

## The production of victims as entrepreneurs of their social redemption: young people, control and involvement

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**Abstract** *Drawing on the results of an ethnographic study and group interviews with young people and social project coordinators from favelas in Rio de Janeiro, this article discusses the association between youth and vulnerabilities and its possible consequences for the reinforcement of negative stereotypes of poor young people through discourses that emphasize self-management. It explores the notion of production of victims as entrepreneurs of their social redemption by promoting reflection on the use of the category involved in crime, disseminated in the common sense as a new form of criminal labeling. The article addresses material and symbolic investments in poor young people, beneficiaries of so-called social projects, reflecting on the maneuvers of meanings that veil the temporality of these initiatives, characterized by moralistic overtones of merit and salvation. The fear of dying or “remaining”, of not finding a job, and a series of other fears are the focus of this reflection, which seeks to broaden the debate over institutional initiatives directed at young people.*

**Key words** *Young people, Social projects, Involvement, Social control, Vulnerability*

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## Introduction

The research that gave rise to this article was undertaken in two phases between 2016 and 2017. The first phase consisted of an ethnographic study conducted in two *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro – the Complexo do Alemão and Morro do Falet. In the second phase, individual and group interviews were conducted with young residents and social project coordinators and military police officers and municipal guards working in the favelas Campos, Rio de Janeiro, and Região Metropolitana.

The data collection and systematization process aimed to shed light onto the social construct *involved in crime* considering its various dimensions and maneuvers and, using this key to production of meaning, reveal the narratives of (and about) poor young people in the face of the devices of control they experience in their everyday lives. Thus, this article is dedicated to understanding a specific effect of tutelage – *the production of victims who are entrepreneurs of their social redemption* – by exploring the dialogue between young people and project coordinators.

The category *involved with* consists of a new way of producing generalized and reciprocal suspicion, which seeks to “capture” subjects and their relations by means of a repercussive and verifiable discourse. The evidence results from an intentionally arbitrary causation established between the selective retrieval of the past, the biased recording of the present, and the prophetic prospection of the future of individuals besieged by control mechanisms. Here is the gain: everyone can end up getting tangled up in the web of control from above, below and around, given that the politics of the meaning of involvement lead its virtuality to the ultimate consequences, pointing to what is, was, or will be (sooner or later) involved.

Calculating and counting involvement reveals itself to be like a radar of the maneuvers undertaken by subalternized subjects to try to break down the ever-moving barriers posed by the legal-illegal, formal-informal control devices that they encounter on the path taken in the favela and between the favela and the *asfalto* (literally meaning asphalt, referring to areas of the city outside the favela). They are like exit doors from the trap of being accused of being or remaining *involved with* the current rival of the boys from “the movement”, the “men from the police”, and the militia. They amount to a symbolic sensor that modulates the trajectories of individuals

from the social periphery, guiding their survival strategies in the ups and downs of inequality experienced in the elevators of social mobility.

One effect on the social imaginary of the engineering of involvement is the demand for strict control and regulation mechanisms in its design and application, be they community mechanisms or administered by the state. This reveals a punitive way of looking at individuals, their networks and trajectories, favoring the emergence of liberty-restricting discourses that promote even tougher sanctions accompanied by tolerance of the excessive use of force by the police. Regimes of exception are emulated as expressions of government in the favela territories<sup>1,2</sup>. The latter allow surveillance and correctional practices marked by routine of exceptionality that circumvents the law, finding moral adhesion in the working and middle classes and political support from both liberal and conservative groups.

The ingenuity of the category *involved in* finds fertile ground to mobilize wide scale surveillance and extended control of and among social groups. It contains regulatory regimes that fuel a micro-economy to deal with the perennial accusation of involvement. It comes across in the narratives of the young men and women from the favela as anathema of the territorial condition: “In the *favela* everyone is seen as *involved*”. The burden of this socio-spatial stigma is felt by them as a key dimension in their interactions, affecting their movements around the city, their coming and going to their place of residence and their encounters with the police, militia and crime<sup>3</sup>.

