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POLICY COMMENTARY

# Crime, Power, and Authoritarian Capitalism: A Dystopian Realism Experiment

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The article contrasts the richness of academic production on illegal markets in Brazil to the obscurantist context of contemporary Brazilian politics. The text takes up the main topics of the Special Issue and faces a challenging question: considering the knowledge produced by the articles as a whole and the situation opened by the victory of the far- right in Brazil, what can we expect in the near future? Certainly, continuity, if not increase, of mass incarceration with class, racial and territorial bias, as well as strengthening of the most retrograde policies in criminal justice, with official legitimation of police lethality in peripheries and favelas, now consecrated as a State policy. On the one hand the modern edge of capitalism, the most insidiously averse to rights, exclusive and inseparable from crime; on the other, social barbarism.

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The papers in this Special Issue of JIED describe key aspects of contemporary Brazilian society. They focus on several of its constitutive dimensions, which are far from restricted to public policy or criminal matters, unlike what a hasty analysis might suggest. It is worth noting some of the aspects and dimensions discussed:

- (1) Speedy mass incarceration, driven by a combination of factors, including the Anti-Drug Act and its draconian application by courts, biased by class, racial, and territorial prejudice.<sup>1</sup> The study<sup>2</sup> focuses on the state of São Paulo; however, it provides a view of a wider reality as shown, for example, by research conducted recently by the Public Defender's Office of the state of Rio de Janeiro, as well as data from higher courts—the STJ (*Superior Tribunal de Justiça*, or Brazilian Superior Court of Justice) and the STF (*Supremo Tribunal Federal*, or Brazilian Federal Supreme Court).
- (2) The unreasonable repercussions of the 'war on drugs,' either on security policy management in view of the impressive waste of human and material resources, or on the practical field.<sup>3</sup> Once again, surveys conducted in the state of Rio de Janeiro confirm the paper has a wider relevance although it focuses on the state of São Paulo.
- (3) The veritable genocide of poor black youth in favelas and the outskirts of large cities, encouraged by the state's law enforcement agencies with the flimsy excuse of fighting drugs. Local action groups have been created in recent years to promote a critical understanding of this situation in

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<sup>1</sup> I examine this issue from a complementary perspective, by considering the Anti-Drug Act and the police model in its mechanical workings, so to speak, in a paper I presented at the *Seminário Internacional: Emancipação, inclusão e exclusão. Desafios do Passado e do Presente* (International Seminar: Emancipation, Inclusion and Exclusion. Past and Present Challenges), held at the University of São Paulo on October 28–30, 2013, and coordinated by Professors Lilia Schwarcz and Maria Helena PT. Machado, as part of the *Conferência USP Humanidades 2013* (2013 USP Humanities Conference) program. That first version of that paper was published in a book organized by Schwarcz and Machado (2018). An updated version will be published in my book *Desmilitarizar* (Demilitarize) (Boitempo, in press).

<sup>2</sup> I am referring here to the paper entitled 'Incarcerating at Any Cost: Drug Trafficking and Imprisonment in Brazilian Court Reasoning,' by Máira Rocha Machado, Mariana Celano Souza Amaral, Matheus de Barros, and Ana Clara Klink de Melo, in this dossier.

<sup>3</sup> I am referring here to the paper entitled 'Low Impact, Wrong Direction: Why São Paulo State Drug Policy is Inefficient and Ineffective,' by Leonardo de Carvalho Silva and Bruno Langeani, in this dossier.

the areas directly affected by it and of the role of prohibitionism in this context. The reflective statement about those initiatives reverses the spatial and political polarization because the periphery becomes the city center and potential victims assume the central role.<sup>4</sup> Although focusing on Rio de Janeiro, the text is more widely relevant as well.<sup>5</sup>

