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Chapter 6

URBAN FEAR IN BRAZIL: FROM THE *FAVELAS*¹ TO THE TRUMAN SHOW

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The theme of this article chapter is the growing fear of urban violence, fear experienced by large numbers of residents of different social class and ethnic backgrounds in Brazil's large and medium-sized cities. We deal here primarily with the strategies of protection from criminals, developed by urban residents, and how these have brought about profound changes in the spatial configuration of the city, as well as in attitudes, conduct and social practices in public space. These attitudes have given rise to a type of urban culture in Brazil which has been recognized in social sciences as a "culture of fear".

In our understanding, and according to the Brazilian researchers who coined the term, "culture of violence" refers to the complex of social and symbolic practices adopted by residents of Brazilian urban centers in order to confront violence. In their usage of the term "violence" (an emic categorization), city residents conflate different types of social action carried out in diverse contexts, from murders committed during muggings, to aggression against women and children.

The data for this article were obtained primarily from the systematic reading of Brazilian newspapers (as referred to in endnotes) over the past five years,² interviews carried out with urban residents as well as the direct observation of life in several major Brazilian cities³.

Brazil, a country of contrasts⁴

Brazil is located in the central-eastern part of South America sharing boundaries with all the countries in the continent but Ecuador and Chile. Its population is 170 million (2000). It is a federate republic, comprising of twenty-six states and a federal district where its capital Brasilia is situated. The country occupies 8,5 million km² of land and has an extensive Atlantic coastline. It is divided into five regions: Northern, Northeastern, Southeastern, Southern and Central -Western. These regions also form three large regional complexes known as Amazonia, Northeastern and Central -South.

Brazilian Amazonia – which consists of the entire Northern region and portions of the Northeastern and Central -Western – is dominated by an exuberant rain forest environment, inhabited by hundreds of Amerindian societies from time immemorial, and creating a global question since the 1970's. Its demographic density is low, having only two large cities, Manaus and Belém. Plant extractivism and extractive reserves⁵ along with agribusiness are its main economic activities.

The Northeastern complex is comprised of the Northeastern region proper and the north of the Southeastern region. It is characterized by a semiarid climate, severe droughts, extensive migration southward, large rural properties besides exhibiting strong indexes of poverty. It is the second regional complex in population density hosting three large cities,

Salvador, Recife and Fortaleza. It has been the first region to be occupied by the Europeans.

The Central - South consists of the South and Southeastern regions and a large portion of the Central -Western. It embodies the most important part of the Brazilian economy. More than 60% of the country's population is concentrated in this region that has five large cities: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre and Curitiba. Florianópolis is also located here.

During the colonial period (1500-1808), the foundation of Brazilian society was based on slavery, with the polygynous miscegenation - i.e. the plural intermarriages or interbreeding between - Portuguese men with enslaved African and indigenous women playing a crucial role in this formation. The abolition of African slavery in Brazil dates back to 1888 whereas indigenous Indian societies continued to be destroyed, enslaved or pushed further into the hinterland even after this date. Its economy was of an "agroexporter" type, producing a large variety of crops and breeding many types of livestock -, based on latifundium, a feudal system specific to South America that granted the hacienda (i.e. estate) owner, the latifundista, an authority overriding written laws and made every individual, even the civil servants, in bondage to the landed estate of this feudal lord.

Industrialization took place in the Southeastern region and it attracted a relatively large Italian, German, Japanese, Polish and Lebanese immigrants to São Paulo and the Southeastern states. The Brazilian economy, totaling to about 900 billion dollars (1996), exhibits one of the worst models of income distribution in the world. The central- southern

region, the focus of this research, accounts for more than fifty percent of the GNP, with only 36% belonging to São Paulo.

Brazil is seventy-fourth in line, according to the UN indicators ranking human development (IDH), which measures a country's development on the basis of life expectancy, educational levels and per capita income. According to these rankings, Canada has the first place and the U.S.A., the third. Brazil has a homicide rate of 19.4 per 100,000 inhabitants, the third highest in Latin America to be superseded only by Colombia (78.6) and Bolivia (23.3). For comparison, the rate in Canada is 2.0 and in the U.S.A., 9.0 per 100,000.

A newspaper reading session

Reading the newspapers on a particular day can exemplify the diversity and intensity of urban violence in Brazil which is closely related with economic class, space and ethnicity, as will be explained later. We will take as an example the "Daily Life" section of the Folha de São Paulo, the newspaper with the widest circulation in the country, of the issue November 18th, 2000. This section daily covers the so-called faits divers, alias known as the 'news in brief' column. On this particular day we find news on different types of recurrent violence in the country. The whole of its first page is devoted to a massacre in the state of São Paulo, under the heading "Ten die in the year's largest massacre in São Paulo." Page three gives violence in Rio de Janeiro, under the title "Army grenade explodes in Leme, wounding six" and another heading, "Entrepreneur's son is freed," referring to the release of a hostage in São Paulo. In addition to this, we find on the same page - though with less prominence - news of a death in a prison cell during a

fire; one dead and seventeen wounded in an attempt at mass escape from a penal colony; a note on two policemen indicted by the court for torture; the arrest of a doctor who murdered his wife and a cyclist who was killed by a steam roller.

