Foreword

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The most important deliberative bodies in São Paulo's contemporary body of crime have a funny name: *sintonias*. Like so much else involving the Primeiro Comando do Capital (PCC), the term is odd, unexpected, opaque. If we want to understand it, we need to move from the inside out.

Since its origins in a high-security prison in the early 1990s, the PCC has grown from a tight group of prisoners determined to curb carceral abuse and fratricidal violence to a transnational brotherhood responsible for the normative regulation of neighbourhoods and economies, from the organisation's native São Paulo to the peripheries of cities throughout Brazil and points of criminal economic activity across the globe. A good part of that rise, Gabriel Feltran argues, can be explained by the PCC's radically decentralised, anti-hierarchical and deliberative structure. No leader defines the PCC, and its ultimate aim is not to profit, but rather to create the conditions through which its 'brothers' in crime might do so – to foment 'peace, justice liberty, equality and union' among thieves. Those conditions are not commanded from high by a powerful mastermind, but created in practice through deliberation within cell-like groupings of 'brothers' who earn their status through action and should never be held above the collective notion of what is 'right' and tolerable in the world of crime. Each of those 'independent nuclei', functioning without full knowledge

Foreword

of one another or even of the PCC's operational map, is called a *sintonia*. When I recently had the chance to talk with Gabriel Feltran about his extraordinary research on the PCC, it occurred to me to ask: why?

The word could be rendered in English as 'synchronicity' or 'harmony'. But Feltran honed in instead on the evocative power of concrete mechanics. *Sintonia*'s most powerful definition, he told me, is 'tuning'. It denotes that magical moment when one's clumsy fiddling with an old-fashioned radio dial or television antennae yields clear reception; the wavelengths are synchronised, the sound is plain. Those men in the Taubaté prison who founded the PCC in the 1990s – for the most part children of Brazil's poor peripheries in the economically disastrous 1980s – had probably messed with their share of rickety televisions and radios. They knew the intricate, tactile delicacy required for every successful tuning. And thus their deliberative bodies became *sintonias*, those intangible spaces where the clash of static becomes lucid sound.

In translating portions of Feltran's remarkable *Irmãos: Uma história do PCC* (2018), *Entangled City* illuminates the logic of the PCC's *sintonias*, allowing English-language readers to peer beyond the veil of bravado and drama that renders the rise of Brazil's criminal organisations as an exotic triumph of uncontrolled violence, straight out of *City of God*. But *Entangled City* is not a straight translation. It is, instead, a synthesis of Feltran's quarter century of intensive ethnographic research in São Paulo's vast peripheries, a crystallisation of forms of understanding that have emerged through the granular accumulation of everyday experiences: bus rides through dusty self-built neighbourhoods in which bodies, houses and commercial outposts gradually incorporate the trappings of global consumerism; everyday conversations in cramped homes where a crack addict and drug dealer is also a son taking a shower; decades of confessional tête-à-têtes with a single mother whose past of domestic abuse and family subsistence on fish-head gruel gradually becomes a present in which material stability and

Foreword

community integration coexist with wrenchingly violent loss. In juxtaposing these histories of granular everyday transformation with the parallel evolution of academic, political and media discussions of ‘democracy’, ‘citizenship’, ‘urban violence’, and ‘crime’, Feltran achieves a *sintonia* of his own, opening a space of clarity where strangers can apprehend the synchronicities and dissonances that order and disorder the urban world as it is experienced from the peripheries.

Gabriel Feltran began publishing his research about São Paulo in the early 2000s. In three major monographs, several edited volumes, and dozens of articles, book chapters and works of public scholarship, he has worked as both a translator and an intellectual, illuminating for outsiders dynamics that are so obvious as to seem banal to residents of São Paulo’s periphery, but also shedding brilliant light on the significance of those dynamics within broader historical, urban, economic and cultural contexts. Feltran has written about peripheral social movements and regulatory regimes, about the music of crime and young people’s encounters with the state and the law, about the structure of illegal economies and the dynamics of urban violence. These projects are layered, not linear, each building on intensive immersion in São Paulo’s southeast periphery but focused on the threads of connection that link those peripheral cityscapes to economies, structures of governance, conceptual aesthetics and moral logics to greater São Paulo, greater Brazil, and alternate urban and civic orders stretching from Paraguay to Berlin. This book assembles fragments of all of those projects, but it is more fusion than collage, an extended meditation on the meaning that all of those disparate strands take on when they are entangled in our own historical moment, and apprehended from disparate and distant global contexts.

In that spirit, one conceptual and argumentative thread from *The Entangled City* stands in especially sharp relief. It emerges from the deceptively simple notion that ‘specific stories’ shape the worldviews of peripheral urbanites. In theoretical terms, Feltran’s

Foreword

commitment harkens back to multiple sociological and ethnographic traditions, and especially to those inspired by the theory of action, as expressed in the notion that ‘the social’ is structured ‘through everyday life ... and it is in pragmatic action ... that the plausible is constituted (p. 31)’; ‘the everyday plays a decisive role in the objectification of the categories of difference (p. 41).’ Feltran’s ethnographic method is built on the notion that the periphery’s multiple and shifting realities can only be understood through the accrual of experience. The peripheral world he portrays is one in which it makes no sense to think through important questions in the absence of specific narratives – real people, real things, real and infinitely varied interactions. It is more meaningful to say that ‘Bianca has a new refrigerator’ than it is to say that ‘more money is circulating’ (p. 7); you convey far more by describing the deaths of actual people – Fernando, Anísio – than you do by analysing the causes and meaning of ‘urban violence’. And the emphasis on narrative is a moral logic as well as a discursive technique; one of the reasons that the PCC’s justice enjoys broad legitimacy is that it is based on the interplay of moral principle and situational nuance, told by the actors themselves and debated by ‘brothers’ with little patience for abstraction or technicality. This is justice based on ‘principles put to the test on a situational basis’ (p. 221), not on an opaque and impenetrable legal infrastructure that’s actions regularly belie its theoretical commitments.