- (4) The adoption by groups robbing banks in different parts of Brazil of the PCC's organizational features, which cannot be dissociated from that organization's corporate culture—less rigid, vertical, and hierarchical, and more flexible, malleable, and horizontal. This shows the PCC is becoming influential due to not only the expansion of its economic and fire power, but also the *Prägnanz*, functionality, and adaptability of its values and relationship standards.<sup>6</sup>
- (5) The coordinated action between the 'productive' chain of motor vehicle thefts—comprised by vehicle resale or disassembly, informal insurance, the dynamics of drug trafficking and the formal insurance market—and their lobbies and legislative initiatives, which call for regulation benefiting this constellation of factors, whose flows cross the porous, ambiguous border separating and uniting legal and illegal.<sup>7</sup>
- (6) The points of contact between state initiatives and criminal interests, the latter of which subject, blackmail, and exploit locals benefiting from housing policies in the state of Rio de Janeiro, mainly in the western part of the state capital and in the Baixada Fluminense region. Buildings and building management are appropriated directly or indirectly by militiamen, criminals belonging to organizations formed by 'law enforcement officers,' current and former police officers.<sup>8</sup> Once again, there is a fine line between law and crime, 'order' and 'disorder,' state action and its mirror image.<sup>9</sup>
- (7) Overlaps, points of contact, elimination of boundaries and interconnections between legal and illegal, formal and informal, are also day-to-day, socially naturalized phenomena of everyday life in the cities of Rio and São Paulo. In this case, the object of analysis is the different local specificities of drug trafficking.<sup>10</sup> In Rio de Janeiro, the three factions trafficking illegal substances are similarly organized despite the open rivalry among them and with the police, large segments of which work jointly with the 'crime.'<sup>11</sup> The dynamics in São Paulo differ from those in Rio de Janeiro in terms of organizational structures, identities, the overall sense of belonging, the relationship with the arms market, negotiations and agreements with segments of law enforcement, and coordinated action with different types of criminal activities, just as there are fewer conflicts. All those differences are reflected in the crime situation in the state of São Paulo, in which there are fewer murders and more offenses against property.<sup>12</sup>
- (8) Strengthened partly by a more dynamic transnational drug market, in which Brazil served as a section of a route, a bridge to other countries, before becoming a major consumer market, the economy of illicit substances eventually started financing arms trafficking in São Paulo and

<sup>4</sup> This is a reference to the paper '#FavelaLivesMatter: Youth from Urban Peripheries, Political Engagement and Alternatives to the War on Drugs,' by Ana Clara Telles, Luna Arouca, Raull Santiago, and Thaynara Santos.

<sup>5</sup> This tragedy has a history and political roots (cf. Soares 2000, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> I refer here to the paper entitled 'Pioneers: The PCC and Specialization in the Market of Major Robberies,' by Jania Perla Diógenes de Aquino, in this dossier.

<sup>7</sup> The references here are two different but complementary studies, both in this dossier: '(Il)licit Markets in Brazil: An Ethnographic Perspective,' by Gabriel de Santis Feltran, and 'Creating (Il)licit Markets: an Ethnography of the Insurance Market in Brazil,' by Deborah Fromm.

<sup>8</sup> My reference is the paper entitled 'Urban Public Works, Drug Trafficking and Militias: What are the Consequences of the Interactions Between Social Work and Illicit Markets?' by Marcella Araujo, in this dossier.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to the bibliographical references quoted in the paper, there is a detailed account of real situations, in a fictional style (so its publication poses no major risks for the authors), in Soares et al. (2010).

<sup>10</sup> I am referring to the paper entitled 'Movement and Death: Illicit Drug Markets in the Cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro,' by Daniel Veloso Hirata and Carolina Christoph Grillo, in this dossier.

<sup>11</sup> I have written a summary of the history of this organizational model and the dynamics of its replication, conflicts, and coordinated action with the police, based on topography and social geography (cf. Soares et al. 2005), which can still be useful. I also propose in that book an interpretation of the development of identities by drawing an analogy with the totemic model, studied in ethnology. Regarding the experience of belonging, in the context of extreme antagonism experienced by young people engaged in drug trade activities in Rio de Janeiro and in other areas in which armed conflicts are common, I suggest referring to my paper 'Juventude e violência no Brasil contemporâneo' (Youth and Violence in Contemporary Brazil), the original version of which was published in Novaes and Vannuchi (2004). A new version will be published in *Desmilitarizar (Demilitarize)* (Soares, LE. Boitempo: in press). In addition to the bibliography quoted in the respective text, I also recommend the book about drug trafficking in the Rocinha favela by Misha Glenny (2016).