Thus, in this particular issue of the newspaper, chosen at random, we find examples of the urban violence that occurs on a day-to-day basis in Brazil: the slaughter of São Paulo slum-dwellers (which, in this case, was not committed by a group of police, as is usually the case, but by a rival group of dealers), the turf war of drug dealers in the city of Rio, the kidnapping of a member of the elite, the death of criminals in prison, male domestic violence, and violence related to motor transit. It is necessary to ponder and comment on these examples of violence in order to understand the psyche and the involvement of the Brazilians, from various ethnic backgrounds, in urban violence and their use of space in this respect. Equally important is to keep in mind the fact that ethnicity or a culturally determined scala of "racial" characteristics, from "black" to "mulatto" to "white", runs, respectively, parallel to the economic classification of "working class", "middle class" and "upper class" in Brazilian society, with a majority of the working class living in poverty riddled favelas.

We will examine here the first case, which took place in Jacareí, a city only 168 kilometers from São Paulo (quite close, by Brazilian standards). "Ten people between the ages of 13 and 26 were shot to death while asleep at home. The woman who owned the house had gone out early to her job at a bakery, leaving her children and some friends asleep. The house was broken into and all who were there were killed, victims of the more than one hundred shots that had been fired. According to the police, nine of the victims had

already faced police charges of homicide, theft or drug traffic. The police concluded that the incident was a settling of accounts among local gangs.”

Massacres -mass murders- occur daily on the streets of many of the country’s capital cities, most of them gaining little visibility since they take place in favelas late at night, far from the view of the middle class and the elites. Most of the time, they are orchestrated by the police or paramilitary groups that have been hired by local merchants anxious to rid the neighborhood of thieves.⁶

In truth, police impunity in Brazil is enormous. Cases in which police are indicted for torture (as covered in the cited newspaper article) are rare in a country in which torture is a common practice in questionings involving the poor. This has been amply documented in Human Rights reports. The torture of upper class individuals occurred only during the Military regime (1964-1979); at the time, it was directed against left-wing activists.

In the case of the Jacareí slaughter, gang conflict is also involved, another form of crime that is commonplace in the country. Groups of drug dealers, fighting over their share in the drug-consumption market, engage in parallel wars that are followed by police from a distance⁶. This particular mass murder⁷ took place in the outskirts of the city (“on a street with no asphalt”, according to the newspaper) and involved white, mulatto and black youth. The number of shots fired – more than one hundred – illustrate another point that is also evident in the piece entitled “Army grenade explodes in Leme, wounding six”: the ease with which bandits get access to arms and ammunition.

“Entrepreneur’s son freed” shows a Brazilian invention, hostage-taking, which today has spread all over the globe. In fact, as the once guerrilheiro (guerilla fighter) and , at present, the federal representative Fernando Gabeira⁸ tells us, this practice was invented

with the kidnapping of the U.S. ambassador, taken as a hostage to be used in exchange for political prisoners held by the military regime. Today, members of the poor and working classes commit the crime of taking hostages for ransom. Initially concentrating on millionaires (as is the situation in the case studied), the victim would be held hostage during a long negotiating period. Today, any person on the street may be taken hostage in kidnappings; the victim is often forced to take money out from the automatic teller machine in order to be released. These are the so-called “lightning kidnappings” that occur by the hundreds in large Brazilian cities and that are not reported in the newspapers. It is hard to get official statistics on kidnapping, since the victims, fearing for their lives and not believing in the police, frequently do not report to the police station. For cases like those reported in the paper cited involving the rich, the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro police keep separate specialized anti-kidnapping squads.

The two following news items deal with prisons, one of the sites of the greatest violence per square meter in the country. The sub-human living conditions in these locales has also been exhaustively denounced in reports to the UN Human Rights Commission. The most common prevailing accounts of their predicament are those of overcrowded cells in which prisoners have to sleep standing up; prisoners enslaved by their peers; prisoners forced to play a lottery to see who will be killed to leave more room for the others, and subjugation to police violence. The Carandirú massacre (São Paulo, 1996) is an extreme example of this type of violence. There, the prisoners were barbarously slaughtered by police who invaded cells after getting a riot under control, as the Brazilian songwriter Caetano Veloso says in a song: “They were 111 defenseless inmates, almost all

Black, or almost Black. Think of Haiti: this is Haiti". The police who were involved met with impunity and continue to be in the police force today.

The last two pieces of news deal with domestic violence and traffic deaths. The visibility of these two types of violence occurs in opposite proportion to their statistical importance: more people die per year on the roads in Brazil than the number of North Americans who died in the Vietnam war⁹. However, it is important to note that the new and more severe national transit law passed several years ago has helped to decrease these numbers. With regard to domestic violence, present in all social classes (the murderer in the case described in this news is a doctor), its targets are primarily women but also include children and the elderly.

Special police stations have been created to which battered women can report their complaints; their role has been emphasized in all studies on this type of violence. These studies have also shown the preference of women for police action to stop men from using further violence against them rather than the actual arrest of the batterer. Brazil has few shelters for battered women.

