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# **Marginalised youth, violence and policing: A qualitative study in Recife, Brazil**

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## **Abstract**

Few studies have examined the relations between urban marginalised youth and the public security system in the northeast of Brazil. This article addresses this gap in the literature through an examination of youth perceptions of a security programme aimed at reducing violence. It also analyses the effects of this security program by interrogating the hegemonic discourses of state-actors in the region, namely, agents of the criminal justice system. The analysis draws on ethnographic data collected between 2012 and 2016 in Recife, the capital city of the state of Pernambuco in the northeast of Brazil. This approach permits an examination of the nature of new security interventions, and a comparison between two distinct narratives about this new securitisation agenda. One overarching narrative focuses on young people's vulnerabilities, the other on claims of successful securitisation. An analysis of these narratives widens understandings of the effects and risks of security interventions, contributing to a debate about their impact on young people's lives and society at large.

## **Key words**

Policing; Violence; Young people; Brazil; Social justice.

## Introduction

A significant literature has begun to emerge identifying the issue of youth violence in poor urban communities around the world (Feltran, 2011; Hagedorn, Davis, & Ebrary, 2008). In Brazil, these communities are often referred to as favelas<sup>1</sup> (slums and informal settlements) and *periferias* (peripheral areas). Outsiders tend to perceive these communities as undesirable places in which to live. They are working-class neighbourhoods where workers such as labourers, service-sector employees and domestic workers live. They are communities in which family ties, hard work and social mobility are highly valued. They are also replete with community associations, organisers and leaders. However, they have come to the attention of the wider public as violent places, known for their high murder rates and for the cinematographic representations ingrained in public consciousness through films such as *City of God* (2002) and *Elite Squad* (2007). The social sciences and the ethnographic literature that examine the troubled context in which violence has become a central part of public life have tended to ignore youth experiences and perceptions of security and justice in Brazil.

Sometimes this violence is associated with ‘gangs’ (Fernandes, 2013; Jones & Rodgers, 2009), or with other forms of organised crime – especially drug dealing and trafficking (Arias, 2006; Bourgois, 2003; Denyer Willis, 2015). Sometimes it takes the form of political or community resistance (Davies, 2006; Scheper-Hughes, 2004). Young people are sometimes the perpetrators of lethal violence, but more often they are victimised by police and death squads (Arias, 2006; Huggins, 1997; Zaluar, 2010). The causes and sources of violence and insecurity are multifarious. They relate to complex historical, socio-economic and geographical factors (Pereira, 2008). Less is known about how young people relate, respond and perceive this challenging context.

Pinheiro (2006, p. xviii) suggests that our failure to listen to young people has led to a failure to understand and respond to their needs. This article examines the narratives of young people and security agents about a process of regional securitisation. The study focuses in Recife, the second largest city in the northeast of Brazil, where a public security programme known as *Pact for Life* has been deployed to reduce high rates of murder since 2007. This article asks how young people living in Recife respond to the nature of state interventions. What effects do new forms of formal control have on the communities they live in? Ultimately, what role does the

State and its policies play in the fluctuation – continuation, expansion or reduction – of diverse forms of violence in the most socially excluded communities?

These issues are important because the securitisation of urban spaces can produce unequal social relations along spatial, ethnic and class lines (Becker & Müller, 2013; Davis, 2013). Securitisation is conceptualised here as a process in which concerns about security, law and order dominate approaches to resolve social problems. This process is associated with political profiteering, law and order politics and with hegemonic punitive discourses. It is also connected to the global export of ‘zero tolerance policing’ (ZTP) (Young, 2011). The export of this approach to securitising urban spaces is a classic example of the ways in which criminological theories travel from the global North and become uncritically applied to South. Attempts to cleanse the streets of groups and communities who are perceived as disorderly, socially undesirable (e.g. the poor and marginalised) are attractive to local elites, businesses and profit-seeking real estate developers – all of which are influential sectors in the city of Recife.

The following sections of this article explore, in order: theories of state and violence; some of the existing challenges that young people face in the Brazilian context; the methodology of this study; the genesis of a new security programme; the dominant (albeit ambiguous) discourse of successful state intervention among public security actors and, finally, the challenge to this hegemonic discourse, emerging from the narratives of young people.