The narratives are explored in the context of social projects targeting young people characterized both as vulnerable, at risk of involvement, and *involved in crime*. These categories give rise to a set of interventions over ways of being young. We highlight certain impasses and challenges brought about by the discourses about these *beneficiaries*. With a sensitive eye and attuned listening, which allows fine tuning with the said, unsaid and miss aid of the reality announced in the exuberance of the utterances, gestures, smells, colors, movements, places and objects that make up the study context and the performance of the interviewees we aimed to understand the day-to-day lives of young people in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and identify recurring trends. This required us to exercise our sociological imagination to bring into play a convergence between concepts, images and figures of speech as a descriptive analytic resource, always

open to reinventing ways of saying in order to understand poor young people on their terms.

The maneuvers and redesigns performed in relation to these youth are blatantly, widely and contradictorily manifested in social projects. These young people are the main beneficiaries (or not) of government actions to address problems such as teenage pregnancy, drug use, violence and crime, and sexually transmitted diseases, which are likely to lead young people down a path towards social exclusion. This all takes place as if these young people were “insurgent” in nature and had a propensity for deviance and transgression, thus needing “brakes” and restraint capable of shaping their development (and in so doing lifting them out of involvement) in a desired orderly and civilizing direction, which disciplines young people’s hearts and minds to reproduce social conventions and accept the exclusionary rules of the market. A pedagogy of obedience is presented as a positive reaction, in the mold of the criminology of social defense, which prevents young people, surrendered to their inevitable youth, from putting their and society’s physical and moral integrity at risk<sup>4</sup>. This approach takes the need for supervised probation, dressed up as an “assisted liberty”, for granted. This ideology brings together certain formulations that favor the negativism or social problem perspective<sup>5</sup> and fuel patterns of intervention that emphasize tutelage.

Widespread since the 1980s, these social projects are implemented in Brazil based on a doctrine that envisages the modernization of society. This ideology is embodied in the Constitution considering two aspects: combating poverty (albeit to create labor and mass consumer market) and sport and leisure as social rights<sup>6</sup>. On the one hand, social projects are mobilized using the discourse “society needs to do something” – or in its individualized form “someone needs to do something about it” – complemented by a critique of the state for its inefficiency or supposed absence. On the other, some social projects are funded by the state through its various levels of government, while others are funded by private foundations or national and international organizations. The main arguments used to raise funds are violence prevention, sex education and human rights, and personal development, which includes “getting them off the streets”, “providing opportunities”, and “resocialization”, whereby the latter assumes there is the need to “civilize the barbarian”, thus reproducing the “violence of assumption”<sup>5</sup>. By focusing on vulnerable groups,

particularly young people from favelas, social projects offer preventive tutelage aimed mainly at shaping the development of young people and in so doing lifting them out of involvement in crime. Tutelage is offered to those who freely choose to participate in the project, inscribing a new *habitus* into these young people: the “young person from the project”<sup>7</sup>. By recognizing their vulnerability, these young people transform themselves into victims of social problems that threaten them and the social order. By becoming a victim and accepting themselves as vulnerable they are provided with a language-passport to a moral ground capable of “positivation”, offering the expectation of a certain degree of visibility, albeit temporary, confined to participation in events promoted by the projects.

These victims emerge within public security, education, sport, leisure, health, and housing policies. The methodological strategies adopted in health and public security actions are built around a conception that views young people’s behavior as risk behavior. Though this perspective is not openly acknowledged, it ends up contributing towards the stigmatization of the youth phase as a problematic stage that requires special attention on behalf of young people themselves, the adults of tomorrow’s society. It is precisely through this ‘voluntary adhesion’ that the dense web of social projects is constructed.

By offering a way out of vulnerability and involvement in crime, through tutelage and the construction of a new *habitus*, social projects disseminate the idea that whether or not the conversion has an effect depends on each young person and their capacity to detach themselves from involvement, thus forming victims who are entrepreneurs of their own development. It therefore falls on each individual to reshape themselves in order to save themselves. The webs and complexity of this non self-evident and non self-explanatory phenomenon - which reflects reified conceptions of world, the deep divisions in Brazil’s cities, and disputes over the modes of production of order, consensus and the socialization of a huge contingent of young people - are unveiled to emptiness of the term ‘social projects’.