The home and the street

Thus, today, primarily for the residents of large Brazilian cities, 'the home' and 'the street' are, respectively, paradigms of 'good' and 'evil'. "The street" has become a peril, a place that has, paradoxically, become the residence of a significant portion of Brazil's low income population, blacks and mulattos in particular¹⁰. "The home", which once always kept its back door open for visitors, is barred off today, protected by alarms, anti-burglar systems, private security guards and video cameras. It can, in fact, be watched twenty-

four hours a day through infra-red light surveillance devices that detect movement and send messages to the headquarters of private security firms. Devices attached to telephones identify the calling number and, as the most recent market invention, there are “tele-voicers” which transmit a previously recorded message and indicate where the messages were set into action. Security equipment¹¹ is, nonetheless, illustrative of a coming together of the “old” and “new” models of protection. That is, we have on the one hand, sophisticated state-of-the-art computerized equipment, and on the other, artifacts used with cruel purposes, such as glass shards embedded on wall tops, iron fences topped with spearheads that are capable of terminally perforating a human body, barbed-wire fences, electrical fences electrocuting the invader, and fences with razor edges (sold in packages from 12 to 60 meters). The coexistence of these two models shows how - what Norbert Elias has called - the “civilizing process” is produced, a movement which persists in contemporary societies.

The expansion of this paranoia can be measured by the growth of an industry specialized in security in the country which generated US\$650 million in the year 2000, placing this sector on the list of industries with the highest growth in Brazil, at a rate of 25 to 30% per year. Evidently, this is a market for the elite who are able to pay the high prices that are usually higher than the minimum monthly wage of a Brazilian worker. Entrepreneurs in the area estimate that the market for this kind of equipment includes 3 million residences, of which today only 6% are using their services¹². It should be kept in mind that as a rule, apartment buildings, town houses and even residential streets in elite neighborhoods have security teams that guard the area¹³.

Residences are not the only target of this “total defense” project. In fact, prior to the residential areas, workplaces, firms, banks and commerce in general had been covered with highly developed security systems. At present, automobiles have become a prime target, as another “space” occupied by middle and upper class residents who never use the Brazilian public transportation system. Offers related to the protection of drivers range from bullet-proof windshields to instruments with an almost invisible radio system that, in the case of being held hostage, the victim can emit discreet signals from the car’s trunk. One of the most successful devices offered during a recent automobile fair in São Paulo was the Mul-T-Lock that if installed in the car’s centre console, uses a steel bolt to lock the gearshift when the driver turns off the engine. Imported from Israel, the device costs US\$150.00 in Brazil. Another piece of equipment manufactured by a Brazilian company is a car alarm using sensors that can block up to eight items of a vehicle’s vital functions. The number of armored cars in the country doubled in the year 2000. The market for the armored private vehicles is also expanding.¹⁴ . The price of this equipment has come down but still remains at around US\$20,000 per vehicle, varying from the lighter armors (referred to as “urban use”) to those that can resist weapons of varying caliber and some explosives (referred to as “anti-hijacking”.) “An armored car is harder to drive, it’s heavier”, is how a sixty year old informant from the city of São Paulo describes the experience. Its excessive weight increases fuel consumption that can also lead to mechanical wear and tear in the car, since the vehicle was not, originally, made for its usage. But this is apparently unimportant to the members of this culture of fear who are even willing to drive army tanks. Even automobile companies, who have thrived on the obsession with protection existing in the society, are offering vehicles intended for rural

areas and unpaved roads, for sale on the urban market. So that the sales have skyrocketed, of the so-called four-wheel drives, large Jeeps with traction on all four wheels, that are both expensive and consume far more fuel than other automobiles, but address to both the esthetic and pragmatic notions of consumers.

There are reasons as to why cars are among the most protected of goods in the country. Since they are in transit in public territories, they are perceived as vulnerable to attack and in fact their hi-jacking in broad daylight is not uncommon today on city streets: As in gangster films, one or two vehicles pull up alongside the targeted car, forcing it to stop even if this costs the life of the driver or the private security guards; the individual who will later have to pay a hefty ransom in order to be released, is pulled out of the vehicle.

In addition to the physical protection of individuals and their patrimony, the protection of the automobile itself becomes a grave concern. The number of car thefts in the country is quite high, and vehicles are frequently taken out of the country, Paraguay being one of the prime destinations. It is also common for cars to be taken apart and sold as auto spare parts at black market fairs which are clandestine but not secret – well-known and usually used by the very clients whose cars have been robbed! For this reason Brazilian car owners prefer and accept complete insurance for the car, which in other countries is thought of mainly as protection in case of an accident, as a necessary protection against the loss of the total capital invested in the car's purchase. In our interviews, theft was mentioned much more frequently than protection against traffic accidents.

