

Vulnerability and precariousness in a favela in Rio de Janeiro: noises, control and conventions of the Bolsa Família Program

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Abstract *The article discusses how the Bolsa Família Program (PBF) is mobilized and gains different meanings in the practices and discourses of beneficiaries in a favela in Rio de Janeiro. The empirical material comes from fieldwork research in the Favela do Tripé (fictitious name), a precarious stretch of a larger favela which involved participant observation and interaction with the Program beneficiaries. From these women's speeches, we reflect on the relationship among the PBF and vulnerabilities, food, health, gender conventions, and the role and presence of the State in favela contexts. The issue of care, represented by the central position of mothers/women, is also one of the conducting axis of the analysis, showing how the act of care reiterates moral conventions. From the noises – ranging from shootings to the screams of mothers – there is also a discussion about the position of the woman and her role as caregiver and mother, addressing that group's expectations. These expectations reaffirm gender conventions and make evident the moralization of the female place and the maternal condition. In addition to State violence, organized crime agents and diffuse controls and surveillance in the Favela do Tripé, the other dimension of sociability of the residents addressed here concerns vulnerability and precariousness.*

Key words *Public policy, Social vulnerability, Morality, Social control*

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Introduction

Another common afternoon in the limits between the north and west zones in the city of Rio de Janeiro. To the west, the Military Village with their barracks, in the olive green world. To the north, a popular housing project. At the middle, the railroad taking and bringing workers and students through and to other areas of the city and of the metropolitan region.

The fieldwork was beginning to end, and through conversations, we could notice strategies of the residents of the *favela* (“*favela*” is the Brazilian term for “slum”). In this paper we have chosen to use the Portuguese word to preserve the characteristics of the specific type of slums that exist in the context of Rio de Janeiro) in regard to the cuts and interruption of the *Bolsa Família* Program (PBF) and/or the *Cartão Família Carioca* Program, which is a program of Rio de Janeiro’s City Hall that aims at offering a complementary income to families that, even with the PBF, still have a monthly per capita income lower than 108 reais. In a heterogeneous *favela*, in which a great part of the families receives the PBF, there have been constant rumors about a cut in the benefit, which added to a broad lack of knowledge about how it is calculated, composed, its continuities and discontinuities. Were these signs of a citizenship in deconstruction? Perceptions of a never conquered nor even regulated citizenship?²

Certainly, there was a sign there that talking about the PBF, our initial focus of interest in the research, was a shortcut to talk about other things. In an environment where it is so common to receive it, the program can be considered a “*total social fact*”³, a character that goes through experiences, relationships and social regulations mediated by gossip and surveillance.

It felt like just another fieldwork day that had the PBF as a starting point, but which, in the end, usually turns out to discuss gender, health, violence and the precariousness that marks the lives of the subjects at Tripé – a fictitious name that we gave to the research place, concentrated in the part considered the poorest, a groups of shacks built with improvised materials located under a bridge. The rumors about the PBF in that afternoon added to others, which were also part of the *favela* everyday life, also coming, in part, from a State’s policy.

Now we hear gunshots and two women screaming, who were running and warning people about the army invasion, and asked everyone to go back inside their houses. We, who

were sitting in front of one of the houses up until moments before that, pushed ourselves through an alley that was protected by the houses, while trying to check if there was anyone missing. The children, playing on the streets and alleys, quickly went inside their houses, with their doors opened, as usual, revealing a cautious transparency, a “see and be seen” that is part of the relational universe of the *favela*.

Luiza, one of the women we talked with, was the last one to go inside, which represented, in that situation, the safeguard destiny. She asked for silence, not to call the police officers attention, and we point out here that it has been a common practice for police force in the *favelas* to perform aggressive searches in the houses, kicking doors and destroying possessions. We started to listen better to what was going on outside: besides gunshots, there were women screaming desperately and, with the gunshots, going to the streets calling their children’s names. This duo is quite common during fieldwork: the loud gunfire shot by men, and the noise of the women who expose themselves in desperation.

While the researcher would not move, Luiza, when hearing the mothers screaming, went to the alley to talk to some of them. Like a teacher calling the students names from a roster, she yelled the children’s names to check who was in her home, so that the mothers could go inside, get calm and wait for the shooting to stop.