### Smile, you deserved it

To break away from the confinement that results from the accusations that produce and reproduce borders, some young people from favelas opt to be part of a “social project”. The acknowledgement of a “social debt” with poor young

people pointed to a significant change accompanied by the expansion of the grammar of control over those subjects identified as exposed to social risk. Before, young people from the social periphery appeared in the government's agenda only as potential criminals or a threat requiring coercive therapies. With the "social redemption" discourse, these young people were reincorporated as at risk and socially "vulnerable" individuals who would have the chance of receiving inclusive therapies.

Under the aegis of the inclusion narrative to reduce inequalities, youth policies should go beyond universal access to formal education to include a set of "reeducational" activities ranging from sport and culture to employment advice and support. In poor areas, it is common among young people, activists, politicians and local media to use the expression "young person from the project" in reference to the adhesion of young people to a new world: that of the *asfalto* in their civilizing mission.

Diverse and differentiated in their styles, objectives and characteristics, social projects become a physical and symbolic refuge used by young people to free themselves from accusations of being involved in crime. They aspire to create means of inclusion in order to unlock the doors of social stratification. They are not just about bringing "community improvement", but, above all, "improving" the *favelados* (favela dwellers), classifying them as being in charge of themselves. With this they attempt to enable upward mobility for some of the hardest workers – the examples of success – and ensure consolidated stagnation for those fully aware that they are not able to move up in the world – those resigned to their fate.

The civilizing expectation of social projects is to contain the machine and demobilize the latent revolt<sup>8</sup> of working class communities. Other indirect modes of control in keeping with the goals of a policy viewed as *empowering* and participatory have been introduced. Young people from the *favelas* now have a voice and opportunity and are able to take charge of a destiny that is granted to them. They become subjects who neither belong to the favela, nor are "outsiders".

Projects are presented as a major opportunity for those capable of creating "hope for a better future", opening a new horizon where pedagogical tutelage is offered in exchange for desired behavior and certificates of good conduct. In a world filled with the rhetoric of absence, social projects are seen as one of the few attractions of

the poverty-oriented policy manufactured for the favelas. This perception is summed up in the phrase "to satisfy a demand of the state":

*The project is an escape, because there are only "drug dens" or churches in the community. I see it as an escape, entertainment. Because in the absence of the state, someone has to do something (security operator).*

Either in opposition to or in alliance with religious denominations<sup>9,10</sup>, the aim is to "compete with drug dealers for each boy and girl", expecting to successfully shape proper, modest, or ambitious citizens. Their appeal lies in the fact that they are a *locus* of "preparation for life" and, in particular, for making new friends free of the traps of suspicion. These spaces provide the opportunity to experience more horizontal learning with greater flexibility in terms of content, teaching methods and capacity to tailor activities to the demands of their clientele, which Gohn<sup>11</sup> calls the field of informal education.

### Life project and the life of the project

Apart from promoting ludic learning, these projects are also perceived by young people as spaces where social capital is produced<sup>11</sup> and where there is access to means and young people learn ways of overcoming the barriers raised by each suspicion of involvement in crime. It is here in the promised world of the project that young people share skills and obtain the "passwords" that enable them to find cracks in the barriers, deal with social challenges, and surpass symbolic and material borders.

Nina, director of a nongovernmental organization, sums up social redemption:

*We have a boy who grew up here and found direction in life. M didn't know how to read, yet after he came here the result at school was surprising. I think dialogue circles are important in the projects. Many come because their family doesn't listen.*

In order to imagine and devise escape routes out of the socioeconomic conditions and favela origins, learn to manage the escape valves for disadvantage, and create or find gaps in the distinctive barriers that appear in their path these young people must reinvent themselves and "become their own sponsors".

It is known that a social project is not a society project, despite being oriented by the latter. In the former, there are concrete places for some, while in the latter there is a worldview that is inclusive for everybody. Soon after enrolling into the world of the project, these young people realize that to

remain in the project they have to show “interest and a lot of will power”. It is necessary to renew their vows of adhesion to a narrative of resilience whose motto is self-investment. It is necessary to acquire a life project through which testimonies are given affirming that these young people are “grabbing the opportunity” to be saved and “doing their bit” precisely because they are “in need”. These young people transform themselves into “entrepreneurs”, using the project as a means, but surrounded by precariousness in the various institutions that govern social life: education, health, security, work. They are victim-entrepreneurs committed to transforming their underlying social needs into an individual abundance of opportunities to progress. There is an obligation to “work out all right”, but in a certain way.