The pager and cellular phones are other types of equipment whose use has increased greatly due to the culture of fear, serving as a shield for the individual in public spaces and

particularly on the street. “When my son goes out at night to a party or with friends, I get desperate. I call him all the time, to know where he is and if he’s alright”, says a fifty years old, and one of the many mothers interviewed by a São Paulo newspaper reporter, that uses a pager. The pager, through which whereabouts of the children of the upper class can be monitored, has, of late, been substituted by the cell phone which has also taken on this function. “I call my friend the moment I get into my car and I talk to her all the way to my apartment, throughout the entire drive. When I lived in Santa Tereza¹⁵ it was even worse. I had to move because I couldn’t get home late, it was too risky”, said another informant, a forty-five years old woman and archeologist, resident of Rio de Janeiro.

The crisis of paranoia that has led the middle classes to protect their cars and their homes takes on a sinister light when it moves onto the streets. Visible and invisible barriers have been put up, not infrequently spilling over the borders of private space, into the public one.

The Truman Show

The most efficient formula for the protection of the street became popular as of the 80s, with the success of the idea of the “condominium”.¹⁶ Formerly, there were the “vertical condominiums” (apartment buildings); today there are also “horizontal” ones, i.e. the gated communities, that are private areas which can be quite extensive and function as buildings. In other words, they are organized according to internal rules decided upon by

the council of residents = and, most of the time, limit access only to residents, their domestic workers and their guests.

Within these gated communities, the Brazilian ethnic cleavage is clearly demonstrated: on the one hand, “white” property owners participate in the meetings of the council of residents and on the other, we find “blacks” and people of mixed race who provide services or are domestic workers. It is important to note that numerous individuals, who would be placed, in other countries, into ethnically differentiated categories, are all included into one category in Brazil. This has been the case for the descendants of Asians such as the Japanese and Koreans, or of Arabs and Jews, who live together harmoniously in these private spaces, all of whom identify totally with the hegemonic ethnic model in Brazil which considers them as “whites”.

In spite of the visible growth of a Black middle class in Brazil, the latter rarely is able to reside in such condominiums, due to various mechanisms of social exclusion. “A Black’s place is in the kitchen” is a well known saying, which makes reference to the relegation of the Black people to the role of serving of the “whites”, as they continue to be associated in Brazilian culture to the enslavement of Africans during the Portuguese colonial period.

In almost all of the cities in Brazil possessing a middle and upper class population, these “horizontal condominiums”, alias gated communities, can be found, whether strictly residential or of the so-called “resort” type which also reserves space for commerce and services. They create walled in communities within cities, pulling down or pushing the actual walls or fences of their homes all the way to the perimeter walls of the area designated for a “horizontal condominium” and implanting full-time surveillance, with

watch posts, video cameras and armed security guards along these walls. All this is to ensure that there will be lesser surveillance and more freedom within these walls so that the residents can live within a sort of Truman Show¹⁷, an artificial reality based on the guarantee that poor and black people can only be admitted as employees. This social exclusion allows for older forms of sociability and residence to emerge within this ethnically and economically homogeneous space: homes without walls and fences, children riding bicycles down the street, women strolling along with their babies, couples out jogging. Sometimes, there are cars patrolling the area, calming its residents with the constantly renewed sight of uniforms and arms.

The number of these gated communities has increased so much in large Brazilian cities that, for example in São Paulo, the local government recently decided to establish a special tax that their residents must pay, to be used in the Fund for Incentives to Public Security¹⁸. Thus, every "horizontal condominium" which has a specialized body of guards, will have to collect a tax - meant to finance this new service- for the state. Evidently, this new tax was not welcomed by the residents of these condominiums in São Paulo. "We're going to have to pay R\$5,000 (US\$ 2,500) to the state in order to have a team of guards when the state should provide us with this service," protested a woman who presides over the council of residents of such a condominium, as reported on the news.¹⁹ "We're going to sue them, not because of the amount, which is negligible (sic), but on principle", explained a lawyer²⁰, who believes that it is the responsibility of the state to defend the elite.

It is interesting to think about the profound transformation of the experience of living in the city that has been brought about and consolidated by these gated communities:

the experience of living in a bi-polar space, divided between place of residence (the condominium) and places of leisure and shopping (clubs and shopping centers), each of them with restricted access and under full-time surveillance, and linked to the automobile which shuttles between the two. Much of what has been associated to life in the city – the flaneur of Baudelaire and Benjamin, or the forced blasé indifference to so much stimulation, in Simmel's terms – are hardly the probable attitudes for these residents. They go from one well-known space to the other inside a private vehicle meant to isolate its passengers as much as possible from what goes on in transit from one of these two “non-places” (Augé) to the other, through barriers of varying types: sound (music), visual (smoked glass windows), climatic (air conditioning) and physical (the car armor).

The members of these new gated communities solve the problem of security through the purchase of “inner avenues” within the complex, while purchasing their home and the impermeability they create on city streets. But what happens to the middle class residents who are unable to move into these neighborhoods that take after those seen in American movies, and who still have to share their streets with the common people, continuing to experience the anonymity and the crowds that were dear to the 20th century thinkers who reflected on urban environments?

