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Sociability in crime

Culture, form of life or ethos?

Alba Zaluar

Abstract

This article discusses how primary social bonds, which constitute sociability, or the lifeworld, or day-to-day experience of what is taken for granted, are influenced, dominated or even colonized by economic and politico-institutional systems. It focuses on how the theory of transnational network-organized crime is important to understand the lives of the poorest young inhabitants of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. It explores the politico-economic associations and cultural interpenetrations between professionalized crime and local politics; the connections between illegal and legal commerce, the transitions between deviance and the conventional world; the links between the economic system, with the power structure that accompanies illicit activity, and the lifeworld of small vendors, their families and neighbours.

Keywords: reciprocity, sociability lifeworld, poor youth, favela, organized crime, violent socialization, dilemma of dispositions

Resumo

Este artigo discute como os laços sociais primários constituídos na sociabilidade ou no mundo da vida – o mundo da experiência cotidiana que faz parte do que é natural e esperável – pode ser dominado ou mesmo colonizado por sistemas econômicos e político-institucionais. Focaliza a importância da teoria do crime organizado em redes transnacionais para compreender os atos ou disposições para a guerra exibidos por jovens pobres e vulneráveis que vivem nas favelas do Rio de Janeiro. Explora as associações político-econômicas e as interpenetrações culturais entre a política local e o crime profissionalizado; as conexões dos empreendimentos ilegais com os legais, as passagens entre os desvios e o mundo convencional; as conexões entre

o sistema econômico do tráfico, com a estrutura de poder resultante de atividade ilícita, e o mundo da vida dos pequenos vendedores de drogas, suas famílias e seus vizinhos.

Palavras-chave: reciprocidade, sociabilidade, mundo da vida, jovem pobre, favela, crime organizado, socialização violenta, dilema de disposições

Sociability in crime

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One of postmodern anthropology's most important assertions is that the ethnographic narrative not only represents the object/subject of study, it constitutes it: the ethnographic authority embedded in the claims of "I was there," "I observed there," "I wrote here" instils the idea of the narrative as a true account of the object (Gupta & Ferguson 1999). Scholars, with their agreements and divergences, many of them stemming from a resolute adherence to one major theory or other, become supporting references on specific topics for those discussing social issues at a political level. This is especially the case with those questions that stir public opinion by impinging on the rights or morality of the country's population. As in any other dialogue, social scientists have never reached any consensus and the hiatus has kept the debate alive, though the political ideology of participants may not always be made explicit.

Other important debates in the globalized world, driven by the speed of network communication enabled by the Internet and the predominance of neoliberalism and financial capital, centre on utilitarianism and the issue of open and transnational social networks. In the controversy over the market's economic rationalism or utilitarianism, the founders of the *Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales* (MAUSS) emphasized how social links are created between people or groups through the three moments of the gift (giving, accepting, reciprocating), through the free obligation to reciprocate the accepted gift (Caillé 2000, Godbout 1998). This, they argue, is the social bond that has accompanied human beings from their primordial beginnings to the contemporary world, constituting what Simmel called 'sociability'¹ or play-form, where what matters is interaction – conversation, kindness and

¹ In this text, like the majority of authors, I shall follow the concept of sociability defined by Simmel as a form of association, also called a play-form, in which the individual's evaluation should not be expressed so that the interaction remains without motives, ends or interests. Hence the expression violent sociability is a contradiction in terms, since violence is a means to an end – material, political or symbolic – and is thus more adequate to the form of association labelled conflict.

the gift that accompanies them (Simmel 1971). Other authors like Habermas speak of the 'lifeworld,' the day-to-day experience that is taken for granted or considered a natural part of the world. Simmel differentiates sociability from other kinds of interaction (economic exchange, domination, conflict) by its lack of any attempt to obtain commercial gain or power. Here it is the interaction itself that matters.² These social forms unfold in the domain of the implicit, the moral taken as natural. We are dealing, then, with a sociology of social networks, constitutive of societies from the archaic to the post-industrial, but also a sociology of practical action, since the gift and sociability do not form part of the written norm. The theory of reciprocity and sociability is therefore a sociology of basic morality – not always conscious – of human relations learnt over the long process of socialization, either through verbal communication or through the direct observation of personal interactions. It is life, not a system (Ricoeur 1976), it is the world of common, primary, everyday experience (Arendt 1958).

However we still need to understand how economic and politico-institutional systems influence, dominate and eventually colonize these social spaces (Habermas 1991; Domingues 2013). The rising violence in various cities, for example, has made the theory of transnational network-organized crime increasingly important to our understanding of the lives of young people, especially the poorest among them. Many sociologists have studied the diverse ways in which illegal business activity is organized among impoverished youths. Such activities were, in fact, already present in the first decades of the twentieth century, including the prohibition era with its ban on alcohol sales in the United States, documented particularly in the urban areas studied by the Chicago School. Various sociologists have signalled the profound politico-economic associations and cultural interpenetrations between professionalized crime, local clientelist politics and uncontrolled capitalism. In other words, the connections between illegal and legal commerce, the transitions between deviance and the conventional world (Hannerz 1996; Matza 1969; Samuel 1981), the links between the economic system, with the power structure that accompanies illicit activity, and

² "Sociability is then a play-form of association... Since in its pure form has no ulterior end, no content, and no result outside itself, it is oriented completely about personalities. Since nothing but the impulse to sociability ... is to be gained, the process remains ... strictly limited to its personal bearers, the personal traits of amiability, breeding, cordiality..." (Simmel 1971: 130-1).

the lifeworld of small vendors, their families and neighbours, regulate both chance encounters and long-term sociability between these social actors. This is the dimension explored here.

As I have explored elsewhere, understanding the politico-economic system involved in organizing this kind of illegal business activity means keeping in mind the background context of the war against drugs, launched at the end of the 1970s. This policy coincided with the increase in violence across almost the entire American continent, which created the same paradoxical scenario of a commodity desired by many being banned. Despite the policies designed to repress the use and commercialization of these now illegal substances, lethal forms of violence broke out, a phenomenon linked by diverse authors to the growth of mafias or criminal business networks. New politico-economic configurations also appeared along with the latter. Among the banned drugs, cocaine in particular was commercialized through a highly lucrative market associated with a violent style of trafficking, imbued with the values of the financial market in general, ever appreciative of easy money, and colonized by the system of despotic power acquired in the conquest of territories, even inside the cities. In Central and South America, the illicit trade deeply affected political and social life across vast rural and urban spaces (Salama 1993, Schiray 1994, Thoumi 1994). The need to ensure that illegal activity remains clandestine invades and colonizes the lifeworld, demanding complete secrecy and absolute loyalty to the 'firm' and its bosses, ultimately punishing by death the failure to stick to those rules that are enforced as essential to survival of the business and its underlying power structure.

As usual, whenever police action is guided by stereotyped imagery of criminals, little or no investigation has been undertaken to discover and dismantle the closely intertwined drug and arms trafficking networks, or the other mafias who control commerce in illegal ways even when the goods themselves are legal. These networks cross class barriers, urban perimeters, states and national borders, infiltrating legal business, state institutions and governments. The close links between the State and illegal drug trafficking have been present from the outset, and they are regularly discussed by scholars. But these links mean there is insufficient information available to reconstruct the dynamics and flows of the various types of organized crime, including the illegal drug trade, which attracts so many vulnerable young people in more disadvantaged areas of the country. It also remains difficult,

therefore, to research major crime in Brazil since the biggest criminals are seldom investigated or registered, much less tried and convicted.

