The Production of Insecurity in Brazil and Mexico[1]

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Abstract

Diminishing socio-economic inequality is a necessary but not sufficient condition for eliminating other forms of insecurity in Latin American societies. In recent years, the trajectories of Brazil and Mexico can be distinguished in terms of the way public policies have worked to reduce or increase social inequality, although both remain societies with high levels of inequality and deep deficits in the public provision of healthcare and education as well as high levels of crime and violence. There are also significant differences between their public security policies, and in both countries, significant differences between the security situations of different regions, which requite further critical analysis from a multi-dimensional perspective on what security and insecurity mean for ordinary people. This paper focuses on impediments to the production of public security policies that work for all citizens irrespective of their race and social class that are common to both countries. They include the role of legitimated and deniable violence in political life and pursuit of economic interests, and the extension of criminal opportunities through continuing diversification of national and transnational illegal economies that are part of a global development model in which criminal practices have become ever more entangled with the practices of apparently respectable states and private corporations. They also include the "capture" of police and military by non-state actors, and the continuing prevalence of rights-violating forms of state intervention that all too often lead disadvantaged citizens to accept the rule of crime as the lesser of two evils.

Keywords: securitization; Brazil; Mexico; organized crime; neoliberalism; states and parallel powers; policing; self-defence forces

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Introduction: capitalism, the state and the production of insecurity

Over the past ten years, Brazil and Mexico, the two largest economies in Latin America, appear at first sight to have followed radically different trajectories of economic development. Mexico is the Latin American country in which inequality and income concentration have increased most, and poverty has been reduced least, over the past decade. The most recent CEPAL figures suggest that poverty measured simply in terms of income levels diminished in Mexico, but only by 4.1%, less than in any other Latin American country, whilst indigence, standing at 13.3% in 2011 in contrast to 12.6% a decade earlier actually increased despite the continuation of the *Oportunidades* poverty alleviation program, the Mexican equivalent of Brazil's *Bolsa Familia* (CEPAL 2012). In Brazil, a decade of federal government led by the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) had reduced the number of Brazilians living in poverty from 37.5% to 20.9% of the population in 2011, and more than halved extreme poverty, to 6.1%. Under Dilma Rousseff's "Brazil without Misery" program (*Brasil sem miséria*), direct income transfers to poor families with children promise to eliminate indigence entirely. But the real measure of the success of Brazilian policies is that creation of more jobs that paid living wages enabled many poor families to move out of dependence on poverty alleviation programs altogether, and had a significant impact not simply on poverty, but on levels of social inequality.[2] Again in sharp contrast to Mexico, Brazil has pursued policies that reduce unemployment, foster substitution of formal employment with access to state benefits for informal sector work, and allow real wages to rise. Social mobility had ended during two decades of neoliberal structural adjustment, privatizations, restructuring of labour markets

[2] The Gini coefficient of inequality in income distribution in Brazil was 0.604 in the early years of the 1990s, falling to 0.587 by the end of Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration and reaching 0.5687 by the end of 2004 (Ivo 2008: 191). Although this was still a high level, the tendency to reduction in inequality of monthly income was evident for all regions and for both men and women in the 2007 figure of 0.534, and the annual pace of reduction was increasing, leading some analysts to suggest that Brazilian income inequality could converge with that of Western Europe within a decade (Soares 2008). Given that France has a Gini index of 0.308, there is still a long way to go to close the gap, but European austerity policies may make it easier: Britain's Gini coefficient, at 0.34, was at its highest in thirty years by 2011 (for further details, see http://www.poverty.org.uk/09/index.shtml, accessed 28 November 2012). The Brazilian Gini, in contrast, had fallen again, to 0.501 (IGBE 2011).

and precarianization of work (Guimarães 2006; Druck 2011), but returned to Brazil under Lula (Pochman 2009).

The Brazilian approach does not go down well with financial pundits in crisis-afflicted Europe, who have joined their U.S. counterparts in arguing that the Brazilian economy suffers from serious structural weaknesses in terms of global "competitiveness" that will limit future growth, which did falter in 2012 in terms of comparisons with the other BRICS, though not in comparison with Europe. Such critics tend to applaud the approach adopted by Mexico, whose recently improved growth is a consequence of reducing wage costs to levels more competitive with those of China, where real wages are rising. Further redistribution of income from labour to capital, the more critical reading of Mexican, U.S. and European policies, is likely to take place now that the Mexican congress has approved a "reformed" labour law that reduces the rights of workers and allows employers to benefit more from outsourcing. Yet if improved economic growth offers no benefits to a majority of citizens, this scarcely enhances the case for a country that has a large internal market and abundant natural resources joining in a "global race to the bottom", at least from the point of view of thinking about the kind of society that can be built on the basis of such an economy, as Joseph Stiglitz (2012) has recently argued with a degree of passion rarely expressed by economists.

It would, however, be unwise to paint too rosy a picture of Brazil. There is a long way to go before the legacy of the restructuring of labour markets in the 1980s and 1990s will be transcended, if it can be transcended in a political-economic framework that does not seek to "roll back" the entire neoliberal "reform" package inflicted on the country by the administrations of Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Although almost 24 million Brazilians, mostly young and many black, have ascended into the "C" class of persons earning between 4 and 10 minimum salaries, it is sociologically misleading, at present, to describe this group as a "new middle class". Entry into the world of mass consumption via widely available but expensive credit, and wider access to state subsidized home loans, does not erase the accumulated social

advantages that the "old" middle classes have acquired through private primary and secondary education, easier access to free public higher education, and membership of social networks that ease entry into professional careers (Souza 2009). In a society in which differences in lifestyle are maintained through residential arrangements and use of public space, and prejudices that link race and social class remain significant despite affirmative action programs, inequality has been reduced in terms of earned income, not capital, and capital has innumerable non-economic dimensions. Brazil's inequalities are deeply rooted in its history. The country suffers from severe deficits in public provision of healthcare and education that in 2011 left it in eighty-fourth place in the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index ranking, not only below Mexico but also below the average for the Latin American region (UNDP 2011).

