SMALL WARS AND INVISIBLE GENOCIDES

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WRITING ON VIOLENCE

I want to preface my remarks with a few words about writing about violence. I have been studying violence and death in one form or another since 1974 when, as a still fresh young anthropologist, I observed the madness of everyday life in a small, quiet (but nonetheless psychologically violent) and dying peasant community in western Ireland on the Dingle Peninsula. At that time I was largely concerned with interiors, with the small dark psychodramas of viscous ridicule, labeling and scapegoating going on inside traditional and threatened farm households that was driving so many solitary farm-inheriting sons to bouts of depression, madness and suicide.

The more pliant 'excess' sons in residual farms were packed off at a young age to monasteries and seminaries; the more rebellious were sent to St Finians, the gloomy 19th century style county mental asylum where they languished meeting a kind of soul death. There were a great many casualties in these covert, low-intensity family wars in which forced celibacy combined with the EEC's land-grabbing policy of mandatory early retirement for subsistence farmers contributed to a die out of peasant families. At the time I would have thought it obscene to invoke genocide as a metaphor to describe the post-colonial, trans-national processes leading to what I chillingly referred to instead as demographic decline and more sympathetically as culture death referring to the gradual demise of a people and a way of life the likes of which, I wrote, will never be seen again. In the much criticized Prologue to Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics (1979), I tried to startle readers with the urgency of the situation by invoking another graphic metaphor. I described the actual death of an ancient villager, the end of her long line of Ballynalacken shepherds and small farmers, as the death of Ireland itself:

I bear the sad tidings that on a certain grey and windy day in March in the year of Our Lord 1975, Ireland passed away...

...and finally the dispersal of hard-won family lands among strangers and outsiders...

Here I am concerned with the varieties of what Veena Das [1] Arthur Kleinman [2] and other critical medical anthropologists call 'social suffering'. My title, 'Small Wars and Invisible Genocides', appropriates words and terms from an historical event in the 20th century that may have no parallel [3] and I apply them to everyday forms of violence and suffering in the third world. In so doing moral quandaries abound.

The philosopher Emil Fackenheim [4] in his reflections following Auschwitz, God's Presence in History, suggests that the Nazi genocide of the Jews has no precedent either inside or outside Jewish history. The holocaust, Fackenheim argues (see pp. 69-70) is sui generis, exceptional, utterly unique. Whereas Albergensians died for their faith, Africans and African-Americans were murdered for their race, the Nazi holocaust of the Jews... was annihilation for the sake of annihilation [p. 70]. The victimized Jews in his view did not constitute a 'true' race and most were secular. Hence, he concludes, the slaughter of the Jews was 'for nothing'. It was not about territory, wealth or power. The holocaust offers a pure paradigm of gratuitous human suffering. Woe to those who would reduce the 'horror' and the 'exceptional' nature of the Holocaust by comparing and equating it with any other form of modern social suffering.

And yet I do so, though cautiously and joining others who have tried to uncover and call attention to forms and spaces of hitherto unrecognized, gratuitous and useless social suffering by referring to them as invisible genocides and small holocausts. The paradox is that they are not invisible because they are secreted away and hidden from view, but quite the reverse. As Wittgenstein noted, the things that are hardest to perceive are often those which are right before our eyes and therefore simply taken for granted.
And so, writing in this vein, Franco Basaglia, the radical Italian psychiatrist, discussed the condition of state mental patients in Italy after the war in terms of genocide. (Basaglia’s copious writings were the subject of my and Anne Lovell’s edited volume [5].) The first time Franco Basaglia entered a manicomio, the traditional Italian state mental asylum, he was struck by the odor of death and defecation.

It reminded him of the prison cell where he was held as a member of the Italian resistance during the German occupation in WW II. That experience was the basis for his dramatic equation of mental asylum and concentration camp.

A patient at the Gorizia mental asylum described the conditions that obtained there in the years following the war and before Basaglia’s arrival. While the inmates of European concentration and prison camps were liberated after the war, the mental patient alone seemed abandoned. The patient-inmate explained:

Each of us here prayed to be the next to die. Whenever the chapel bells tolled [for the death of an inmate] we would pray: ‘Oh, God, if only the bells tolled for me!’ How many of us died here who could have been alive and healthy outside! But humiliated and deprived of all dignity, many refused to eat. Then the food would be forced down our nose with a tube. The lucky ones died. There was no other choice, locked up here without any hope of being set free. We were like scorched plants with leaves withered from drought.

In reflecting on the plight of the state mental patient through the lens and imagery of WW II, Basaglia’s last major work was a series of anti-institutional essays entitled Crimini di Pace, Peace-Time Crimes ( [5], pp.169–193). International war tribunals had been established to try those guilty of war crimes now treated for the first time as crimes against humanity. In Peace-Time Crimes Basaglia hoped to unmask the invisible, because sanctioned and discreet, crimes practiced daily against one ‘class’ of despised humanity—the mad. Here the public torturers and executioners were ordinary civil servants, bureaucrats and clinicians: doctors, nurses and social workers. As director of the asylum at Gorizia, Basaglia tried to reverse the regime of violence, torture and terror that masqueraded as therapeutic and which contributed to the premature deaths in detention of hopeless inmates. Basaglia described the hospital regime as a culture of institutional efficiency and indifference. At times it produced in the wardens a sadistic enjoyment in the useless suffering of the institutionalized mad. Basaglia described the efficient nurse, the dedicated hospital social worker, the careful asylum administrator, the up-to-date psychologist with his latest statistical and diagnostic charts as technicians of practical knowledge and as the technicians of the popular consensus without whom neither ‘mad’ nor ‘sane’ could exist. It was their job to enforce and to monitor the confinement of those who were confined not for what they had done but for acts that they might possibly commit.