### **Violence and the State in Latin America**

State theorists and social scientists have debated the extent to which Brazil’s violent context is linked to the issue of state absence. (O’Donnell, 1993) argued that human rights violations were linked to the absence of the rule of law and of effective state institutions in poor communities. His thesis embodies a common fallacy that Brazilian cities are divided between accessible and no-go areas. In the former the State is perceived as present while in the latter, allegedly the territory of criminals, it is absent. A book by Zuenir (Ventura, 1994), *Cidade Partida* (‘The Divided City’), focuses on this dualistic ideology. This emphasis on ‘division’ and on ‘duality’ ignores the connections that do exist between different areas of the city. It becomes tempting to perceive favelas as not only poor but also dysfunctional areas, which have failed to integrate with the rest of the city; areas in which traffickers impede the

progress and development of civil society because they will not tolerate forms of social or political organisation that might challenge their power. This common misconception fails to acknowledge the ways in which the State is present in different territories and the ways in which poor areas are connected to the political system and to the rest of the city.

Elizabeth (Leeds, 1996) argued that rather than being absent, the State is entangled in violent relations through patron-client relations with favela residents. In a similar line of argument, (Arias, 2006) deployed ‘social network’ theories to argue that violence in poor urban areas was in fact not caused by the absence of the State, but rather by an intricate network involving a variety of social actors: civil society (e.g. non-governmental organisations, residents’ associations), the police, corrupt politicians and favela residents. This suggests a need to look beyond the hypothesis of ‘State abandonment’ (Wacquant, 2003) often applied to the poorest communities in the region. The State is often part of existing problems (Arias, 2006; Gledhill, 2013).

Moreover, in some aspects the Brazilian state, specifically during the rule of the Worker’s party (2002-2014), had not ‘abandoned’ the poor. The Worker’s party increased spending on education, health, conditional cash transfers (CCTs) and increased the minimum wage (Hall, 2008; Molyneaux, 2008). Although most of the increase in public spending was directed at the often-criticised CCTs, in the 2000s Brazil experienced a reduction in labour informality (Comin, Barbosa, & Carvalhaes, 2012) and poverty (Barros, Carvalho, Franco, & Mendonça, 2010; Neri, 2009). This period of economic growth, growing employment and improvements in the life chances of Brazil’s poorest came to a halt when the country entered a recession and the political right reclaimed the highest ranks of government (Cavalcanti, 2017).

Instead of examining ‘State abandonment’ per se, this article suggests that it is important to examine the nature of state interventions. This demands an analysis of how state interventions take place and how they are interpreted, experienced – challenged and negotiated (Darke, 2013) – by those at the receiving end. It also requires an understanding of the complex context in which the State exists and relates to its citizens. The following section focuses on the complexities of this context with particular reference to issues faced by young people.

## Youth in Brazil's context

Since the 1980s both the homicide rate and the use of firearms in homicides have been rising in most Latin American countries (Arias & Goldstein, 2010). Just in 2014, approximately 60,000 people were killed in Brazil (Cerqueira et al., 2016). Brazil has the highest homicide rate among the 12 most populous countries in the world (Waiselfisz 2013). There is also an unequal distribution of deaths in the country, with the North and Northeast regions seeing much higher increases in levels of lethal violence in the 2000s. In the Northeast, the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants went from 19.4 in 2000 to 33.5 in 2009 (Souza, Ribeiro, & Valadares, 2012, 52). While there is a geographical aspect to this phenomenon, there are also gender, ethnic and class dimensions to it. According to a large-scale national survey (Waiselfisz, 2011, p. 60), the likelihood of death for a young man who is not white, and is aged between 15 and 25 in 2008 was 127.6% greater than for a white male in the same age bracket. Most victims of homicide are poor young black males (Waiselfisz, 2014).

In 2010, the rate of youth homicide (15-29 years old) with a firearm in Brazil reached 42.5/100,000 of the population, as compared with 9.1/100,000 in 1980 (ibid 2013, 13): almost a fivefold increase in thirty years. Overall levels of lethal violence continue to grow, making Brazil one of the least safe countries for young people. However, at a policy and legal level, a number of promising and progressive changes took place in the country in the 1990s and 2000s. For example, spending in public health and education increased, the family income benefit programme (known as *Bolsa Familia*) was implemented and accredited with reductions in levels of extreme poverty and income inequality (Hall, 2008; Molyneaux, 2008; Neri, 2009).

