



Democracy 3: Frontier violence and civilization in São Paulo's periphery

Diadema

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Toward the end of the 1970s, along dimly lit, unpaved streets of Jardim Campanário, a new settlement was growing at the edge of the São Paulo suburb of Diadema. Crude houses of hollow brick mixed with wood shacks, in a jumble of migrant lives, was becoming a community. These were times of fevered construction and disorder in Greater São Paulo's periphery. An explosion of land invasions and illegal subdivisions tripled Diadema's population in two decades. On rainy mornings in Jardim Campanário, people left home for work with two pairs of shoes because

the dirt streets became swamps. But the mire beneath their feet was not the most frightening thing en route to the bus stop. Sometimes they found bullet-ridden corpses dumped beside their path.

At the entrance to two bakeries in Jardim Campanário, macabre lists were scrawled on rough signs that announced the names of those to be murdered in coming days. Graffiti bearing the names of those marked for murder also appeared on walls along Campanário's streets. The lists were the work of self-appointed enforcers, *justiceiros*, who killed people whom they said were disturbing the peace. The *justiceiros* were accepted as part of daily life in these new communities. "The police never did anything when

they saw the lists," said a neighbor. "We never knew if the police were afraid or if they were involved with the *justiceiros*. When they found a corpse in the morning, the police tossed it into the trunk of a patrol car like a

This essay, continuing a series of Braudel Papers on the functioning of democracy in Latin America, is the product of four years of team work. Bruno Paes Manso carried out a study of homicides in Diadema as a researcher for the Fernand Braudel Institute of World Economics. Maryluci de Araújo Farias contributed to this study as coordinator of the Institute's projects in Diadema. Norman Gall is executive director of the Institute and editor of Braudel Papers. We are grateful to the World Bank and the Tinker Foundation for their support for this project.

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dead pig.” In 1990 the *justiceiros* killed seven students in a plaza of Campanário, near their homes. Several people saw the killings, which never were solved. A law of silence governed these settlements.

Murder and civil war

In 1999, 11,455 murders were recorded in Greater São Paulo, in a climate of negligence by federal, state and municipal authorities. Public security was not yet a major political issue. The police were disorganized and underfunded. These 11,455 murders in São Paulo dwarfed the totals registered for other big cities, such as the 667 homicides in New York that year.

The killings in São Paulo were roughly comparable in scale to the annual civilian deaths in insurrections and civil wars such as in Iraq, Sierra Leone and Somalia. In one year in Kosovo (1998-99), 2,000 people were killed in a civil war and ethnic cleansing. Those 2,000 deaths prompted military intervention by NATO with United Nations support. In Peru, some 30,000

people were killed in the Shining Path Maoist guerrilla insurrection, but these deaths occurred over a 10-year period. Those 30,000 killings in Peru would have been the toll of only three years of homicides in Greater São Paulo.

Since then, the people of Diadema have learned that an epidemic of homicides is terrible, but tolerance of homicides is much worse. In 1999, the homicide rate in Diadema reached 141 per 100,000 population, one of the world's highest. Four years later, in 2003, the murder rate was reduced by half, thanks to a mobilization by citizens and by the state and local governments.

While the decline in murders started only in 2000, the turning point came in March 1997 with the scandal of the Favela Naval, a string of shacks along the fetid canal that forms the border between

the municipalities of Diadema and São Bernardo. For three consecutive nights, an amateur video cameraman recorded the police torturing young men during pre-dawn searches for drugs. They were stopped for no apparent reason, leading to the murder of one of them after he had been repeatedly punched and humiliated. When he shouted out that he had taken the number of the police car, he was shot in the neck. The tapes were sent to the Globo network's *Jornal Nacional*, Brazil's most popular evening news program. TV images and photos in the press, transmitted worldwide, depicted Favela Naval and Diadema as a theater of violence and urban degradation.

In 2000, the Fernand Braudel Institute of World Economics became part of a civic mobilization to stop the killing, organizing a Public Security Forum, meeting monthly in the City Council chambers with the local police chiefs and civic, political and religious leaders. With all its problems, Diadema's lines of political and administrative responsibility were

**The primitivism
and violence in
Diadema is
giving way to the
consolidation of
institutions.**

clear and coherent, in contrast to the amorphous and chaotic political structure of the giant metropolis of São Paulo, with its 18 million people spread among 39 municipalities. Diadema's compact size, the nature of its problems and its political and administrative structure made it a promising field for research and social action by our Institute.

São Paulo is not a picture postcard metropolis. It has few architectural monuments and tourist attractions, but it teems with vitality, diversity and business activity of many kinds. Diadema occupies a small area (30 square kilometers) of hilly terrain sandwiched between the much larger municipalities of São Paulo (10 million people) and São Bernardo (800,000). Its 376,000

Learning and culture in Diadema

Diadema's cultural programs stand out among the municipalities of Greater São Paulo. Their cultural vitality can be explained in part by the way Diadema was shaped politically, by social movements that gave birth to the Workers Party (PT) and by the solidarity of leftist artists and other intellectuals.

This cultural effervescence had an important role in the development of young people who, in their search for culture, managed with creativity and determination to prevail over the environment of poverty and violence, as told in the personal stories of young educators in our Reading Circles, all from Diadema, published below.

These stories attest to the wealth of young talent hidden in the precarious settlements of Greater São Paulo's vast periphery. Most of this human potential remains undeveloped for lack of educational opportunities. Development of this potential not only would enhance the capacity of these communities and their citizens to solve their own problems but also, on a larger scale, could greatly improve the quality of management of complex societies, desperately needed by this huge metropolis.

Over the past two decades, Diadema developed a network of artistic workshops, cultural centers and neighborhood public libraries. In 1982 the Diadema Cultural Center was founded in the city center. In 1989 PT Mayor José Augusto da Silva Ramos (1989-92) created Diadema's first community cultural center, in Jardim Campanário. By 1992 the municipal government had inaugurated a Youth Cultural Center (YCC) in each neighborhood. But the YCCs lacked solid programming, resources and supervision.

Over the next three years, the Municipal Department of Culture channeled resources into selection and training of personnel and transformed the YCCs into local cultural centers for people of all ages. The municipality

now announces workshops in theater, music, literature, cartoons, plastic arts, photography, circus arts and dance. These workshops vary in quality, but they offer young people their first contact with formal culture outside the school and home. Our educators tell of their experiences here:



Reni Adriano Batista, 23, *was born in rural Minas Gerais and arrived in Diadema in January 1990, at the age of nine, with his parents and sister.*

At first I had a cultural shock when I discovered that the São Paulo where I had come to live was not a modern Avenida Paulista. It was a slum with unpaved streets, poor sanitation and unemployment. My dream of a better childhood, full of electronic toys like those shown on TV, disappeared. I learned that it was possible to be even poorer than I had been in Minas Gerais. There I might not even have known what it meant to be poor. We were sheltered by the solidarity in our family and community.

In a public school near my home in the Serraria district, kids made fun of my accent and the elementary schoolteacher exhorted me to speak "correctly". I got rebellious, although I earned good grades in every subject. Because I talked too much in class,

my third grade teacher confined me to a storeroom for old books inappropriately called a library. I was forced to stay there alone during classes, copying out long texts. Noticing that the teacher did not bother to read what I copied, I began skipping paragraphs so as to finish quickly. This is how I found time to rummage through the books. I read almost all of Monteiro Lobato's children's stories in that storeroom.

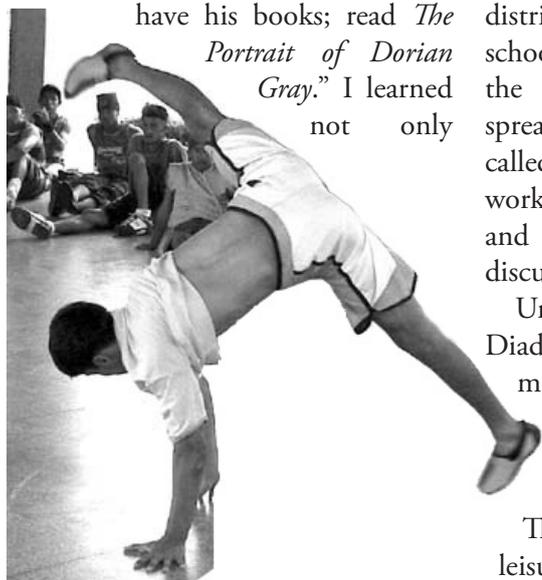
Living in a one-room house of bare bricks, I had to read by the stove lamp late at night, lying on the floor, in order not to wake up my family. My father found books to be worthless and forbade me to read near him. "Books don't fill anyone's belly", he used to say.