It is commonplace, and not entirely mistaken, to link the urban labour market situation in Mexico and devastation of rural peasant economies to the growth of recruitment of young people into the world of organized crime. A deteriorating labour market in the United States, escalating costs of migration that result from border securitization, and tighter enforcement of sanctions against employment of undocumented workers plus a significant rise in deportations under the Obama administration, have reduced the balancing effect of the traditional safety-valve of international migration in regions such as Michoacán which have now become fiefdoms of the drug cartels. Yet the comparison with Brazil reveals the limits of simple correlations between economic conditions and the growth of crime and violence. If, in a general sense, we can argue that there is a relationship between levels of inequality and levels of criminality and violence,[3] reduction of inequalities has been accompanied not by a reduction but by an increase in violence and criminal activity in some parts of Brazil, such as the city of Salvador, Bahia, where my own recent research has been conducted. Brazil, a country of continental scale with borders that have proved almost impossible to police effectively,

[3] The relationship is clearly between *inequality* and violence and not *poverty* and violence, as Sapori (2007) has demonstrated.

though perhaps drones will soon be on the horizon, now offers the world's biggest market for crack cocaine and is the second biggest for overall cocaine use.[4]

Brazil has also been invoked as the paradigmatic Latin American exemplification of the "penal state" by sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2009), and Mexico could be considered another example. Wacquant's penal state is directly linked to neoliberalism, defined both as regime of capitalist accumulation and a mode of "governing" in a (modified) Foucauldian sense. Wacquant describes it as having a "left" hand which is "feminine" orientated to managing the consequences of economic precarianization through social interventions and a repressive "right hand" that is essentially about "punishing the poor". Some Brazilian scholars have already extended this conception of the Janus-faced logic of a neoliberal "society of control" to the favela "pacification" programs of Rio de Janeiro (Batista, ed., 2012), often presented as a "success" story when compared to the public security regime in São Paulo. Almost anything would be likely to qualify as relatively successful in comparison with the purely repressive approach pursued in Mexico under Felipe Calderón, which is conservatively estimated to have cost 60,000 lives over six years. But Wacquant's framework does remind us of some uncomfortable truths. One is that even the "gentle" interventions of social workers in poor communities may be directed to producing "docile" neoliberal subjects adapted to the lower niches of the labour market. Another is that Brazilian capitalism reflects broader tendencies, such as a political as well as economic dominance of real estate interests in the contemporary urban economy. This turns "urban rehabilitation" into a project orientated to the middle classes that entails eviction of the poorest sectors of the population from the spaces that they currently occupy even in the absence of sporting mega-events (Smith 2002; Rolnik 2012). Such processes of "accumulation by

[4] "Brazil's crack cocaine boom", *Financial Times,* Beyondbrics blog, http://blogs.ft.com/beyond-brics/2012/09/11/brazils-crack-cocaine-boom/#axzz265Rd7RKy, accessed September 11, 2011.

dispossession" (Harvey 2005) may be carried out through the direct deployment of state violence, as in the case of the forced removal of crack addicts from a prime redevelopment area in the centre of São Paulo, but they may also take place more gradually and indirectly as a result of new market forces unleashed by programs such as favela "pacification".

Nevertheless, Wacquant's ideas seem to fall short in a number of key areas, leaving aside the fact that in the Brazilian context it is difficult to ignore the ways that the "authoritarianism" in neoliberal governance replicates much longer standing historical patterns. He insists on describing the neoliberal state as a "Leviathan" whose contradictions lie principally in conflicts between distinct "bureaucratic" factions within it, given that the penal state seems to enjoy as much backing from centre-left as centre-right political parties within electoral democracies. He does not pay sufficient attention, in my view, to the permeability of the state to private interests, including organized crime, nor examine the way that the state itself is responsible, now and in the past, for the expansion of the illegal activities that have come to permeate its own institutions. In a case such as Mexico, this can lead to a transfer of effective sovereignty over significant parts of the national territory to a variety of non-state actors and the concentration of power behind the façade of the institutional state in the hands of groups and networks whose "shadow state" or "parallel power" escapes democratic control in practice despite the best efforts of new social movements explicitly focused on democracy, such as the student movement *#Yo Soy 132* in Mexico.

Beyond "state abandonment"

In this paper, I try to move beyond the commonly held view that the problems of physical insecurity faced by poor citizens and citizens who live in regions now controlled by organized crime are the product of abandonment by the state. Like Daniel Goldstein (2012), writing on Bolivia, I think it is more productive to understand both their situations and the way that they react to those situations in terms of the nature of the state's presence in their lives.

Even when state interventions are sporadic, their effects can be profound, whether it is in terms of enforcement of bureaucratic regulations that impede the necessary pursuit of livelihood through informal economic activities, or occasional invasions of communities by police who are both corrupt and careless of the collateral damage armed actions against specific criminals usually cause. The new public security policies that have been adopted in Rio de Janeiro through the installation of Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora (UPPs) and replicated in Bahia under the different name of Bases Comunitárias de Segurança (BCSs) promise a different approach, combining the delivery of social programs and infrastructure improvements with a model of community policing that will eliminate the vices of the past. As we will see, the second objective has proved difficult to attain, particularly in the case of large irregular settlements, and the first may be subject to Wacquant's critique of the agenda of the neoliberal state's left hand, depending on how it is handled, although there have also been attempts to promote the social mobility of *favelados* by means of cooperatives and other social economy projects (Da Costa y Castilho 2011).[5] Nevertheless, even relative "success" in pacification in terms of official criteria may have consequences of the kind mentioned earlier, facilitating the social mobility of a few at the expense of poorer residents. Furthermore, if we take a step backward, we can also see that the policy also reflects the pervasive "securitization" of social problems that has become characteristic of our era.

Pacification is based on the premise that situations in areas of social deprivation threaten the security of all other urban residents, because of the presence of violent criminals. This formulation threatens to exacerbate the injustice of the "territorial stigmatization" from which such communities already tend to suffer, to invoke another of Wacquant's concepts (Wacquant 2007), but without accepting the connotations of his resurrection of the concept of

[5] Those projects with which I am familiar in Bahia are, however, heavily dependent on state funding, much of it channeled through Petrobras, the national oil company, which is a public interest corporation with shareholders. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but such projects do not include large numbers of residents.