After the shooting, mothers at the gate whisper and set in motion a solidarity network looking for the children who had not showed up yet. They showed their cell phones with messages from some people who also had kids at home who could be their sons and daughters. This fast and orchestrated reaction by Luiza and other women reveal the somewhat prosaic element of this situation. At the same time, it highlights two issues that proved to be important in this research: on one hand, the vulnerability and precariousness that mark this space and the lives of these people; on the other hand, mutual help networks among women, which go *pari passu* with control mechanisms, with implications related to receiving and using the PBF, as we will see next. Precisely because it was just another common day in the *favela*, these aspects appear as central issues to understand that universe. Initial questions about the PBF opened a window for attempts to comprehend the life – and, sometimes, the death – of those people.

As a whole, this research has aimed at understanding how the PBF works as a type of subject,

a character that goes through experiences, accounts and daily conversations in the Favela do Tripé. Thus, starting from the PBF and from narratives and interviews with female beneficiaries, we can reflect upon relationships among moralities, the *Bolsa Família* Program, gender, health and nourishment.

To contextualize this study, it is important to briefly describe Favela do Tripé. Located between the limits of the west zone and north zone in Rio de Janeiro, this *favela* is part of a group of six *favelas*, which we call Conjunto. Although it is apparently cohesive, it is divided into three regions: *Rua do Serviço* and *Pátio Redondo*, in the front; *Rua Reta* and *Rua da Linha*, in the middle; and a part under the bridge, at the back, which does not have named streets. Besides these main streets, there are small alleys, which usually bare the name of a resident, a bar or some local characteristic. This division coincides with the relationships that the residents establish among themselves and with the territory, and with the moralities and classifications that we can perceive among them.

The fieldwork record of a common weekday in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro, which opens this paper, shows us the dimension of the precariousness and vulnerabilities, and the dimension of control and surveillance, which manifest not only through public policies (here, especially that of public safety), but which are also internalized in individuals that make up the “*favela* Big Brother” through, for example, cellphone applications and houses with open doors that reveal a diffuse surveillance. Besides that, it helps us think about matters that have guided the research, as well as about the relationship between the PBF, vulnerabilities, nourishment, gender conventions, the role and presence of the State in the contexts of *favelas*, and the issue of care.

Method

To perform the research, we used tools from ethnography, such as participant observation, prolonged immersion in the research context, and interviews with a semi-structured script. Following Rego and Pinzani’s⁴ indication, when aiming at understanding the role of PBF for the generation of autonomy, modification of the relationship with money and its impact in poverty reduction, we work with the idea of “testimonial facts” starting with the task of “listening to the voice of the poor”. The work was produced con-

sidering the meanings, values, symbols and motivations. Hence, it is a qualitative research since it calls attention to the relations and the contextual experiences of the subjects.

During the participant observation, we collected data throughout six months (in the year of 2018) being present in the everyday activities of the women beneficiary of the PBF, including some who have suffered some type of cut in the benefit, all of them residents of the Favela do Tripé. In order to obtain more structured data, we have interviewed five women with semi-structured scripts. All interviews indicated different uses and agencies of the PBF, corroborating with the hypothesis that it acts as a guide to discuss matters such as precariousness and vulnerability, care, health and moralities.

It is important to highlight that it is not about reflecting upon the PBF itself. We have chosen to approach broader issues that relate to this public policy, like the feedback between precariousness and surveillance, constitutive dimensions of the life in the *favela*, especially of a particularly poor segment (less visible from the point of view of the State) in a larger *favela* that presents a heterogeneous classification system among its space and people, which does not follow the State or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Gender, health and nourishment touch these two questions adding up a series of dynamics that produce effects in the *favela* sociability.

The project has been approved by the Committee of Research Ethics of the Institute of Social Medicine. All procedures have been adopted according to the Resolution CNS n° 466/2012, which regulates researches involving human beings. All women who participated in this work have received and signed an Informed Consent Form (ICF).

