Chapter 3
Transnational Organized Crime and Structural Violence in Brazil

Marcos Alan S. V. Ferreira

Abstract This paper is a research note that explores the links between *transnational organized crime* (TOC) – namely the groups linked to drugs and arms trafficking – and the structural violence in Brazil. Grounded on the discussion on violence explored by Johan Galtung and thereafter developed by other scholars of Peace Research, the paper specifically aims to answer the following question: How does TOC take advantage of societal configurations that perpetuate social injustice in contemporary Brazil? The exploratory research is grounded in the analysis of data provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specialized in criminality and violence in South America, government communications and public security studies, as well as United Nations agencies reports (mainly *United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime* (UNODC) and *United Nations Development Programme* (UNDP)). The preliminary results show a correlation between transnational illicit networks and structural violence, with minor differences between rural and urban areas.

Keywords Violence · Brazil · Crime · Transnational organised crime

3.1 Introduction

High numbers of homicides and violent crimes, mainly with the use of firearms, make Brazil one of the most violent countries of the world. According to *Seguridad, Justicia y Paz*, a Mexican NGO which analyses public security in Latin America, 21 out of the 50 most violent cities of the world are in Brazil, fluctuating between 30 and 60 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (Seguridad, Justicia y Paz 2016: 1–4). The sociologist Jacobo Waiselfisz, the coordinator of the yearbook *Mapa da Violência* (Map of Violence), adds more alarming data to this discussion: from Brazilian Ministry of Health data, between 1980 and 2014, at least 830,000 people have been assassinated in Brazil (Waiselfisz 2016: 16).

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C. Atieno and C. Robinson (eds.), *Post-conflict Security, Peace and Development*,
SpringerBriefs in Environment, Security, Development and Peace,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-01740-8_3

High levels of poverty, social inequality and chaotic urbanization are important factors contributing to the growth in homicides rates – and Brazil is not an exception (Saint-Pierre/Mei 2007; Imbusch et al. 2011; Ferreira 2017). Together, these three factors perpetuate structural violence – here understood as conceptualized by Galtung (1969) as a form of violence that often goes unnoticed but that victimizes thousands of people daily through unjust social structures – and spill over into an increase in anomic direct violence, making Brazilians live in a setting which in some spots exceeds conventional battlefields by far.[1]

In this equation, *transnational organised crime* (TOC) is distinct. Its activities take advantage of persistent structural violence seen in Brazil to co-opt new "soldiers of crime" serving its business as well as perpetuates the possibility of young people earning money in a proportion that would be impossible to gain through legal means. Unfortunately, several of these young people do not live sufficiently to spend the gains on themselves or their family. During police confrontations with them and other criminal gangs, have contributed to an increase in the alarming homicide rates described previously. While this connection between social injustice and TOC is very important from Brazilian context, surprisingly there are few studies on the topic made by Brazilian scholars (Dreyfus 2009).

Given this setting and grounded in Galtung's discussion on violence, this paper explores how TOC takes advantage of societal configurations that perpetuate social injustice in contemporary Brazil. It intends to explore the links between TOC – namely the groups linked to drugs and arms trafficking – and structural violence in Brazil.

The following section is dedicated to look into the key concepts of this paper: transnational organized crime and structural violence. The second and largest part presents an analysis of the nexus between structural violence and TOC divided in two dimensions: socioeconomic and political. Lastly, the paper shares some suggestions for continuing examination of nexus between TOC and structural violence.

3.2 Definitions: Transnational Organised Crime and Structural Violence

Although transnational crime is regarded as a new form of post-Cold War phenomenon (Zabyelina 2009), it is a fact that TOC has been part of the international order for decades, as seen with the issue of piracy and slavery in the 19th Century (Marmo et al. 2016). Nonetheless, the sophistication of such activities has gained

[1]For example, according to the Brazilian Forum of Public Security, one of the main NGOs engaged in research and advocacy against violence in Brazil, between 2011 and 2015 the number of killings in the Syrian Civil War was 256,124; in the same period, 279,592 people were assassinated in Brazil (FBSP 2016: 5–6).

momentum with the weakening of border control by the end of bipolarity (Capie 2016), with the intensification of the use of technologies, the greater movement of people and the emergence of global markets – processes that are inserted in what many call globalization (Marmo et al. 2016; Holmes 2016). Although organized crime that transcends borders is a historical fact, globalization also changes the characteristics of this activity. It ceases to be hierarchical and highly centralized to become organized in networks, emulating licit markets and making them more difficult to tackle (Capie 2016: 213; Zaluar 2008).

