

# The expansion of criminal organizations into South America's borders and the Brazilian State's initiatives

*La expansión de las organizaciones criminales en las fronteras de América del Sur y las iniciativas del Estado brasileño*

**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to discuss the international expansion of criminal organizations, specifically the First Command of the Capital (PCC), from Brazil to South America and other continents, based on a strategy of territorial domination in Brazilian prisons and international border regions, the security dynamics of which have shifted in this regional periphery. Thus, the goal is to emphasize the theoretical underpinnings of criminal organizations' economic and transnational governance strategies, as well as the production and commercialization processes of the coca-cocaine complex in South America and Brazil's subsequent inclusion in this global illegal trade, as well as the major policies for criminal disarticulation. In this way, this article represents a distinct perspective in the fields of International Relations, Geopolitics, and Public Security, but one that is as pertinent, given its significant influence on security concerns in Brazil and South American countries.

**Keywords:** borders; public security; criminal organizations; economic regulation of crime; The First Command of the Capital.

**Resumen:** Este trabajo busca discutir la expansión internacional de las organizaciones criminales, específicamente el primer comando de la Capital (PCC), de Brasil a América del Sur y otros continentes, a partir de una estrategia de dominación territorial en las cárceles brasileñas y en regiones de frontera internacional, cuyas dinámicas de seguridad han cambiado en esta periferia regional. Buscamos resaltar los conceptos teóricos sobre las estrategias económicas y la gobernanza transnacional de las organizaciones criminales, así como los procesos de producción y comercialización del complejo coca-cocaína en América del Sur y la respectiva inclusión de Brasil en este comercio ilegal global, que comprende también las principales políticas de desarticulación criminal. En este sentido, este ensayo constituye un enfoque diferenciado en el campo de las relaciones internacionales, la geopolítica y la Seguridad Pública, pero igualmente relevante, ya que tuvo un fuerte impacto en temas de seguridad en Brasil y países sudamericanos.

**Palabras clave:** fronteras; seguridad pública; organizaciones delictivas; gobernanza económica de la delincuencia; Primer Mando de la Capital.

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## 1 Introduction

The main scope of this article is to conduct a discussion on the economic and geographic expansion of the Brazilian criminal organization First Command of the Capital (PCC) to border regions of South America. Consequently, it seeks to visualize its activity in the main routes and corridors of international drug trafficking, aiming at the predominance of illegal marketing and the use of violence, raising the importance of discussion and understanding about the phenomena that contributed to the change of criminal dynamics in the South American peripheries, especially in recent decades (FERREIRA, 2019).

The expansion of the PCC was based on commercial, economic and expansion strategies of its national and international territorial influence, from the illegal marketing of drugs, combined with predatory criminal diversification, such as robberies and homicides, and settling in most of the Brazilian prison system, as well as in the main logistic routes and corridors, especially in the complex border regions of Brazil with neighbors of South America.

The Brazilian state has an extension of more than 16,800 kilometers with ten countries, almost half the circumference of the planet and about 7% of the international limits of the globe. In a monumental geographical area that extends from the Amazon, going to vital areas of the borders with Bolivia, Paraguay to Uruguay. Which, in turn, have greater geographic and logistical proximity to the Center, Southeast and South of Brazil, that are used as logistical platforms for illegal international trade (ANDRADE et al., 2019).

In order to discuss this process, the following starting question is important: what factors influenced the First Command of the Capital to view the border regions as an economic and geographic source of action in South America? The hypothesis is that this criminal organization began to visualize the possibility of acting more efficiently in economic terms in the control of drug trafficking from its expansion outside Brazil's international borders.

Understanding this geopolitical process is relevant to the construction of regional security and public security in Brazil, as it involves an actor that has influenced the security dynamics in several regions of the continent, despite mistakenly being a marginal theme in the studies of Ferreira (2019). In this sense, to carry out this article, a qualitative approach based on available bibliographical references, research, publications in newspapers, public policies designed in the region and empirical knowledge on the subject will be used.

This article was divided into two sections, the first of which seeks to make a theoretical analysis on the evolution of the production and commercialization of the coca-cocaine complex in South America and the respective insertion of Brazil in this context, contributing to the solidification of the PCC, which began to exploit this lucrative market. An analysis on the theoretical conceptions of criminal organizations and their methods of economic and geographical expansion will also be presented.

In the second section, the origin of the PCC and its relationship with the degraded Brazilian Prison System will be discussed, in addition to how the process of geographic and economic expansion took place and its establishment in border regions, which represented an important national and international consolidation. In the last section, some Brazilian federal actions with international projection in these geographical areas will be demonstrated.

## **2 Brazil's insertion in the world drug market: geoeconomic strategies of criminal organizations**

With regard to the expansion of the PCC to regions with illegal borders and economic connections, it is important to explore how the coca-cocaine complex evolved in South America, as well as the respective insertion of Brazil in this market. Concomitantly, it is sought to highlight the theoretical references on the territorial, economic and transnational expansion strategies of criminal organizations, namely the appropriation of the PCC of such strategies.

### **2.1 Evolution of the coca-cocaine complex in South America and Brazil's insertion in the world drug trade**

In the field of illicit economies, notably international drug trafficking, some criminal organizations have systematically structured and expanded their activities in the South American continent, such as the Brazilian illegal structures Red Command (CV) and especially the PCC, the focus of this article. It is essential to understand how the dynamics of the coca-cocaine complex took place and the inclusion of Brazil in this process, from the rapid growth of this illegal branch in the region.

Based on the construction elaborated by Machado (2011), the evolution of cocaine production and by-products (base paste, crack) in South America was classified into four phases. In this perspective, an initial phase took place in the 1970s, with the important leadership of the Colombian cartels and the beginning of Peruvian and Bolivian specialization. In a second phase, about ten years later, in the 1980s, the pressure of North American demand is the preponderant growth factor in this market, pointed out by several other researchers, such as Griffith (1993), who demonstrates the exponential demand of the United States as fundamental: it is "the starting point for one of the fastest growing and most profitable industries in the world", which gave rise to what this author calls "geonarcotics", that are the international diplomatic relations of security agencies induced by the violent and profitable phenomenon of narcotics and money laundering, which allows the feedback of this global criminal chain (GRIFFITH, 1993, p. 3).

