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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Social Dynamics of Violence and Respect: State, Crime and Church in a Brazilian Favela

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Abstract
Drawing on extensive ethnographic fieldwork carried out in a large favela of Belo Horizonte, this study argues that there are three logics at play when it comes to regulating violence in poor Brazilian urban areas: that of crime, that of the state, and that of religion. These three logics act as normative regimes which, connected by the shared notion of 'respect', form symbolical relationships among themselves alternating between dissonance and coordination. This everyday interaction produces a normative triangle that determines which lives are more and which are less valuable and, therefore, the likeliest target of violence.

Keywords: crime; state; church; urban poverty; respect; life/death

Introduction

'I almost died, girl', said Du.[1] He was telling me the story of how, many years earlier, members of a drug gang that he used to belong to had tried to kill him. Our conversation was taking place in a Centro de Referência em Assistência Social (Social Welfare Reference Centre, CRAS)[2] in Morro da Luz, a large favela in the city of Belo Horizonte.[3] Our meeting was the last of four that had taken place as part of an oral history project about the favela. Du was a slim Black man with grey hair and an easy smile. He was 60 years old and had plenty to say about the history of the community.

In his eventful life, Du brought together such a variety of experiences that his trajectory seems to summarise to some extent the complexity of the everyday life and of the social dynamics of violence in an area that, as I will demonstrate in

[1]In order to protect their identities, names of people and places referred to in this study are pseudonyms.

[2]Brazil's CRASs are federal bodies that deliver social welfare services to the needy. In a favela the size of Morro da Luz there would be two CRAS offices. See http://mds.gov.br/assuntos/assistencia-social/unidades-de-atendimento/cras (URL last accessed 26 July 2022).

[3]Belo Horizonte, the state capital of Minas Gerais, has a population of 2.5 million and is the sixth most populous city in Brazil.

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this article, is governed by multiple normativities. Du's story also encompasses some of the main macro processes that have taken place in Brazil's urban margins over the last six decades, at the same time revealing the specificities inherent to the micro-level context of Belo Horizonte and Morro da Luz. These qualities led me to choose his biography as the leitmotif of this article.

The high rates of violence that remain a feature of contemporary Brazilian life were first reached in the 1980s and 90s.[4] At the time, the prevailing discourse in the media and among the middle and upper classes was that poor areas in Brazilian cities had become zones of lawlessness, chaos and savagery in which the extreme use of force was an everyday occurrence that followed no discernible logic whatsoever. Gradually, as criminality spread, so the prevailing narrative changed.

Today that narrative is centred on the idea that the absence of the state in these areas has created a power vacuum that has been filled by 'organised crime', mostly in the form of drug trafficking gangs; these gangs have produced a 'parallel government' in favelas that completely controls their residents and alienates them from the rest of society; thus, the state should try to fight for control over these territories, which means that criminals and the state are implacable foes in the grip of a 'war' of attrition'.[5]

For residents of poor neighbourhoods and academics who observe the reality up close, the situation is more complex. Although the literature on Latin America cited in the following section has demonstrated that criminal groups have indeed managed to establish governance in many areas throughout the continent, it has also demonstrated the various forms in which the state *remains present* in the lives of the urban poor, from schools to health care and from income transfer programmes to police repression. Thus, the state and crime are not mutually exclusive but act simultaneously.[6]

And, in fact, the works on violence in areas of urban poverty in Latin America which I cite in the following section have generally focused on the relations between crime and state as these governances rely, ultimately, on their capacity to resort to violence. Although this does make sense, this literature misses a very important facet of violence – its social plausibility. This article switches the focus of the analysis from who employs violence to who is the victim of this violence. By drawing on ethnographic research carried out in Morro da Luz and focusing on Du's life story from this perspective, this paper explores important transformations in the social fabric of the Brazilian lower classes in recent decades and focuses on the formation of bodies that are 'subject to violence', of lives that don't matter, of deaths that can't be mourned.[7] It shows how, alongside state and criminal normativities,

[4]According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, between 1980 and 1990 homicide rates jumped from 11.7 to 22.2 per 100,000 inhabitants: https://www.unodc.org/documents/lpo-brazil/Topics_crime/Dados/Numero_e_taxa_de_homicidios_no_Brasil_PT.pdf (last accessed 23 Aug. 2022).

[5]For a discussion, see Márcia Pereira Leite, 'Da "metáfora da guerra" ao projeto de "pacificação": Favelas e políticas de segurança pública no Rio de Janeiro', *Revista Brasileira de Segurança Pública*, 6: 2 (2012), pp. 374–88.

[6]The state is taken here not as a coherent rational unit, nor as a simple set of pre-established rules, but rather as a mesh of diverse and often contradictory actions and effects. I share Philip Abrams' notion that the state is 'reified' as a socially shared illusion: 'Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State (1977)', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1: 1 (1988), pp. 58–89.

[7]Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006); *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).

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the value attributed to a specific life is also very much established by a third logic, as important as the other two, i.e. religious normativity.

I argue that the constant interaction between state, criminal and religious actors and logics in favelas forms a relatively flexible *normative triangle* that constitutes a mechanism for the moral evaluation of people and behaviours.[8] This mechanism can exist only because the three regimes share an important native category, that of *respectability*. I conclude that the *normative triangle* classifies what/who 'is respectful' and 'deserves respect', and what/who 'is not respectful' and 'does not deserve respect'. Thereby, it assigns more value to some lives than others and determines who is more (and who less) likely to be a target of violence in a favela.

The paper begins by introducing the notion of *normative regimes*, the theoretical framework with which I am working. This is followed by contextual information in respect of Belo Horizonte and then by a description of the ethnographic methodology I employed in Morro da Luz. Next comes a twofold discussion on the multiplicity of authorities and their relation to the social dynamics of violence in the favela. In the first part, I look at early moments in Du's life story to analyse the social–historic formation of the state, criminal and religious *normative regimes*. In the second, the more recent parts of Du's life are intertwined with other excerpts from my fieldwork to help build an empirical understanding of the ways in which these normativities interact with each other in daily life. The article ends with an assessment of its contributions to the field.

The Normative Regimes Framework

Brazilian society experienced a huge increase in violence in the 1980s and 1990s. Alba Zaluar has provided an insightful explanation for what was going on. She claimed that the situation was the product of the combination of illegal economies and the development, among some young men, of a 'warrior ethos' that, drawing on elements of hyper-masculinity, valued a disposition to violence and an indifference to the suffering of others.[9] Like Zaluar, Luiz Antonio Machado da Silva suggested that a new pattern of sociability – 'violent sociability' that revolved around criminal activities and was centred on the use of force – was taking shape in poor neighbourhoods. He correctly added that what was commonly referred to as 'urban violence' and was seen as a threat to social order was really a social order in itself. Thus, he pointed out that different governances can (and do) coexist.[10]

[8]The state normative regime differs in some respects from the other two. While 'religion' is identified with churchgoers, and 'crime' with drug traffickers, the 'state' category encompasses a diverse set of policies and actors, leading people in Morro da Luz to usually make reference to each facet of the state separately (i.e. 'the police', 'the CRAS', 'the healthcare unit' etc.). Nevertheless on many occasions (particularly within favela social movements), they also refer to 'the state' as a unity. This indicates that the formation of what Abrams called the 'state-idea' ('Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State') is a reality in Morro da Luz, as it is elsewhere.

[9]Alba Zaluar, *Condomínio do diabo* (Rio de Janeiro: Revan, 1994); *A máquina e a revolta: As organizações populares e o significado da pobreza* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1985).

[10]Luiz Antonio Machado da Silva, 'Criminalidade violenta: Por uma nova perspectiva de análise', *Revista de Sociologia Política*, 13 (1999), pp. 115–24; 'Violência urbana, sociabilidade violenta e agenda pública', in Machado da Silva (ed.), *Vida sob cerco: Violências e rotina nas favelas do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 2008), pp. 35–46.