In such contexts, TOC becomes a fluid threat to international peace. The *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime* UNTOC (2000), defines organised criminal group as:

> (…) a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.

In turn, Article 3 defines that "serious crime" is "where the offense is transnational in nature and involves an organized criminal group" (UNTOC 2000; Capie 2016: 213; Zaluar 2008). As summarized by Reginaldo Nasser, "transnational criminal groups can be defined (…) as associations of individuals who operate in a transnational manner for the purpose of obtaining monetary, commercial or influence gains by illegal means in one or more states in which they act" (Nasser 2014: 145). Commonly, they are groups with the following characteristics: use violent means to reach their ends; in general do not have political goals; are structured combining elements of static hierarchy and network; have limited or exclusive leadership with a unique subculture and; it is governed by its own rules and regulations (Holmes 2016: 7–8).

Legally, TOC differs from international crime. According to the Rome Statute, international crimes are defined as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crime of aggression, while the TOC is not labelled as an offense against the entire world community (Marmo et al. 2016). As defined by United Nations, transnational crimes are offenses "whose inception, prevention and/or direct or indirect effects involved more than one country" (UN 1995), being a global problem that causes significant damage to states and has economic and social implications (Marmo et al. 2016; UN 2010; Capie 2016).

When TOC is analysed in depth, one can observe that it is only the tip of the iceberg of an entire complex and multifaceted productive chain that threatens peace in many societies. In general, this chain starts at the local level with the commercialization of "raw materials" (plants for drugs, people and weapons), sometimes through business intermediaries (human and arms carriers, drug production laboratories, etc.), going beyond national borders until finally reaching the buyer of the illegal 'product' – this being a 'product' from a human being trafficked to slavery or prostitution, to a narcotic or an explosive to a terrorist attack. With the clash between competitors and sellers in these crime-producing chains – or even as an

end-activity in the case of terrorism – the alarming statistics of deaths and violence resulting from TOC emerge (UNODC 2013).

One of the first and more visible consequences of activities lead by organized crime is the direct violence. That is, "(…) physical and readily apparent through observable bodily injury and/or infliction of pain" (Barash/Webel 2002: 7). To overcome this direct violence is just the first step to really say that a society suffering from the effects of organized crime becomes peaceful – in this case, negative peace (Galtung 1969).

This violent context can be understood both in a security and peace approach. As stated by Galtung, under a security-based bias, organized crime would be an evil party, with strong capability, an evil intention and a clear present danger of violence, real or potential. Only strength could deter or defeat the evil party, in turn producing security as the best approach to 'peace' (Galtung 2007: 23). In such a context, the main objective is defeat TOC. It is not important to deal with the structures of society that fuel this criminality.

However, Peace Studies concepts can be critically reread when one wants to understand the spiral of violence generated by crime. Under a peace-based bias, the existence of organized crime can be understood as a manifestation of a conflict which has not been resolved and transformed and that brings a danger of violence seen as a motivation to "settle the conflict once and for all". Only a conflict transformation, empathic-creative-nonviolent can produce peace, which is the best approach to 'security' (Galtung 2007: 23). Thus, [t]he peace argument against the security approach is strong and works like a bandage over a festering wound. Conflict between parties having goals with too many incompatibilities has to be transformed into a peace formation by bridging the legitimate goals non-violently, empathically and creatively. An untransformed conflict will reproduce violence sooner or later. Not going to the roots, transcending the contradictions, leads to a spiral of violence and counter-violence (Galtung 2007: 23).

In the case of violence related to TOC in Latin America, these contradictions involve a permanent context of inequality, prejudice and poverty. Hence, not only direct violence must be transcended, but also structural and cultural. It is necessary to understand that direct violence – like crime-related homicides – is an *event* resulting from violent *processes* present in the structure of society (structural violence) – like the unjust structures that disseminate inequality and poverty – which are strengthened by cultural elements that *permanently* disseminate violence (cultural violence) – like the prejudice against afro-Brazilians (Galtung 1990: 294). "[T]he reduction of personal violence at the expense of a tacit or open neglect of research on structural violence leads, very easily, to acceptance of 'law and order' societies" (Galtung 1969: 184). Hence, criminal activity must be interpreted as "symptoms of a deeper human insecurities arising from underdevelopment and lack of economic opportunity rather than as destabilizing security challenges that can be thwarted only through international cooperation" (Battersby/Siracusa 2009: 123). Only with the significant reduction of all vertices of a violence triangle (see Fig. 3.1) can positive peace be achieved.