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the bibliography referred to in the paper, I recommend the book by Paes Manso and Nunes Dias (2018).

throughout the country. That bridge leads mainly to Europe and more and more often to Africa, which had a medium, intermediate position in the global geopolitics of drugs like Brazil, but is increasingly becoming the end consumer market, without prejudice to its previous role, which is still fulfilled. Connections with African drug traffickers,<sup>13</sup> immigrants or not, in networks comprising different—particularly religious—organizations are progressively relevant and need thorough research, not least to prevent sweeping unfounded, stigmatizing accusations, which only strengthen and aggravate racism and other forms of prejudice.<sup>14</sup>

- (9) Modernizing inclusive economic and tax policy initiatives, studied mainly in São Paulo, designed to encourage the 'enterprisation' of informal trading to increase tax revenue, formalize employment, and align enterprises with the logic of trading capital, eventually lead to more exclusion and inequality, as well as an increase in real estate prices in urban areas, thus serving the interests of big business.<sup>15</sup> Boundaries are crossed here as well. By attracting to the formal economy, the state expels to the informal economy; by expanding the urban space governed by lawful order, public policies increase the areas not reached by that order, with its benefits, as well as losses and their perverse effects. The very definitions of formal and informal become less and less clear, and even more so as changes in labor laws affect ordinary people's lives more widely and significantly.

This impressive array of descriptions and interpretations that thematize different objects is centered on an epistemological and empirical-analytical axis—discussed by Gabriel Feltran in the conclusion of his paper—that pervades all the texts in this dossier implicitly or explicitly and, therefore, orders them. Given its importance, I must quote an extensive excerpt from it:

How can we determine where an illegal market begins if it is certain that empirically a 15-year-old boy can earn 300 reais [\$80] by selling cocaine and immediately buy a pair of Nikes in cash at the mall near his home? His 'dirty' money from the drug trade becomes 'clean' money in the formal economy, with consumption taxes paid, in minutes. Likewise, but on another scale, a coffee container (with hundreds of kilograms of cocaine as overweight) can be shipped from the Port of Santos to Europe and bring in foreign exchange unofficially—paid in cash—to buy, for 4 million reais [\$1,059,520], a farm on the Bolivian border and a brand-new Toyota SW4, among other items. There are countless means to launder money, all of which are already well-known, in both domestic and international transactions, including: bitcoins, fake invoices issued by hotels, gas stations or car dealerships, as well as very expensive jewelry and works of art, or even soccer players and investments from multinational churches. 'Dirty' money becomes 'clean' money. Therefore, there is no point at which an illegal market ends and a legal market begins, in analytical terms, when money is considered a mediating object to study. Both markets are connected directly through consumption or indirectly through other markets (money laundering, but also auctions and insurance, all legally organized.) Monetary economy connects legal and illegal markets."<sup>16</sup>

That is empirical-analytical dimension of that guiding axis. The epistemological dimension is implied in the epigraph: 'even the empirical in its perfected state might no more replace philosophy as an interpretation, a coloring, and an individually selective emphasis of what is real' (Georg Simmel – *Philosophy of Money*). Given the inexistence of self-evident experiences, devoid of hermeneutic appropriation and disconnected from an analytical sample, it is warranted to examine the phenomena from a specific perspective that, like any bias, refracts objectivity and implies choices whose axiological foundation is boldly asserted, even

<sup>13</sup> My reference here is the paper 'Development of the Brazilian Drug Market Toward Africa: Myths, Evidences and Questions,' by Corentin Cohen, in this dossier.

<sup>14</sup> A chapter of *Meu Casaco de General* (My General's Coat) (Soares 2000) explores the stigmatization of Angolan immigrants in Rio de Janeiro in 1999, victimized by widespread accusations clearly inspired by racism. Those falsely accused suffered tragic consequences, and the Ambassador of Angola was called back to his country. The crisis worsened quickly and only came to an end after intense political mobilization.