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The question of territories that are governed by various authorities is of interest to scholars discussing violence and challenges to the modern state in the so-called Global South. Achille Mbembe, for example, in dialogue with Michel Foucault, defines the concept of 'sovereignty' as the right to kill and argues that the use of force was the basis of the functioning of power in colonised territories. Mbembe argues that in many former colonies today the threat of violent death remains an important tool of governance that is used by different actors, including, but not limited to, those of the state.[11] Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat make the same assertion and propose the concept of 'emerging governscapes' to signify that, in the multiple-governance arrangement of the post-colonial world, the normative capacities of different authorities are unevenly spread across territories and fall disproportionally on populations, making some people more and others less subject to one or another type of governance.[12]

Literature on the Latin American case has considered this issue and tends to focus on the roles of criminal and state regimes, emphasising the many-sided relationship between the two (which goes well beyond plain antagonism and often involves rivalry and mutual reinforcement). It also provides evidence on the role of this relationship in the ongoing violence affecting the continent. Angélica Durán-Martínez, for example, has investigated Colombian and Mexican cities. She affirms that violence related to drug trafficking results not from state 'weakness' but from the relationships and agreements (or disagreements) between criminal and state actors.[13] Similarly, José Miguel Cruz argues that, in Central American countries, the state has always had to negotiate with local authorities to be able to govern.[14] In Argentina, Matías Dewey demonstrates that a part of the state in fact depends on the illegal suspension of the law,[15] and Javier Auyero and Katherine Sobering expose collusion between criminals and the police in urban peripheries.[16]

In Brazil, Michel Misse describes the conversion of illegal state protection into 'political merchandise' – a dynamic that in Rio de Janeiro (Misse's case study) can easily be identified by the fact that drug traffickers set aside a part of their profits to pay the police in order to avoid arrest.[17] Similarly, Enrique Arias, who also

[11]Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15: 1 (2003), pp. 11–40, here p. 16. Mbembe records his debt to Foucault's *Il faut défendre la société: Cours au Collège de France, 1975–1976* (Paris: Seuil, 1997) and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon, 1979).

[12]Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (eds.), *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); 'Sovereignty Revisited', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 35 (2006), pp. 295–315; Finn Stepputat, 'Pragmatic Peace in Emerging Governscapes', *International Affairs*, 94: 2 (2018), pp. 399–416.

[13]Angélica Durán-Martínez, *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[14]José Miguel Cruz, 'Criminal Violence and Democratization in Central America: The Survival of the Violent State', *Latin American Politics and Society*, 53: 4 (2011), pp. 1–33.

[15]Matías Dewey, 'Zona liberada: La suspensión de la ley como patrón de comportamiento estatal', *Nueva Sociedad*, 276 (2018), pp. 102–17.

[16]Javier Auyero and Katherine Sobering, *The Ambivalent State: Police–Criminal Collusion at the Urban Margins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[17]Michel Misse, 'Trocas ilícitas e mercadorias políticas', *Anuário Antropológico*, 35: 2 (2010), pp. 89–107; 'Violence, Criminal Subjection and Political Merchandise in Brazil: An Overview from Rio', *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 7 (2018), pp. 135–48.

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studies Rio, demonstrates that such social influence as traffickers have is connected to the bribery relations they establish with policemen and politicians.[18] Meanwhile, Erika Larkins stresses that the 'spectacular' way that the police act in favelas, alongside their well-known arrangements with criminals, have the effect of weakening the legitimacy of the state and potentially strengthening criminal governance.[19] To conclude, Palloma Menezes has described the ways in which some public safety policies have brought into existence a social configuration whereby favela dwellers constantly monitor their own behaviours in order not to be thought of as allied with the police or sympathetic to the traffickers. These residents create strategies to distance themselves from the possibility of being the targets of violence by either one of the *de facto* authorities ruling their communities.[20]

As for São Paulo, Karina Biondi has shown how hyper-incarceration policies and appalling living conditions have fomented a self-protection-driven collaboration between criminals and the rise of the Primeiro Comando da Capital (First Command of the Capital, PCC), Brazil's largest criminal organisation.[21] Gabriel Feltran has studied the expansion of the PCC into poor urban areas in São Paulo and how it came to govern them. He argues that poor *paulistas* in situations of conflict can turn to the police or to the 'world of crime' to seek justice, depending on the nature of their problem.[22] And Graham Denyer Willis demonstrates that the attitudes of police detectives and PCC members converge in respect of the moral attribution of 'deservedness' to violent deaths, thereby giving rise to a 'killing consensus'.[23] Generally speaking, Brazilian social science has exposed the insufficiency of a purely state-centric analysis of the understanding of the lived reality of a very significant part of the Brazilian population.

In close dialogue with these traditions, a group of ethnographers of Brazil's urban peripheries, of whom I am one, has in recent years developed a conceptual framework known as *normative regimes*.[24] We argue that the historical multiplicity

[18]Enrique Desmond Arias, 'The Dynamics of Criminal Governance: Networks and Social Order in Rio de Janeiro', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 38: 2 (2006), pp. 293–325.

[19]Erika Robb Larkins, *The Spectacular Favela: Violence in Modern Brazil* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

[20]Palloma Valle Menezes, 'Monitorar, negociar e confrontar: As (re)definições na gestão dos ilegalismos em favelas "pacificadas"', *Tempo Social*, 30: 3 (2018), pp. 191–216.

[21]Karina Biondi, *Junto e misturado: Uma etnografia do PCC* (São Paulo: Terceiro Nome, 2010).

[22]Gabriel de Santis Feltran, 'Crime e castigo na cidade: Os repertórios da justiça e a questão do homicídio nas periferias de São Paulo', *Caderno CRH*, 23: 58 (2010), pp. 59–73; *Fronteiras de tensão: Política e violência nas periferias de São Paulo* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2011).

[23]Graham Denyer Willis, *The Killing Consensus: Police, Organized Crime, and the Regulation of Life and Death in Urban Brazil* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

[24]Ana Beraldo, 'Negociando a vida e a morte: Estado, igreja e crime em uma favela de Belo Horizonte', PhD diss., Universidade Federal de São Carlos, 2020; 'Entre a vida e a morte: Normatividades, negociações e violência em uma favela de Belo Horizonte', *Dilemas*, 14: 1 (2021), pp. 27–51; Feltran, 'Crime e castigo na cidade'; 'Governo que produz crime, crime que produz governo: O dispositivo de gestão do homicídio em São Paulo', *Revista Brasileira de Segurança Pública*, 2: 11 (2012), pp. 232–55; Janaina Maldonado Guerra da Cunha, 'Jogando meu corpo no mundo: Relações entre "conflito urbano" e "acumulação social da diferença"' Master's diss., Universidade Federal de São Carlos, 2020; Isabela Vianna Pinho and Gregório Zambon Diniz, 'Cidade em conflito: Regimes normativos e desmanches de veículos na capital paulista', 44° Encontro da Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais (ANPOCS), on line, 2020.

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of orders in Brazil has been consolidated in recent decades and evolved into governances, these being the so-called *normative regimes*. Feltran defines a *normative regime* as a 'plausible set of guidelines for the empirical actions of subjects'.[25] This set of guidelines is not uniform. There is a 'dissensus' – in the Rancièrian sense of the term[26] – in place in Brazil whereby distinct criteria of legitimacy coexist. This means that the common ground that should characterise a given society's representations of justice, security and rightness is fractured: there are multiple and often antagonistic understandings of how the world is or should be.[27] This lies at the heart of Brazilian urban conflict.

Moreover, we have suggested that, in poor urban neighbourhoods, the main producers of guidelines for behaviours today are the three *normative regimes* discussed in this paper: the state, the criminal and the religious,[28] all of them functioning as self-contained terrains[29] and becoming progressively more established in subjectivities and routines. Some subjects can identify more with one or the other regime. However, ordinary residents tend to navigate these relationships and mobilise the multiple repertoires they provide to interpret situations and choose paths of action. This article will show that, in this scenario, the notion of *respectability* has gained a renewed centrality: it permeates the three governances, assuming the role of their symbolic interconnection and therefore making the Brazilian dissensus plausible for those immersed in it.

Belo Horizonte

Belo Horizonte can be thought of as a symbol of one of the great (apparent) contradictions in which Brazil is entangled: the coexistence of aspirations to modernity with a prevalent insistence on informality. This is because Belo Horizonte was a planned city designed to represent Brazil's progress towards civilisation, with its planners using 'advanced' European cities, in particular Paris, as their models.[30] According to the original project, inaugurated in 1897, the city was divided into an urban area, where public buildings were to be located; a suburban and residential area; and a rural area, forming a kind of green belt. In such a set-up, the poorest populations would not legally be able to live in the central zones. They were left to populate the peripheries, or to have recourse to a mechanism that has been in use for a long time: the extra-legal occupation of land. A mere 15 years after inauguration, 60 per cent of the city's population lived outside its planned area.[31] Today,

[25]Gabriel Feltran, *The Entangled City: Crime as Urban Fabric in São Paulo* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 19.