Fig. 3.1 Violence triangle. *Source* Galtung (2004)

In view of that, [t]he direct violence, physical and/or verbal, is visible as behaviour. But human action does not come out of nowhere. There are roots two of which are indicated: a culture of violence (heroic, patriotic, patriarchal, et cetera.) and a structure that itself is violent by being too repressive, exploitative or alienating (…) (Galtung 2004).

Thus, "we shall sometimes refer to the condition of structural violence as social injustice", or a form of violence that often goes unnoticed, but that victimises thousands of people daily through unjust social structures. It is silent, essentially static and seen as natural as the air around us (Galtung 1969: 171, 173). Therefore, building positive peace presupposes reducing structural and cultural violence (Galtung 1990, 1996, 2004). This means a constant search for quality of life, personal growth, freedom, social equality, economic equity, solidarity, autonomy and participation (Galtung 1969: 173). That is, the absence or drastic reduction of structural violence presupposes high standards of social justice in a given society. Structural violence can also be understood as an analytical category that studies the machinery of oppression, being the latter a result of many socioeconomic and cultural unfair conditions, as are the forms of memory erasure and de-socialization that drive the conditions of these structures (Farmer 2004: 307). In turn, this oppression – be it political, economic or both – reproduces or increases social inequality and widens the ground for the performance of TOC.

In contexts of high structural and cultural violence, TOC finds a mass of unemployed young people, mostly living in peripheral regions with high levels of poverty and constantly victims of prejudice from the elites of society. This context occurs within a defined framework in which the tensions of society reproduce a historical structural violence permeated by the cultural violence of elites against blacks, natives, *pardos* and other minorities. Not surprisingly, it is precisely in the unequal America's continent that this context is maximized, in which TOC finds more force and lethality (Geneva Declaration 2015; UNODC 2013).

Lastly, structural violence can be understood both as a structured and structuring category (Farmer 2003). It has had its genesis in society and also structure and triggers new collectively created violent processes that need to be analysed (Bourdieu 1989: 18). "Particular attention must be paid to the role of armed violence and its potential for escalating existing and creating new waves of direct and structural violence" (Schnabel 2014: 22). At the same time, organized crime uses the structure of inequality which manifests itself as structural violence for part of

the population, however also reproduces the violence – structurally and directly. It depletes the economic and social capital that could be used for economic development and improve social cohesion, bringing instability and, in some cases, even a return to armed conflict (UNODC 2013: 77).

In summary, the categories of cultural and structural violence, when analysed in the light of the TOC problem, are no longer mere marginal concepts as has been the practice in mainstream Peace Research and International Security. They become central to a thorough analysis of how TOC is the result of structural violence, and at the same time the structuring of violence. Structural violence thus becomes central not only to understanding TOC, but also as a result of the TOC phenomenon.

3.3 The Nexus Between Structural Violence and Transnational Organised Crime

In Latin America, TOC can be regarded as a complex social issue. Together with a specific inner culture – "*la cultura callejera*" or "*a cultura das ruas*" (street culture) – the marginality is a result of the exclusions from the society (Imbusch et al. 2011: 131; Zaluar 2008). In one of the few studies using Galtung's concept of violence to understand crime, Blackwell and Duarte (2014) reflect that social exclusion is linked to many of the criminal activities and problems of violence that are present in the Americas, including the high levels of homicide, kidnapping and other crimes, as well as a disproportionate number of incarcerations. Faced with these circumstances, social exclusion becomes a form of structural and cultural violence[2] that prevents thousands of people from achieving their personal achievements. This structural violence disproportionately affects the most vulnerable members of society, such as women, youth and ethnic minorities (Blackwell/Duarte 2014: 111–112). Thus, it might be useful to consider some other forms of structural and cultural violence which are in many aspects interwoven with the different forms of physical violence and political order in Latin America. Despite the vagueness of these concepts, neglecting structural or cultural violence on a continent with profound social inequalities and important class and race cleavages, with strong discrimination and social exclusion, with extreme wealth and extreme poverty, is to omit important aspects of violence in this region (Imbusch et al. 2011: 89).

In this setting, South America presents a unique environment for organized crime. In addition to the lack of confidence in public institutions, there is a significant amount of illegal financial flows inserted in an environment of social inequality and deprivation of opportunities in poor areas. According to UNODC,

[2]It is beyond the scope of this article to explain in depth the cultural violence in Brazil. However, an example can be mentioned on the strong presence of prejudice against afro-Brazilians more than a century after the abolition of slavery and the low social indicators specifically in this group of population.

