

RESEARCH

# Irregular War in Favelas of Rio de Janeiro: A Macro-Micro Approach

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This paper is about the irregular war in Rio de Janeiro regarding its rules and dynamics, its links with local politics and transnational business, as well as the actors' subjective meanings, part of the ethnographic data gathered over years. My approach has been to interact with many actors during long periods of time using multiple sources of data to adjoin clues and contradictions provided by the various agents interviewed. I followed the precepts developed by Gluckman and Buroway on the extended case method, adapting it to the violent social contexts in the favelas of Rio emphasizing conflicts and diversity within them. The analysis bears also statistical and historical material. In 1980, I found a new neighborhood organization: drug-dealing gangs engaged in turf wars. In them, a kind of male identity was the crux of the matter to understand the subjective meanings and the ethos not revealed on the surface of everyday experience. Some youngsters, who plunged in violence and crime, interiorized the warrior ethos or violent practices, becoming their own executioners by killing each other with increasing cruelty justified by the warfare. This altered completely not only the local balance of power but the sociability between neighbors in such areas.

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**Keywords:** Drug trafficking; Gun trafficking; criminal faction; violence; irregular war; warrior ethos; transnational organized crime

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## The Theoretical Path

Although drug trafficking is typified as a crime in Brazil, there is still some moral acceptance of such activity, even more so if the dealer lives in a poor neighborhood where youth unemployment is large. Consequently, there is an ideological debate on how social scientists should present the minor actors of this intricate and wide network of organized crime that involve more powerful agents, including state officials. In critical criminology, there is no concern with power structures of traffickers' gangs or factions. As a way of somehow legitimizing their presence and actions, therefore avoiding judicial processes, it studied much more youth sociability, as expressed mainly in funk balls, graffiti, and shopping center parades (*rolezinhos*), sliding it into interactions inside traffic groups that had acquired an evident violent character lately, especially because of the use of guns for solving conflicts. This new kind of sociability was called violent sociability and included youth culture and drug trafficking (Cecchetto, 2004; Machado, 2000). My text sustains a concern with the changed subjectivity of youths that started, as they say, 'put a gun on their waist', changing their social identities to be part of illegal drug trafficking. The political reason for my approach is exactly how to deal with such subjectivity in prevention policies, much more implemented at the public health and education systems, as well as the judicial system. The civil rights aspect is that such policies are a way of avoiding the killings that increased so much amongst young men in Brazil, especially the black and poor ones. The challenges were many, beginning with how to understand organized crime networks in countries with fragile institutions.

In Brazil, there is a great lack of information on the upper sectors of organized crime, due to corruption, lack of resources for institutional intelligence and investigative police, and as yet little connection between the Police and the Public Prosecutor or the Judiciary. As always happens when prejudice and stereotypes of criminals predominate in the imaginary of policemen, little investigation is done to uncover and dismantle

the networks for trafficking illegal drugs and weapons, besides many other mafias that control illegal businesses even when the goods or services are legal. These articulated networks transpose barriers of class, urban perimeters, state and national borders, and encroach on the legal business, in state institutions and governments. Since scholars and journalists sometimes pointed out the relationship between the state and drug traffic, one knows that a vast network goes further upwards the more visible part that is located in retail commerce done by the humblest of its members.

It is hard knowing the great banditry in Brazil since the big bandits were, until recently, neither investigated nor tried and sentenced with the same effort put on the bad guys of lesser status. Police investigation about the activities of those who operate in the drug retail commerce is still marked by rough repression and manifestations of ingrained prejudices against certain categories of people, such as *favelado* poor black youngsters. One still finds little information for reconstituting the dynamics of various types of organized crime, including the wholesale trafficking of illegal drugs and guns that attracts vulnerable young people in disadvantaged areas of the country. As a result, poor black and mixed young men from the favelas flooded prisons for the past 40 years, exactly when drug trafficking spread throughout the country. Overpopulated prisons, full of poor young men that need some protection to survive in this conflicted and violent milieu, were the locus for making factions more powerful (Zaluar, 2004; Manso & Dias, 2018).

Homicide also strikes more poor young men. Quantitative research done in Brazil, showed that the proportion of victims of homicide increases with age and reach their highest number at age 21, from where it begins to decrease, what confirms the main assumption of the interactional theory (Cerqueira & Coelho, 2015). As it is well known, crime is not forever, it is temporary, beginning at age 13, and culminating at the age of 20. The same study shows great differences in the probability of victimization by race/color and schooling. While the proportion of victims among black men at age 21 is 40% larger than that among non-black men, 'the probability of a 21-year-old with less than seven years of schooling to suffer homicide is 5.4 times higher than those who have eight years or more of study' (Cerqueira & Coelho, 2015: 13). In other words, though race makes a difference, schooling has a greater impact on being killed prematurely.