[26]Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

[27]Laurent Thévenot, *L'Action au pluriel: Sociologie des régimes d'engagement* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006).

[28]Gabriel de Santis Feltran, 'O valor dos pobres: A aposta no dinheiro como mediação para o conflito social contemporâneo', *Caderno CRH*, 27: 72 (2014), pp. 495–512; Beraldo, 'Negociando a vida e a morte'.

[29]Feltran, *The Entangled City*, p. 15.

[30]Heloisa Soares de Moura Costa, 'Habitação e produção do espaço em Belo Horizonte', in Roberto Luis de Melo Monte-Mór *et al.* (eds.), *Belo Horizonte: Espaços e tempos em construção* (Belo Horizonte: PBH/CEDEPLAR/UFMG, 1994), pp. 51–78.

[31]Sérgio de Azevedo and Mariza Afonso Rezende, 'Cidade, poder público e movimento de favelados', in Malori José Pompermayer (ed.), *Movimentos sociais em Minas Gerais: Emergências e perspectivas* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 1987), pp. 111–39.

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450,000 of the city's total population of 2.5 million live in favelas.[32] In Belo Horizonte, therefore, just as in other Brazilian and Latin American cities,[33] illegality and urban development have always been closely intertwined.

In addition to its particular foundational history, Belo Horizonte exhibits another feature that is worth mentioning for the purposes of this paper: the way in which criminality is structured there is substantially different from that of the better known contexts of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In Rio, there are four *de facto* authorities outside official state institutions: three of them are large drug trafficking groups (Comando Vermelho, Amigos dos Amigos, and Terceiro Comando Puro), and the fourth is a paramilitary organisation, known as the 'militia': groups of militia are generally formed of individuals connected to the police; they make money through extortion. In Rio de Janeiro's governance arrangements, entire slums are dominated by one of these four criminal entities, all of which dispose of heavy weaponry and regulate residents' behaviours. The literature has shown that these groups' normative abilities rely on their capacity to impose violence as well as on the significant level of legitimacy that they have managed to garner among the poor.[34]

In São Paulo, there is a single hegemonic criminal organisation, the PCC, which manages drug trafficking, robberies and car thefts, and dominates the prison system and the favelas. Several scholars have described the alternative justice system provided by the PCC that mimics the official juridical structure, with trials, including 'defence' and 'prosecution', in which the parties to a conflict are heard and sentences are handed down.[35] This mechanism, known as the 'court of crime' (*tribunal do crime*), is meant to discourage excessive violence between criminals (and the poor in general) and to encourage violence against the repressive forces of the state: a philosophy summarised in the PCC's motto 'peace amongst thieves, war against the police'.[36]

The structure of criminal networks in Belo Horizonte has its own special features. Luís Felipe Zilli has conducted pioneering investigative work on the internal dynamics of criminal groups operating in the city.[37] He has described the dispersed

[32]Costa, 'Habitação e produção do espaço em Belo Horizonte'.

[33]Brodwyn Fischer, Bryan McCann and Javier Auyero (eds.), *Cities from Scratch: Poverty and Informality in Urban Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

[34]See, for example, Alba Zaluar and Isabel Siqueira Conceição, 'Favelas sob o controle das milícias no Rio de Janeiro: Que paz?', *São Paulo em Perspectiva*, 21: 2 (2007), pp. 89–101; William da Silva Lima, *Quatrocentos contra um: Uma história do Comando Vermelho* (Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 2001); Carla dos Santos Mattos, 'Uma etnografia da expansão do mundo do crime no Rio de Janeiro', *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, 31: 91 (2016), pp. 1–15; Enrique Desmond Arias and Nicholas Barnes, 'Crime and Plural Orders in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil', *Current Sociology*, 65: 3 (2017), pp. 448–65.

[35]Gabriel Feltran, *Irmãos: Uma história do PCC* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2018); Bruno Paes Manso and Camila Nunes Dias, 'PCC, sistema prisional e gestão do novo mundo do crime no Brasil', *Revista Brasileira de Segurança Pública*, 11: 2 (2017), pp. 10–29.

[36]Daniel Hirata and Carolina Grillo, 'Crime, guerra e paz: Dissenso político-cognitivo em tempos de extermínio', *Novos Estudos CEBRAP*, 38: 3 (2019), pp. 553–471.

[37]Luís Felipe Zilli do Nascimento, 'Violência e criminalidade em vilas e favelas dos grandes centros urbanos: Um estudo de caso da Pedreira Prado Lopes', Master's diss., Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), 2004; 'O bonde tá formado: Gangues, ambiente urbano e criminalidade violenta', PhD diss., UFMG, 2011.

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character of the 'world of crime' in Belo Horizonte: it is split between small groups of drug traffickers (of about ten to 15 members), known as gangs, each one of which is very much identified with the specific portion of the favela it dominates, where, as a rule, most of its members have lived since birth. Zilli remarks that constant police brutality towards favela youngsters pushes some of them to join local gangs as a protection strategy.

More recently, Rafael Rocha has shown that this criminal fragmentation is built on a relationship of violent rivalry between the groups, often perpetuated from one generation to the other. In this scenario, young gang-members frequently participate in conflicts that started long before they were born and have been passed on from father to son, uncle to nephew. The rivalry intensifies cyclically, giving rise to what combatants know as a 'war of gangs', characterised by sequences of vendetta murders in the form of ambushes on favela streets.[38] Murders are frequently carried out by people the victims have known since childhood and tend to happen near victims' homes.[39] Authors such as Zilli, Rocha and Cláudio Beato state that while gangs do compete in terms of drug sales, the main triggers of violence in Belo Horizonte are generally of a moral–personalist nature, structured around family, affective and friendship ties and antagonisms.[40] Homicide rates in Belo Horizonte are therefore variable (with significant peaks and troughs across time, despite always remaining at high levels) and given to 'implosions' of deaths concentrated in clearly demarcated areas.[41] One of these is Morro da Luz.

Fieldwork in Morro da Luz

The ethnographic fieldwork that underpins the article was carried out in Morro da Luz for a period of just over a year (August 2017–September 2018) and complemented by visits in April/May 2019 as well as by a project in the favela that began in 2011.[42] The research consisted primarily of frequent visits to Morro da Luz (around four times a week) that usually, but not always, took place in specific strategic spaces. The main ones were: 1) a school; 2) a pre-university preparatory

[38]Rafael Lacerda Silveira Rocha, 'Vinganças, guerras e retaliações: Um estudo sobre o conteúdo moral dos homicídios de caráter retaliatório nas periferias de Belo Horizonte', Master's diss., UFMG, 2017; 'A guerra como forma de relação: Uma análise das rivalidades violentas entre gangues em um aglomerado de Belo Horizonte', *Dilemas*, 8: 2 (2015), pp. 277–301.

[39]Cláudio C. Beato, 'O problema dos homicídios em Belo Horizonte', *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Criminais*, 11: 42 (2003), pp. 345–50; Beato *et al.*, 'Conglomerados de homicídios e o tráfico de drogas em Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brasil, de 1995 a 1999', *Cadernos de Saúde Pública*, 17: 5 (2001), pp. 1163–71.

[40]Beato, 'O problema dos homicídios em Belo Horizonte'; Beato and Luís Felipe Zilli, 'A estruturação de atividades criminosas: Um estudo de caso', *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, 27: 80 (2012), pp. 71–88; Beato *et al.*, 'Conglomerados de homicídios'; Zilli, 'O bonde tá formado'.

[41]Marco Antônio Couto Marinho and Luciana Teixeira Andrade, 'O sobe e desce das taxas de homicídios na Região Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte: Armas de fogo, drogas e políticas de Segurança Pública', *Dilemas*, 4: 2 (2011), pp. 229–59.

[42]At the time, I was a student on an internship in a school in the community. Since then, I have engaged in a myriad of activities in Morro da Luz, from workshops on race and gender with teenagers to a project that sought to trace the trajectories of senior women residents. I have frequently reassessed the notes I accumulated along this journey during the present ethnographic study.