"marginality", which tends to imply a lack of capacity to organise politically as well as give a misleading impression of the social and economic profiles of heterogeneous populations of working people.[6] But in the Bahian case, where resourcing has thus far been inadequate to meet the ostensive goals of the pacification policy in all save one, comparatively small, show-case community, it also reveals the politicized nature of a project in which "getting results" in terms of getting good press for arresting drug traffickers and calming middle class anxieties seems to take precedence over improving the security of the residents of the targeted communities.

Ironically, the policy has thus far not produced a diminution of violence or crime but its migration to new areas and disturbing signs that displaced traffickers and their followers are turning to other forms of crime. So as things stand, the middle classes have not felt a heightened sense of security either. The Mexican comparison suggests that diversification into kidnapping, extortion and other kinds of illegal markets, particularly mining, may occur anyway in the longer term, given the failure of purely repressive policies to diminish the numbers of people eager to engage in such activities. But this brings us back to the question of whether it really makes sense to imagine "the state" and "the criminals" as constituting different sides in some cosmic battle against the dark forces of "insecurity" (Soares 2006).

As Michel Misse (1997) has shown, the return to more repressive policies in Rio de Janeiro after Leonel Brizola ended his second term as governor in 1994 resulted in an explosion of opportunities for every kind of police corruption, including sales of arms to traffickers and extorting payments in return for setting them free, as well as an ever closer integration of political and criminal networks as traffickers traded protection for bringing out the vote for their patrons by means of their backstage control of community institutions such as residents' associations. In Mexico, the proposed solution to the "capture" of municipal and state police by the cartels under the Calderón

[6] The fact that Wacquant writes of "advanced marginality" further distorts the picture for long-established, "consolidated" irregular settlements in Latin America. For empirically grounded critiques, see Caldeira 2009 and Hita and Gledhill 2010.

administration was to strengthen the role of the federal police, whose own level of penetration by organized crime was illustrated by several dramatic incidents in the final year of that government, including a fire fight between different federal police groups in the domestic terminal of Mexico City's airport. The founders of Los Zetas, principal competitor of "El Chapo" Guzmán's Sinaloa cartel in terms of the transnational extension of the reach of Mexico's cartels, were members of the Special Forces unit created to spearhead "the war against drugs" (Grayson and Logan 2012). It is therefore ever more difficult to draw any kind of clear boundary between "the state" and the criminal organizations that have penetrated public institutions at every level.

In the Mexican case, the main effect of past security policies has been to promote the increasing fragmentation of the cartels into loosely and unstably allied regional groupings that practice escalating and ever more horrific and "spectacular" violence against each other. The incoming Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) government of Enrique Peña Nieto has abolished its National Action Party (PAN) predecessor's public security secretariat and brought all security coordination back under the roof of the interior ministry (ill-famed for its role in the murder, torture and disappearances of student protestors in 1968). Although the military will continue to participate in security operations if needed, the new administration promises that the creation of a national gendarmerie will reduce the damage that has been done to the reputation of the armed forces as a result of their human rights violations,[7] some of which reflect the way that Calderón's government used operations against drug trafficking as a pretext to repress political opponents and social movements. Given that the new president was happy to accept responsibility for one of the most controversial repressions of

[7] In the state of Michoacán alone, there were 2,609 formal complaints against the military and federal police during the Calderón administration (*La Jornada*, February 23, 2013). In reality this is only the tip of an iceberg since most people are too frightened of reprisals to make a complaint or think, with good reason, that it will be pointless. I was able to document some unreported cases personally. Those who did see federal forces as the only viable solution to their problems became deeply disillusioned.

a social movement in recent Mexican history during his term as governor of the State of Mexico,[8] and inaugurated his period in national power by repressing student protestors, there are reasons for fearing that "security" will justify more of the same in the future, particularly given that the federal executive has now concentrated an unprecedented amount of repressive power under its direct control. Yet emphasis on efforts to re-centralize power and build a stronger federal government more akin to old regime of the PRI would give a misleading impression of the underlying condition of a state whose media-crafted figurehead was propelled to power by a lineage of politicians whose own relations with organized crime have been subject to considerable discussion over the years since they achieved national prominence under the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94). Even the old PRI state in its more coherent moments was never truly a Leviathan. But in at least some areas of the country, it is now the *narcos* who decide who should stand for election to public office and tell them what to do once they have achieved it.

The deep penetration of state and municipal government by organized crime is provoking a turn towards the creation of local self-defence forces in some regions, once again illustrating the principle that it is not so much the absence of the state as its representatives' behaviour as a presence that is the problem. In states such as Michoacán and Guerrero, some indigenous communities have longstanding traditions of communal policing. In these systems, serving in the police was a form of community service that most adults would perform at one or more points in their lives, without pay, and subject to election by community assemblies. Such organizations worked in terms of specifically indigenous concepts of security and the administration of justice, which take violence as an inevitable aspect of social life, and use a mixture of punishment and negotiation of settlements calculated to prevent conflict escalating (Gledhill 2012a). A regional confederation of communal

[8] This was the operation against the dissident ejidatarios of Atenco in 2006, who had defeated government plans to build a new international airport for Mexico City on their lands in 2002, and subsequently aligned themselves with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation's "Other Campaign".

police groups was established in Guerrero as far back as 1995 (the CRAC, Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias). Nevertheless, as more and more communities have found themselves plagued by extortion, drug addiction and violence, and official security forces have failed to act against the perpetrators or even guaranteed their impunity, self-defence organizations have begun to develop in non-indigenous communities and in regions without prior community policing traditions, and are, as I write this, multiplying on a daily basis.