The analogic thinking that enabled Basaglia (like Erving Goffman [6]) to see the relationship between concentration camps and mental asylums and between ‘war crimes’ and ‘peace-time crimes’ allows one to recognize the readiness and willingness of ‘ordinary people’—Basaglia’s ‘practical technicians’—to tolerate and enforce, sometimes with gusto, ‘genocidal’ practices against categories, classes and types of people generally thought of as ‘deficient’ in their humanity and personhood, and therefore in all likelihood as ‘better off dead’. The profoundly mad have often fallen into this category, along with the mentally deficient, despised ethnic minorities, female infants and severely disabled or disfigured children. And here I think, for example, of the profoundly disturbing writings of Meira Weiss [6] on the regime of terror, rejection and territorial seclusion met by severely appearance-impaired (disfigured) children who were returned to their middle-class homes in and around Jerusalem. Some were called ‘monsters’ or ‘devils’ by their overwhelmed parents who hid them in hallways, closets and on balconies. Weiss has testified on behalf of the rights of these stigmatized children to Helsinki committee meetings on human rights abuses.

If there is a moral and political risk in over-extending a powerful metaphor such as to ‘genocide’ into spaces where we might not have previously seen it, the reward lies in sensitizing people to genocidal-like practices and sentiments that are daily enacted by ordinary citizens as if they were the most normal and expected behaviors. Hannah Arendt [8] paved the way in recognizing the potential within otherwise decent people to become dedicated technicians of genocide under particular social and historical conditions. Denial is a pre-requisite of genocide. Adolf Eichman pleaded ‘guilty’ to each of the 15 counts of genocide and other war crimes on the grounds that under the existing Nazi legal system he had done nothing wrong. What he was accused of were not crimes at all but merely ‘acts of the state’ ([8], p.21).

Adorno and his colleagues suggested that the seemingly willing participation of ordinary people in genocidal acts requires strong childhood conditioning for mindless obedience to authority figures in addition to powerful ideologies, such as anti-semitism. But Daniel Goldhagen [9] suggests, backed up by powerful testimony, that millions of ordinary Germans participated, willingly even eagerly, in the Holocaust not out of fear but because of race hatred. Erick Erikson [10] came close to this same conclusion some 40 years ago with his notion of ‘pseudo-speciation’, the human tendency to classify some individuals or groups as less than fully human.

In Death without Weeping [11], I explored the normalization and institutionalized social indiffer-
ence to staggering infant and child mortality in shantytown *favelas*. Local political leaders, Catholic priests and nuns, coffin makers, and even the shantytown mothers themselves casually dispatched a multitude of hungry ‘angel-babies’ to the afterlife each year saying: ‘Well, they themselves wanted to die’. (The babies were described as having no ‘taste’, no ‘knack’ and no ‘talent’ for life).

Common medical practices such as prescribing powerful tranquilizers to fretful and frightfully hungry babies, Catholic ritual celebrations of the death of ‘angel-babies’, and the bureaucratic indifference in political leaders’ dispensing free baby coffins but no food to hungry families and children, interacted with maternal practices of passive euthanasia such as removing or dramatically reducing gruels, milk and even water to severely malnourished and dehydrated babies so as to help the infants to die quickly and well, combined to produce a multitude of angel children. The infants died, it was often said, like Jesus, so that others, especially their mothers, could live. I soon came to think of the angel-babies of Alto do Cruzeiro in terms of Rene Giraud’s theological notions of sacrificial violence and the ritual scapegoat. The ‘given-up, given up on’ babies of NE Brazil had been sacrificed out of terrible conflicts over scarcity and survival.

**POST-MODERNITY AND THE OBJECTS OF OUR STUDY**

*Counting angels*

Interpretive and post-modern approaches to the social sciences have called into question the epistemological status of the ‘objects’ and the ‘realities’ under study. The body, illness, disease and death are seen as simultaneously biological and social, and as apprehended only indirectly through ‘constructed’ notions that are necessarily partial, uncertain, fragmented and negotiated. But while reality is always more complex, contradictory and elusive than our limited theories and methods can possibly encompass, some things remain incontestably ‘factual’. Either 150 or 350 children died of hunger, respiratory disease and dehydration in the Alto do Cruzeiro in a given year, and the anthropologist has a strong scientific and moral imperative to get it right. In third world situations there are a great many lives and deaths to account for especially in populations generally thought of as not worth keeping track of at all. I have suggested that in instances like these the anthropologist might best serve as a humble and empirical ‘clerk of the records’.

Since 1964 I have attempted to keep track of the invisible ‘angel-babies’ of the plantation zone of Pernambuco in Northeast Brazil in what I would refer to as a primary context of invisible genocide. Counting angels is either a pre-modern or a post-modern task. As a fervently lapsed Catholic, probably aspects of both obtain as I attempt to chase down those poor souls hovering somewhere between Limbo and *virtual reality*. Elsewhere [12], I refer to a ‘demography without numbers’ referring to a theoretically driven demography. But in its plainest sense, demography without numbers is simply descriptive, given the bureaucratic disinterest of the state in recording and counting the deaths of poor infants from the *zona da mata*. Public records—whether official censuses, birth and baptismal certificates, marriage and divorce records, or death or burial certificates—are not ‘pure’, ‘accurate’ or ‘objective’ sources of information. Nor are they politically ‘neutral’. But they do reveal a society’s system of classification and its basic values including what is considered hardly worth tracking or counting at all.

In rural Northeast Brazil two-thirds of all infants who die do so without a medical diagnosis. The cause of death on the official death certificate is most often simply left blank, testifying to the child’s negligible civil status. Only 159 of the 881 infant and child deaths recorded in the civil registry office of Bom Jesus over three sample years (1965, 1985, 1987) carried a cause of death. And even one-third of these attributed the baby’s death to the useless diagnosis: ‘heart stopped, respiration stopped’. ‘Natural causes’ described a host of other infant deaths along with ‘weakness’, ‘hunger’, ‘dehydration’ and ‘accident’. Perhaps the mytho-poetic folk medical diagnosis ‘acute infantile suffering’ was one of the truest descriptions.