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course; 3) a cultural group that promotes artistic projects carried out by residents; 4) two CRASs; 5) a health care centre; and 6) an international Evangelical missionary organisation.

In each of these spaces, I developed different kinds of methodological approaches making up what I call *creative ethnography*:[43] conducting workshops on daily life in Morro da Luz; guiding writing exercises on the experience of growing up in the favela; carrying out encounters with the elderly to discuss the past and present of Morro da Luz; observing various institutions' regular activities; tracking social media publications; and engaging in informal conversations.[44] People I met in these spaces often invited me to visit other parts of the favela – their houses, bars they frequent, churches they attend – and introduced me to more residents of and workers in Morro da Luz.

I therefore managed to access a great variety of experiences and subjects: old and young, university graduates and the illiterate. As a complementary strategy, I conducted ten in-depth interviews with subjects whom I got closer to during my research: the school's pedagogical coordinator; a schoolteacher who was also a resident; a former employee of a homicide prevention programme who worked in Morro da Luz; the coordinator of one of the CRASs; three workers at the health centre; three residents participating in the cultural group; and one joint interview with two residents with a background in social movements in favelas, one of whom was Du.[45]

The first time Du's name came up in my fieldwork was months prior to the series of workshops in the CRAS, when I met a woman named Amanda at a conference who had worked in Morro da Luz as part of the 'Fica Vivo!' (Stay Alive!) programme team (this is a state programme seeking to reduce homicides in Minas Gerais' most violent areas).[46] During our interview, she shared many of her experiences of years working in the favela, emphatically mentioning Du – a programme 'workshopper' – as one of the subjects to have had the most impact on her.

When I met Du, I already knew much about him. We shared long conversations that were always informal and were therefore never recorded or guided by any kind of script. In April 2019, I returned to Morro da Luz to interview Du in depth. He introduced me to another resident, a community leader, and I interviewed the two together. They recounted to me an expansive version of the community's history, rather less so about the more personal aspects of their lives. I was therefore not able to trace a life story *per se* but shaped a narrative by means of the conversations that we shared at different moments and from reports from other subjects – like Amanda – that partially reconstructed his trajectory.

In this article I have drawn on the fragments of this character's life story – and on other reports collected in the field – to approach debates on normativities and violence. The choice of Du as the central character in this paper is due to the fact that, in his eventful life trajectory, he seems to illustrate much of what I have been dealing with in my different visits to Morro da Luz over the years, revealing himself

[43]Beraldo, 'Negociando a vida e a morte'.

[44]The participants were informed that they were taking part in research activities and that the data produced from my interaction with them could be published, with their privacy and safety respected.

[45]The interviews were recorded and transcribed, always with the interviewee's consent.

[46]See http://www.seguranca.mg.gov.br/component/gmg/program/283-Programas (last accessed 23 Aug. 2022). I describe the programme in more detail below.

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as something of a Weberian ideal type for the understanding of how *respect* gains a central role in a conflictive and multiple-normativity-governed scenario.[47]

Du's Memories

Poverty and the Community

Du has lived his entire life in Morro da Luz, where he has witnessed a range of social transformations. During our encounters in the CRAS, Du and other older residents informed me of the infrastructure difficulties they faced when they were young: the lack of running water and electricity, the dirt roads, the shacks made of plywood and asbestos. Despite the precariousness of their lives, the idea of *community* emerged as a theme from a time in which 'everyone helped everyone else out'. Exchanges involving money, food and child care were identified by Du and other residents as one of the most striking characteristics of their families' trajectories.

Similar dynamics have been described by Larissa Lomnitz in her work on Mexico's peripheries during the 1970s. She argues that in a context of financial insecurity, with little access to rights, and under-valued occupations, the social relations of mutual reciprocity in these neighbourhoods constitute an 'informal economic system parallel to the market economy'.[48] This system is the main survival mechanism among large sectors of the population in Latin American urban environments. These strategies, along with others such as taking in multiple income streams from formal and informal work, are what have come to be known in the Latin Americanist literature as 'resources of poverty'.[49]

Likewise, in Morro da Luz, neighbourhood bonds were important tools for the poor to continue living in the city, especially when faced with a far-right military dictatorship, as was the case for Du throughout most of his childhood and youth. In 1964, when Du was little, there was a coup in Brazil that ousted elected president João Goulart and suppressed democracy for the next two decades. During this period, any mobilisations of favela residents were violently repressed. Thus, relations of reciprocity between them seemed more crucial than ever.

In that period, statecraft in Brazil was centred on the classification of people into 'good citizens' ('*cidadãos de bem*') and 'subversives' or 'enemies of the nation'. The first category comprised those who 'worked hard', respected social hierarchies, exhibited strong Catholic characteristics, and supported the government; the second comprised those who were critical of the government, worried about social inequalities and had less traditionalist views of family, sexuality and society. 'Subversives' represented a supposedly 'communist' threat to the country to be persecuted, tortured and, sometimes, killed.[50] Against this background, Du was closer to a 'subversive' than to a 'good citizen'.

[47]Max Weber, '"Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy', in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. Edward E. Shils and Henry A. Finch (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1949), pp. 49–112.

[48]Larissa Adler de Lomnitz, *Cómo sobreviven los marginados* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1975), pp. 11–12; my translation.

[49]Mercedes González de la Rocha, 'Vanishing Assets: Cumulative Disadvantage among the Urban Poor', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 606: 1 (2006), pp. 68–94.

[50]Liliana Sanjurjo and Gabriel Feltran, 'Sobre lutos e lutas: Violência de estado, humanidade e morte em dois contextos etnográficos', *Ciência e Cultura*, 67: 2 (2015), pp. 40–5.

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'Malandragem'

When Du was little, his older brother, Zé, whom he admired greatly, started earning money during a period of economic difficulty affecting the family. The origin of his income, however, was controversial: Zé was taking part in criminal activities. Du frequently tells me how in those days 'crime was different': back then it was *malandragem* and now it's all *bandidos* (criminals). The difference, Du says, has to do with 'what's right and what's wrong'. *Malandragem* is a profoundly Brazilian term for a complex phenomenon that refers to both involvement in illegal activities and an almost 'natural' capacity for trickery. The *malandro* is someone who avoids regular work and lives a hedonistic life. He may be seen as particularly friendly and charming, or as dangerous and exploitative (or both at once). The *malandro* is feared and yet admired.[51]

Du tells me that he looked up to Zé, and, as soon as he got a little older, wanted to join his group. In Du's narrative – and as described in the works of scholars such as Zaluar, Misse and Brodwyn Fischer – *malandragem* was linked to a lifestyle, to ways of earning money in an exclusionary structure and outsmarting a society that still operated according to a slavery-based mentality.[52] *Malandros* contributed to the building of a more clearly defined favela-based social identity, usually behaving in *respectful* ways towards residents and aiming their scams at the higher social classes. They normally avoided the use of violence and rarely possessed firearms. Between the late 1970s and the early 80s, Du and Zé's group came to prominence through the sale of illegal drugs, mainly marijuana.

The narrative continues. Du takes a small pile of black-and-white pictures from his backpack and shows me photographs of his family and his group of friends involved in illegal markets 'in the old days'. He picks out a picture of himself and Zé as small children, standing side by side in front of their house, and describes the day years later when the cops charged into Morro da Luz, rushing through alleyways, searching for a drug trafficker who belonged to the same group as them. Zé got left behind and was shot dead. 'At that time there was no such thing as an investigation, girl', he tells me. Despite his family's grief, life went on. A few years later, the trafficker the police had been chasing the day Zé was killed was the victim of a homicide. And so it was that many of the friends and relatives in the photos Du showed me had met their ends.

Frustration, Cocaine and Money

With the gradual decline of the military dictatorship in the 1980s and the mobilisation of political organisations in the favelas, state apparatuses finally started providing much-needed resources for the poor.[53] From healthcare to retirement, such resources reduced these populations' central vulnerabilities. Social movements were

[51]Misse, 'Violence, Criminal Subjection and Political Merchandise in Brazil'.