In 1990 Brazil replaced the discriminatory, repressive and segregationist legislation known as 'Minors' Code' with the Children and Adolescent's Act (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* or ECA). The Minor's Code in operation from 1927 to 1990 had discriminated between the definitions of 'child' and 'minor' (Rizzini, 1997). Children were constructed as deserving innocent individuals in need of adult protection while minors were constructed as undeserving young wrongdoers from poor and morally deficient families (Drybread, 2014, p. 757). This code made it legally possible to institutionalise children indeterminately whether or not they had broken the law (Drybread, 2009). ECA redefined childhood by including all children and adolescents as rights-bearing citizens and forbidding the institutionalisation of young people, unless they commit a heinous offence of violence such as rape, murder

or kidnapping with a maximum sentence of three years (Drybread 2014, p. 758). Young people under the age of 12 are considered children incapable of committing crimes and those between 12 and 18 years old are considered adolescents, who cannot be held criminally responsible.

ECA became a reference for Latin America because of its emphasis on human rights and the respect for the development of children and adolescents (UNICEF, 2015). This legal change developed a new discourse that constructs young people as bearing rights instead of as objects of intervention (Moore, 2015, 273). However, it is still unclear how much the law has changed discriminatory practices. Police practices remain embedded in misconstructions that portray young, poor, black males as criminals and young, poor, black females as morally dangerous. These discriminatory practices resonate with wider inequalities in Brazilian society, revealing its racist and classist discrimination that conflate crime with poverty.

Despite the legal and policy gains Brazil has made over the last 25 years, the current economic recession and growing unemployment (Amorim, 2016), coupled with the impeachment of President Rousseff of the worker's party in 2016 and the following conservative interim government pose new threats to young people in the nation. The interim government and its supporting conservative parliamentary caucus have proposed freezing public spending (Alessi, 2016), support for the reduction of the age of criminal responsibility and for the increase of sentences for young offenders from 3 to 10 years (Douglas, 2015). This punitive approach is fuelled by misconceptions about crime control that emerge in societies where fear of crime and high-crime rates are widespread (Garland, 2001).

In the Brazilian context, the rise in punitive penalty, as illustrated by the extreme growth of the prison population, has been associated with the intensification of the war on drugs, the inclusion of drug trafficking in the list of heinous crimes in the 1990s and the practice of incarcerating drug users and small-scale dealers as if they were drug traffickers (Carvalho, 2013; Darke & Garces, 2017). Moreover, as Azevedo and Cifali (2015) note, many punitive laws have been proposed and rapidly created in contexts of high public demand with large disparities in the use of penal policies and criminal justice institutions in each federative state. The state of São Paulo and the state of Pernambuco, for example, while under the rule of the PSDB party have experienced conservative tendencies in the field of public security policies,

with increasing use of the prison and law-and-order politics during a period of national leftist redistributive policies.

These recent changes are expected to generate devastating social costs. Young people, while being one of the most victimised groups in Brazil, are continuously constructed as criminals in need of tougher penal sanctions. The remainder of this article examines a state intervention aimed reducing violence and the ways in which young people respond this attempt to securitise the problematic context in which they live.

### **Methodology**

This article draws on multiple sources of qualitative data collected and analysed between 2012 and 2016. Ethnographic data was collected through observations, open-ended and semi-structured interviews (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) with young people aged between 16 and 29, in two low-income communities in the city of Recife in the northeast of Brazil (N=120). My experience of living in Brazil for over 17 years and knowledge of cultural norms facilitated the establishment of access through local contacts. Young participants were recruited through a local school and via the contacts of a youth community organisation. I used a snowballing method (Atkinson & Flint, 2001) to access a wider sample, based on the criteria of residence in low-income communities. Given the limited data available about young people's perceptions and experiences of safety in the northeast of Brazil, my intention was to facilitate the voices of marginalised young people to be heard and to discuss the issues that they considered important.