<sup>15</sup> According to the paper entitled 'Problem and Power: Informal Commerce Between Repression and Enterprisation,' by Felipe Rangel, in this dossier.

<sup>16</sup> It is worth consulting the paper by Roberto Saviano (2015) about the global economy of cocaine and its inseparability from the legal economy, in which the same empirical-analytical perspective is applied to, and supported by, countless examples of great importance.

when not clearly shown. Values intrinsically carry policies and vice versa; therefore, the ethical and political commitment of the intellectual project embodied in this dossier is a key element of its nature, identity, and quality. Just as legal and illegal pervade each other, so that they ultimately become parts of a continuum, the final substantive distinction between which tends to be blurry and the 'real' is left adrift, floating between political and legal games, the different modes of expression—constative/descriptive, performative, analytical, interpretive, judgmental and normative—and their rules also overlap on the discursive level in this joint project. There is no naiveté here; therefore, there is no pride in indifference, typical of positivism, either. We seek to avoid confusion between, for example, the descriptive-analytical and the normative modes because confusion is hybridity unaware of itself and consequently reflects theoretical immaturity; however, we make a distinction between the cognitive and the discursive registers to ensure clarity and thoroughness, and not to pursue institutional silencing and hierarchizing strategies, typical of low-level 'politics.'

A challenging question has yet to be answered in these brief supplementary notes to the dossier: Considering the knowledge produced by these papers and the situation resulting from the victory of the far-right in Brazil, with an ultra-neoliberal economic agenda, what can we expect for the near future?<sup>17</sup> There will certainly be a continuity of, if not an increase in, mass incarceration based on class, color, and territorial prejudice. After all, there are clear signs future federal administrations and legislatures will thwart any attempt to loosen the Anti-Drug Act. On the other hand, the new situation only strengthens the most conservative and punishment-minded segments of the judiciary and of the public prosecutor's office. We should also expect an increase in excessive police violence in favelas and on the outskirts of large cities because the new president bragged in his campaign that he would change the rules of police engagement and have affirmative defense approved,<sup>18</sup> which in practice means attempting to legitimize extrajudicial killing, which tends to become even more frequent than it already is. Everything indicates the horror and bloodshed already victimizing poor and black young people, although denied by the government, will be established as a state policy.

The new rulers' words, gestures, and track records suggest the problem of criminal factions will be tackled by increasing repression in prisons and curtailing convicts' meager rights; that is, the Sentence Execution Act will be even less respected, if not amended to reflect more closely the inhumane situation of the prison system rather than the current legislation. The combination of prison tension with a rise in 'legalized' police killings in cities, which tends to increase disorder in the geopolitical distribution of territories among criminal factions and in the criminal division of labor, will probably fuel and expand the spiral of violence. It should not be forgotten that denying suspects the opportunity to surrender forces them to resort to weapons and fight to the death, as well as murder police officers on or off duty in anticipation of conflicts, as shown by the Rio de Janeiro experience. Bloodshed is increased by vendettas, and life in low-income communities becomes hell, even more unbearable than everyday life under local armed authorities often is.

Other significant factors showing an increase in different forms of violence are, on the one hand, the tacit authorization, implied from the winning political discourse, to misogynistic, homophobic, LGBT-phobic, and racial assaults and, on the other hand, the permission for the police to act with brutality and even kill. It is widely known that police officers, when given freedom to kill without having to suffer any consequences of such an extreme act, feel they have the power to decide whether or not to do it. As a result, they are often encouraged to sell the decision not to kill for amounts limited only by the blackmailed person's ability to raise money and buy his or her life. No other corrupt currency has such great inflationary potential; therefore, nothing boosts corruption as much as officially sanctioned lethal police brutality. The context created by the combination of all those circumstances is obviously conducive to the formation of militias and strengthens those in operation. As a result, both the oppression and militarization of low-income communities are current trends.

