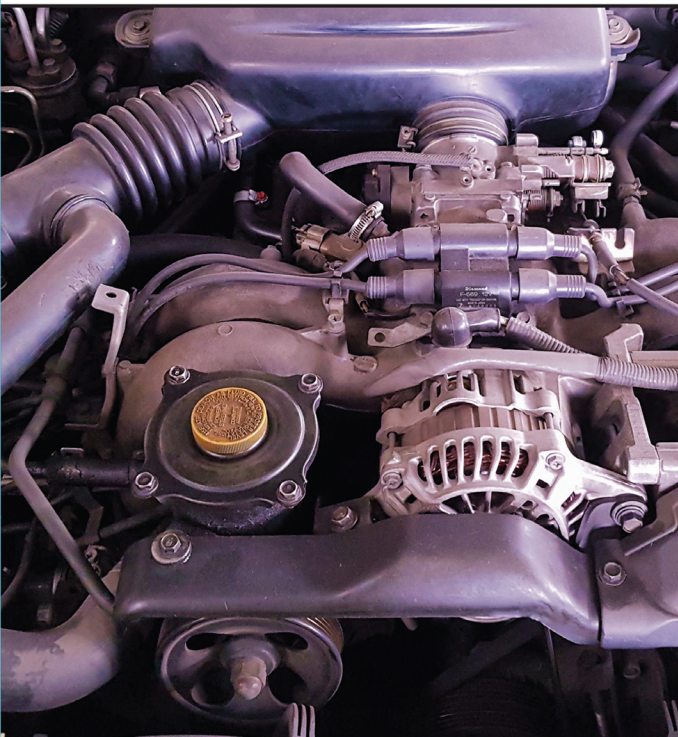


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STOLEN CARS

A Journey Through São Paulo's Urban Conflict



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A Journey Through São Paulo's
Urban Conflict

Edited by

GABRIEL FELTRAN

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Series Editors' Preface

IJURR Studies in Urban and Social Change Book Series

The IJURR Studies in Urban and Social Change Book Series shares IJURR's commitments to critical, global, and politically relevant analyses of our urban worlds. Books in this series bring forward innovative theoretical approaches and present rigorous empirical work, deepening understandings of urbanization processes, but also advancing critical insights in support of political action and change. The Book Series Editors appreciate the theoretically eclectic nature of the field of urban studies. It is a strength that we embrace and encourage. The Editors are particularly interested in the following issues:

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The series is explicitly interdisciplinary; the Editors judge books by their contribution to the field of critical urban studies rather than according to disciplinary origin. We are committed to publishing studies with themes and formats that reflect the many different voices and practices in the field of urban studies. Proposals may be submitted to Editor in Chief, Walter Nicholls (wnicholl@uci.edu), and further information about the series can be found at www.ijurr.org.

Walter Nicholls
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Jenny Robinson

Introduction

Gabriel Feltran

It's November 2015. A white Suzuki Jimny moves slowly through the streets of Vila Mariana, a middle-class neighborhood in southwestern São Paulo. Inside, three researchers talk about the best way to get to Vila Cisner, an old working-class neighborhood in the East Zone. Vila Cisner was settled in the 1950s after a glass bottle factory was set up there. The factory belonged to Olavo Egydio de Souza Aranha Jr., scion of a family from the Portuguese nobility, who studied engineering and architecture in Europe. His employees were migrants from the Brazilian countryside, descendants of Christianized Indians or blacks freed from slavery, or even poor whites, especially Italians, who had come to São Paulo as beneficiaries of Government population-whitening policies. They were taken on by the factory as they came: mostly illiterate, no surname, no papers.

We don't know the way for sure, so we decided to follow Google Maps directions. A cell phone fixed to the vehicle's dashboard with the help of a plastic holder begins telling us the way to go. We continue on our way, talking about the fact that we are in a Japanese car, made in Brazil, with a cell phone from an American multinational company, powered by Google, one of the largest companies on the planet. Our conversation comes to rest on the subject of the plastic holder that allows us to attach the cell phone to the dashboard; it was made in China and bought at a São Paulo traffic light. Informal workers born in the favelas of São Paulo sell plastic supports, but so too do immigrants from the slums of Lagos and La Paz – they all sell them throughout downtown São Paulo.

As a collective of researchers, we have transformed everyday scenes in the Brazilian megalopolis into building blocks for ethnographic study, the results of which this book presents. Transnational industries, from the biggest names – Google, Motorola, the manufacturers of the satellites that let them work their magic – to the humblest – Chinese plastic products sold on the informal market – have long been mainstays of everyday life in the big cities in the Global South (Inverses Collectif 2016; Parnell and Robinson 2012; Robinson 2002;

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Simone 2013). From the high-flying world of transnational capitalism to the dusty backroads of globalization (Knowles 2011, 2014; Mathews, Ribeiro, and Vega 2012; Ribeiro 2009; 2010; Tsing 2005, 2015), urban conflict remains a hardy perennial, one of those grim certainties immune to the changes in the wider world. Urban conflict is fueled by inequalities and violence, and these are fundamental themes underlying this book (Feltran 2020a; Machado da Silva 1967; Peralva and Telles 2015; Telles 2013; Telles and Hirata 2010).