Scholars broadly agree that the everyday practices of poor young people situated at the end points of the organized crime networks in Brazil have their own specificity (Zaluar 1985, 1994, Misse 1995, Machado da Silva 2000, Feltran 2010, Grillo 2013). However the terms employed – warrior ethos, violent sociability, political commodities, form of life, consensus, world of crime – have provoked theoretical divergences, not always made explicit, that merit analysis. Is its specificity as a form of sociability due to its violence, or a type of power in the market, or a lifeworld, or is it a hybrid of local lifeworlds colonized by the market and by the power structure typical of illegal and secret enterprises?

We can begin by observing that these terms have different theoretical statuses, some originating exclusively from the everyday words used by offenders, others from more or less clearly defined theoretical frameworks. The term crime, used in diverse contexts, including the quotidian life of offenders, can undoubtedly be traced to the Brazilian Penal Code and constitutes a formal legal category, not an analytical one. When considered as something other than an ‘analytic category,’ though, the word crime refers to a classification of conduct that prompts (or is supposed to prompt) state repression and moral censure by citizens. Moreover, it highlights the crux of the relation between the market, institutions and social life.

Any expression, description or interpretation of the specific morality of groups living outside the law in Brazil must begin by observing that the morality involved is specific to the underground organization and that it operates in interaction or tension with the morality of residents in their neighbourhoods, and in conflict with the juridical-institutional apparatus of the Brazilian state. Put otherwise, this particular morality derives from the system of secret or outlawed societies, the morality of popular sectors and the morality of what, because of their illegal activities, is permeated by the legal system, which identifies and stigmatizes them as ‘criminals.’ In the everyday interactions that inform their practices, habitus or ethos, we find an overlapping of different kinds of rules and values of reciprocity in their families, neighbourhoods and social class, as well as the rules and values of the market governed by power relations, modified by the systemic requirements of complete adherence and loyalty to the factions and their leaders (Zaluar 2004).

There is also the problem of investigating which laws serve citizens, whatever their social class, and are thus legitimized, authenticated and accepted as fundamental for protecting the public interest in a democratic state based on the rule of law. This problem vanishes only when we set out from the premises of radical criminology theory, which states that the legal-penal apparatus – and thus all the criminal laws defining what is a crime – is created to protect the interests of the dominant class (Chambliss & Mankoff 1976).

According to the theory of the democratic state based on the rule of law, when acts are defined as transgressions but these concerns how a person lives without physically or personally harming anyone else (like prostitution, homosexuality, the use of illicit drugs and even their commercialization), the legitimacy and morality of the criminal imputation continues to be questioned, remaining within the political field of the dispute over the action's meaning. Excluding just wars – i.e. wars that are morally sanctioned – the same does not apply to those actions that cause personal, mental or physical harm to others, including the eventual loss of life of the victim in the perpetrator's action, as in the case of common crimes of theft, aggression and murder, especially when the assailant's use of force or arms leaves the victim defenceless and without freedom of response: that is, when it is qualified as cowardice. In Rio de Janeiro's favelas, it is not those who sell drugs who are morally condemned but the armed 'cowards' who impose their will on unarmed people in any situation and sometimes kill them (Zaluar 2004). In this case, the moral repulsion over transgressions is socially shared, legitimizing the demand for its perpetrators to be punished. Crime then becomes a common sense category and acquires another semantic field, one that is neither always internally coherent, even less consistent with the Penal Code. This does not prevent the work of moral justification, never completed, from being undertaken even by those who commit robbery and murder.

Any smaller or primitive grouping, villages, tribes, kinship groups, voluntary associations, non-state organizations, i.e. without a state structure or dominant class, has norms concerning serious transgressions to rules and expectations that are not fulfilled in interactions. Non-literate societies, like the Barotse and the Nuer studied by Max Gluckman and Evans Pritchard, had legal provisions to judge, mediate and set punishments for transgressions of the values and practices deemed important, especially in cases where the transgressive action caused harm to someone else. In these studies, the

translations of native terms reveal their proximity to the idea of crime, since they provoke mediations, judgments and retributions, even in the absence of a separate justice system functioning as an autonomous field. The factions of dealers and thieves have their own normative codes of conduct or *laws* and procedures for judging offenders, mimicking procedures of the state legal system. The question therefore becomes: to what point does radical cultural relativism allow us to consider all these codes to be acceptable not only to members of the groups, but also to those interacting with them on an everyday basis? Can a code of prescribed and written norms be considered an autonomous, consensual and single culture whose ontology can be understood?

These kind of theoretical questions posed by Anthropology have become even more complex today when cultures have ceased to exist in isolation, transformed into marbles that collide with each other continually. Contemporary cultures can no longer be studied as collectively shared universes of meanings, radically different or impermeable to others. Instead, Marcus and Fischer argue, cultures are no more than fictions, constructed by anthropologists rather than lived by natives in their encounters with the former. The ethnographic narrative creates more than it narrates these supposedly distinct, coherent and holistically comprehensible analytic objects. But cultures today are fragmented, lacking borders or any essential, immutable essence. The difference would be something akin to an ethnographic fiction (Marcus 1995; Fischer 2011; Clifford 1988), prompting another author to speak of an ethnography without the *ethno* (Appadurai 1991), a modality that has not only become possible but also necessary, especially in urban areas of the planet. We can no longer study cultures as distinct entities, as unique systems of meanings, practices and values: they have become hybrid, interconnected and without predefined physical borders, worlds that interpenetrate. The global forms of rapid and constant connection render the isolation of cultural units impossible and create the polyphony that, though always present, has changed the cultural dynamic into multiple reconfigurations. Cultures have always changed: now, though, they change more quickly than ever.

The transformation caused by globalization has diverse consequences for the association between place and culture, difference and identity. Anthropological theory has shifted away from the idea of totality to explore the relations between culture, place and power. Knowledge has ceased to be

considered merely local. Cultural difference is increasingly de-territorialized by the fluxes of migrations and transnational cultures in the post-industrial, post-colonial world. Ulf Hannerz and Arjun Appadurai even speak of an *ecumene* that is hybrid and creolized, just as Brazilian cultures have been considered since the first half of the twentieth century. A culture (or ethnic group or nation) may still become territorialized as a complex and contingent outcome of an ongoing historical process that still needs to be understood. Elsewhere, we might be faced by several kinds of ethos, habitus and social practices consigned to history in the rush of cultural change.

Hence the recourse of isolating and treating as a distinct culture the codes and social practices of those opting to engage in criminalizable actions and embarking on a criminal career, transgressing wider codes in the process, becomes merely a surgical device. In fact there are many points in common with systems external to where these young people live: acquiring power through arms, recognition or 'consideration' between peers, belonging to a group assembled in absolute secrecy and loyalty, and making easy money. If, as various studies have shown, juvenile delinquency is circumstantial, intermittent, transient and spread more or less evenly across all social classes (Matza 1969, Jankowski 1991), how can it be considered the 'culture' of just one group – drug traffickers – living in those areas inhabited by poorer workers, whether the latter are odd-jobbers, workers with formal contracts, or temporary workers? Drug dealers have families, neighbours and school colleagues; they frequent diverse social, leisure or religious groups that comprise the local sociocultural context. At the very least, we are dealing with a habitus or ethos, still with a relatively short history, linked to a ban imposed by powerful nations that transformed something accepted by many into a crime, generating a warrior ethos in response to the violent repression used in the war on drugs and the hunting down of traffickers.

Can we ignore the fact, for example, that when identifying someone as a criminal, the constant reference point is the state penal code and the moral evaluation of the people with whom they interact everyday in their neighbourhood, at school, in diverse kinds of associations and public spaces? Egos are constructed through numerous social relations in which each one becomes involved and individualized in the process (Burkitt 2008). Criminal subjection, a concept created by Michel Misse to name what Goffman called stigma, is inevitable though variable: criminals possess some awareness

that their actions are subject to the moral evaluation of common people and condemned by the state penal system, however 'revolted' they may appear, depending on their age and sex. This identity cannot be treated in isolation from the wider context. Even if national societies lack an established core set of values and beliefs that affect all the country's inhabitants, whether to be followed or transgressed, there will still be diverse wider forms of consensus concerning the type of actions that violate the rights of others.