At the age of 11, I discovered the local library in Serraria, which had just opened as part of the growing municipal library system. In 1997, my school received hundreds of books from the Ministry of Education. Scattered randomly on shelves in the classrooms, the books became playthings for vandals. Students would tear them, kick them around, stomp on them and scatter pages in front of the fan.

I began taking some of these books home – I still have a copy of *Viva o Povo Brasileiro* ("Long Live the Brazilian People"), by João Ubaldo Ribeiro, bearing a footprint on the first page. This was also how I discovered Otto Lara Resende's short stories. I was in seventh grade at the time, attending evening classes – the most disorderly period in the public school routine – but I wanted to be like Otto. Never before, or later, had I yearned so much to be someone else. That was the first time I thought of going to college, despite my lack of resources: I believed that all I needed to study journalism was to have Otto's erudition.

In my search for new things as I grew up, I learned to move around the city. I got to know the public spaces, above all in libraries and in Diadema's rich informal cultural life: in plazas, streets, bars, at friends' homes. When I was 17, I was hanging out with some friends in the Praça da Moça, Diadema's main square, in the wee hours of the morning, talking about poetry. A man of about 30 approached us, asking if we had something to drink. We did our best to ignore him. Despite our indifference, the man lay down quite near us. Suddenly he turned to me and said: "Have you ever heard of Oscar Wilde?" Flustered, I said no. He said, "Then look for it in Diadema's library, they're sure to

have his books; read *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*." I learned not only



Casa do Hip-Hop, 2005.

of the importance of this classic but also its author's story through this stranger, who was one of Diadema's leading writers. He was to become my friend years later.

In 1999 I passed an entry exam for CEFAM/ Diadema, a preparatory school for teachers, less because of any teaching vocation than because of my financial need. We students got a monthly stipend to study full-time. Besides, I hoped in this way to get a better high school education. This was how I began to have a more solid educational foundation, partially

through the support of good teachers, but mainly through the bright students that CEFAM attracted.

Students began to exchange ideas about what to read and recommend books to one another. We formed a discussion group that used to meet during school breaks and free periods. Writers such as Clarice Lispector, Machado de Assis, Fernando Pessoa, José Saramago, Herman Hesse and Samuel Beckett became musts for all of us.

There also were philosophers among us. We talked philosophy, discussing ourselves and the world, without much academic rigor but with lots of vigor. Sartre, Camus and Nietzsche were our favorites. We formed a sort of knowledge distribution network across the whole school, sometimes in protest against the administration. This network spread into downtown Diadema. We called our group "Ism." We joined workshops at the cultural centers and spent long hours reading and discussing in the city's plazas.

Under the new bar closing hours in Diadema, my friends and I sometimes meet in bars until closing time, then go to bars in neighboring cities. Sometimes we meet at someone's home, but not always.

There is a difference between what leisure means to us and what it means to our families. Our houses are too small to accommodate those different tastes. Lack of money often makes it hard for us to do things out of town. Despite all these difficulties, few people managed to have so much fun and learn so much with so little money.

In late 2001, I was introduced to the Reading Circles project at CEFAM/ Diadema. We read and discussed *The Odyssey* every Saturday, in a group led by a psychoanalyst, Catalina Pagés Lamas, who created this method. I discovered that the wonder of reading could help us achieve practical things in life. I learned that like me, many other ambitious

young people from the periphery aspire to more opportunities than they can find at most of our schools, which are incapable of educating ambitious people. They seek instead to reduce everyone to a mediocre and homogeneous mass.



Vanessa Almeida, 21, was born in Diadema, the daughter of immigrants from Brazil's Northeast.

I was eight years old and in the second grade when I began to enjoy reading. My public school had a small library where students could take books home. Noticing my interest, my mother would buy me children's books. The first time I visited Diadema's Cultural Center (CCD) in downtown was on a school trip when I was 11. That was the day I saw my first play. This visit prompted me to begin attending the Clara Nunes Theater. Since the Central Library was in the same building, I began to take out books and do my homework for school there.

In 1999, my arts teacher asked each eighth grade class to set up a play to be performed at school. The best play would be presented at an interschool festival, to be held at the Clara Nunes Theater, named in memory of Brazil's great pop singer. I wrote the script for my class's play, which was chosen for the festival. In late September we performed our play *Apocalypse* which, to my great surprise, won

awards for best makeup, costumes, and original script. I believe that was the day I decided to dedicate myself more to reading and writing. The next year, my friend Luis asked me to write a play for his workshop on theatrical directing at the Cultural Center. I wrote a monologue. I was the actress, performing at three of the city's cultural centers and at the Clara Nunes Theater.

In 2001, I began to hang out at the *Bar do Zé* on Graciosa Street, just a few meters from the CCD. The bar was a meeting place for artists, intellectuals, activists, writers, teachers, students to exchange ideas and information about every form of artistic expression. It was by talking to these people that I discovered authors such as Dostoyevsky, Hesiod, García Márquez and Artaud.

The bar was filled with leftist activists, who prompted me to read Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Leo Huberman and Rosa Luxemburg. I was also introduced thereto the ideas of Freud and Jung. Books with photographs of works by artists such as Rodin, Picasso and Klimt circulated among the regulars. People recited poetry over the microphone, and videos of singers like Elis Regina were shown on the television screen.

In 2003, I enrolled in CCD's Drama Reading Workshop. I began to visit cultural centers outside Diadema, on outings organized for workshop participants. But the quality of the workshops declined. As the local cultural movements began to wind down, my friends and I ended up without places to meet and discuss our ideas. After the bars shut down at 11 pm, under the new closing hours, we hang out in a plaza, occasionally go to someone's house, or, when we have the money, go to São Paulo, São Bernardo and Santo André. Our parents fail to understand why we are always reading, always discussing subjects that they cannot understand. They find all this quite useless. But, despite these difficulties, my friends

and I are still trying to invent new ways of creating spaces where we can share ideas.



Mônica Rodrigues, 26, actress and theatrical director.

My involvement with theater in Diadema began in 1993, when I was 14. Until then my contact with art had been limited to reading stories at school (the first book I read was *The Little Prince*) and to annual performances at ballet academies and dance festivals. Encouraged by my ballet teacher, I searched for a theater course. In the lobby of the Clara Nunes Theater, I came upon a poster announcing "Auditions for Actors".

I joined my first theater group, *Children of Aquarius*, directed by a member of Diadema's Dance Company. With a totally independent production, we performed in Diadema and in various regions of the ABC, as well as outside Greater São Paulo. However, following the common fate of amateur groups that crumble for lack of artistic and financial support, we ended our activities two years later.

Fortunately, the municipal government opened auditions for an intermediate theater group. The Young Actors group, of actors from Diadema, was created in August 1995. It was the first time

the municipal government had supported, even partially, a theater group. From Mondays through Fridays, we were taught playwriting, voice, corporal expression, theater history and improvisation.

Our first play was *Algumas Estórias*, based on three short stories by João Guimarães Rosa. Having won prizes at out-of-state festivals, we performed at all of Diadema's cultural centers until February 1996. The group became known as being different from the usual workshops that addressed social exclusion through theater, without much artistic ambition. We were chosen to represent the city for the first time at São Paulo State's theater festival, the *Mapa Cultural Paulista*, where we won two awards with *Histórias que o povo conta* ("Stories people tell"), a panel of stories enacted by each member of the group, identifying characteristics of Diadema's culture and history.

In July 1998, the Young Actors became known as an advanced theater group. Under a new director, we performed the Greek tragedy *The Trojan Women* by Euripides. My first main role, as Hecuba, queen of Troy, demanded a lot of dedication and study on my part to give a realistic interpretation of the suffering of those women. This work led me to a more serious view of artistic production, rousing my critical and aesthetic senses. I began to regard ethics and discipline as integral elements of art.

In November 1999, the municipal government decided to terminate our group – at the very height of its brilliance and expansion. While shocked, several members did not want to stop. Theater, for us, had become a form of survival, struggle, protest, and also our attempt to bring wonder to the world around us, by expressing our dreams and poetry. We invited friends and local actors, including several former members of the

Young Actors group, to assemble the *Tufo* group. Our first play, based on texts by Sartre, Fernando Pessoa and Henry David Thoreau, was performed at Diadema's cultural centers and schools.

From January through September 2001, the municipal government held a seminar to discuss cultural policies without the participation of artists or the general population. In protest we organized the first Municipal Cultural Forum in January 2001, even though we lacked basic tools for organizing, not even a telephone. Meanwhile, other movements began to gain ground in the city. Serraria's Cultural Center organized an Annual Theater Exhibit in the district, where, to this day, artists, residents and staff hold detailed discussions about the structuring and use of funds. Diadema's Municipal Culture Forum has begun to participate more in the discussion of the municipality's cultural activities. With the support of some City Council members, we won approval of the Plínio Marques Law, which ensures special awards for Diademabased artists in the city's Annual Arts Exhibit. The Patrícia Galvão Center (better known as *Pagú*) was created in 2002, an initiative of the Leftist Articulation, an internal faction of the PT, to create a space for artistic and political discussion.