The main question in this paper is why lethal violence has affected men 10 times more than women, and young people five times more than older people, and 21-year-old men with seven years of schooling more than five times the ones with eight and more years of schooling, and blacks 40% more than non-blacks. This is the puzzle of Brazilian violence, for which the city of Rio de Janeiro is just one piece. Although this criminal pattern is a global phenomenon, in Brazil it is very different from ethnic or religious conflicts where women, children and old people are killed or sexually assaulted in similar proportions. For finding the answers, one needs qualitative data without which it is impossible to understand the growing violence in dispositions and actions of young males. Therefore, I write about what is going on at the bottom layers of drug traffic in Rio de Janeiro and I have approached these complex and variable processes from an ethnographic perspective in several researches done during the last 40 years. They presuppose listening the other and an other-directedness posture, that is, inter-subjective encounter. The encounter with the other as the concrete scene is the main source of data as well as of ethics. Because of the chosen perspective, I have written a subjective narrative but using also quantitative data, that is, objective data.

Combined in a complexity approach, these two dimensions – subjective and objective – allows the researcher to put Anthropology in a historical and political perspective, as suggested by George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986). I therefore followed the precepts developed first by Max Gluckman (1961) and more recently by Burawoy (1998) on the extended case method, adapting it to the violent social contexts in which the fieldwork took place. As pointed out by Gluckman and his followers, the ethnographic data was put in a process perspective taking conflicts and diversity within the same social situation or social network, but sustained by other registers, statistical or historical. The result is thus a historical reconstitution of findings collected along several years, recording conflicts, tendencies and changes whereby it became possible to adopt a theoretical perspective that accounts for the objective and the subjective dimensions.

The aim of contemporaneous sociology that was influenced by ethnographical methods, as suggested by Burawoy in his presentation of reflexive sociology, is a dialogue between social scientists and 'the people we study'. But, contrary to his view of the fieldwork, during which there should be a continuous process of understanding social situations and reconstructing theory, in my reflections on crime I used not only ethnographic data from different researchers that were envisaged as way of deepening the knowledge, finding anomalies and paradoxes or making predictions, but also quantitative data. As a way of keeping the tension between the objective and the subjective dimensions, I also employed statistical data on poverty and homicide rates, as well as constructed maps of their incidence, what made my texts on the subject a mixture of narrative and explanatory writing or a combination of interpretative social processes with social facts. I

could thus reach multiple subjective meanings or *habitus*, not revealed on the surface of everyday experience or in general and objective data.

*Habitus* is a concept that both Bourdieu and Elias use referring to ingrained postures or dispositions, which individuals, linked through networks or fields of relationships, acquire through their conviviality and remain unconscious. It is an important concept for understanding the dynamics of power that is neither completely legitimate nor consciously obeyed by the people subjected to it (Weber, 1968), but also for those who subject other people. On the gliding surface of legitimate order and illegitimate or unseen domination, this concept may clarify why so many young men act impulsively with violence, exhibiting ingrained disposition to do so.

Elias, as usual, never defined *habitus* but described first how certain patterns of social conduct regarding eating, dressing, addressing each other and playing games developed in certain societies through the socialization of children and youngsters (Elias, 2000). It may also designate the self-control that individuals, belonging to the same social figuration, interiorize as a second nature. This second nature contains, controls, or disciplines the first one, made of explosive and potentially destructive basic emotions, referred to as warrior ethos. For him, the second nature is made of tacit pacts that are ruled but remain unconscious, that is, his idea of mind is that a complex system consisted of different areas that should be understood in its historical process and social context (Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998). Thus, Elias made a distinction between social *habitus*, the one that is shared by the majority of a network or figuration, and the individual *habitus*, denoting emotional and practical dispositions that the individual develops by himself. The first is, so to speak, the basis, the prime matter or the soil over which individual differences arise. Articulating theories of Marx, Weber e Freud, Norbert Elias is the sociologist that incorporates individual psychic structures into the collective social formations by means of the concept of figuration. This concept conveys interdependence amongst human beings that is created and modified in constantly changing social processes, which do not develop in only one and certain direction – that of civilization – but allow for retrocessions in agreed rules and habitual practices. Still, it is probable that Elias was not so much impressed by Weber's ideal types of order (Weber, 1964), but on the social processes by which violence and the ruler's unquestionable power loses force in ascertaining automatic actions of the ruled. The civilized ethos accompanies state formation based on agreed rules and democratic processes of decision making.

