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SECTION: ARTICLES

When they cleanse with fire, what becomes of children? Abbreviated lives, brief lives*

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Abstract

This article arises from a study in progress which aims to learn about squats and the struggle for housing by focusing on a specific group of its residents, namely children. Following the fire in the Wilton Paes de Almeida building on May 1, 2018, 200 people, including many children, came to occupy Paissandu Square, in the city of São Paulo. This event imposed itself on the path already taken by the study, becoming part of it and offering itself as a rich opportunity to learn about aspects related to the occupation and production of space, starting with the children who composed it daily, and revealing forms of struggle that consisted of donations and negotiations with the municipal government. To that end, field observations were carried out from May until August 10, 2018, when the last occupants were removed from the square. Being a qualitative study, interviews and talks were conducted involving adults and children. The relationship of girls and boys with the physical space, especially the so-called Praia Urbana (Urban Beach), showed their ability to turn the space into a place of coexistence involving processes of creation, play, conflicts, disputes and constant dialogues, which provides insight into different forms of abbreviation of their lives – comprising not only physical death – in a political project that chooses the lives that, in their precariousness, matter.

Keywords

Struggle for housing – Childhood – Gender – City – Squats.

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Scars remind us that our past is real.
Kader Attia

Figure 1 – News story in the Folha de São Paulo newspaper


FOLHA DE S.PAULO

TRAGÉDIA DOS SEM-TETO

Prédio invadido desaba em incêndio no largo do Paissandu, centro de SP

Bombeiros buscam desaparecidos nos escombros com auxílio de cães farejadores

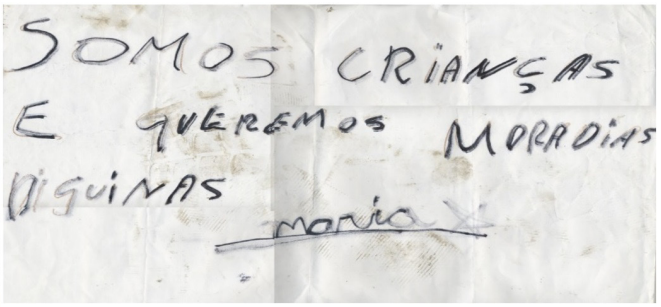
1 / 35 Prédio desaba durante incêndio no largo do Paissandu, centro de SP

Ato em defesa das ocupações tem cerimônia ecumênica próximo ao local em que prédio desabou no centro de São Paulo Marlene Bergamo - 09.mai.18/Folhapress

LEIA MAIS

[Squatted building collapses in fire in Paissandu Square, downtown SP]
Source: FSP 05.01.2018.

Figure 2 – A placard made in the Paissandu Square occupation on a Sunday in May by an eight-year-old girl. Black marker pen on reused paper.



[We are children and we want decent homes – Maria]

Source: research material* collected by Matheus Rodrigues Pesso Salgado

*I would like to thank Matheus Rodrigues Pesso Salgado with whom I shared important moments of this study and who kindly gave me the image of the placard made with children on a day of field work. It is noteworthy that we were in Paissandu Square, sometimes together, sometimes separately, motivated by different research interests. Matheus was conducting a study linked to the PUB, the Unified Scholarship Program, which I coordinated, and the results of which can be accessed in his final report, as well as in an article we will shortly publish.

It became difficult to move untouched through Paissandu Square, in São Paulo, after Worker's Day in 2018. From that date until August 10 the same year, this place was home to families of homeless workers who squatted the once modern Wilton Paes de Almeida building, which burned down on May 1st. Ordinary people, people working in different areas and representatives of politicians sought definitions for the event and presented all sorts of answers, mostly blaming the fire on the squatters and/or social movements for housing and their possible carelessness about the organization of people and the places they lived in.

Soon after seeing the images published on the subject, one question took over my mind: to what extent do the lives of others really matter to us? Amidst the discourses and images that began to circulate, it seemed that important social actors were missing who should give their testimony of the facts: the squatters themselves and, among these, the children who also lived in the burned-down squat and could certainly inform or represent something about what had happened. Interested in childhood and its ways of seeing, dwelling and living in squats, and astonished by the information and images seen and reported by broadcast and print media, I set out to the square with some broad questions

about what had happened, and other questions focused on specific interests regarding children and their lives in squatted buildings and plots in the city.

The images overloading us with information about the events – largely privileging the ruined architecture over the people in a similar condition – summon thoughts and political attitudes which place themselves and us beyond astonishment, and evoke feelings and practices and, even against our will, provoke reflections about bonds sometimes more, sometimes less distant from this population that now occupies, like urban refugees, Paissandu Square, near the Our Lady of Black Men Church, a few meters from the burned-down building.