The answer is, when the street is not private- as in gated communities, it must be privatized. This can be done in diverse ways that are visible within urban space and accepted by authorities although they are illegal in principle. The elite neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro are an example. A visitor passing through them, several years back, would have been shocked by the number of men in blue or black uniforms guarding entrances of the buildings in these neighbourhood . They were the "doormen", usually black or mixed

race émigrés from the Brazilian northeast, who would only allow residents and authorized guests into the building. These "doormen" continue to exist, but accompanying them are now armed guards contracted through private security firms, along with metal barricades that encroach on the sidewalks, making it hard for pedestrians to get around them. In some cases, such as the situation at the central plaza of Ipanema, , one of the elite neighborhoods in this city, a sidewalk running parallel to the regular city sidewalk was created when local merchants decided to unite their protective barriers. In other words, in order to get into the stores you must be authorized by a guard who watches over the people entering into this elongated cage-like structure that fences off the entrance to the shops. On other streets, residents pooled resources in order to build bullet proof watch posts that protect the guard who is on duty. The posts are similar to the guard booths in banks though they differ insofar as they have been built on public ground which should be watched over by the state police.

Street security guards, uniformed "doormen" and electronic devices similar to those that are used in the "horizontal condominiums" are ways of maintaining social distance that keeps the white residents of "vertical condominiums" away from their neighbors who live in the favela. In other major cities, barriers may be less subtle, such as the case of a four kilometer wall built by the City Hall itself, in a neighborhood of Salvador, with the intention of completely isolating the ten thousand residents of a favela (see photos)²². In order to cross the street, the favela dwellers must walk for kilometers to first get around the wall.

These people are the slum-dwellers that are seen as "dangerous" by the state security apparatus but, paradoxically, they are the ones who are the most exposed to

dangerous situations, as we saw in the newspaper items discussed at the beginning of this chapter. All of these strategies make up what has come to be called the “culture of fear” that runs through different social classes. Fear of crime, albeit exaggerated, is not a fantasy but a real fact since a large number of people have had to face some type of physical threat as victims. The fear felt by poor and working class populations seems more visible and concrete, since this population is exposed not only to criminals (particularly drug dealers) but also to police harassment in the favelas when they come to search for criminals.

The unequal distribution of violence

Public and private security expenditures in Brazil supersede what is spent on health. Yet these security expenditures are clearly concentrated in particular neighborhoods of the cities and in particular regions of the country. With regard to regional distribution, it is well known that 81% of all equipment is sold in the central-southern region (63% in the southeast and 18% in the south) and 13% in the northeast. The central-western region and the north have the smallest shares of the market²¹: 4% and 2% respectively.

Even if the security equipment and services market is concentrated in the richest part of the country and certainly in elite neighborhoods, the same thing can not be said with regard to urban violence. Research has shown that urban violence is not uniformly distributed in all residential segments. Middle and upper class neighborhoods have much lower levels of violence than the favelas. The city of São Paulo is a case in point, as the richest major city and the one that has the highest rates of violence in the country, that is,

an average of 66.89 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (as compared to the average for the country, which is 26.8 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants).²²

The map of homicide rates in Sao Paulo shows a clear concentration in neighborhoods located in the outskirts of the city, that is, where the number of favelas is greater. Although the areas of low homicide rates shrunk between 1996 and 1999, we can still find zones with a rate of less than 30 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants,²³ thus safer than many European cities. Such a case is the neighborhood of Jardim Paulista (a neighborhood close to the city center, heavily forested, and the residence of the two candidates in the recent mayoral race in the city; see map). This contrasts with the slum areas on the outskirts of the city, where homicide rates are 90 per 100,000 inhabitants. It is also in these areas that the highest unemployment rates are found, as seen on the map. While Jardim, one of the most centrally located neighborhoods has an unemployment rate of 8.3%, the areas of "the periphery", i.e. the outskirts, have rates as high as 21.2%. This means that 71% of the city's unemployed are concentrated in the outskirts. In some neighborhoods, these numbers mean that one in every five economically active residents is unemployed, whereas in the centrally located neighborhoods we find that on the average there is one jobless person out of every 12,7 who are economically active. Almost half (48.25) of the unemployed are under age 24, of whom 70,1% live in the outlying zones.²⁴

Similarly, in Rio de Janeiro, there are close to 1.2 million people living on the hillsides surrounding the city, in the favelas. This population has increased in recent years, growing from 15% of the total number of inhabitants of the city in 1991 to 17% in 1996, a growth rate along the lines of 7.93% during a period in which the total population of the municipality grew by only 1.29%.²⁵ The total number of favelas in Brazil is 3, 905, having

grown in the last ten years²⁶. São Paulo is in first place, with 621 of them, and Rio comes in second with 513. Given their geographical proximity to the elite neighborhoods, they have become the daily nightmare of the predominantly "white" middle and upper class population of Rio. The role of the police, as an ex-minister of security in the city stated, is to maintain a state of social apartheid, "without the need for the fences they use in South Africa, because they don't come down from the hills, they don't organize themselves." The same ex-minister pointed to the low minimum wage (close to US\$60.00), as to what draws so many young people into drug dealing, an illegal activity which attracts young blacks and mulattos, and also drew attention to the police repression that leads to high rates of death. "The guy sees his dad working his whole life for sixty dollars a month. He can make ten times as much dealing drugs. Of course he prefers drug dealing. It's a matter of logic. It's just not logical for someone who's never felt hunger."