Bourdieu and Elias (Bourdieu 1972, 1992; Elias 1998) both provided a theoretical model for exploring questions relating to male honour involved in wars between gangs, conceived as a habitus or ethos. The practical matrix – as a system of dispositions, values, and expectations acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life – leads men to make certain strategic choices to maximize their potential symbolic capital in response to the challenges they face. Nevertheless, this matrix is part of a plural lifeworld of the studied groups. In the case of drug traffickers in favelas, there was a clear disagreement over male morality in regards to obtaining an income – through work or easy money obtained in crime – and concerning the courage involved in clashes between unequal rivals where some had firearms and others did not. The revolver, a phallic symbol and instrument of violence, despite its association with virility, especially among youths, was seen negatively by mature and unarmed workers as a sign of cowardice and the mark of someone 'brainwashed' and 'manipulated,' lacking their own free will. Thus workers outside the world of crime did not value challenges and plots vital to the strategy of asserting virility. Instead of a system of dispositions, there was a dilemma of dispositions: to kill or to work (Zaluar 1997, 2004). Indeed even drug traffickers, dealing permanently and daily with illegal drugs, differentiate themselves from the 'slackers' who do nothing but rob occasionally. This is one more indication that moralities intermingle, just like cultures, languages and discourses. We therefore need to work with inter-textuality, inter-culturality and inter-morality: we cannot treat this context as a tribal culture or an independent form of life.

It is important to examine the multiple meanings of crime because any moral condemnation by poor workers of some criminal activities – albeit not all of them, nor with the same intensity – implies that the informal social control of such activities is present in intragenerational and intergenerational social relations. The world of work / world of crime dichotomy, ambiguous

and complex, continues to operate since socialization takes place between people from different generations and between those of the same age. Children and young people are socialized within the family, at school, as well as in religious, sporting and cultural groups. If they receive little attention and care from these agencies of socialization, however, they will primarily learn the violent social practices found predominantly on the street. In this case it is more appropriate to speak of violent socialization rather than a violent sociability, since trust, loyalty and reciprocity – the foundations of sociability – are only loosely present in the interaction between young people from drug gangs because of the systemic demands that colonize their social life.

Based on my own close monitoring of the transformations in drug trafficking using oral history techniques, I can state that the criminal factions formed in prison began to dominate trafficking from the mid 1980s onwards (Zaluar 1997, 2004). The habitus that they developed for their everyday activities, including the capacity for communication, cooperation and trust essential to any collective activity, cannot be realistically considered an entity separate from or opposed to the everyday activities of their neighbours. Its intermittent and interim nature is determined by the age of the participants, many of whom leave the world of crime as they mature (Pereira 2008), although the habitus or forms of association remain.

In such areas, intergenerational relations socialize children and young people, but sometimes fail to contain their impulsiveness, their engagement in risky or unconventional practices, their aggressiveness, and the importance that peer groups assume in identity formation. This identity process initiates precisely during the adolescence of human life (Wexler 2006). Such observations led to theories that explore ‘collective efficacy’ in the ecological approach to crime (Beato Filho, Alves & Tavares 2005) or criticize it (Zaluar & Ribeiro 2009). New discoveries in the area of neuroscience also show that adolescence is the period when the human brain is the most flexible and has its highest capacity for learning (Crone & Dahl 2012), as well as the desire to change the status quo.

Thus a huge divergence exists between interpretations that ignore or deny the forms of life, moralities or ethos predominant among poor workers in some neighbourhoods, opposing the sociability prevailing among some poor or favela-dwelling people either to bourgeois ideology – as a violent sociability – or to a conventional and formal kind of sociability found in

other parts of the city (Machado da Silva 2000). Misse (1995) suggests a dichotomy between the crimes of the rich and the crimes of the poor, arguing for the “association of a certain kind of criminality with ways of exerting power among the ‘marginalized’ subaltern classes,” as though it were not a development of recent history. Misse and Machado da Silva both appear to reject any notion of ongoing deep internal divisions within the urban proletariat (or within popular classes) in relation to morality and the forms of exerting power, emphasizing how the predominant mode takes shape among residents of such spaces, which comes to constitute the prevailing ethos among members of drug trafficking factions ruled by the violence demanded from outside by an organized crime system.

In using this hybrid concept, we can take Machado da Silva to assert that violent sociability is an autonomous culture in relation to what he calls the state organization or conventional organization of everyday activities, arguing that transgressors neither violate nor rebel against the latter since it does not form a significant element in their practices. He goes on to assert that violent sociability and conventional sociability are not in conflict, but coexist in the face of the inevitability of the former, already pervasive in the quotidian activities of the poor urban population. Hence it would be inappropriate to use the category ‘crime’ to describe, much less understand, what is ‘commonly’ called urban violence:

...as a category of understanding and reference to models of conduct, urban violence is at the centre of a discursive formation that expresses a form of life constituted by the use of force as an organizing principle of the social relations. [...] The dominant perspective defines the agents that threaten the public order through the legal-formal characteristics of their activities as criminals (that is, as practitioners of certain categories of criminal offences that constitute common violent crime). As a consequence, the conducts in question come to be comprehended in terms of the violated rules themselves, rather than in terms of the meaning constructed by the criminals for their practices. (Machado da Silva 2000: 54-59)

In personal conversation, the author explained to me that the term is deliberately hybrid since it aims to take into account what I understood as the inverse of Simmel’s concept of sociability in which interaction occurs without any instrumentality, that is, without any objective beyond

the interaction itself. In the case of violent sociation, the kind of violence employed without limits, without a specific target and without ulterior objectives amounts to what Hannah Arendt called violence for violence's sake, whose main protagonist is not the dealer but the '*bicho solto*'³ (uncaged animal) who acts alone, unconstrained by rules or morality. The use of the term is ambitious: it involves shifting beyond the three paradigms of the social sciences – holistic, individualist and relational (Caillé 2000, Elias 1970) – to a paradigm constructed through a form of sociation averse to any commitment, obligation or morality, which in fact also exists among traffickers and other forms of criminal association based on secrecy, loyalty and revenge, from which the '*bicho solto*' is excluded (Zaluar, 2004).

Misse, analysing the modes of exerting power supposedly typical of the subaltern classes, suggests that it amounts to an autonomous culture, a mark of social class, which resolutely ignores the legal/illegal opposition. His arguments equally suggest the blurring of the informal and the illegal, imputing to the popular classes the incapacity to make any moral distinction between informal and criminal practices such as murder and mugging.

The general indifference to tax regulations and commercial law (hundreds of small unlicensed bars, all kinds of different illegal informal work, the connection between the network of street vendors, contraband and theft, the fairs of stolen objects regularly held in Caxias, Acari, etc. [...] the semi-legal scrap metal merchants, the freight industry, gold sellers, gambling, drug dens, unlicensed taxis, the law-breaking patrons of samba schools, etc.): does this not all appear to be structurally connected to certain types of criminal practice, precisely those that provoke the greatest moral reaction? And likewise is this not all structurally connected to the so-called marginal populations, to their ways of exerting power in a context of subalternity, strong social hierarchization, the complete lack of money, and the effective absence of citizenship? (Misse 1995: 17)

Indeed, the two authors adhere to the critical theory that rejects the existence of crime as the leitmotif for understanding the issues relating to the abusive and cowardly use of violence, as well as activities that do not

3 One of the terms used to designate young people who 'barbarize' more: that is, the person who acts out of control without following local rules of sociability, without respecting anything or anyone, is precisely a *bicho solto*, a 'wild animal' or a 'loose animal'

constitute crimes, such as deregulation and informality, which, indeed, are not morally condemned by residents of the districts and favelas where the poor live. Cowardice is indeed a category used more often than crime to represent acts that force the submission of a weaker or unarmed person to a thug or a policeman.