The third phase of this process, between the mid-1990s and the 2000s, coincides with US actions in the war on drugs, which mainly involved Colombia, but reflected in Peru and Bolivia, considerably reducing the cultivation areas. According to Machado (2011), it contributed years later with increased productivity, because, as criminal activities adapt to adversities and state controls, new genetic engineering techniques were sponsored by criminal organizations, envisioning the North American market (LAMPE, 2016; MCCARTHY, 2011).

In the last phase, the production is decentralized to small areas scattered in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, including in regions where the coca plant is not endemic, such as in the extensive and low areas of the Amazon rivers, including in the border regions of Brazil with Peru and Colombia, making control difficult and facilitating illegal economic diversification, given the growing demand around the world. Such factors contributed to Brazil's insertion in this world trade, due to the

possibility of astronomical illegal gains, diversification of money laundering mechanisms and strategic location on the continent (MACHADO, 2001, 2011). This insertion was not quite regular, because at first Brazil was seen only as a transit country to Europe and the United States, with low domestic consumption and international traffic concentrated in the Amazon region and in specific parts of the southern borders, in addition to sparse marijuana productions within the Brazilian territory. The map below demonstrates these main coca, marijuana, and poppy production areas on the continent and the main routes and corridors that existed in the mid-1990s.

Map 1 – Drug Trafficking Network in the Amazon River Basin - 1996.

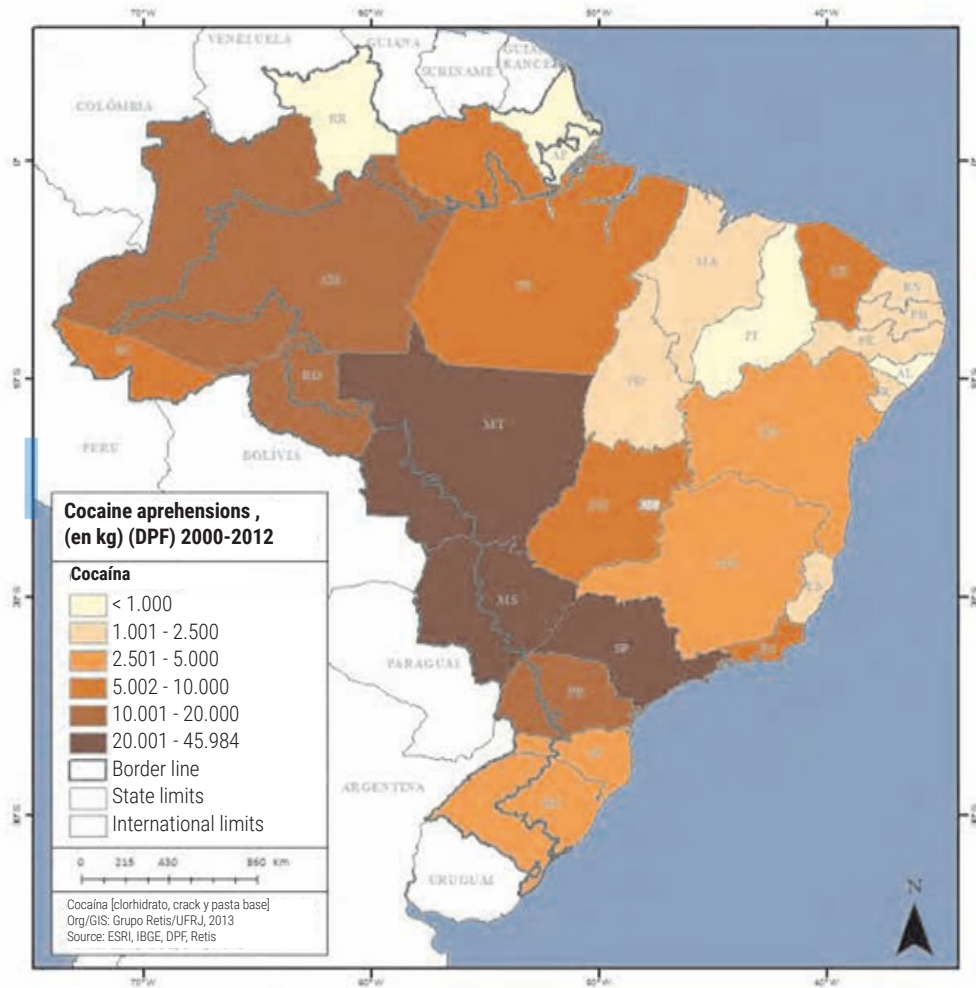


Source: Steiman (2002, p. 45).

Therefore, this scenario contrasts with the current reality of the 21st century, in which the Amazon region remains important, but with a significant shift to routes and corridors in the south-central region of the Brazilian borders, between Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina, due to its own regular trade logistics for large consumer centers and export platforms, such as the Port of Santos, located less than one thousand kilometers from the border with Paraguay and fifteen hundred kilo-

meters from the border with Bolivia. In addition, there was an abrupt change in the level of drug consumption in Brazil (DROGAS..., 2016). The map below shows cocaine seizures from the period of Brazil's most evident insertion in this trade around 2000, being possible to observe that it involves all areas close to Colombia, Peru and more intense in areas close to Bolivia, Paraguay and São Paulo, regions where the PCC settled.