In order to cross-check the inadequate official statistics one had to leave the civil registry office and walk the length and breadth of shantytowns and rural districts to attend wakes, follow infant and child funeral processions, examine old, new and reused grave-sites, and to talk with all those involved in the production, death and burial of ‘angel-babies’. Among these were the priests and nuns who baptized dying infants, pharmacists who prescribed medicines for them, coffin makers who fashioned shoe boxes of cardboard and crepe paper, and seamstresses who prepared the infant shrouds. What these people did not know, the taxi cab drivers who carried mothers and sick to death infants to the clinics and hospitals and from there just as often to the public cemetery often knew. In answer to the question: ‘How many poor and how many rich infants did you bury in the past month?’, Seu Chico, the club-footed grave-digger of Bom Jesus replied: ‘Thirty-four infant paupers and one bourgeois baby’. Only one ‘angel’ arrived, he said, in a proper, ‘bought’ coffin. All the rest were pauper angels whose graves were only temporary and whose remains could be quickly exhumed and graves reused. The death of poor children was quite simply the most natural, routine, ordinary and expected of events.

I leave open whether or not it would be useful to refer to these unnecessary angel deaths as an invis-
ible genocide. Decidedly lacking is any intention to rid the world of a specific class or type of people, which would seem to be a pre-requisite of the term genocide. In fact, to the contrary, poor infants are viewed as existing, if anything, in an unlimited and indeed almost frighteningly 'limitless' supply. And so, shantytown women could console each other with the expression: 'Better a baby should die than either you or I'. Consequently, the frequent die-outs of shantytown babies—as many as 38% of all infants born in a given year—could pass without comment, surprise, anger or grief.

**Dangerous and endangered youth**

While the violence of political economic relations lay behind the over-production of angel-babies, I did not begin to study political violence until the late 1980s when some of the older adolescent and young adult children from the shantytown began to 'disappear', their mutilated bodies turning up later, the handiwork of the police-infiltrated local death squads. But as Brazilian newspapers continued to circulate stories about the 'dangerousness' of shantytown youths and of drug addicted street children—a discourse that made the work of vigilante death squads seem a necessary defense against the anarchy of the *favela*, I saw that anthropology must exist on two fronts: as a traditional, disciplinary field and as a force field, a more immediate and reactive site of struggle and resistance.

Now I wish to turn to a second form of invisible genocide practiced against a class of poor and semi-autonomous youths existing on the margins of two transitional societies. I am concerned about children and young men who are perceived as 'dangerous' and about adults who feel murderous toward them and who sometimes act on those sentiments. Of course, even the most impassioned human rights advocate can experience a kind of nervous rage toward those 'dangerous' youths who make our lives feel so much less secure. Recently Conor Cruise O'Brien remarked (personal communication, 1995) that his feelings about the rights of children took a decided turn about after he was mugged by a gang of adolescents on his way to a UN meeting on civil rights in New York City.

My contrasting scenarios are contemporary urban Brazil and the 'new' South Africa. Both have recently emerged from oppressive political histories—the military state in Brazil, the apartheid state in South Africa—and both are transitional democracies. In both countries public intellectuals have given much thought to the position and rights of children and marginalized youths in the drafting of new, model constitutions and Bills of Rights.

Brazil recently passed into law a Child and Adolescent Statute (1991) which established Childrens' Rights Councils in all 5000 municipalities. The law was designed to protect Brazil’s thousand—some would estimate them as millions—of 'street children' who, since the military state years were subjected to police round ups and often thrown into state reform schools that were worse than prisons. But despite this broad reform street kids and criminalized youths are still illegally detained in jails alongside common adult offenders. And though the process of democratization has been rapid since 1982, death squad attacks have not ceased and in recent years seem to have resurfaced with even greater vigor. More frightening, the targets of these new death squad executions are not suspected subversives but ordinary people, most of them poor and illiterate—in particular, young black men from hillside favelas and roving bands of street children.

South Africa has gone through an even more radical political transition and, like Brazil, the government has drafted a model constitution and bold new legislation that recognize the rights of young people to security, health care and protection from violence and abuse, whether at the hands of parents, teachers, shopkeepers or police. But even as Mr. Mandela and then President DeKlerk appeared together in Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 and to mark the event by co-signing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, South Africa's security police raided a home in Umtata and killed four youngsters point blank as they were watching television. The government defended—and Deputy Vice President DeKlerk continues to defend—the attack against the 'dangerous terrorists', one of whom was 8 years old.

In each instance—Brazil and South Africa—the transition to democracy has initiated a crisis: a crisis of rising expectations among the still marginal and deeply alienated poor and a crisis of security among the privileged classes who had over the years come to rely on the authoritarian state to keep the poor (often synonymous with the black), and the 'dangerous' (especially 'criminalized' youths) at bay and in the shantytowns and squatter camps 'where they belong'.

The drafting of model constitutions is one thing. Their implementation in everyday life and in legal-political practice is quite another. It is not my intention to red-line an area of the globe to the exclusion of another. My own home in the shadowy borderlands between South Berkeley and North Oakland, California is increasingly dominated by guns and drugs and seems abandoned by the police of both cities. The problems of dangerous and endangered youth and of angry vigilantes wishing them removed, harshly disciplined or killed is not unique to one part of the world.

**Brazil: democratization and death squads**

For more than 20 years, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, Brazil existed as a military and police state. The 1964 military coup, first described euphemistically as a 'revolution' brought into power...
a dictatorship of generals that justified itself as stabilizing a politically volatile population of rural and urban poor and a precariously dependent and inflationary economy. And, by the late 1970s Brazil was able to boast the ‘Economic Miracle’ that propelled the nation toward rapid industrial expansion, making it the Western world’s eighth largest economy and one of its most ‘enterprising nations’.

