

An Analysis of the Murder Rate of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) 1990- 2016

The Nexus between the evolving illicit drug trade and an escalating
murder rate

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January 2017

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To focus on the murder rate for a single year and posit analysis of the reason/s for the said rate is an exercise in lunacy. This social phenomenon has to be viewed over periods of time and what becomes apparent from this exercise are: 1. The evolution of the murder rate in T&T mirrors the historical evolution of the illicit drug trade/illicit trades in T&T and 2. For all the money and programmes thrown at the problem by the politicians and the state agencies they control they have failed to impact the evolution of the murder rate as the illicit drug trade/illicit trades continue to hence the noted increase in the murder rate across time. This analysis is based on the official murder statistics for the period 1990 to 2016 where in 1990 the year of the attempted coup d'état the murder rate was 7 per 100,000 persons in T&T and in 2016 it was 35 per 100,000 a reality which potently illustrates the failure of the politicians and the state agencies they control. In this exercise I didn't round off the murder rate figures so a rate of 35.53 per 100,000 is presented as 35 per 100,000.

For the period 1990 to 1999 the lowest murder rate for one year was 7 in 1990 and the highest was 11 in 1994 but the rate rose from 7 in 1990 with 84 murders to a rate of 11 in 1994 with 143 murders. From 1995 to 1999 the rate declined from 10 per 100,000 to 7 per 100,000. In the decade of the 1990s the murder rate was already showing signs of the changed nature of the social order brought about by the illicit trades and this was now impacting the murder rate but the rate was still manageable with total murders for 1990 to 1999 being 1,064 murders. At this time T&T was being turned into a premier trafficking point to Europe by the Colombian traffickers and heroin was exported to the US also which meant that there was a frenzied level of trafficking in and out of T&T but the level of violence placed T&T in the category of the Dominican Republic model (frenzied trafficking with controlled violence). The new Colombian organisation dominating Caribbean and T&T trafficking at this time was the Valle Norte cartel and a new business model was put in place where the Colombians wholesaled cocaine and heroin to buyers with a reference which resulted in for the first time in T&T the creation of a T&T drug market with product for sale to all and sundry with the means. Finally, the maximum leaders on the ground were in place in this decade creating their illicit organisations/mistakenly called gangs biding their time to announce their power in the social order and this power will be enhanced by

the new order of the Colombians and the politicians of the day. The history of the following decade will be then written in blood.

For the period 2000 to 2009 murders increased from 1,064 from 1990 to 1999 to 3,139 murders a jump that is nearly three times that of the 1990 to 1999 period. In this period the lowest murder rate was 9 in 2000 and the highest was 42 in 2008 an escalation in the murder rate that delegitimised the state and tore apart the social order where social control and disciplining oneself to abide by hegemonic discourse of the social order collapsed. This collapse resulted in a social order where various forms of predatory behaviour blossomed and multiplied such as fraud of all kinds, sexual predators victimising children, women and the vulnerable, predatory behaviour on the nation's roadways and serial killers especially those specialising in murder, arson etc. or for their personal pleasure derived from the taking of human lives. The murder spiral in this period was different compared to the previous period given the volume of murders involved which pointed to realities impacting the social order which were not present in the period 1990 to 1999. The murder rate rose from 9 in 2000 to 17 in 2003 then, in 2004 it rose to 20 jumped to 30 in 2007 peaked at 42 in 2008 the highest murder rate per year to date in T&T and fell to 39 in 2009. What then radically changed in this decade compared to the previous that fed this murder spiral? Simply the chickens of especially the second half of the decade of the 1990s came home to roost. The maximum leaders and their illicit organisations became powerful on the ground in the previous decade as they now commanded the retail turfs in the areas under their control, had become involved in drug exports to the North Atlantic and were drug wholesalers to small players. For the first time in the history of illicit drugs in T&T the control of the supply of ganja and the ganja retail points became an issue to go war over in this period. The new Colombian business model had for the first time enabled the creation of illicit organisations on the ground commanding their own drug supply and points of sale and export hustles which generated cash money never ever experienced before on the ground in the Corridor. This wealth enabled the creation and maintenance of armed militias under the command of these maximum leaders, transnational drug entrepreneurs were created, networks local, Caribbean and foreign were created as the drugs, arms and wealth flowed. These organisations also offered a range of illicit services that the decent and respectable of the

society paid for. The power of these maximum leaders and their organisations to impact the political order became palpable to the politicians of T&T and as all politicians do they danced with the maximum leaders where they were handed access to the state trough in return for services rendered. This access to the state trough did not make these leaders and their organisations powerful it was because of their power that they were danced with. They didn't need URP money to trade with that was simply extra frosting on the cake they made with their own hands.

Soon the war broke out on the ground in the quest for hegemony over the landscape dominated by these organisations as organisations fell on each other with a blood lust in the quest to be No. 1 there can be only one. This proved to be a bloody and brutal war which eventually took the lives of the maximum leaders. Get rich quickly and die trying. Whilst this war was being raged a fundamental change of order swamped the drug markets of T&T and the Caribbean as the Valle Nortel cartel fractured and eventually the Clan Usuga/Clan Golfo became the dominant Colombian organisation. In this period of instability, the Mexican surrogates made their move for dominance eventually seizing control as the Clan became an associate. This uncertainty and instability of the drug markets led to a contraction of supply on T&T drug markets and the war for product on the ground contributed to the murder rate peak in 2008. The strategy to have T&T as a premier export point in the Caribbean in this period was also shelved which caused further violence in the trade on the ground. All these realities directly contributed to the arrival of kidnapping for ransom as a business in this period. Most importantly the ganja wars that raged in the period showed no signs of letting up and it continues to this day as ganja is the most popular illicit substance in T&T and demand continues to outstrip supply feeding the war. In T&T people literally die in the quest for a supply of ganja.

