

Vulnerability and the *mind*: symbolic conflicts between institutional diagnosis and the perspective of young people serving social-educational measures¹

A vulnerabilidade e a *mente*: conflitos simbólicos entre o diagnóstico institucional e a perspectiva de jovens em cumprimento de medida socioeducativa

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, the use of the term vulnerability has been expanded to several knowledge and intervention fields. This article examines the use of the idea of vulnerability in the socio-educational system as a component of power relations between institutions performing educational measures and adolescents. Based on ethnographic research conducted in the metropolitan area of São Paulo in 2009, 2010 and 2011, with the participation of fourteen teenagers serving social-educational measures, the paper analyzes the conflict between the psychological report of a young man and his own interpretation when talking about the same aspects of his life. The article discusses how the adolescent, who is differently intricated by distinct codes, experiences a reality shock which has escaped socio-educational system practices in their own existence. The meeting of the idea of vulnerability in the psychological report with the perspective of the mind as an attribute of a young man, creates a field of symbolic disputes between visions of the individual's capacity for self-regulation.

Keywords: Young People; Social-Educational Measures; Ethnography; Vulnerability; Mind.

Resumo

Nas últimas duas décadas a utilização do termo *vulnerabilidade* foi expandida para diferentes campos de conhecimento e de intervenção. Neste artigo analisamos o uso da noção de vulnerabilidade no âmbito do *sistema socioeducativo* como um componente das relações de poder entre instituições de execução de medidas socioeducativas e jovens atendidos. Baseado em pesquisa etnográfica realizada na Região Metropolitana de São Paulo em 2009, 2010 e 2011, com a participação de 14 adolescentes em cumprimento de medidas socioeducativas, o texto analisa o conflito entre o relatório psicológico de um jovem e sua própria interpretação ao falar sobre os mesmos aspectos de sua vida. Discute também como o jovem, intrincado diferentemente por códigos distintos, ensea em sua própria existência conflitos simbólicos que têm escapado às práticas do sistema socioeducativo. O encontro da ideia de vulnerabilidade no relatório psicológico com a perspectiva da *mente* como atributo de um jovem configura-se um campo de disputas simbólicas entre visões da capacidade de autorregulação do indivíduo.

Palavras-chave: Jovens; Medida socioeducativa; Etnografia; Vulnerabilidade; Mente.

Introduction

In the last two decades, the use of the term *vulnerability* has been expanded into different fields of knowledge and intervention, being commonly used to describe aspects of behavior and social contexts considered to be negative. In this article we consider the misfortunes, disadvantages and violence suffered by young people serving socio-educational measures², as well as approaching the context of their lives in degrees or types of vulnerability. When looking at the socio-educational system³ from an ethnographic perspective, we focus on analyzing the ways in which these young people experience their own existence in a symbolic conflict between worlds - that of the discourse and practices of the socio-educational system and that of their daily lives in neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city of São Paulo. We also analyze the power relationships in the socio-educational system through the conflict between drawing up the adolescent's psycho-social report and his interpretation on speaking of the same aspects articulated in the document.

The scope of this article does not include discussing the validity, or lack thereof, of the idea of vulnerability. The theories of this topic are not in question. We are more interested in discussing: (1) how the notion of vulnerability is used to define normative profiles which situate adolescents living in neighborhoods on the outskirts as potentially dangerous for their own context of life; (2) the ways in which the young people serving socio-educational measures subvert this logic, redefining elements taken as vulnerability - poverty, unemployment, family breakdown, drug addiction - they point out other ways of dealing with the crises they experience. This method of discussing the notion of vulnerability requires viewing it as a category native to

2 In the Children and Adolescents Statute (Brazil, 1990), socio-educational measures should be applied to infractions committed by adolescents, as those under 18 years old are "not criminally liable (ECA, article 104). These measures are divided between those which involve loss of liberty (semi- and full incarceration in an educational establishment) and those which do not (warnings, reparations, community service, probation). Socio-educational measures are operated by a system beginning with the police approach, involving the judiciary system which imposes the measures, state organizations specializing in measures involving incarceration and public authorities and civil institutions responsible for executing those not involving incarceration.