Militias are armed vigilante groups comprised mainly of current and former police officers that impose levies illegally and benefit parasitically from all local business activities, including land use and property occupancy. As they grow and strengthen, institutions are deteriorated, which, in turn, fosters corruption and connections between the police and criminal factions. All those problems already exist, and it is already impossible to distinguish between legal and illegal from so many points of view and in so many aspects of social, political, and economic life. In fact, that interconnection will be strengthened, mainly in a context marked by the major changes introduced in labor laws, which will hinder those wishing to transition from

<sup>17</sup> From this point on, I will be referring tacitly to each of the nine items listed in the introduction.

<sup>18</sup> So did the governors elected in the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in 2018.

the informal to the formal economy to obtain their rights, as well as encourage the move in the opposite direction, thus blurring the distinctions that supposedly characterize the legal sphere. In parallel, social exclusion resulting from the selective formalization of business activities through 'enterprisation' will tend to increase because the balance of power leans toward the elite and 'the big boys.' It is reasonable to expect the connections between illicit activities and the profits of the most influential companies to be strengthened indirectly because lobbies, including that of insurance companies, are usually favored or even legalized by ultra-liberal governments.

The weapons and ammunition market is already booming, and the new administration has promised not to prevent 'good citizens' from buying guns. As is widely known, 'more guns equals more deaths,' so that is another factor leading to the dystopian situation I unfortunately feel compelled to describe for the sake of intellectual honesty.

In this environment marked by regression and obscurantism, loss of social rights, increased violations of individual rights, environmental degradation, and neglect of national sovereignty are all to be expected. In addition, it will be impossible to resume the debate about the police structure and the institutional law enforcement framework (the most promising reference for which was PEC [*Proposta de Emenda à Constituição*, or Constitutional Amendment Bill] 51, proposed by Senator Lindbergh Farias in 2013), unless regressive reforms strengthening the militarization of law enforcement and a corporatist insulation of the police are proposed.

Punitiveness and judicial activism, which have served the coup d'état mentality at least since President Dilma Rousseff was impeached in 2016 and secondarily excluded former President Lula da Silva from the election in 2018, have increasingly admitted their ideological face. In fact, they may become even more extreme in the coming years by tapping into all their pragmatic potential to politicize both courts and the public prosecutor's office, a rightist segment of which has already organized itself into as a political-ideological faction and issued a 'pro-society' manifesto endorsing the new rulers' ultra-conservative anti-globalist discourse. The next step may be the judicial persecution of environmental NGOs, human rights advocacy organizations, and social movements by focusing on economic aspects and blocking access to international funding, as in Hungary and Turkey, for example. The criminalization of leaders and activists can provide a veneer of 'democratic' legitimacy for political repression, thus suggesting to international public opinion that institutions are working normally and only fulfilling their duty to enforce the law. Public demonstrations against the court-approved 'democratic' elimination of democracy may pave the way for the declaration of a state of defense or siege, thus normalizing the state of exception and establishing a dictatorship by using the means provided by the 'democratic rule of law.'

That would be a tragic situation, but it would fulfill the historical role of showing the skeptics from post-dictatorship generations that the state of emergency now informally in place, which governs police operations in vulnerable areas, can become even more intense and arbitrary if it is institutionally established. Therefore, we have a great deal to lose if we despise democracy because of its limitations and contradictions. It is always a good time to learn that, from the perspective of the grassroots' interests, it is a serious mistake to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Last but not least, it is worth noting some connections between two issues. The first is the development of authoritarian capitalism in Brazil. It was based on the conservative modernization model, which involves, albeit marginally, the subsumption of labor under capital<sup>19</sup> formally through political (and political-repressive) interventions and the immobilization of the working class (two classic examples of which are the monopoly of land and slavery), which, in turn, preserve traditional economic and social systems by combining them unevenly with more dynamic modern processes of capitalist economy, under the hegemony of financial capital.

