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Research Project - Margins of the city, by Prof. Dr. Gabriel de Santis Feltran

I. Introduction

The Project “margins of the city” studies the social relationships in groups socially codified as marginal in order to unveil contingent codes of the State and society. Homeless people, drug users, drug dealers, thieves, prison inmates, youth living in the urban outskirts and prostitutes are its core study subjects. In contrast with approaches that commonly classify them as “excluded” from the social life, we intend to verify the relationships of the subjects among them and with legitimate instances such as family, work market, churches, the State and its agents, in addition to the “world of crime”.

The study of the routine and ways of entering markets, as well as their forms of association and territorialization – always marked by a considerable social tension – allows us to access the criteria that list subjects and territories as “marginal”. In contrast, one can also verify the criteria that define positive representations of the law and the State, but also of the normal, the desirable, the legitimate, the worthy and, ultimately, the human. The study of margins and the conflicts that arise from them lends itself to an ethnographic approach to the normative center of the contemporary urban dynamic.

The research is focused on the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (in the neighborhoods of Heliópolis, Jandira, São Bernardo, Sapopemba and “Crackland”), as well as São Carlos and ‘Cruzes’ (fictional name), cities of medium and small size within the State of São Paulo.

II. Methodology

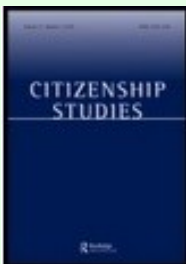
The project conducts simultaneous ethnographies in different territories starting from a common research question. Seventeen individual ethnographic investigations are being carried out, in constant group dialogue, starting from the following procedures:

- i) long duration permanence of the field researcher;
- ii) constant and systematic recordkeeping of the experiences in field diaries: a) description of chronologies and cartographies treaded within the territory; b) dense description of interactional situations, trajectories, critical events, categories, context lexicon and grammar; c) analytical annotations and personal diary;
- iii) qualitative interviews with key interlocutors (based especially in life trajectories and organizational paths as well as territorial transformations);
- iv) compilation of formal and informal documental registry

III. Main findings

1. A decrease of almost 80% in the murder rate in the state of São Paulo between 2000 and 2011 was accompanied by a major decrease in murders in the outskirts during the years 2000. We argue that this decrease does not express a reduction in criminal activities – which were actually intensified during the period – nor is it due to the success in public safety policies. On the contrary, a decisive contribution to this outcome is the expansion of the criminal faction Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) in the urban outskirts, which instrumentalizes ongoing repressive policies in order to strengthen itself, increasing its social legitimacy and acting as a local justice in the interdiction of homicides considered to be “unrighteous”.

2. Therefore, different normative regimes coexist in permanent tension in the urban outskirts territories, whose accommodations produce a device of urban order composed by state and criminal policies. This is the government device responsible for the particularity in the state of Sao Paulo regarding the “public safety” issue when compared to the other federative states.



3. Within the marginal territories, at least three policy regimes are in dispute, actively constructed to manage the social conflict that emerges from the radical consumption of crack and the territorialization of its users. They are:

i) the State policies: programs and policies aimed to combat crack (health, social welfare, therapeutic clinics, harm reduction), progressively more in a direct interface with the criminalization policies of the actors within the drug market; ii) the criminal policies: In São Paulo, especially through the PCC policies aimed at drug price regulations and regulation of places where crack consumption is permitted (private spaces, empty or of mass circulation) or interdicted (“PCC prisons”, favela streets), as well as other several everyday

conflicts.

iii) the evangelical policies: focused on religious conversion of drug users and their admittance in “treatment clinics” in which the goal is religious adherence. There are also several other evangelical policies for the control of collective and individual behavior.

4. What results from these three policy regimes is not the “reintegration” of drug users or marginalized groups, nor the reduction in the drug market or other illegalities, but instead, the construction of a repertoire of normative regimes available to the outskirts inhabitant, which work together as a control mechanism that unsuccessfully attempts to mediate the social conflict within the urban margins. The same mechanism spreads in a capillary form to other pauperized social sectors in answer to the moral demand for the repression of marginality in a setting where the real estate market is heating up, especially in the central areas, and economic development centered on an increase in consumption. This resultant does not touch on the central issue of offer and consolidation of illicit markets and its territorialization forms or its – very intense – interfaces with legal markets. Nor does it touch on social inequality.

IV. Implications for public policies

There is a public consensus that “violence” and “drug use”, especially crack, are central problems for the contemporary “urban issue” in São Paulo as well as in other large Brazilian cities. This figuration, however, has been profoundly reduced to issues of “public security”. The State answer to these problems in São Paulo is centered in: (i) expansion of incarceration by expanding the incrimination of popular sectors with a supposed social isolation of the incriminated agents; (ii) equating drug traffic with a heinous crime; and (iii) police repression, forced displacement and further hospitalization of intensive drug users. Two decades of State efforts in this direction fostered, as a side effect, conditions for the “expansion of the world of crime”, nowadays highly ramified and legitimized within the urban outskirts territories. The territorialization of extreme crack users also gained strength in this period, even in a setting of unemployment recovery, popular consumption and expansion in the reach of social policies.

We suggest a revision on the conception of the contemporary urban marginality problem in order to consider it fundamentally produced: i) by the type of structuration of the illegal markets in Sao Paulo; ii) by the radical transformation in the social dynamics of urban workers (job market, family, religion, migration and social mobility project); iii) by the social counterpart deficit in economic development; iv) by a State answer to this deficit focused on the incrimination of the individual. Strategic actions guided by this revision would move towards an emphasis in the regulation of larger scale criminal markets, with special attention to its frontiers with legal markets, alongside a reform in the social protection system, with public education being also included.

V. Publicações de referência

FELTRAN, G. S. *Fronteiras de tensão: política e violência nas periferias de São Paulo*. 1. ed. São Paulo: Editora Unesp/CEM, 2011. v. 1. 366p .

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