3 The socio-educational system is a complex political field involving a variety of institutional actors and interconnections between monitoring programs, the judiciary, the Public Prosecution Service and Rights Councils, the police and municipal and state departments (mainly in the health and social care areas), partnerships between governmental and non-governmental bodies. At the center of this institutional tangle is (ideally) the adolescent author of the infraction, the "subject of the rights" on whom the whole system should converge. In São Paulo, over the last few years, the socio-educational system has become capillary, spreading, above all, in the neighborhoods on the outskirts.

institutions and professionals who operate within the ambit of the socio-educational system. The discussion of this notion will take place through analyzing documents which guide practice and texts produced by professionals in the socio-educational field, without presuming to engage with the various theories of vulnerability.

Young people serving socio-educational measures are not passively subjected to logics exogenous to their life experiences. Nor are they disenfranchised by the State, or excluded from the social world. In this article, we verify how the “adolescent in conflict with the law”, differently intricated by distinct codes, experiences a reality shock which has escaped socio-educational system practices in their own existence.

The notion of vulnerability in the socio-educational system

Of the processes launched in Brazilian public administration since the 1990s, health, care and children and adolescents are the areas which have become consolidated as strategic areas of social policies: they are the three areas in which the struggle to reverse vulnerability takes place. Social policies in Brazil today outline specific groups in the population, among them young people deemed to be vulnerable - those who are (hypothetically) more prone to succumb to the lure of criminality and violence. From the 1990s onward, various specific pieces of legislation have set in motion a new concept of Brazilian social policy, in which indices measuring the population’s quality of life, such as the Human Development Index (HDI), have come to be used. The socio-educational system is one of a variety which have appeared in the last few years, following the execution of policies guided by the 1988 Constitution; it is a public policy specifically triggered by the Children and Adolescents’ Statute (ECA). In this movement, the notion of vulnerability became part of the lexicon and practices of operators of institutions responsible for implementing and executing socio-educational measures.

Youth became highlighted in Brazilian public

policies in the 1990s, with specific policies for this age group consolidated in the 2000s, with the creation of the National Youth Secretariat. The increase in mortality among young men in a context of declining mortality attracted the attention of the State to youth as a theme to be highlighted in the area of public policies. The notion of youth in this field, however, emerged as a problem.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the notion of the vulnerable youth became central for socio-educational institutions (governmental and otherwise), being incorporated into their repertoire in the search for support and financing. In the majority of cases, the idea of “vulnerable youth” gives an idea of fragility and dependence linked to the youths’ situations, principally those of the poorest. In fact, in the early 2000s, the use of this notion to address the problem of youth is related to orientation from international agencies, trying to avoid wasting time and energy on “undesirable” practices (Malvasi, 2008). The socio-educational system, as one of the country’s many public policies for adolescents and children, is composed of repression on the part of the security forces, combined with the search for consent via promoting the areas of health and social care. The idea is that the adolescent contributes to improving the nation’s indices by not reoffending.

In 2000, in São Paulo. A Youth Vulnerability Index (IVJ/Seade) was drawn up, and is an example of how the view of youth vulnerability and risk manifests itself in documents which guide policies. This index is ambiguous as it tries to separate the notion of vulnerability from the background of the lives of young people living in low income neighborhoods in São Paulo. The choice of the term “vulnerable youth” is justified as an attempt to avoid a “prejudiced message” that “only the poor are vulnerable”, “when, in fact, they are more subject to vulnerability through their condition as adolescent, which is then amplified by their living in poverty”⁴. In other words, the term indicates the association between adolescence and “problems/danger”, as if it were a biological factor of the period called adolescence (“a natural period of unrest” and of the increase in “vulnerability” through living in poverty). The aim

4 Taken from IVJ. Available: <<http://www.seade.gov.br/produtos/ivj/>>. Accessed: 30 Oct. 2013.

of this type of mapping is “to impede or minimize them sliding into transgressing”.