It was early Sunday afternoon, the sun was shining and traffic was light, and because of this we saw that we could get to Vila Cisner in 45 minutes. The place we were aiming for lies some 30 kilometers from downtown São Paulo. Since the middle of last century, São Paulo has grown into a sprawl. The periphery is where poor workers live, mostly third-generation internal migrants, and also unemployed and informal entrepreneurs who have occupied land without any proper urban infrastructure since the 1940s. By building their own houses there, decade after decade, the city grew with them (Cavalcanti 2008, 2009).

São Paulo's demographic explosion of the 1950s to the 1980s resulted in rapid concentric urban growth across the "Paulista" plateau, and was in no way "disorderly." The logic of this apparently disordered and brutal growth has recurred in practically all Brazilian cities, as indeed it has in most Latin American industrial cities (Fischer, McCann, and Auyero 2014; Fischer 2019), reflecting an uneven model of industrialization. In the 1970s, this "logic of disorder" was given the name "urban plunder" by São Paulo's urban sociologists (Kowarick 1979). In short, it was argued that migrant workers themselves built the city in which they would live, on rural land; for this reason, with their labor, they simultaneously produced the industrial wealth that would drive the "country of the future" (Brazil has become the ninth largest economy in the world by the twenty-first century) and thus the cities that would symbolize its progress. São Paulo was the center of this economic growth, and for that reason the driver of the despoliation that produced such abysmal inequalities.

Fifty years later, the metropolis has 21 million people (see Table I.1) and its poorest districts have a life expectancy of 57 years while the richest people live, on average, to age 80 (Rede Nossa São Paulo 2019). Yes, the rich live, on average, 23 years longer than the poor in the city that produces one-third of Brazil's GDP (see Figure I.1). If urban plunder is a fundamental starting point for us, the mechanisms of reproduction of these inequalities, which today see São Paulo simultaneously occupy the most disparate rankings of global poverty and wealth, need to be much better understood.

In São Paulo, as in many other Latin American cities, inequalities manifest themselves in the form of violent crime. Crime, in turn, feeds the representation, shared between elites and workers, of "urban violence" (Kessler 2011;

TABLE I.1 Population growth in the municipality and metropolitan region of São Paulo (absolute numbers)

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1991	2000	2010	2018
São Paulo	2,151,313	3,667,899	5,924,615	8,493,226	9,646,185	10,434,252	11,253,503	12,176,866
Metropolitan Region	2,653,860	4,739,406	8,139,730	12,588,725	15,444,941	17,878,703	19,683,975	21,571,281

Source: IBGE census and bulletins – compiled by the São Paulo City Government 1950–2010, first published in Feltran, 2020a.

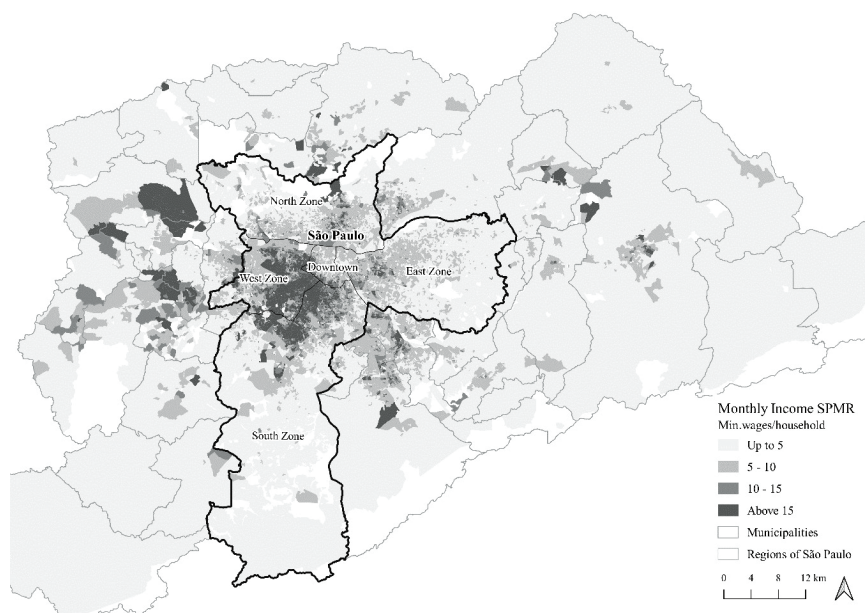


FIGURE I.1 Map of the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, by income.

Source: The authors, with technical support from Bruna Pizzol, based on data from the 2010 Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) Census.