[52]Zaluar, *Condomínio do diabo*; Michel Misse, 'Malandros, marginais e vagabundos. A acumulação social da violência no Rio de Janeiro', PhD diss., Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro, 1999; Brodwyn Fischer, *A Poverty of Rights: Citizenship and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

[53]Bryan McCann, *Hard Times in the Marvelous City: From Dictatorship to Democracy in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

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able to express themselves more freely and the city's peripheries came to be marked by the struggle for workers' rights. Improvements in working conditions enjoyed by each successive generation led to expectations in the working classes. But expectations at the end of the authoritarian regime were not fulfilled by material benefits such as those longed for by favela residents.[54] People were indeed gaining access to rights, but Brazil was going through an economic crisis and neoliberal policies contributed to a worsening of the situation of the lower classes.[55] As poverty and unemployment rose, an 'improved quality of life' seemed completely out of reach.[56]

As a result, the strategies previously employed by the urban poor were negatively affected. Instead of the *resources of poverty*, poor neighbourhoods were dominated by a *poverty of resources*, a social configuration characteristic of prolonged crises – as Mercedes González de la Rocha has argued.[57] Likewise, Du recalled moments of extreme financial difficulty as periods when the everyone-helped-everyone-else-out philosophy no longer worked as well as before. The widespread frustration with the persistence of deep inequalities in a now democratic country made residents' interactions increasingly tense. Drug trafficking – and the money and prestige that came with it – was becoming more attractive for some people, especially young men.

The changes to the social texture that Du described were not exclusive to Morro da Luz, Belo Horizonte, or even Brazil, but part of wider processes that were taking place all over Latin America and related to the advent and expansion of the cocaine market. Elizabeth Leeds argues that the Latin American monopoly over the production and global distribution of cocaine has placed the continent at the centre of a large global market for the first time. She mentions the unprecedented amounts of money passing through the hands of the poor, who have begun to occupy the lowest positions in the hierarchy of a complex illegal labour system.[58] Brazil, despite not being a coca producer, had an extraordinarily strong internal market for the drug.

Zé's death appears in Du's narrative as a symbol of the reconfiguration of the sociabilities surrounding illegal markets in poor urban territories: the end of the era of the *malandro* and the beginning of the era of the *bandido*, as he himself explained. Zaluar has claimed that, unlike the *malandro,* the arriviste *bandido* had an individualistic view of the world and the favela that undermined the old values that had organised relations among the lower classes. The *bandido*, she argues, is focused on endlessly increasing his profits made through illegal transactions and does not hesitate to use violence to get what he wants.[59] Little wonder

[54]Gabriel de Santis Feltran, 'O legítimo em disputa: As fronteiras do "mundo do crime" nas periferias de São Paulo', *Dilemas*, 1: 1 (2008), pp. 93–126; McCann, *Hard Times in the Marvelous City*.

[55]Teresa Pires do Rio Caldeira, 'Violência, direitos e cidadania: Relações paradoxais', *Ciência e Cultura*, 54: 1 (2002), pp. 44–46.

[56]Janice Perlman, 'Marginality: From Myth to Reality in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro, 1969–2002', in Ananya Roy and Nezar AlSayyad (eds.), *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2003), pp. 105–46.

[57]González de la Rocha, 'Vanishing Assets'.

[58]Elizabeth Leeds, 'Cocaine and Parallel Polities in the Brazilian Urban Periphery: Constraints on Local-Level Democratization', *Latin American Research Review*, 31: 3 (1996), pp. 47–84.

[59]Zaluar, *Condomínio do diabo*.

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then that violence became part of the lives of Du and his peers in a way it never had before.

Emergence of the 'Bandido'

Zaluar and Leeds have discussed the emergence of new forms of sociability in Brazil. Misse has argued that the *bandido* is a socially shared representation rather than a real living human being, that the *bandido* represents an individual who not only commits crimes but is also intrinsically transgressive and violent. This is morally much worse than the older and more charming representation of the *malandro*. Misse adds that the social category of *bandido* is a racialised and class-based one, as it is usually linked with Afro-Brazilian phenotypic characteristics and lower-income social status.[60]

During the dictatorship, government propaganda claimed that the country was in danger of being dominated by 'subversive' and 'leftist' forces that would take power and lead Brazilian society into a state of social, economic, moral and political degradation and instability. It presented the figure of the 'communist' as the main enemy of the nation, a 'plague' or a 'cancer' to be fought and eliminated for the sake of the country's 'health'.[61] In the wake of the military regime, as neoliberalism became the preeminent ideology in the region, and with the emergence of the cocaine trade and the creation of updated state-building strategies, Brazilians, especially the poor, became classified as either 'workers' (*trabalhadores*) or *bandidos* – a new category of public enemy every bit as feared as the earlier 'subversives' and 'leftists'.[62]

We continue talking and Du mentions how he and his colleagues would travel to Rio de Janeiro to buy the cocaine they would later sell to middle-class youngsters in Belo Horizonte. The cocaine market, Leeds has demonstrated, has given rise to a new scenario in Rio: the capacity of criminal groups has expanded, the amount of money that street-level traffickers deal with has increased to another level, and the influence illegal drug businesses have on the everyday life of favelas and the economy and politics in a broader sense has changed significantly.[63] Belo Horizonte and other big cities have begun undergoing similar processes.

As drug sales became more lucrative, Du was able to buy better clothes and furnish his family's home. However, access to weapons was also becoming increasingly easy and it was not uncommon to see armed people walking along favela alleys at night. Other criminal groups gained prominence in Morro da Luz and Du's gang had to start taking competition into consideration when setting the prices of their products. Du recalls a day when, sitting on a low wall in the favela and worrying about the increasing dangers of a life of crime, a girl approached him and started to preach to him about religion, God, and the possibility of him escaping 'this life'. He did not make much of the conversation at the time, and his criminal career went on.

[60]Michel Misse, 'Crime, sujeito e sujeição criminal: Aspectos de uma contribuição analítica sobre a categoria "bandido"', *Lua Nova*, 79 (2010), pp. 235–44.

[61]Carlos Fico, 'Versões e controvérsias sobre 1964 e a ditadura militar', *Revista Brasileira de História*, 24: 47 (2004), pp. 29–60.

[62]Sanjurjo and Feltran, 'Sobre lutos e lutas'.

[63]Leeds, 'Cocaine and Parallel Polities in the Brazilian Urban Periphery'.

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At one point, Du started consuming the drugs he was supposed to sell. His body and mind responded to the narcotics in ways that were, for him, exceptionally pleasurable, he tells me, as if he were someone confessing to a sin. Du found it increasingly difficult to control his use of drugs. Suddenly, he found himself addicted. His ability to earn money as a dealer was soon compromised. After becoming immersed in a cycle of debt with the gang he belonged to, he could no longer sustain his own habit. Du mentions vaguely that he was violently attacked ('I almost died, girl'), and that, in the midst of the mental confusion caused by the shots fired into his body, the image came to his mind of the girl preacher he had spoken to a few months earlier.

The Miracle

Although Du was shot several times, he 'miraculously' survived. After being admitted to hospital in a critical condition, he received ongoing support from a Catholic church: its representatives paid him visits, assisted him financially, and, as soon as he had recovered, included him in their social circle. Du felt that, at least to these people, he could be someone minimally worthy of *respect*. Martin Riesebrodt argues that the nucleus of religiosity of any kind stands in its promise of salvation,[64] and it was precisely this promise that Du needed to restart his life after his traumatic brush with death: he would be a *malandro* no more, he was now a *convert*. This 'transformation' from addict/trafficker into 'man of the church' protected him from becoming the target of more attacks – although today, decades after the event, he is still not able to frequent the region dominated by the gang that he was once part of.

Du's death would most likely have been considered 'just another statistic' if he had died when he was shot. After all, he was both a trafficker and an addict, a bad combination. He had revealed himself to be a bad *malandro*, someone *disrespectful* and, therefore, undeserving of *respect*. If, in his eyes, *malandragem* was not as bad as the activities of modern-day *bandidos*, in the eyes of the community the distinction was not that important any more. Du could very easily have been killed as were Zé and so many of his friends, whose deaths were to some degree tolerable to the people around them.[65] He survived, however, and went on to transform himself.