Four in-depth focus groups were undertaken in a community organisation and in a school in the two communities, with the aim of exploring issues that residents and young people considered important. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with community activists, high-ranking and low-ranking members of the military and civil police, as well as with members of the public security apparatus (e.g. statisticians, the police ombudsman and policy-makers). Interviews with these groups concerned the changes that occurred with the implementation of the new security intervention, and participants' evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of this intervention. A total of 185 participants were heard. I also conducted observations of government meetings at the Secretariat for Planning and Management (SEPLAG) in Recife. A thematic



approach was adopted to analyse the most recurring emerging topics (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

### **The genesis of a programme of homicide reduction**

In the context of high levels of homicide, Latin American governments have been keen to adopt fast and quick fixes to crime problems, emulating the American experience, which is perceived as best practice (Bailey & Dammert, 2006). In 2007, a violence reduction programme, known as ‘Pact for Life’ (PPV), was implemented in all of the state of Pernambuco, where Recife is located. The programme is largely founded on the ideas of mainstream managerial criminology, such as rational choice theory and situational crime prevention (Clarke, 1997; Clarke & Felson, 2004), which intensify formal social control (e.g. the use of surveillance and policing). Most importantly, it emulates the COMPSTAT police performance programme used in the 1990s in New York (Macedo, 2012). This approach focuses on the management of information, crime statistics and police targets and has rather problematically been credited with the ‘New York Miracle’ (Young, 2011) .

In 2007, the governor of the state of Pernambuco, Eduardo Campos, contracted a sociologist from the federal university of Pernambuco, Professor Ratton, to work as his public security advisor. Between March and April 2007, an initial set of consultations and events were organised as part of a forum of public security where the topic of public security was debated and a plan drawn up. Over one hundred project ideas were proposed (PESP-PE, 2007; Ratton, Galvão, & Fernandez, 2014) and categorised into six lines of action. These included improving responsiveness to victims, social prevention, more joined up working, enhanced planning, information management, evaluation and the training of public security staff.

Although investment in public security grew rapidly, many of the projects originally proposed were not implemented, as interviews with public servants confirmed. This critique corroborates the findings of other studies (Macedo, 2012; Portella & Nascimento, 2014). Social crime prevention (e.g. drug rehabilitation programmes) and training of police also received very little attention. Meanwhile, the implemented projects – focused on managing police targets and conducting more arrests – had the effect of expanding the criminal justice system, overcrowding prisons further and exacerbating adversarial police-youth relations.

### The hegemonic discourse of success

Although there is a clear disparity in the implementation of projects, with the hard-line of repressive control taking precedence over social approaches, PPV became known as a success. The programme was accredited with reductions in levels of homicide (Ratton et al., 2014) in the state of Pernambuco, where ‘between 2000 and 2005 the average homicide rate was 54.13, while between 2006 and 2011 this average fell to 46.67’ (ibid, p. 1). PPV received international awards from the Inter-American Development Bank in 2014 and from the United Nations in 2013 (see GEPE, 2013; Ribeiro, 2014). It has also been promoted as a model for Brazil’s federal public security secretariat (SENASP) and other Brazilian states (Macedo, 2012). The intervention was one of the main marketing points of the political campaign of the state governor of Pernambuco Eduardo Campos (2007-2014). Highly publicised reductions in violent crime associated with PPV facilitated Campos’ re-election for a second term in office and launched his political career at the national level (Wolff, 2014).

In the narrative of members of the police and public security agents interviewed, two main factors were constructed as the cause of successful reduction of homicides. Those were: (1) the shift to a model of increased management of targets; and (2) the increase in investment in police resources. This is illustrated in the following interview extract with a senior member of the management of the public security secretariat:

‘To achieve reductions in homicide, having the political will is a start. But an important point is the model of management by results. There is also investment. We increased the public security budget from R\$20 million (Brazilian reais) per year to around R\$80 million per year. This 80 million is mostly structural investment, such as investing in police stations, appropriate cars for the police, appropriate uniforms, guns, bullet-proof vests, handcuffs. We have also recruited 10,000 new professionals over the last 10 years.’