Machado da Silva 2010). The world of crime thrives in São Paulo, and as we will see, the networks of its main criminal organization, the PCC (*Primeiro Comando da Capital*, First Capital Command), are global (Feltran 2020a, 2016b; Willis 2015). Mapping (il)legal automobile markets through stolen cars' journeys will be our empirical instrument for understanding the reproduction of inequalities and urban violence in São Paulo (Feltran 2019). Our city is not only these journeys' scenario, nor our analytical subject, but our theoretical and analytical perspective through which we address transnational inequalities and global urban violences.

We continued east and no longer saw luxury malls or tall skyscrapers through the window. Instead, we passed through huge avenues surrounded by auto-parts stores, evangelical churches, hypermarkets, car dealerships, and housing developments. We also saw overpasses with crack users camped underneath. Whenever we stopped at traffic lights, someone approached the cars to ask for change. Drivers responded with indifference, sympathy, compassion, or irritation. The fear of being mugged is almost always present in this range of reactions. Not many drivers opened their windows; not many of them ever

would. We did open ours and apologized for having no change; the old man begging replied that his daughter lived in the town of São Carlos. Our Suzuki had São Carlos license plates.

We had considered going on public transportation. It would provide a different experience of the city. Exposure to the potential for violence is different when you're not driving in São Paulo; contact with people is more direct. There is less risk of armed robbery, often aimed at the vehicles or the objects of those who are considered to be wealthy; on the other hand, on foot there is more exposure to the multiple forms of potential street violence. Above all, women are more exposed to sexual violence, from harassment to rape, when they walk the streets of São Paulo. At night, few of them walk alone. Still, the city in 2020 is much safer than it used to be.

The 1990s saw an explosion of violent crime in the city (Caldeira 2000; Feltran 2011; Hirata 2018), while the 2000s saw the consolidation of the PCC's hegemony in the peripheries, which established order in the local criminal universe (Biondi 2018; Feltran 2018, 2020b; Manso and Dias 2018). In central regions of the city, private security has become *de rigueur* and the military police are better armed (Caldeira 2000; Feltran 2011; Hirata 2018; Telles 2010a). The city's subway and metropolitan train networks have been modernized, expanded significantly and have become much safer since the 2000s (Requena 2019, Santos Silva 2017). Despite this, Paulistanos view buses, trains, and subways as much less efficient than their private cars. Using public transport, it would have taken 1 hour and 18 minutes to cover the same route we had just covered in 40 minutes; nor does the price of public transport make using it worthwhile. To give you an idea, a worker who makes only two trips a day in São Paulo, by bus or subway, will have spent 0.24 MW¹ by the end of the month. For many people, this represents a quarter of their monthly income.²

Therefore, the majority of Paulistanos live with very little mobility. In greater São Paulo not everyone moves around (Dennis and Urry 2009; Freire-Medeiros 2009; Urry 2004). It is still common, in field research, to encounter residents of the peripheries who have never, or only very rarely, left their neighborhoods. In any event, for those who don't live in the city center and need to get around, the private car and more recently Uber and analogous applications are almost always the fastest, most practical, and safest alternatives. For this reason, the traffic in São Paulo is hellish: a 100-kilometer-long traffic jam on a weekday is nothing out of the ordinary.

In addition to practicality, there are other conditions that give the car immense symbolic power. Unlike other countries in North and South America, cars are extremely expensive in Brazil. A 2018 Toyota Corolla costs an average of USD 18,000 in the United States, or 13.8 US MW. In Brazil, the same car

costs an average of USD 23,000 or 92.5 Brazilian MW. In relative terms, the Brazilian car is almost seven times more expensive. The middle classes and elites were, until the 2000s, the only ones capable of moving around the city by car.³ Therefore, cars have become potent signs of social differentiation and autonomy in Brazil, as in other North and South American contexts (Miller 2001).

To this day, São Paulo elites get around almost exclusively by car and almost never go to the peripheries – except when they live in gated communities, some of which lie some distance from the city center. The southwestern quadrant of the city of São Paulo, where these elites live, is the most affluent in the country, and it is there that the “official city” moves around, for the most part, by car. In Brazil, the richest 1 percent holds nearly 30 percent of the national wealth.⁴ There are two million super-rich Brazilians, many of them living in São Paulo. The city, therefore, has entire neighborhoods in which high-end markets (cars, boats, aircraft, jewelry, restaurants, etc.) are involved in active trade. The scale of these neighborhoods in São Paulo is unique in Brazil and, to a large extent, in Latin America. Much of our research was carried out from trips made in our own or rented cars, but we also traveled by bus, subway, and train. These trips almost always crossed extremely unequal locations.

In 2015, the 3G signal was never the best in the peripheries, but we could see from the map that we were approaching Vila Cisner and that we should soon turn right, leaving the main avenue. There were many narrow streets in that direction, and down each one we could see a favela. Yes, we were close. We turned. We went up a narrow, asphalted street, which became increasingly potholed, and could see ever more precarious houses through the windscreen.