In April 2002, in partnership with the French city of Montreuil, Diadema organized a selection process to award three of its young residents with full scholarships at French universities. Later, the mayor of Montreuil offered French courses and invited the other twelve finalists to spend the month of July or August 2004 in France. As one of the finalists, I left Brazil for the first time and traveled through France. Its beauties and contradictions made me value even more the gains that we already have achieved here.



Jimmy Brandon Neves de Ávila, 23, has lived in Diadema since 1992. Enrolled in a public school, he joined the Hip-Hop movement and then went on to other things.

I moved to Diadema at the age of 11, because my parents were in financial trouble. We had always lived by paying rent in São Paulo's middle class neighborhoods. My father owned a small shop and my mother complemented the family income making crocheted items for middle-class women. Together, my parents struggled to build a modest home in Diadema on a plot of land inherited from my grandfather

My first contact with break dancing, graffiti art and rap music was through friends, just as the Hip-Hop movement began to gain ground in Diadema, receiving support from the municipal government. Several Brazilian HipHop pioneers, such as Nelson Triunfo, Marcelinho Beck Spin, DJ Hum and the graffiti artists Gêmeos, came to work in Diadema.

Until then I had no contact with any kind of cultural or artistic expression, either in school or from my parents, who lacked a formal education. In 1993, I began attending Campanário's Cultural Center and participated in Hip-Hop workshops. There were gettogethers to study social issues such as criminality, poverty and social

inclusion, as well as break dancing classes, DJ, and graffiti workshops. My friends and I formed a rap group called Street Break, later renamed as Shadow B. Boys, which became popular in Diadema's Hip-Hop culture. We were proud to be the youngest rap group in town.

My school was a theater of fights, aggression against teachers, stealing and killings. The school had many delinquents who threatened teachers, inspectors and principals. In my class there were at least 10 kids who brought weapons to school and were not afraid to show them off in the schoolyard, just as they did in the streets. Some smoked pot in the toilets. Under such conditions, little education was available, even for those genuinely interested in learning. The only alternative was to ask for teachers' permission and guidance to study at home.

I tried to learn by visiting municipal libraries, whose collections and guidance services were very poor. But my mother's customers set aside their newspapers for me. The news would arrive late, but the important thing was to have some access to what was happening in Brazil and the rest of the world. When I was 15, I got my first formal job in a drugstore in São Bernardo do Campo as an office-boy. That was the ideal job for someone who liked reading. Now I could read on buses and while waiting for messages. I could spend my own money on newspapers, books and magazines.

While Hip-Hop awakened my social awareness, study of the Bible defined my sense of ethics. When someone close to me died, I began to read the scriptures. I read and commented on the Pentateuch, the Gospels, Paul's Letters and the Apocalypse. Starting in 1997, my cultural interests took me away from the ABC region and to the city of São Paulo, which offered a far broader range of talks, seminars,

conferences and philosophical cafes. These took place in the cultural centers of major banks, bookstores and universities.

When I was 16, I read in the *Folha de Sao Paulo* newspaper an interview with Eric Hobsbawm, the English Marxist historian. I was able to buy his book *The Age of Extremes* at a newsstand in Sao Paulo, then read *The Wealth and the Poverty of Nations* by David Landes and now I am reading *Manias, Panic and Crashes* by Charles Kindleberger. This is how I make up for my lack of money to attend college, an old dream that has finally come true through with a scholarship to study International Relations at the Methodist University of São Paulo.



Carlos Henrique André, 21, born in Piraporinha, Diadema's industrial area, writes poems and short stories, works as an administrative assistant and dreams of attending a good university.

We lived in Jardim Santa Elizabeth, a very poor neighborhood. My father was an alcoholic who died when I was five years old. My mother, born in the rural state of Paraná, worked for ten years as a cleaning worker at Diadema's City Hospital to pay our bills, always brave and loyal to her children.

I went to kindergarten at the age of five. Two years later I learned to read at a local primary school. My first grade teacher, Bete Afonso, praised my writing and gave me a children's book, which I read and analyzed in an assignment outside of school. I always stuttered badly, since I was very small. But people never laugh and are very patient with me.

Reading soon became part of my daily life. Without much guidance I spent my teenage years discovering literary works that awakened my curiosity, such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Graciliano Ramos' *Vidas Secas*.

When I was 12 I lived for eight months with my mother and my younger brother and sister as squatters on land invaded by the Homeless Movement (*Movimento Sem Teto*). The land was owned by Paranoa, an auto parts firm that later gave me a job as an office boy after I took a technical course.

We were surrounded by many families who saw the mud they squatted on as their only hope of building a decent home. Watching their children playing innocently around the settlement's tents, I wrote my first poem, planning to turn it into a song. After eight months, police shock troops evicted us. They didn't burn down our huts but allowed us to take our possessions with us. The land later became the site of a public housing project.

When I was 13, I would gather with friends at home and spend hours discussing the lyrics of songs that raised social issues, by composers such as Renato Russo, Raul Seixas and punk bands. I stayed in that job at Paranoa until I was 17, tired of the mediocre

and repetitive tasks given me.

I went to high school at night. I took rotting books, covered with mold, from my school's library, which nobody used, believing that the books would be better off with me. Seeing that teachers were unable to respond to students' questions, I spent entire class periods reading on my own, regardless of what subject was being taught. I lacked money for private speech therapy, so I continued to struggle with my stuttering.

I went to my first literary workshop when I was 16, at Diadema's Cultural Center. Run by the local poet Beth Brait Alvim, this group enlarged my cultural horizons and learning opportunities. Many ideas were discussed at those meetings. I felt that my relationship to knowledge was finally being realized, with a constant flow of precious information and clarifying dialogue. I began to read authors such as Nietzsche, Plato, Karl Marx, Machiavelli, Aldous Huxley, Thomas More and many poets.

I later joined workshops of theater and video production at almost every cultural center in the city. There were times when I would attend plays every weekend. I used to consider the cultural centers as our spaces for redemption, made sacred by contemplation and dissemination of art. I participated in discussions with artists and cultural center workers, who became good friends. In 2003, I participated in Diadema's Arts Festival and by April 2005 my poem will be published as part of a collection of local writers who, like me, dare to challenge, with their vitality and talent, the vast emptiness of modernity. Diadema can be seen in many forms and shades.

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inhabitants represent only 2% of the population of Greater São Paulo, but its small area embraces the second greatest density in Brazil. Running through Diadema is the *Rodovia dos Imigrantes*, the main highway linking São Paulo and the port of Santos, inaugurated in 1974. Before then, the opening in 1947 of the first modern road to Santos, the *Via Anchieta*, led to the establishment of many factories in the ABCD suburb, creating Brazil's biggest industrial concentration.

A rush of migrants built shacks on the hills and in the valleys of Diadema to dwell near the factories. When Diadema became a municipality in 1959, an "emancipation" from being a district of São Bernardo, a population surge already was underway, ending the former tranquility of its forests, small commercial vegetable gardens and weekend homes. The abrupt topography created panoramic views from the hilltops: broad spaces covered with shacks as 192 *favelas* were being created. The settlers, forced to coexist with violence, were mostly hard-working people, trying to live and raise their children decently, facing floods, landslides, lack of street paving and lighting and a great deal of economic fragility.

That was an extraordinary period in the history of urbanization. Greater São Paulo underwent the most intense long-term urban population growth in human experience, increasing from 31,000 in 1870 to 18 million in 2000, at an annual rate of 5%. Between 1940 and 1960, the population of central São Paulo grew by 171% and that of the periphery by 364%. Between 1950 and 1980, the population of Greater São Paulo multiplied fourfold. In the 1960s and 1970s, the metropolis absorbed two million new migrants. Weak public institutions could not meet the demands bred by this growth.

The inability of institutions to

enforce the laws of property and human rights facilitated the logic of disorderly growth and the surge of homicides in São Paulo's periphery. Laxity in law enforcement produced two clear results. First, it created free space for the enterprising spirit of migrants who created, out of nothing, communities of hundreds of thousands of people. They built houses by themselves in illegal subdivisions, that despite their illegality became busy neighborhoods with bakeries, butcher shops, markets, bars and video rental stores. But the almost complete freedom of action also allowed the use of violence to become a tool for imposing one's will with impunity.