I intend to encompass this recent event in the city which progressively intertwined with and imposed itself on the course of an ongoing study[2] that aims to learn about children in struggles in a particular squat downtown and in other peripheral ones by collecting the images made by children that somehow evidence everyday life in the squats. A relatively recent social phenomenon, these squats – the way they have been occurring – require investigations by different theoretical fields. Gaps are found especially when we seek to understand them according to the children who are part of them. My goal here is to contribute to the subject of childhood – without excluding babies – in urban contexts, especially in the struggle for housing, based on field research, by treating the occupation in Paissandu Square as a section and a complement of a longer study. For my understanding, within the limits of an article, I explore sociological and philosophical conceptualizations, as well as ethnography as an inspiration for observations during my field work.

The fire in the squat in the Wilton Paes de Almeida Building – located between 33 Antônio de Godoi Street and 10 Rio Branco Avenue –, a building that had been there since the 1960s and was squatted by homeless people, led me to paths I had not considered initially. As we know, the initial questions in a survey provide some guidance, and the foray into the field itself, whether through written documents, imagery or different locations in the city, tells us where to go and indicate routes not always planned. Thus, I set off for Paissandu Square, mostly by foot, in order to understand and become familiar with the surroundings.

One problem arises: people, including babies, begin to gain more visibility as they appear in significant numbers in square's public space. This fact imposes debates about its uses and, moreover, about children who begin to use it frequently, thus rearranging it. New relationships are established in unexpected situations with children of all ages. I am concerned with preventing the risk of forming a condescending eye for the poverty the pervades these children's actions. Mediated by representations that turn childhood into a spectacle, the challenge is to estrange them without failing to observe those actions that imply children's creation processes in these spaces and in adverse conditions.

I consider that writing can also be presented as a way of being on the side those whose speech is denied or unknown. I start from this principle to write this article.

2- The study is funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation, and is titled *Imagens de São Paulo*: *moradia e luta em regiões centrais e periféricas da cidade a partir de representações imagéticas criadas por crianças*, coordinated by me under number 2017/11440-2.

Writings stay between us and mark us, they produce things in the reader, like images in the viewer, and are potentially provocative. In part, the writing on the placard (figure 2) places me on the side of children in the desire/right graphically recorded by a girl during preparations for a demonstration in the square. It is of interest here to question the practice in which children and even adults, depending on the place they occupy, are mere targets of someone's discourses, mostly adults.

From my experience in the field, I sought to observe the production of space by children, agents in the process of struggle – which occurs, even if stealthily or ephemerally – in different ways, between themselves in the games they experience. I ask if it is possible to recognize a certain child logic created between girls and boys of different ages and genders over a process of permanence and struggle for housing. Are children in the struggle process building other ways of claiming social rights and practices that are removed from them? I write about them from observations, dialogues and games in the field, and with them, as their voices and social practices were intertwined with mine, which marked me during and after field work, while I was also a participant witness of the long process of struggle and survival in this space, and thus, they are represented here.

This research used a participant methodological practice (OLIVEIRA; AMARAL; SILVA, 2018) with the several children and adults occupying Paissandu Square, and involved a qualitative fieldwork that supported it. The research period lasted throughout the permanence of occupants in Paissandu Square, in weekly visits, mostly during the day, from May 3 to August 10, 2018.

The fire[3] in the Wilton Paes de Almeida building, squatted by homeless people, adds to those in so many other squats and slums in different areas of the city. This is where the question-title of this article was formulated: When they cleanse with fire,4 what becomes of children? What becomes of their lives? Do they matter to anyone? In the same title, I leave a clue: abbreviated lives. I start from the conviction that lives are not disposable. Or have they been so? I associate children with a concern for lives, not just any children, but those who struggle with their families in places such as squares, plots, streets, buildings and squats for the right to housing, and not only that. As with the adults who accompany them in the struggle, it is inferred here that girls and boys, from an early age, can also become disposable in a process of removal of rights that is occurring rapidly around the world and even more so in Brazil. Their bodies present in these spaces already present themselves as provocateurs of all kinds of reflections and indignation. These are particular ways of conceiving and experiencing childhood, of relating to and establishing political and institutional bonds, affiliation and practices.

In the case approached, all occupants of Paissandu Square were observed, especially the children who stayed there for 101 days, showing themselves and their material and

3- While I wrote this article, other fires happened: on 07/31/2018, houses in the Paraisópolis slum, in São Paulo; July 1, 2018, the slum on Zaki Narchi Avenue also burned down, in the north of São Paulo; dawn of 08/13/2018, a slum on Ibitirama Street, in an expanding upper-class part of the Vila Prudente district, is set on fire, a man is found burned to death. Source: Folha de São Paulo newspaper. It is noteworthy that "fire-cleansing" can take other forms, as on 08/18/2018, when residents of the city of Pacaraima (in the state of Roraima) barbarously set fire to Venezuelan refugee tents and clothing in response to the robbery of a local shop.