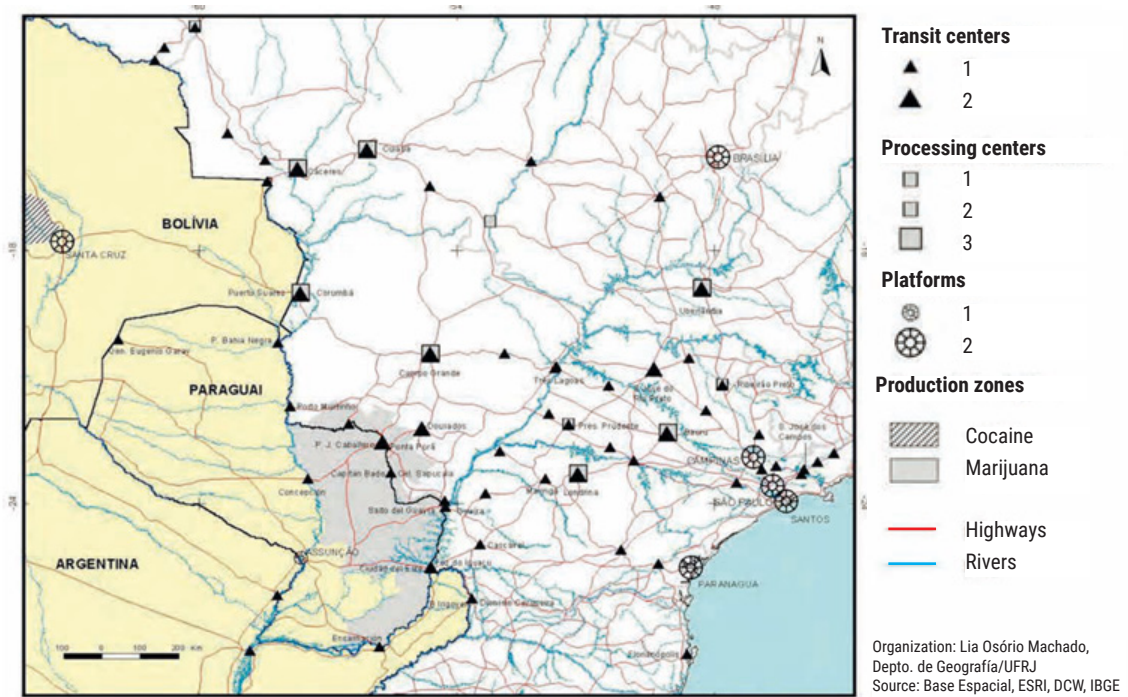
Map 2 – Geographical areas with the highest cocaine seizures in Brazil between 2000 and 2012



Source: Brasil (2016d, p. 539).

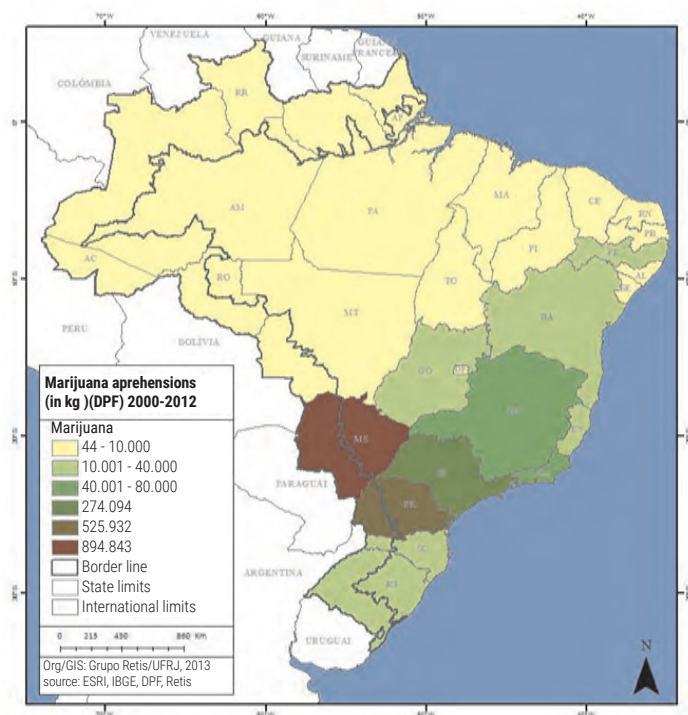
Marijuana has a lower market value than cocaine, however, it generates large volumes due to its low acquisition cost and a large part is imported from Paraguay. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the largest production of this product in the South American continent is located in areas very close to the borders of Brazil, namely between the states of Mato Grosso do Sul and Paraná. This facilitates the introduction and search for hegemony of control of the main routes and corridors by the PCC, as can be seen in the maps of the cultivation areas, main routes and seizures carried out by the Federal Police of Brazil.

Map 3 – Paraguay and Southeastern Brazil: marijuana production and trafficking routes



Source: Neves, Baptista et al., (2016, p. 557).

Map 4 – Geographic areas with the highest marijuana seizures in Brazil between 2000 and 2012



Source: Brasil (2016d, p. 541).

Cocaine and marijuana can be seen as the first phase of Brazil's insertion in this market, from the late 1990s. The other phases of this process are marked to the present day by the forms of "organization and adaptation, speed in decision-making and interaction between the legal and illegal" practiced by criminal organizations for economic expansion in the region (MACHADO, 2011, p. 13).

In this respect, Lampe (2016) e Machado (2011) emphasize that the greater the flow of legal goods and merchandise, the greater the volume of illegal merchandise, as criminal modes take over the same economic strategies as large corporations. In the case of the PCC, having originated in the largest state of Brazil, with consolidated road, air and port networks, in addition to being very close to the borders of Paraguay and Bolivia, contributed to its strengthening in Brazil and expansion of business to South America and other continents that will be demonstrated throughout this discussion (MACHADO, 2011). Understanding this evolution process of the coca-cocaine and marijuana complex, how criminal organizations are theoretically conceived and to what extent the PCC is framed in these premises will be discussed in the next session.

## 2.2 Criminal organizations and the strategies of geographical and economic expansion

The international literature on this topic is not consensual and there are several conceptual nuances used to designate criminal groups, in this sense, the contribution of Nicaso e Lamonthé (2005) is brought, and it demonstrates that, since the origin of these structures, criminals were worshiped a command structure, with their own symbologies, both in the past and in the current situation, criminal organizations have logics and practices similar to the normal economic and financial market, using the same logistical structures, with ample capacity for metamorphosis, seeking expansion and maximization of profits and power, enhanced by the volatility of the world financial system, which allowed the transformation of "geographic into financial territory" (NICASO; LAMONTHE, 2005, p. 2).

The understanding of McCarthy (2011) and Edwards & Gill (2003) goes in the same direction, for these authors, criminal organizations can be seen as companies, as they are part of the same economic system and provide illegal goods or services in exchange for money, without the need for a large and rigid hierarchical structure. For this author, the main goal of the main criminal organizations is to come as close as possible to a "vertically integrated business", as the Colombian cartels of Medellín and Cali have done, controlling all phases of the illegal cocaine industry (MCCARTHY, 2011, p. 157).