US$72 billion, equivalent to 418 tons of cocaine, are annually moved from South America to other regions of the world (UNODC 2014). This massive quantity of money and goods is driven by criminal organizations with refinements similar to capitalist corporations (Saint-Pierre/Mei 2007: 252) that use large numbers of youth in poor areas as the workforce (Zaluar 2008; Dreyfus 2009; Soares 2008).

It is also known that small arms are trafficked massively every year from North to South America, supporting the capabilities of criminal organizations (Geneva Declaration 2015; UNODC 2011; Graduate Institute 2012). Nevertheless, is not only guns and ammunition coming from abroad that is the main issue regarding arms and crime in South America. There is also a strong regional market for arms trafficking, featuring Brazil as the largest arms industry in the region and a niche serving captive local markets (Graduate Institute 2012; Ferreira 2017).

Drug and arms trafficking, plus the structural violence and TOC, results in a productive chain that propagates violence extensively. Let us use the example of drug trafficking, the main violent criminal activity lead by TOC in the region. In this case, the cycle begins in the producer of the input of a drug (example, the production of coca leaf). This drug is processed in illegal labs protected by armed men serving in the drug and arms trafficking trade. They take advantage of the fragility within the borders to enter in different countries and deliver to consumers who are new addicts. Eventual foreseeable side-effects of this productive chain are the deaths related to war on drugs especially of police, innocent civilians caught up in the firing line or young people that allied themselves with trafficking because of the structural violence (Fig. 3.2).

For a better comprehension of the relation between TOC and structural violence in the particular case of Brazil, it is necessary to understand how inequality manifests, both socioeconomicaly and in the distribution of political power (Galtung 1969: 175), given that structural violence manifests both in economic marginalization and in the repression (Schnabel 2014: 21). These research notes focus on analysis and interpretation of the following question:

How does transnational organized crime take advantage of societal configurations that perpetuate social injustice in contemporary Brazil?

To perform the interpretative analysis of the question, eighty seven (87) reports, official documents, articles and books were examined. The sources include data from NGOs that specialize in criminality and violence in South America, government communications and public security studies, as well as United Nations agencies reports (mainly the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)).

The period chosen is from 2010 to 2016, given the study aims to explore how the nexus between structural violence and TOC manifests in the contemporary Brazil. The inference and interpretation are organized in two categories and its relation with TOC: (a) the socioeconomic and (b) political aspects of structural violence. The following two subsections summarize the findings in each of these categories.

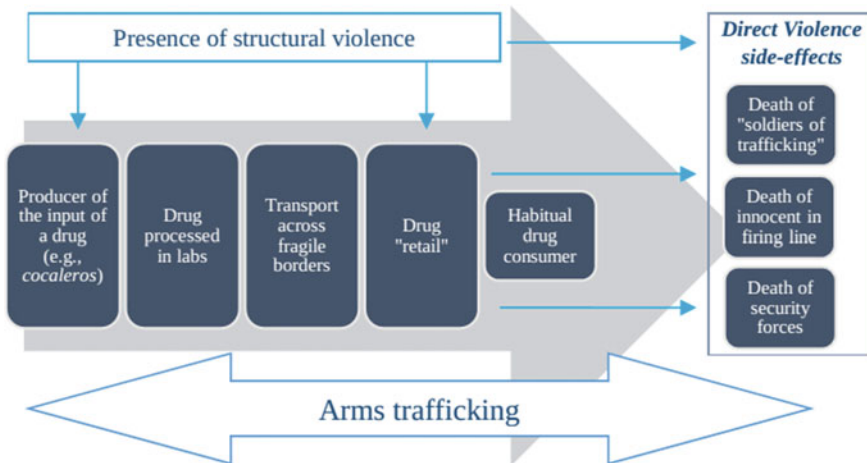

Fig. 3.2 Productive chain of drugs led by TOC and its impacts. *Source* The author

3.3.1 Socioeconomic Dimension of Structural Violence in Brazil: Inequality and the Failure of Economic Policies

Research topics such as structural, interpersonal, domestic, institutional, communitarian or urban violence[3] express the multidimensionality of the violence phenomenon but also the difficulties of circumscribing it (Imbusch et al. 2011: 114). One of the most comprehensive reports trying to deal with such challenge is the yearbook *Mapa da Violência* [Map of Violence].