For Elias, for a civilized or pacified society to exist it is necessary that the state has the monopoly of the use of violence, that is, citizens should not be allowed to use guns as a means of solving private conflicts. But nothing would work if there were not such social and psychic changes in the personal and subjective characteristics of each citizen, that is, if individuals did not learn how to control their emotions and physical violence, if the pleasure from inflicting pain and physically destroy the rival or enemy did not diminish, if they did not acquire some respect for the laws of the country, beginning with those that guarantee the monopoly of violence by the state.

For Bourdieu, *habitus* is subconscious and tacit as well, but an effect of the symbolic power that insidiously establishes the asymmetry between the rulers and the ruled. The language itself is a mere mediator of relations of power that creates domination by the inculcation of their practical logic as something that was always there, that goes without saying and is not challenged nor discussed because it is considered natural.

Since the individuals would not be aware of this arbitrary symbolic in which they are socialized, Bourdieu substitutes the word *habitus* for the word *illusio* in order to remind the fact that such domination remains opaque for the actors in each field of power. Not surprisingly, Bourdieu criticizes Elias because the latter does not bother to know for whose benefit the legitimate monopoly of violence is exercised, or even to understand that there is a legitimate monopoly of the symbolic power that divides individuals into domineering and dominated. Consequently, there is not a reflection on physical violence and less about crime, but only on social inequality, reproduction and divisions in each of the fields of power where always exists a dichotomy between the dominant and the dominated. Any power is, for him, violent in so far as it is based on symbolic violence, that is, the masking of cultural arbitrariness that is instilled in people. Moreover, the matrix of power is male dominance, also called ethos of masculinity that compel man to occupy the dominant position (Bourdieu, 1989).

According to Bourdieu's theory, what matters is not the subjective interaction between individuals, but their structured relations objectively set up since they exist outside the individual minds. There is not exactly a theory about the psychic formation, but only what is already given in the power structures of society based on the dichotomy dominators versus dominated, established by domination created from symbolic power, that is, the capital accumulated by different individuals in a field of force, marked by unequal relations between them (Bourdieu, 1989). However, in certain parts of his reflection, the author acknowledges the

importance of creativity in the practical sense that drives individuals to participate in the games in different social fields.

I will try, based on my extensive ethnographic data, to discuss their theories and spot their limits for interpreting this data.

### ***Socio-economic inequality in the city***

A process of pacification for another subjective formation, that of a civilized ethos, depends on how inequality was established and has changed overtime. From the perspective of a more accepted peace, inequality is an important element for understanding high levels of violence and the predominance of a warrior ethos.

There are not many socio-economic differences between favela and 'asphalt' residents in the suburbs and other poor districts of the North and West Zones of the city. In fact, there has been a remarkable impoverishment and deterioration of the Rio de Janeiro suburbs since the 1970s, a process exactly the opposite of the one occurring in the North American cities where suburbs correspond to the richer areas. De-industrialization, economic losses in the service sectors and small or ineffective anti-poverty programs hit hardest there, provoking a noticeable drop in family income and urban degradation in districts where the poor and lower middle-classes people have always lived. It is now difficult to mark the boundaries between favelas and the contiguous regular districts, although there are islands of affluence in some of them. The opposite is true at the richest zones of the city near the coast (the southern zone). There, favelas are separated from adjacent neighborhoods forming islands of poverty within wealthy environments and establishing the dramatic and visible contrasts of inequality. Yet, homicide and other criminality rates are higher in the former areas than in those where inequality is most flagrant, that is the richer areas where there are favelas spread all over the city, though concentrated (50%) in the suburbs.

Rio de Janeiro is thus a city divided by many factors including income, skin color, religion, gender, age and risk of victimization, undecided between a proper state policing or an armed control by traffickers, militias and other forms of private security. State or formal private policing predominates in wealthier areas; unofficial, illegal or informal control in poorer areas. As regards family income, there is a concentration of poverty in certain districts and certain portions of districts, most of them in favelas, where there is low income and schooling, darker skinned people, more children and adolescents, and more unemployment.

Informal real estate markets operate within the rapidly growing favelas, where land regularization and real estate property is still a very slow process. Informal construction and irregular acquisition of electricity or water have created many conflicts due to difficulties in limiting individual freedom, concerning the location of pipes, electric wires, and sewers, besides usual domestic activities in such crowded spaces. The officially defined 'subnormal agglomerations', have become in fact uncontrolled markets for many goods, from services such as security to real estate transactions. Since there is no legal control over such businesses, and access to justice is enormously difficult for favela residents, the increased population density due to uncontrolled building make the favelas 'sanctuaries', some inexpugnably, for armed retail drug dealers. This partly explains the much higher risk of dying young from violent causes for males in the poor regions because of the vulnerability of youths to the lure of criminal groups, to be discussed below.