These eligible vulnerable young people are expected to fund their own social redemption, which implies converting, on their own account, the little that is received into much to be made. The recognized social risk is converted into an individual contracted risk. The young people from the project discover the need to take charge of themselves and become stakeholders in their own survival. They are compelled to adhere to and legitimize the actuarial discourse that cuts across the devices of social control. “Self-calculation” is at stake. Like a precocious and intuitive financier, these young entrepreneurs of the self learn to conduct analyses of risk and expectations in relation to their own socioidentity income to determine whether they deserve to receive their self-investment. How much is it worth? How much is it worth to remain in the social project? Smile, your best bet is to invest in yourself! After all, presenting one’s self as an entrepreneur can help you to escape from the fatalistic determinism of *involved in crime*, because it is associated with a new way of being built over other ways and in another guise.

These projects are able to provide a certain degree of security by bringing order to the chaos of these young people’s lives and signaling possibilities. However, this route does not offer absolute guarantees, moratorium or free transit. It is not a passport that frees the young interviewees from the successive reenactment of personal references to compensate stigmatized social references. Being frisked by the shopping mall security guard, background checks for employment, and the embarrassment of police stop and search. The following is a fragment of one of the accounts given by the interviewees about the police “check list”:

*The police think that everyone who does sport in this project is involved in drug trafficking. I was on my way back from church in my suit jacket and they came up to me to ask if I was using drugs. [Boys from the favelas Alemão and Falet]*

Neither the bible, nor the social project or school can save them from the clutches of the control mechanisms, especially police harassment. Avoiding the traps of socio-spatial discrimination depends on several other marks that they must maneuver in the games of appearance, making use of the gestural and spoken performance that is most fitting to each particular interrogation and agent of control. There seems to be a fundamental testimony that must be given at each passage across the border, even when dressed in a suit jacket and carrying a bible or wearing the project’s T-shirt and holding a ball: to show in all ways that the opportunity given by god and the state is deserved, thanking society for their pedagogical tutelage and the renewal of their “in the right direction certificate” by the police at every new stop and search. They must show that upon eating their first fish they have already learned to catch their own, there by turning the dependent victim into the victim-entrepreneur. In short, a victim that produces results.

In a desert of basic institutions, poor young people are called upon and call upon themselves to transform themselves into victims who are entrepreneurs of social rehabilitation. Through their social itineraries, they negotiate the capture and propaganda of the essence of the discourse of redemption through self-sacrifice. An analogous discursive performance of the self-made man that would animate the biographies of great businessmen. All this with an indelicate caveat: the victim-entrepreneur produces him/herself from the meanings of scarcity, which is rebuilt not only from the entry of young people into the market (micro-entrepreneurs and outsourced employees), but also from the precariousness of employment and deficiencies in public security, education and health services.

In order to be entrepreneurial, the young beneficiaries of social projects must move between the precarious conditions of life, experiencing different forms of exile and isolation, navigating in the parallels or out of reach of the incursions of the *caveirão* (literally the “big skull”, a slang term for the armored vehicles used by the military police in favelas). Calculating the comings and goings of the favela is less about wanting to be a passenger of a new social condition and more about managing to remain on a social route

without a specific destination, riddled with obstacles, tolls, and false leads. Being in the project is being alone in a race without support, yet with barriers and border patrol agents.

Political emphasis is given to discourses that value individual behavior in the grammar of resilience over the impact of social structures on the trajectory of individuals. In this calculable and individualistic narrative, it is believed that institutions are by nature positive, working as a compass for individual ambitions or enablers of the neoliberal dream thought of as common to both rich and poor alike. While the categorization of these young people as socially vulnerable brings with it the recognition by society that it is necessary to contribute by “giving a little push”, their identification as victim-entrepreneurs points towards personal accountability -the moral obligation to make it happen. There is a constant search for proof that shows with enough effort “you are capable” and “you can do it”, in order to continue to give meaning to the scarcity experienced, or perhaps desired, in the *favelas*.