Frontier violence

The periphery of Greater São Paulo became notorious as a kind of "Wild West" because of its violence. Diadema bore features of frontier life common to earlier experiences of pioneer settlement: precarious forms of territorial occupation, absence of government and poor local organization. In his study of high homicide rates in 13th Century England, James Given found violence to be worse in pioneer regions with weak institutions such as the Forest of Arden, the hideout of Robin Hood's legendary band: "As a frontier region, it had few institutional means of solving conflicts. Men were accordingly compelled to resort to violence in larger numbers than elsewhere.... For the poor man or woman in 13th Century England, violence was one of the few available means of influencing the behavior of one's antagonist in a dispute, although it was a desperate and not very efficient means."

Around the same time, the emerging Italian city-states of the 13th Century were suffering from another kind of frontier violence, which continued until their institutions consolidated. "The maintenance of order within the city presented difficulties to all the medieval communes," wrote the

historian Daniel Waley. "The laws against carrying arms show what kind of trouble was feared. Men tended to be on a short fuse, easily took offense and gave expression to their anger in physical violence, hence the laws referring to quarrels and fights." Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, set in Verona, provides a vivid account of this kind of violence.

The principles of frontier violence applied to the Far West of the United States after the Mexican War (1846-48) and the Civil War (1861-65), with the spread of the Colt six-shooter, which sowed terror in the new towns west of the Mississippi River, in the same way that the spread of guns stimulated homicides in Diadema and other parts of São Paulo's periphery. The same kind of frontier violence marks the land theft and murder in Amazônia today.

In a history of the violent *Cattle Towns* of Kansas in the 1870s, Robert Dykstra argued that "tradition would have it that the cattle town homicide involved an exchange of shots—the so-called gunfight. Actually, though 39 of the 45 victims suffered fatal bullet or buckshot wounds, less than a third of them returned the fire. A good share of them were apparently not even armed." But the citizens and authorities of the Kansas towns committed themselves to a struggle against homicides, as in Diadema today. They won their struggle with the consolidation of institutions.

The high noon of the Wild West in Diadema is passing. Between 1950 and 1980, its population grew at an average annual rate of 16%, three times as fast as Greater São Paulo as a whole. After 1980, Diadema's population growth slowed to an average of 2.2% over the next two decades, only slightly more than that of the metropolitan region (1.8%). Relaxation of demographic pressures, in Diadema as in the rest of the metropolis, enabled public institutions gradually to assume their proper functions. This process also

was strengthened, little by little, by the control of chronic inflation after 1994.

The primitivism and violence in Diadema is giving way to the consolidation of institutions, to public investment and to cooperation among neighbors. Infant mortality fell from 83 deaths for each thousand live births in 1980 to 16 in 2004. The homicide rate fell from its peak of 141 per 100,000 population to 74 in 2003, an improvement of 47% in only four years. The police reported a further decline in homicides of 20% during 2004. However, the murder rate still is high. The forces driving the improvements are complex. Yet they attest to the consolidation of democracy under difficult conditions.

Public investment flowed gradually and precariously into schools, health posts, water, electricity, paving and sewage. Pressure from social movements and action by authorities to alleviate the conditions of the poor changed the face of the periphery in recent decades. But if social rights were advanced, the establishment of a rule of law to guarantee civil rights remained beyond the capacity of public institutions.

The era of the “justiceiros”

The authority of the *justiceiros* lasted nearly two decades. *Justiceiros* were tolerated because local people saw them as allies. Executions by them were welcomed because their victims supposedly committed the robberies, murders and extortions that were daily events in the frontier neighborhoods of the periphery. Unlike in central São Paulo, where thieves disappeared after their robberies, criminals in Diadema lived next door to their victims. They strutted about the streets with an air of superiority because they were ready to kill anyone who opposed them.

Neighbors saw the *justiceiros* as complementing the work of the police, who openly used murders as their own method of keeping order. Some *justiceiros* were policemen or

licensed informally to kill by the police. Instead of public authorities helping to put out the fire and guaranteeing the rule of law for all, they threw gasoline into the fire and promoted a cycle of violence, nourishing people’s belief that private solutions were the only way. The abundance of guns, the demographic density and the youthful profile of the population made it all worse.

At the end of the 1970s, the Vila

place in homicide rates among the 645 municipalities of São Paulo State, remaining there until 2000. Murders were tolerated in silence. Those who protested or went to the police also could be killed. But a time came when these crimes became intolerable. The population and public institutions changed their attitude toward the killings and began to challenge the regime of violence. New policies slowly produced results, thanks to



Police evicting invaders in Vila Socialista, 1990 (Diário do Grande ABC).

Nogueira section of Diadema was beginning to lose the appearance of a makeshift slum and take on the shape of a settled neighborhood. Much of Vila Nogueira arose from land invasions and illegal construction. Survival amid violence and high inflation required agility, diplomacy and a certain ruthlessness.

A businessman we know, now a respected civic leader, then had a bustling luncheonette. He came from Minas Gerais as a teenager, lived on a shoestring and worked long years as a clerk. He finally was becoming successful. He bought said to have killed 100 people, murdered the two merchants who supported him. The *justiceiros* acted according to their own whims.

In 1982 Diadema reached first

political will and to the development of public institutions and civil society that matured over the years. But progress was gradual and irregular.

A new Workers Party

Diadema has a peculiar history as one of the world’s most violent communities and as one of the most politicized cities in Brazil. In 1982, as protest against Brazil’s military regime (1964- 85) gained strength, Diadema elected as its was elected mayor again as an opposition candidate. In 2004 the current PT mayor, José de Filippi Jr. (1992-96; 2001-04), lost to José Augusto by 9,752 votes in the first round but won by 554 votes in the runoff after making a deal for Menezes’s support. The main banner of Filippi’s reelection campaign was

the reduction of violence, proclaimed on billboards and streamers on the main avenues.

With its socialist ideology, the PT took office in Diadema in 1983, proclaiming its dedication to satisfying the unmet needs of the population. The lack of infrastructure and basic services was so urgent that the problem of violence was overlooked. In successive administrations, the *favelas* were urbanized. Streets were widened, paved and lighted and houses were numbered, enabling people to have mailing addresses and to register houses and lots that were created in illegal settlements.

The people of Diadema have a more intimate relationship with local authorities than the citizens of a huge, disorganized municipality like São Paulo, where communities of hundreds of thousands of people lack clear territorial limits, responsible political representation and clear lines of administrative action. (See "São Paulo Metropolis: Political disorganization and problems of scale," *Braudel Papers*, No. 28/ 2001). Despite all the imbroglios in the intense political life of Diadema, its political class responds more directly to popular pressures. The result has been the creation of a social infrastructure in recent years.

This started at the end of the 1980s, with the administration of Mayor José Augusto de Silva Ramos (1989-92), a young physician who had migrated from the state of Pernambuco in the Northeast. Today Diadema has 13 public libraries, a cultural center in each of its 11 neighborhoods, gymnastics programs for senior citizens, a safe house for victims of domestic violence, two general hospitals and 22 public health stations, nine soccer fields, six gymnasiums and more than 40 courts for basketball and volleyball. It has a Casa do HipHop, a dance company, a

symphonic jazz band and even an astronomical observatory. These cultural facilities created new opportunities for leisure and development for young people, as explained in the personal accounts of the young educators of the Reading Circles of our Institute, all residents of Diadema, published in this edition of *Braudel Papers*.

After chronic inflation was controlled in 1994, with the Real Plan, the periphery of Greater São Paulo gained from price stability

will. Violence was still the main way of winning respect.

Land invasions and speculation

Rapid population growth and illegal settlement explained much of this violence. In 1970, Diadema had 79,000 inhabitants. Within a decade, its population surged to 229,000. Without supervision or control by the municipal government, real estate agencies managed the settlement process, becoming the main beneficiaries of



Public housing blocks, Vila Socialista, 2000.

with big improvements in popular consumption. In the 1990s, apart from the creation of urban infrastructure, two movements accelerated in Diadema, as Brazil recovered from decades of chronic inflation and consolidated its democratic regime. The development of social infrastructure was the more important of these movements, though less apparent at the time. The most spectacular was the aggravation of the problem of homicides after 1995. With the urbanization of *favelas* the municipality began to intervene in local disorder. However, the police continued to judge and execute at

growth. They subdivided areas of 500 square meters, which were hard to sell in large blocks, into small lots that were greatly in demand, creating new densities overnight independently of zoning laws.

Today many families occupy land around the Billings Reservoir, with their raw sewage contaminating one of the main sources of water for Greater São Paulo. The 40,000 inhabitants of the neighborhood of Eldorado in Diadema also built their homes at the edges of the legally protected reservoirs. More than two million people in the southern region of the metropolis live illegally along reservoirs that

are supposed to be protected by environmental laws that have not been enforced.