4- A reference to the film *Limpam com Fogo* [They Cleanse with Fire], São Paulo, 2016, directed by Conrado Ferrato, Rafael Crespo and César Vieira.

immaterial organization – the latter perceived in their games and customs. They evidenced ways of organization and struggle in which occupying public spaces and making vigils emerge as both form and content that call into question political notions and governments which are contaminated and therefore contested in each group's own way. What is curious and interests us particularly: with girls and boys at various ages. Their bodies settling on the floor, heaping and mingling among tents that popped amidst donations. Their presence challenges us. A nuisance, in an exhibition that looks more like an open wound than a scar. As Butler (2018, p. 17) says:

> From my more limited vantage point, I want to suggest that when bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or in other forms of public space (including virtual ones) they are exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field, and which, in its expressive and signifying function, delivers a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity.

The initial hypothesis is that despite the fleetingness those relationships are woven with, there is a way of appropriating the surroundings and the urban – in the sense given by Lefebvre (2001). An appropriation that can be fed by the gender and age of those who inhabit it, redefining it, or even attributing value and use to objects and social conditions that would otherwise fall into oblivion. Plays, bodies, gestures, smells, questions, tempos, discourses and drawings are practices that reorient themselves in these spaces that are also composed by children and arranged according to the way of being of girls and boys who come to compose them, whether as long-time residents and regulars or not. I affirm the existence of a confrontation between logics of domination when I think of children in urban public spaces. Their bodies, historically regarded as fragile and constantly unprotected, now in the streets, gain and imply other possibilities of comprehension and bring along with their presence a claiming mark. The presence of children as they walk through the parks, dialoguing, in their own way and pace, with those who are there, or merely walking in the streets, indicates possible reflections about collectivity, about the – who knows? – non-capitalist appropriation of space, while being also, in their own way and pace, agents and witnesses of the urban struggle, although still little heard or considered in their specific features.

Although circumscribed to this part of the city of São Paulo, i.e., the central area, the recent events experienced by its residents have a great relevance for thinking more broadly about other squats in the country and about the lives forged in this battle, especially the lives of the children I seek to highlight because, in my view, their presence and the social practices they engender in this context, and in such precarious conditions, emerge as affronts to a city's spatiality whose grammar, by being unknown, insists on pushing them aside. Other interpretations will unfold from these considerations and will certainly come with other scopes and different theoretical approaches. It is known that the history inscribed in space will leave its mark and raise future investigations, which are certainly welcome.

"This is what we look like, like animals, look at the bars"[5] – Arriving at Paissandu Square: in my mind, many questions, in the streets, so much contempt

The urban form gives us a good insight into what we understand by city. When we come in touch with what is material and symbolic in the city, we can see not only its history, but also the relationships that mark and are marked by it. By paying attention, we can realize that the city informs us about disputes between social groups, desires and fantasies expressed in different symbolic aspects present in walls, corners, bodies and gestures of people who pass by or stay around. Elements that can be captured by visual and olfactory perception and make us know whether we are in particular times or places in that same city. (COURBAIN, 1988). These elements, which surround us and are hardly perceived by us, are fundamental to draw attention to the established relationships, the historical transformations, the population that is usually around and the groups that constitute the city. Knowing them and their transformations is useful for us to examine the strategies used for the dominance and imposition of certain interests to the detriment of others, obviously implying the permanence or exclusion of groups and people, including children.

The Wilton Paes de Almeida building was listed in 1992 by the São Paulo State Council for Historical, Cultural and Social Heritage (CONPRESP) and classified by Resolution No. 37/92 as protection level 3, which "corresponds to goods of historical, architectural, landscaping and environmental interest, which determines that its external characteristics be preserved" (MURARO, 2018). In 2015, it was squatted by homeless people. What brought me to the occupation in the square was not mere curiosity raised by local newspapers or the contribution it gave the history of those buildings, but rather a path I outlined in order to reflect about squats and children in this area, particularly in a dispute between groups that have been struggling to appear and claim their rights and others which insisted on repulsing them as invaders, as featured by a newspaper with great circulation (figure 1).