Nonetheless, in order to protect themselves from traffickers' violence, other favela residents support militias that wind up exploiting the residents by controlling several informal and illegal services (Zaluar & Conceição, 2007).

Thus, informality has facilitated the violent control of these areas by drug gangs or militias that, in addition to selling illegal drugs or security services, also trade irregular cable TV, informal transport, domestic gas supply and all real estate transactions even though no one has legal property of them. One million people in the city live in areas that had no regular policing and police enforcement. This increases the chances for armed conflicts inside the localities and enhances the vulnerability of youths attracted to the armed drug gangs.

As regards race or skin color, racial segregation does not explain the greater vulnerability of youths living in favelas. Although the proportions of dark skinned and white people in them are exactly the opposite than that of the rest of the city (58.6% of favela residents are blacks and browns, and 41.4% are white, compared with 36.5% and 63.5% of those 'racial' categories respectively outside the favelas), one cannot define this situation as segregation found formerly in ghettos in the United States or South Africa. Yet, socio-economic data are consistently worse in favelas: and 50% of the favela population is younger than 25 compared to 37.7% in the rest of the city. In 2000, 10% of favela residents were illiterate, compared to 3% in the rest of the city. In this city, education levels are high compared to the national average of 6 years of schooling, but the proportion of favela residents with less than 8 years of schooling is 82%, almost double that of those in

the rest of the city where it is 46%. Only 2% of favela dwellers, as compared to 25% of non-favela residents, have higher education. Nonetheless, 94% of children in favelas attend school, yet they exhibit comparatively poorer performance: 20% of them are more than two years behind in school compared to only 10% of students outside the favelas. Most migrants from the poorest states of Brazil, especially the Northeast, where illiteracy is very high, have flooded into the city and constitute, with their descendants, a large part of favela dwellers. Whereas 67% of the population outside the favelas 15 years or older was born in the city of Rio de Janeiro, 24% in other Brazilian states, and 2.8% in foreign countries, 34% of favela residents come from other Brazilian states (Zaluar et al., 2007). School is therefore a major issue for favela dwellers. Estrangement from family and school also have an effect on the vulnerability of youths to the attractions of gangs and, therefore, to the risk of premature death. It is at the verge of adolescence, when they are finishing elementary school or skipping class because of repeated failure, become more vulnerable to the attractions of criminal gangs: easy cash and the power acquired from the barrel of the gun.

Nevertheless, the former are not the worst as far as public services are concerned given that only 1% of households do not have some water, sewage and electricity services, even though the supply is very precarious (Cardoso, 2008).

Official crime data for the metropolitan regions of Brazil show that in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro, the homicide rate by handguns tripled from 20.5/100,000 in 1982 to 61.2/100,000 in 1989, when it reached its peak. Since then, it has been around 50/100,000, with the lowest rate in 2001 (45.3/100,000), which rose again in 2002, and fell in 2005 to (34.9/100,000) and continued to fall till 2013 (Cerqueira et al., 2017; Waiselfisz, 2016). But 70% of these deaths involve drug trafficking and other similar conflicts, whereas the killing of related people or those who knew each other intimately is much rarer than in other parts of the country. Indeed, this rapid growth in homicides particularly affects male youths from 15 to 29 years of age, the majority of which were crimes committed in public places among people who neither knew each other socially. This is the pattern found in conflicts over the division and defense of territories and earnings among armed dealers, as in the violent competition among gangs in the ghettos of Los Angeles, Chicago and New York at the beginning of the 20th Century, and later, during the heroin, cocaine and crack epidemics in the United States of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s (Sullivan, 1992).

### ***The ethnography of traffic groups***

During the 1980s, two main researches took place in Cidade de Deus, one accomplished by me alone, the other carried out with research assistants, three of them males and one female, all university students who had grown up and continued to live in this place. The first study focused on the meanings of poverty, neighborhood associations and local politics; the second one was directed at the youths who were involved with the drug trafficking gangs or were about to join them. Later on, during the 1990s, with a different team, we investigated styles of trafficking and drug use in three different districts of the city. Ten years ago, a series of interviews and focus groups of ex-traffickers made possible to deepen our knowledge on the dynamics of the unlawful trade as well as the ideas and mixed feelings of their main actors. All these studies used participant observation and interviewing techniques. In them, we assumed that one cannot and need not try to become a native in order to understand the subjective meanings of the agents or the social, economic and political dynamics of their criminal activities. We had followed the anthropological tenet that it is possible the encounter of different subjectivities and that understanding the ideas and practices of the other may follow this meeting. We were aware that the other was not a homogeneous social entity but had disagreements and discrepant justifications for violent actions.