The entire Vila Cisner region is self-built, with the exception of the huge glass factory of the same name and the social-housing buildings built in the 1990s (Bonduki 1994, 2009; Rolnik 2001). Many of the residents of the periphery, in spite of having lived in neighborhoods for more than 40 years, still do not have deeds to the houses in which they live. Favelas are almost always built on illegally occupied land. We should arrive at our destination in three minutes.

Wilson, a contact of many years' acquaintance and the son of one of the thousands of migrants from the northeast who moved into the neighborhood, was waiting for us at the headquarters of one of the capital's amateur football clubs.⁵ As we parked the car we could already hear the sound of samba music and found ourselves smiling involuntarily. We were in a good mood. Wilson also greeted us with a smile; we shook hands and hugged. He told us that the

group gathered at the samba party was celebrating a victory on the part of the neighborhood team in one of the amateur championship games that year. A moment of joy.

During the samba, while the musicians took turns playing and many people talked, flirted, danced and drank beer, we were introduced to Aron, who went on to become a valuable contact for years to come.

A Phone Call

Two years later, we met with Aron at the same bar, but at night this time, while a meeting of the residents' association was going on next door. Aron is white with black eyes and light, short hair, shaved at the sides. He's short and athletic with a shy smile. He greeted us with his right hand outstretched, while his left held the key of his new Ford Focus, which he had parked seconds ago. After a few minutes of conversation, he told us that he had actually wanted to be a football player. He said that in 2004, while still very young, he had held high hopes for his career and nearly went to live and play in Switzerland. Even though he was a top scorer in several youth amateur championships, it didn't work out in the end. Without the support he needed, his career hadn't taken off.

In 2017, at the age of 34, with his playing days behind him, Aron dedicated himself to "entrepreneurship." A career, he claims, that led him out of the favela where he was born, also in the East Zone of São Paulo. His entrepreneurship had two distinct branches. On the one hand, sports, but now as an agent for promising young talent from small soccer teams; on the other, drug trafficking, which, thus far, has met all of his material needs.

Wearing a blue t-shirt and a green cap, jeans and sports shoes, Aron proudly showed us pictures on the phone of some of his soccer players, boys of 14 or 15 years old. One of them in particular was worth keeping an eye on; he felt sure that the boy would have a promising sports career. He never once made reference to the other boys of the same age, with the same skin color and the same social background as his soccer pupils, who worked in the drug dens that he runs in the East Zone. Individuals stand out in some trades more than others – and not all trades are best talked about in public.

In a reflective moment during the conversation, Aron asked us if it would be possible to get him a job at the university because he wanted to turn his life around. We told him a little about how the career of an academic works, the study it demands, and the average salary. Aron changed the subject immediately. He then told us that he runs 16 marijuana, cocaine, and crack outlets in the East Zone; he has been involved in drug trafficking since the age of 17,

and nowadays a turnover equivalent to some 1,500 MW passes through his bank account on a monthly basis. The monthly salary of a Brazilian university professor at the peak of his career is 15 MW per month. A master's scholarship is worth 1.5 MW. Aron, born in a favela and involved in the life of the community, earned an income worth no less than 1000 times more than a master's student, and 100 times more than a university professor.

It's a lot of money, we say. It's not an easy job, he says. Trafficking sent him to prison a few years ago, but he escaped, handcuffed, through the front door of the police station. The policeman with him had let his guard down for a moment and Aron ran off as fast as his legs would carry him, ignoring the sound of gunshots behind him. He threw himself down a bank and hid in a swamp. Two years after our conversation, in 2019, Aron was arrested again, now as part of a Civil Police investigation. Thanks to the good lawyers he hired, he got out in two weeks. In 2020, Aron was still up to his neck in crime and was still trying to get out of it.

One event in Aron's rich life story is of special interest to us: a phone call he made on October 1, 2016. It was to a certain Rosildo, an old partner from the same São Paulo favela, now based in Cuiabá, the capital of Mato Grosso state. Rosildo answered after the first ring. The conversation was friendly, but not free of tension thanks to their shared fears of something not being left clear or coming out on the wrong side of the deal – or being tapped by the police. Experienced thieves and dealers change cell phones practically every week in Brazil. With few words – but trying to make sure of all the details of the arrangement – Aron told Rosildo that “everything was alright” and that he could now ask his boys to “take the pickup” to whoever was supposed to receive it in San Estéban, Bolivia. Rosildo thanked him and hung up.