Neither author considers the segmentations within these areas, nor the differences separating generations in terms of their interest in 'work,' another native category, or the differences between the transgressive actions that partially deconstruct the world of crime/world of work dichotomy. Still less do they consider the differences between the conceptions of masculinity among migrants from the Brazilian Northeast, based on the native category of the 'male subject' (*sujeito homem*), one which was developed in Rio de Janeiro's favelas, making it part of local culture (Zaluar 1998). The male subject covers a semantic field spanning from the ability to protect his wife, his football team and his local neighbourhood to his willingness to "never lose face" or be publicly humiliated, however small the slight. The latter meaning became widespread among youths with 'attitude,' that is, rebellious and armed, and their response to challenges that often become lethal due to the easy availability of firearms. The spectacular increase in homicide rates over recent decades attests to this fact.

In delimiting this new type of sociability as a 'mode of exerting power' or 'ethos,' are we not giving different names to phenomena that overlap considerably at empirical level? Violent sociability could be translated as violence for violence's sake; criminal subjection as stigma; political commodity as extortion; the social accumulation of violence as moral panic. Don't the semantic fields of the concepts of 'warrior ethos,' 'hyper-masculinity,' 'violent sociability,' and even that of 'political commodities,' despite their different theoretical contexts, also overlap empirically, given that they all refer to social practices that change a person's form of thought, feeling and action, recognizing the subjective dimension of the young men involved in the webs of illegal drug trafficking in Brazil, making them act in increasingly brutal form, insensitive to the other's suffering? All these concepts point to the dimension of power, or the search for absolute dominance over the other, as the basic motivation and objective of such practices.

But there is a paradox here. The existence of a complex symbolic web capable of generating a sense of belonging, solidarity and communication

between young drug dealers would seem to assure their form of life. Yet the persistence of this community is based on war and violence, implying a loss of material goods, the freedom to act and even ultimately their lives and those of their rivals. Indeed it is the failure of belonging, solidarity and communication that leads to the emergence of the instrumental action of agents who pursue only their own interests and use any means to impose their power over others (Habermas 1991), rescinding amicable sociability and the gift. A question arises, therefore: to what extent are the organized groups of those who live from crime and the need to take revenge based and reproduced through sociability and communication?

The concepts mentioned above relate – albeit not always explicitly – both to the codes of good manners governing the relations between individuals and groups in ‘informal’ or ‘marginalized’ areas of the city, and to personal psychic configurations: in other words, the way of controlling one’s emotions and relating to oneself (Elias 1998). In short, exploring the phenomena of crime and violence through local social relations also highlights the need to include the dimension of sociable sociability in any attempt to reach solutions. The difference resides in the scope, the negativity and the supposed irreversibility of this sociability. By taking a circumstantial and contingent ethos as a transcendental culture of crystallized tradition, we are left unable to contemplate how its transformation can be a means to reduce the extremely high homicide rate among young people – a desire of many residents, including a significant proportion of young people themselves.

Recently, some researchers have gone further and explored the practices adopted by drug gangs as an independent culture that, conceived in almost sacred isolation, possessed the same characteristics that functionalists once attributed to tribal cultures: consensus, indivisible solidarity, the unshakable belief of group members in the figure of the chief. The debate on violence in the trafficking of illegal drugs in Brazil emerges in an unexpected manner, therefore, in the terms used to describe and analyse those who opt to make money in long-term systemized activities like drug trafficking.

Based principally on her time spent with women who accompanied her to funk balls (*bailes funk*), one author declares that the *firma* (or *boca de fumo*, the drug selling point) is a gift system rather than a commercial enterprise, a spiritual entity rather than a power structure (Grillo 2013). The divergence shifted, then, to refer equally to the conceptualization of culture as a system

of clearly distinct and internalized meanings whereby the *firma* could receive the same treatment given to tribal and traditional cultures, involving all levels of social life, including the spiritual and transcendent. Can the world of crime be considered a culture radically different to other cultures with its own holistic logic? If so, it would be impossible to conceptualize the intermixing, juxtaposition and mimesis that occur between such proximate modes of acting and thinking. Moreover culture understood in its own terms moves in the direction reverse to ethnocentrism, as it romanticizes a conception of internally consensual and solidary pre-industrial communities, denying the existence of the international organized crime system that colonizes it.

Not always clearly or explicitly, various contemporary authors describe those groups of youths who make a living (or easily lose their life) through a variety of economic, political and symbolic activities – subject to diverse moral judgements by the wider population – as though these groups formed a culture based on a set of agreed rules and values, meaning that their analyses are inevitably imbued with a certain cultural relativism. A clear ‘nativization’ (Gupta & Ferguson 1999) of the groups of traffickers and thieves is evident with place, identity, solidarity, consensus-based order (Feltran 2010, Biondi 2010, Rui 2012) and belief (in the ‘owner’ or the ‘firm’) all taken to be harmoniously interwoven. In Biondi’s analysis (2010) the world of crime is “an ethics and a prescribed conduct,”⁴ but simultaneously an abstract, transcendent entity for the ‘natives’ concerned. For Grillo (2013), though agreeing that the activities revolve around an “illicit commerce of drug trafficking, robberies, assaults and thefts,” this does not constitute an internally conflictive power structure, but a spiritual, transcendent entity in which its participants believe and in which the exchange of gifts is not clearly distinguished from the trade of merchandise. Using the precepts of ethnographic research to understand native culture in its own terms, the author writes:

It is the faction that offers drug dealing a minimum basis of collective purpose insofar as it mobilizes a series of symbolic referents concerning the discourse

4 Here the author clearly grounds her analysis on the Foucault’s concept of ethics, which follows Hegel rather than Kant. For the latter philosopher, ethics is based on clear and prescriptive principles, while for the first two, members of the community know the approved ways of behaving collectively without the need to appeal to explicit principles. However in the factions there are norms and principles made explicit in a written code of prescriptions imposed on their members.

on its existence. The factional symbolism promotes affective bonds with an idea of belonging, constructed in opposition to an alterity and strengthened by extolling fraternity and loyalty, amid the images of war that it circulates. [...] In order for an act of giving to be interpreted as an act of generosity rather than self-interested, sufficient time needs to pass for it to be forgotten, before its repayment by a counter-gift. Consequently the difference between the exchange of gifts and mercantile exchange is a question of fitting into a network of relations, that is, which relations are considered and which are ignored [...] The *dono do morro* or 'owner of the favela' – whose name clearly denotes the ownership relation to the local space – 'gives out' responsibilities – a term emphasizing the relational aspect of the gift – to his 'employees' – another term that implicitly contains the idea of a labour relation to the boss. In return, the employee owes the 'owner of the favela' unconditional loyalty, which involves, of course, a relational countergift. (Grillo, 2013: 79; 85; 93)

The discursive strategy of transforming the ethos or habitus or form of life (and communication) of criminals into an integrated culture with its own terms and values, without comprehending that this form of life is affected by the exteriorities imposed by the system, is evident in the same author's surprising claim that robbery is an exchange, as it exists between free people who comply in it.