Hot zones, cold zones

Today, some Brazilian cities such as São Paulo are monitoring urban violence by computer. Every complaint reported to the police is immediately put into an electronic system so that at any police station it becomes possible to know the exact number of crimes reported on a particular city street or neighborhood. This makes it possible to pinpoint dangerous or "hot" zones on the urban map.

Hot zones are those they are considered potentially dangerous in many other cities of the world – such as poorly-lit streets, dead ends, parks at night, etc. – but there is also a long list of places that would seem inoffensive to an uninformed visitor. In most Brazilian cities, the areas around cathedrals, central plazas and bus stations are hot zones that require

precaution. Yet the most prominent “hot zone” in Brazil today is to be found right on the street, in one particular place: at the traffic light. “At night, the police themselves tell us not to stop at a red light. It’s extremely dangerous”, says a woman from Rio; this is just a piece of advice given to residents of São Paulo. Likewise, a magazine read by foreign residents in Brazil suggests to its readers: “The risk of dying in a traffic light mugging is absurdly greater than in a hijacking. At night, calculate the time and speed you need in order to avoid getting caught at a red light. There have been no reported cases of assault to moving vehicles.”²⁷ Expressways, on the other hand, are considered “cold zones” since the probability of mugging or hijacking is low, as the above-cited magazine suggests.

There is a word of mouth code which is known by residents of particular areas which guides people on what to do: such as not stopping at traffic lights; always travelling with closed windows - even without air conditioning at a temperature of 40°C in Rio; avoid getting close to young street vendors (who could threaten the driver or passenger with razor blades); avoid wearing watches, jewelry or other valuables in public places, and avoid using brand name clothes and sneakers in public places, even if doing so means breaking traffic laws or inconveniencing yourself or others. This code, known by big city residents, also obliges people to accept such unusual behavior as always keeping cash in one’s wallet. “It’s commonplace in Rio to hear people to say, ‘I only have money for the mugger’ when they mean they don’t have much cash. No one leaves home with an empty wallet”, says the archeologist cited earlier, since lack of money can irritate the mugger and put the victim’s life at risk. Going to the beach, a habit held in high regard by Brazilians, also demands complying with precise rules. In Rio, for example, some luxury hotels keep security personnel on the beach, controlling the circulation of there and thus avoiding such

crimes as the frequent theft of cameras. Newspaper and magazine reports also “teach” Brazilian tourists from other parts of the country how to dress and what to take to the beach, in other words, what the minimal kit of indispensable items should consist of.

"Hot zones" are not necessarily zones of complete anonymity, where bandits are unknown people. Several years back we witnessed a mugging on a trolley car in Santa Tereza, in Rio, in which a French woman tourist lost her camera to a mugger who calmly entered the car as it went slowly up the hill. The tourist resisted the theft attempt and, since the thief tried to cut the camera strap with a pocketknife, ended up cutting her. The mugger got off the trolley just as easily as he had gotten on, in plain sight of all the other passengers and passersby who made no attempt to go after him nor call the police. After helping the tourist, who was more panic-stricken than hurt, we spoke to the bus driver who said he knew who the mugger was but would not report him to the police for fear of retaliation.

Thus, "hot zones" frequently require a socially known code of conduct based on avoiding contact, due to the potential risk it implies. Among whites, contact with blacks and the poor is avoided; among blacks and mulattos, contact with police, drug dealers and rival gangs is avoided. When contact cannot be avoided, other socially known rules of contact are also put into effect in order to minimize the conflict between mugger and victim. One rule to which the French tourist was apparently oblivious is never to resist a mugging, even when it is going on in a public spot and with witnesses present.

There are some Brazilian cities with low rates of violence, such as Florianópolis, 800 kilometers south of São Paulo. Nonetheless, here too we find all sorts of electronic security paraphernalia, as well as "horizontal condominiums", security guards and so forth. This can be explained by the fact that many residents have moved to Florianópolis in an

attempt to escape the violence of other large cities, so that they are already contaminated by this culture of fear; furthermore, these types of artifacts and residence-places are also seen as markers of social distinction, symbols of modernity and wealth.

Gender, race and violence

This urban violence, which in the eyes of the majority of the residents of large Brazilian cities seems uncontrollable, is much more common, as we have seen, in poor neighborhoods and slums inhabited primarily by blacks and people of mixed-race than in the middle and upper class residential zones. Furthermore, there are particular groups of people who are considered more fragile and become particular targets for violence: women²⁸, the elderly, the physically handicapped, children and sex workers such as prostitutes and transvestites. These are groups who are the target of violence both in public spaces as well as within the private space of the family. Statistical data from the government bureau IBGE (research on victimization) show that it is men who die more frequently due to homicides within the public spaces. Among men, they are particularly young, black or mulatto, slum-residents and between the ages of 13 and 20. Thus, women and men undergo different types of violence – women are beaten within the home and suffer risk of rape on the streets. Young men, blacks and the poor are at greater risk of death on the street or before age 30.