Over the years, the PCC has created a large hierarchical structure, whose command is carried out from within Brazilian prisons, seeking at all costs to achieve control of all phases of the illegal market, expanding its violent actions to the main twin cities<sup>1</sup> of the Brazilian international borders, heart of these transnational spaces, mainly with Bolivia and Paraguay, making it pos-

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1 Twin cities are cities located in the international landmarks of two or more countries, separated by a river, square or street, connected through the economy and social, historical, political processes and main regions of international interaction between Brazil and ten countries of the continent (MACHADO et al., 2005).

sible to reduce the cost of cocaine and commercialized marijuana (HISAYASU, 2016b, 2016c). Meneguetti and Ferreira (2020) also advocate in this sense,

Its statute, the *Criminal Courts*, and its form of governance represents a political objective of claiming rights and questioning the monopoly of the use of force by the state, but for the economic purposes of the group in particular. Also, its high degree of structural sophistication points to this gang as a unique object of study. We will see in the next section the strong presence and international organization of the group characterizes the PCC not only as a Brazilian gang but a transnational gang. Violence reverberates in other territories and membership is no longer only a restricted factor in Brazil (MENEGUETTI; FERREIRA, 2020, p. 41-42).

Another important approach suggests that a criminal organization can be characterized as a conglomeration of connected people who commit crimes with a certain degree of planning, articulation and continuity, not being common and routine crimes, sometimes denoting a systemic condition, which eventually involves political connections and is supported by criminal actions, structures and illegal governance, in addition to the use of violence and diversification of the portfolio of illegal economic activities, divided into three modalities: crimes based on the demand and supply of illegal goods and products, including drug trafficking; predatory crimes that are committed with serious threats and violence, such as robberies and, finally, regulatory crimes, which are practiced in the establishment of illegal norms (LAMPE, 2016, ).

For Lampe (2016), the structure and governance of criminal organizations are relevant to understand their dimension and structure, and to what extent they affect security and the International System, whether in a nation-state, region or globally. In this context, one of the predominant issues is understanding their cooperative dynamics and transnational connections. For this, it is necessary to verify compliance with three requirements: illegal activities that cross international borders; criminal organizations that are transnationally mobile or present in more than one country; and illegal governance that extends beyond international borders, based on the movement of people, goods and information (LAMPE, 2016).

Evidence indicates that the PCC has been carrying out continuous criminal actions for nearly three decades, having a systemic condition, well-defined hierarchy and expansionist planning as a regular transactional company, moreover, it has structures and practices criminal actions based on the demand and supply of drugs, not to mention extremely violent predatory crimes, such as robberies in Brazil and in border areas, for instance the robbery of 30 million euros on the triple border (Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil), considered the greatest robbery in the history of Paraguay. The actions of the PCC cross national borders, are present in almost every country in South America, in addition to being involved in cocaine exports and financial connections with several countries, enabling the circulation of criminals, illegal products and information management, as well as being an important international governance from the Brazilian territory (CUSICANQUI, 2012; DIAS; DARKE, 2016; HISAYASU, 2016a; HISAYASU; TOMAZELA, 2017).



Moving on to a final contribution on the concepts around criminal organizations, the analysis carried out by Ferreira (2017, 2019) is approached, which relates the importance of analyzing criminal structures such as the PCC in the scope of International Relations, including from the category of analysis on peace and conflicts conceived by Galtung (1969, 1990) on direct, structural and cultural violence. This author criticizes international security studies that have constantly neglected the topic and addresses the concept of violent non-state actor, which operates transnationally in the trafficking of drugs, weapons, robberies and practices of extreme violence. Thus, the PCC fits into this perspective because "it is not only armed and outside the control of the State, but it is also transnational and violent in a broad sense, making use of forms of direct, structural and cultural violence" (FERREIRA 2019, p. 151), such a view is in line with the statement that "of all illegal industries, narcotics are the most active and violent" (NICASO; LAMOTHE, 2005, p. 195).

### **3 Criminal cardinal and economic expansion and state responses**

The purpose of choosing the term cardinal for this section is suggestive, since it is a word that synthesizes the territorial and economic expansion of this criminal organization born through a small group of prisoners in 1993 within the state of São Paulo. Over these three decades, the PCC adopted strategies that allowed to advance and expand its actions and the recruitment of members to all states of Brazil and to several countries, configuring, according to Lessing & Willis (2019), as the largest gang in the world and the leading global case for prison-based criminal governance.

#### **3.1 Consolidación transnacional en América del Sur**

According to data from the Brazilian Yearbook of Public Security, in 1993 the prison population in Brazil was approximately 126,200 prisoners (FÓRUM BRASILEIRO DE SEGURANÇA PÚBLICA, 2019), over the years there has been a progressive increase in the prison population, which is characterized as one of the pillars of growth of this organization, that can reach thousands scattered inside and outside prisons, without precise statistics. At the end of 2017, this Brazilian prison population was already over 700,000 inmates for a total of approximately 400,000 vacancies, with a precarious dynamic and difficulty in changing this scenario through public policies, configuring structural violence that generates direct violence under the terms proposed by Galtung (1969), opening space for criminal domination of the prison environment, based on rules established outside of state control.

At the beginning of the PCC's actions, the discourse adopted was to establish mechanisms for contesting the State for the precarious structures of prisons, presenting itself as a defense party for the system's inmates, which served to captain supporters until reaching the point of expansion in the prisons of the state of São Paulo, being a fundamental previous step for its cardinal expansion in all directions of Brazil and its international connections (FERREIRA, 2019).

In order to facilitate the understanding of the expansion process of this criminal organization, important contributions from Dias (2014); Dias & Darke (2016) e Ferreira (2019), which present approaches to this process, were used. In the analysis, the consolidation of the PCC had five main milestones, and it was preferred not to establish dates for these moments, because they would consist of a dynamic and concomitant form, not following an exact temporal sequence. The first milestone is obviously the foundation of this organization, that took place in 1993; the second phase can be characterized as the consolidation of this organization in the Prison System of São Paulo and in the coordination of criminal actions such as trafficking and robbery in this region of Brazil, using violent strategies and territorial consolidation brought by Dias (2014). In this period, Ferreira (2019) emphasizes crucial moments of demonstration of power that confirm its consolidation strategy, such as the rebellions that paralyzed the largest prison structure in Brazil, involving tens of thousands of prisoners in 2001 and 2006, which resulted in the death of hundreds of police officers and criminals.

