prison inspector Cesar Caldeira proposed to start with prevention programmes about the risks of crack use in the Rio prison system. Since use is not widespread yet, it might help to prevent a crack epidemic in city. Although his proposal was received well by politicians, there still is no money made available to start a campaign.



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