The following day, the main newspaper in Campos Verdes, Mato Grosso state, reported as follows:

Early Tuesday morning, October 2nd, a family from the city of Campos Verdes was taken hostage and their vehicle, a white 2016 Toyota Hilux pickup, was stolen. Four armed men in a Fiat Siena, also white, held up the Silva-Costa family. The crime, according to the victims, took place around 7am, in the Parque dos Príncipes neighborhood of Campos Verdes. The victims say they were approached by four men. The policemen of the Specialized Border Group (GEFROM) were called in and reported that the Hilux pickup had been stolen and that it was being escorted by the criminals in the Fiat Siena. In addition to the pickup, a motorcycle was also stolen from the victims. [...] The suspects are B.J.O (age 20), F.R.G (24), D.D.O (21) and E.C.D (20) the last carrying a 765 handgun [Local Newspaper, October 1, 2016].

Campos Verdes is 1,700 km from São Paulo, close to the border with Bolivia. But the urban world of Campos Verdes and that of Vila Cisner, a neighborhood in São Paulo, share a common genesis. Aron has never been to Campos Verdes, to Mato Grosso, or to the Bolivian city of San Estéban. But he knows the going rates for cars, drugs, and weapons in Campos Verdes like the back of his hand. Ten MW/kg worth of base paste bought in Campos Verdes sells for 50 MW/kg in São Paulo. Revenue was split between him (the owner) and his direct employees: managers, lookouts, and scouts, in addition to the guys who transport the drugs from the border to São Paulo (Feltran and Horta 2018; Hirata and Grillo 2017). Selling at a five times markup is good business by any measure.

In recent years, however, Aron has realized that he could do even better. Aron has learned from PCC contacts about swapping stolen cars for drugs, a popular practice at certain locations along the Brazilian border. Profits are much higher, and the math is simple: a stolen car, exchanged for drugs, greatly reduces the investment needed to sell your cocaine on the retail market in São Paulo. Instead of paying 10 MW for 1 kg of base paste, Aron could pay a few boys 9 MW to steal a Hilux for him – he'd pay even less in Mato Grosso (4 MW) – and then they'd deliver the pickup to a drug trafficker on the Bolivian side of the border (usually for an additional 5 MW). Thus, Aron would obtain 5–7 kg of base paste in exchange for the vehicle.

That's five to seven times more cocaine than he'd get for paying cash, for an even smaller investment than before.

Swapping cars for drugs is big business. It was clear to Aron that was the way to go, and that's why the Silva-Costa family was taken hostage in Campos Verdes – 1,700 km away, don't forget. His cocaine came to São Paulo in a truck that transported soy, one of the main export commodities, hidden in a sealed box at the bottom of the load. The truck driver was an impeccable individual with no criminal record.

A Global Market

In this book, we will analytically reconstruct the journey of this Toyota Hilux exchanged by 5 kilos of cocaine that goes to Aron in São Paulo and then carries on to Berlin. We will also look at the journeys of four other cars stolen in São Paulo – a Ford Ka 2018, a Fiat Strada 2014, a Fiat Palio 2011, and a Hyundai HB20 2016. We chose these cars (and their journeys) because of their different consumption profiles and consumers, and because they move within different niches of the same (il)legal economy. The owners of the stolen vehicles and the people who steal them are just a few of the actors inscribed in their journeys,

as a long list of men and women, rich and poor, black and white, derive some economic gain from their circulation.

In recent decades, money from illegal markets has structured urban routines (Feltran 2011, 2018), produced urban territories (Batista 2015) and modified the landscapes of cities in the Global South. It has also produced images of global violence (Cohen 2017). The highly unequal transnational, urban economy is produced by everyday life routines touched by various forms of control and regulation (Knowles 2015; Simone 2004; Tsing 2005). Armed violence is one of them and arises only in some specific contexts related to illegal economies. Robberies are much more common in Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg than in Copenhagen or Montreal, which also have drug dealers and smugglers. Marginality makes money circulate around the world, but the forms it takes vary from place to place.

It took us a while to understand that car theft in São Paulo was feeding global markets. We knew that Brazil’s vibrant *legal* trade with Mexico hints at the equally vibrant black-market trade between the two countries (Sandoval 2005, 2012a, 2012b). But we had no idea of the magnitude of the illegal car market (see Figure I.2), nor the scale of the auto parts and accessories markets until our research in Europe, perhaps the continent least enamored with car culture (Miller 2001). We conducted research in Europe over the course of

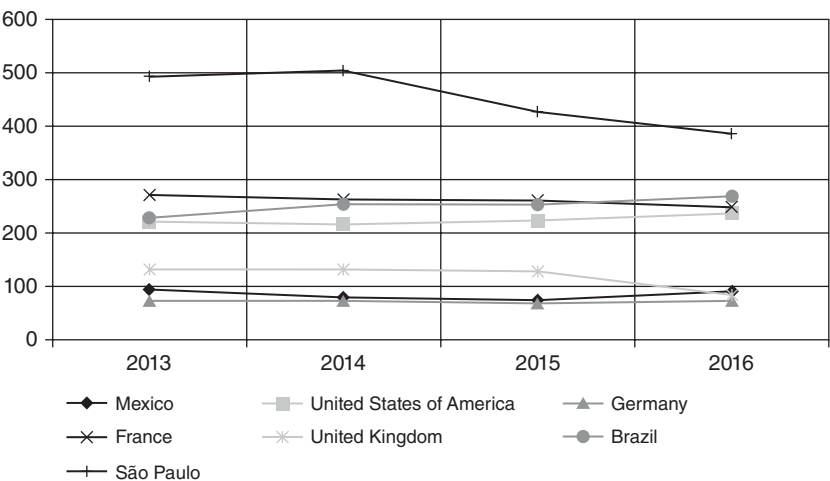


FIGURE I.2 Graph of theft and armed robbery of vehicles. Rate per hundred thousand inhabitants (2013–2016).