Violence strongly manifests itself in six geographic and socio-economic configurations in Brazil, according to the yearbook (Waiselfisz 2016). First, new economic growth areas that attract investment to the countryside, but law enforcement does not grow in the same pace therefore easing prospects for criminal individuals and drug trafficking gangs. Second, municipalities in border areas that are strategically located for TOC actions. Third, cities in the arc of Amazon deforestation that presents social challenges such as conflicts between native people and land owners, modern forms of slavery and illegal timbers that provide an atmosphere for violence and homicides. Fourth, predatory tourism in coastal cities, that provide a setting for prostitution and the drug market. Fifth, traditional violence that persists in areas like the "polygon of marijuana" (located in the limits of Pernambuco and Bahia states). Finally, the most known areas of violence in Brazil

[3]I thank Erick Patrício de Magalhães Vieira (CNPq Undergraduate Scholarship grantee [2014–2016], Federal University of Paraíba) for collecting data and support the analysis of this sub-section and the following.

– the urban setting of very populated sub-national capitals and metropolitan areas (Waiselfisz 2015: 55–6).

In all of them TOC is involved in some way, mainly through drug and arms trafficking, sometimes as main actor – as in the metropolitan areas and border cities – others as secondary agents that fuel the violence, like providing illegal small arms, as said by a group of experts on Latin American violence.

The combination of structural inequalities, disorganised urbanization processes, availability of firearms, and weak institutions, together with cultural aspects and a very particular democracy – capable of guaranteeing political but not social rights – are some of the elements key to understanding this scenario (Imbusch et al. 2011: 115).

In the centre of this problem are the historical inequalities that impact Brazilian society (Imbusch et al. 2011: 115). The country presents a positive correlation between homicides and social inequality measured by Gini Index (Jaitman 2015: Table 1.5) while at the same time other related factors also impact in violence like chaotic urbanization, demographic changes and lack of development policies (Soares 2008). A significant proportion of the population lives in poverty, nowadays mainly in urban settings, while the rural poverty still persists (Imbusch et al. 2011: 115). Conditions of structural violence, such as social injustice, poverty, unemployment and poor education, bring a vulnerability that favours drug trafficking. To the individual who is in a situation of exposure to structural violence in Brazil, drug trafficking appears as an alternative income in a system of social injustice where the opportunities to socially ascend to a better condition of life are scarce (GCD 2011; UNODC 2016).

In this same environment, the risky business crime can also organize more adequately using as a strategy, bribing police, politicians and judicial agents. Corruption of state agents through drug trafficking organizations would be a factor generating violence by weakening democratic institutions and impacting on police action. Moreover, it is common that through corruption, criminal groups obtain weapons from the police, paradoxically fomenting the future death of police officers (Zaluar 2008; Alves/Evanston 2012). Moreover, bribes are the key to opening doors for crime to use violence in its activities. In the local level, the crime foster underground practices of violent conflict resolution and permanent struggle for commerce control, making use of threats, intimidation, extortion, aggressions, killings and, in some cases, terrorism (Zaluar 2008: 148).

In addition to this context of inequality and high flow of easy money outside the legal circuits, in recent decades the phenomenon of organized crime has presented significant development in Latin America due to economic crises caused by the external indebtedness of the states and its inability to promote fiscal adjustments. Such setting provides an environment conducive to the growth of informal economies (Dreyfus 2009). With the structuring of organized crime in networks operating across national borders, the informality of the Latin American economies favoured the development of TOC activities on the continent and is one of the ways of legitimizing assets obtained illegally.

Another salient feature of Brazil's socioeconomic context is that the country is one of the main routes of the international drug trade and also the second in the consumer market (UNODC 2016), consuming the equivalent of 17.7% of the global volume of cocaine (Groll 2013). The growth in cocaine use can be seen as a result of the significant increase in disposable income of the younger generation in developing countries. In general, the higher the income, the greater the access to illicit drugs. This relationship can be observed in geographical aspects. In the Southern Cone, which has higher income rates than other South American countries, drug use is higher than in rest of the subcontinent. Particularly in Brazil, the largest number of users can be observed in the southern and south-eastern states, the richest region of the country (UNODC 2012).

Moreover, the inequality and impoverishment reinforced by the neoliberal macroeconomic policies, together with the incapacity of the national states to address poverty and exclusion in the distribution of economic, political and social resources, account for the main reasons for the proliferation of juvenile delinquency, organized crime and violence (Imbusch et al. 2011: 129). The data provided by Waiselfisz (2016: 20–22) shows a correlation between the period of economic openness provided by neoliberal policies – mainly in the beginnings of 1990s in the Fernando Collor's administration – and the growing homicide rates. The rate maintained in the period around 8,1% per year and only diminish in 2003–4 with a combination of new public policies like disarmament statute and its campaign (Waiselfisz 2016: 17), and the policies to struggle extreme poverty lead by Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva's administration like *Fome Zero* and *Bolsa Família.*[4] Nevertheless, Brazil still maintains high level of inequality and poverty both in rural and urban settings. The Gini Index decreased from 58,1 to 51,4 between 2003 and 2014. However the country continues among the ten most unequal countries in the world (World Bank 2016).