The invasions along the banks of the reservoirs posed a political problem for successive state governments of São Paulo. No government agency had the courage to stop these invasions. On the contrary, officials installed urban infrastructure and social services — schools, health centers, paved roads, transport, and piped water— under pressure from religious and political groups and trade unions.

If land speculation was a good business for real estate dealers, it also benefited the migrants who were trying to get their own homes and live rent-free. It also was a .vote-getter for politicians. When Mayor Gilson Menezes was elected in 1982, he believed that a socialist revolution was underway and saw the land invaders as allies. He and other leftist leaders offered incentives to the occupiers, a policy that lasted until the beginning of the 1990s.

This sudden growth and disorder created many opportunities and causes for conflict. In a highly competitive environment, where murders were rarely punished, people who killed won more “rights” than those who did not kill. In the 1990s groups made money selling makeshift shacks. In the Coca-Cola *favela* people with names such as Cabelo, Cazuzza and Leonardo were ringleaders. In some cases they led the invasions, then started a fight with a buyer, killed him and sold his shack again.

The limits of populism

Eventually political leaders, after encouraging the land seizures, finally began to see what confusion they had created. Populism and disorder reached their limits. Although the invasions continued in the 1990s, they subsided during the second PT administration. The organizers of

land invasions, who had a free hand when Menezes was mayor, were held in check. Some were expelled from the PT.

The PT’s attitude changed under the new mayor, José Augusto. The critical events were evictions from seized private land in Buraco do Gazuzza and Vila Socialista which caused a political uproar but showed that the city government was trying to enforce the law, even if it created bitterness among the migrants. Near the Buraco de Gazuzza, the city was planning community participation in the construction of apartments, including a day care center and a school. It went to court to evict the squatters, many of them PT members. The eviction of invaders in Vila Socialista, today a housing project, caused battles with the police and the deaths of three people in 1990. The PT city councilman Manoel Boni, a leader of the invasion, suffered an amputation after a molotov cocktail exploded in his right hand.

The dispute over the evictions in the Buraco do Gazuzza led to the departure from the PT of the vice-mayor and some city councilmen who backed the invasions. But the dialogue continued. The municipality agreed, 45 days after the invasion, to cede half of the land to the new settlers, keeping the other half for a day care facility, school and community center. The settlers of Gazuzza remained mobilized to obtain piped water, electricity and asphalt for paving the streets, marching on government agencies to press their claims. Less than a decade after the invasion, the community was consolidated. Their legal problems caused neighbors to unite and organize for political action and negotiation.

Urban improvements

Urban improvements of the *favelas* already settled became the priority of Diadema’s mayors. The city government got more involved in the internal dynamics of the *favelas*

with policies that over time helped to reduce crime.

From 1993 to 1996, following the policy changes under José Augusto, his successor, José de Filippi, intensified efforts to urbanize illegal settlements. Concrete channels were installed to reinforce the banks of the many streams that ran through the *favelas*. The streams carried garbage and human waste with them, flooding the communities in the rainy season. The neighbors worked on the projects, supervised by municipal technicians who also helped them build new houses. The city became a hive of construction activity. Municipal employees worked in the *favelas* where violence was frequent. Government agencies played a stronger role in places that previously were beyond their influence.

Public security in Brazil

Public security in Brazil is mainly the responsibility of state governments. Each state police organization is modeled along European lines. A uniformed gendarmerie, the Military Police, performs street patrols and enforcement while a Civil Police of detectives conducts investigations. The two police forces have been plagued by rivalries with each other and by sloppy and obsolete procedures. Until recently, they resisted cooperating in joint operations.

Support for increased security first came from the Military Police, which in 1992 created a new battalion in Diadema. The new police chiefs tried hard to show results. Combined efforts of the municipal government and the police and the building of new infrastructure contributed to a temporary fall in crime.

Diadema got its own Civil Police detachment only in 1999. Mitiaki Yamoto, a detective who has worked in Diadema for 15 years, stressed the difficulty of access to the *favelas*. Police had to hunt criminals in labyrinths of shacks with unpaved streets, improvised stairways and many blind

alleys. Once Mitiaki found a band of *justiceiros* called Padeiros (bakers) in a labyrinth of Campanário. He seized arms and munitions in a shack that had a stream running inside it and rats roaming near the machine used to make bread to sell in the neighborhood.

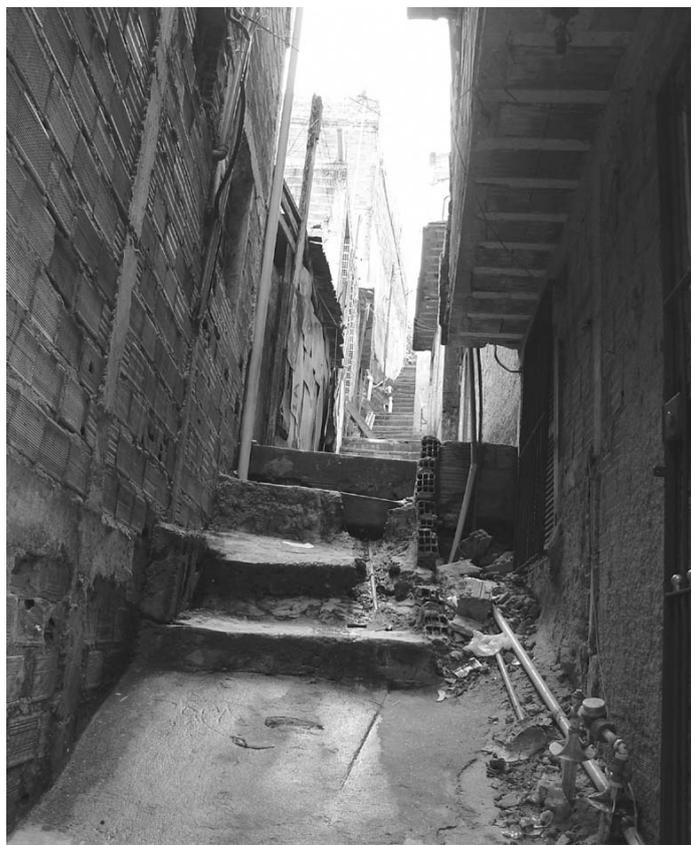
In the 1990s, population growth in Diadema continued to slow and the growth of institutions accelerated. The widening and lighting of streets enabled ambulances and police patrol cars to gain access to places previously isolated. The assigning of numbers to each house, creating mailing addresses, strengthened the ties of people in the *favelas* with the municipality and the outside world. Houses in an urbanized *favela* no longer were hideouts. Public works, with labor supplied by the community, enabled the city government to reinforce its presence. Public space was now occupied by public institutions. There were now rules to be obeyed. Identities were strengthened. Mitiaki recalled: "Before this, many people had no fixed residence. People would just say: 'This guy killed someone and fled to another part of São Paulo.' With urbanization, Diadema was no longer such a good hideout."

Crack and cocaine

There were two occasions when homicides in Diadema declined sharply: at the beginning of the 1990s and after 1999. At both times there was determined action by the police and the municipality. However, starting in

1995, homicide rates began to rise again, surging from 112 for each 100,000 inhabitants to 141 in 1999. Curiously, all this seemed to happen in a climate of normality. Public investments were the same. There was no significant variation in employment or poverty. But new criminal activity was detected by municipal employees in the communities.

In 1995, there was a rapid turnover in the buying and selling



Alley and steps, Favela Pantanal, 2005.

of some 200 house lots in different parts of Diadema that were being urbanized. These lots were being bought at prices far above the going market rate. "We investigated and found that drug dealers were moving to Diadema and buying places to set up business," recalls Regina Miki, who was legalizing land titles then and now is the municipality's Secretary for Social Defense. This was when the epidemic of cheap crack cocaine was spreading throughout the

periphery. Disputes over territory and markets ignited a new cycle of violence.

Morro do Samba

Morro do Samba in Jardim Ruyce was a large private hillside property that was invaded in 1990 by some 300 families. It soon became headquarters of one of the best-organized drug gangs of the southern region of Greater São Paulo. Biroška, its leader, became powerful, with several bodyguards and lookouts and a siren mounted on a lamppost to warn against invasion. Neighbors became alarmed when Biroška began recruiting 12 year-old boys into the drug traffic. Apart from retail sales in Diadema, Biroška was a wholesaler to smaller dealers throughout the region. He ran a big business, distributing a kilo of cocaine every two or three days. Biroška was arrested in 2000 after a gunfight with police in São Bernardo.

Despite the risks, there were many candidates to take his place. The number of dealers multiplied in the *favelas* and public housing projects. They fought furiously among themselves for territorial control, feeding a renewed

cycle of killings.