Du and Others in the Favela Today

From Catholicism to Evangelism

When Du was little, there were no Catholic chapels in Morro da Luz. Residents of the favela who wanted to attend Sunday mass had to go to the 'rich people's church' in the next neighbourhood. Over the years, the Catholic authorities in Belo Horizonte built chapels in parts of the city where there had been none. In

[64] Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[65] Sandra Gayol and Gabriel Kessler, *Muertes que importan: Una mirada sociohistórica sobre los casos que marcaron la Argentina reciente* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2018).

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Morro da Luz, they built eight. Yet even though residents valued the priests and their sermons, they still often felt that there was a distance between them and the religious leaders. They did not have the same skin colour, nor did they have similar educational levels or consumption capacities. Pablo Semán remarks that these differences – and the fact that the Catholic Church functions as a highly hierarchical, bureaucratic, and often rigid institution that does not adapt easily to local specificities – were some of the reasons why in recent decades in Latin America Catholicism has lost much of its ground and Evangelical churches have rapidly expanded, especially among the poor.[66] Du and other residents have shown me how, even when Catholicism was still hegemonic in the country's urban margins, it did not seem to be able to forge itself as a normative regime. The same does not apply to the Evangelists.

When I first met him, Du was still outwardly religious, but the church he now attended was an Evangelical one. He hasn't told me anything about this transition, but it is safe to say that this process was not just his alone.[67] As Du's trajectory illustrates, the metamorphosis of the Brazilian (and Latin American) religious profile happened in tandem with the transformation of criminality: as the Evangelical churches were growing in influence,[68] crime was becoming more lucrative and more violent. Interestingly, Evangelical churches, more strikingly than Catholic ones, present themselves around the idea of a 'battle against the devil', and the devil, when it comes to places such as Morro da Luz, is identified with crime, drugs and alcohol.[69] One might imagine that the spread of these churches would be accompanied by a decrease in criminality, but one would be wrong: despite the strong discursive confrontation between them, the two poles are deeply interconnected.

Luísa, a White woman aged around 50 who has worked for almost 20 years in one of the favela's healthcare centres, illustrates one of the main apertures in what could be misperceived as a rigid boundary: *converts*.

> Priests or pastors are influential figures in the community, mainly among women and 'formers'. Former addicts, former traffickers, former alcoholics, former drug users – their influence is enormous, isn't it? And pastors are a much bigger deal than priests now. We've had this shift in how life should be … As incredible as it may seem, the lead drug trafficker recently became

[66]Pablo Semán, '¿Quiénes son? ¿Por qué crecen? ¿En qué creen? Pentecostalismo y política en América Latina', *Nueva Sociedad*, 280 (2019), pp. 26–46.

[67]See Pew Research Center, 'Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region', 13 Nov. 2014: https://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/ (URL last accessed 26 July 2022).

[68]Ronaldo de Almeida, 'Os pentecostais serão maioria no Brasil?', *Revista de Estudos da Religião*, 8 (2008), pp. 48–58; Ronaldo de Almeida and Paula Montero, 'Trânsito religioso no Brasil', *São Paulo em Perspectiva*, 15: 3 (2001), pp. 92–101.

[69]Christina Vital da Cunha, 'Religião e criminalidade: Traficantes e evangélicos entre os anos 1980 e 2000 nas favelas cariocas', *Religião e Sociedade*, 34: 1 (2014), pp. 61–93; *Oração de traficante: Uma etnografia* (Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2015); David Smilde, *Reason to Believe: Cultural Agency in Latin American Evangelism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

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> an Evangelical, he spends his time on the street clutching a Bible and has handed the trade over to one of his brothers.[70]

Camila, a young Black woman resident of Morro da Luz with short hair and tattoos all over her body, tells me the same story. She used to attend an Evangelical church called the Assembleia Missionária, whose pastor was a former *bandido*. Her comment on this was as follows:

> At the Assembleia Missionária that I went to, the pastor had been a *bandido* here in Morro da Luz. He killed scores of people and caused a lot of harm, and then was arrested and imprisoned, found God and converted and then opened a church. One time – I'll never forget it – he held a service with a woman whose brother he had killed and there was a moment when they were praying and he asked for her forgiveness, and she forgave him.[71]

Cases of conversion that seem improbable, involving subjects whose religious identity seems unimaginable, are actually very common. Robert Brenneman, in his research on how to leave Central American gangs,[72] and Patricia Birman, Carly Machado,[73] Mariana Côrtes,[74] César Teixeira,[75] and Vagner Marques,[76] in their work on Brazilian converts with criminal histories, have pointed out that religiosity can be one of the few ways for an individual to step away from a criminal group and remain alive. Conversion represents a chance of survival for the individual and can be leveraged as 'symbolic merchandise' by the church, according to Côrtes. The bleaker a subject's past, the more valuable their story, as it becomes a proof of the redeeming power of the church.[77]

Over the years, Du has become an example of someone who, thanks to his faith, has managed to 'escape crime', 'straighten out his life' and regain his lost *respect*. However, for Du, the pastor of Camila's church, and others with similar trajectories, the past becomes a permanent addition to a new personality forged upon conversion (of those whom Luísa referred to above as 'formers'). Du is, and will never cease to be, a *former bandido*.[78]

[70] Luísa, health professional, 20 Nov. 2017.

[71] Camila, Morro da Luz resident, 8 June 2018.

[72] Robert Brenneman, 'Wrestling the Devil: Conversion and Exit from Central American Gangs', *Latin American Research Review*, 49 (2014), pp. 112–28.

[73] Patricia Birman and Carly Machado, 'A violência dos justos: Evangélicos, mídia e periferias da metrópole', *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, 27: 80 (2012), pp. 55–69.

[74] Mariana Magalhães Pinto Côrtes, 'O bandido que virou pregador: A conversão de criminosos ao pentecostalismo e suas carreiras de pregadores', Master's diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2007.

[75] César Pinheiro Teixeira, *A construção social do 'ex-bandido': Um estudo sobre sujeição criminal e pentecostalismo* (Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras, 2011).

[76] Vagner Aparecido Marques, 'O irmão que virou irmão: Rupturas e permanências na conversão de membros do PCC ao pentecostalismo na Vila Leste – SP', Master's diss., Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 2013.

[77] Côrtes, 'O bandido que virou pregador'.

[78] Teixeira, *A construção social do 'ex-bandido'*.

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The Ability to Circulate between Different Spheres

After his conversion, Du embarked on a career as an artisan, and this is his main source of income to this day. He makes miniature wooden sculptures, he says as he shows me a little chair he plans to be part of a miniature bar. Du's dedication to religion and to his crafts have not undermined his ability to interact closely with the traffickers who are now involved in the favela's drug trade. On the contrary, he seemed to be *respected* by them, by churchgoers, and by state functionaries acting in Morro da Luz. A few years ago, Du was hired by the state government to be a workshopper at 'Fica Vivo!'

As mentioned earlier, the 'Fica Vivo!' programme is designed to reduce the incidence of homicide in Minas Gerais' most vulnerable areas. The project is based on two pillars: the Strategic Intervention Group, formed of police and magistrates, who pursue and try the communities' main drug traffickers; and the Social Protection Group, formed of social science professionals and workshoppers who work towards the strengthening of the communities' networks and present young residents with possibilities of a future outside criminality.[79] The workshoppers – preferably residents of the neighbourhood where they work – offer local youngsters a variety of classes and activities in areas they are familiar with, from construction work to hairstyling to football. In the preventive facet of 'Fica Vivo!', the workshoppers are key, less because of the content of the workshops they offer and more because of their function as a much-needed bridge connecting state actors and local communities, hopefully making them a state-linked local role model for young people.[80]

In this light, Du's participation in the programme seems valuable. After all, his transcendental 'salvation' allowed him to invest in his career as an artisan and become progressively closer to the image of the *cidadão/trabalhador* – the poor person whom state policies seek to integrate economically – and further from that of the *bandido* – the poor person who should be incarcerated and repressed by the state's security forces.[81] Du represents the possibility of change, with his status as a *former trafficker/addict* and now *convert* being the very reason why the 'state-system',[82] in the form of a homicide prevention policy, sees him as an ally in its objectives.