The second is non-strictly capitalist forms of labor or labor relations and of appropriation of surplus, although externally connected with the capital dynamics such as: (a) those connections forged within drug trafficking, in Rio de Janeiro's favelas and peripheries, characterized by a hierarchically organized division of labor in which actors, some of whom are children, establish links with one another of subordination at times of a proto-military nature, governed by specific rules and values; or (b) those established between militias and residents, who pay the fee set by the local armed group. The militia model depends on each group's

<sup>19</sup> In *Capital* (Marx 1971), there are only a few passages in which Marx thematizes the concepts of formal and actual subsumption of labor to capital. In Volume One, they appear in Sections Five, 'The Production of Absolute and Relative Surplus-Value,' and Seven, 'The Process of Accumulation of Capital,' specifically in the chapter 'The So-Called Primitive Accumulation,' and in Volume Two, on pages 216 and 236. There is no reference in Volume Three. Friedrich Engels refers to those concepts in the foreword to Volume One, on page 40.



strength and territorial domination, as well as the consent of law enforcement agencies, whereas the drug trafficking model relies on loyalty based on the virtuality of force, police complicity (though different from that in the case of militias), and a tacit consent obtained by coercing local communities.

Drug trafficking in Rio de Janeiro proves economically irrational day by day because most of its expenses are useless from the point of view of business. In contrast, drug trafficking in São Paulo, modern and rational, is integrated into the economy through economic means, reflecting an actual subsumption of labor to capital marked by an adaptive flexibility, formal heterogeneity, and preferably horizontal contracts. To thrive in the retail drug trade (and even more so to grow in the wholesale market), drug traffickers would not need to impose themselves through territorial domination, form a group trained for gun fights, invest in weapons, and waste so many lives and energy to defend their territory against the police or rival factions. They would be able to lead longer, safer lives with less anguish and violence, as well as have better chances to enjoy their profits, by adopting an organizational model similar to those structured in São Paulo and in the core capitalist countries. In turn, society would have tremendous benefits.

In the state of Rio de Janeiro, three factors lead to the maintenance of the traditional drug trafficking model: (1) its history, which, coupled with the local social geography (i.e., the existence of enclaves of poverty within affluent consumers' neighborhoods), gave rise to the organizations we know today, with their totemic identities, 'geopolitical' ties, histories, values, consolidated practices, and naturalized operational dynamics; (2) prohibitionism, that is, the Anti-Drug Act, which paved the way for the drug trade and the 'illegal' drug market; and (3) the role of law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system, which cause this situation to consolidate in two different and occasionally interconnected directions: corrupt groups parasitize the drug trade, benefiting from a portion of the profits brought by the illegal activity and/or (in this case, not only corrupt segments) preventing the mobility of the actors of the drug trade, including their move from the illegal sphere. The previous statement sounds like a paradox because common sense suggests the justice system and the police would force traffickers out of the drug trade or even prevent them from joining it, but that is not the case. They bar traffickers from leaving the drug trade and encourage people to join it, as I myself have witnessed.<sup>20</sup> They prevent criminals from leaving the drug trade by restricting their opportunities to surrender, turning reckoning into an imminent risk of a 'witness elimination,' converting imprisonment sentences into death sentences or simply refusing to allow them to leave the job when it is particularly profitable to the associated police groups.<sup>21</sup> The hatred of institutions that arises from the humiliation and brutality the state imposes on a daily basis on communities, especially on black men and women, encourages people to join the drug trade in response to the everyday *esculacho* (degrading treatment). Institutions pave this way primarily by limiting the alternatives and reducing the appeal of a promise of belonging, recognition, and self-appreciation. However, that way is trodden by a small minority.

Therefore, it should be noted the costliest drug trade model, unaware of its own inefficiency, is replicated due to endogenous and exogenous factors, the most important of which are political vectors, such as legislation and the state's action.<sup>22</sup>

I have developed a hypothesis that I do not consider invalid, however simplistic and schematic it may seem, and whose scope may be useful in a more comprehensive and ambitious manner: drug trafficking in São Paulo has modernized itself just as the capitalist model of Brazil's main state, whereas drug trafficking in Rio is marooned in its own past and has become entangled in typically authoritarian and regressive plots, as is Brazil's modernization. It is becoming increasingly clear that the capitalist system cannot easily coexist with democracy. Indeed, neoliberal capitalism has even proven refractory to it. Nevertheless, mass killings

<sup>20</sup> I have written about drug traffickers struggling to abandon the drug trade, but their efforts were undermined by both the police and the criminal justice system, which thwart them and condemn them to remain in the drug trade, holding them in some sort of 'captivity.' Refer to *Meu Casaco de General* (Soares 2000), *Cabeça de Porco* (Pig Head) (Soares 2005) and *Rio de Janeiro: Histórias de vida e morte* (Rio de Janeiro: Stories of Life and Death) (Soares 2015).