The kind of activity in Morro de Samba spread its risks in other ways. It impacted the Mário Santa Lúcia primary school in the neighborhood of Serraria, near the Morro do Samba. Our field research in schools of São Paulo's periphery showed that pupils get little training in reading and writing, but that there is a nucleus of gifted students in each of these schools eager to read and learn more. The Fernand Braudel Institute conducted Reading Circles

in the Mário Santa Lúcia school in the community of Serraria, near the Morro do Samba, where on Saturday afternoons we read with adolescents classics such as Richard Bach's *Jonathan Seagull*, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and the Oedipus tragedies of Sophocles.

The principal of the Santa Lúcia school invited the Institute to conduct Reading Circles there in a desperate hope of finding a way to control violence and disorder. In April 2002, the principal received a death threat from a man who invaded the school. The pedagogical coordinator had her cell phone robbed at the school entrance and a teacher had her car vandalized in the schoolyard. Adolescents consumed drugs and hard liquor on the sidewalk in front of the school. Young drug dealers dominated the student union. According to the teachers, the bathrooms were used for selling arms and drugs. The school was built beside a stream that flooded the classrooms in the rainy season, forcing classes to be suspended. The waters flooded the bathrooms, mixing with faeces and urine from the clogged toilets. In January 2004, the school was closed by order of a public prosecutor. The Reading Circles stopped there, but continue with 1,500 pupils in 21 other schools in the periphery.

Schools

Despite impressive growth of enrollments in recent years, the public schools of Diadema operate within a culture of failure that pervades public education in almost all of Latin America. In 1980, only 38% of children in Diadema finished four years of schooling and only 8% completed eight years. Dropouts were nearly half of those enrolled. Today primary schooling is nearly universal, as in the rest of Brazil. Secondary education has expanded rapidly, but one-third of adolescents still remain

outside the classrooms. However, the main problem is the low quality of teaching. There is little popular pressure or concern of the political class for raising quality.

Developing this culture of failure, public education in Latin America is the weakest link in the democratic process. The system does not collapse entirely because of public demand for some kind of schooling and because schools provide an abundant source of formal employment and pensions for teachers and administrators who in turn provide a useful bloc of votes in elections.

Effective teaching is undermined by adverse selection of staff, whose low pay and poor training corral them into a system of perverse incentives, characterized by negligence, poor standards and lack of accountability. Rare examples of excellence are provided by the isolated heroism of a few teachers and administrators. But now there are opportunities to focus on improving the quality of public education. These opportunities were created because school enrollments no longer are expanding. Declining fertility has reduced demographic pressures on school systems.

There are 134 primary and secondary schools in Diadema, most of them run by the state government. The PT has resisted the national movement for municipalization of primary schools, thus economizing on budget outlays and avoiding the political costs of conflicts with unions of teachers and principals, most of them controlled by the PT. In this way, municipal authorities have need not deal with endemic school problems, such as violence, vandalism, trafficking of drugs and arms, absenteeism and high turnover among teachers and principals and, above all, lack of teaching.

Roughly two-thirds of the schools in Diadema change principals every year, several of them two or three times a year. Endemic absences of teachers leave idle pupils to congregate

and play in the corridors, creating an infernal noise that impedes work in those classrooms where teachers are conducting lessons. These behavioral patterns are accepted as norms. There are some good public schools, but they are a small minority.

On March 12, 2001, a pupil was shot to death outside a classroom at the Átila Ferreira Vaz School in Diadema. On March 23, another pupil was shot to death in the doorway of the Nicéia Albarello Ferrari School upon his return from an excursion. On April 11, two pupils were arrested for carrying guns inside the Antonieta Borges School. On April 17, two pupils suffered gunshot wounds inside the Mércia Artimos Maron School.

As these incidents unfolded, a group of teachers went to the Public Security Forum in the City Council chambers to seek advice and support. The Forum created a commission to investigate school violence, composed of the two police chiefs, the municipal Social Defense Coordinator, three City Council members from different political parties, the head of the Municipal Education Council and Braudel Institute staff members. The commission attempted to visit 10 of the most violent schools in Diadema to interview teachers and principals. These visits were prohibited by the regional school director, whose own husband, a policeman, was shot to death two years before outside one of the schools. She said that our visits to the schools had to be approved by the State Secretary of Education. After a two-hour interview, the Secretary of Education said that she could not authorize our visits in order to "preserve the integrity of the schools."

In 2004, the State Education Department opened the schools to the communities for courses, recreation and sports on weekends, which strengthened relations between schools and surrounding neighborhoods. But the Education Department, with six million pupils

and 250,000 employees, remains without a single professional dedicated to school security. The Military Police recently began regular patrols, called *rondas escolares*, that helped to reduce violence, especially near the school gates. But the endemic problems of the system persist. The police patrol cars of the *rondas escolares* must visit many schools every day, and thus are unable to give much attention to individual cases of disorder.

The State Education Department reports a 26% decline in aggressive acts against teachers in 2004, but many such incidents are never registered. Teachers and principals who suffer threats or attacks are told to file a complaint with the Civil Police, but the aggressors warn of worse consequences if they tell the police. At the Átila school, after a pupil was murdered, the mothers of other children insisted on dialogue with the authorities and obtained removal of the principal who refused to receive them. But these episodes of parents' pressure are rare. Most work long hours. Many studied for only two or three years in rural schools, so it is hard for them to evaluate how their children learn in school.

What inspires admiration is the struggle of some young people of Diadema, from poor families, to develop their intellectual and professional capacities, alone or in small groups, in many cases making use of the cultural infrastructure of the municipality. Many of them have the tenacity to persist in finishing secondary school at night, despite the poor teaching and irregularity of classes, and then continue their struggle to develop, scraping together

money to study in private colleges and vocational schools in the periphery.

The few who can pass the competitive entrance examination to win a scarce place in a tuition-free public university must study for two or three years in preparatory courses to compensate for their poor education in state schools. Only 26% of new entrants to the University of São Paulo, the premier state institution, are graduates of public schools. Apart from the problem

However, the main problem remains the quality of teaching at all levels.

The Favela Naval

In the late 1990s, even as schools multiplied and urban infrastructure developed, the violence intensified. In the new phase dominated by drug dealers, there was no role for the justiceiro, because no man alone could oppose the authority of local gangs. Small dealers ready to kill in order to get their way drove Diadema to break

new homicide records in three successive years. The new surge of violence caused little repercussion in the community. Some politicians used to deny that Diadema was a violent city. They claimed that the high homicide rate was due to the efficiency of its public hospitals which, they said, attracted victims of gunshot wounds to die in Diadema. Beyond this, the law of silence, imposed by the killers, muffled public protest. Meanwhile, the police lapsed into neglect until 1997, when the scandal of the Favela Naval exploded.

"In those days, when asked where they lived during job interviews, people used to say that they lived at the edge of São Bernardo, so as not to

reveal that they were from Diadema", recalls Luiza Guerra da Silva, president of the Security Council of Vila São José. "Admitting that you lived in Diadema was shameful and cost you job prospects."

The publicity generated by police abuse in the Favela Naval was so shocking that the gravity of the situation no longer could be denied. In 1997 the City Council formed a Special Committee on Human Rights and Citizenship, followed by other civic initiatives. Facing the problem



Favela Naval, 2005.

of their academic qualifications, students from the periphery must pay the high cost of public transport to attend classes. It is amazing that a growing number of them manage to overcome these obstacles. In response to political pressure to create more public university places for the growing number of poor students graduating from secondary schools, a new Federal University of the ABC and a new campus of the University of São Paulo, in the eastern periphery of the metropolis, are being established.

was the first step toward adopting measures to solve the crisis. Killings by *justiceiros*, drug dealers, murderous policemen and others suddenly became a public scandal, with high political priority.

The police were initially the main focus of debate. The local police batallion was a dumping ground for men with disciplinary problems. Of the 10 officers in the video, six were under internal investigation for previous offenses. Some had criminal records. The battalion commander, Pedro Pereira Mateus, owned a private security company. He spent little time in Diadema and had no control over his men. Police patrols acted as judges and executioners, carrying out death sentences on their own. For both officers and rank-and-file, serving in Diadema was seen as a form of punishment for previous irregularities.

After the scandal, Diadema was no longer used as a place of punishment for deviant policemen. Dedicated police professionals were sent to Diadema, which became a sort of public security laboratory. After years of underinvestment in personnel and equipment, reinforcements were provided. Staffing of the Military and Civil Police units quadrupled over the next few years. They received more patrol cars and other equipment. More effective methods of patrolling and investigation were applied. The products of these efforts were more imprisonment of criminals and more discoveries of kidnappers' hideouts. Increased arrests filled police station detention pens and penitentiaries to overflowing, forcing the state and federal governments to embark on emergency prison construction programs. Frequent revolts, escapes and killings in jails and juvenile facilities, and the operation of organized crime gangs within penitentiaries, made prison reform more urgent. Public security became a major issue in the 2002 election for governor of São Paulo State.