A United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) publication in the early 2000s proposes combatting social vulnerability through “social capital” (Abramovay et al., 2002). The key to understanding the potential of “social capital”, the authors add, is in measuring its ability to produce “externalities”, “[...] a composition of various social elements which encourage individual and collective action” (p. 63). The notion of externality comes from economics – costs and benefits resulting from social interdependence – and is a key concept in understanding the neoliberal grid of intelligibility (Foucault, 2008). The use of the notion of “social capital” in the struggle against “vulnerability” indicates the way in which the social policies of recent decades were conceived; a concept that can be defined as neoliberal, according to Foucault (2008).

Analyzing neoliberal thinking in his course in the Collège de France in 1979, Foucault (2008) identifies the notion of human capital as a central element in the grid of “economistic” analysis of an individual’s activity in their relationships with the world. Neoliberal thinking represents an epistemological shift in the economy, a change in the general framework of economic analysis. According to the author, neoliberal thinking is more about the economy analyzing the relational mechanisms between investment, production and work; neoliberal analysis proposes the following as a task for the economy “[...] analyzing human behavior and the internal rationality of this human behavior” (Foucault, 2008, p. 307). In classic economic theory, the individual is a “partner in the exchange”; in neoliberal thinking, each enters into economic relationships as an “entrepreneur of themselves” – the individual is their own capital. Thus, the nucleus of neoliberal analysis is human behavior measured in terms of capital. Neoliberal analysis revolves around forming human capital “[...] species of machine-competence

which will generate income” (Foucault, 2008, p. 315). In the neoliberal concept, the elements which compose this investment are “[...] the time parents dedicate to children [...] the parents’ level of culture [...] the stimuli the child receives [...]”, human capital therefore being “[...] the investments made at the level of the man himself” (Foucault, 2008, p. 318).

Attributing vulnerability to certain juvenile segments of the population discriminates those who need care. The path to overcoming vulnerability, however, contains obstacles, as the condition of vulnerability itself implies poor “human capital”. This web of vulnerability, dealing with which should increase human capital, is a labyrinthine concept enmeshing young residents in low income neighborhoods. It is argued that using the notion of vulnerability is a strategy of opening up ways to defend and protect poor young people, rejected by schools, without opportunities; it can, however, lead to stigmatization and to criminality, a self-fulfilling prophecy – the adherence to lives of crime and to violence by those young people viewed as most vulnerable – and providing those who want to repress them with ammunition. This danger is inherent in using the notion of vulnerability in the ambit of the socio-educational system.

Theoretical framework

This article forms part of the results of the “Public policies, risks and vulnerabilities: citizenship and inclusion technologies in contemporary societies” project⁵. The proposed focus leads us to observe convergence between Foucauldian analyses of power and ethnography as scientific practice. In Foucauldian analysis, the relational character of power, present in all human relationships, does not admit a nucleus from which it emanates; it is dynamic and procedural (Foucault, 2001). Ethnography inclines to seeking ideas and practices within historical contexts, taking into account the governing principles,

⁵ This article is a product of the doctoral thesis “Interfaces da vida loka: um estudo sobre jovens, tráfico de drogas e violência em São Paulo” – Interfaces of the crazee life: a study of young people, drug dealing and violence in São Paulo (Malvasi, 2012), under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Rubens de Camargo Ferreira Adorno. Based on ethnographic research conducted with adolescents serving socio-educational measures São Paulo, in 2009, 2010 and 2011, the study was consolidated and more precisely delineated and articulated during the doctoral internship at the “Public policies, risks and vulnerabilities: citizenship and inclusion technologies in contemporary societies” project /CAPES/FCT 316/11, developed in the ISCTE-IUL, coordinated by professor Adorno (USP) and professor Chiara Gemma Pussetti (ISCTE-IUL), between July and November 2011.

seeking to understand how such principles operate in a specific place - located, described and analyzed. In these places, power relationships inevitably exist. An interstitial and microscopic look at anthropology allows us to observe in which situations the complex convergence of unstable relationships permeating power in people's everyday lives occurs.