When something is robbed a circumstantial contract is established that regulates the terms in which exchanges are effected. In proposing that we think of robbery as a form of exchange, I draw from the formulations of Simmel. According to this author, exchanges do not necessarily produce equivalences, commonly leading to complaints that they are unfair. In cases of badly paid work, for instance, the decision to engage in the exchange indicates that it is valid in some form: that is, it is better to be poorly paid than die of hunger. The same applies to theft, since when a mugger seizes a person to steal their belongings, leaving them their life and physical integrity 'in exchange,' this exchange is worth it. (Grillo 2013: 170-1)

Obviously this formulation fails to consider the meaning given to this exchange by the other party to the relation (the person robbed), an exchange imposed on him or her, more than likely at gunpoint. The question is not the lack of equivalence but the threat to life, leaving the victim with no choice: in other words, he or she has none of the freedom essential to defining

reciprocity, in Marcel Mauss's formulation (1974), and thus the contract, which is not to be confused with the gift. Rather than an act of peace like the gift, the robbery involves an act of war from the very first moment of the transaction. From the victim's viewpoint, it may also be seen as the reverse of 'criminal subjection.' In a section referring to robbery, the only observation Mauss makes is that the thing robbed is inevitably imbued with a negative symbolic force since it weighs on the assailant's moral conscience. The act of robbing someone can be understood as the opposite of reciprocity as defined by Mauss: it is taking, refusing and accumulating, rather than giving, accepting and returning.

According to Mauss, the social bond is created between people or groups through the gift in its three moments (giving, accepting, returning), in which a free obligation impels the receiver to return the accepted gift. This, he argues, is the sociability that has accompanied human beings from their beginnings to the contemporary world. Its efficacy depends on the silence surrounding what was given, in other words, the absence of any demand for repayment to ensure it really is given freely. This is its secret, tacitly shared by giver and receiver alike. It is not registered in the written knowledge learnt from books or in school but in ethos: that is, in implicit knowledge, in culture embedded in the everyday practice of sociability. Even less is it restricted to the real or virtual threat of maximum punishment: that is, the death of anyone who fails to repay the presented gift. Different people make these bets in disparate situations, not always with predictable results, precisely because – at least in the idea of the gift game – each partner is free to act. The gift is not a coercive norm; it is a practice that impels a person to reciprocate for what is received from someone else, in the seesaw between freedom and obligation. Obligatory freedom and free obligation: this is the tension constituting the ethical paradox and dilemma of the gift in practical action. These characteristics mean that it conserves the ambiguities and ambivalences of what is neither a contract, or a law, or a political demand. It is not written, or coercive, nor is it merely obligatory, meaning that it can be positive or negative: in other words, the gift is paradoxical. Hence its ambiguous, ambivalent and unpredictable character.

While sociability occurs between people who create ties with each other, this does not remove the power dimension and its capacity to differentiate them. In fact the social always involves the interweaving of necessity and

gift, selfishness and selflessness, avarice and generosity, greed and solidarity, love and hate, despite the sometimes overly optimistic assertions made by critics of self-interest as the cement of society. Hence speaking merely of the reciprocity involved in the gift is not enough. We need to know what kind of reciprocity is involved, its social context, its limits, the meanings socially attributed to the actions characterizing it, and its socially perceived and criticized distortions. As occurs in political clientelism, in giving charity to the poor, in the Greek gift that is really an act of war, in gifts manipulated to subjugate others, and in deadly vengeance that amounts to a complete denial of any relation with other people. We need, therefore, to go beyond the interpersonal relations of the three moments of the gift to understand how and why a person offers or denies something to someone else, how and why something is accepted or refused, and how and why something is reciprocated. The analysis or interpretation will only be sufficiently complete when the sociocultural and politico-institutional contexts of the gift and counter-gift are included.

Much of what is narrated as though the bandits' specific culture or form of life echoes the tacit agreements found in favela dwellers' everyday life and their moral economy, where snitching or *caquetagem*, betrayal or *escama*, deceit or *volta* are all morally condemned, deemed wrong in any social transaction. However the unarmed residents lack the power to obtain redress and re-establish a balance in their relations in the same way as the armed *brothers*, enabled by the supply of arms and money from drug trafficking.

Discussing the changes that had occurred in the PCC (Primeiro Comando da Capital, the largest criminal organization in Brazil) and based on a statement made by Marcola, leader of the faction in São Paulo, to the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee into Drug Trafficking (CPI do Narcotráfico), other authors claim that decisions such as the ban on selling crack in prisons are reached collectively – based on consensus – meaning that there is no command. These decisions are not orders but proposals discussed in all prisons by all prisoners. Biondi states: “the PCC is constituted by relations crafted personally in which everything is constantly negotiated, transformed and discussed” (cited in Rui, 2012). More importantly, consensus and guidelines should not be mistaken for laws, rules, orders or judgments: they have to be observed in response to an unceasing debate on what is correct. This implies that while “nobody is forced to do anything” and no

punishments are stipulated for those who breach the supposed code, though, as people are well aware, “everything has a consequence”. But how to know the consequences and on whom they will be imposed? Sadly, this dimension is seldom if ever explored. Feltran (2010), who conducted long-term in-depth field research, argues that emergence of a *lei do crime* (crime law) as a form of social control has played a significant role in the drastic reduction in homicides on the periphery of São Paulo in recent years. This crime law advocates recourse to the *proceder* (to proceed, to behave), a native category for extra-legal rulings or *debates*, described as highly sophisticated. This, Feltran writes, comprised one of the four different *laws* (normative codes of conduct) considered legitimate that functioned at different levels of everyday life justice. The *lei do crime* was invoked whenever someone was robbed, mugged, coerced or killed, when the perpetrators were not the police. However Feltran narrates one of these debates as follows:

The course of action in the ‘debate’ that led to the decision to expel Lázaro provides a good insight into how this process works. The main dealer in the territory in question, José, who had known Ivete for 14 years ever since the family arrived in the favela, called Lázaro immediately for a serious talk. The ‘debate’ involved just José and one of his subordinates, who had heard the accusation that Lázaro was an informant from a police officer. José asked Lázaro directly whether he had been involved in any kind of schema of *caguetagem* [snitching] with the police, something he denied vehemently (Ivete told me this). The accusation was extremely serious, but no actual proof existed. Lázaro had been known since a child and, though the deviant deserved to be killed, José had too much respect for Ivete to order the death of one of her children without being sure. So José intervened directly in the case, asking Anísio to take Lázaro to the coach station so he could ‘vanish’ immediately. He was giving him a ‘chance of life,’ without the ‘debate’ reaching a definitive conclusion.

On the way to the coach station, though, Anísio’s phone rang. The news that Lázaro was a *cagueteta* [snitch] had already reached the ‘brothers’ (from the PCC) and they had more power than José. Despite the numerous accounts I heard of how the PPC ‘controls’ the entire Sapopemba region, I also obtained information on other criminal factions in the district, as well as ‘independent’ dealers. The hypothesis I have been pursuing is that the ‘brothers’ (PCC) control just one segment of the illicit markets operating in the area, although they

comprise the final deliberative instance for any rulings concerning the local 'crime world' as a whole. In other words, although a lad is free to steal a car on his own and not hand it over to anyone from the PCC, his conduct vis-à-vis other members of the 'crime world' and the police is guided by the law dictated by the normative device of the 'Command.' In Sapopemba, therefore, as well as those individuals immersed 'in the crime world,' all the favela residents are guided by this 'law' irrespective of whether or not they participate in criminalized activities.

The 'brothers' telephoned José and asked Lázaro to return for a second 'debate,' this time in their presence. Anísio brought his brother back. Lázaro then had to submit to another discussion, only much tougher this time. Some of the 'brothers' wanted to execute him summarily – the *proceder* considers *correr com* [helping] the police and *caguetar* [snitching] capital sins, deserving the death penalty. However others taking part in the debate were unsure about the decision and a person is only executed when a consensus is reached. Perhaps because of their respect for José, an old and well-regarded drug trafficker in the region, or to avoid the unease of overturning a decision taken by him, the 'debate' decided to 'sneeze' Lázaro away from the favela forever...