*My work has to do with the respect that this young person created for me. It is my life project, to be able to give him the right to be whatever he wants to be. We are managing to show the other side. I always welcome young people involved in drug trafficking if they come with good intentions.*

Vulnerable young people place themselves in an embryonic situation of involvement in crime, presented as a stage prior to becoming the victim-entrepreneur. While on the one hand they are viewed as “in need”, like all those who have the same socioeconomic origin, on the other they are inscribed as “different” human beings who are owed a social debt because they are seen as an investment with an expectation of return. Worthy of a vote of confidence, the young entrepreneurs of their own salvation are perceived based on the extent to which they do justice to the “opportunity” to show their potential. Thus, they deserve credit because they are willing to compete with others in the same situation for the “chance of salvation”. It is within this discursive order that the common expression “the mother is absent and the father is a drug addict. If he stays on the street he’ll become a drug dealer, one of his brothers went that way” emerges. The following words spoken by Nina illustrate the expectation of moral ascendancy:

*I have a mother who asked me to talk to her son. He loves being a drug dealer. He’s 15. His mother thinks he will talk to me. Those who work with the grass roots are marked like you are the solution.*

### Projects, maneuvers and developments

In the world of these young people there is pressure to resist the temptations of consumption that can be fulfilled by getting a position in the crime business. However, there is a risky trade off: being seen to be *involved with* crime, either due to the label given by drug trafficking or from police records. But being young means being able to go to the *baile de favela* (dance party) and amble around with their accessories: sneakers, caps, Smartphones, shorts, straightened hair, chains, and headsets. All designer brands of course. And a little more to be “chilled”: a joint and vodka to animate the trips and parties.

The calculation must be fine tuned with each experienced circumstance, facilitating self-control so as not to change the project T-shirt that makes them stand out in the *favela*. It is necessary to learn self-management so as not to let the ball slip through your hands due the marks of consumption. Self-discipline is the key to self-punishment in face of the danger of ostentatious consumption and becoming yet another victim in “deconstruction” who goes back three spaces on the Monopoly board and, like any banking investment, can lead to low returns or even losses.

The management of self-investments is a vital part of the rationality of the young person from the periphery in order to survive, first and foremost, and “get on in life”. Self-control and self-policing are required to diminish the likelihood of a “killable life” in the *favela*, where there are many nervous hands and easy access to objects that cut, injure, and kill. Those who are able to exercise self-control perform self-discipline and self-policing in relation to expectations projected by other agents of control, discipline, and policing.

The victim-entrepreneur is part of a biographic construction that brings a translocal narrative of the production of control and has strong moral appeal. Its ingenuity lies in simulating the registration of an autonomous subject isolated in an ascetic discipline, released from the other, standing alone and free from the attachments that grant social existence. However, what appears to be an isolated, genuine and renovating conduct is actually a characteristic of neoliberal times.

Without knowing which step of the social ladder they will reach or fall back to, these young people need to show a disposition to mask the latent marks of their origin classified as involved with crime and permeated with various risks.

Like windows whose opening is controlled by different agents, social projects propose new alternatives and produce exchanges that reorient conduct without removing the label of origin. Although they promote circuits of mobility, these do not constitute a space of moratorium for the latent threat of extrajudicial execution. They learn, between practicing sport and culture and between classes and get-togethers, an informal code of conduct that make ways of thinking and acting and ways of dressing and talking available. A project coordinator and former beneficiary reinforces these potentialities:

*Sport allows young people to gain another worldview. Who are the medal winners in Brazil? People from the Program, the government doesn't encourage anybody.*

The social project becomes a place of practices that can shape the development of young people involved in crime thereby lifting them out of involvement both within and outside the favela. Within the favela, the social project distinguishes between these young people, creates provisional safe conduct that serves as a bargaining chip with the “border barons” – the drug lords, police and militia. It reinforces the political capital of local leaders who gain the status of “social politicians” because they make these social projects their life project. Outside, the social project offers greater license for coming and going, above all because it signals adhesion to the civilizing project of the *asfalto*. This was considered one of the most valuable resources by the interviewees because it increases their mobility across the city and access to urban assets.