The global arms market and local consequences of violence

Statistics on violence in Brazil (and probably those for all of Latin America and eastern Europe as well) surprises Europeans. The high distributions tend to be seen as

caused either by deep economic and social inequalities (in those analyses that emphasize the need for structural change) or as aberrations of a moral nature (thus emphasizing a need for more education). What rarely appears in these analyses is the role of the First World in maintaining such a state – whether through the exorbitant cost of financing foreign debt, or more directly, through the sales of arms to drug dealers. We will leave the first matter for economists to deal with. With regard to the second, we see that Rio de Janeiro possesses and uses arms in ways seldom seen in cities on this planet that are not engaged in war.

A large portion of these arms are in the hands of civilians, private guards and criminals. Evidence of this are the 251 grenades confiscated from drug dealers by the Rio de Janeiro police during the first 11 months of the year 2000 alone²⁹. These grenades, according to the newspapers, are detonated against police stations and vehicles or used in assaults; some are domestically produced, but a large portion come from abroad. João Salles' documentary video illustrates the global distribution of these armaments. We see scenes of a huge room where millions of arms that police have taken from drug dealers are kept, while a police officer explains on the side the origin of the arms: they come from the US, Russia, Switzerland, Israel, France, Germany, etc³⁰. Just as in the case of the violence-augmenting arms, the “security” market too is completely dominated by foreign firms. 75% of the security equipment sold in Brazil is imported. Of that share, half comes from the US, 20% from Israel, 20% from Japan, 5% from Canada and 5% from other countries. In other words, both violence and the war against it produce profits.

Is the fear of the rich the same as the fear of the poor?

The street is considered deadly. That is why it is avoided by the predominantly white Brazilian middle and upper classes. They live within condominiums that are enclosed by walls and watched over, veritable walled cities of the medieval period, and from there take their automobiles to other protected urban spaces, such as commercial centers or clubs. They are afraid to let their children out alone on the street, where their imported tennis shoes or bicycles can be stolen; they are afraid of being raped or kidnapped. Often the criminals are young thieves, hardly older than their victims.

Nonetheless, the street is even more of a deadly danger for the oppressed classes, made up of blacks and mulattos who live in slums where even the police will not go in, where the law is dictated by gangs of criminals and drug dealers. People are perplexed when they learn that the "home, sweet home" is the site of domestic violence: violence against women, children and the elderly, as can be seen from the numerous complaints registered in specialized police stations. .

To think of urban violence in Brazil as a uniform phenomenon would therefore be a mistake. Brazil is an extremely segmented society. The rich and the poor, that is, whites and blacks – live in two different but permanently articulated world, reflected in the urban space they occupy. The domestic workers (employed by most elite and middle-class families) become the connection or go-between for these two worlds (Velho, 2001).

If we think of violence from the gender perspective, we see that the male population is more subject to violence on the street, while women are more subject to violence at home; men are more likely to die a violent death than women. If we think in terms of race,

class and age, we have rich, white adult men on one end of the spectrum and poor, young, black men on the other. Life expectancy for these two groups is diametrically opposed. While on the one hand the average life expectancy for the country is visibly on the rise, having increased by ten years in a very short span of time, the survival chances for young black males who live in the slum areas are getting lesser and lesser.

Thus, we see violence not as a fact unto itself but as a profound indicator of the inequalities of Brazil and of the world. The struggle against police impunity seems, to us, to be one of the most important and difficult conflicts with the state in Brazil today since it is within the state that violence is produced. The intermediaries are exactly those who are supposed to be involved in its combat. But the fear of violence of the civilian population is not new. The Brazilian composer Chico Buarque de Hollanda expressed this fear well in a song called “Cry Burglar” in which, during the military dictatorship in the seventies, a couple is woken up at night by alarming noises and fear that it is the police: a peril that, in this song (and by slum-dwellers), is considered greater than that of a burglary.

¹ *Favela* is the term for the agglomeration of poor dwellings, illegally and irregularly built, which are usually set into the hillsides surrounding the city. “ The name came to be used around mid-century and comes from the name of the first of its kind, which emerged in 1906 on the Favella hill in Rio de Janeiro”. See Valladares, Lícia, “*A gênese da favela carioca*”, in RBCS., vol 15, n. 44, October 2000. The Portuguese term *periferia* (periphery) is commonly used for the same type of slum when not located on the hillsides.

² These data were collected daily during two distinct periods: the first academic semester of 1995 and the second academic semester of 2000. The data collected in 1995 made up part of a research financed by the national research council CNPq (Project on violence against women and other minority groups) with research teams made up of members of the NIGS/UFSC and the NEPEM/UnB.

³ Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (which both have more than 5 million inhabitants and rank highest in the statistics on violence in the country), Brasília and Florianópolis (where we live), also including references to other Brazilian cities.

⁴ The introductory information on Brazil has been taken liberally from Rafael Bastos, “Brazilian Popular Music: An Anthropological introduction” in *Primeira Mão* n. 40, 2000 and enlarged to explain local terms to international readers.

⁵ That is, wood extraction (of the Brazil-nut and rubber trees) besides manganese ore and cassiterite (tin ore) exploitation .