The third phase occurred concurrently with the second and was characterized by the search for more profitable dynamics and territorial expansion, in an attempt to consolidate a vertically integrated criminal process theorized by McCarthy (2011), seeking for this, the supply of cocaine and marijuana directly from the border regions of Brazil with Paraguay and Bolivia, which made it possible to reduce costs and maximize profits as the main economic driver of growth of this organization in the South American continent. This moment is contradictory, because it was built jointly with the support of the Red Command (CV), born in the prisons of the state of Rio de Janeiro, still in 1979 (DANTAS; CLEMENTE, 2001; KONIG, 2016).

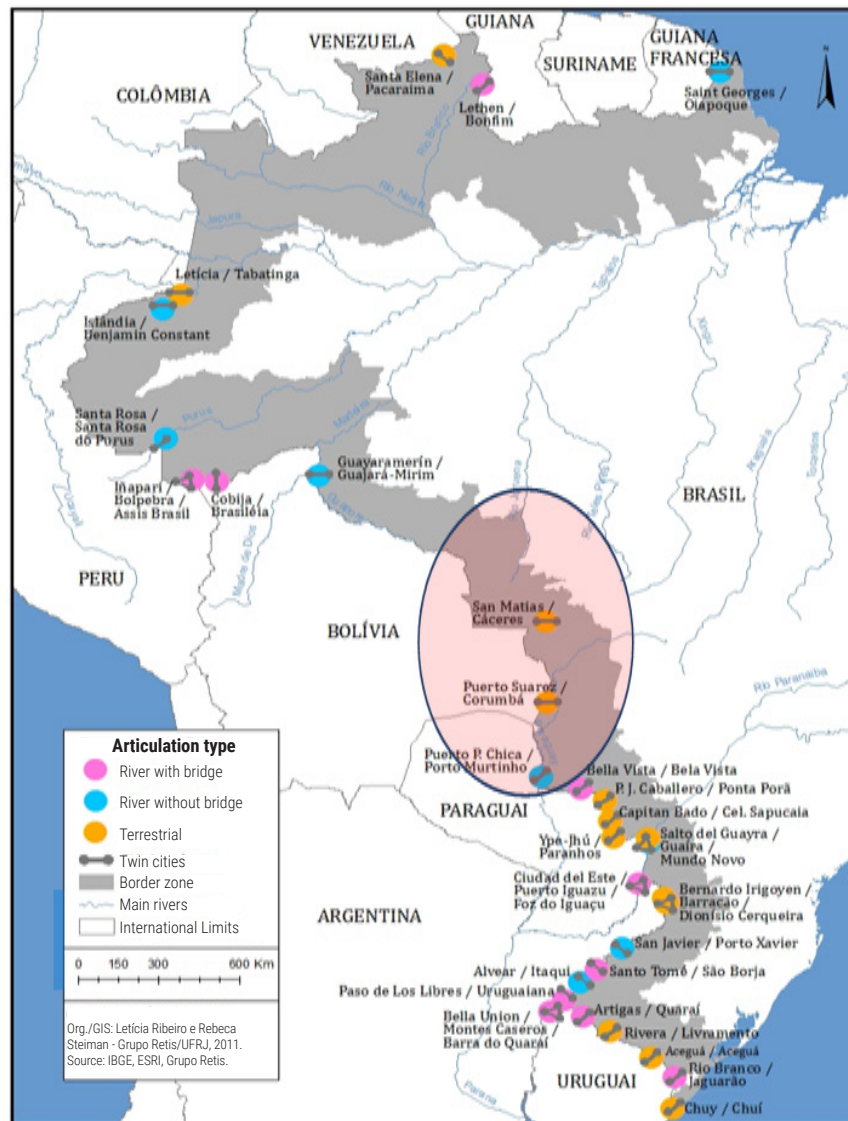
The fourth milestone of this process takes place with the consolidation of this criminal organization in all states of Brazil, which occurs gradually and progressively, outside of state actions, made possible by the chaotic structure of the Prison System combined with the violent process of territorial consolidation and economic expansion, in addition to the loyalty strategy of thousands of criminals, creating a network of action inside and outside prisons, being the key to the consolidation of the PCC. This phase also marks the beginning of a period of conflict in the regions of international borders, notably in the twin cities (DIAS, 2014; DIAS; DARKE, 2016; FERREIRA, 2019).

The fifth milestone takes place with the international consolidation in South America, with expansion of actions on the borders with Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela, changing the criminal dynamic in the border regions of the continent, which occurs simultaneously with the expansion of the international trafficking of cocaine to other continents. This phase is very important and was consolidated concomitantly with the others and from a temporal point of view, it began around the late 1990s and early 2000s, as soon as the PCC was established in the Prison System in São Paulo, supported by its current biggest rival CV, which already operated in the region. This international establishment aimed to get as close as possible to a structure of domain of the illegal drug chain and with clear signs of transnationality in the terms proposed by Lampe (2016) e McCarthy (2011), with the objective of expanding profits and predominance on the continent, starting from the border regions.

This establishment of international boundaries in the South American continent occurred in the areas of influence of the twin cities in several border regions, that, due to their strategic location, were used as important warehouses for the international drug trade, which changed the dyna-

mics of violence in some of these territories, not being homogeneous across all borders, as shown by the Ministry of Justice diagnosis (BRASIL, 2016e). However, the PCC initiated its activities in territorial areas located between the triple border of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay to the border areas between Brazil and Bolivia in Cáceres and San Matias, considered the poorest region in Bolivia with more than 60% of the population in the poverty line, according to a study by Sánchez Serrano (2018), due to the greater proximity to the logistical structures with the southeast of the country and respective export platforms, as can be seen highlighted on the map below.

Map 5 – Twin cities and main areas of insertion of the PCC in international borders



Source: Adapted from Steiman and Ribeiro. (2011, n.p.).