Democratically-run local organizations of policing and the administration of justice that enjoy genuine popular support may offer a way forward to guaranteeing security to all in societies whose official justice systems are plagued by procedural inadequacies in terms of conventional western legal norms and class and racial biases. Furthermore, the indigenous self-defence organizations have tried to work with the official justice system despite their scepticism about it. Yet comparative historical evidence from countries such as Peru suggests that such “autonomous” groups are not immune from manipulation from outside or a play of internal factionalism that can generate “boss rule” (Starn 1999), and anxieties in Mexico are growing about the possibilities of similar developments. One fear is that some self-defence forces will become another paramilitary arm of an organized crime that has become politically sophisticated: some of the newer groups have an impressive armoury. In the case of Guerrero, the posture of a state governor who has a long experience of operating as a regional political boss has excited accusations that he plans to use some of these groups to suppress resistance to the extension of mining operations by transnational companies in his state.

But it is not simply the frontiers between the state and organized crime that have become permeable in Mexico. As my own research on the Pacific Coast of Michoacán has shown (Gledhill 2012b), even indigenous communities that have successfully defended their autonomy in the past are now being torn apart by the recruitment of young people into rival criminal organizations in a context in which all levels of government have allowed

paramilitary forces to operate with impunity, once again in a context in which indigenous communities have represented a barrier to the extension of mining operations. These are operations in which both transnational companies and the criminal organizations themselves have a direct interest through the growing transnational illegal market that supplies minerals to China in return for the precursor chemicals used to produce methamphetamines.

The Mexican scenario is therefore one of continuing fragmentation: fragmentation of the state in various different senses despite apparent recentralization efforts as backstage powers work to promote their interests at both national and regional level, and fragmentation of the cartels as regional groups assert their autonomy and enter into alliances that are made all the more unstable by operations that have followed a US-sponsored strategy of "decapitating" organizations without regard to the consequences in terms of competition for succession (Grillo 2012; Grayson and Logan 2012). Political authorities are part of this scenario of conflict between criminal organizations too, in the sense that they seek to negotiate deals with whatever faction appears to be in the ascendant locally, or, at the higher levels, reached out to them individually, which makes it difficult to see a consistent national pattern of the kind suggested by conspiracy-theory hypotheses such as the idea that "the state" has been trying to create conditions which will allow El Chapo Guzmán to liquidate his rivals and restore stability, or that the Federal Police always back the Zetas.

What can be said is that federal military and police operations in states such as Michoacán have so alienated the population that many of its residents have accepted the dominant group in that region,[9] the Caballeros Templarios, as the lesser of two evils, despite the fact that its public rhetoric of being a social movement defending the people of Michoacán from the Zetas and government alike is not consistent with its everyday practices of extortion. Operating through a cellular structure dispersed through rural communities, the Caballeros have established a parallel power that not only controls a good

[9] For more detailed historical and ethnographic information about drug trafficking, violence and community responses in Michoacán, see Maldonado 2010; 2012.

deal of municipal government but also provides its own services in the administration of justice and resolution of individual personal problems, including conflicts with other members of the community and powerful outsiders. The organization has demanded payments from the local managers of major transnational companies such as Pepsico, attacking their installations when payment was denied but justifying their actions by accusing the companies of covert collaboration with the federal police, telling the public that they have no intention of damaging legitimate businesses that dedicate themselves to their proper task of bringing jobs and prosperity to the people. That the only viable answer to the power of the Caballeros, who were in this context running local illegal logging operations, seemed, in the case of the municipality of Cherán in the Purhépecha highlands of Michoacán, to be the formation of an armed self-defence force and establishment of a "uses and customs" government run by a council of elders, is testament not simply to the corruption of the state and mainstream political parties, but also to the emptiness of federal public security policy.

The downside of rule by mafias, for that is what the Caballeros Templarios have become, is apparent enough in these examples, and from the comparative literature. As Jane and Peter Schneider (2003) argued in their analysis of the Palermo Mafia in Sicily, besides the contributions of mafias to the reproduction of a "subculture of violence", they tend to form dense networks with politicians and bureaucrats who often act as conflictive "pieces" of an internally fragmented state, as well as with bankers and other "respectable" private sector interests, such as real estate developers in the Palermo case. There is strong evidence of links between mining interests and paramilitary violence perpetrated by cartel gunmen in rural contexts in Mexico, which has the great advantage of easy "deniability" by both the companies and government, since violence is easily explained in terms of the drugs trade.[10] Although in this case organized crime has its own direct interest in the

[10] Where, as in the case of Chicomuselo in Chiapas, the leader of a local protest movement against the environmental devastation caused by a mining project is assassinated, the link is more obvious, but official investigations tend to stall.

sector, as they also have in the case of siphoning off oil from the pipelines of the national oil monopoly, PEMEX, the efficient operation of these illegal economies involves a degree of collaboration from within the “legitimate” operators in the sector. The Schneiders also point out, however, that repressing mafias can also cause harm to vulnerable people and communities. The potentially perverse consequences of policies of repression can be illustrated by the example of the Brazilian metropolis of São Paulo, which will also steer us towards further analysis of the role of state agents themselves in the production of insecurity.

The paradoxical virtues of the rule of crime

Homicide rates in São Paulo fell dramatically after 2006, a year which had seen a sanguinary confrontation between the police and the main criminal organization operating in the city and interior of São Paulo state, the PCC (Primeiro Comando da Capital). Originally created inside the prisons in which its leaders were incarcerated, the PCC’s operations on the “outside” are still directed from inside the gaols that the organization controls. What makes the PCC a distinctive force in the world of Brazilian drug trafficking is that it has not only achieved an almost undisputed hegemony over drug trafficking in São Paulo, but has also succeeded in instituting a strong control of the social life of São Paulo’s urban periphery, that includes the capacity to declare curfews. Administering its own kind of justice in zones where the police rarely entered, the PCC came to provide residents with a kind of security, through practices for which we now have detailed ethnographic evidence, thanks to the work of Brazilian scholars such as Vera Telles (2010) and Gabriel Feltran (2010a; 2010b).

Thieves that rob their neighbours, and rapists, tend to be harshly treated, but “the law of crime” administered by the PCC is not summary justice, since it is based on argument for and against the accused within deliberative procedures known as “debates”. Feltran (2010a: 111) argues that debates not only mimic the official justice system but have also “occupied the

legitimate space of the apparatus of violence previously regulated by practices of 'popular justice' such as lynching and payments to assassins". PCC hegemony in the urban periphery could therefore help us to understand the decline in homicide rates that occurred after 2006 (Feltran 2010b). Yet in 2012 the violence of 2006 repeated itself. To understand both episodes, we need to explore the relations between the state government, police and traffickers in more depth.