We consider the perspective of young people as an eminently suitable way to understand the socio-educational system. By taking a public policy, from its margins, we map the sites of practices in which mechanisms of power are put into action (Das and Poole, 2008). In the case of this article, we are referring to the psychological diagnosis of an adolescent, and that adolescent's own reading of the elements which sustain the definition of vulnerability expressed in the report. By analyzing ethnographic sources, we can observe the manifestations of power in the repeated activity around knowledge and power that delineate the modes of action on the subjects' field of activity. The analysis focuses on subjects affected by power dynamics; for the "strange", in a certain way "improbable" "[...] mix of science and social practice developed around subjectivity" (Rabinow, 2002, p. 31). This procedure allows the power lines that outline the conflicts and tensions in the childcare system to be discussed.

The actions of this system, which are present in the majority of Brazilian cities and regions, are effected by a discourse of reversing these young peoples' vulnerability. Adopting the State margins means observing governmental activities as processes which take form and weaken, model and are modelled, become evident, become hidden or naturalized, are experienced, embodied, resisted and symbolized by the social group at whom they are aimed; to explore territories considered vulnerable is to enter there where "pathologies of power" and "perversions of the economy" (Epele, 2010) produce their most intricate labyrinths.

The field work took place in two neighborhoods in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo; neigh-

borhoods on the outskirts of the city that were eminently suitable points for thinking about vulnerability, crime and violence. The systematized elements of this article are based on following the path of one adolescent, of 14 who were monitored as part of the ethnographic research conducted between 2009 and 2011, in two programs not involving incarceration. We accompany Ivan (not his real name) while he completes socio-educational measures during his probation, between February and September 2010. The choice of following only one adolescent's trajectory was a descriptive strategy inspired by the "quasi characters" approach developed by Veena Das (2006), using a concrete and visible experience to discuss social suffering⁶. In addition to encounters in the headquarters of the socio-educational measures service (which will remain confidential), we also visited the young man's home. During this period we conducted two individual interviews in April and in September 2010.

Psychological diagnosis and Ivan's *mind*: conflicts regarding the notion of vulnerability

When we met Ivan, in São Paulo in February 2010, he had just been released and was on probation. During dialogues with probation professionals, we were asked to discuss the psychological opinion of Ivan, drawn up by a "psychological-technical-analyst" from the Fundação de Atendimento Socioeducativo ao Adolescente (Fundação Casa). Reading the report provided elements of the characterization of vulnerability conducted within the ambit of the socio-educational system. The complete report is shown below:

The young man's attitude during the interview was appropriate, spontaneous and helpful with regards the dialogue with his interlocutor. His memories were intact, his level of intelligence appropriate to his age groups, he was oriented in time and space.

6 João Coin Carvalho (2008) discusses the work of the Indian anthropologist Veena Das as a reference for studying situations of violence and social suffering. He highlights the construction "quase personagens" as a methodological and descriptive approach, strengthening the author's arguments: "[...] suffering materializing in history and in the body means the argument gains force as it moves away from being an abstract and is supported by flesh and by discourse" (Carvalho, 2008, p. 13).

In psycho-social appointments “Ivan” demonstrated sentiments of being in denial, with discourse which idealized the family dynamic, denying competition or rivalry between siblings, as well as the lack of protection experienced due to a lack of positive male role models; his would-be step-father provoking feelings of contempt due to alcohol abuse.