Results and discussion

Vulnerability and precariousness

When we decided to hear about the life at Favela do Tripé, from the point of view of the relationship the women develop with the PBF, we realized that there was a homogenous speech in the sense of the reduction of what Rego and Pinzani⁴ call “multiple marginalization”: the women talk about a transformation in their sociability pattern with new visions, opportunities and perceptions of themselves. It is in that sense that Luiza – 33 years old, mother at 13, who re-

ports having a body “entirely marked” by the violence of a partner with whom she lived and who had “registered her children” – asks us to carefully record the transformation of her world:

[...] write down this part, I only became a person after the PBF. Did you write it down? I say this to everyone. I could separate from him because I knew that my children wouldn't starve anymore. I stopped getting beaten. The PBF changed my life. Here in the favela, everybody receives it, it doesn't matter, everyone receives it. Everybody had their lives changed, if they say they didn't, they're lying. Are you writing it down? (Luiza, 33 years old).

This request to highlight change came up in other interviews, repeating a positive characteristic widely mapped in the bibliography on the theme⁴⁻⁷. At the same time, repeating the term “everybody” stressed how much the generalization of this benefit in that place makes it central in the structure of relationships, which allows for separations and a greater autonomy, but also generates new bonds, conflicts and local hierarchies. The voice of these women speaks about more subtle inequalities and vulnerabilities, which we intend to explore here, generated within the social relationships in the *favela*, as well as with their relationship with subjects and institutions that represent the State there.

In common, it is immediately visible that the life of these people is marked by precariousness. But in the sense of the distinction that Butler⁸ proposes: besides the life that is already vulnerable on its own, the author points out the “precarious conditions” of certain populations that are particularly vulnerable, exposed to the most severe levels of violence, poverty, hunger and State's lack of protection, which makes the individual be threatened by that which is supposed to protect them. This makes us think about bodies that become targets, enemies and, hence, need to be executed for presenting threats to other lives, for they are not “worthy of grief”.

Thus, we start from the idea that vulnerability is something relational, dynamic, and not specific or characteristic of a certain group, but it concerns certain conditions and conjectures. To be vulnerable is to be exposed to a group of different risks, which can be economic, natural, cultural or social, and which demand to be confronted in an attempt to diminish the vulnerability. A vulnerable individual builds what Ayres⁹ qualifies as “vulnerability relationships”, that is, those who are vulnerable are always vulnerable to something and, therefore, it would be more coherent to speak about “vulnerability relation-

ships”. This relational dimension of vulnerability, which can lead the reader to a dyad, is a public, collective, dimension that involves that community of subjects, different levels of vulnerabilities, which go from the relationship with the State to the spatial division of the community.

If we think about the PBF, at the same time that the program shows itself as mitigating vulnerability, it is also capable of producing vulnerabilities. That is because, according to the women interviewed, it is difficult to comply with the proposed requirements – school attendance, following the children's development, vaccination calendar and prenatal care – in this context, which leads the beneficiaries to live in fear of having their benefits interrupted. Health and education services are increasingly scarce and more difficult to be accessed and, thus, the needs, which should be a sign of vulnerability, become a reason for the interruption or cut of the benefit, increasing the vulnerability relationships of these individuals even more. That is because, in this context, the possibility of suspending the PBF means, to these families, reviving several precarious situations, such as, for example, hunger.

In the specific case of Favela do Tripé, it is a very transparent example of the differences in the distribution of precariousness, for its population, besides the condition of vulnerability, is also target to other precariousness generated by the State. Thus, we are dealing with several layers of violence that influence, as we have said, in the sociability of the *favela*, especially in the circuit of support and patrolling among women.

One aspect that repeats itself in the research data is the disinformation flow that circulates in the *favela* regarding the quantitative of the benefit. In the moment of the fieldwork, politically dense because it was close to the elections, there was also a lot of speculation about the future of the program, depending on the result – which, regardless of political reasons, comments on a regime of uncertainty about the benefit. There was discomfort and disinformation about the program's criteria for having to provide so much information without knowing exactly why, and for never receiving explanations about the benefit calculation. Josefa (45 years old, black, mother of two children and resident of the Tripé for 30 years) synthesizes this series of dissatisfactions:

[...] I receive 64, Suelen receives 37. I don't know why, I just know that that's how it is. How they decide who is going to receive more, I don't know. I have already asked them, but they didn't know what to answer, or didn't want to. I go there

and all I have to do is bring that pile of documents. You see, right, they say we're accommodated; I clean houses, I do everything to improve a little; my son is on a diet, so everything is more expensive, I can't settle for so little. (Josefa, 45 years old).