Before returning to the coach station, however, Lázaro was beaten so hard that some of his bones were broken, his brother forced to take part in the beating too. Anísio dragged him back home and, an hour later, he was put in a coach heading for a state capital in Northeastern Brazil. Lázaro still ran the risk of being killed there if other 'brothers' were to disagree with the sentence.

Not by chance, the above case describes not the protection of a robbed or assaulted resident, but the maintenance of the faction's internal order and power. Even without reading Habermas and the other philosophers of communication, it is clearly evident that this *debate* and the *consensus* that emerges are founded on a very efficient system of repressive power, ultimately based on the use of armed force to impose justice on those who breach the rules set by this power. And that mere accusation, without concrete proof, is enough to condemn someone. The punishment, for its part, may be less severe when personal relations with relatives offer the chance to save the accused's life, albeit with no guarantee that the death penalty will not be executed sometime.

From being a community constituted through belief, consensus and solidarity, this form of normative power, as Feltran calls it, is a mode of exerting power repressively, one which cannot be considered uniform or consensual

across the subaltern classes. None of the ethnographies produced to date contain a study of the different cases taken to this kind of justice-deciding entity, only the description of them made by third parties, not always witnesses to the case, but who also heard the events described by others. This fact in itself reveals the secrecy and concealment surrounding the *proceder*, a 'legal procedure' that is seldom public.

Although the internal order or voluntary submission to the power structure that develops in clandestine form are internally sustained by the reciprocity between its members, the solidarity and loyalty always demanded from those who enter into these arenas in which gifts (in the two meanings of the word) are always present, the appeal to armed force is inevitable. The more it is organized, the more the criminal faction is able to control deadly confrontations between its members, forever vying for sales points and power. Numerous testimonies from youths involved in drug trafficking or from former dealers recount the problems of keeping friends in this world. This is especially the case during initial phases when factions have yet to obtain control of the territories as well as all the different stages and networks involved in drug trafficking. Connections are weak, trust is maintained under constant threat of deadly reprisals, and loyalty can be suddenly and completely overturned. After the power of the factions has been consolidated – as in the case of São Paulo where just one faction dominates most of the prisons and urban peripheries – new forms of regulating and curbing the lethal punishment inflicted on rivals and enemies may be established. In Rio de Janeiro at the turn of the twenty-first century such confrontations still occurred more often.

Interviewing former traffickers at length, I obtained a series of testimonies, including those transcribed below, that recount the impediments to solidarity, loyalty, friendship – in sum, the elements of the gift – mostly pursued without success against a background of disbelief. Loaned guns and cocaine have to be returned or repaid quickly in accordance with their market value. Meanwhile exchanges with the police occur through the medium of gunshots and *arregos* (pay-offs), not exactly alternatives since they go hand-in-hand:

After that I started to buy guns. Every gun that appeared before me, I'd buy. Sometimes when I invited someone to hang around with me I'd say: 'Hey dude, let's head off to Madureira, Penha, Rocha Miranda and get some cash!' We were

still young then, about 15 or 16 years old. When someone said: 'I went round with that guy, I lost some money, I lost a revolver!' I'd reply: 'No problem, I'll lend you another.' Today it's different, the cops from the PM [Military Police] shoot on sight. Back then, though, they'd capture and mug us. They'd rifle through everything, wave their revolvers, grab what was in our pockets and send us on our way: 'Clear off, clear off.' [...] Today the police are paid off, they start their shift and receive the *arrego* [pay-off]. At certain times, though, it works differently: they'll say that officers from the Supervisory Division or Inspectorate are going to make a tour there. [...] So they warn, 'today there'll be no *arrego*!' Then they don't want to know. When the PM comes, the shooting kicks off immediately. And the same cop who is shooting today, will be taking the money, his pay-off, tomorrow. That's how the whole thing works in the favelas nowadays. If he can't take money one day because there's going to be a patrol – either because there's a supervisor in the police vehicle or because they want to invade – then they're going to start firing. [...] In Jacarepaguá, for example, it's like that: the *arrego* has to arrive before two in the afternoon. If not the police enter and start shooting. [...] Today the pay-off is a better idea. Pay up so you don't get hassled!

Distrust always lurks behind the precarious trust and the payment for help received. It is still the market as pecuniary interest that predominates. Not even the *fiel*, the right-hand man who always accompanies the *dono da boca* (owner of the drug den) closely throughout the day, evades this logic. In an interview from 2009, a trafficker imprisoned for many years described the early years of cocaine trafficking in Rio de Janeiro as follows:

They would pack (*endolar*)⁵ the drug every day in a different place. People let their homes be used, you know, they took some cash to hand over their home for us to work in it. Then the neighbours would see, you know, so the next to time we'd find somewhere else. Otherwise we'd run the risk of being shopped by an anonymous phone call.

I just lived like that, suspicious. So much so that the luck of [name of another dealer] ran out because of that, right? Sometimes [name of the other dealer] would come up to me and would say, with 10 to 12 people close by, 'hey I'm

5 *Endolar* is a term used by dealers to describe the process of separating illegal drugs into small packets for sale to consumers.

with some friends from outside the area, come and let me present you to them.' I saw him from afar with two revolvers tucked under his arm, and these guys reaching out to shake my hand. I'd say: 'It's cool, you don't need to shake my hand.' He'd reply: 'Hey, aren't you going to shake hands with my friends or what?' I'd say: 'Not me lad, you're killing your friends.' Him: 'We're your friends, are you going to leave these friends with their hands dangling?' Me: 'Yes, there's no need to shake hands, it's fine as it is.' So if I hadn't dealt with him like that, I wouldn't be here now talking to you. And this happened various times, I'd see him from afar and he'd put his hand on his revolver. What happened? He'd grit his teeth, nervous with me, wanting to shoot, but if he did so would I... We'd both die... So it didn't go well for [name of the other dealer] because of that. He killed his friends, he'd be talking with a friend, eating, drinking and then suddenly 'boom' he'd shot the guy in the face. Then he'd take everything he had.

Sometimes too there's something wrong, you know, something amiss. If the guy goes around killing, people will soon be saying, "hey, that guy is killing everyone, he's killing friends." So they end up clearing the area that way, killing each other. And that way the guy obtains what he wants. In the end all those he wanted gone, he gets rid of... The first thing that enters the head of the guy involved is: if I don't kill that guy, he'll kill me. So people say, 'if my mother's going to cry, let his mother cry first.' Sometimes the guy thinks 'no, that poor guy, he's a friend' [...] When the guy does that, he's enraged. He is killing someone else so he doesn't get killed, you know? Sometimes the guy feels sorry: 'so-and-so is cool, I'll give him a chance.' He turns his back; he risks getting shot in the head. So the guy reacts already with this idea in mind: 'If I don't do this with that son of a bitch, he'll do it to me.' That's just how it happens. In the drug world lots of guys also say – nobody says it to the person's face mind, nobody – but they say that some guys are robots. The word was used a lot in prison: a robot is a guy who hears someone else say 'kill so-and-so' and he goes and does it. He isn't angry with [his victim]. It's something different: you kill a person without being angry with them, without the guy having done anything. That's the robot or remote-controlled guy. There's a lot of this in the *boca de fumo*. There are lots of guys who want to show their worth, who are trying to get a better position, right? These are the guys who don't have a *pátria* because in the drug world everyone is a friend, 'hey there little brother,' people just call each other brother, bro here, bro there, bro everywhere. [...] They embrace; they eat the guy's food. A while later, the *dono da boca* says: 'you

can 'break' (kill) so-and-so.' He has just eaten the guy's food and he goes and kills him.