Finally, these unequal structures in Brazil can still lead vulnerable groups to use drugs, which also affects the relationship between drug trafficking and violence in the country. For UNODC (2016) and GCD (2011), social exclusion contributes to the use of drugs. To the extent that drug use causes further deterioration in the lives of socially excluded users – that is, when "their somatic and mental achievements are below their potential achievements" (Galtung 1969: 168) – the user is further

[4]*Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger) is a public program introduced by the former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2003, expanding the *Programa Comunidade Solidária* (Solidary Community Program) created in Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration. The *Fome Zero* had the goal to eradicate hunger and extreme poverty in Brazil and was co-ordinated by the Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Combat (*Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome*). The program takes a number of forms, ranging from creating water cisterns in Brazil's semi-arid areas, supporting subsistence family farming and mainly giving access to financial aid to the poorest families (*Bolsa Família*). According an UNDP report, "Bolsa Família and other major CCT programmes in Latin America, such as those in Chile and Mexico, have had an impressive targeting performance, even though they have adopted different targeting methods. However, these programmes should implement constant monitoring of targeting performance in order to minimize the exclusion of potential beneficiaries, particularly the extremely poor" (Soares et al. 2007: 7).

Table 3.1 Socio-economic impact on TOC and structural violence nexus

Socioeconomic factor	Consequences for the nexus TOC and structural violence
Social inequality and poverty	• Drug trafficking appears as an alternative income • Lead groups vulnerable to drug use • Underpaid police and high inequality foster corruption, weakening democratic institutions and impacting on police action against crime • Disorganized urbanization
Economic crisis	• Environment conducive to the growth of informal economies, sometimes lead by TOC • Foster an illegal economy stimulated by criminal organizations, legitimizing organized crime assets obtained illegally or through legal voids in national legislations
Consumption of drugs	• Contributes to the increase of drug-related problems, including direct violence and accentuation of structural violence • Largest number of users can be observed in the southern and south-eastern states, impacting both public security and health
Neoliberal macroeconomic policies	• Incapacity or no prioritisation of the national states to address poverty and exclusion in the distribution of economic, political and social resources • Proliferation of juvenile delinquency, organized crime and violence

Source The author

marginalized in society. Under these conditions, the drug user commits crimes to finance drug addiction, provoking even more violence. In this way, it is clear that by observing the profile of vulnerable people entering the drug trade and those who suffer the most from the effects of drugs, vulnerable individuals can be at the same time victims of drug trafficking and perpetrators of violence related to trafficking in a systemic conjuncture socially unjust, corroborating both the thesis of Imbusch et al. (2011) and Blackwell\Duarte (2014) (Table 3.1).

3.3.2 Political Dimension of Structural Violence: A War on Drugs against (and by) the Poor

As seen previously, structural violence can manifest itself both in the socioeconomic and political dimensions. In a setting of social inequality it is not surprising that political institutions also reproduce structural violence in its policies. Our research shows that this reproduction become apparent in the repressive approach of security forces, directed and reaching mainly the low-income population, but which also spills over to rural areas and smaller cities in the countryside.

In order to deal with TOC, Brazil has defined the strategy "South America as a priority" (*América do Sul como prioridade*), which consists in the promotion of regional institutions and bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries to

strengthen the country's security institutions and to combat the activities of criminal groups that operate through national borders (Muggah/Diniz 2014).

Some of the high levels of violence on Brazil's land border with South American neighbours originated in the illicit activities of Brazilian criminal factions. These criminal factions, such as *Comando Vermelho* (Red Command), *Amigos dos Amigos* (Friends of Friends) and the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (First Command of the Capital PCC), which seek to control cocaine production areas and drug trafficking routes into Brazil. They have increased their presence and power in the border regions by eliminating intermediate groups, which increases violence (Muggah/Diniz 2014). Although praiseworthy, this international strategy of combat can be considered ineffective when one notices the volume of drugs present in different parts of Brazil and the high rate of violence and repression in the poorest areas of the country – precisely those with more manifest structural violence.

The state's fight against the drug problem in Brazil is now based heavily on a repressive approach that causes more deaths and damages than drug use itself. As summarized by Amnesty International, [t]he re-democratisation of Brazil, which gave rise to the 1988 Constitution (…), failed to bring about changes in the structures of Brazil's public security and police forces, resulting in corps that are out of line with the rule of law and the requirements of a plural and diverse democratic society. Public security policy in Brazil is dominated by repressive police operations, justified by the logic of the "war on drugs", leading to a high number of deaths from police action (Amnesty International 2015: 13).