Not all sectors of Brazilian society benefited from the military years, however. Hundreds of thousands of rural workers, urban migrants, factory workers, domestic workers, as well as ‘suspect’ intellectuals and political dissidents suffered from economic exclusions, political repression or both. As for the rural workers and urban migrants of the impoverished northeast region, the only economic miracle for them (as ‘Black Irene’ from the shantytown of Alto do Cruzeiro was fond of saying) was that any of them managed to stay alive at all. [The World Bank recently reported that Brazil has the most disproportionate income distribution of any major nation [13], p.6).

Some years ago Eduardo Galeano [14] chose an unsettling metaphor in suggesting that the political economy of northeast Brazil had turned that region into a ‘concentration camp for more than 30 million people’. The population has since increased but the metaphor, though extreme, still rings true. The adult male sugar cane cutter in Pernambuco consumes on average fewer calories (between 1500 and 1700) than the inmates of Buchenwald whose daily food allotment—as reported by a physician internee [15] who later became a member of the French Academy of Medicine—was 1750 calories per day.

During the harshest period of the dictatorship in the late 1960s and early 1970s Brazilians suspected of political subversion were arrested and tortured and hundreds died in prison forcing many others into exile. Throughout the military years (1964–1985), the civil and military police were heavily implicated in the abductions, illegal arrests, tortures and deaths in detention of intellectuals, journalists and community activists. Though never approaching the horrendous situation in Argentina, for example, during that country’s ‘Dirty War’ (1976–1982) when the army there turned its full force against ordinary citizens, the Brazilian military years were ruthless enough, the aberrations of a state gone haywire [16].

The covert operations of paramilitary ‘death squads’ with close ties to local police—and merely the rumors about death squads—were sufficient to terrorize rural workers and the urban poor living in favelas into passivity, forced compliance, and, above all, silence. The silence and complicity of the middle and professional classes derived from an additional source: a fairly pervasive belief that Brazil could ‘develop’ only under strong authoritarian rule. It was only when the ‘economic miracle’ faltered, and then failed in the late 1970s, that the middle classes and the educated élite began to demand change and a return to democratic forms and structures. Then, the real Brazilian miracle began as the military, over the next decade, initiated, participated in,—indeed oversaw and ‘managed’—a gradual and incomplete transition to democracy that began in 1982 with the ‘abertura’ (the democratic opening).

The ‘democratic transition’ culminated in the presidential elections of 1989 that brought to power a mass media-created populist ‘hero’ who later turned out to be a crook. But during the Madison Avenue-styled election campaign that brought Fernando Collor de Melo into power, his name was artfully manipulated in political slogans equating Collor with a colorful, celebratory, anti-racist democratic promise. But soon after his election Collor began to show his true colors and protest graffiti appeared on walls and public buildings equating the coming of Collor to the presidency and the simultaneous arrival of chôla-era in Brazil.

But during these shaky transitional years, Brazil did produce a new constitution (1988) that is one of the most enlightened and progressive documents of its kind. The rights of women, peasants, urban workers, traditional squatters, shantytown dwellers, prisoners and patients, and children, among other vulnerable groups, were carefully detailed. Many new democratic structures and institutions were put into place at the community level, largely through the efforts of a multitude of tireless grassroots organizations which had developed during the military years in opposition to the dictatorship. Yet, these hard won new laws have not, in most instances, been claimed at the local level and by ‘ordinary citizens’ and they have not radically transformed the practice of justice nor extended basic human rights’ protections to those still marginalized social groups.

The 1990 Child and Adolescent Statute replaced earlier and repressively anti-child legislation [Código de Menores] and created Children’s Rights Councils in all 5000 of Brazil’s municipalities [3]. These Councils, made up of representatives from both grassroots organizations and local government, were designed to prevent the worst abuses commonly practiced against Brazil’s thousands of semi-autonomous ‘street children’. During the military years street children were subjected to periodic police round ups for nothing more than vagrancy or for having a ‘suspicious attitude’ and they were thrown into abusive state reform schools that were often worse than prisons.

Hector Babenco’s acclaimed film Pixote, filmed in 1981 during the final years of the military dictatorship, stunned audiences throughout the world with its brutal portrayal of institutional life for Brazil’s street kids. Within Brazil, Pixote struck the conscience of the nation and popular movements and grassroots mobilizations such as the Movimento Nacional de Meninos e Meninas de Rua, the National Movement of Street Children, founded by
activists and street educators, sought to empower and to organize street kids in their own environment: the public spaces of large city centers. The dedication of these activists is inspirational and their achievements are impressive: exposing police brutality and the assassinations of children, organizing street schools and alternative employment for street kids, fostering AIDS education and prevention, and advancing model legislation to defend the rights of children. A great many ordinary Brazilians have taken to the streets to advance the cause and fight for the rights of kids who work or live in the street.

But even as late as 1987—well into the democratic transition—680,000 children and adolescents remained interned in militaristic institutions in Brazil [17]. And, by 1990 Pixote, himself, the street kid turned actor and national symbol, was shot dead in the city streets that remained his only home. According to a report issued by the Brazilian Federal Police, more than 5000 children and youths were murdered in Brazil between 1988 and 1990. Very few of these deaths have been investigated, which is hardly surprising when off-duty police officers are often prime suspects. Most victims are black males between the ages of 15 and 19. In 1991 the Medical-Legal Institute (the public morgue) in Recife, the capital of Pernambuco, received an average of 15 bodies of children a month. The proportion of black and mixed race children was 12:1. Boys outnumbered girls 7 to 1. 80% of the bodies had been damaged or mutilated.

And these attacks are occurring in the noticeable absence of public outrage or widespread collective protest. The new constitution has not challenged the principles around which everyday life is organized. Brazilian popular 'culture' retains many authoritarian aspects. This was painfully evident in the aftermath of a prison massacre in São Paulo in October 1992 when a riot of unarmed prisoners was met with an immediate armed response by military police who executed 111 prisoners. Many of the victims were sitting in their cells at the time of the attack. Most were youths serving light sentences for minor infractions. Public opinion polls taken in São Paulo immediately following the massacre showed strong public support for the police action (O Estado de Sao Paulo, 13 December 1992). Then, on Friday, 23 July 1993, eight young street children—meninos da rua—were gunned down by off duty policemen while they slept near the Candelaria Church in downtown Rio de Janeiro. While the Candelaria massacre brought renewed international attention to the plight of Brazil's street children and while a small number of supporters staged demonstrations and weekly vigils at the site of the massacre, public opinion sided with the violent police actions.