The former squatters of the Wilton Paes de Almeida Building were sheltered in tents around the Our Lady of Black Men Church, which was built in the square in 1906. This church had been built in other areas of the city, then torn down by real-estate developments which pushed away black people, who were not allowed to go to the same churches as whites. At the beginning of the 20th century, the place where it settled and remains to this day guaranteed some invisibility to those who attended it, while providing a stage for cultural and political demonstrations. The square kept some centrality, which then moved towards another axis of economic interests, namely Paulista Avenue and its surroundings, which created behaviors and ways of life, and showed the economic relations which promoted these changes, apart from spatial relations. Not that a territory is actually abandoned so that another one is built, but rather a game of economic, social and political interests materializes by creating centers, other districts and ways of living

5 - This sentence was said by one of the homeless women I interviewed in the occupation.

and relating. Arriving at the square makes different temporalities perceptible. The Black Mother, a sculpture by Júlio Guerra, of 1955, coexists with the Our Lady of Black Men Church, of 1906, and the Urban Beach,[6] bars, hotels and restaurants, and the people who came to live there by occupying the square itself with tents. One can see in detail the times and their imprinting on this space. In layers historically and socially juxtaposed, relationships stablished between different groups over more than a century are expressed.

The once imposing buildings we can see around us and in nearby districts such as Luz, Sé, Barra Funda, Santa Ifigenia and Santa Cecilia give us clues to think about the social and spatial exclusion in São Paulo and the urbanization processes, as Somekh (2013) points out by referring to the diffuse and segregating production of the city, from which derives the deficit of 380,000 homes in São Paulo (SANTIAGO; MURARO, 2018), and, pervaded by other issues, of 7.7 million in Brazil, which ranks country first in inequality in the right to housing. There is a planned neglect that cleverly drives the place and its residents to impoverishment, thus creating in the social imaginary the belief that the emptying it and then allocating it to other groups is the only solution. This is evidenced, among other things, by the process of gentrification in actions taken by managers at the São Paulo municipal administration, especially in the so-called *cracolândia*[7], i.e., gentrification and real-estate speculation go indissociably together in the processes of moving the city center, thus showing complex ways of dealing with them. People stay, others return to claim access to transportation and shops still inexistent in peripheral areas. Expensive rents, closeness to jobs and transportation bring people to the struggle for housing in squats, and children, along with these groups, indirectly carry with them other needs.

Among the disputes found in these spaces of the city, real-estate interests scorch and confer the struggle on life forms of different social groups, including girls and boys, since babies. They are accompanied by family – mostly their mothers – and friends taking part in a strenuous routine in dwellings and streets that are uninviting and unwelcoming to childhood. If only certain lives are worth caring for, what can be said of the exposure of children and their existence, particularly about building quite unstable lives in terms of schooling, family relations and friendships, and culture in their various stages and socialization processes in dwellings and institutions?

In a far-reaching project of extermination of those who are different, particularly the poorest, childhood is also in the firing line. Some men, many women and children are viewed as threats to an alleged local order, and they bear the marks – scars, as Franco-Algerian artist and political activist Kader Attia would say – that show their lives and social backgrounds to everyone who can and want (or refuse) to see them, and childhood does not escape any of this, on the contrary, it integrates it. Children, not just adults, can be seen as *placeless*,[8] those who, without proper housing, are placed or place themselves

6 - The Urban Beach (in Portuguese, *Praia Urbana*) was created during Mayor Fernando Haddad's administration in some locations in central São Paulo in order to attract people seeking leisure, culture and quietness in the urban environment.

7 - A widely used term that deserves questioning, *Cracolândia* (Crackland, Land of Crack Cocaine) implies a homogenizing thought about the area and, what is worse, about those who inhabit it, thus hiding the complexity of relationships found in the area.

8 - I use the definition given by HATENTO, a Spanish laboratory linked to the University of Madrid and others. It is dedicated to studying people who are victims of hate crimes. Placeless people are not viewed as political subjects, they have no fixed place, they are in a kind of statelessness.

anywhere in the city, sometimes squatting empty spaces and buildings, sometimes living in overpasses, bridges, avenues. This derives from the social inequality we are in and against which some do sometimes commit hate crimes in many different ways. In the context of academic research, studies show us girls and boys in urban poverty, especially since the 1980s, such as those of Alvim; Valladares (1988); Del Priore (1999); Freitas (2003) and Freitas (2014). But what can be said about children living in urban squats? The phenomenon has scarcely been studied when it comes to subjects combining childhood, city, struggle for housing and right to the city. Thus, this study aims to add to the previous ones mentioned above.

Being in the field implies an analytical operation that aspires to estranging, contextualizing and identifying existing relationships, and perhaps understanding in between the lines, in what is said or unsaid, and it is also about witnessing changes and relationships engendered in it over time. Early on, not yet familiar with Paissandu Square, I decided to sit on the benches beside the church and sometimes walk around the square. On the second day I was sitting on the bench, one of the residents addressed me with an important question, 'You're not from here, are you?' The question hinted more than curiosity. I was given a mark, the outsider, the one from somewhere else, and I moved away from the resident, who showed respect, curiosity and estrangement. I kept in my body and gestures the signs of one foreign to the place. The way he treated me placed me in the position of belonging to another group. My foray began in this field and with the multifaceted people who occupied it and set the tone of the coexisting differences there.