The adolescent was urged to be honest, hardworking and studious, with no concrete example of such attitudes before him. Moreover, the young man suffered due to this lack of protection, resulting from a lack of information on his biological father which made him uncomfortable but he refused to reflect or ask his mother for information so as not to deal with the situation of repression in which mother and child found themselves.

Against this background, and with his attempts to attract (his mother’s) attention repeatedly frustrated, the young man began to commit infractions and transgress socially accepted norms, aiming to have behavioral boundaries set.

Within the family environment, we observed that the mother was a positive role model, being present during the visits at our request, keeping in contact via telephone, accompanying “Ivan” through the re-socializing process, sparing no effort to try and imprint changes to his life, but feeling impotent when faced with the discriminatory coexistence of the step-father and his attitude towards the children from the previous union.

“Ivan” reports how, out of curiosity, he began to use drugs at age 14, starting with cannabis, which he still uses to date, this being intensified when he feels “stressed”, without being critical of the damage it does to his development, receiving advice on this topic from this psycho-social team.

With regards treatment for drug addiction: we emphasize that the adolescent has been referred to the Psychosocial Care Center - CAPSad, with the aim of working on the damage that substance abuse has caused to his bio-psycho-social development, advising him of the importance of continuing this after his release.

We emphasize that during his stay at the detention center, we continued to give advice, raise awareness

and conduct psycho-social interventions regarding disorders caused to him and his family by abusing toxic substances, internalizing new social values and self-awareness as recommended in psycho-therapy.

*During monitoring and psycho-social appointments, we were able to perceive that “Ivan” existed in a context of **high vulnerability**, possessing only fragile family support. Affective links need to be worked on, to strengthen them and to provide a real role model in the young man’s life. “Ivan” is poorly connected with activities that are important for his development (school, sport and work), which eventually encourages his involvement in criminal situations, as well as with those of questionable character.*

Thus, we conclude that there is a need to extend the educational measures now underway to ensure we achieve the proposed objectives.

These being our findings for the moment, we submit them for consideration and ruling.

In the report, the young man was analyzed based on an evaluation of this “mental state”. According to the document, he “was in denial”, although from a bio-physical and cognitive point of view, he was shown to be “helpful” in the interviews, with an “appropriate attitude” and “intact memories”. His emotional state situates him as someone who “idealizes” things that are, “in reality” harmful to his health: sibling rivalry, rejection by the step-father, lack of information about his biological father. The report states, therefore, that Ivan is in an emotionally imbalanced state due to “family breakdown” and “drug” use. The family, sometimes characterized as a protective factor, sometimes as contributing to the destruction of the individual, is the initial aspect in defining the adolescent’s profile.

Ivan’s report reveals recurrent readings on the vulnerability of young people subject to socio-educational measures. Relationships with parents are usually described and analyzed in terms of protective potential, that is, their ability to contribute to controlling reoffending. The “lack of a positive male role model” is a common point in the characterization of adolescents considered most vulnerable. They are viewed as unprotected as they do not have

“positive male role models”, whether that is through a lack of a biological father, or because of the father’s involvement with drugs or alcohol.

Mothers are usually valued for adhering to the socio-educational measures and for demonstrating “exemplary” behavior. In the positive descriptions of mothers, in the discussions and reports such as that of Ivan, the importance placed - by the mother - on following institutional advice, “being present during the visits”, “meeting requests”, “making an effort to imprint changes on the adolescent’s life” is repeatedly found. However, Ivan’s report questions the mother’s ability to avoid her son’s *reoffending*: it describes a young man who is estranged from school and defies family rules, which favors his involvement in “criminal situations as well as with those of questionable character”. In spite of the mother’s efforts, the family is viewed as incapable of taking responsibility for the son, with State intervention being necessary.