Finally, in November 1994, then President Itamar Franco and the state governor of Rio de Janeiro, Nilo Batista, sought military intervention (up to 20,000 troops) to gain control of Rio's 400 shantytowns and to combat what both leaders called a state of 'lawlessness' and drug and gang related violence in those areas. The commander of the troops, General Roberto Senna, led 400 soldiers backed by helicopters and tanks into a shantytown to capture an arsenal of weapons. Again, opinion polls collected by Databrasil and published in Brazil's daily newspapers recorded strong popular support for the army and approval of the military occupation of Rio's shantytowns. I will try to explain that remarkable consent.

As Alba Zaluar [18] notes, Brazil lacks a strong political culture of human rights. The first stirrings of 'human rights' concerns came to Brazil in the late 1970s through radicalized Catholic clergy who had come into contact with the work of Amnesty International, Americas Watch and other international human rights organizations. The incipient human rights activism was easily subverted by the Brazilian right which played on people's fears of escalating urban violence and criticized human rights as special dispensations for 'common criminals' [13, 20].

In 1985 the Association of Police Chiefs of São Paulo produced a 'Manifesto' addressed to the general population of the city in which the police lambasted the 'human rights' policies of the PMDB, the then ruling center-leftist political coalition: 'The situation today is one of total anxiety for you and total tranquillity for those who kill, rob, and rape.... How many crimes have occurred in your neighborhood, and how many criminals were found responsible for them?.... The bandits are protected by so called 'human rights' something that the government thinks that you, an honest and hard working citizen, do not deserve' [20].

When a negative conception of human rights cast as 'special favors' for criminals is superimposed on a narrow definition of crime that does not recognize the violent acts of the state, it is easy to see how violence against the poor can be routinized and defended, even by some of the shantytown poor themselves. Meanwhile, the progressive ideology of the new constitution is negated by a powerful and popular counter-discourse that continues to see poor youths and adolescents as criminals, as having already committed a crime or as just about to do so.

A classified document produced at Brazil's Superior War College (ESG) in 1989 analyzes the problem of urban violence in terms of the coming of age of Brazil's wild and unsocialized street children. The document concludes:

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that there are some 200,000 unattached minors (which is a conservative estimate). By the beginning of the next century we will have a contingent of criminals, malefactors, and murderers the size of our current army.... At that time, if police lack the means to
confront such a situation, the constituted executive, legislative and judicial powers could request the co-operation of the armed forces to take on the difficult task of neutralizing them [i.e. ‘destroying’ them] in order to maintain law and order. (cited in Caldeira [20].)

So, although the Brazilian military surrendered its direct control over the country, the formal transfer of authority has not been complete and it has not been accompanied by a demilitarization of everyday life. Underlying this crisis is a national preoccupation with the economic future of Brazil and with an increase in urban crime and public violence that seems to have accompanied the democratic transition.

Democratization took place in the presence of chaotic urbanization, the AIDS epidemic, and the entry into Brazil of the Columbian drug cartels. By the 1980s the geographical limits of most large cities, particularly São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, were finally reached. Consequently, the poor were forced back into central districts where they were feared and unwanted. Meanwhile, the AIDS epidemic created a moral panic about contamination from contact with the ‘bad blood’ of social margins. This contributed to a hostile impulse toward the ‘sick and sickening’ favelas.

The 1980s was also the time when the Colombian Cartels and the Italian Mafia, trafficking in cocaine, entered Brazil bringing upscale fire-arms which were distributed to poor youths from the favelas and even to street children who were recruited as messengers (‘aviões’) for the big time drug dealers. The reorganization of crime in the shantytowns interrupted the growth of participatory democracy which so many grassroots organizations—residents associations, trade unions, and ecclesiastical base communities—had struggled to introduce.

As Teresa Caldeira [20] has so forcefully described, a culture of fear permeates daily life in urban Brazil today. Ordinary people are afraid to walk city streets, to go to the beach, to drive a car. Talk about crime dominates casual conversations, replacing talk about the economy, sports, politics, sex and even Carnival. There is a feeling that violent crime is increasing while the police and the courts not only fail to provide security and justice, but are corrupt and lawless themselves. Private technologies of personal security have proliferated in the form of security guards and vigilante operations. High-tech surveillance machines are installed in homes and office buildings. Resident associations have closed off entire streets, even to pedestrian traffic.

Although it has many surreal qualities, the culture of fear in urban Brazil is more than just the product of wild imagination. Violence is real enough. There are an average of 20 violent deaths a day in Rio de Janeiro making death from violence the third highest cause of mortality there. The age-at-death pyramid in Brazil today suggests a country at war—with a noticeable deficit of young men and an unbalanced sex ratio. The primary victims of this undeclared low intensity civil war are young boys and black men from the hillside favelas.

One could say that democratization itself provoked a crisis. The former police state had kept the social classes safely apart and the ‘hordes’ of disenfranchised, desperate and ‘dangerous’ poor children contained to the favelas or in long-term public detention. Suddenly, with the democratic transition, the shantytowns ruptured and poor. Black street children descended from hillside slums and seemed to be everywhere, flooding downtown boulevards and praças, flaunting their misery and their socially antagonistic needs. Unwanted and perceived as human waste, older street children evoke strong and contradictory emotions of fear, aversion, pity and anger. These ‘garbage’ kids suddenly refused to stay put in the dump (the favelas and slums of Brazil).

Instead, they staked out elegant spaces of the city to live betraying the illusion of Brazilian ‘modernity’. Complex emotions of fear, anger and revulsion contribute to a public license toward their extermination [21].