Source: The authors, based on data from Data Unodc, InegiMX and the Brazilian Public Security. Forum. The number of Brazilian records corresponds to the sum of thefts and armed robberies.

several months between 2017 and 2019, specifically in Berlin, London, and Paris. From the moment a car is stolen, as we will see, many people start to make money, in unequal proportions. A lot of vehicles “disappear” every year all over the world. By following five stolen cars, we will learn how this money circulates but also how it impacts the broader social and political dynamics of inequalities and violence reproduction.

On the move with the stolen cars we quickly exit the favelas and travel many divergent roads within Brazil – from modest backroads to the largest ports in Latin America where illegal markets link to many places in the so-called Global North. Even to its richest cities. Our primary purposes in analytically reconstructing these journeys are theoretical and methodological. Not least because our research has taught us that, notwithstanding the existence of classic itineraries followed by stolen vehicles, the distinguishing characteristic of (il)legal markets is their perennially improvised and circumstantial nature. Such being the case, method is called for, without caricaturing these markets or treating their operating mechanisms in the abstract; we decided on a multisituated ethnographic investigation, of the type that follows objects and reconstructs typical journeys.

Furthermore, it is necessary to rethink theory in order to comprehend the operations of these mechanisms and their contemporaneous effects according to appropriate scales. We decided to revisit the theoretical point of view in traditional Latin American urban and political thought that recognizes a plurality of orders, in addition to that of the State, governing urban life from the margins. Here, we emphasize the centrality of urban conflict, in São Paulo and in several other metropolises, so as to contemplate inequalities and violence from a relational and transnational perspective.

Theoretical Framework: Normative Regimes

In Latin American cities as in São Paulo, it is not only State agencies that govern ordinary urban life (Machado da Silva 1993). During our years of ethnography, many criminal groups and several paramilitary organizations often informally linked to the police or churches (the so-called militias, more recently common in Rio de Janeiro), have claimed that their uses of violence are locally legitimate. Instead of assuming a universal state that was never hegemonic in the margins, this book assumes the idea of a coexistence of plural orders, or normative regimes (Feltran 2020a), as an analytical framework.

The notion of “normative regimes” (Beraldo 2020; Feltran 2010, 2011, 2012, 2020a; Maldonado 2020) was developed to understand daily life in Brazilian favelas. These regimes inform the operations of power in two fundamental

dimensions: (i) they inform how a social order should be from a local perspective (shared codes and values on which stand justifications and senses of justice) and (ii) they produce means for the material governance of social order, made through concrete instruments and resources, including money and the use of armed violence.

We argue that a normative set of plural and coexisting regimes of action, structured by coexisting normative regimes, maintain urban order in São Paulo. Our approach is inspired by the idea of “coexistence of social orders” discussed in a long tradition of Brazilian and Brazilianist authors working on urban conflict and violence (Arias and Barnes 2017; Feltran 2010, 2012; Grillo 2013; Cabanes 2014; Machado da Silva 1967, 1993, 1999, 2004, 2016; Misse 2006, 2018; Stepputat 2013). For these authors, the hypothesis that urban conflict occurs between subjects who do not share the same plausible parameters of action is crucial. By extension, such subjects do not occupy merely different positions in a common urban order – they are distributed throughout different and coexistent urban orders.

Different analytical traditions discuss the same issue in political terms. Concepts such as hybrid sovereignty, hybrid orders or “governscapes” are called on to explain empirical challenges to modern states and to interpret fierce violent contexts (Arias and Barnes 2017; Das 2007a; Lessing 2017; Mbembe 2003; Stepputat 2013, 2015, 2018; Willis 2015). Alternative concepts such as “regimes d’engagement” (Thevenot 2006), “forms of life” (Das 2006), and “modes d’existence” (Latour 2005) gave us relevant insights, but they failed to inform the normative and relational dimensions we face within São Paulo’s urban conflict.