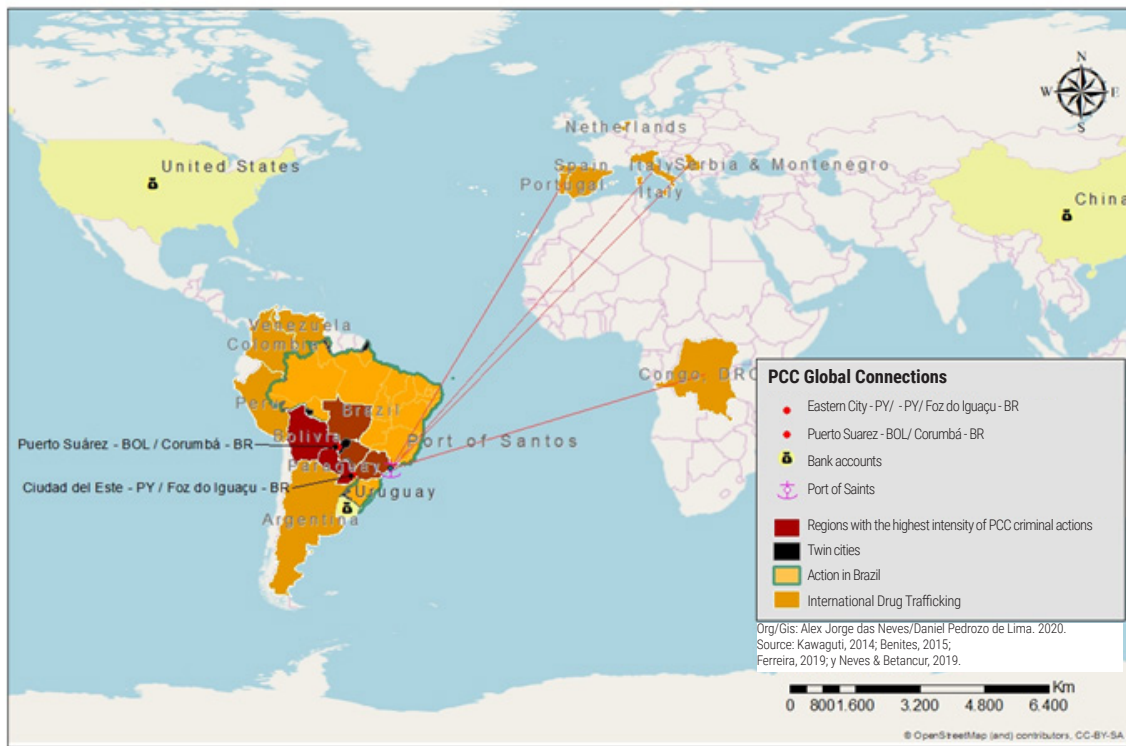
This region, approximately one thousand kilometers away, was where the main activities of establishment of the PCC took place at the borders and is still configured as the main warehouse for the international trafficking of drugs, weapons and smuggling in the southern cone of the continent.(HISAYASU, 2016a). Illustrating this perspective, between 2012 and 2015, 753 tons of drugs were seized in more than 16,000 kilometers on the Brazilian borders, with 78% of this volume occurring in the areas where the PCC is most active, in the border regions between Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay highlighted in the previous map (ANDRADE et al., 2019).

The height of this fifth phase occurs precisely with the break with another Brazilian criminal organization, Red Command, which initiated its criminal activities on the borders of South America well before the PCC, changing the criminal axis in the region (HISAYASU, 2017). This occurred in 2016 with the PCC's action reported in several South American newspapers, which resulted in the death of trafficker Jorge Raffat in the Paraguayan city of Pedro Juan Caballero, a region that concentrates the main routes and corridors of drugs, weapons and smuggling in the southern cone of the continent, generating an unprecedented war between criminal organizations on international borders and in large and medium urban centers in Brazil (FERREIRA, 2019; FÓRUM BRASILEIRO DE SEGURANÇA PÚBLICA, 2018a; HISAYASU, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c).

This moment demonstrates the expansion of the PCC on the borders of Brazil with Paraguay and Bolivia and highlights its criminal territorial movements in other countries on the continent, generating a chain reaction, with violent disputes in the main border areas, in addition to the dispute within Brazilian prisons, that generated hundreds of deaths and countless rebellions, which contributed to the year 2017 being the most violent in the history of Brazil. That year, about 63,895 people were victims of homicides in the country, an average of 175 deaths per day (FERREIRA, 2019; FÓRUM BRASILEIRO DE SEGURANÇA PÚBLICA, 2018a, 2018b).

This movement confirms the evidence of the PCC's international connections in practically all South American countries, warehouses in East Africa, as well as recipient countries of the drug sent through Brazilian ports, especially the Port of Santos to Portugal, Spain, Netherlands, Balkans, Italy, among others, made possible by the partnership and international connection with other criminal organizations, such as the Italian Ndrangueta, one of the oldest in the world, findings from investigations by the Federal Public Ministry and the Brazilian Federal Police, in addition to the existence of financial movements in the United States and China, which are systematized on map 6 to facilitate the visualization of these international interactions (BENITES, 2015; CHASTINET; GUEDES, 2018; FERREIRA, 2019; HISAYASU, 2016b, 2016c; KAWAGUTI, 2014; NEVES; BETANCUR, 2019).

Map 6 – Criminal global connections



Source: The authors (2021).

Such connections confirm Brazil's inclusion in the international drug market, allowing high profits and contributing to the PCC's cardinal criminal geographic expansion strategy, even with all the main leaders arrested: "based on data provided by criminal prosecutors, it can be stated that 80% of the PCC's profit comes from drug trafficking of approximately 40 tons of cocaine/year, totaling US\$ 200 million/year" (FERREIRA 2019, p. 157).

From this expansion, involvement in violence and criminality in the peripheries of South America and despite the fact that this is the period of a new international governance called geonarcotics (GRIFFITH, 1993), it did not prevent the growth of these criminal organizations, due to the fragile South American international coordination and difficulties of the public security policies, which would change the reality of the prison system and more effective measures to prevent structural violence and the disarticulation of the PCC. It is important to note that Brazil began to have a Single Public Security System (SUSP) only in 2018, with the approval of Law No. 13,675, of June 11, 2018.