Police forces have emphasized repressing drug trafficking through one-off operations and raids in peripheral neighbourhoods, in which the trade in illegal drugs is controlled by criminal gangs and organizations which usually have a strong armed presence (Amnesty International 2015). This militarism is seen by Lea Rekow (2016: 82) as part of a wider framework of "structural violence" that produces suffering – both directly through acts of violence, torture, murder and indirectly through an institutionalized political social pathology that results in dispossession, lack of social policies, and insecurity.

Moreover, it is an irrational policy from the point of view of the costs it generates, as to deal with a problem that hypothetically affects public health, a deadly warlike approach is used costing thousands of lives. In this way, a repressive approach does not help to transform the present conflict. On the contrary, it tends to maintain or even worsen structural and direct violence (Garzón-Vergara 2016: 14). In this sense, strategies to combat drug trafficking would be more effective if they looked at those at the top of the pyramid, rather than punishing almost exclusively those who operate at the lowest levels of the segment (GCD 2011: 6).

Another element is *for who* the policy of repression is directed. Although drug use also manifests in rich areas, repression is focused on less economic privileged areas. Consequently, the situation of insecurity and lack of peace in societies like Brazil is closely related to the criminalisation of poverty and securitisation of poor

areas (Gledhill 2015). The securitisation serves extensively as a reproducer of insecurity, in which the state is embedded with an authoritarian approach and creates more tension than pacification. The result is that beyond the suffering with structural violence, poorest class-including the underpaid police are impacted more in terms of direct violence (Gledhill 2015; see also Farmer 2003).

Such repressive policies cause high social costs by fostering the continuation of marginalization of poor areas, violating human rights, increasing the prison population in Brazil and generating a new cycle of obstacles to the development of human capacities disseminating structural violence (Carvalho/Pellegrino 2015: 1–2). Moreover, the repressive policy is discriminatory, given it affects mainly black people (FBSP 2016: 21). As mentioned by Amnesty International, racial discrimination and the resultant inequality mean that the black population, particularly young black people, face a situation of structural discrimination where their rights to access higher education, health, work, decent housing, and so on, have been seriously impaired. (…) Meanwhile, the trivialization and normalization of violence in Brazil, especially violence against certain historically discriminated groups, has generated a number of negative stereotypes associated with black people, especially young black favela dwellers. Consequently, part of Brazilian society is indifferent to deaths of black young people, the main victims of homicides in the country (Amnesty International 2015: 11).

For the Brazilian Forum of Public Security, when the state neglect educational policies or omits in the promotion of social rights, and use security forces as a way to control violently the ‘excluded’ people, it incentivizes confrontations that become police and population potential victims. Between 2009 and 2016, 741 police were killed in operations against crime, while 17,688 people died in police operations (FBSP 2016: 6–7). In such context, the state institutions – mainly the police – are not seen as reliable exactly by the people that suffer the structural violence (Olinger 2013).

These negative impacts of the state approach combating organized crime paradoxically increase the profits of drug trafficking organizations. By generating more insecurity and reproducing a daunting scenario for the youth within the periphery by not promoting the reduction of structural violence, the state fosters the possibility of this young men turning against their own society when it is associated with TOC. For the affected youth, TOC emerges as an outlet to be co-opted into inorder to meet their basic needs (Blackwell/Duarte 2014). Consequently, this strengthens criminal groups both symbolically and operationally, spreading more violence, intimidation and corruption within the state, and preventing the full functioning of democratic institutions (GCD 2011: 14). Thus, the repressive policies makes few effects in TOC. However in an opposite way it can in some extent it can make the state less effective when TOC finds an opportunity in hiring new youth for trafficking and corrupting state agents (Garzón-Vergara 2016: 16).

Another effect of violence of war on drugs is seen in less populated regions of Brazil, as well as the increase in the consumer market in rural areas[5] (GCD 2011: 2). This "criminal diaspora", as labelled by Vergara (2013), is stimulated by two main factors. First, there is low probability of arrests or interference of security forces in TOC activities. The productive restructuring in Brazil in the last decades has brought changes in the spatial dimension in the country, creating new fields of productivity across the country that attracted both investments and criminality (Olinger 2013: 23). However, the state security institutions are still fragile in those cities. As a result, crime has increased because of the virtual absence of state agencies in small cities and a growing consumer market in these new economic hubs and rural areas (Waiselfisz 2016: 24).