This circulation of disinformation proved to be an important element in the field, for it feeds a system of questions, gossip and accusations among the beneficiary themselves, which, as a whole, tends to moralize the use of the money, which starts to be reserved for certain ends:

She should use the money from Bolsa Família to buy vegetables, greens for the kids, but no. The truth is that here only I feed my children with vegetables. The other day I made soup and called her kids to eat here. They ate everything, a huge dish, and got more. So you see, the kids like it, but the mother doesn't give it to them. But you know, right? She spends all her money in drugs. Do you know what she does? She borrows 100 from you, then pays you 150. As a guarantee, she leaves you her Bolsa card and her password. On the right day, you go there and take the money. I've already done it for her, but I won't do it again. It feels like I'm taking food from the kids' mouths, because that's what the money from Bolsa Família is for, right? To feed the kids. (Joana, 40 years old).

In another account, it became evident that the women do not see the State as an ally. Crystallized at the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS), the image of the institution is that of a supervisory, only, responsible for registry, eventual cuts and for defining the amount, which is frequently responsible for increasing the "vulnerability relationships"⁹, as has already been analyzed above. Luiza tells us that:

[...] when I went there, the woman told me that she had to write an income for me. I told her that I didn't have any income, to write zero, but she said she couldn't and that she had to invent any amount. She wrote 200 reais, as if I received that. But my sister receives from fewer children and gets more than I do, and she doesn't have any income either, shouldn't it be the same? So, I think that's what it was: the woman invented an income for me and I receive less than I should. I don't know, nobody here understands these calculations. (Luiza, 33 years old).

It confirms Eger's⁵ view, that "the relationship between beneficiaries and social assistants aims not only at remedying vulnerabilities, but it is also responsible for its production", as mentioned above. During the research, there was no account about participation in activities offered by the local CRAS.

Something notable throughout the field research regards the pride that the women feel about their transformation, and the power that they now have in relation to their own life as, for example, to carry the magnetic PBF card. For many of the beneficiaries, this was the first time that they opened a bank account, since the majority of them works, or has worked, only with side jobs in informal occupations. In every interview, when we started to explain the content of the questions and the research as a whole, they meant to stand up to show their PBF card. The magnetic card is handed to all beneficiaries and allows only for a single withdraw of the full amount of the benefit. Thus, it does not offer any other service and there is not any bank maintenance charge.

However, it appears in the field research as something more than a simple object. Symbolically, it is responsible for making the lives of the beneficiaries less scarce, an instrument that materializes the independence and the hope in better days. The card seems to be the material expression of this series of diffuse and subjective sensations of a greater autonomy. Thus, it is seen and showed with pride by the women and ends up receiving several other functions besides being just a card to withdraw the benefit.

Furthermore, the card is used to guarantee payment in case of debt in the *favela*, thus creating a system of popular credit for this population of extremely low income that cannot get approved in any credit or loan system for not having the necessary documents – such as proof of address or income – since a considerable part of Favela do Tripé does not have a mail system and works in informal jobs. Nonetheless, different from the logic of bank or loan agencies, where payment is made through credit card or bank slip, debit or paycheck, in the case of the Tripé, the physical card is the guarantee of the payment of the debt.

In a precarious context, the card crystallizes some security and works as a type of currency. An example like this reveals the complex relationships in the field among subjects, policies and objects, taking the PBF as a starting point.

Control and surveillance

A common afternoon in the *favela* fosters the experience of multiple noises. Music, conversation, cellphone applications, TVs turned on in a myriad of popular shows with sports, city alerts and electronic pastors. Love and hate are tuned. But also gunshots, running, screaming and open

air sewers. To live and survive in the *favela* requires to produce and reproduce noises, to hear them and quickly position oneself physically and morally without necessarily building a public and political voice. Rumors and their absence tell, indicate, communicate and share the fear, the terror, the frailty of bodies and lives facing weapons and their possessors and bearers. The fear, produced by the sounds of armed confrontation, produces association, alliances and strategies that, in a last attempt to remain alive, leads to the collective search for a shelter, for a safety house that allows them to survive until the next alert of the state and criminal violence. Solidarity produced facing the fear of dying. The noises of the confrontation come, in part, from a State's voice that, through a safety policy, according to the convenience of the moment, elects bodies as enemies to be eliminated, what Mbembé¹⁰ calls necropolitics. Add to that the noises of the violence attributed to the so-called "organized crime", which also operates in several networks with the presence of state agencies¹¹.