In order to visualize state policies to contain criminal organizations, the main initiatives in Brazil will be addressed, since at the regional level systemic policies were not built on the subject, as in the European Union (EUROPOL, FRONTEX, CEPOL), among other agen-

cies that articulate strategic, tactical and operational actions in a multilevel regional and global governance perspective (COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, 2017; FRONTEX, 2020; MARKS, 1993; MUNGIANU, 2013).

### 3.2 The Brazilian State facing PCC's growth on international borders

In response to PCC's growth, the expressive international public policies built at the regional level (Mercosur or Union of South American Nations) was not identified in the bibliography, for this reason, some Brazilian actions of international projection that broadly involved the theme of criminal transnational organizations will be demonstrated, namely: the Strategic Border Plan (PEF), the Integrated Border Monitoring System (SISFRON) and the Integrated Border Protection Program (PPIF). These initiatives were designed with assumptions of integration, cooperation and articulation between Brazilian security agencies (Military, Civil, Federal and Federal Highway Police), aiming at dismantling the trafficking of drugs, weapons, smuggling and the growth of criminal organizations in the regions of international borders (ANDRADE et al., 2019; BRASIL, 2016b).

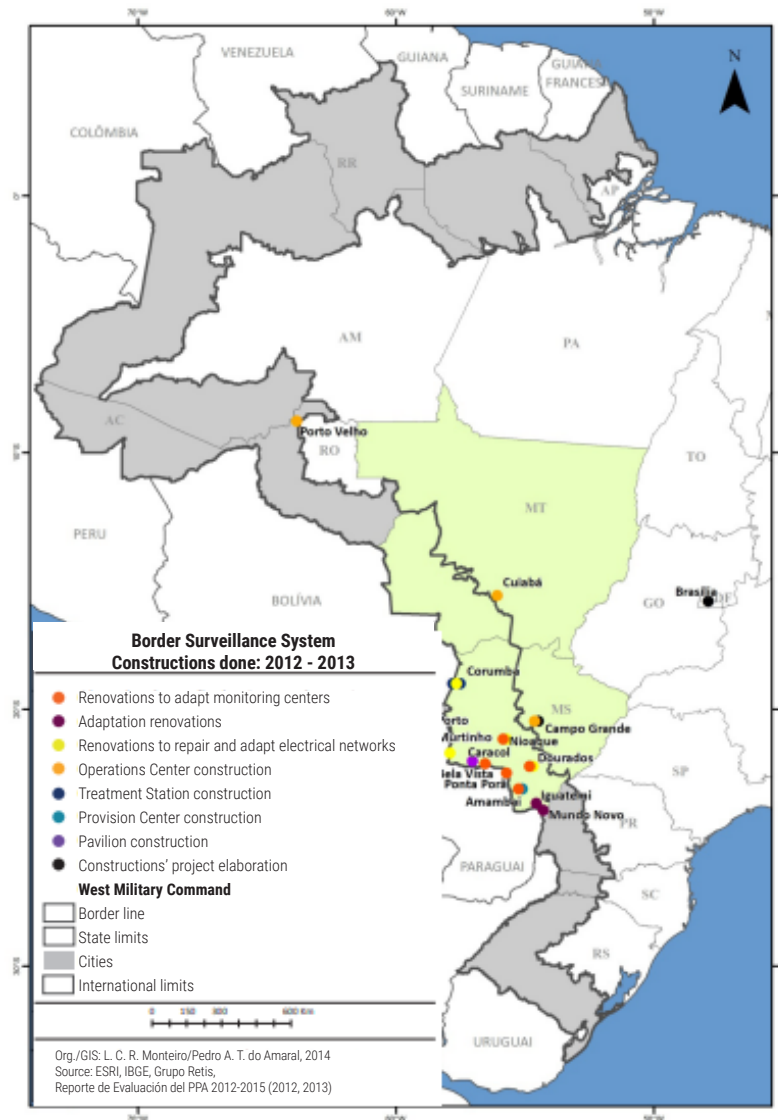
The PEF was established through Decree No. 7,496/2011, involving the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Justice and Federal Revenue, providing for two main structures of national/international cooperation, the Integrated Border Management Offices (GGIF), established in the main twin cities with the objective of locally articulating integrated responses from the Military Police, Civilians, Fire Brigades, other local agencies and federal bodies (Federal, Federal Highway Police, Armed Forces, etc.), involving agencies from Brazil and border countries. The other structure of national character was designated as Joint Operations Center (COC), with a focus on interagency defense actions in the region (ANDRADE et al., 2019). Both structures did not have significant international action given the low international political priority on the subject and the fact that the countries neighboring Brazil did not participate in the construction of these measures. In addition to this perspective of interagency cooperation, three large hybrid operations involving defense and security agencies were instituted to curb transnational crime: Operations *Ágata*, *Sentinela* and *Fronteira Blindada* (ANDRADE et al., 2019).

Another action instituted within the scope of the PEF was the National Strategy for Public Security at the Borders (ENAFRON), coordinated by the Brazilian Ministry of Justice, which implemented numerous actions and technological investments, trainings and coordinated actions with the subnational security agencies that worked in the areas of international limits, totaling approximately 100 million euros in investments between 2011 and 2014, resulting in thousands of tons of drugs and weapons seized. This program was discontinued at the National Public Safety Secretariat (ANDRADE et al., 2019).

These actions marked new perspectives for fighting transnational organized crime, but were severely discontinued as of 2014, impacted by the political moment Brazil went through and the absence of a consolidated National Public Security Policy, which was created only in 2018 (BRASIL, 2018), after the most violent year in the history of Brazil (FÓRUM BRASILEIRO DE SEGURANÇA PÚBLICA, 2018a, 2018b).

Parallel to the creation of the PEF and the updating of the National Defense Policy and the Brazilian National Defense Strategy in 2012 (BRASIL, 2012), the implementation of the Border Surveillance System (SISFRON) began in the same year, with initial completion forecast in 2021. This project is audacious, complex and with an estimated cost of over 2.6 billion euros, with the premise of enabling the Brazilian Armed Forces for interagency actions in the fight against transnational crime, to "guarantee the control and integrity of borders, in the face of challenges and border uncertainties" (ANDRADE et al., 2019, p. 65). The pilot project began its activities exactly in the region of greatest intensity of criminal actions of the PCC in the border regions with Paraguay and Bolivia, as can be seen in the map below.