The apparent solution to crime had rather Americanised connotations: increased policing and formal control. Some experts admitted to having travelled to the US and observed the models of policing that (in their view) worked – including zero tolerance policing – as shown in an interview with the chief of the Pernambucan civil police:

‘Over the years since *Pacto pela vida* started, the prison population has more than doubled from around 15,000 to 30,000 inmates now. Among the *successful* criminological policies in the world, I had the opportunity to visit New York and get to know their *Zero Tolerance* policing, where they had very high incarceration rate. Here it has not been different. [...] I knew it would go well, in six months we went from 50 to 400 captures per month. The secretariat decided this was the secret to success. The secret to success is incarceration. This is our aim. I don’t know any other policy in the world that could revert a situation of violence without incarceration.’

The punitive approach to crime control has been widely discussed in criminology in recent years (Feeley & Simon, 1992; Garland, 2001; Wacquant, 2003). It is not the aim of this discussion to explore this phenomenon directly. What this article addresses are some of the ways in which this phenomenon has manifested itself in Brazilian discourses about security and some of its social effects. The case of PPV’s widening of policing and incarceration, as illustrated by police narratives above, has exacerbated many existing problems in Brazil. For example, the prison population in Pernambuco, as well as in the rest of Brazil, has continuously increased since the 1990s (Carvalho, 2013), even before the implementation of PPV. It is clear that this process has been accelerated during the PPV years.

Nevertheless, there was an overall reduction in the number of homicides in the state of Pernambuco and in Recife between 2008 and 2013 (Ratton et al., 2014), but with more recent fluctuations upwards<sup>2</sup> (Oliveira, 2015). It is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to assess whether this is a direct impact of *Pacto pela Vida* or whether there may be other influencing factors. It is important to note that, although repressive security interventions have been marketed and discoursed as a success, they have had perverse outcomes. The following analysis of young people’s perceptions illustrates some of these effects.

### **Youth perceptions of the effects of the securitisation agenda**

The analysis of youth and community residents’ perceptions highlights the disparities between hegemonic state discourses of success with the voices emerging from street

level. When I started visiting a low-income community surrounding one of the largest prisons in Latin America, in the city of Recife, young people complained about the nature of state intervention in their lives, the lack of public spaces for leisure, inadequate access to housing and public services (e.g. education, health and transport). According to these young people, the State was clearly present in their lives and in their communities. Some of the problems they experienced related to the ways in which the State was present. There were some changes and some continuities in the ways in which the State and its institutions interacted with young people. For example, many young people complained about increasing stop and search police operations. However, they perceived the kind of policing they experienced to be ‘old wine in new bottles’. The police and their institutionally racist practices had not been reformed.

Young people’s experiences of being targeted by the military police, and of the increasing use of stop-and-search, were traumatic. Their experiences resonated known problems of coercive rather than consensual policing (Huggins, 1998). The PPV security program had increased sporadic policing by increasing motorised police patrols and police crackdown operations. However, it had not improved the quality of policing (e.g. the quality of the interactions between the police and community residents) or the level of police accountability.

In the communities studied some young people referred to the police as the *capitão do mato*, a historical character from the time of slavery, who was responsible for capturing fugitive slaves and punishing those who caused disorder or who disobeyed their masters. The analogy said much about the type of policing available for poor black and ethnically mixed communities, as illustrated in the narrative of a young black community resident:

‘The military police gave him a *baculejo* (that is a violent stop and search). They looked at his ID card, took 40 *reais* (equivalent to approximately £13 at the time) from his wallet and called him a shameless cripple. He wasn’t disabled or anything, but he had a broken leg’ (Luther)

The myth of a ‘racial democracy’, that is the idea that Brazilian miscegenation led to non-racist social relations, has been by and large discredited, disproven and contested by multiple studies that reveal Brazil’s profound racial inequalities (Skidmore, 2010,

199-200). The evidence emerging from interviews with members of the police and with residents in low-income communities indicates that both social class and ‘race’ were mobilising factors in police-community interactions. This is not a surprising finding – it is well backed up by the Brazilian and the international literature (Barros, 2008; Bowling & Phillips, 2007; Wacquant, 2008; Zaluar, 2004) – but nevertheless it is a rather enduring and bleak one. What is distinctive in the evidence presented here is the extent of discrimination, disdain and ethnic and social class divisions in the ways in which community-police relations took form in Recife, despite efforts to implement new security interventions. The new security agenda instituted new modes of police governance, with the creation and regular monitoring of targets. However, no significant effort was directed at reforming the police or changing police practices.