Regarding the State control, there are also other controls and diffuse surveillance produced and reproduced by the very dynamic of the social life in the *favela*. Social life that is fed by and that feeds the networks of socially dependent relationships¹². In the *favela*, residents also control and observe each other, producing their peculiar arrangements of classification and distinction.

Open doors and windows signaling the antagonism with a different world where there actually is a pre-notion of a house as a private, intimate space. Here, where the search and seizure warrant is ignored, intimacy containment is not a rule either. Strategies that inspect and expose, to those circulating, the acquired goods, food consumed and produced, habits long widespread and reorganized. But it also produces control over those who pass. To see and to be seen becomes part of the scrutiny for moral control. There, where the house and the street¹³ are under the perspective of the discipline and of the surveillance that puts each resident as inspectors of themselves and of others. Inspectors in a universe where the architecture of the houses and shacks also helps to think how the control practices happen on the streets, neighborhoods and condominiums of what is, in a shallow dichotomy, called "asphalt world" (this expression, in the Brazilian context, opposes the "asphalt world", that is, the parts of the city with infrastructure, to the *favela*, where there are no proper streets, and when there are, they are dirt streets; there is no sewage system,

street lighting etc). This dimension of the sociability of the *favelas* allows, in its breadth, to produce and reproduce segmentations, divisions and distinctions¹⁴. Contrary to the exotic¹⁵ and common sense views of the *favelas*, we propose here to think of a diverse, conflicted and harmonious *favela*, with alliances and rivalries, with interests, symbols and hierarchical classifications in dispute. That is, with individuals in sociability, but under certain conditions and with networks that go beyond the city outskirts.

If, on one hand, we have observed the constant threat on lives, on the other, we have followed, throughout the research, the role of the mother, of the woman who tries to protect and take care of her family against the destruction promoted by the State, through state violence and through networks with the organized crime. Paula Lacerda¹⁶, in her work that analyzes the case of the emasculated boys in Altamira, relating gender and motherhood, has shown that, socially, the responsibility to protect the children falls upon the mother and, later, that of using the pain as a mechanism to seek for justice. Besides this connection, she makes another one, regarding gender, motherhood and social class, since the idea of motherhood is connected to the very perception of "person", and to the configuration of the moral being in contexts of more popular groups.

Food is not free from judgement and oversight. Particularly, people observe what the families purchase with resources from the PBF. They do not only control habits that can be associated with an involvement or label that qualifies social relationships as criminal, and do not only control the individual¹⁷, but they also watch with what and how PBF resources are spent, which classifies, ranks and produces segmentations within the *favela*.

In the heterogeneity of this specific *favela*, the classifications and accusations perceived by the interviewees appear in the perceptions about parties, gossip and other socialization dimensions. For Márcia, for example, resident of the area under the bridge, the most precarious part, to go to the front of the *favela* is uncomfortable:

I don't go to the parties there at the front, everybody there is snobbish. And, frequently, their houses are worse than ours, the parties don't even have that many tasty things and they remain snobbish. (Márcia, 30 years old).

In the case of Favela do Tripé, the food choices that can be purchased with PBF resources are according to a social learning within a social

group. For this reason, people think it is strange to escape from the items that are considered correct to purchase with the money from the benefit, and judge ethically: “How could she? Buying formula using *Bolsa Família*?” “Coke? She’s rich!”

Oh, the amount of people who use the money from Bolsa Família to go to parties, you don’t want to know. I see lots of mothers buying beverages here and, the next day, they don’t have anything to eat. They don’t even worry, Viviane, they don’t even care. That’s why I don’t have any friends here, they are worthless. Who lets their kids starve to go drinking? To buy cigarettes? Us, mothers, have to be careful, we have to use the money for food, for a cookie, milk, vegetables, which are good for them, right? There are people who don’t deserve to be mothers. (Lidia, 45 years old).