In 1992 local ‘street kids’ of the Alto do Cruzeiro were able to identify 22 of their peers who had been murdered in the past few years by gangs, ‘hired guns’ and by police-infiltrated ‘death squads’ [22]. And despite the new laws designed to protect minors from incarceration in common jails, Daniel Hoffman and I visited several boys and adolescents who were being detained in the local jail alongside adult offenders. They were being held without formal charges, the Judge explained, for their own safety. The boys had been rejected by family members and were hated by the local population. A few, he said, were already ‘marked for extermination’.

In one cell we found ‘Caju’, 17 years, and ‘Junior’, just 15. I remembered both as cute street urchins who were attached to our household in 1987. Now, a few years later, they were in prison for rape and robbery, chaotic behavior born of street life. The ‘final solution’ that awaits older street kids like is even worse. A guard at the local jail put it like this: ‘The life of a young marginal here is short…. for a street kid to reach thirty years of age, it’s a miracle’. A nutritionally stunted 11 year old street kid from Bom Jesus who been released from jail, told us the following story:

I am small but I already know a few things. My mother said I was so small that I could hardly be born at all. But here I am. Before I left home I suffered a lot. My mother turned our house into a cabaret doing those sex things they do in the telenovelas. [television soap operas] It made me hate all women…. As the eldest I was left alone in charge of everything. You could say that I was like the dona da casa, the woman of the house. I did the shopping, the cleaning, the cooking. The babies were always hungry and sick. I had to go out begging milk…. In the end all but three of them died.
Whenever one of them was sick I wrapped them up and took them to the clinic and whenever any of them died it was left up to me to go to the mayor and get a free coffin. And it was me who washed them, dressed them, and 'arranged' them in their boxes... even the flowers I arranged. I did everything! I only didn't die myself because I was the oldest and I was lucky. Finally, I run away. In the streets it was better for a while. I smelled glue and I robbed. When I pulled a knife on a rich man's son to get his watch, the police grabbed me... In jail it was bad, miserable. The other boys called me names like 'fag' and 'queer' (fresca, bicha, viado) and a bunch of the bigger ones stuffed my mouth [with rags] and they raped me. I screamed. But the police didn't do anything; they just laughed. I went before the judge and I made my case. He took me out of jail and put me in this shelter.

(What do you think of the world now?)

I think it stinks

(Is there anything good about it?)

Nothing. It's only fit for thieves. The world is nothing.

The murder of shantytown youths and young men was not even thought worthy of a column in the progressive 'opposition' newspaper of Bom Jesus. 'Why should we criticize the 'execution' of malandros (good-for-nothings) and scoundrels?' asked a progressive lawyer. 'How can we verify a disappeared youth from all those murdered by gangs and in street fights? the Judge replied, to my questions about the fate of those disappeared youths identified by the local street kids.

As for young men of the shantytown like 'Nego De' who was executed by some form of vigilante justice in 1990, they were casually written off by 'respectable' citizens of Bom Jesus. 'The police have to be free to go about their business', said Mariazinha, the old woman who lives in a small room behind the Church and who takes care of the altar flowers. 'They know what they're doing. It's best to keep your mouth shut', she advised, zipping her lips shut to demonstrate. Padre Agostino Leal, the new liberation theology priest of Bom Jesus, shook his head sadly: Is it possible that they murdered Nego-De? What a shame! He was in reform. He attended my Wednesday evening 'young criminals' circle'. The good padre added ruefully: 'I guess it was just too late for Nego-De'. And many in the shantytown sided with the police and the death squads, saying when one or another young thief was 'disappeared': 'Bom, menos um, Good, less one!'

Meanwhile, aspects of social life and socialization in Brazilian favelas reproduce just the kinds of aggressive behaviors that 'decent' and 'respectable' middle class Brazilians fear. Among favelados liberty is often interpreted as 'taking liberties'—taking advantage of others, especially anyone smaller or weaker than one's self. Freedom and exploitation are sometimes confused. What is valued is personal, individual power, physical strength and charisma (captured in the notion of forca). Little 'big men' proliferate to torment and dominate the shantytown from within, and the enviable 'free' man is one who 'takes no shit' from anyone.

The rule of domination with humiliation can be rubbed in, so to speak, by harsh forms of physical punishment meted out by some shantytown mothers, among whom can be found those who discipline incontinent children by making them suck on urine-soaked or feces-soiled blankets [23]. In so doing favela mothers participate in a survivalist ethos built on a rude sense of popular 'justice' such that the 'punishment should equal the crime'. These same mothers told Goldstein, who lived in a crowded shack with a large favela family, that their children, particularly their sons, needed to be prepared, 'toughed up' for the daily struggle they would undoubtedly have to face as adults. A combination of reactive and defensive aggression tempered by a restraining sense of social humiliation and shame were the necessary ingredients for male survival in the favela and on the 'mean' city streets below. But these same 'survivalist' traits antagonize middle-class people and contribute to young men's deaths at the hands of the police and of vigilantes.

Finally, one must note that even the contemporary social science writings and discourses on urban violence that are so fashionably popular today in the universities and urban institutes of Brazil (as they are in South Africa, Europe, and North America) are themselves 'dangerous'. The over-production of research on violence in part to the theoretical opportunism which this area of study provides) unwittingly contributes—though indirectly and mediated through popular media that appropriate and deform social science writings—to the popular sense of 'dangerousness' and hence to sanctioning of vigilante 'death squads' as a necessary defense against urban anarchy. Meanwhile, the tendency of activist grassroots social movements to inflate the statistics on the prevalence of urban crime, drugs, and street children also has the effect of frightening people rather than mobilizing a more positive and activist response.

South Africa: dangerous young lions

There are strong parallels (as well as many differences) between post-democratic transition Brazil and the new South Africa. South Africans are recovering from a former and brutal white police state which has left many social legacies. The decades of bitter struggle against apartheid made soldiers out of children and turned black townships into breakaway armed camps ruled by their own informal associations. Since the late 1980s the young comrades governed the Black townships through street committees, self defense units and discipline committees. These identified and punished police collaborators, thieves, or anyone perceived as an enemy of the community. Peoples' courts meted out a rough sort of popular, revolutionary justice. Apologies and fines were levied for lesser infractions. More serious
offences were punished through public 'spectacles' in which the lash and more rarely the necklace (burning rubber tires around the necks of suspected state collaborators) succeeded in wresting the black communities from white control.