There's the *fiel* (right-hand man) too, although that wasn't the word used back then. But whenever something exploded, it was the *fiel* who betrayed him, it was the *fiel* who was responsible. The guy is glued to him, but he's envious, he wants his place. I had these people who surrounded me too, but whenever they escorted me when I was going to sleep or hide in some place, I'd leave them behind at a certain point. Taking a path where I knew I could carry on ahead alone, I'd say to them: 'You can turn back here...' They're men you trust, but not entirely... If someone flatters me, it makes me feel uneasy, I can tell it's fake, you know.

In the case of Denis, the *dono* (owner) of the Rocinha favela at the end of the 1980s when the factions already controlled the drug trafficking network, the deadly reprisal for betrayed trust emerges as a tragedy in which deceit and lies are unable to mask the inversions (taking, refusing and accumulating) in the usual signs of the gift (giving, accepting, returning).

Then one time Denis travelled to Mexico with the idea of crossing from Mexico to the United States to do some business there [...] During his trip, these guys began to betray Denis in collusion with a group that had just escaped from Ilha Grande [...] He had a meeting with a Bolivian who brought in merchandise [...] He travelled to various places using false documents, you know? [...] He went and left the *boca* (selling point) with the guys there in charge, the two brothers, but then the two brothers became dominated by the guys who had arrived from Ilha Grande [...]. The guys wanted to take over the *boca* and were killing those of Denis's friends who came to Rocinha. So I was already suspicious about all this and left. [...] There was this woman who had belonged to this guy and was now Denis's woman. [...] So the girl's mother went to Rocinha to fetch some money after Denis had contacted them from the United States, but the guys just started laughing. I saw it all from afar and spotted the betrayal: 'These guys are betraying Denis, they're going to trick him.' The guys were out of their heads, snorting day and night, cocaine and whisky. So sometimes people would be chatting with these guys, sat together, they'd put the pistol to their ear and that was it. They'd kill them and stuff the body in the car boot. Locals would drive past on their way to work and would see a body on the ground. The guys would say: 'take that body over there.' The locals weren't used to that, you know, Denis didn't do that. The guys were terrorizing the favela.

The locals would be scared. They didn't want to take the body, but the gang would say: 'either you take the body or you'll be keeping it company...' They wandered around the favela with a bag of cocaine. They'd take out a straw and snort from the bag. And killing people day and night. It was like they were swatting flies.

Then, already safely outside the favela, I called Bolado. He was Denis's real trusted *fiel* (right-hand man). So I telephoned him and explained the situation. An old guy, a fugitive from Ilha Grande, was leading the overthrow against Denis. When I called there from (name of the favela) to tell them where I had left some of Denis's weapons, this old guy... he really was thick-skinned... answered the phone: 'Who is it?' I told him who I was. He replied: 'Hey, it's you mate, don't take this badly, but I take my hat off to you.' I asked: 'What do you mean by that?' 'You see fucking loads, eh?' What he really meant, then, was that they would try to take my life. So I said: 'I've no idea what you're on about.' Him: 'No, you know full well, you see loads.' So when Denis's *fiel* came, he explained to me 'Damn... you're right, they're plotting an overthrow, but I don't let my guard down when I'm near them, my hand is always on the trigger, they're fucked'... I think two days passed... On that day I went to resolve the situation of a guy there who had also asked me for help, he needed some cocaine that he didn't have. [...] So I seized the chance and asked Bolado to lend me 1 kg of powder... Then two days later Denis arrived back from his trip, met up on Rua Um [Road One] without anyone knowing, and his *fiel* and another group who he trusted went up into the favela, and then went down to Rua Dois [Road Two] and killed everyone. It was a massacre. He killed all those guys who had fled from Ilha Grande. [...] The old guy and a bunch of them there. He discovered a cellar where these guys had been stashing various machine guns. Just one guy escaped who ran the *boca* there. But how did he get away? The police invaded and he asked for protection.

[...] He [Denis] was travelling a lot. They really liked going to Florianópolis. They even raided a number of banks there. [...] At that time, Denis's right-hand man, him and a group of six, robbed about five banks, they made a lot of money. They had already arranged the right places to store the cash and leave empty-handed, the women would come back to Rio later, bringing the money. In one of these bank jobs Bolado got caught. He was a small white guy, short, like a playboy. He was from Rocinha, but anyone who didn't know him thought he was a *mauricinho* [rich kid] from the South Zone, but he was a responsible guy and everyone's friend. Denis liked him a lot. Well, he was the only one to

be caught in Florianópolis. Denis liked this guy so much that he assembled a group, spent a lot of money, sent these guys to Florianópolis and they rescued him from jail. I know that the favela's banditry changed after the slaughter... But who took over? Bolado was running everything... So Denis was talking to his right-hand man, and then he said, 'let me talk to so-and-so now.' Bolado passed the telephone to the guy next to him and Denis said to the guy on the telephone: 'Kill him, kill him: I want to hear the shot and take control of the *boca*.' Some friends who were there told me all this later, right? So the guy finished speaking to Denis and said: 'Take the phone, he wants another word with you.' So Bolado took the phone and the other guy killed him. He was a close friend, they'd grown up together. [...] A bought policeman said that Bolado had snitched Denis.⁶

I heard many accounts over the years and very recently about people who had been robbed or assaulted who went to the local drug bosses to recover their possessions or ask for the attacks to stop, without any need for a debate among the faction's leaders. In fact, according to the statements of residents interviewed over the last thirty years, many of them went to members of the drug faction because they would have to *prestar contas* (account for their actions) to them were they to go to the police to deal with small local disputes and losses. Doing the latter would imply bringing the police into the locality and jeopardizing the illegal trade. These cases that hinder business, threaten faction members or upset the faction's power mobilize the 'brothers' and inform the debate on punishments. In small cases of theft and assaults on residents, the deliberative body provides a means of preventing the police from arriving – the biggest problem to be avoided since it threatens the criminal's source of identity, his stigma or criminal subjection, as well as increasing the chance of being caught, tried and sentenced, or having to submit to the extortion of the expensive *arregos* (pay-offs) to the police. In other words, the decision-making bodies locally present and active are limited – and conform – to the practices utilized in them. Two questions become crucial then: how did the systemic need to maintain the secrecy of commercial activities and their lucrativeness develop; how the loyalty to bosses within the power hierarchy in which inertia and convention are

⁶ Denis was imprisoned in 1987; a bullet to his head killed Bolado in 1988, which the local press called 'accidental.' Denis was found hanged in his cell in 2001.

imposed on the more fragile minds; which young people join these clandestine societies, willing to die in armed conflicts? If evil is systemic, or banal, as Hannah Arendt suggested in the case of the extermination of Jews during the Holocaust, then it is inertia that leads young people to kill each other. But they are mostly vulnerable people, coming from poor and troubled families, who seek social recognition by offering their courage and sacrifice for the *firma*. We need to explain and analyse the secrecy involved in their decisions and transactions, as well as the appeal to those desperately seeking recognition, glory and fame.

Another flaw in the texts by the authors cited earlier is their failure to mention the conflicts that always occurred between residents and dealers over the control of resident associations, disputes over women, especially the ban on former girlfriends of dealers ever becoming the girlfriends of common residents, the disturbances caused by the excessive noise of the funk balls, even though residents are often too scared to complain about the din. Conflicts are not limited to pecuniary interests or class conflicts. To understand them it is imperative to consider the wider social, political and economic contexts, whether these relate to underground activity or to local politics.