Second, it is the growing of operations against criminal organizations in metropolitan areas and sub-national capitals. Often, it is precisely in the success of repression against a criminal faction in an urban area that can lead to the explosion of violence elsewhere with the migration of the criminal group (GCD 2014). The impact of this criminal diaspora is seen in the statistics. While the homicide rates decrease 22.4% in cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants between 2003 and 2014, in towns with 1,000–50,000 residents, the killings had grown between 34 and 66% (Waiselfisz 2016: Table 5.5) (Table 3.2).

3.4 Final Remarks

While some characteristics of the violence are imminently local, this research note demonstrates that TOC plays a key role in the alarming index of criminal violence and homicides, fuelling local violence and helping make Brazil one of the most violent countries in the world, very far from a peaceful country as commonly known abroad.

The analysis showed that the influence of structural violence in TOC can be seen in two dimensions: the socioeconomic and in the distribution of power. In the socioeconomic dimension, the historical inequality and poverty serves as catalysts for TOC. Moreover, the corruption contributes to TOC's expansion, given that state agents are co-opted to perform their activities without political interference. Finally, while the inequality decreased in the last decade due to public policies, such as *Bolsa Família* and disarmament statute, they were not sufficient to significantly reduce the increase in TOC influence in Brazil.

[5]It is important to mention that, regarding violence, Brazil's countryside is not an island of tranquility. Rural violence is historical "due to structural conflicts that has since time immemorial characterized the national land tenure systems and brought about new forms of violence in land conflicts in recent years" (Imbusch et al. 2011: 99). An example is the development of a political movements fighting violently against state for radical land reform and redistribution, like the MST – *Movimento Rural dos Trabalhadores sem Terra* (Rural Movement of Landless Workers).

Table 3.2 Political impact on TOC and structural violence nexus

Political factor	Consequences for the nexus TOC and structural violence
Regional cooperation to combat TOC	• Seek to control areas of production of cocaine and drug trafficking routes into the country
Repressive approach of security forces	• "Produces suffering – both directly through acts of violence, torture, and murder, and indirectly through an institutionalized political social pathology that results in dispossession, lack, and insecurity" (Rekow 2016) • Tends to maintain or even worsen structural and direct violence • Focused on less economic privileged areas, it criminalizes poverty and securitize poor areas • Poorest class, including the underpaid police, are more impacted in terms of direct violence • Generates a new cycle of obstacles to the development of human capacities disseminating structural violence • Affects mainly black people, the main victims of homicides in the country • Do not affect the expansion of profitability of drug trafficking organizations. When the drug market is threatened, it morphs into other kinds of illicit markets, examples extortions, counterfeits, et cetera • Criminal diaspora for rural areas and less populated cities
Lack of focus on social and educational policies	• Foster the possibility of youth to turn against their own society when the association with the TOC appears as the best alternative • The state becomes less effective and more susceptible to crime influence
Fragility of security forces in less populated cities and rural areas	• Low probability of disruption of TOC activities by security forces • Growing consumer market in these new economic hubs and rural areas

Source The author

In terms of distribution of power, there is a strong focus on repression of drug trafficking, the main TOC activity in Brazil. This repression has not changed the social differences (structural violence) neither the homicide rates (direct violence). The use of force, mainly against the low income population, had no proven effect in the reduction of drug use, nor organized crime operations. It also undermines the confidence in public institutions of the people that suffer structural violence more acutely. Hence, it is the young poor people, mainly marginalised ones that find TOC as an absolute channel to acquire, illegally and violently, the means that the state does not provide. Moreover, the repression in urban areas has brought, as a

side-effect, the spillover of TOC to smaller cities and rural areas, making the problem even more complex and difficult to overcome.

Finally, it is clear that crime and structural violence in Brazil are mutually influencing phenomena. In summary, structural violence is a structured and structuring category. While TOC helps to reproduce conditions of social marginalization, discrimination, devaluation of human life, inequality and poverty, these same structural conditions of violence lead hitherto unaffected youths to join criminal organizations and the users of drugs to commit illicit acts. Thus, a spiral of crime and violence is reproduced, undermining the possibility of peace in Brazil. In such a worrying context, only a conflict transformation approach, involving different actors (state, individuals and civil society), focused in the promotion of policies to overcome the three vertices of violence (direct, structural and cultural), can begin to change Brazilian society towards a more peaceful environment.

Acknowledgments I am grateful for IPRA Foundation that supported this research (Small Grant for IPRA Conference, 2016).

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