The Favela Naval still is very poor. Flimsy shacks still stretch along the canal. About onethird of those working scavenge far and wide for waste materials, such as aluminum cans and cardboard, piled on carts drawn by their owners on foot, on bicycles and occasionally by a scrawny horse, to be sorted in a primitive depot in the neighborhood. But several houses have been enlarged and reinforced with permanent masonry and steel grating. A new community center was built and donated by Mercedes Benz and an impressive Assembly of God church opened in 2004. Running the community center is Tato (Carlos Antonio Rodrigues, 41), who earns his living repairing computers for clients throughout the

The murder rate in Diadema was a cocktail of drugs, alcohol, population density, short tempers and widespread use of firearms.

metropolis and teaches neighborhood children computer skills. "The big change here is better security," Tato says. "The police avoid us. The last killing here was 18 months ago. Before then there was no murder for three years. When we live in fear nothing makes sense. When fear is removed we can concentrate on the real problems of life. Security breeds confidence. Now our teenagers can hang out in the street until 2 am or 3 am in complete safety."

Civic mobilization

Police reinforcements alone, in the three years after the Favela Naval episode, were not enough to reduce homicides. Relations between police and local authorities remained distant. In 1998 Mayor Menezes told us that

he had not spoken to the Military Police commander for several months. Reduction of homicides began only when the municipal government, the City Council and the community became involved.

At this point, the Fernand Braudel Institute became a catalyst for community mobilization, helping to bring together various groups. First, the Institute organized a town meeting against violence in June 2000, presided by Mayor Menezes, who was a candidate for re-election that year. Days later, the Public Security Forum, sponsored by the Institute, held its first monthly meeting in the City Council chambers. Politicians, police chiefs and community leaders met regularly to analyze current developments and to discuss joint action to combat crime and disorder, with reducing homicides the priority.

The Forum meetings were conducted by the Council president together with Norman Gall, the Institute's executive director, and a retired police colonel, José Vicente da Silva, the Institute's public security researcher who in 2002 became National Secretary for Public Security in the federal government. The Institute's coordinator in Diadema, Maryluci Farias, worked with community organizations and government agencies and conducted Reading Circles in the public schools. Accompanying the work of the Forum was Bruno Paes Manso, a journalist and political scientist, who was conducting research for the Institute on homicides in Diadema and other communities of the periphery.

The work of the Forum advanced with the constant participation of two excellent professionals, Reinaldo Correa, head of the Civil Police in Diadema, and Lt. Col. Luiz Carlos Barreto, commander of the Military Police batallion. Also participating was the municipality's public security coordinator (a newly created post), the commander of the new Municipal Civil Guard, members of the City

Council and several civic leaders. Meetings were covered by the local press. At the start of each meeting, the two police chiefs announced the crime statistics from the previous month, accompanied by observations that enabled the Forum to analyze specific situations and debate ways of solving problems.

Joint actions by police and municipal authorities began to hit their targets. They focused on two main fronts. The first involved better deployment of police and municipal assets. For this, efficient management was needed for joint action of the police, municipal guard and city agencies in critical areas, free of traditional frictions and rivalries. The second involved better use of intelligence. Planning of operations needed computerized maps, current statistics and specialized software. The Fernand Braudel hired six law students as research assistants to analyze police investigations of 618 homicides committed between 1997 and 1999. Gunfire accounted for nine-tenths of the killings. They found that only 30 of themurders were solved. Many of the police investigations were poorly documented, but gave a clear impression that most of the killings were the product of petty conflicts, like drunken brawls or jealousy over women. The murder rate in Diadema was a cocktail brewed by drugs, alcohol, population density, short tempers and widespread possession of firearms.

Mayor Filippi, elected again in 2000, took up the challenge of reducing homicides. The Municipal Guard, created in 2000, had 236 men available for a division of tasks and joint patrols with the Military Police. The guard's patrol cars focused on the city center in order to free more Military Policemen to patrol the more violent periphery. The municipality began joint projects with the police. Municipal storage depots were created for cars and motorbikes seized in police raids and

at checkpoints, with the municipality supplying tow trucks to facilitate the work of the police. Deteriorated and neglected plazas were patrolled and spruced up, so they again could be used for leisure. The schools were visited by police patrol cars. The *Feira do Rolo*, a flea market used for sale of stolen goods, received regular police patrols and inspections. In a new project, Adolescent Apprentices, the municipality tried to help, with special courses and part-time jobs, youths who live in neighborhoods where drug traffic flourished.

Creation of a police hotline called *Disque-denúncia* became a source of anonymous tips that broke the law of silence. People were able to guide police investigations without identifying themselves. With the spread of cell phones among the low-income population, these calls could be made without conspicuously using public telephones. These tips are crucial in solving murders, even if the testimony is not used in court. The municipality began to computerize crime data. Television security cameras were installed in key plazas and other sensitive places in Diadema. Members of the Municipal Guard, known locally as as "Angels of the Block," patrol peripheral communities on foot and bicycle.

"Lei Seca"

Little bars called *botecos*, often installed in shacks and house garages, proliferated throughout the periphery. In many communities they were the only gathering places available for leisure. But they also were the scene of many murders. Col. José Vicente of the Fernand Braudel Institute brought to the Forum in Diadema policemen from the suburban cities of Hortolândia and Barueri to explain how reduction of the hours that bars could stay open led to a decline in homicides in those communities. At the end of 2001, a law was proposed to the City Council to close all bars after 11 pm, because many murders took

place in or near these bars between 11 pm and 2 am. Political conflict was expected, since many bar-owners were wardheelers and friends of members of the City Council. Nevertheless, in March 2003, after long discussion, the Council unanimously passed the so-called "Lei Seca" (Dry Law), which began to be enforced in July 2003, following an intense campaign of publicity and persuasion.

Led by Councilwoman Maridite Oliveira—a former Municipal Secretary of Health who later became a member of the Institute's governing board—the mobilization of Diadema's political class led to agreement by City Council members that none would intercede on behalf of friends to seek exceptions to the "Lei Seca." In August 2003, the month when the new closing hours came into force, only eight homicides were reported, a steep fall from previous monthly averages of from 30 to 40.

"To reach consensus, we needed a year of dialogue and debate, lots of it belly to belly," recalls Maridite. "Nearly all City Council members have friends or ward healers who own bars. Some were worried about job losses in the bars, others by the impact on public opinion. We held a public hearing. Some bar-owners said they were in favor in order to reduce violence. We reached unanimity. That was a historic turning point for Diadema."

Enforcing the "Lei Seca" demanded a joint mobilization of public institutions. Municipal inspectors and unarmed Civil Guard officers were escorted late at night by the Military Police to avoid violent resistance. Diadema's social defense coordinator, Regina Miki, accompanied police and inspectors in the early morning hours with Military Police Major Ícaro Demétrio Santana to supervise enforcement. Regina received death threats in anonymous phone calls and was forced to move her family to other cities. The bar City Club, otherwise known as "Fecha Nunca"

(“We Never Close”), was the scene of many murders. It was closed and sealed after its owner resisted the new law, and never opened again. People learned that Diadema no longer was a no man’s land. With the police making more arrests, people started giving more information anonymously.

Some bars caused problems because they sold drugs. Closing these bars reduced drug traffic. The reduced number of homicides was concentrated in the hours before 11 pm. Killers continued to live in Diadema, but public institutions reduced the scope for conflicts, forcing criminals to think twice before acting.

Three years after the first meeting of the Forum, the police announced that only five murders were reported in November 2003, the lowest number ever recorded in Diadema. In the worst month of violence, in the late 1980s, Diadema had been the scene of 90 murders.

The death of Major Ícaro

The last meetings of the Forum provided a warning. A routine change of police chiefs took place in early 2003. The new chiefs refused to participate in the Forum, which became less relevant as it entered its fourth year. The public institutions still did their job enthusiastically, but were chanting victory too early.

In February 2004, following a near-empty meeting of the Forum, Military Police Major Ícaro Demétrio Santana, 48 years old, a beloved and respected public servant, was victim of the kind of gangland-style killing that he tried for many years to prevent in Diadema. Married and father of three children, Ícaro was getting off a bus while returning to his home in Diadema, alone and in uniform, from a training course for officers in São Paulo. He was hit by 10 shots at point blank range by two youths who were waiting for him on a motorcycle

and quickly escaped. All these bullets hit him in the head and neck because the killers evidently knew that he was wearing body armor. There were several people in the street when the killing occurred, but they all told police that they saw nothing. So there were no witnesses.