In terms of the subjectivity of the young people involved, today some agreement exists among anthropologists who have studied the great diversity that emerged from the process of rapid globalization. After the critiques of consensualism, harmony and homogeneity, ethnographers also began to focus on the unexpected, the surprising, the deviant, what Malinowski himself called “the imponderabilia of actual life.” Those studying unending processes and conflicts inherent to never perfectly ordered systems do not look for the system *per se*, but explore what flesh and blood people do in different contexts, the subjects whose actions reveal how lived situations actually unfold. In hybrid, flexible or transitional cultures, the subject has various identifications to hand that he or she can adopt contextually, negotiating them but never taking them as an immutable and transcendent essence. In such cultures, subjects become Hamlet-like figures, forever unsure whether to be or not to be, who resolve the tragic conflict by choosing from a range of available alternatives those that can define a never complete and ever renewed identificatory project. In the many situations in which diverse actors interact we can observe an intermittence and intersection of places,

identifications, discourses and goods: these actors span from neighbourhood residents to institutional agents – police officers, doctors, teachers, social workers – as well as researchers and journalists who continually dispute the discourse on the locality and its social identity.

In the periods when more favelas were under the armed control of drug dealers, I continued to collect testimonies that indicated other forms of conceptualizing and organizing power within these areas. Community leaders not linked to drug trafficking continued their activities, albeit often in limited fashion, independent of the resident associations as the latter came under the control either of the paramilitaries who made up some of the ‘militias’ (Zaluar & Conceição 2007; Cano 2008) or the dealers (Zaluar 1994, 2004). Hence we need to emphasize both the error of generalizing this ethos, sociability or mode of exercising power to entire social classes, whether we call them the popular classes, the subaltern class or marginal populations, and of presuming its permanence and irreversibility. The social context is one of institutional crossovers, cultural hybridism and multiple social networks that intersect, divided and become reconstituted through complex and diverse processes.

Concomitantly to the differences in the moral evaluation of actions classified as *crime* by residents of Rio’s favelas, there were also shifts in sensibility in relation to the suffering of others involved in drug trafficking activities, which became increasingly cruel. The vast majority of residents, however, never accepted the horror, although they had to learn to live with the despotic forms of power so close to their homes.

This led to the spread of a *solta*⁷ (unfettered) first nature (Wouters 2004) among some poor young people living in these locations, combined with a ‘second nature’ against legality, albeit while complying with the despotic rules of local tyrants, developing a warrior ethos of mercilessness in the face of the other’s suffering, a pride in inflicting violence on the body of rivals – black, brown and poor like themselves – now seen as deadly enemies to be destroyed in an unending war. Among the many styles of masculinity identified by the various ethnographic studies conducted by the NUPEVI team (Cechetto 2004, Monteiro 2009) with migrants from other states, including second-generation black, brown, *mulato* (mixed) and white youths, we can

7 See footnote 3.

highlight the style most clearly linked to violent action against the others: the warrior ethos and hypermasculinity in which ostentatious consumption defines these new successful male identities and makes the possession of money essential in displaying assistance to friends, neighbours and kin, impressing them by wearing expensive jewellery and cloths, or holding parties and paying for drinks in public venues – all strategies used by youths seeking to dominate through the power of guns and bundles of cash in the pocket. These styles of intensified masculinity, the spectacular display of male rebellion, created the social context for the localized but unending armed conflict described by some as a ‘molecular war’ (Zaluar 2004), operating through the dehumanization of their enemies as a means to justify the atrocities committed against them. Finally, it undermined the ever fragile civility of Brazil’s urban inhabitants, a civility constructed over decades, principally in the various neighbourhood associations, including the recreational samba schools, carnival blocks, *maracatu* groups, *folia* revelries, etc. This led to a reversal of the internalization of a ‘third nature,’ more unconventional and less submissive to incontestable authority and more flexible in the negotiation with other people.

The biggest divergence was, therefore, in the role allocated to long-term processes in the attempts to interpret violence among young poor men in Brazil, more specifically in Rio de Janeiro. These processes, which Elias and Wouters studied in the social context of Europe from the Middle Ages onwards, more recently complemented by the work of Dunning, encompass the rules of ‘fair play’ and relationships between people of different social classes, genders and generations as part of the long process of order or discipline that substitute the physical destruction of rivals with the control of emotions in a regulated form of rivalry. This long process was observed in parliamentary politics, in sporting competition (Elias & Dunning 1993) or in the Rio de Janeiro samba school parades (Zaluar 1998), revealing other dimensions and segmentations of the social classes. Expressions of fair play and civility did not concern, therefore, the good manners that enabled access to the elites or to the closed groups of the well-born and well-bred: rather, they involved respect for the rules of the game that would apply to all those involved in public spaces, that is, outside the local neighbourhood. Sports events and competitive parades involved the application – under equal rules for everyone – of a sense of informal justice learnt over the course

of socialization, much more than the rush for upward social mobility. By uniting people from different families, generations and urban districts in public spaces, the process fostered the internalization of civility between fellow citizens. This also provided the basis for internal class solidarity and thus for their social movements.

The focus then has to be the process of pacifying customs or what we might call 'the culture of civility,' which transformed the relations between the State and society, divided into social classes, ethnic groups, races, age groups, genders and religious affiliations. By emphasizing civility instead of etiquette or the code of good manners, I interpreted the civilizing process through the politico-institutional dimension of the State's legitimized monopoly of violence and the changes in the formation of subjectivities through fair play and the control of emotions. Through this process, people learned to respect the rules of the game, including the aim of sparing other people's lives. I interpret it, therefore, as a vital part of the culture of civility and of association towards collective action, something closer to what Putnam (2006) called civic culture.

According to Wouters, the process of 'informalization' of etiquettes occurring in the 1960s and 70s, also termed 'collective emancipation,' rendered this opposition more flexible with the acceptance of what he calls 'lower impulses' and 'lower classes.' In terms of the relation between generations, this meant superseding the figure of absolute and incontestable authority whose orders had to be obeyed without discussion. Alternative patterns of conduct, principally merging from youth culture, became accessible, the object of negotiation between figures of authority and young people. In the psychic economy of individuals, responsibility and thus rationality vis-à-vis the choices made between alternatives increased, along with greater social egalitarianism as the social distance between those ranked as inferior and superior diminished.

Although the triumph of the market in the 1980s meant a return to the need to climb the social hierarchy, reflecting the increasing inequality with and conformity to the dominant elites, the emergence of a 'third nature' fostering the dialogue between repressed emotions (first nature) and approved social etiquette (second nature) did not just vanish. Greater moral flexibility and better understanding between conscience and impulses, Wouters argues, characterize this third nature, so that the successful are those who combine

firmness and flexibility, frankness and tact (Wouters 2004).

Indeed, it would be important to analyse how the capital of personality among young people in Brazil's cities is compromised by the interruption and incompleteness of the process of informalization/social egalitarianism, given that social democratization has not occurred at the same pace as political democratization. The persistence of social authoritarianism and social hierarchy in Brazil, especially the forms of despotic power that emerged from the 1970s onwards in more disadvantaged urban areas, has aborted the process of informality and better dialogue with authority figures, including to discuss the rules of the game, especially in the less schooled and more subaltern sectors of the population. Once again we are confronted by an incomplete, partial and excluding process of redemocratization that combines different stages in the consolidation of the rule of law. And again social inequality is evident, also appearing now in the process of socialization and the acquisition of dispositions and postures more in keeping with participation or inclusion in society.

The divergences in interpretations, even between those based on intensive ethnographic research, have kept alive the debate on the objects and subjects that, divided themselves by ethical dilemmas, ambiguities, inconsistencies and ceaseless quests for power and recognition, also continue immersed in this interminable process of disagreements and clashes, some of which, from deep-seated enmity and the desire for revenge, turn deadly.

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