The unequal distribution of policing and disproportionate policing tactics – such as police racial profiling, verbal and physical confrontation with residents of poor communities – generate resentment and hostility towards the methods of the police. As a consequence, trust in public institutions is damaged, with residents refusing to provide information to the police. The approach of increasing policing resources and managing performance targets fails to make the police act fairly, or to enable them to protect the most marginalised citizens.

### **Negotiating life and criminalisation in a violent city**

Young residents experienced an informal curfew, and many refrained from using public space due to fear of crime and fear of being perceived as a criminal. They claimed that using public space after 9pm, and being black immediately implied criminality to those policing the war on drugs, an issue shown in young people’s narratives of their interactions with the police:

‘My brother was coming back from a gig at night when one of his mates stole his silver chain, so he decided to call the police. When the police came, instead of treating him as a victim, they accused him of theft and of carrying a firearm. He didn’t have a firearm. They shot him but he survived [...] My other brother was involved in drug trafficking and he was shot and killed by the police last year. My mother was devastated.’ (João, 17 years old)

These narratives reveal a great deal about criminalised and marginalised people's struggles in an increasingly penal state. As a number of academics have argued, Brazil has been experiencing a shift towards a crime and security management discourse in which transgressing social boundaries is increasingly seen as a threat (Feltran, 2011; Moore, 2015, 267-268). The use of public space, access to leisure activities and consumer goods by afro-descendants is policed and perceived as a threat to long-standing power relations that had privileged the dominance of white elites, the ones who are perceived and treated as respectable and deserving citizens. For marginalised young people, crossing those boundaries has become increasingly dangerous, increasing their exposure to lethal violence or of being criminalised and eventually spending time in the country's fast growing prison industry.

Young men in the communities expressed some masculine bravado, claiming that despite the risks and dangers of being out at night, they still used public space at night. One of their strategies of survival was to walk in groups. For young women on the other hand, the risk of violence, rape and common knowledge about multiple unsolved rape cases in the community was enough of a threat to inhibit their use of public space at night. Young women expressed feeling incarcerated inside and outside their homes. In additions to the risks outside the home, domestic violence was also rife as illustrated in the following comments by a young female interviewee:

'I don't spend much time out on the streets so I don't know much about the neighbourhood. I know that we have problems with sanitation [and] mudslides in the community during the rainy season so people can lose their homes. There is plenty of drug trafficking and drug use, especially crack cocaine [...] now and then you hear of a young person who was killed [...] Like a friend of my cousin's, he was killed because of drug debt, that is quite common. There are also cases of men killing their women. Recently a guy shot, killed and cut up the body of his woman because of jealousy'

PPV's focus on homicide reduction and increasing levels of incarceration has sidelined other important crimes in poor communities, including rape, non-lethal violence, violence against women, extortion and crimes committed by state actors, such as police abuses of force and abuses of human rights in prisons and young offender institutions. Women have specifically been overlooked by the policy and so have the

needs of young people. PPV defined and over-enforced the idea of security as the reduction of homicides. This has taken precedence over the overall protection of human rights. Respect and fairness towards people in low-income communities should, but has not, gone hand-in-hand with legitimate policing or democratic police reform.

Most residents in the low-income communities studied did not notice any positive effects of public security interventions at ground level. In sum, the protection of the rule of law has not been the emphasis of programs such as PPV. Changing the focus and methods of security programs is fundamental to promoting more democratic, just and accountable policing. This needs to start from the training of the police and has to include educative campaigns to increase public support for the rule of law.