The struggle against apartheid produced a vanguard of highly articulate and politicized youth. While many things began to change in South Africa beginning in 1990, urban violence was not one of them, and as one drives along the notorious N-2 freeway into Cape Town, one suppresses the impulse to duck for cover against angry rock-throwers from the squatter camps that still line the road. And, no wonder, as one looks out over endlessly ugly stretches of sand with thousands of plastic, cardboard and corrugated iron shacks behind razor wire fences. These shantytowns resemble bombed out concentration camps and surpass most Brazilian favelas in sheer physical ugliness.

When in August 1993 the American Fulbright student Amy Biehl was dragged from her car in Guguletu township in Cape Town and pummeled to death by jeering, politicized youths, the sensationalist media images described a 'lost generation' of South African youth. Biehl's death became a kind of watershed as South African political leaders of all stripes began to worry that township youth were totally out of control. At the memorial service the next day at the University of the Western Cape, Amy's mentor, the feminist activist Rhoda Kadalie spoke angrily of Biehl's death at the hands of 'young monsters' created and set loose by the 'apartheid machine'. 'Now they are afoot in the land. They are eating us and eating each other.'

During the early stages of the Biehl trial when witnesses came forward to describe in graphic detail Amy Biehl's final agony, the young comrades and PAC supporters packed into the upper gallery of the courtroom laughed and cheered. Judge Friedman, revolted by the outburst, cleared the courtroom. But the newspapers failed to report, however, that defendant #2, 'Easy' Nofemela, whipped around to chastise his supporters: 'What's wrong with you? Get out of here, all of you!'

"Why did some of the boys laugh?" I asked Nona Gozo, the soft-spoken defense lawyer.

The laughter was not acceptable to me, nor to anyone else. But it did not shock me. I live in a township and know the extent to which apartheid has murdered human feelings. And I know how strong race hatred is. Their own people have been killed so often that it has the effect of reducing killing to nothing.

*What can you tell me about the accused?*

They are children just like any other. Under normal circumstances they would have had a wonderful life. But they are children of apartheid and they have been exposed to everything.

I thought of the children of Chris Hani squatter camp in the Western Cape and how they like to play games like 'funeral' and 'AK-47', how children in a make-shift day care center there produced drawings of guns being fired, police attacking people, children discovering corpses, injured people being loaded into ambulances, shacks burning and people fleeing their homes. As for the three boys convicted of killing Biehl, the history of apartheid was etched on their bodies. In examining Nofemela for signs of police torture related to his confession, a police major testified he had found only 'old' wounds. Each of the nine scars on Nofemela's young body told a story of township life: stab wounds, brick bashings, machete chops, burns and scars from untreated infections. The two other boys were sick with chronic respiratory infections and suspected tuberculosis.

For Biehl's single white death there was a 'royal' dispensation. Three judges: their robes were red, the court room was rich in polished hardwood. But an air of sullen mockery and suspicion filled the court as Afrikaner police, compromised District Surgeon, English-speaking Judge, Xhosa defendants, white prosecutors, and the Black defense team eyed the other with mistrust and loathing. With the disappearance of key witnesses on each side, and with the Greek chorus of laughing PAC youth in the gallery, the trial seemed a drama of mockery, defiance and refusal. The trial began while the negotiated 'revolution' still hung in the balance and at a time when for all practical purposes there was no legitimate state at all.

The trial ended in October 1994, 6 months after Mandela marched triumphantly into Parliament, a few blocks away from the Municipal Supreme Court. The three boys were convicted of murder and mayhem, but the death penalty was rejected in favor of a 17 year prison sentence. The judge noted that the boys had been carried away on a wave of radical, anti-white rhetoric and were incensed by the seeming (though unconscious) arrogance the privileged white girl who dared to call herself a 'comrade'. The Judge hoped that the young men might still someday become useful citizens in the new South Africa.

Today, in the 'new' South Africa there is less fear of the 'comrades' and more of the so-called 'lost generation' of angry Black youth who have turned, it is said, from revolutionary actions to common criminal violence. The perception of disaffected and dangerous township youth is even shared today by Nelson Mandela who warned in a speech delivered soon after he assumed office:

The youth in the townships have had over the decades a visible enemy, the government. Now that enemy is no longer visible because of the [political] transformation that is taking place. Their enemy is now you and me—people who drive a car and have a house.

Jacqueline Cook [26] has labeled this current situation the 'Ulysses Factor', referring to the difficult reintegration of several thousand revolutionary MK
soldiers (many of them youths) and of countless township rebels, the 'young comrades' of the ANC and PAC youth leagues, following years of armed struggle that produced neither clear victors nor vanquished. The democratic transition in South Africa came about through a painfully slow process of political negotiation from which the so-called angry 'young lions' were sidelined.

When Mandela took office in May 1994 some 25,000 children, many under the age of eight, were still locked up in South African jails. Robbed of schooling, manipulated by political slogans ('revolution now, school later'), controlled by gangs, arrested and tortured by the South African Police and pursued by local death squads, township youth are children without childhoods. The 'young lions' were used by the ANC and the PAC in campaigns that kept township youth out of school, in the streets, and available to 'the struggle'. When the struggle reached its final and negotiated conclusion, youth were swept aside. Old enough to fight, the comrades were told that they were not old enough to vote. As the British sociologist Dick Hebdige has argued, youth tends to be present in public discourse only when it is regarded as a problem. Or, we might add, when youthful energy and exuberance is useful to political or nation building projects, including civil wars and wars of liberation in which children have figured largely throughout Southern Africa.