Borrowing Legitimacy

The power of religion in the area is recognised among the state workers I encountered. Despite their awareness of the importance of their own work in Morro da Luz, these subjects realise that they are not the only normative references for the population. Eduardo, a 35-year-old White psychologist and coordinator at one of Morro da Luz's CRASs, explains his view on the competition between normativities in the favela when I ask him whom residents turn to when conflict emerges:

[79] Claudio Beato and Andréa Maria Silveira, 'Efetividade e avaliação em programas de prevenção ao crime em Minas Gerais', Instituto Igarapé, 2014, pp. 30–51; Enrique Desmond Arias, 'Social Responses to Criminal Governance in Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Kingston, and Medellín', *Latin American Research Review*, 54: 1 (2019), pp. 165–80.

[80] Cláudio Chaves Beato, Ludmila Mendonça Lopes Ribeiro, Valéria Cristina de Oliveira and Sara Carla Faria Prado, 'Reducción de homicidios en Minas Gerais: Un análisis del programa "Fica Vivo!"', *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 116 (2017), pp. 129–58.

[81] Feltran, 'O valor dos pobres'.

[82] Abrams, 'Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State'.

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> I think that residents sometimes call on the groups of traffickers, who have the power to 'organise' [makes air quotes] relationships, because people don't call the police … But I also think that the families have contacts and *referências* [points of reference] in institutions like the CRAS … they also have church groups, which are nuclei of protection in themselves … sometimes even the pastor goes to help settle [a dispute], so I think it depends a lot on who the family's contact is in the community … [And why do you think they don't call the police?] Ah, out of fear. [Of the police or the drug traffickers?] I think both, because of their experience of the police and of their heavy-handed intervention. There's also the impression that the police are not welcome, and that there will be retaliation from the trafficker groups, you know?[83]

Eduardo's narrative explicitly reflects the presence of the three normativities that are my object of interest. The police appear as a state sphere that is barely accessed by these subjects (who are *a priori* seen as suspects by the police rather than as 'good citizens'), but services of a more 'social' nature, such as the CRAS itself, are mentioned as possibilities in cases of difficulty. At the same time, traffickers appear as possible mediators of conflicts, and churches as 'nuclei of protection'. Despite expressing reservations about some aspects of religion, such as fundamentalism and the charging of tithes, Eduardo sees churches as important providers of ties (which is also evident in Du's story):

> Here at the CRAS when we're attending to people, if someone says, 'I go to such-and-such church' … generally we tend to say, 'That's great', in the sense that they have a support group, for protection, you know? Sometimes it's a pastor, someone from the church who will be able to intervene … Sometimes we work on mental health, on alcoholism, on other drugs, with families at their wits' end, sometimes we manage to get them involved with a church, and we say, 'That's great', because sometimes the healthcare centre isn't able to intervene and the CRAS isn't able to help.[84]

With these words, Eduardo demonstrates how, particularly in complex scenarios involving alcohol, drug abuse and criminality, state institutions often attempt to intervene but fail. In such cases, the churches' legitimacy – which is anchored in their perceived communication with the transcendental[85] – seems to surpass that of state mechanisms. In this context, the power religion has in the residents' socialisation does not seem to be viewed as opposing the interests of state welfare workers, thus leading them to regularly establish partnerships with the churches as a strategic means of accessing the residents.[86]

Amanda tells me, for example, that many of the cultural, sporting and vocational workshops offered by 'Fica Vivo!' are held in churches, both Evangelical and

[83] Eduardo, CRAS coordinator, 22 Jan. 2018.

[84] *Ibid.*

[85] Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation*.

[86] Carly Machado, 'É muita mistura: Projetos religiosos, políticos, sociais, midiáticos, de saúde e segurança pública nas periferias do Rio de Janeiro', *Religião e Sociedade*, 33: 2 (2010), pp. 13–36.

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Catholic, which she believes is due to both financial constraints and the relationship the church seems to have with the drugs trade. According to Amanda, this relationship is one of dialogue and *respect*: the churches do not attempt to argue with *crime*.

> I think that [the church supports] not only anyone wanting to get out, but also really heavily supports those who are *in* the drug trade. I used to see that the church could get closer to young people than we could as representatives of the state, as its people are from there, and in many cases, they've known them since they were children. In Morro da Luz there are many churches, and the ['Fica Vivo!'] programme itself, we work very closely with them, because the workshops are in community spaces, so we always try to build partnerships because otherwise the workshoppers would have to pay rent [to use the spaces]. And we saw that the relationship that some churches had with the young people was very intriguing. And even the relationship they had with the drugs trade, you know, getting close to it and *respecting* it.[87]

What Amanda reveals, as is also discussed in the literature, is that the relationship between religion and crime extends beyond conversions and points of inflection separating an 'incorrect' past from a 'correct' present. Churches, particularly the Evangelical, are frequented by young people who are still in the 'world of crime'.[88] Especially in Belo Horizonte, with its multiple rival gangs, churches are some of the few safe places for these subjects.[89] For many, life is restricted to their home, their drug sales point and their church.

The dialogue between church and *crime* does not mean there is a concordance between these two normative regimes, but rather a scenario where the experience within the 'world of crime' and the experience of 'the world of the church' do not cancel each other out: the transition between these spheres is an everyday occurrence. This is possible because the conflict is not between pastors and criminals; it is a supernatural 'war' between God and the devil.[90] This permeability, and the widespread *respectability* churches have in the favela, makes the strategy of 'borrowing' religious legitimacy a popular and effective one, central for statecraft in Morro da Luz.

The Problematic Son and Criminal Punishment

I do not know much about Du's affective relationships, as these are curiously absent from the life story he tells me with such enthusiasm. What I do know is that he has children who have now grown up. He frequently mentions his daughter, a 'hard worker', and his son, 'the problematic one'. Months after the end of my field work, when I was to return to Morro da Luz to conduct a couple of interviews, I contacted Du and we spoke over the phone. He mentioned that he was having

[87] Amanda, former 'Fica Vivo!' worker, 17 Nov. 2017.

[88] Mariana Côrtes, *Diabo e fluoxetina: Formas de gestão da diferença* (Curitiba: Appris, 2017); Vital da Cunha, *Oração de traficante*; Jeff Garmany and Anthony W. Pereira, *Understanding Contemporary Brazil* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[89] Jeffrey W. Rubin, David Smilde and Benjamin Junge, 'Lived Religion and Lived Citizenship in Latin America's Zones of Crisis: Introduction', *Latin American Research Review*, 49: S (2014), pp. 7–26.

[90] Brenneman, 'Wrestling the Devil'; Côrtes, 'O bandido que virou pregador'; Teixeira, 'A construção social do "ex-bandido"'; Marques, 'O irmão que virou irmão'.

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trouble with his son, who had become involved with the drugs trade and had been acting violently towards him. A few days earlier, the son had thrown away dozens of handmade sculptures that Du was storing to provide him with income in the months to come. He did not give me the details of the conflict, and just kept repeating that life was exceedingly difficult at that moment. We met a short time later, in the community's main square on a sunny afternoon.

Du led me to the home of a community leader who is a friend of his. While we made our way up the hill, he told me about the handmade sculptures his son had destroyed, saying 'there was nothing left'. Du said that as soon as he realised what had happened, he called the police in desperation. He told me the police had dismissed the situation and behaved aggressively and *disrespectfully* to him, even though he was making a complaint. This type of unjust treatment from the police is a frequent experience for the poor. One of its consequences is to strengthen criminal normativity. When the police left, the 'guys in crime' (it was not clear if they were part of the same gang as his son) paid him a visit. Du, a *believer*, a *worker*, and, in the eyes of some spheres of the state, a *citizen*, was still a *former bandido*. He was made to experience the consequences of having called the police and was subjected to a series of beatings. The episode had occurred a week prior, and he told me that since then he hadn't been able to return home and had been living on the community's streets. If this episode illustrates how the *state* ends up strengthening *crime*, the scene I will describe next shows that the contrary is also frequently true.

The Healthcare Centre Incident

A conflict occurred in the healthcare centre in which two patients, irritated at having to wait to be seen, assaulted a member of staff. The space is small, clearly insufficient for the number of people who wait there. Whenever I pass by, I observe a huge queue that takes up part of the street. Poor people often need to wait to be able to access state services that are their right, and this process, argues Auyero, is part of a dynamic of political subordination.[91] However, it does not always take place without incident.