Urban theory has also been insightful (Inverses Collectif 2016; Parnell and Robinson, 2012; Simone 2013), although it does not address how violence theoretically relates to urban order and urban inequality. As in many other regions of the so-called Global South, large Brazilian cities are witnessing rapid transformations. They represent an extremely potent analytical object in the field of urban studies and also a theoretical challenge. Cities like São Paulo allow us to think about the new transnational geographies of urban informality as an ordering logic (Roy and AlSayyad 2004) that mobilizes interpersonal engagements that act as infrastructures (Simone 2004) as well as forms of popular politics (Chatterjee 2004). These forms can unveil conflicting rationalities vis-à-vis a planning and managerial rationality (Watson 2003). At the same time, they allow a problematization of certain central concepts in contemporary urban theory, such as modernity, development (Robinson 2006), subalternity (Roy 2011), and neoliberalism (Parnell and Robinson 2012). Such big concepts are usually associated with normative readings about cities, often shaped from large “global cities” of developed

countries (Sassen 2007). According to this reading, the “megacities of the global South” would represent an “other” with respect to what cities should be (Roy, 2011). Literature requests us to study these marginal cities taking them as a locus of original production of urban theory (Parnell and Robinson 2012). Our contribution empirically demonstrates how stolen cars *connect* otherness, manifesting violent conflicts and forms of unequal regulation between normative regimes. The mechanisms through which this happens challenge normative definitions about the city and urban management. “Making the City” means producing local order and its ordinary contours. When fierce conflictive situations last for decades without any political synthesis, local sources of authority can reproduce relatively autonomous social orders, structured not by official institutions but by ordinary infrastructures.

Jacques Rancière, in his classic work *La Méésentente* (1995), pursues a related conceptual argument. For Rancière, the key conflict that helps us to understand contemporary power struggles does not occur when one says “white” and another says “black.” Black vs. white dispute would be only a secondary, sequential, and managerial dimension – what Rancière calls the “police” – of the original, essential, and political conflict that occurs when one says “white” and another also says “white” but they do not understand each other. Because between these subjects there is a radical and paradoxically “mutual” incomprehension about the criteria (Rancière 1995), the many plausible meanings (Wittgenstein 2009; Cavell 2006), and the pragmatic effects of whiteness, as they are understood by each ‘actant’ (Boltanski and Thevenot 1991; Thevenot 2006; Werneck 2012).

Let’s take an example. Three subjects – which we will call here Norris, Alvin, and Cumulus – born in the same city, a contemporary European capital, which we will call Saint George. All three don’t feel safe in Saint George, so they want more security in their daily lives. The first two, Norris and Alvin, present their arguments about what security means to them: they want to feel protected from ordinary urban violence, but especially from terrorism. Both agree that, although it is on the rise, ordinary crime is rare and generally without serious consequences in Saint George. Terrorism, on the other hand, is a real and potentially lethal threat.

For Norris, achieving security means more democracy and social justice. Norris believes in democracy, and insecurity is a structural problem for him, linked to the inequalities and social exclusions that have persisted since colonialism. If all interest groups, all ethnic, religious, generational or class groups really shared the same world, we would achieve something much greater, where everyone would have their place in security. Whether in the multicultural equation, in the republican or federalist equation, it doesn’t matter, subjects and communities can share the same public space. Norris sees many

successful examples of this coexistence. The equation of differences takes place under conditions of political equality (the premise of citizenship, to be granted to all) and the quest for social equality (to be achieved through Saint George's redistribution policies).

Yet, for Alvin, this same security can only be achieved by rehabilitating values that are now lost. It is the State that must guarantee security, and the active repression of the state against crime, through preventive actions towards the youngest, is necessary. Above all, the State must act against terrorist organizations. Alvin wants more cameras, more surveillance, and more State control. He wants more police and military intelligence, tougher laws against common crimes but especially against terrorist attacks. Alvin believes that defending his values has nothing to do with reducing social diversity or disrespecting cultural, ethnic, and national differences. He simply does not accept that the fundamental rules of civilized coexistence, which include respect for the law and other citizens, should be violated. The law applies to everyone. Since it has been repeatedly flouted, greater control over all people is needed. And this control must come from the State.

Until now, the conflict between the positions of Norris and Alvin has opened the way for sequential debates, which focus on shared diagnoses and divergent solutions. They defend quite different concrete policies or even global political projects of being in the world. They have divergent views on how to address the problem of growing insecurity. The difference between the positions of Norris and Alvin separates right and left, but both have a common understanding of security: they do not accept ordinary crime or terrorism. One says white and the other says black, one may dislike the other, but pragmatically both recognize each other as interlocutors. One says white and the other black, but both admit that white and black are categories of the same order, the palette of colors. Although they express different political projects, their positions are part of the same palette, the same political spectrum, the same normative regime. They are part of the structure of material regulations of the contemporary state, with its instruments, its techniques, and its bureaucracy. Elections will show which position will take precedence in the republic, in multiculturalism, or in any other universalist premise equation. The public debate between their positions aims at finding possible syntheses, plausible practices for both sides in a common world.