Ivan is situated in a context of “high vulnerability” because of the characteristics of his family, as well as his circle of friends and his habits, especially cannabis use (which is, in fact, the only drug recorded in the adolescent’s psychological report). Networks of relationships with peers in the neighborhood is commonly linked to risk-taking behavior associated with drugs in adolescents. The report indicates that the young man should undergo treatment in a Psychological Care Center for Drugs and Alcohol (CAPs AD). Indeed, of the various state structures which make up the comprehensive protection network for adolescents serving socio-educational measures, the service which is most active in partnership with the bodies responsible for conducting these measures during probation - at least in those we accompanied during this research - are the CAPs. The strategic partnership of mental health with socio-educational programs reinforces the entanglement of adolescents’ lives as potential addicts. The issue of drug addiction extrapolates the problems diagnosed as “chemical dependency” and broadens it to include all adolescents serving socio-educational measures and using any illegal psychoactive substance.

The notion of vulnerability in Ivan’s report was used to systemize social factors considered harmful

to the adolescent: fragile family ties, being estranged from school and work, structural conditions in the neighborhood, involvement with drugs and with social reference groups deemed a “bad influence”. The *socio-educational intervention* model is, in the report, posited as a legitimate treatment for suffering and for the rights violation the adolescent suffered by coming from a context of vulnerability. Taking charge of adolescents, sometimes viewed as victims, sometimes as criminals, means installing control and care through legal, psychological and care instruments to treat this population considered to be vulnerable.

In the interview, we seek to recognize how Ivan himself interpreted his life trajectory through the same elements referred to in the Fundação Casa report. In the interview, he stated that he did not accept his step-father, calling him *useless*; he knew nothing of his father, only saying that he *was a coward: he abandoned my mother; I’m hurt by what happened in the past*. Ivan’s discourse on his father and step-father is, at first glance, similar to the picture outlined in the technical report, listing the young man’s problems with his father and his entry into crime. However, the interview and the technical report differ fundamentally: the young man views criminality as a way of entering the adult world, of becoming emancipated, having his own ideas: *I was starting to want to see what the world was like, starting to enter its systems*.

Question: What did you start to understand about those systems?

Response: Ah, I started like this: “ah, my father abandoned me, my mother isn’t there either, my gran can’t help me, my step-father is useless”. I’m going to fight even more to get myself a house, a car, a wife. If God’s willing, if there wasn’t a wife, it would be even better, I would continue the same as now. I’m going to struggle long and hard. I’m going to advance myself through the sweat of my brow and when the end of the month comes round I’m going to say: “oh, I want this here”. In a jewelers, for example, in a clothes shop, in any shop, car dealers, and say: “this one here... ah, no, that one, all of them, I don’t care about the price”. I have a mind (tenho uma mente) to get what I never had, you know?

The young man's outline of his "mind" shows the conflict between the perspective of the adolescent and of the socio-educational system: a symbolic dispute between visions of the individual's self-regulatory capacity.

I'm doing what I need to do. I'm going after it. Everything that he (the father) never gave me when I was little, I want to have it, I want 50 thousand times what he never gave me. And if I have a child one day, I'm going to bring him up much better than I was.

The adolescent's statements revolve around the issue of how to overcome the trauma of paternal absence. And the criminal world appeared as an opportunity to "have a mind", "to get what he didn't have as a child".

Question: What does "have a mind" mean?

Response: Get a mind, like, it's like this, it's the person having, like, a life of drugs, like, having a goal to reach, you get there and you stop. Opening your mind, like I was telling you, it's like this: having your head in the place you want to reach, that's what you want. Like, you see someone with a new car, and you say: "wow, I want a car like that". Then, like, I go to work, I save cent after cent. When I've got the money, I'm going to go to the car dealership and say: "it's all here, my money's here; I want this one here, you can give me the document, it's in my name, I'm of age". And that's it. You know, if you want something, you go there and buy it, get it.