In this case, the two patients waiting for a doctor to see the new-born baby of one of them had completely run out of patience. I was shown photos of the resulting damage caused in the doctor's office: the computer broken and scales, stethoscopes and official seals strewn across the floor. The police were called. After inspecting the site, they took no action. When they left the healthcare centre, a young man from one of the nearest drug sales points arrived to try to find out what had happened. Another worker led him to the doctor's office and explained the situation and why the police had been called.

Tamara, the centre's psychologist, aged between 50 and 55, told me how, although the following day the unit was closed by the staff, the patient who had sparked the conflict arrived to offer an apology.

> The next day we didn't open the centre … we got a WhatsApp message saying that the woman had gone there with a drug trafficker to apologise. It was not

[91]Javier Auyero, *Patients of the State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

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> the same guy, there were maybe two of them, a higher-ranking one, a 'boss' as they say, but she had gone there to say sorry …[92]

After the apology the centre resumed its activities. Violence clearly permeated the interaction between *crime* and this patient from the healthcare centre (whether directly or by means of an implicit threat): it is a form of violence directed at those who do not act with the due *respect*.

Respectability and the Valorisation of Lives

The notion of *respect* seems to be directly attached to the social production of violence in the favela. It is valid for normative regimes of *crime* (violence is the response to those who do not abide by the 'law of the favela' and who do not act with *respect*); the state (violence tends to be the response to those who destroy order, who are not 'good citizens', and who do not deserve *respect*); and religion (which, in discursive order, directs violence, the *fight against the devil*, against all subjects seen as distanced from God or from Jesus, and against all subjects who do not *respect* the divine word, the Bible and 'common decency').

Forces which may appear to pull in separate or even opposite directions (crime vs. state, state vs. religion, religion vs. crime) thus interact and show how, in some situations, the *value* of a life is subject to similar criteria for *crime*, state and church. This grey zone, in which the boundaries between one actor and the other become blurred,[93] frequently characterises daily life (and the violence that often touches that life) in poor Latin American urban neighbourhoods.[94] By means of a complex web of disputes and negotiations, the three moral regimes are mutually reinforced and are intertwined in an (always everyday) construction of categorisations and classifications of subjects: people should behave *respectfully* in order to deserve *respect* and to live *valuable lives.*[95]

Du's life – and the possibility of death linked to it – had its value altered by his symbolic interactions with the normative regimes of *crime*, the state and the church. Du had a very close brush with death when he was a *bandido* and became an addict, falling into debt. At this time, Du was a *bad bandido*, someone who did not *respect* and did not *deserve respect*, someone who did not spark admiration for the criminal normative regime, for the state normative regime or for the religious normative regime. After surviving a murder attempt, Du converted, became religious, a *former bandido* and a worker. He was now greatly *respected* in the community. In the eyes of the state, of 'crime' and of the churches, he was an example of a person who had managed to overcome difficulties, worked hard and dedicated himself to religion. But his past never stopped being part of who he is, and, in light of his actions

[92]Tamara, health professional, 27 Sept. 2017.

[93]Auyero, *Patients of the State.*

[94]Javier Auyero, *Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); José Miguel Cruz, 'State and Criminal Violence in Latin America', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 66 (2016), pp. 375–96; Matías Dewey, 'Illegal Police Protection and the Market for Stolen Vehicles in Buenos Aires', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 44: 4 (2012), pp. 696–702; Matthew A. Richmond, '"Hostages to both Sides": Favela Pacification as Dual Security Assemblage', *Geoforum*, 104 (2019), pp. 71–80; Willis, *The Killing Consensus.*

[95]Butler, *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*; Gayol and Kessler, *Muertes que importan.*

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upon coming into conflict with his son (a current *bandido*), Du demonstrated a lack of *respect* for the 'law of the favela' and did not therefore *deserve respect*. The process of classification allocated him a position of someone whose 'deviations' allow for little tolerance. His life (and his death) is once again less significant. In a dynamic process shaped by a variety of normative regimes, Du's destiny (and that of the favela) is uncertain.

Conclusion

Du's life encompasses aspects of Belo Horizonte's particularities. It shows the consolidation of the small *gangs* of drug traffickers that came to divide favela territories of the capital of Minas Gerais into limited sections of land over which each criminal group exerts its domain. It also illustrates much of what happens in Brazil's urban peripheries more broadly. By following his trajectory, this text accompanies the processes of transformations of 'crime', shifting from *malandragem* to *banditismo*; of religion, shifting from the hegemony of Catholicism to the expansion of Evangelism; and of the state, shifting from dictatorship, where the police was the most visible facet of the state for the poor,[96] to a statecraft that implemented a series of social policies, at the same time as it never ceased to maintain the violent *modus operandi* employed by the security forces to deal with the lower classes. I argue that, during the last decades, state, crime and religion have brought their governance capacities closer together, turning into three separate but interconnected *normative regimes*.

By focusing on who is the victim of violence instead of who employs this violence, I identify how violence towards specific subjects becomes socially predictable. The predictability of violence makes it unlikely to generate much surprise, and, thus, to some extent, makes it acceptable.[97] In Morro da Luz and in Brazil (and perhaps in Latin America more generally), the production of more or less valuable lives is done not only by state and criminal governances, but also by religion and religious-linked moralities.

In this triangulation, religion exerts a privileged role that is different from the other two, first because its normative capacity is not based on the possibility of the use of force but on a perceived superhuman contact with the divine (an important quality for those living in scenarios of uncertainty), and second because it enjoys a widespread, almost *a priori* legitimacy, unlike the state and the 'world of crime' which are constantly negotiating their approval in the favela. Thus, from different perspectives, state, crime and religion engage in daily interactions with each other. This interaction sometimes exhibits a more confrontational and sometimes a more collaborative character. This article shows that the prevalence, intensification and reduction of violence over the course of the different phases of Du's life has been determined by connections between these governances (state, crime and religion): these seem distinct and even contradictory but, in everyday life, their boundaries are clearly porous.

By intertwining Du's trajectory with other fragments of ethnography, I have demonstrated how these interconnections between the three spheres of state, crime and religion enable an ongoing dialogue between them, and how, today,

[96] Yanilda María González, 'State Building on the Ground: Police Reform and Participatory Security in Latin America', PhD diss., Princeton University, 2014.

[97] Gayol and Kessler, *Muertes que importan*.

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the notion of *respect*, albeit historically important for the lower classes, gains a special centrality in the social dynamics of the favela. This is the case because it is precisely by means of sharing the notion of *respect* that state, criminal and religious normativities interact and communicate with each other, thus building a tripartite mechanism of classification of subjects and behaviours and therefore largely determining how violence will be inflicted upon the inhabitants of the periphery. Thus, in the favela, for Du and for many others, to *be respectful* and to *deserve respect* is vital, often literally.

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Dinámicas sociales de la violencia y del respecto: Estado, criminalidad e iglesia en una favela brasileña

Spanish abstract
A partir de una larga investigación etnográfica realizada en una importante favela de Belo Horizonte, este artículo sostiene que la regulación de la violencia en los territorios urbanos pobres de Brasil supone la coexistencia de tres lógicas: la lógica del crimen, la del Estado y la de la religión. Estas tres lógicas actúan como regímenes normativos que, atravesados por la noción de 'respeto' que comparten, forman un conjunto de relaciones simbólicas, que alternan entre la cooperación y la disputa. Esta interacción cotidiana produce un triángulo normativo que determina cuáles vidas son más o menos valiosas y, por lo tanto, qué sujetos tienen más posibilidades de ser objeto de violencia.

Spanish keywords: crimen; estado; iglesia; pobreza urbana; respeto; vida/muerte

A dinâmica social da violência e do respeito: Estado, crime e igreja em uma favela brasileira

Portuguese abstract
A partir de extensa pesquisa etnográfica conduzida em uma grande favela de Belo Horizonte, este artigo argumenta que existem três lógicas primordiais em jogo quando se trata da regulação da violência em territórios de pobreza urbana no Brasil: a do 'mundo do crime', a do Estado, e a da religião. Essas três lógicas atuam como regimes normativos que, por meio do compartilhamento da noção de 'respeito', constroem entre si relações simbólicas que alternam entre associação e disputa. Essa interação cotidiana forma um triângulo normativo que determina quais vidas são mais ou menos valiosas e, portanto, mais ou menos passíveis de serem vítimas de violência.

Portuguese keywords: crime; estado; igreja; pobreza urbana; respeito; vida/morte

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