**Map 7 – SISFRON implementation map in areas with the greatest illegal flow in the border regions with Bolivia and Paraguay**



Source: Neves, Silva and Monteiro (2016, p. 94).

Finally, the PPIF is a policy that redesigned the PEF, with few significant changes, being instituted through the Brazilian Decree No. 8,903/2016 (BRASIL, 2016a), reaffirming the need for international cooperation and articulation, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a preponderant actor in the context, with a view to articulating, in a more qualified way, integrated actions with other countries in South America. In addition, the PPIF began to have a formal concern with maritime regions, based on the conclusions of studies carried out by the Ministry of Justice, especially regarding the use of large Brazilian ports in international drug trafficking. The other important innovation of the PPIF was the creation of a national coordination and articulation structure to allow a more effective national and international management of the problems of these regions, however, it is still too early to assess the effectiveness of the PPIF actions and there has been no evaluation by SUSP on the topic (ANDRADE et al., 2019). In addition, the role of the Brazilian Armed Forces, within the scope of the PPIF, is highlighted by Operation Ágata, which, under the command of the Ministry of Defense and the Joint General Staff of the Armed Forces (EMCFA), sought to fight, essentially from the joint presence on Brazilian borders, international drug trafficking (FERREIRA; MEDEIROS, 2020).

It is also important to highlight that currently the Secretariat of Integrated Operations (SEOPI) of the Ministry of Justice manages the VIGIA Program, which has articulated operational actions with the Brazilian police, in the same way as the FRONTEX carried out in the European Union, including involving the recent Integrated Operations Center, inaugurated in the largest border conurbation in Brazil (Iguassu Falls). This program has sought to articulate other specialized structures of the state police (Military and Civil Police), such as the Foreign Exchange Operations Command (COD), the Special Border Security Group (GEFRON), Department of Border Operations (DOF), being essential for the National System for Monitoring and Evaluation of Security and Social Defense Policies (SINAPED), created within the scope of SUSP, to be able to carry out systematic evaluations of the main security policies, with a view to better directing the resources and efforts of security institutions from Brazil (ANDRADE et al., 2019; BRASIL, 2016c, 2019b; NEVES; GIMENEZ; OLIVEIRA, 2018; NEVES; SILVA; LUDWIG, 2019).

Finalizing our approaches to state policies aimed at reducing the influence and capital of the PCC, it can be concluded that they were important, they defined some guiding milestones that may reflect on actions with greater impact on these criminal organizations, however, it is still too early to say that they were sufficient to reduce severely the business of this criminal organization, especially due to the fact that Brazilian national policies in relation to the prevention of violence, changes in the Prison System and actions of financial decapitalization of criminal organizations are not consolidated. In addition, Brazil and the countries of the continent have great difficulties in articulating an integrated concertation of international solutions to reduce the influence of the PCC and other criminal organizations on the continent, as the European Union has been doing in the effort to articulate 27 independent and sovereign countries, in addition to its wider neighborhood in Africa, Middle East and in others regions of the globe.



#### 4 Final considerations

As discussed throughout this article, the PCC has gone beyond the borders of Brazil and South America, building a significant criminal network that has contributed to changing violence and criminality at a regional level. Thus, it was sought to bring reflexive evidence on the inclusion of Brazil in the illegal drug trade route and the relationship with the PCC's criminal geoeconomic contours and respective international connections.

From this perspective, theoretical and empirical circumstances that contribute to the understanding of some factors that explain the expansion of the PCC to border regions were addressed. In this light, the PCC initially saw the possibility of economic expansion, enabled by the reduction of intermediaries with producers of the coca-cocaine and marijuana complex in South American countries, notably Bolivia and Paraguay, drastically reducing the cost of these illegal products. This action beyond international borders has significantly contributed to the economic profits obtained by drug trafficking, which can reach approximately € 180 million per year, leaving no doubts that the enhancement of profits was one of the main factors in the introduction of the PCC in these border regions (MAXX, 2017; RIBEIRO; CORRÊA, 2017; FERREIRA, 2019).

Secondly, the PCC is an organization that practices the territorial domain wherever it passes, using direct violence when necessary to establish this geographic control, in this perspective, the border regions become vital and strategic. Furthermore, this territorial movement allowed closer connections with suppliers of illegal weapons and ammunition, especially in Paraguay, supplying their criminal structures within the Brazilian territory.

Lastly, the connection with the main producers of the coca-cocaine complex in South America allowed its more competitive action in economic terms for the international drug trafficking in other continents, such as East Africa and especially Europe, establishing cooperative connections with criminal organizations in these regions. These factors corroborate the arguments used in this work about the insertion of the PCC at the borders in search of profits, territorial control, and also criminal hegemony in important areas of the continent, based on transnational governance and leadership, which was not followed by integrated public policies of regional scope to reduce the damage and disarticulation of this organization, despite the demonstrated initiatives, such as SISFRON, PEF, ENAFRON, PPIF and VIGIA.

Looking to the future, some actions deserve further analysis in the context of transnational cooperation, such as the impact of the transfer of the main PCC leaders to Federal Prisons, as well as the recent rapprochement of the Brazilian government with the European Union and the United States, for example the participation of members of the Italian, Portuguese and EU police forces in the 2nd Transnational Coordination Meeting in the Fight against Criminal Organizations held in Brazil (EU, 2019), in addition to the inauguration in December 2019 of the first Integrated Border Operations Center, created in the triple border of Brazil with Argentina and Paraguay, based on the models of North American Intelligence Centers called "Fusion Center" (BRASIL, 2019a, 2019b).

Despite all the initiatives, there is still a fragile international political agreement within the South American continent, fundamental for the process of building more assertive policies from the point of view of prevention, development of vulnerable areas involved with the production and marketing of drugs, weapons and smuggling, as well as the disarticulation of criminal organizations operating on the continent, such as the PCC. In-depth studies and analyzes in the field of International Relations, Police Sciences, Public Security, among other areas of knowledge, are essential to better understand these phenomena and point out alternatives for solving problems that affect millions of people in the peripheral areas of the continent and which, unfortunately, are not yet a priority focus of analysis and research.

### **Authorship and Collaborations**

All authors participated equally in the elaboration of the article.

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