As an independent investigation by the NGO Justiça Global and a team from Harvard Law School has shown, the cause of the outbreak of hostilities between the PCC and police in 2006 was extortion practised by serving police officers against the relatives of imprisoned PCC leaders (Ribeiro et al. 2011). Violence escalated because the police responded with a campaign of extra-judicial executions that left 120 dead (compared with 48 police). It ended after a military police helicopter took a senior functionary and the lawyer of the PCC's charismatic leader[11] Marcos Willians Camacho, aka "Marcola", to the penitentiary in which the latter was incarcerated. Although the negotiation of a ceasefire deal is still officially denied, it appears that the state government agreed to allow the PCC leaders to continue to run the gaols. The renewal of violence in 2012 followed two violent police raids on PCC meetings in the urban periphery, one of them a "debate". In the first case six, and second case nine, people were executed in clear violation of the understanding that the police would not harm any criminal who offered to surrender (Martins 2012). Worse, state governor Geraldo Alckmin initially appeared to endorse this change of policy, although he was subsequently obliged to make a strong condemnation of a police execution that a member of the public filmed from a house across the street.[12] Another disturbing revelation was that it appeared that other police officers had sold the PCC computerized lists containing the full names, phone numbers and residential addresses of some of their

[11] For an analysis of the Marcola's skillful public use of the language of deprivation, rights and social justice, see Holston 2008.
[12] A local DJ who unwisely boasted to his friends that he did the filming was subsequently killed.

colleagues, adding to the risks facing serving and retired members of the force and their families.[13]

2012 also saw similar outbreaks of bus burning and shootings in the state of Santa Catarina to the south, which continued into 2013. These were clearly a direct response to mistreatment of prisoners in the state's typically overcrowded gaols, highlighting the problems facing a penal state that cannot effectively "decapitate" criminal organizations simply by imprisoning their leaders. In Mexico, a number of recent scandals have highlighted similar problems, but in both countries, they are problems that arise from a policy of mass incarceration of minor offenders, and a good many poor people who are not actually guilty as charged.[14] One of the consequences of present policies is that prisons become places where very young people learn the skills needed to advance in a criminal career, but even in the absence of major confrontations between security forces and traffickers, extra-judicial execution rather than prison will be the fate of many who participate in the world of crime.

In the case of Salvador in early 2013, a strike on the part of some elements of the military police revealed the extent to which death squads remained active. During the twelve days of the strike, 135 murders were committed. Of these the Department of Homicides and Protection of the Person detected 45 cases that manifested "characteristics of extermination". Amongst those, the department's director suspected that between 25 and 30 killings were committed by police acting as militias or clandestine private security agents paid by store keepers in poor communities, since although the perpetrators were masked they had used arms restricted to military use.[15] This is not the only evidence available of the longstanding and continuing significance of death squads in Bahia (Noronha 2008).

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[13] "Corregedoria suspeita que policiais venderam dados de PMs a bandidos", *Folha de São Paulo*, November 13, 2012.

[14] It is very probable, for example, that poor people in possession of small quantities of drugs will be convicted of trafficking but middle class people will not be charged with anything at all.

[15] "Delegado suspeita que PMs executaram 30 durante greve", *Jornal A Tarde*, February 15, 2012.

In the 1990s it was common for people setting up businesses in irregular settlements to hire extermination squads to "cleanse" the neighbourhoods of "undesirables". Their members were often off-duty or retired police, and although such "cleansings" could evoke ambiguous feelings on the part of residents when it came to the deaths of specific individuals (Nunes and Paím 2005), as in pre-PCC São Paulo, lynching and other "self-defence" practices were generally accepted in a context in which little was expected from the state except ill-treatment and authoritarianism. As Teresa Caldeira (2002) has shown, despite being the principle victims of police abuse, working class Brazilians themselves may be in favour of their persecutors executing those they themselves regard as "marginals" and "bandits". The frequency of such executions can be measured by the fact that even conservative newspapers generally add the adjective "supposed" in referring to firefights in which the police were "supposedly" returning fire after being attacked, the occurrence of which is often vehemently denied by witnesses.[16] In the case of Bairro da Paz, the community of 60,000 residents that I have studied in Salvador, however, the private security hired by the shopkeepers rapidly escaped the control of its creators and began to extort protection money from everyone in the community. This was a Bahian counterpart of the armed militias of Rio de Janeiro, which expel the traffickers only to impose their forms of extortion on the community not only through protection rackets, but also by levying "tolls" on sales of goods and services such as gas and cable TV (Zaluar and Conceição 2007). Militias have also served as the power bases of local politicians, replicating the kinds of political services that the traffickers and community leaderships offer elsewhere. Rio's Public Security Secretary Jose Mariano Beltrame has recognized that militias replicate the logic of capturing and controlling territory of his UPPs, but argues that his efforts to eliminate them are impeded by the absence of a clear legal

[16] The police often cover their tracks by taking the corpse of their victim(s) to hospital and contaminating the scene of the original shooting.

definition of militia activity as criminal.[17] In the case of Bairro da Paz, however, the community had achieved an unusually high level of militancy and organization while resisting repeated efforts to forcibly expel the residents from the land that they had invaded, strategically located on the major axis of expansion of the modernizing city (Hita 2012). They were therefore able to make enough noise to oblige the state to deal with the problem.

A police post was subsequently installed, but it was subsequently closed down as a result of widespread complaints and replaced by sporadic "ostensive" policing by motorised patrols and occasional major operations in pursuit of drug traffickers, one of which ended in ignominy when the invading police misread the street names and hauled a hard-working evangelical couple who devoted all their spare time to efforts to rescue kids from drugs naked from their bed into the street before figuring out their mistake. Residents of both sexes, and different ages, educational levels, occupations, creeds and political persuasions all accused this police unit of being authoritarian and racist. Younger people recounted endless stories of being stopped and searched without reason, talking of physical assaults as well as verbal abuse. But what is most significant is that the verbal abuse was often explicitly racist, despite the fact that the Bahian military police themselves are often dark afro-descendants who live in similar kinds of peripheral neighbourhoods: one female police officer who served in the first Base Comunitária de Segurança remarked that she wished they'd install one where she lived. There are various ways of looking at this apparent paradox.