The young people seek to develop to become discovered, visible and under control, “improve as a person” and expand their horizons and progress in life. These projects serve as a passport that renews the expectations of these young people to be part of life in the city and to redesign their trajectory in their comings and goings. They seek to equip the beneficiaries with knowledge and skills that help them in their integration into the formal city. This translates into being capable of reenacting themselves in another role: that of a “developed being” (and therefore lifted out of involvement in crime) or of a “being in development” through their incorporation into another web of interdependencies outside the *favela*. Competitions in local, national and international taekwondo, jiu-jitsu, football, and artistic gymnastics circuits illustrate the promotion of young people’s personal growth to make them stronger in yet another dispute for a place in the market.

The development of the young person involved in crime so that he/she can experience a “new form of involvement” does not occur without exacting successive evidence of conversion to new patterns of development. These tests of adhesion do not provide any guarantee that the label ‘of origin’ will be permanently discarded, neither do they come with a “social receipt” showing that the new intended status is accepted. Young people involved in crime who have developed are likely to hear “that’s typical of *favela* dwellers” if they happen to slip up, a common expression that relegates them to their social origins.

The new label that the “social entrepreneurs of the self” and the rest of the “young people from the project”<sup>7</sup> seek to produce does not have a flight plan that lends foresee ability to the intended destination. How is it possible to abandon the place of “middle class from the *favela*” for a slightly more comfortable position in the liberal race to a place in the sun if very is little guarantee that of being able to get into university via the *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* (Brazil’s national higher education entrance examination)? The paths of the girl who wants to be chief of police or the boy who wants to be an engineer, biologist or astronaut have a number of obstacles. Thus, they have to abandon their social standing or confine it to certain areas, webs and contexts, without knowing which label they will be using further down the path. The young people from the social project collect various T-shirts. After all, they may come to serve as a “clean background check” to satiate the appetites of the innumerable agents of control.

The paths taken by these young people are neither linear or foreseeable and contain obstacles, interruptions and steps backwards. Sports competitions are abandoned due to lack of equipment and schooling is interrupted because students have to give up studying to find a job. This creates tension, which in turn leads to insecurity in relation to material and symbolic reproduction<sup>12</sup>. While these young people concern themselves with learning new patterns of sociability, they also need to be extremely careful with their own lives. Within reach of the distrust of the merchants of death who fight each other for control over the favela, they need to be vigilant to resist the pressure of immediatism, consumption, and the changing webs of involvement in crime.

One of the main challenges of young people who seek to develop is the race against time to grasp and consolidate opportunities, overcoming

the temporality of social access. They must struggle to inscribe the search for the future within the present in becoming, while in the *vida loka* (crazy life), their antagonists experience time in the intensity of *the now* for the fruition that the moment can offer in face of a precarious and provisional reality. They do not seek to extract the future from their present, but rather allow themselves be led in and by the *dérive*. The former, purposeful, seems to want to fulfill a dramatic saga, with hazards, resignation and resilience, while the latter, excessive, seems to wish to stage a tragic fate, with disarray, excess and fatalism. One or the other of these dramatic or tragic characters is liable to remain or die.

In a reality of constantly moving barriers, tailored to each new doubt of involvement in crime, the distance between salvation and damnation is permeated by the current of the imponderable nature of an unannounced shootout or a stray bullet, even in the more peaceful and favorable world of the social project. Fear of dying and fear of remaining, “resistance to survive”, being alert to the next deviant behavior in the expectation of involvement in crime. Even when fear is not a counselor in the mold of the Leviathan, it is present in the favela, reminding of the risks that can transform a small act into the most consummate facts. Tangible and immediate fears, right there in the routine. The fear of going out and not being able to go back home, of having your house invaded, of not being attended to by the ambulance, of losing the little you have, of having a missing relative, of being labeled an informer, of moving around the favela, and of people from inside and outside the favela. Fears that motivate calculations of how to manage the webs of involvement. Fear of the consequences of the accusatory game: being involved and remaining involved.

A range of styles, ways of being, and producing and reproducing oneself reveal these young people to be a mosaic that is constantly under construction, reshaped and recomposed. The movements between local and global and their mimesis are stamped in the aesthetics and attitudes of the young people from the favelas who “are connected”, as are those from the *asfalto*, to the virtual advertisements of the multiple worlds broadcast through the screens of their Smartphones. The young people of the digital generation experience the angst of being “unplugged”, disconnected from social networks and virtual groups. They experience the anxiety of being “lost” or forgotten and invincible, albeit temporarily.