### **Living with organised criminals in a punitive state**

Evidence from the case study communities revealed that simply incarcerating members of organised criminal groups did not, according to residents, dismantle extermination groups in charge of the sale of security in these communities. Participants explained that illicit security and extermination groups formed by ex-policemen operated by extorting money from residents in return for their services. Residents were coerced into paying fees and claimed that they would be victimised if they did not, potentially by the same security racketeers. Extermination groups were responsible for informal justice in the community, killing any petty criminals, people who owed money and even drug dealers and users. According to numerous residents, the imprisonment of members of these informal groups did not resolve issues in the community:

‘Some people miss the time when Marcos was out because the community did not have problems with drugs. The drugs problem started here in the last 7 or 10 years. But you know he was not arrested because of the community. No one here would have spoken about him (reported him to the police). But his friends are also ex-police officers and they are all being investigated for being part of an extermination group. [...] Now everything here is run down, there is crack cocaine everywhere. When Marcos was out, the problem in the community was just homicides between rival security groups. People died

because of the competition between extermination groups. One group would start terrorising the community to damage the reputation of the other group, because they wanted to take over the security business, it caused all sorts of fights.’ (Luther)

Despite increased spending on policing with the implementation of PPV, the monopoly of violence in these communities continues to be fragmented and the marginalised continue to be treated as expendable nonentities victimised both by violent police and by illegal security groups which are themselves often made up of ex-police officers. From inside the prison, members of these groups continued to manage and profit from a parasitic business, which, extorts money from residents in forcibly selling alternative forms of security.

Young people perceived the PPV security programme as a political discourse rather than an intervention that reduced violence. They did not feel safer. They felt increasingly targeted by police on the basis of their social status. When asked what the state should do to reduce violence, the key local demands were social and preventative interventions such as investment in (1) vocational training for the young, (2) better-quality education, (3) access to leisure spaces and cultural activities, (4) improved work opportunities, (5) the demilitarisation and enhanced training for the police to develop dialogue and respect for human rights in their interactions with the public. Residents viewed these as essential to promoting a safer society. Instead, *Pacto pela Vida* focuses on providing more policing (of an unsatisfactory nature), on imprisoning offenders and on measuring and monitoring targets.

## Conclusion

Police violence and diverse forms of routine violence have been enduring problems in Latin America, predominantly in the communities most affected by social inequalities. This study has examined the effects of a managerial homicide reduction programme in one Brazilian city. The data above suggest that the emulation of mainstream criminological theories of crime control from the Global North, based on the idea of managing crime statistics and police performance – without police reform – has produced large-scale perverse effects in the context of countries of the Global South. Theories produced in the North and applied in the South, have failed to take



into account: the context of the Global South, the literature emerging from the South, complex diverse harms and the experiences and victimization of marginalised urban dwellers, women and young people. Methods of crime control cannot succeed if the communities affected and the institutions supposedly delivering change (in this case the police and the criminal justice system) are not understood within Brazil's historical and socio-economic context.

There was a clear dissonance between what high-ranking officials, police, and academics involved with new security interventions claimed as a 'success' (Ratton et al., 2014), and what people in marginalised communities experienced. Poor people in the communities studied felt increasingly trapped, isolated and criminalised by increasing the policing. The police now had targets, and their work and performance was measured on the basis of the volume of drugs and firearms that they apprehended, the number of investigations concluded and sent off for prosecution.

Incarceration rates grew but long-standing ills in the police – including: racism, classism, violent practices and militarised culture – were not addressed or targeted. Both the model and intensity of the use of policing and the growing use of the prison had perverse effects for the communities studied, some of which can be captured by the inability of these methods to maintain order or contain crime, an issue illustrated by the recent prison escapes. This failure is also evident given that homicide rates and levels of violence only declined until 2013. The State has perhaps simply contributed to a fluctuation in levels of violence, but ultimately the State's adoption of securitisation has proven unsustainable. The context in which organised criminals operate and engage with outside communities over, under and through the prison walls epitomises the failures of global North methods of crime control. Security programmes have failed to inhibit diverse forms of violent and organised crime. Moreover, the securitisation agenda promises to exacerbate existing inequalities affecting the most marginalised populations by bringing them into contact with the criminal justice system as suspects and perpetrators rather than as victims.

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## Biographical note

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<sup>1</sup> I have refrained from using italics for the term favela because it has become internationally used and widely known.

<sup>2</sup> Homicide rates have been increasing since 2014 again, coinciding with the period since Brazil entered a new economic downturn.