The dominant culture of the military police (often criticized by new entrants) is authoritarian, the policed communities are stigmatized as nests of violent criminals, and the police do not generally have sufficiently reliable intelligence to identify who might be dangerous or not. This situation is even worse when police are based outside the communities and simply enter them to engage in "ostensive" policing or hunt for "suspects": best to treat everyone

[17] 'Hoje a UPP está nas mãos da sociedade', diz Beltrame, interview with Júlia Dias Carneiro, *http://www.bbc.co.uk/portuguese/noticias/2012/03/120314_beltrame_doha_jc.shtml, accessed March 15, 2012.*

as a “suspect”. But residents themselves sometimes identify neighbours or their children as “marginals”, following the logic of an unequal society that obliges all “those below” to engage in a daily struggle to assert their claims to “personhood” (Linger 1992), even if it is at the expense of others. The military police are entangled in the same logic, but their reactions are heightened by the real dangers of death or injury that they face in their work, on or off-duty,[18] and by the internalization of a securitization discourse that exaggerates the criminality of poor people (and may thus help to convince some, including some police, that extermination is legitimate). All this reinforces the “blackening” of poverty so characteristic of Brazil. There is a parallel in the victimization of indigenous people by mestizo soldiers and police in Mexico, which, even if only partial, nevertheless reflects the impact of racist ideologies in that country also (Stephen 1998).

One general lesson to be drawn from the problems confronting police reform in Brazil, besides the structural difficulties of an organization that separates the investigative, Civil Police, arm from the enforcement, Military Police, arm, results from the persistent refusal of politicians of all parties to honour promises to improve pay and career opportunities. Many police officers are obliged to seek additional sources of income, and many choose work as private security guards in their off-duty hours. As a result, public power is frequently captured by private interests, with the unfortunate consequence that officers or ex-officers working privately often enjoy impunity when they violate the law as a result of possessing these professional networks. Private security companies also recruit guards who are not police from the poor communities, who sometimes find themselves invited to “cooperate” with friends or neighbours seeking to rob premises in which they work. But the implications of the widespread use of former or serving police in this sector run much deeper.

[18] Off-duty officers identified by armed thieves robbing bus passengers may well be killed even if they do not “react” to the assault, for example.

Private power, criminal power, public power: the "Bahian UPP"

Bairro da Paz is now surrounded by middle class condominium developments whose encroachments on its borders, which are not clearly defined legally, took a more violent turn in 2011 when a few families living on the margins were forced to abandon their homes by armed security guards. In January 2012, a land speculator was lured into a trap and killed in his car along with his university student son. He had offered to give land to the community for building a sports centre whose ownership was disputed by another of his kind. It also subsequently became known that he had been passing information to the Public Attorney's Office on the fraudulent land transactions and false titling that underpinned much of the area's real estate development. Four members of the group of security guards that had menaced residents of the neighbourhood when they had tried to stop his rival clearing the disputed land just before the killing were arrested for the crime, but three others managed to escape, and the police have not succeeded in identifying who paid them to carry out the hit. What the case did reveal was the pervasiveness of clandestine private security operations in the city and the possible use of such networks not only by businesses such as wholesale warehouses but also by construction and real estate interests. As in the case of employment of killers from criminal organizations in Mexico, this underworld of irregular security operatives who are likely to keep their mouths shut offers rich possibilities for practicing "deniable violence".

The covert use of this kind of violence may play a role in "facilitating" the acquisition of land through piecemeal individual informal market transactions in strategically located irregular settlements such as Bairro da Paz in the future. Secure tenure of their land and the houses they have built on it is the major preoccupation from the perspective of Bairro da Paz residents on what security means for them. To date most attention in the community has been focused on the possibility of expropriations of land by the municipality in relation to preparations for the World Cup in 2014, since it lies on the main transport artery linking the airport to the city centre. By 2013 this seemed less probable given impending elections for governor in 2014, but

it may not be the main threat. Individual titles that would guarantee security of occupation to residents living in a central polygon have been repeatedly promised, and the new administration that entered office at the start of 2013 began immediate moves towards land regularization in this area. Yet many of the residents live outside this zone and given the juridical obscurity that surrounds land ownership throughout the area, the chances of the developers making inroads into this space are considerable. Even in the short term, land regularization of the type proposed will probably lead to the removal of a significant number of families whose homes are deemed to have been constructed in areas subject to high environmental risk.

When I first started doing fieldwork in Bairro da Paz in 2006, people were happy to talk about other aspects of security, since at that time the police post still functioned and the goal was seen as making those who served in it "more civilized". But by 2010, nobody wanted to talk about security in this sense any more. This was because drug trafficking had been taken over by a young man who set about implementing the paulista PCC model for governing the host community.[19] Petty crime ended inside it, and the traffic became very discreet, with no public display of arms. But because, as in Rio de Janeiro, drug trafficking in Salvador is relatively fragmented, there are regular struggles to take over rival local territories, which the Public Security authorities admit may be exacerbated by "pacification" as traffickers expelled from one area trying to set up in another. In the case of Bairro da Paz, the leader who had imposed "the order of crime" was gaoled. After a period of growing tension, in October 2011 a rival gang invaded the community and set fire to some shops and houses.

Not everyone had been happy about the rule of crime in the first place, but the ending of what had truly been a tranquil period in the community's history convinced many others that the state's coming back in might be the

[19] The PCC has attempted to build networks into other regions, and Bahia is probably the most important, but here as in Rio de Janeiro, there is little vertical integration of the kind some Mexican cartels have achieved. Local drug retailers may have regular sources of supply and stable supply chains, but these are managed by a variety of actors, most of whom appear to be employed in some respectable activity. Taxi driving is a popular choice for lower-level wholesalers.

best available option, and the community was already scheduled to receive a BCS, although the community leadership continued to oppose the idea publicly. The traffickers were still around and influential, although they now belonged to a different group.