In the excerpt above, it is possible to observe the frequent accusation game among neighbors, where the PBF appears as a conducting axis that is used to promote judgements and gossip. Lidia makes it clear that, for her, it is unacceptable that the women who receive the benefit use it for anything else other than strictly care and, more specifically, feeding their children. In the *favela*’s “Audit Office”, every expense is analyzed, classified and regulated by the residents themselves.

It is not only the children who have their food regulated by women. When there is a man in the family, his meals, or at least most of them, are also the women’s responsibility. Rice, beans and the protein – or “*mistura*” (“mix”), to use an emic term – are, for them, the basis of a healthy meal, even more so than vegetables and greens, which appear as complementary, and not essential, food. As a luxury, a waste of resource that does not provide energy, within the logic of food choices that “really provide energy to work and bring the money home”. A rationalization that changes priorities in name of survival¹⁸.

According to Yatzimirsky¹⁹, survival makes people prioritize food needs instead of other necessities. Thus, the residents of *favelas* can resist hunger, but not nutritional deficiency, resulting in an occult hunger that is caused not by clinical signs of malnutrition, but by the monotonous eating, which can result in lack of nutrients, and is caused by the increased intake of processed foods. Another reason for a possible occult hunger is abstaining from nutrient rich food in favor of children and husband, as narrated below:

I usually go to the cheapest store. For the kids, there must be yogurt, milk, cookies... When it’s possible, I buy fruit. I try to always have something at home for them. Now, I can eat whatever, as long

as they are fine, I eat anything. Sometimes, when there isn’t enough for everybody, I eat a cookie and don’t even have lunch. It’s they who matter. (Rita, 30 years old).

Clearly, the food choices are guided by a sociocultural approach, influenced by historical, cultural, social and economic orders of the individual, and which mark their identity. Food is seen as something symbolic and not only under the biological point of view, which meets only the functioning needs of the organism.

The body, as well as being a beneficiary of PBF, is also associated, in that context, to not working. According to our interlocutors, body fat is seen as a sign of laziness, carelessness and accommodation. The stigma of fat disqualifies the individual and makes them incapable of getting a job. For Goffman²⁰, “the term stigma, therefore, will be used to refer to a profoundly depreciative attribute”²⁰(p.6). Stigmatization, for those who already have moral attributes that are considered bad, works as a social control, pushing this minority away from a group relationship.

What the research showed us is that women who are considered to be overweight, as well as those who receive the PBF, and those who have been removed from the benefit, end up being devalued and excluded. That is because they are seen by their neighbors, friends and family as lazy and incapable of supporting themselves. As a result, they are accused of living off the state for receiving the PBF and, if the benefit is interrupted, they are judged and live under the suspicion of having acted wrongly to justify this suspension. That is, they are people who suffer multiple stigmas, as reported by Luiza’s account:

I was talking to my compadre about the elections. I told him that, if that “dude” won, we would be screwed, the chances of Bolsa Família ending were high. He doesn’t care about the poor, he doesn’t care at all. And do you know what he told me? He said he didn’t care, that it better end, that these women should get up with their fat asses and go to work, and stop living off the government. I answered right away: do I live off the government? Do you think I’m home as a couch potato living only with the money from Bolsa Família? Do you support your goddaughter? Do you feed her, give her clothes, milk, yogurt, Mucilon [Nestlé], do you buy her diapers? For Christ sake! He really thinks that people don’t do a thing and live only with Bolsa Família. (Luiza, 33 years old).

In the narrative above, Luiza is talking about the godfather of her daughter (in Portuguese, her “*compadre*”) about the upcoming presidential

elections of 2018 and refers to the then candidate Jair Bolsonaro with a slightly pejorative term, as she clearly demonstrates being scared of him interrupting the PBF in case he were elected. Is possible to observe at least two points about the PBF beneficiaries: they are stigmatized and seen as people who do not want to work, and the benefit is frequently misunderstood as an extra help from the government, instead of as an assured right with the goal of reducing social inequality.

Residents of *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro are subjected, and subject themselves, to multiple controls. By the State or by the few virtuous and unstable public safety policies, which reproduce the logic of fear, of criminal selectivity^{6,19}, and of the democracy of the exception²¹; or by a public policy that operates for income distribution and with the attempt of reducing misery – this other producer of state control⁴.