I experienced serendipitous revelations along the years I was interviewing youths in favelas of Rio de Janeiro. The first was exactly to discover that, because of my gender and class origin, I was accepted as an interlocutor but was fooled most of the time. Maleness, or at least a specific kind of male identity, was the crux of the matter for understanding my relationship with them and the youths' commitment to violence and transgression. It was therefore possible to do a deep ethnography or thick description (Geertz, 1973), but without the radical culturalist narrative that described in a few words the essence of the studied culture. Using the concept of *ethos*, I avoided the pitfalls of taking for granted a stable or homogeneous system of cultural values and rules. Instead, I worked with the conflicts within an unstable and fast changing social process.

I discovered that I could also consider some of these youngsters as partly conscious of their social condition, denying the unconsciousness behind the idea of *habitus*, as they said: 'no one told me to enter the quadrille or commando; I did it by my own will, I am a *sujeito homem*'. In fact, this ideal of man, is a man that decides everything for him, not taking any advice from anyone for anything. Thus, even considering the social context they live in, some of them make choices independently of external social constrictions, even

though they are aware of the illusions ingrained in the power achieved by the barrel of the gun and 'easy money' they get from trafficking, money that, according to them, goes as quickly as it comes. Hence, even if some vulnerable young people plunged in crime, internalized the warrior ethos or violent social practices, becoming their own executioners by killing each other with increasing cruelty always justified by the warfare, yet some were aware of this illusion. How far does the unconscious inculcation of this ethos go? The point in this paper is to understand those that are not oblivious of their actions and how they consider the illusions they are trapped in.

For juveniles, as several international studies have shown, transgression doesn't always mean the embracing of a criminal career or even not knowing the negative consequences of this venture. Yet, some of them end up practicing a kind of armed power in their communities where guns and a new trade have developed since the 1970s. Our research also confirmed that illegal drug trafficking is part of the formal and informal economy, as it employs few people full-time and allows many more to earn money informally as street vendors. Initially, in Rio de Janeiro, most of them lived where they sell and started early to do small errands for the dealers who controlled the local drug outlets without putting guns at their waists. Nowadays, there is more migration between cities and states in Brazil, as the criminal factions spread throughout the country and become more like cartels.

Even at the retail points of this vast network, that is, the drug outlet inside the favela, a commercial language is also used by youths who have little schooling: profits, accountancy books, inputs and outputs, bookkeepers, owners and managers. In Rio de Janeiro, the traffickers' gang was not wholly based on personal dependence and loyalty, even less on family ties. It was not a family business; it had no 'big boss' but worked in networks loosely connected in some areas and with violent controls over its members. Yet, these networks were not always horizontal for there was great inequality inside them in terms of power relations and division of profits and gains; internal relationships were also vertical: the chief or the owner at the top of the gang power structure, followed by the managers, who control the point of sale, the *vapores* (sellers who may stay in one place or move rapidly from one to another depending on arrangements with policemen and customers) and the street sellers (inside the favela or outside it). Gang members and their neighbors expressed this verticality symbolically in terms of a dichotomy of power that was also a dichotomy of decision-making awareness, by which independence of decisions were left the chief and his managers, the only ones who have guns all the time and gain more with the trade, the chief keeping the lion share for himself. Bookkeepers and *vapores*,<sup>1</sup> who worked directly with the boss, and many go-between sellers called 'little airplanes' (*aviõezinhos*) did not carry guns, unless told so, were paid by tasks, and used to be the ones more commonly arrested and prosecuted. Mostly, they just received varying amounts of the drug to sell, for which they become entirely responsible. They might sell them after increasing their weight with cheap substances in order to raise profits; or they might consume the drug, thereby running the risk of being killed by the trafficker if not paying for them properly. Of course, these conflicts have some room for negotiations that used words, not guns. These negotiations might take place considering the links the *vapor* had in the neighborhood and what the neighbors said about him. But it was not a rule that should be followed as it happens in the periphery of São Paulo controlled by another command PCC<sup>2</sup> (Feltran, 2010).

Some of the more business-like traffickers have established legal business, such as freight trucks, taxis, bars, bakery stores and gas stations. This type of activity was not evenly possible for all drug members so that the lower positioned should always be in debt with the 'owners'. There were stories about men that had been killed only because they, although in the lower layers of the gang, had accumulated money or properties. But most stories were about how chiefs lost their money quickly through payments to corrupt policemen, lawyers and their own lavish consumption. When owners were short of money, they organized robberies, car thefts or muggings, calling the *vapores* and *aviões* considered tough to come along or perform these crimes for them. Chiefs provided then guns to the youths, even if they were not part of the permanent drug trafficking gang. This is what some of the disillusioned youths caught in the violent strife called the

<sup>1</sup> The *vapor* distributes the small amounts of cocaine that are sold inside a piece of paper to the very young dealers (*aviões*) who finally take the drug to the customers. They are the ones more easily arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned mainly because of their lack of a proper address, personal appearance and poverty. Thus, most of prisoners are the less powerful inside the factions, the poorer and darker skinned dealers.