When pacification finally took place, almost a year later and in the context of upcoming municipal elections that the state governor's party, the PT, failed to win, the aggressive manner in which police invaded homes searching for drugs, guns and suspects in the original occupation provoked complaints that continued into the first months of the base's existence, accompanied by accusations of damage to property and intimidation of minor children in intelligence gathering operations. The base itself was an improvised affair, since the converted school in which it was to be housed was not ready. There were no female police available to join the unit, nor enough male police properly trained in the skills of community policing that were supposed to transform the relations between police and residents. The police of the BCS did not go on foot patrols, an essential part of that strategy, but reproduced the old model of "ostensive" policing by vehicle. There were not enough of them to maintain a daily visible presence throughout a community of 60,000 residents and the patrols are not seen in many parts of the community. The base got good publicity in the media from a Christmas party that it organized for the children of the neighbourhood, but its impact in terms of winning hearts and minds inside the community was more limited. Although some of the traffickers involved in the violence of the previous year had already been arrested, and their leader, who escaped, is currently number two in Bahia's "most wanted" list, their successors also handed out presents to kids that Christmas.

What had happened was that the group known as the "Comando da Paz" had re-established its hegemony over the entire surrounding area at the time that the base was installed, something that, in the normal course of events, would reduce violence without police intervention. But in fact the police had intervened, in the nearby Nordeste de Amaralina complex, by

arresting the leaders of a group that had previously broken away from the Comando da Paz, along with most of the very young people who worked for them. This did not, however, mean that trafficking ended in Nordeste de Amaralina. Some months later two middle-aged residents were wounded in their homes while sitting watching TV after work, following a (supposed) exchange of fire with another group of traffickers. The neighbours insisted that the police had just descended on the street and started firing in all directions, a behaviour with ample past precedents, although the police insisted that this "collateral damage" was caused by the traffickers. Some would argue that the traffickers themselves orchestrate denunciations of the police, which do tend to follow a common script in different neighbourhoods, although criticisms of the bases are consistent with what people who want to see the traffickers expelled also report, and what our research team has observed directly. But two things are beyond question.

One is that the "Bahian UPP" is an improvised and under resourced strategy that still largely reproduces the vices of past models of "ostensive" policing, with the exception of the first, model, project in the Calabar neighbourhood. In this form it will not easily capitalize on the fact that some people are willing to give official policing another chance. The other is that the physical security of residents is a secondary consideration, since the authorities accept that migration of traffickers takes place as a result of pacification and will likely cause violence elsewhere.[20] Although some traffickers have in fact simply gone off to lie low with relatives or associates elsewhere, accepting the displacement of the problem is to accept the inevitability of more collateral damage. What seems the principal driver of strategy is gaining headlines for successes in a "war against drug trafficking" that has not thus far produced particularly impressive results in terms of the situation inside the pacified communities, and has been accompanied by an

[20] Newspaper interview given by Mauricio Telles Barbosa, Secretary of Public Security for the State of Bahia, "Traficantes que fogem das bases da Polícia buscam atuar em outros bairros", *Correio da Bahia*, September 15, 2012

increase in other types of crime, including a growing number of armed assaults on middle class families inside their condominiums.

Although the “left hand” of the state appeared in force in Bairro da Paz in December 2012, many of the problems discussed, including the disrepair and understaffing of the community’s medical clinic and inadequate public investments in infrastructure, had long been problems to which the community’s own organizations had been demanding solutions. Training programs, cooperatives and programs to persuade kids to stay away from drugs were already in operation, in large measure due to programs run by NGOs that maintain facilities within the neighbourhood. Much may depend on what more can be delivered and how quickly, but it will not be enough unless the role of the police changes too. The eruption of violence in 2011 did scare staff coming in from outside as well as residents. But to break the intimidating power of the traffickers and foster a new confidence in the state’s good intentions, the smart strategy would have been to build a functioning community policing regime that would allow the police to build genuine support and break the code of silence, whilst simultaneously supporting (and protecting) community organizations and attending to the problems of insecurity that most preoccupy residents themselves.

Formally, institutions do exist for “democratizing” the production of public security policies and allowing residents to have a say. Community Security Councils (Conselhos Comunitários de Segurança, CONSEGs) are supposed to bring together police and representatives of the different kinds of residents inhabiting a region. But although representatives of Bairro da Paz have participated in the local CONSEG, it has always been difficult to transcend the barriers of suspicion that divide Bairro da Paz from the middle class residents of the surrounding condominiums, particularly given the tendency of senior police officers to identify Bairro da Paz as the home of the area’s robbers and burglars as well as its drug traffickers. Negative perceptions may be reinforced by the installation of a BCS unless active steps are taken to move understandings in different directions. A better

implementation of the BCS project might actually lead the traffickers, conscious of their diminishing power, to withdraw without confrontation. Force can be demonstrated without violence. Yet even if the end game were one of violent confrontation, it would have a better chance of gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the residents than a situation in which everyone who lives in the community feels treated as an object of suspicion.

Nevertheless, the other fatal weakness of the policy is that it is likely simply to displace the problem from one place to another. The big wheels of organized crime do not live in favelas. Drug trafficking and drug addiction require coordinated actions at different levels and cannot be eliminated simply by "punishing the poor". Furthermore, Mexican experience suggests that, although it might help, even decriminalizing and regulating the drugs trade is no longer enough, given the diversification of organized crime into other activities, a tendency already incipient in Bahia. Since state agents routinely practice extortion, it is scarcely surprising that "parallel powers" are getting in on the act.

Yet comprehensive police reform will cost a lot more money than is presently in the budgets of the state and federal governments, and it will not be possible, however much money is thrown at the problem, without continuing commitment to break what Michel Misse (1997) terms "the dangerous connections" between "markets for illegal economic goods" and "political commodities", a problem that is also at the root of the Mexican dilemma. Whilst powerful economic interests find it convenient to hire violent criminals or suborned state agents to do their dirty work for them, disadvantaged citizen will continue to suffer, yet many will find the what the rule of crime has to offer preferable to abuse by state agents deployed (and also in a sense victimized) to maintain the existing order of power relations. In some circumstances, the rule of crime may be better able, under prevailing conditions, to reduce violence inside communities than the state is. The problem is that a criminal organization seldom achieves uncontested hegemony, state repressive actions frequently militate against stability, and when the state and capitalist corporations become sufficiently entangled in

Misse's "dangerous connections", we get to the kind of impasse that has occurred in Mexico.

