

Brazil: the politics of life and death

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On Homicide Rates in Brazil

Research on violence in Brazil is often based on homicide rates. Two major problems are scarcely discussed: 1. homicide is used to understand "violence", an analytical category performed to "describe" very different phenomena such as robbery, drug trafficking, criminal groups, domestic or gender/race based violence etc. Paper recovers the ancient Machado da Silva's critics on the topic. 2. Based exclusively on homicide rates, empirical changes on homicide dynamics are described but papers does not consistently address causality. In 2017 the country experienced more than 63,000 homicides, more than 30/100,000 inhabitants. Ceará State had 48.6% more homicides in 2017 compared to the previous year. The Federal District, 17.1% less. São Paulo witnessed the explosion of homicide rates in the 1980s and 1990s and a drop of 70% in the 2000s; Rio de Janeiro and Pernambuco had both significant descents for some years with rates turning up again very quickly. How to understand these rapid changes? Combining ten years of ethnography on homicides in São Paulo to secondary data analysis about different Brazilian States, the paper argues that homicide rates in Brazil are caused by three situated and entangled factors: i) the local dynamics of conflict between criminal groups; ii) the local dynamics of transnational illegal economies; iii) the local implemented Security Policy model.

Graham Denyer Willis, University Senior Lecturer, Centres of Development & Latin American Studies, Dept. of Politics & International Studies, University of Cambridge

Politics Gone Missing

Every year, 25,000 people 'go missing' in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. This ethnographic work examines the political production and use of 'missing people' as a political, but ostensibly apolitical, category. I trace the rise in disappeared people through the bureaucracies of the state, the struggles and trauma of families, in the disinterment and materiality of public and clandestine cemeteries, and via the ongoing violence of racialised policing and agentic organised crime. I argue that the 'unevident' political condition of people gone missing is decisive in the contemporary practice of governance by abandonment, where truth and evidence are subsumed to the violence of 'third things' and the certainty of supposition. Making people 'go missing' from politics is a widespread political condition

Roxana Cavalcanti, Lecturer in Criminology, University of Brighton, School of Applied Social Science

The politics of crime and militarised policing in Brazil

This presentation examines the interlacing politics of crime with the recent history of militarised policing in Brazil. Through an analysis of archival material from US government agencies, the article reveals the enduring influence of the US over violent Latin American police forces with the view to protecting corporate interests and US ideals. Ethnographic data collected in the northeast of Brazil complements this material, revealing how a contrived focus upon supposed crime control takes precedence over citizens' human rights and equality before the law, maintaining a legacy of authoritarianism. I argue that international police and political assistance coupled with the political misuse of crime control discourses have facilitated the endurance of a military regime (1964-1985) and the return of the authoritarian far-right to mainstream politics.

Fernando Rodrigues, Lecturer in Sociology at Universidade Federal de Alagoas, UFAL, Visiting Fellow, LSE.

From the outskirts to urban peripheries: national criminal collectives in North and Northeast Brazil

Until very recently, there was no perception that West-Centre, North and Northeast Brazil were connected to national and international criminal collective networks such as PCC (Primeiro Comando da Capital), in São Paulo, and CV (Comando Vermelho) in Rio de Janeiro. A series of massacres in Brazilian prisons from 2016 has put pressure on researchers to reevaluate their investigation agendas. From the findings of fieldwork and questionnaires I intend to draw on some developments within the networks under which the North and Northeast have appeared in current criminal debate. The work is based on research on juvenile prisons and poor neighbourhoods (including shantytowns) in one of the poorest and the most agrarian states of Brazil, Alagoas. Through juveniles and their families' trajectories, I point out how work, family and criminal migration have become entangled. Furthermore, I aim to bring some evidence of how these migration movements are tied to new state and trade developments in their lives. From this, I sketch representations of emotional, cultural and economic transformations that seem closely connected to a singular process of the state's expansion on the "new" urban poor, and the spreading "facções" as criminal collectives through "peripheric" regions in Brazil. In the end, I highlight how this scenario is interdependent from some movements worldwide.

Fabio Magalhães Candotti (ILHARGAS, Universidade Federal do Amazonas/Federal University of Amazonas, Brasil)

Assemblages of bordering in Brazilian criminal and security politics

In the last two decades, in Brazil, we have seen a progressive proliferation of prison and criminal collectives, almost always differentiated and related by spatial identities, referring to counties/states, regions and nations. At the same time, space-related security concerns were diversified and intensified in the big media and state policies. In addition to an old discourse on the (de)control of national borders, one has talked about the expansion and creation of factions, the different situations in the counties/states and regions, and the flows that cross and connect these places (drug routes, escapes of leaderships, transfers of prisoners, information sharing etc.). My proposal is to problematise this spatialisation of Brazilian criminal and security politics. For this, I will take as a center of reference a county/state seen as one of the most peripheral of the country, the Amazonas (with 1.5 million km², with the largest national border area and where the Family of the Northern faction was born). From this place, I will discuss divergences and convergences between some assemblages of bordering, that is, between sets of simultaneous and heterogeneous actions that have the effect of producing spatial borders, which are also managerial, warlike and identity borders.