Walking, taking pictures and observing made up my stay in the field, as well as some conversation with those who passed by: people who seemed familiar with the place, many sex workers, and several men at a flea market[9] next to Urban Beach, and the park where the children played. In Paissandu Square, small camping tents donated by anonymous persons were set up and sheltered around 200 people. Families, single people, women with their children, and several babies – I could not get data on the exact number of children. One could see people fighting for plates of food, for the warm clothing which, upon arrival, were loudly announced by the lady who received donations, the worn fabrics of which metaphorically revealed more about the social conditions of those days than the donation itself of clothing to warm someone up.

Watching games and talking with the children proved to be rich opportunities for contact and bonding. With adults, I chose interviews and informal talk, respecting their limits of time to spare and their disposition to talk about life in the new context and before the fire itself. Sitting on the benches next to the small stages and toys in Paissandu Square and just observing the relationships between all passersby and other agents in this part of the city, as well as walking in nearby streets, provided an important way to understand and be in that space while considering the relationships created or recreated in it. The field notebook was a fundamental resource for daily notes and reflections.

9- This flea market has been there for a long time and involves the buying and selling of second-hand goods and goods of unknown origin.

As I walked around the square, I noticed that in those days it began to behave as a space of appearance, the result of claims that, even silent, claim the rights of children and adults who were there. According to Butler (2018, p. 57):

> [...] that right is supported by regulatory schemes that qualify only certain subjects as eligible to exercise that right. So no matter how "universal" the right to appear claims to be, its universalism is undercut by differential forms of power that qualify who can and cannot appear.

It is a right claimed by the physical presence, gestures and discourses and presented by and with the children in different manifestations, especially in the way they used the Urban Beach park, which they occupied and flooded with their various, and hitherto absent, games. Thus, I affirm that although their concealment, or exclusion from living in decent homes, results from previous decisions by small groups that decide who should or should not be in the public space, their presence leads to perceiving the existence of a certain force which breaks with that determination by entering through a small crack. A manifestation is visible, especially among the children, which changes this daily routine of hardships. It seems to us that physical survival is not the only thing at stake here, but also the right to other forms of living in society, forms in which social exclusion is questioned and ceases to exist, and resonance is found in the collective recovery of urban spaces disputed over by the real estate market. This provides a fundamental point to reflect on social movements, and on children in struggles, shaping themselves and their practices in a peculiar way.

In the occupation's surroundings, one could see the creation and use of spaces not meant for children to be or play in: bar tables become racetracks for plastic cups and toy cars, poorly kept gardens are used to run and sit around, tents and cardboard boxes where someone had slept become hiding places. The fact is that the children are there, making do in different ways, looking for the vital experience of playing in an expression of city experience. When we research children until six years of age, living on the edge (GREGORI, 2000) seems to gain another outline. It is greatly enhanced with games, in abstractions that interrupt daily hardships with toys found in the trash or donated by some passerby, and this is so with boys and girls alike. They unintentionally show us that the right to the city is broader than the right to housing, it is the right to play. It is the "right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habit and inhabit. The right to the oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property)" (LEFEBVRE, 2001, p. 134-135).

Children, and not only children, are expropriated of this right early on, while also building it, claiming it and representing it with their families and other components of the social groups and classes they belong to. The city and housing problems are questioned, but also the experiences of children as their agents. Inhabiting the city, which comprehends appropriation and processes of creation (LEFEBVRE, 2001), implies determining how one wants to inhabit, which can be perceived and elaborated by children when they are understood as subjects and agents. We emphasize that we noticed their presence, voices and demands in assemblies, in the discourses of the women interviewed by me, for

whom the children and their manifestations cannot be disregarded. The children in the occupation of Paissandu Square are not exactly placeless or even homeless. They require another way of understanding them.

The boy's blue drawing on the dirty ground: suspension amidst chaos

One day I was making my way to the Square and when I got to the bus stop that connects downtown to peripheral districts, I spotted this boy who was obviously apart from everything that went on around him. Leaving aside the dispute over food and clothing, the boy was drawing. His eyes fixed and his attention devoted to his creation, his body bent over the ground dirty with spits – so dirty – where, without seeing it, passers-by trod and threw food scraps that found no space in the overflowing trash cans. In broad gestures, the boy was leaving his mark there in blue chalk and marking it in me. The situation at that moment poked one into seeing poiesis where there was chaos and precarious living conditions mingling with the rubble and smoke still rising through the woods and burnt bricks. There was a gesture of lightness in the midst of the tragic turbulence that affected some lives and the life of the city, and that scene led me to suspension.