<sup>21</sup> I wrote about this in the second part of the book *Elite da Tropa* (Squad Elite) (Soares et al. 2005), entitled 'A cidade beija a lona' (The City Hits the Canvas), adapted to the stage years later under the title *O Confronto* (The Confrontation) by L.E. Soares, Domingos de Oliveira, and Márcia Zanelatto.

<sup>22</sup> Bruno Paes Manso and Camila Dias provide very interesting information in their work quoted above (Paes Manso and Nunes Dias 2018). Drug traffickers from São Paulo have actually tried to persuade their peers from Rio de Janeiro to change their organizational and operational models. However, it is evident that those efforts have been in vain. I describe in my book (Soares 2012) the visit from representatives of a Colombian cartel to Rio de Janeiro to assess the drug market and business opportunities. They enjoyed themselves immensely in the defunct nightclub Help, networked, examined the situation, and gave up after a few days, dismissing Rio de Janeiro as totally unfeasible.

are neither necessary nor appropriate to contemporary capitalist development, even though neoliberals do not shy away from flirting with dictatorship or even allying themselves with barbarism, whenever convenient, to ensure profits and privileges. São Paulo and its economic and political order prompted the organization, modernization, and rationalization of crime, although that was not the only key factor in this process. The São Paulo capitalism provides Brazil with a model for organization, in terms of crime as well, with a lower homicide rate, despite a persistent increase in offenses against property, which, as we have seen, is not always inconsistent with the capital gain chains.

In contrast, Rio de Janeiro offers, in addition to the horrid spectacle of its never-ending excruciating decline, the image of a violent, authoritarian country in which capital is accumulated by immobilizing labor and blocking access to funding for emancipation. Drug trafficking, hemmed in by the circle of the state's irrationality, provides a brief picture of an economy in which the informal sector reflects virtuous entrepreneurship less than the twofold result of the exploitation of labor (including child labor) and the exclusion from citizenship. However, that picture would be incomplete without the militias. The other half is comprised by the direct intervention of the plain-clothes state, that is, the privatized state, which expropriates and demeans communities and plays the archaic role of its double (the actual state): discretionary, despotic taxation.

No Manichean picture can describe complex realities. Therefore, it is important to point out that Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo serve here as ideal types distant from their respective experiences, necessarily combined and uneven. São Paulo's law enforcement agencies are just as violent as Rio de Janeiro's, but they exercise brutality differently, more often in killings than in direct conflicts. No other state incarcerates as much as São Paulo. A fall in homicides and capitalist modernization are no road to paradise. They bring in their wake trails, traces, and horizons of barbarism. However, it is crucial to note the distinctions. Brazil is Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and much more. São Paulo is not the future of Rio de Janeiro—if Rio de Janeiro is able to overcome its atavistic backwardness, which is not impossible, not least because it has vibrant, creative social sectors. Moreover, both states are more than just their respective crime universes, apart from anything else because those universes have been interconnected with all others for a long time. The lesson to be drawn from this reflection is simple: a neoliberal punitive agenda will likely radicalize degraded and degrading processes, marked by 'irrationality,' insofar as it reinforces inequalities and reifies the most regressive aspects of the criminal justice system. In addition, it will make the modern end of capitalism more insidiously averse to rights, exclusive and inseparable, on the one hand, from crime and, on the other hand, from social barbarism. It is sometimes impossible to know under what category barbarism actually falls. That question will surely remain unanswered. The good news is that forecasts fail. In any case, the best recipe to keep the horizon of expectations open is to think long-term and find reasons in history to believe that a radically democratic path of development is possible.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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