On the other hand, in the local or community sphere, in that which sociology would call micro-social, *favela* residents also operate in the diffuse control and surveillance, producing and reproducing segmentations, sanctions, condemning behaviors to deny them, those considered invalid, unacceptable. Micro cleavages that dispute behavioral patterns of the popular classes: control and surveillance that operate distributing and managing sociability, but which are marked by a constant conflict among different ways of building the body, of lifestyles choices and sociability patterns, and the disputes of the ways to manage oneself²².

Beyond the noises of violence and of the so-called “urban violence”^{23,24}, it is worth thinking about other associative dimensions of the lives in the *favelas*, such as those registered in the fieldwork that supports this paper. Dimensions such as precariousness and vulnerability also organize and condition the life of popular classes. Voices that are structured on affection, but which are guided and marked by the mess of state violence and of the so-called organized crime.

Final remarks

This paper has aimed at revealing part of the sociability dynamics in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro, having as starting point the PBF as a benefit to some extent generalized in that territory. We understand that it is precisely this generalization that makes the residents produce strategies of differentiation, classification and hierarchy among themselves. This generalization would

reinforce, to inattentive gazes, an aspect of supposed homogeneity. However, our fieldwork has revealed that the Favela do Tripé has built their peculiar system of classification and plurality. If “everyone” receives the PBF, as some of the research subjects have informed us, not all of them live under the bridge and are still characterized as outsiders²⁵, as poorer, dirtier and more immoral, as “involved”¹⁷.

This game of accusations is made possible by a dynamic of diffuse control and surveillance that allows classifications and judgements among those established and the outsiders²¹. If this differentiation falls over different areas of the *favela*, a system of accusations also regards the proper or poor uses of the benefit, especially in relation to the women who receive the amount and organize the expenses. There is good food and bad food for the money from PBF, as there are good and bad women and mothers.

Beyond the state and organized crime violence, the controls and diffuse surveillances, at the Tripé, the other dimension of residents’ sociability approached here refers to vulnerability and precariousness. Any noise about the PBF tends to generate a certain commotion within the community, at the same time that a greater autonomy of the subjects becomes evident, especially of the women who, after receiving the benefit, become agents of transformation and of choice for their own lives, since receiving the benefit opens for them, within certain limits, new ways to consume and, consequently, new sets of choices that escape what is tangible, reaching more profound changes in their lives, such as evading domestic violence relationships, leaving situations of food insecurity and having safety and the possibility of building and rebuilding their houses and lives, breaking the poverty cycle. However, this new condition seems to be constantly under threat. If the generalized benefit is a constitutive part of social relationships in the *favela*, rumors about it – its amounts, raise, end, extension – are usually amplified. There is a disinformation system that produces suspicions about the benefit and its beneficiaries, which feeds gossip, accusations and local hierarchies. The low quality information, from the point of view of beneficiaries in the poorest part of Tripé, works as another mechanism that feeds the “precarious condition” of these citizens, who seem not to know how their benefits – and those of their neighbors – are constituted.

This text begins with gunshots in a relatively prosaic afternoon, which introduced us to the

relational universe of a *favela*. It ends now with so many others, whose number is as uncertain as the compared amount of the benefits. Recently, close to the entrance of Tripé, a heavy shooting fired by army members targeted the car of a family, an event that ended up receiving media repercussion. This reinforces the argument that this population lives under state violence threatening their lives. The same State that produces everyday violence to this level manages a public policy that promotes food security and greater autonomy for these subjects, especially for women and their children. Nonetheless, we have showed here that

the native perception of the benefit talks about an uncertainty regarding its continuity and its amounts, producing a feeling of the permanent threat, something that we have already called an “instability in precariousness management²⁶”. Noises about it can become a tsunami in that community, while the PBF remains subjected to the convenience of the political moment. From data arising from the poorest part of an already precarious *favela*, we hope to have exposed the urgency to turn the program into a State’s policy, and not a governmental one, in a context of profound inequality.

Collaborations

V Mattar has performed the fieldwork in a *favela* at the west zone of Rio de Janeiro in the year of 2018 in a particularly poor area, made invisible, of a larger complex. RL Azize and RA Monteiro have worked building the research and, together with V Mattar, have written this paper.

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