Traces that denoted another tempo in a dispute with the fast-paced knowledge of what had happened. From there came lines in a blue chalk color commonly used on blackboards. Where did that little bit of chalk come from? Where was that force coming from which the boy expressed, self-involved in his drawing, in conditions that were apparently castrating of any creative act? There is more to a piece of school chalk than we can suppose, especially when one learns to distrust the easiest answers and to question the unlikely, the most resistant. The lines highlighted on the floor showed social practices that would feed my study and the writing of this article, and I followed that line. I sought the children and they also appeared in the making of traces of their existence. If, at first, I was led to consider the boy's undeniable vulnerability, after a while I reflected on the force contained in that action, which, in a way, places him and his condition politically in this space. In other words, if his presence risks being erased, his act inscribes him in the public space, somehow marking those who pass by while the traces remain.

In my view, that piece of chalk kept and sketched different conditions experienced over a short time. It is perhaps situated in the limit between the past, so close, at a school with friends and classmates, and the present in the streets, in a square among strangers, composing new elements in a daily life that is mostly a repetition of hardships which clearly reveal a constant enhancement of contemporary practices and techniques of submission of life to the power of death, as Mbembe (2011) would say. This is expressed by segregating practices that drive away certain unwanted social groups from certain areas in a kind of extermination of their bodies, of their ways of being and acting, and of the memory they might build or leave. In this case, and in those of so many fires, in a process of cleansing with fire, in the constant pursuit of urban "hygiene" as seen throughout the history of this city. Unseemly ways to obliterate the other, the unwanted, the different. And the blue line resists, though easily erasable.

Scars in the City: Fire and Struggle of Children in the Surroundings

If certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense.
Judith Butler

Inquiring about the lives of girls and boys present in this occupied space, obviously without forgetting those in which precarious lives are competing with impoverished ones, motivated this study and the weekly field trips. Which lives matter? (BUTLER, 2015). Which ones are framed in mourning and in full life, or which ones deserve to live and continue? Which ones do we look at and come across as more important than others? Aporophobia adds to all this (CORTINA, 2016). A dangerous phobia that justifies segregating practices based on "hygiene" for cities and people. If xenophobia is characterized by an aversion to the other, to the foreigner, aporophobia brings us one more element to think about and build that other: repugnance to the poor.

Cortina (2016) presents elements to think about the construction of hatred for all those who do not have the means to consume products which are daily offered to them. According to the author, based on European contexts of xenophobia, blacks, indigenous people and people of other nationalities have a better position when they are wealthy, unlike the poor or indigent whose lack of means to consume makes them unwanted. Lacking the position of consumers, they will not leave resources in the countries they go to as migrants, and not as tourists, or even as unemployed, dispossessed people. This interests us when we reflect on people who live in squats and, among these, the poor children who, in the occupation of Paissandu Square, have characteristics that make them homeless, former residents and squatters in the struggle for housing. The very terms "invaders" – used on the front page of a newspaper of the day (Figure 1) – and "invaded areas" indicate how one is to understand the place they occupy or the place that is assigned to them in a process where the poor and their children are pushed to the fringes of a city so as to be made invisible, if possible. However, as they move, they urgently imply the need for structural change in the city. It is a change that needs to be thought of also with children in their subtle forms of struggle.

I consider this reflection fundamental to think about the conditions and relationships imposed on children in this context, for when they accompany their families in the struggle, they can bear the representations intended for the families. They are now homeless, since they are no longer sheltered by the burned-down squat, i.e., they were impelled to occupy the public space of a square due to the non-fulfillment of the right to decent housing that could be granted to adults. They are, moreover, in a constant and distressing process of negotiation with the municipal government to obtain a monthly support of R$ 400.00 for accommodation,[10] which can hardly cover their basic expenses.

The presence of groups of children – made up by former squat dwellers – in large squares or crossing avenues and streets at their different paces causes dislocation and

10- Interestingly, such aid will encompass, by 2020, all the funds for the construction of popular housing in the city of São Paulo (PMSP, 15/05/2018), i.e., the municipal government focuses on providing a fix for the effects of problems and not on solving them structurally.

tension. People pass by aloof from this state of affairs. Their existence appears before us only to the extent that it challenges order by disrupting routines and schedules, by conflicting with a supposedly orderly beauty of the city, or because they bear in their bodies the marks of everything one seeks to be in denial of. Their presence close to other people in Paissandu Square, as they play at Urban Beach, offers itself as walking wounds that remind us of a present-past made of serious inequality and childhood neglect, or rather the childhood experienced by children in poverty.