<sup>2</sup> PCC (*Primeiro Comando da Capital*) is the most powerful faction in Brazil and has thousands of members not only in São Paulo, where the organization was created in 1993 inside a state prison. It is present in 22 out of 27 states of the Federal Republic of Brazil, especially inside prisons for controlling the local commands and dominating drug and gun traffics. Lately, since 2013, but clearly in 2018, PCC and the other commands, including enemy factions, started a series of attacks on government assets, proclaiming they are not against society but against the state that oppress them.

'devil's condominium'. It is a condominium because it is based on informal and sometimes tacit contract that comply cooperation and loyalty by sharing guns; it is devilish because it is fatal for those youth who start committing crimes by borrowing guns from dealers and frequently die as a consequence of the retaliation circles into which they fall.

Even if registered crimes are not directly related to drugs, the presence of this new power operates at the social and political levels as well as the representational level, as a model, a symbolic map for youngsters who want to be considered, respected, feared. It can be considered as a field of force according to Bourdieu's theory.

How are youths prepared for cooperating with drug dealers? Children grow up in areas where the latter walk with their guns, give orders, pay lavishly for parties and are talked about. The stories about their deeds were an important part of the people's talks in the neighborhood. Children are thus attracted to the drug dealers' gang. They began being close by going to buy food or carrying things between the dealers who are in different parts of the neighborhood. They enter the gang later when they show 'disposition', that is, mugging or killing someone with guns. Therefore, there is a kind of socialization in the streets for what could be considered a field of force with its own rules for establishing hierarchies between its members. The warrior ethos is acquired in childhood by the example and fame of elders, with it the illusion proper to the tacit rules and practices that they learn early.

Any personal disagreements or group conflicts were solved violently, since appeals to the justice system would be impossible. During interviews, they said that 'to keep hold of a cocaine outlet, you could not lower your guard for a minute'. A 'front man', that is, the chief who is in charge of the outlet, must keep all his employees in line so that competitors would not sell more or better goods or acquire more fire power. Simultaneously, the chief had to uphold himself with his supplier, who is no longer just a man coming around in a truck but another network that links him to other Brazilian cities and countries. To carry a gun and to keep constant surveillance over the gang were everyday concerns for him. It takes a lot of 'disposition' for the drug gang's leader to prevail.

Inexperienced young men might kill each other because of rivalry over a woman, a minor scuffle or any act that is taken as provocation, that is, any motives that menace the status or masculine pride of youngsters trying to assert their virility – the '*sujeito homem*'. It is a sexually charged, virile world. To carry a gun is to 'fucking strut' or to 'have your iron in your belt'. Instead of the verb to rob, they say 'to mount' their victims, used both for mugging on the streets and for breaking in houses. To kill somebody is to 'lay them down' (Zaluar, 2001).

Warfare among trafficking crews became constant when commands started to dominate some *favelas*, also called 'hills' of the city. Beforehand, armed traffickers were merely owners of the drug outlets; from then on, they were called 'owners of the hill'. Since the mid 1980s, drug outlets in the favelas were divided in two or more organizations: Red Command, and the Third Command that subdivided subsequently when resentful traffickers started Friends of Friends. Nowadays, militias<sup>3</sup> control more favelas than the commands and have several kinds of business, mainly Real Estate transactions that made them control most of the land in the West Zone of the city.

The basic principle of any Command is that when a friendly crew in one favela needs drugs or guns, that is, belonging to the same Command, other favelas will help. Thus, even if not coordinated entirely as a mafia hierarchy, the drug trade in Rio had an efficient horizontal arrangement by which a favela that runs out of drugs or guns gets them from allies. It should not be forgotten that trafficking in Rio is very unstable, for there are several gangs and individuals striving for power and positions inside the trade. Drugs and guns came from other countries and Brazilian states by boats, vehicles, airplanes in wider networks even more difficult to control. The unstable and conflicted networks are thus national and transnational (Sain & Games, 2014).