In May 1994 President Mandela made a dramatic and symbolic move when he ordered the release of 1500 young children held in detention and 14,000 youths held in South African jails. Closing down jails is a necessary step in demobilizing a former police state. Opening up and demilitarizing the communities to which these youths must now return is more difficult. In the new South Africa, as in post democratic transition Brazil, the popular culture, across many classes and subgroups, retains many authoritarian features. Diffuse anxiety about the threat posed by dangerous township youths—the political comrades-turned-killers (called com-tot-ies)—casts an ominous shadow over the future of South African democracy.

And South Africa continues to be one of the most violent countries in the world. A recently published profile of violence-related mortality in the Cape Town Metropole [27] indicated that there were an average of 4.9 homicides and 3.1 transport related deaths per day. Black and mixed race males accounted for 84% of all homicide victims. Most had been stabbed to death. Adolescents and young adults in the 15–34 age category accounted for more than half of all violent deaths in Cape Town.

**Body counts**

In stark contrast to the attention paid to the single death of Amy Biehl, and to other white people, black deaths in the townships continue to be reported unceremoniously in South African newspapers as mere body counts, a persistent residue of the apartheid years. White deaths 'count'—the victims have names, personalities, histories and grieving family members. Black deaths are merely counted as in the following headlines and reports from Cape Town newspapers in 1993–1994: ‘Another 40 bodies found on the East Rand’; ‘Dozen Bodies Removed from Guguletu in Weekend Casualties’; ‘The charred bodies of seven people, including a 50 year old woman and her teenage daughter, were found in a hostel in Katlehong on Friday’; ‘The burned bodies of two young men were found at the Mandela squatter camp in Thokoza and another body at Katlehong railway station’; ‘Charred bodies of two witches found in Nyanga’.

In one ‘ordinary’ weekend in the middle of February 1996, 132 South Africans died in violent crime [28]. Reacting against the tradition of reporting in which the African murder victims are normally reported as 'faceless, unidentified bodies', the news reporters dug beneath the surface of the convention in order to affix names and faces to the victims, many of whom were still lying, unclaimed, in the state mortuaries. In Cape Town a young black journalist explained that even Zulu and Xhosa language newspapers in South Africa—the black press—treat black deaths in the same anonymous fashion as the white South African press:

The numbers are too numbing. Black people too, are tired of violence, and tired of reading about more deaths. Stories that personalize the deaths won't sell in the black community ... Besides Black journalists come through the same institutions as white journalists, and the Black press picks up many of its stories from the larger and more established white presses. We are all using the same sources of information in any case. I remember a combi-taxi and bus crash that occurred a few weeks ago on the main street of Rondebosh [a white suburb]. The Cape Times reported only that 17 people were killed in the accident. I knew immediately that the 17 who died were Blacks. How did I know? I knew because the press did not bother to say who they were and the newspapers made absolutely nothing of the accident. There would have been better reporting if a busload of chickens or hogs had died in the crash on Main Road in Rondebosh. That would have really been something! Instead, it was just another one of those things that happens to the kind of people who ride public transportation, that is—to Black people.

As is another context where the term invisible genocide might apply.

Democratic elections have come and gone in both Brazil and South Africa but the legacies of the former police states remain. It is best to understand any democratic transition as a 'dangerous hour'. With the collapse of authoritarian regimes there emerge new nations full of needs and full of rage. During civil wars and wars of liberation—as in situations of extreme poverty—many aspects of childhood are denied or foreshortened. After the war, or after the fall of authoritarian regimes, children are expected to return quietly to their 'proper' child-
hoods (as in South Africa) or, in the case of Brazil, to their 'proper place' (off city streets). While some go with relief, others go with great reluctance. Many others cannot return. Some would rather die than give up their hard won independence and autonomy.

I do not see any simple or immediate solutions or panaceas to the problem of 'dangerous' and endangered youth, whether in the context of democratic Brazil, the new South Africa, or for that matter in an increasingly youth-and-child-hostile North America. One set of issues concerns the extension of citizenship rights to young people. In the necessary 'settlement of accounts' now taking place in Brazil and South Africa (as in Mozambique, Angola and many other parts of the world) abandoned children and war-wounded youths deserve special attention. Their sacrifices and—in the case of South Africa—their heroisms need to be recognized, their losses mourned, their bodies mended. Above all, their loss of dignity, respect, freedom, and family and community life, and in addition, to protect them from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty, and oppression. They need to name and nationality from birth, parental care, to public health and social services, to freedom from abuse, neglect and exploitative labor practices, and to be detained under conditions appropriate to age.

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REFERENCES

3. Article 227 of the new Brazilian Constitution states unequivocally that 'it is the duty of the family, society, and the state to assure with absolute priority the rights of children and adolescents to life, health, food, education, leisure, occupational training, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, and family and community life, and in addition, to protect them from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty, and oppression.' Article 30 of the new South African Constitution guarantees ever child the right to name and nationality from birth, parental care, to public health and social services, to freedom from abuse, neglect and exploitative labor practices, and to be detained under conditions appropriate to age.
21. I am mindful, of course, that a similar situation applies in the United States where de facto neighborhood segregation, racism, unemployment, and poverty combine to create ideal social conditions for a cycle of 'inner city' failure and violence leading to heightened police surveillance and 'neighborhood watch' activity, much of it repressive, some of it violent. And, of course, the life prospects of inner city youth in America are little better than those of their Brazilian counterparts, and the rates of violent death in some sections of Oakland, California are comparable to those from Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, the following analysis could go much further to implicate the role of trans-national capital and U.S. foreign policy in supporting authoritarian rule in Brazil with all its negative consequences for poor children.
22. I offer their names here as a small act of resistance and as a way of honoring their short lives: Pedrinho, Zeze, Docideiro, Rihgue, Malaquias, Dedha, Beto Boca de Veia, Joca, Misso, Bebe, Taiga, Ze Pequeno, Pipio, Regi, Geronimo, Xunda, Gilvam, Bodinha, Bui, Nino, Biopiolho, Frô.