Children are particularly included among those who are rejected or whose lives are not exactly framed as losses or worthy of mourning (BUTLER, 2015). However, the games in the street, the diapers changed in front of everyone, a breastfeeding time, the act of playing on the swings of Urban Beach, of building sandcastles in a park right in the central district, all this gives another air to the daily strife and contributes to questioning the importance of their presence, a presence that can change the time and space of struggle and of ways of dwelling, even though in such precarious conditions, and introduce other claims in the agenda.

It is of interest to think about and observe those children. Living on a border that is even spatially delimited by the railings that separate them from the street and from passersby, a barrier set up by municipal staff, they are in a kind of confinement that delineates, to some extent, the state in which they live and, even more so, the way we are in terms of the relationships established with each other in the city. Within the railings where the occupation was situated, one of the occupants echoes her friend when I interviewed her on July 3, "We're here like animals, people pass by and look at us from a distance, as in a cage. That's what we're like in here. Like animals." As Butler (2018) would say, these railings work as form of imprisonment of those who claim, in this case, in the public space, the right to housing. And within the railings are the girls and boys who come out to play – conferring another pace on space – to walk around, to go to the nearby facilities of SESC 24 de Maio, to bathe in places pre-established by the government, or in other places they make a deal with when they can afford it. And by simply existing, these children who occupy the square extend their occupation to other spaces, thereby confronting the exclusionary logic and putting their fingers on wounds that will not heal.

I affirm that their presence is capable of provoking in an act of resistance, although unintentional, questions about "social hygiene" policies in force and with always similar clothes that still insist on the construction of the city, exposing a project of society with heavily exclusionary features, which resume similar propositions while changing garments for over a century. These propositions sweep under the rug everything they consider as dirt by excluding, segregating, but never discussing the problems nor listening to those involved. An aggressive treatment predominates that generates even more neglect and aggressiveness, as seen and felt by the occupants of Paissandu Square.

By carefully listening, I could feel the state of abandonment they were in, as well as their disbelief in the social programs proposed to them. This was shown by the words they used during informal talks about the struggle over the chemical toilets, which had been taken off the streets and no longer provided by the municipal administration; by their certainty that solution would not come from politicians but from a well-known Brazilian

TV show host. It is necessary to pay close attention to learn how people are represented in these conditions concerning housing, which are very specific. It seems to me that the representations are anchored in others about those with an idle life, those who are unemployed, and, not being included in the world of consumption and productive work, must be eradicated. This is similar to what Cortina (2016) says about the justifications for programs to exterminate the poor.

Those children are between spaces divided by thin lines of understanding of what they are and for whom their presence and their lives matter. During the time I was in the occupation, I could easily see the older ones walking around and the small ones playing at Urban Beach; seldom was there an adult with them in either situation. There was no clear gender division; more boys were walking and running around the square than girls; girls and boys play together in the sand or alone on motorbikes. While I am sitting on the short park wall, one of the girls calls me to ask if I can release a swing that was rolled up around the swing framework. Immediately, she looks at me and answers her own question: "We can't, right?". I ask her why not, but she just says she would like to swing there, and soon disappears into the railings that separate the inside from the play area. Because it was dusk, I suppose the play could not carry on into the evening, which brought other relationships unwanted for children's eyes. It is curious that the same square that welcomes those children with its toys seems also avoided for fear.

I noticed some cooperative practice among women. The woman who repeatedly calls the children to bathe – one can only wonder where – and another, even more emphatic one who summons them for the afternoon snack sent daily by the municipal social service, play the role of someone who provides some guarantee of care so as to help them coexist more comfortably. This is not about having the mother around, but rather about women who provide some care for all those children who move from place to place, from person to person, circulating among them, both within and outside the railing. The children have bonds with their blood mothers, however, such bonds are loosened, thus giving way to other people who watch over the place and the children. The current idea that "there is only one mother" is displaced, as noted by Claudia Fonseca (1990).

I observed a movement of children which corroborates the models defined by Fonseca (1990): there is not just one family custom "in which children move between the homes of grandparents, godmothers, neighbors and 'true parents'" (FONSECA, 1990, p. 9), but some additional aspects can be seen when we consider the daily life in the square with them. I identified in the account of one of the women, Tatiana, a certain distrust and a deep and justified feeling of discomfort about curious people around who did not introduce themselves and prevented, with inquisitive glances, the privacy of relationships. The occupants expected to be asked permission to enter – a way of establishing the inside and the outside so as to reestablish a conventional public/private model of home/dwelling – as much as they repulsed gazes, questions and pictures, many pictures taken by those who passed by. Passersby would pry, say one or two words, and then resume their path, as I was told by a man and a woman (whose names were not revealed) within the railing during informal conversation.