As a result of armed control, the drug lords have restricted the movements of dwellers and governmental agents, sometimes limiting the access to public services, such as schools, health agencies, and sports compounds. Residents of one favela should not enter the territory of an 'enemy' favela, even when delivering

<sup>3</sup> Militias started during the 1970s in the city's west zone where migrants from the Northeast of Brazil live and decided to protect themselves from the traffickers and robbers of other favelas. During the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, they expanded their dominion. Generally called militias, such groups are closer to what is defined as paramilitary for members nowadays come from the Armed Forces, the Police Forces, including firemen, and penitentiary guards, retired, expelled from or active in such institutions. Although linked to the dwellers' associations of the dominated favelas, paramilitaries are the main holders of power and profit that come from their several informal and illegal businesses inside such localities, especially real estate transactions (Zaluar & Conceição, 2007; Cano, 2008).

goods, visiting friends and relatives, or having dates. If they do, especially young men, they might be killed. Many adolescents had so died simply because they passed from one sector to another commanded by feuding drug gangs (Ventura, 1994). They grew up seeing the exhibition of guns as symbols of power and its cruel use as lethal instruments for punishing foes. They learned to hate policemen and fear being pointed out as informers, which provoked loss of consideration and death threats.

For this scenario, neighbors of some districts have a name: 'the endless war', that is, the firing between members of enemy trafficking commands, or policemen and militiamen confronting traffickers. During these violent clashes, not only gang members, but also youths that lived in the invaded favelas were asked to help the local gang against their 'enemies'. Adolescents working for traffickers, who were called 'soldiers' or 'falcons', formed a 'bond' that would confront the other 'bond' that came to the invaded favela. Some of them had in fact been trained as recruits in Brazilian Armed Forces, a conscripted army. Even when they were not gang members, recruits were 'invited' to mount automatic weapons either smuggled or stolen from Army arsenals, and to train the younger traffic soldiers. Such invitations could not be refused without consequences: they would lose 'consideration' of the peers, they might be expelled with their families from the favela (Zaluar, 2001). As competitors in the drug trade became mortal enemies, it was necessary to discourage them by a progressive increase of guns and men, in this peculiar local gun race. Therefore, there was some rationality when preparing for a specific irregular confrontation, a rationality explained by the dynamics of organized crime linked to drug trafficking.

Nevertheless, disillusioned pushers then cited the drug outlet as a place of distrust and animosity, where there is no mutual trust and respect except for the other man's gun. The illusion was never complete and recurrent conflicts stretched mistrust and hatred, important ingredients of violent reaction (Zaluar and Freitas, 2017).

Initially, violence linked to drug trafficking was local, and did not divide the Brazilian population into two opposing groups. In civil wars, soldiers are part of military armies and do not generally participate in everyday activities in their neighborhoods (Wessells, 1998). Consequently, there is less militarization of children and adolescents in the favelas where they do not leave their families, schools and neighborhoods in order to join distant military forces. The irregular war is local. Recently, this figuration is changing with national alliances between the several factions that were created inside prisons.

However, such configuration is not natural, nor consensual, and is not the only one found in poor vicinities. The destructive social configuration points to conspicuous consumption defining successful masculine identities. Helping friends, neighbors and relatives, impressing everyone with a display of jewelry and expensive clothes, giving parties in public places are its main features. But one should add a spectacular display of male protest: in this localized but endless armed conflict, youths with guns and a lot of money in their pockets become a threat to their neighborhoods. What really matters is to understand the different processes and their intertwined effects that make youngsters continuously breach not only the law, but also local sociability. Only then can one conceive public policies that may help to prevent the mistrust, hatred and hostility that result in their mutual destruction.

Therefore, there is another social level to consider: that of fragile or broken social ties inside favelas, generation conflicts, estrangement in families and neighborhood associations, which have inverted the sign in reciprocity circuits: from solidarity to revenge, from the agonistic to the antagonistic, from rivalry expressed in sports and carnival parades to deadly rivalry. Continuous splits within these finely woven social ties have destroyed the social fabric and created social fragmentation, anomie and isolation.

In differing degrees, poor workers that stayed together in neighboring organizations, getting married to form families regardless of race or creed, have watched the weakening of these organizations, so important in the creation of culture, in achieving moral and political autonomy, in participating in the public debates about justice. Leaving the organizations that they had built up during decades of republican history (Zaluar, 1985; Carvalho, 1987) in the poor neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro, adds more fuel to violence, if we consider the importance of reciprocity networks and rules that allow for the controlled manifestation of emotions in a dispute.