However, “unemployment” and “violence” are the problems that worry them most and highlight their main fears: “fear of the future” and “fear of dying”. As Novaes asserts<sup>7</sup>, fear of the future is close to “fear of remaining”, of being left out, of being useless in the world of work, while the “fear of dying” refers to the fear of an early death.

The existence of these young people from the favela is often cheapened and made superfluous, be it due to the negligence of economic progress that produces collateral damage, be it due to an intentional waiver of the protection of the law by public agencies that inform that certain subjects are not legitimate targets of social security, or be it due to the sanction of actors in the construction of order who classify certain individuals as unrecoverable. Lives that are discarded due to the failures of public policies and to the changing demands of the market and state security reasons.

The experiences of these young people with work are associated with the circulation and mobility around the city. With the lack of employment opportunities in the favelas, the possibility and will to work takes them to regions far from their place of residence. This circulation, promoted through both formal and informal, introduces these young people to the many cities within the city. They experience new cities with a new landscape and new divides without having totally overcome or classified the old ones. They are introduced to a polycentric city redesigned by the “temples of consumption” whose centers are born in the periphery.

### Final considerations

The invitation to the “you are what you consume party” and promises made by capitalism seem to fuel the fear of remaining and of not being able to consume and thus be a citizen. The young people experience the city as a commodity, which according to Harvey<sup>13</sup> weakens social identities built around work and dynamizes borders and their “posts” of control beyond the employee time clock. This means that the lives of some young people are seen as defective products without the right to recall. Lives that may be in constant liquidation, making the fear of dying prosper. Fears that are unequally distributed among unequal young people. The combination of both fears engenders the perception of a distant future, a past without innocence, and a present oriented by taking charge of one’s self.



The young from the favela Alemão showed themselves to be more resigned to accepting their “lack of future”. They took the fear of dying for granted, valuing the management of this fear and the ability to flirt with the *vida loka* and the *ronca* (drug dealer or militia). This way of maneuvering the fears of remaining or dying highlight the cogs of involvement and their disposition to enjoy the immediatism of the present. The interviewees from the favela Falet on the other hand made a point of showing that they will not surrender to the fear of remaining. They refuse to conform because they are aware of what goes on in the city. They see themselves as being “bold and brash” and through their insolence seek their rights even when far away and when the outcome is uncertain. They refused to accept that their lives are predestined to be tragic or “wasted”. The lesson provided by the project is understood: leave the favela to climb up the reversible steps of the ladder of social mobility. The young people from Falet intend “to be someone to be able to consume”. This implies administrating ways of belonging in their interactions, which combine the affirmation of fidelity to family investment in their pursuit of upward mobility, circumstantial demonstrations of sympathy for drug dealers, and distrust of the police. This way of dealing with the fear of remaining and dying highlights the enactment of development as a way of obtaining resources to believe in the future of the lived present.

One of the dualities inherent in social projects is that they are both an entry door and exit door. The projects provide an entry to the civilizing project of the *asfalto* and the premise of socialization of young people who are seen as dangerous and a way out for young people from the periphery who seek to build a new *habitus* and a new way of being. Entries and exits that reveal their ambition for the symbolic profit of the normality of being developed: the salvation of (few) souls, one of the tasks most valued by the project coordinators.

It can be seen from the discourse of the project coordinators that the pastoral power<sup>14</sup> is exercised by the projects over the young people. The power of doing good, caring for the flock and the stray sheep that remain. This is an underlying characteristic of social projects: to save is to save everyone, but without excluding the sacrifices that reawaken the drama of remaining or the tragedy of dying.

Early violent death among young poor people exposed to the accusation of involvement in crime is one of the most serious social and public health problems in the country, as Minayo has warned<sup>15</sup>. This reflection seeks to contribute to the field of public health by providing a critical insight to inform the formulation of social policies designed to remedy this tragic situation at the periphery of Brazil's cities.

## Collaborations

F Cecchetto, JO Muniz and RA Monteiro, participated equally in the elaboration of this article.

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