However, when Cumulus enters the scene, these syntheses are no longer possible without destroying the framework in which the previous debate was elaborated. Our third subject does not share with Alvin nor Norris a common base of ideas about the world; he does not consider security in the same way at all. He believes that there is no possibility of security for all, and that there never was. Cumulus says that Alvin and Norris think this way because they have always

had everything, including security, while he, and especially his forefathers, have never had anything. Precisely because Norris and Alvin stole everything from them, from him, from his ancestors, from his community, in wars and barbaric invasions. Cumulus goes further and even says that Alvin and Norris continue to steal his land and kill his relatives, even without knowing it. Cumulus considers Norris' concerns futile and Alvin's inhuman. He only believes in self-protection against people like Alvin and Norris and the police that protect them. Cumulus expresses neither Norris' white nor Alvin's black, but he says another, radically different "white" (in this case, "security").

Cumulus thinks that blowing up a restaurant where Norris or Alvin might be is a concrete step in the fight for the liberty and safety of his people. Security for his people will only be achieved through a struggle for justice and liberation, historical reparation, and a commitment to the present. From his perspective, Cumulus is on the side of his people. His people are not a collection of citizens but a community, bonded by a blood, and a nature, and an identity. Cumulus sees that those who look like him are excluded, while those who look like Alvin or Norris are much better placed. Those who look like Cumulus are caretakers or street sweepers and those who look like Norris are doctors, financial market agents. Exceptions are really rare and Cumulus has no more patience.

When he appears and says everything he thinks, the foundations of the conflict between Norris and Alvin dissolve and a much stronger conflict emerges on the previous "political" arena. But it is when Cumulus appears armed that the scene really changes: he propels Norris and Alvin to the same side of a new political conflict, in which the old differences between them are hardly relevant. This new political conflict is much more radical and can, in a short period of time, lead to violent outcomes. Cumulus, far more than the bearer of the contents of a divergent, and even radical, political position, is in itself, as a subject, a violent threat to social order and the state.

Cumulus arrived in São Paulo at least three decades ago disguised as the PCC. In such a divided governmental landscape, the act of describing (how the city is) begins to require different categorical grids depending on the perspective through which one sees the city (Feltran 2017). But to think about the normative problem (how the city should be) is to face immense disagreement and sometimes even violence. In São Paulo, for journalists, lawyers, doctors, the middle classes, and even for many workers in the outskirts, security means living far from thieves, bandits, and the PCC in vertical and horizontal gated communities. But for some groups in the favelas, it is precisely the thieves and bandits who bring them security and other resources such as income, justice, and a sense of belonging.

This is why the word “thief” is an offense in the middle classes but an exaltation of intelligence and insight in the world of crime. The divide manifests itself in many ways – including material ones, money, and violence – but also in the common language. The word “thief” and many others have an essential, well-defined content in each of these places, but this understanding is very different in each context. Both say “thief,” both say “white,” but they do not agree on what it means. It is a polysemous word, susceptible to various meanings, because it can be filled with different contents. Its use requires content and context. Meaning occurs with usage, as Wittgenstein (2009) already warned us in his *Philosophical Investigations*.

We dare to say this conflict is not unique to São Paulo. For decades, the world saw republics and multiculturalism as promising or successful alternatives to equalize differences, but today these are clearly insufficient. The problem is that we do not seem to have better ones. The countries of the Global South to which the modern world order has been promised (Ferguson 1999), such as Brazil, have huge masses that never even belonged to their own nation: indigenous Brazilians, blacks, and the *favelados* of São Paulo are just three examples. It so happens that these groups, without the mediation of national politics, and therefore of the political communities that protect them, are projected into national politics and globalization through other doors, those of informal and illegal transnational markets. They are confronted daily with the problem of understanding the order that allows them to exist, in a changing scenario and in deep disagreement about who they are, thieves or entrepreneurs, outlaws or legislators.

The PCC represents “crime,” the government represents the state. The PCC is not a “counter-public” (Fraser 1992; Habermas 1992) or an alternative “public arena” that would tend to a synthesis of future assumptions. The world of crime in São Paulo represents an alternative power regime, incapable of synthesis because of the impossibility of plausible communication with the State order (Feltran 2020a). When the impossibility of any rational, argumentative or modern communication marks the very relation between these regimes, what remains is violence. Negotiated solutions to urban conflict, in theory achievable by administrative means, are unlikely. Since the 1980s, São Paulo, like other Brazilian and Latin American cities, has descended into snowballing urban conflict manifested as violence, understood as manageable only by the use of force or the threat of it (Caldeira 2000; Misse 2006). Thus began, on what was a newborn, formally democratic territory, a discussion about what we should do about *them*, or rather, against *them*.

Don’t think they didn’t do it too. “We” cannot, of course, accept Cumulus’ contention that theft is a form of justice. Theft is a crime and crime must be punished, period. It was precisely at this limit of the admissible, the plausible, that terror, raw violence, became the fundamental relationship between the