### ***The penal system***

Prisons are very porous in Brazil where the commands created control over their members outside the walls, doing business, passing on orders, sometimes even deciding who is to be killed in and outside the walls. When they gained control of the drug outlets during the years 1985–1989, the prisoners started to charge traffickers for the protection they could have if arrested, getting part of the profits in the illegal business. Consequently, outside and inside the jail, one of the biggest drains for drug dealers was, and



still is, payments to organizations, bribes to policemen, expenses with lawyers. Between all these actors, there is a continuous string of strategic games wherein many partners' intermediaries participate in order to avoid detention. There are also debates within the criminal factions about fees to guarantee survival when arrested. It is this chain of interactions that finally binds them more and more to the rules of negative reciprocity based on blackmail and threats that criminal factions employ, but nevertheless the only possibility of some protection if sent to a prison where they can die for nothing. It is what in game theory is called 'endless repetition of interactions' in which the partners learn how to act cooperating to keep the organization strong (Axelrod, 1984). So, it is imperative to stop arresting mainly the poor youngsters with little knowledge, few connections, less power and importance for the faction. They are the ones that obey the chiefs' orders inside and outside the walls. They are the soldiers in the endless irregular war that kills so many young men in Brazilian cities.

The war inside and outside prisons had begun as local and irregular, but it is changing quickly since some of the most powerful commands (Red command and PCC) have expanded their businesses and power throughout the country (Manso & Dias, 2018). There is continuous armed confrontation, but without a war proclaimed. This is what strategists call the new challenges that unconventional wars have brought about. These armed conflicts happen when the war is not between states and don't follow international pacts on warfare; more than irregular or asymmetrical, they are 'savages' for only informal agreements between the parts may control what happens during confrontations. Peace negotiations are more arduous since the enemy is not another institutionalized entity, therefore more uncontrollable. Conflicts may last endlessly and become more ruthless towards the enemies. That is why they create so much insecurity, social fear, and widespread human suffering for which people have no explanation or justification. Ending this war is imperative though peace negotiations are problematic. There are indirect ways to diminish the clashes. The first one is to control gun traffic, that is, the illegal market of automatic weapons exclusive to the Armed Forces. Instead, the legal market was recently softened by a presidential decree.<sup>4</sup> Now adults more than 25 years old that have not a police enquiry or a judicial process may buy any guns to keep at home or at work to 'defend themselves'. New categories of professionals may also carry guns in the streets. Instead of investigating how fast-fire repeaters, such as AR15, are sold to traffickers in Brazil, the decision will increase the number of guns circulating.

To reverse the warrior ethos, another indispensable step to finish the irregular war and the amazing number of homicides, public policies should concentrate on socialization of children and teen-agers, the main social process for building up a civilized habitus. Troubled youths and their relatives should have assistance for dealing with the constant threats to their lives. Schools should have programs to socialize the students in respecting adults and the rules of games for winning in fair competitions, and not for killing the opponents. Nowadays, this idea of fairness includes some informalization of etiquettes occurring from the 1960s onwards, also termed collective emancipation, overcoming the figure of irrefutable authority whose orders had to be obeyed without discussion. Alternative patterns of conduct became accessible, as object of negotiation authorities and youths. In the psychic economy of individuals, responsibility vis-à-vis the choices made between alternatives increased, as well as greater social egalitarianism. This recent process Elias termed functional democratization, that is, the overall trend to reduce power potentials between different groups, even to those between men and women, parents and children (Wouters, 2019). Children and teen-agers should also be in contact with adults in neighborhood associations, either cultural, leisure or political ones, that have suffered the most from traffickers, militiamen and policemen violence.

However, civil habitus socialization should encompass all social classes, including the richest and most powerful. Governmental discourses that further the use of guns for the latter 'self-defense', and support policemen who kill poor young men considered 'bandits', as stated today in Brazil, are counterproductive. Penal injustice has received little attention from recent governments, nonetheless the inequity that brings further revolt from the deprived sectors living in more dangerous areas because guns are so easily available, and arrest is certain. It is mistaken to focus only on questions of income distribution instead of considering what most deprived people think as abhorrent, that is, our justice system; instead of improving education and training for lower-wage workers; instead of increasing sociability based on functional democratization in local associations as well as in larger society. This is an efficacious halt to humiliation and lack of social recognition, undeniable drives for violence.

<sup>4</sup> The decree no. 9.685, of 15 January 2019, amends decree 5,123, dated July 1/2004, which regulates the registration, possession and sale of firearms and ammunition, on the national system of arms.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

## Author Information

This article is published in memoriam of my mother Alba Zaluar, who has passed away in December 2019 victim of pancreatic cancer. I can still remember her leaving our home in the 1980s in her old Volkswagen Beetle, tape recorder by her side, to go to Cidade de Deus. I didn't realize then that she was interviewing drug dealers, this realization came much later. My brother and I were children when she, alone, undertook these risks. I can't comment on her contribution to her field, as I'm not an urban anthropologist myself, but I can attest to her courage and personal sacrifice during this period. Reading this article that she wrote in first person while undertaking chemo renewed the longing for her and how proud I feel of her. I thank Dr Leonardo Fontes for carefully reviewing the proofs of this article.

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