Conclusion: the "banalization" of violence and insecurity

I am in Michoacán, Mexico, visiting a peasant family I have known for thirty years. In the course of my visit I talk on the phone to three of the kids who are in the United States when they ring their mum. They grumble about Obama's moves against illegals causing plants to close and tell me things are getting bad in terms of earnings, but the daughter says she has to stay there because her US-born kids don't want to come back to live in the village even though she built a lovely house which is full of TVs and computers. I ask her mother whether they feel insecure with all the criminal violence going on. The entire municipal police force of a neighbouring municipality was kidnapped, tortured and executed by the narco a few weeks earlier. No, she says, apart from the extortionists who call you on your cell phone, it's pretty quiet here. "They" just leave the dismembered and decapitated bodies of people they kill in other places neatly stashed in plastic bags in front of the community cemetery, which is out amongst the fields. A grandson later tells me that this community enjoys "their" protection. A few days later we go to enjoy a bull riding festival. During it, the army blew away four alleged kidnappers on a back road nearby.

I am in Salvador, and the press is full of lurid accounts of how two teenage girls, aged 16 and 13, have been tortured and decapitated by a group of traffickers. They had left their homes in another community to meet up with these men without telling their parents, and the father of the older girl, a fireman, had received a final call from her cell phone in which she pleaded with him to pay a ransom to rescue her, although the traffickers, all in their early twenties, killed her anyway. Torturing and decapitating are not yet as "normal" in Bahia as they have become in Mexico. Public opinion was outraged at the brutal killing of these "innocent children". But they may not have been so innocent, though they were certainly naïve. According to a member of the gang who claimed not to have participated in the killing, the

older girl already had a sexual relationship with one of its members, and had promised to show them where the traffickers of their own neighbourhood stashed their guns and drugs.[21] He claimed that they were killed because it was discovered that they were making out with members of the gang in order to lure them into a trap planned by the rival group: hence the "excess" of violence. But excesses of violence are increasing. Another young woman organized a group of friends to kidnap a rival who had slept with her boyfriend and filmed her torture on her cell phone. Governor Jacques Wagner has publicly lamented the increasing "banalization" of violence, including sexual violence, in relation to kidnappings, robberies and assaults in Bahia, but the problem appears to be broader than that.

Some would rationalize the "excess" of violence in Mexico, which even shocks seasoned war correspondents from foreign countries, in terms of the particular conditions of the struggle over control of the drugs trade. But we need to think about what violent acts seek to communicate. The dismembered bodies often carry written messages addressed to the rival group, and the torturing, which is prolonged, also seeks to signal an implacable willingness to escalate and gain revenge. Brutal treatment of bodies has occurred at other times of crisis in Mexican history, particularly when rebels faced government forces with greater firepower and equal ruthlessness, but it was less focused than contemporary brutality on sending public messages. In Jalisco state, traffickers kidnapped and dismembered school children who had no involvement in crime simply because they needed bodies to dump on the *autopista* to show that they were still a force to be reckoned with after a police operation had captured some of their leaders. What kinds of processes might explain the diminishing value of any human life for some actors in these regions?

Economic models that reproduce or intensify profound social inequalities create populations of "desechables" whose own struggles to

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[21] "Polícia apresenta dois suspeitos pela decapitação de adolescents", *Jornal A Tarde*, December 6, 2010.

acquire social value may express themselves in violent attempts to dominate others, as well as violence directed to satisfying the desire to acquire the commodities and life style that seem essential for being a “someone” in a neoliberal market society. Others born into more fortunate circumstances may experience, or feel threatened with, downward mobility. Some of the opportunities that the contemporary capitalist economy offers are experienced as degrading, and even if people do achieve some degree of satisfaction in their job in itself, work in an economy increasingly orientated to services may involve interacting with others whose superior standards of consumption create a sense of unfairness and frustration that may tempt a person into crime. Most people, of course, manage to live with their frustrations and resentments and many still hope that their children’s lives will be better if they sacrifice themselves. But once violence becomes a widely available model for making oneself powerful rather than powerless, as well as a means of enjoying patterns of consumption denied to “desechables”, it becomes an increasingly tempting choice. Not respecting the life of others easily becomes integral to the alternative moral universe that joining the drug traffickers invokes, since it is a choice that will likely end in one’s own death.

But participation in various forms of people trafficking (also prevalent in both Brazil and Mexico) is also about devaluing of the rights of others to be treated as human. Furthermore, people traffickers seem prone to abusing their victims personally before selling them on to others. Leaving the world of organized crime aside, examples I gave earlier also suggest that the commercial sexualisation of human relationships by the mass media and marketing campaigns adds to longstanding patterns of violence within domestic relations, including, in the Bahian case, underreported abuse of women by their fathers or stepfathers, attracting women as well as men to adopt violent strategies for overcoming feelings of powerless in order to set their relationships and sense of self-worth to rights. Although jealous schoolgirls usually just stab their rivals, filming the extended humiliation and pain of the rival seems to take the message to a higher level.

These are all good reasons for seeking to limit the repressive counter-violence of the state, and democratize the production of public security policies by promoting citizen participation and deliberation that enables people to express their own priorities, at all levels, without reducing the poor simply to objects of paternalistic or authoritarian intervention. If reform is at all levels, then local security arrangements can be democratized without being disarticulated from the wider rule of law, although a degree of legal pluralism can be positive, and without running the risks that may accompany local groups taking their security entirely into their own arms-bearing hands. Reduction of inequalities in relation to control of assets as well as income levels must be integral to improving security in the broader, "human security" sense that includes a decent job and a decent home in a decent and safe environment. But trying to contain violence by yet more violence has already proved a failure, at least for everyone who does not profit from the plunder of national resources, the transfer of income from labour to capital, and the markets that only extreme privilege or violence itself can create.

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