The railing, an expression of social control over the grownups and children occupying the square did not control everything. A cry coming from within the enclosed area evidenced relationships in that space and inscribed another arrangement on it. I talked to the mother of the two-month-old girl born days after the fire and apparently integrating with the scene without getting any special care from those around her. Her presence had no implications for the group, yet at the same time, by looking into the tent she was in, one could clearly see in that small space a place intended for a baby, with its blankets, clothes and milk powder of a brand specific for babies, the presence of which was used to justify the absence of breastfeeding. The baby's young mother, whom I talked to informally, was also telling her pregnant younger sister about the importance of not breastfeeding. It could cause attachment, and one had to let go in order to avoid suffering later. Unsure of what it meant, it seemed to me that the child would be at risk of contagion of feelings and needs that were impertinent to that way of life. Perhaps in order to continue, life could not be subject to the regular hours and the imposition of certain – questionable – maternal exclusivity, which can sometimes be perverse to a woman's life. This coexisted with the collective forms of care aimed at more children, including the older ones. The future was a regulator of this present practice. Hopes for a better future coexisted with a fatalism packed with an unchangeable burden, which led to practices that promoted detachment and prevented becoming so fond to the point of wanting to be together for a longer period. It seems that detachment should be viewed as the intention to mitigate future suffering for both child and mother in case the latter finds a job, something she mentioned a number of times, thus corroborating expectations for a future better than the present life conditions.

A recreation of the domestic space and a certain domesticity emerge and stick to one's eyes and body. A baby's cry competes for attention with the smell coming from the filthy ground and the chemical toilets which the occupants themselves found and placed there. I bring up this field observation as a theme to think about the presence of codes of privacy and intimacy to the public order (FRANGELLA, 2000) which recreated and presented in their own way, and inside improvised tents, some of the ways of organization we may know in which rooms impose and create relationships by forming the environment of a home, regardless of the rooms' sizes. The internal divisions were made through linen arrangements so that in 1.5 m^2 they improvised a bed and household objects, cosmetics and clothes, all visibly organized as in a house where order derives from the unknown learning of an invented tradition (RIBCZYNSKI, 1996) or from imagination fed by means I ignore but suppose. Maybe magazines seen from a distance at newsstands which teach how to organize a home, or even in a past where life at home still existed. Chairs placed outside several tents gave them a beachy feel, as though on a porch or in a backyard, and allowed cooling off from the heat within the tent. I believe this is due to the long stay in this place, which led the occupants to create what resembled a familiar environment. I found fixed-bodies whose eyes apparently looked into the void. They would seldom take part in looking after or playing with the children, or in more expansive activities; fixed to their chairs, one could see them in their silent, serious (fighting?) gaze. They struggle and experience the city in their own way.

Final Considerations: When They Cleanse with Water Hoses

On August 10, 2018, after negotiations with the municipal government, the 50 occupants who were still in Paissandu Square were removed. They went to municipal shelters to which others had been taken. Municipal staff washed the site with water hoses, in an apparently veiled attempt to leave no trace of the past.

Over the 101 days of occupation in the square, during and after my visits, I observed its progression as an injury to the city, and, after they left, as a deep, invisible scar from the stay of a group of 200 occupants, including many children, whose presence was a provocation to the local order, while showing the social and political chaos we are in. It revealed the political character of the act of occupying. The relevance the children achieved in the square by occupying it in their own way and with adults, added elements to the observations, leading us to reflect on the existence of different modes of circulation, appropriation and production of space by and with girls and boys, which occurred: through negotiations between them and adults; through the way they used Urban Beach as a space for socialization and fun, but also through the small requests and disputes between the many children during their feeding times; through their disguises to avoid bath time; through their apparent fear of using the swing, often rolled up around its framework, making it impossible to play on it and encouraging someone else's collaboration; the fear of being with strangers and the constant return to the area within the railing, as if it provided as a world apart, a form of isolation and protection.

A point to be highlighted is that the presence of children in and around the square prompts ideas and learning about childhood involving ways of being in and seeing the world, by relating to people or showing different ways of organizing time and space. Seen from afar in the occupation, their bodies, marked by their stories, emerge to break and compose routines. Their presence in toys and the way they defined their games, the rules they should or should not abide by, their negotiations to stay around the sex workers and the men in the flea market, denoted particular ways of designing and creating the place they were living in as they occupied the space and produced it in their relationships with other children. Thus, the rich possibilities for upbringing in adverse conditions are mixed with the extreme poverty imposed in different ways, in how older brothers had to use their time to watch for hazards, in the search for food, in the cleaning of the tents, in coexistence in such an unhealthy place.

Memories remain from the rubble and circulate in the hygienized space that wants to return to the routine of a square in downtown São Paulo, where soon another building may be built. However, resuming the words of Kader Attia in the epigraph to this article, "Scars remind us that our past is real" and indelibly mark even the children who, despite their extreme poverty, draw another city in chalk.

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