Major Ícaro had worked in Diadema for 15 years and was a protagonist of the changes that had taken place, having commanded police companies in different peripheral communities. A modest man of few words, he was able to develop cooperation among different elements of a highly politicized



Major Ícaro, first anniversary of the “Lei Seca”

community and participated actively in the Public Security Forum. When the “Lei Seca” was passed, he took charge of enforcement, together with Social Defense Secretary Regina Miki, making latenight inspections and facing the resistance of bar owners to the new closing hours with cordiality and patience. But then he began to face complications. The new commander of the Military Police in Diadema in 2003 had arranged for the transfer of Ícaro away from Diadema, opening disciplinary proceedings against him for arranging with local merchants to donate food for a stew to stem the hunger of patrolmen during the early morning hours.

The death of Major Ícaro shows that Diadema still has some way to go in controlling endemic violence. His corpse was laid out, with much ceremony, in the City Council chambers. His swaddled head, wrapped in flowers, shocked many of the officials present. But the murder of Major Ícaro remains unsolved.

Civilization

The decline of homicides in Diadema since 1999 was in the vanguard of a general reduction of violent deaths in Greater São Paulo. Because of the demographic diversity of the metropolis, a mix of older, wealthier neighborhoods and violent communities of the periphery, the general homicide rate of Greater São Paulo in 1999 (65 per 100,000 population) was less than half that of Diadema. From 1999 to 2003, the metropolitan region’s rate fell by 26%, while Diadema’s fell nearly twice as fast, by 47%. But the murder rates of Greater São Paulo (48) and Diadema (74) still are very high by world standards, especially if compared with cities like London, Paris, Tokyo and New York, whose rates vary between two and

seven per 100,000. So these recent improvements should not be cause of premature celebration. According to our public security researcher, Col. José Vicente da Silva, “a homicide rate of 40 per 100,000 still is indecent and should not warrant celebration before reaching 20. To be really civilized means bringing it below 10.”

But the recent declines in homicides are nevertheless the fruit of a process of civilization, still incomplete, that has many facets. Diadema represents this process. It represents the consolidation of communities in a transition from a kind of frontier settlement



Sports complex of SESI/Diadema, 2005.

toward a more organized society. This complex process involves demographic changes, new forms of cooperation, more effective action by state and municipal governments, increases in popular consumption, new infrastructure and cultural opportunities, incorporation of new technologies, expansion of economic activity with many modest but important improvisations and, above all, the effort of many families to develop more dignified standards of living.

Between 1980 and 2003, the fertility of women in Diadema fell by half. Families now are smaller. Since 2000, the male population between ages 15 and 24, the group most involved in violence both as victims and aggressors, also has been shrinking, as a result of previous fertility declines and the impact of violence. Gangs in violent neighborhoods are smaller. "Many bandits died fighting other bandits," says one policeman. "Others were killed by the police and still more are in prison. Among drug dealers, new bosses at first replaced the

ones killed or in jail, but then this substitution fell off. The new kids on the block saw that this way of life could be fatal."

Meanwhile, the smaller size of families enabled them to invest more. According to research by our Institute on popular consumption in the periphery of Greater São Paulo, the main form of savings by these families is investment in home improvement. In less than two decades, shacks became sturdy brick residences of two or three stories on the same lot, thanks to persistent efforts by these families. The big manufacturing and retail enterprises are trying hard to expand sales in the periphery, seen now as a fast growing market. Most of the houses are equipped with a variety of domestic appliances, like televisions, refrigerators, microwave ovens, stereos and washing machines. Supermarkets and *sacolões* (selling by the kilo), proliferating amid intense competition, are cheapening the cost of food and improving diets. Kitchen cabinets store a much wider variety of products than two

or three decades ago. Problems of logistics and communications for low-income people are reduced with the spread of cell phones and cheap fixed lines. Public transport has improved with modernization of the bus fleet and construction of two big intercity terminals in Diadema, with rapid connections to the São Paulo subway system.

The public space exposed to violence is shrinking. As in the rest of Greater São Paulo, few streets in Diadema remain without paving or lighting. In the periphery, a spontaneous quarantine is developing that tends to isolate bandits from citizens who want to live in peace and avoid problems. Each group recognizes and respects the sphere of the other, but keeps its distance. A force reducing the space for violence is the expansion of commerce at all levels, from the new supermarkets to street sellers and small neighborhood repair shops to women selling candy and cake out of their homes. At the edge of Jardim Campanário, a vacant municipal lot used to be a killing

ground and a dump for corpses and the carcasses of stolen cars after their saleable parts were removed. Now this space is occupied by SESI, a sports and swimming complex used by local families, with new highrise apartments for the middle class in the background.

A scene of petty crime known as the *camelódromo*, a plaza in the city center used by street sellers, was moved to a covered building baptized "Shopping Popular." Diadema now has 31 bank branches, plus many small businesses acting as correspondents intermediating transactions for the big banks. In poor neighborhoods, sales of mineral water are growing rapidly with special promotions. Pizzerias, pharmacies, fast food restaurants, video rentals, exercise gyms, martial arts academies, auto driving schools, language schools, computer schools, travel agencies, surf shops, musical instrument stores and hair stylists also are multiplying. New pet shops in Diadema also are prospering. "Classes C, D and E spend plenty on pet food and shampoos for their dogs," says Manoel Gomes de Oliveira, 38, a former Purina salesman who opened a pet shop as a family business.

An important study by a team of urban specialists, *São Paulo Metrópole* (EDUSP/ Imprensa Oficial, 2004), observes that the move of consumer businesses to the periphery "only can be analyzed as a 'new logic' of location of consumer systems. The implantation in the periphery of shopping centers, supermarkets, hypermarkets, and fast food franchises is a recent phenomenon, especially in the last decade."

Since 2000, the number of registered commercial establishments in Diadema increased by 62%. The number of factories and workshops, mainly small and medium sized, grew by 28%. Industrial employment in

Diadema grew by 10.5% in 2004, twice as fast as in the rest of São Paulo State, with the recovery of the automobile industry in the ABCD region. Industry is diversifying, with fast growth of the "Plastics Pole" and the "Cosmetics Pole". Diadema now hosts 65 of the 107 cosmetics firms operating in Brazil, employing 8,300 people in Diadema plus another 4,000 in local suppliers of plastics, essences and packaging.

"We built our factory in 1982, when nobody wanted to come here," says Silvestre de Resende, commercial director of Valmari, a firm employing 88 people. "Land was cheap. Diadema had logistical advantages in its proximity to São Paulo and Santos, but it was very

The people of Diadema learned that an epidemic of homicides is terrible, but tolerance of homicides is worse.

violent. Lots of robberies. One day our driver was murdered in front of our factory. Another time we found a corpse near our doorway. But we grew 18% in sales volume in 2004. We concentrate on classes A and B and on the professionals who serve these higher income brackets. However, most of our companies here sell to low-income customers through distributors."

The growth of commercial activity is fed by the rapid expansion of consumer credit. Even perfumes are being paid for in monthly installments. Alliances have been forged between mass retail chains and banks and finance companies. Finance company agents sit at desks inside the big chain stores, approving credits with monthly interest rates of

5% to 7%. Over the past two years, the volumes of outstanding personal loans rose by 79% and consumer credit by 47%. From 1999 to 2003, the share of low-income consumers in Brazil's credit cards market rose from 10% to 21%. The use of credit cards in supermarkets grew by 1,450% in only five years. Monthly credit card interest rates are roughly 9%. New credit modalities are being invented continuously. Interest rates of 2% monthly are charged under agreements by which payments are deducted automatically from salaries and pension checks. Despite exorbitant interest rates, which may create trouble later for both borrowers and lenders, the credit boom allows poor people to consume more and invest in home improvements.

We easily can exaggerate the progress in Diadema. Its broad central avenues, with bus terminals, supermarkets, fast food restaurants and automobile distributorships, no longer create the impression of a poor city. However, as we have observed, homicide rates still are high, despite their reduction in recent years. The average monthly income of family heads in Diadema in 2000 was half the average for the municipality of São Paulo. But the combined effect of its political structure, of the strengthening of its public institutions and the expansion of commerce has been very positive, showing how much its people value stability. Diadema also has shown that the problem of homicides can be reduced fairly quickly with a political effort based on a community consensus and more effective action by the authorities. Four decades after the start of the migratory surge of precarious settlement, Diadema no longer is a city trapped in a downward spiral of apparently insoluble crises. Instead, it is showing the strength of democracy and is emerging on the crest of a process of civilization. ■

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