⁶ “One night, I saw the sky lit up with green lights back and forth between the hills (*favelas*) of Alemão and Santa Marta. It was a gang fight. I thought: They are using a weapon that was used during the Gulf War. Now, what other country on this earth has a city in which gang fights involve that kind of weapon? Only in Rio”, says the ex-minister of security in Rio de Janeiro, and at present, a federal representative, Hélio Luz in the documentary film, *História de uma guerra particular* (Story of a Private War) by João Salles.

⁷ With close to 170,000 inhabitants, Jacareí ranked twelfth in violent deaths among São Paulo state cities, with between 100,000 and 199,000 inhabitants in 1999, with 42.9 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (there were 77 murders in the city during that year). An industrial city, it houses beverage makers (Brahma, Kaiser

and Pepsi) and others (Parker, Votorantim, Celulose and Paper). Data from the *Fundação Estatal de Análise de Dados*, cf FS, Nov. 18, 2000. P. C!,1.

⁸Gabeira, Fernando. (1980) *O que é isso, companheiro?* RJ: Codecri.

⁹ By October of 2000, 150,000 people had met their death in traffic accidents on federal highways alone, since the beginning of the year. *Globo News*, December 30, 2000.

¹⁰ A recent incident in São Paulo illustrates the critical situation of homelessness in Brazil today. In a symbolic act organized to inaugurate the new city mayor, Marta Suplicy, a dinner which was not publicly announced was held for leaders of the homeless peoples' movement. Almost 1000 famished people showed up (*Folha de São Paulo*, January 3, 2001).

¹¹ "Security" is an emic category used to refer to private police. Security systems refers to alarm systems and other electronic devices.

¹² Cf. Chaim, Célia, "*Violência alimenta indústria da segurança*", *Folha de São Paulo*, October 16, 2000.

¹³ Given the low salaries that Brazilian police officers receive, a large number of private security guards are in fact police who hold two jobs: one as a state police officer and the other in private service as a security guard.

¹⁴ After the design and project of the engineers O'Gara, Hess and Eisenhardt who, as it is known, created the first of its kind in 1942, during the Second World War, for use by the U.S.A. president Franklin Roosevelt

¹⁵ A middle-class neighborhood in Rio that is considered dangerous because of its proximity to the Rocinha *favela*, the largest in Latin America. Rocinha has between 150 and 400,000 inhabitants, and is one of the most developed of all such neighborhoods: it has an Internet website that appears in four languages, a McDonald's, satellite antennas, etc.

¹⁶ Estate-like walled- or fenced -off town house complexes.

¹⁷ Film about a television show that goes on around the clock, and in which Truman, the protagonist, lives on an island with hired extras - unbeknownst to him- that perform as his family members or friends, under total surveillance by TV cameras.

¹⁸ Cosso, Roberto. "*SP cria taxa para segurança*", in *Folha de São Paulo*, December 27th, 2000. C1.

¹⁹ As reported on the *Globo News* program, December 28th, 2000.

²⁰ FS, December 29, 2000.

²² FS, October 5, 2000.

²¹ Chaim, Célia. Op. cit.

²² Violence in São Paulo has been on the rise: in 1996 there was an average of 55.56 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, increasing to 66.8 in 1999. This average increased in 79 of all of the 96 districts of São Paulo between 1996 and 1999.

²³ Data from the *Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais*, published in FS, September 25, 2000.

²⁴ Data from the study by Barbosa, Alexandre et. al. "Mapa do Emprego e do Desemprego do Município de São Paulo" in Barbosa, Mariana, "Periferia tem 71% do sem-emprego em São Paulo", FS, Nov. 4 2000 B1

²⁵ Data from the city's *Anuário Estatístico*, Rio de Janeiro City Hall. See Escóssia, Fernanda. "População da favela aumenta 8%", in FS, Nov. 21, 2000. C6. This document also shows that Rio has the second lowest annual population growth rates of all Brazilian capital cities, losing only to Belem (northern region) which has a negative growth rate of 1.67%. Rio's estimated population for this year is 5.6 million.

²⁶.IBGE data. See FS, Jan 7, 2001.

²⁷ Magazine of the American Chamber of Commerce. UPDATE n. 367, Dec/Jan 2001, pg. 52

²⁸ The violence that women face remains hidden within the private and invisible space of the home. Ninety percent of all reports of violence that are made by women in all of the states of the country – according to police reports – refer to spouse battering or a father's abuse (usually sexual) of a daughter. Silent violence, that is, domestic violence against women and children, takes place in more than 10% of Brazilian homes, respecting neither social class, age nor ethnicity in the choice of victims.

²⁹ FS, Dec. 10, 2000. P. A7

³⁰ The same ex-minister of security to whom we referred earlier, Hélio Luz, proposes in his testimony that Latin American countries come together to control the arms factories situation in the countries from which the arms come. "Just as they control coca plantations in Latin America, we should control and close down the factories in their countries that sell arms to the drug dealer. They won't sell arms to the IRA, to Sadam Hussein or Kadafi; we don't find those arms there, but we find them here!"

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