Feltran’s take on PCC justice is but one facet of a broader set of arguments about the nature of urban order-making, and in particular the ways in which contemporary cities are shaped by overlapping, contradictory, competitive and interdependent normative regimes. There is nothing especially novel about the notion that liberalism, citizenship and democracy coexist with their antitheses. In Brazil, these paradoxes inhabit the core of national self-reflection, preoccupying thinkers as varied as Joaquim Nabuco, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Roberto Schwarz. The fact that Brazil’s post-1988 democratic expansion

Foreword

has been paradoxically entwined with the rise of illicit economies, police violence and criminal governance has undergirded some of the most insightful analyses of contemporary urban Brazil, from Luiz Antônio Machado da Silva and Michel Misse to Teresa Caldeira and James Holston. Feltran pushes those insights a step further, with especially penetrating everyday logic. The issue in São Paulo is not only that there are competing notions of how to achieve a normative state that we might define as the rule of law or liberal democracy. It is, rather, that São Paulo's commitment to those principles – understood not through rhetoric or legal forms, but through the concrete workings of everyday life – is so aleatory and incomplete, especially on the peripheries, that progressive institutional inclusion and citizenship cannot operate as hegemonic ideals. The question in São Paulo's peripheries is not whether democratic governance can be best achieved by law-and-order crackdowns or through radical expansions of civil rights and formal equality; it is, rather, whether democracy and liberal governance are even relevant as ordering concepts. The PCC understands this, and has in response created – with violence, but also methodically and consistently – 'alternative and coexistent regimes of publicness' (p. 13). Like so many relational and informal orders that have historically co-governed cities in Brazil and around the globe, these operate not in opposition to laws and institutions, but in conjunction with them, becoming part of a repertoire of operative scripts that everyone calls upon on a situational basis. The PCC has grown not as a force of violent chaos, bent on disordering urban society, or as a militarised business hierarchy, bent on profit at all costs. It has emerged instead as an intricate pact capable of organising and protecting bodies, relationships, spaces and economies, that the liberal order has systematically failed to recognise or fully incorporate.

Feltran grapples frequently in these pages with the new meanings his insights have taken on in Brazil's current context of violent historical rupture. He reflects, as many have, on the ways in which

Foreword

elite imaginaries have shifted from paradigms of economic and civic integration to those of management, control and defence. He delves far more deeply, with sparser company, into the ways in which more than thirty years of democratisation and liberal economic reform have been experienced on the peripheries as ‘a series of crises; formal employment, in Catholic religiosity, of the promise of social mobility for the working family, of social movements and their representativeness’ (p. 69). By the new millennium, these crises were so endemic that they had become for young people ‘a constitutive element of their being in the world’; their parents’ ways of understanding progress, moral behavior, and societal pacts of protection and responsibility had fractured beyond recognition (p. 70). In their place, consumerism and ‘old-fashioned religious morality’ emerged as the only social logics capable of integrating peripheral and privileged spheres that no longer shared common understandings of the present or the future. Money connected illegal and legal economies and governing bodies, eye-for-an-eye morality and faith in divine jurisdiction linked ‘citizens’ and ‘bandits’ who no longer invested much faith in institutional jurisdiction. Seen in this context, Jair Bolsonaro’s political rise doesn’t seem like an aberration; it might be better understood as the lifting of a veil, the moment when ‘the conflict that plagued the favelas ... finally became a part of national politics ... Police repression, religious fundamentalism, and radical liberalism, everything that was thought to be backwards in the era of building democracy, was now in the vanguard of a new national project (23).’

There is nothing remotely utopian about the urban periphery that Feltran describes. Since the early 2000s, Ivete – Feltran’s most intimate informant, the person who helps him understand how normative regimes intersect to sustain family life – has seen two sons die violent deaths. A third is beaten to a pulp and sent to exile in the Northeast, one of her daughters is an addict, in and out of prison. The world of crime provided Ivete with day-to-day security

Foreword

when she arrived in the periphery, and gave both the material resources and the local legitimacy she and her straighter-arrow children needed to forge a more sustainable life. But the PCC also decreed her son's exile and forced his brother to participate in his brutal beating; the organisation facilitates the sale of the drugs that devastate her daughter, and cannot protect two of her sons from dying young, at least one from a police bullet. All of this during years when São Paulo's homicide rates were plummeting and the economy was booming, the golden age of both PCC and democratic governance.

At a broader level, there is no guarantee that the ethical strain that Feltran identifies within the tangle of PCC governance – its radical commitment to deliberative methods and to the principles of peace, justice, liberty, equality and unity – will be even as enduringly present as the ethical strains within liberalism and institutional democracy, especially as the organisation competes for dominance with other normative regimes and expands nationally and globally in a context of rising authoritarianism. Without that strain, criminal governance – like liberal governance – becomes simply the violent forging of an order suitable to those who hold the reins of power. As anyone who has ever manually tuned a radio knows, *sintonia* is ephemeral and sometimes impossible. *Entangled City* does not open our eyes to an urban order most people would choose if they had a better option. But it does allow us a brief moment of synchronicity, within which tangles become patterns and the peripheral worldview makes absolute sense. In allowing us to see the disjuncture of the liberal and democratic discourses emanating from the so-called centre, *Entangled City* lays the basis for a frank, honest conversation about the lived experience and moral underpinnings of contemporary urbanity.