In this period and the next the organisational solidarity of the illicit organisations headed by the maximum leaders was being shredded by the hard times brought about by the drastic changes to the supply side of the drug market of T&T as it was becoming increasingly difficult to generate wealth in the expected quantities to satisfy the demands of the membership. The solidarity shattered as factions formed and went at each other especially vulnerable were the high earners. The shattered solidarity led to internal war and the appearance of challengers to the

dominance of the maximum leader. The death of the maximum leader resulted from this tension and the shattering of these organisations into smaller and smaller groups constantly at war with each other and others which obtains to this day. On the supply side of the market the new order established downgraded T&T to a tier 2 Caribbean operation which intensified the supply pressure on the drug market. One reason for making this downgrade was the endemic violence on the ground and the absence of powerful multifaceted illicit organisations to deal with on the ground as before.

For the period 2010 to 2016 there were 2905 murders which means with three years to go for the decade only 235 murders are needed in three years to surpass the bloody decade of 2000 to 2009. T&T has then two types of murder spirals: those within decades and between decades. In 2010 the murder rate was 37 as the peak of the previous decade was now leading to a trough with 2011 having a rate of 27. But in 2012 there is a rise in the rate to 29, in 2013 it was 31 as in 2014 with 31 and 2015 with 31 but in 2016 it rose to 35 murders per 1000,000. The spiral has now changed with four straight years the rate is in the 30s pointing to steady killing sprees. From the previous decade to the present ongoing changes to the supply side of the T&T drug market continues to impact the murder rate combined with the momentum of the predators unleashed and the predilection to violence spawned when social control mechanisms falter especially the disciplining of oneself to conform with hegemonic discourse. The Mexican overlords have now instituted a new order over the Caribbean and T&T and this has squeezed supply to the drug market except to their affiliates as they have now switched on T&T as a cocaine and heroin export point especially to the US and have moved to expand and dominate drug retail markets in T&T through their affiliates. In this scenario those excluded are faced with expulsion from the trade and as in Chicago, USA the response is violence as the associates are generating and earning wealth in quantities last seen during the heyday of the Colombian business model. In this new market the Mexican overlords and their affiliates have focused on the Caribbean ganja markets including T&T. The ganja war in T&T now has a new incarnation where the oligopoly formed to dominate the supply of ganja to the drug market to the exclusion of the Mexican overlords and their affiliates is now wilting under the pressure applied as the new order is rolled out to the detriment of those of the old order.

The Mexican overlords in their Caribbean arm operate with associates drawn from transnational organised crime groups mistakenly termed gangs formed and operating in the Caribbean these crime groups then operate via their membership and associate street gangs in the Caribbean including T&T. The Mexican order of business has changed the illicit industry wherever applied in the Caribbean and it's now the turn of T&T. Failure to deal effectively with this reality amounts to futile gum bumping whilst the innocents are victimised. Nuff said!

From the 1990's to the present the politicians of T&T all read from the same playbook and continue to refuse to discard this failed playbook. We have gone through several phases as follows: reports on the police service and prison service that are never applied, the creation of covert, civilian intelligence agencies charged with the task of collecting intelligence on the drug trade but the trade evolves unhindered, the importation of a police commissioner from Canada since discarded, the application of various interventions borrowed from multilateral lending agencies or copied from other countries especially those who aren't drug trafficking points and they have all failed to quell the blood-letting and the latest squeeze is the policeisation of the military as the militarisation of the police has signally failed. To implement this position, you appoint ex-military officers as ministers of national security and they publicly express their war on crime in military terms associated with combating an insurgency bent on seizing state power but under our constitution even criminals are innocent until proven guilty. More importantly the strategy of flooding a so-called hot spot with a resident police and military presence to "suppress" the gun violence illustrates the fixation with the politics of crime rather than dealing with the drivers of the gun violence as under the suppression model the illicit trades thrive which leads to further violence not necessarily in the area under suppression. How long can this suppression go on for? The overarching political strategy in the period has been to throw state money at the problem with the hope that this will win political space for the politicians but all it did was make the situation worse. Paving the way for a Duterte but in his case the business of the overlords of meth/ice remain untouched as sprangers and pusher men are eliminated. The model of policeisation of the military is borrowed from Central America and Colombia making it totally alien to the history of T&T. In this play book the revamping and re-visioning of the state institutions charged with dealing with the security of the

citizens and the state are not included as the political price to be paid for this as visualised by the politicians they are not willing to pay. This fear of becoming unelectable is amplified by the politics of racist hegemony in T&T to the point where the politicians of the day are afflicted with perceptual and motivational paralysis. Political considerations then result in sitting on their hands and the use of the very same failed discourse and failed interventions with no consideration of the fact their efficacy is absent as they are the wrong solutions to the threat posed. In this scenario the evolving threat is not met with evolving interventions that match the nature of the threat. We continue to prescribe anti-biotics for an evolving viral infection where the futility of the response is now feeding the position where as long as you are a young African male shot to death you are a gang member thereby unleashing a racist position that reflects the racist social order of T&T and the politics it drives. The state agencies are all politicised and afflicted with leadership inertia because there are different types of politicisation with different impacts on these agencies and the only persons under the constitution to break this log jam are the politicians. That is the CATCH-22 that drives our reality and the only way to break it is for the electorate to dump the politics of racist hegemony. Pax Mexicana!!!

“Report on Crime Statistics 1996” Central Statistical Office T&T

T&T Crime Statistics: <http://www.ttcrime.com/stats.php>