With regards the "drug problem", seen as a factor of "personal vulnerability", Ivan reveals that "having a mind" also means dealing with drugs in a different way than that revealed in the psychological diagnosis. Using psycho-active substances is also an expression of choices and can even be a way of demonstrating self-control. With respect to drug use, Ivan also attributes controlling addiction to the "mind". In the interview he talks about his trajectory with drugs.

Question: And do you use drugs, even though you sell them?

Response: The first time around I was using a lot of cocaine while I was working. When you lose track like that, you have to ask for more and more drugs

from the boss. And if you use a little that night, to be wide awake for work: "you're going to use a little more from that other wrap". So you take it and use a little bit, and even if it's a little bit, it makes a difference. You take it: "I'll take it all and then I'll get more. I go on taking more and more". And then, when you've taken a certain amount, someone comes up to you and says: "you owe such and such... we don't want you to work for us anymore, you have to pay, you have so many days". And then what do you do? How are you going to pay? So, if you want to use and to sell... you can't go taking powder. Today I only smoke a remedy to distress.

Ivan says that you can even cultivate "mind" in prison. I asked him to explain better why he thought this:

At the Foundation (Fundação Casa), for example, I don't need so much mind; there are a lot of activities, there are psychologists, training courses. Now, the guy in prison... if he doesn't have mind, he ends up psychologically shaken up.

The "knowledge" that Ivan acquired is shared, creating a marked discursive in which terms such as "humility", "respect" and "transparency" recur.

You have to be humble, right? Because if you want respect, you have to show respect. If not, it's not clear.

With respect to behavior which is prescribed in "crime". The girl sings: *Living like a man is the spoils of war*, about the life of crime, to cite a funk carioca song: [...] *it's not a question of courage, but our crazee life, we're passing through*. After quoting this song, Ivan said: *Because life is full of surprises, right bro? How do you know there's not a police car round the corner? How do you know there's not someone evil coming after you?*. "Respect", "humility" and "transparency" are necessary in the life or death games played in the "world of crime". The "atmosphere of tension" described by Adalton Marques (2009), conceptualized by interlocutors as "psychology" is the keynote in this "[...] unpredictable world" (p. 110).

In our conversations with young people serving socio-educational measures, the expression "having a mind" synthesized the attribute of whoever wants to present themselves as an "honorable thief". In the context of these young people, the idea of "mind" has two, at the least, characterizations: (1) instrumental rationality aimed at resolving concrete situations in

everyday life in order to achieve both personal and material objectives; emotional self-control when going through experiences such as prison (penitentiary system) or internment (socio-educational system).

In the first case, the expression “have a mind” means having a concrete material or social objective, and achieving it through appropriate management of resources and risk. The manifestation of the “mind” is a specific form of rationality: a means-knowledge seeking to obtain true facts about social and mercantile relationships; it is an end-knowledge, developing strategies of personal and social actualization, maximizing profits and minimizing risks through behavior. The “mind” refers to each individual’s ability to take initiative, developed according to a business-like psychological framework (Rose, 2008); it encourages individuals to behave with daring and energy, to calculate their own advantage, rigorously guide them and to accept risk in the search for their objectives.

The second meaning given to the “mind” among the young people refers to perceptions of reality, self-control of emotions, concepts and rational manipulation, in situations of extreme control and pressure, particularly in prison, but also in situations of everyday suffering, common in the daily lives of those who live on the outskirts of São Paulo. To deal with being imprisoned, the “mind” becomes a differentiating quality - conferring value - of the individual. Prison stories show it as an “experience at the limit”. In which only “mental control” can keep the subject sane.

In Ivan’s discourse, we observed that the adversities and structural absences (the lack of a father, conflict with the step-father, availability of drugs in his neighborhood) which had an impact on his life were the principle elements he needed to face and overcome. It is interesting that Ivan’s characterization of “mind” gives an alternative reading of the elements listed in the report: instead of these elements making him more vulnerable, they impelled

him to become stronger in dealing with adversity in his daily life.

Whereas the technical work of drawing up the profile of an “adolescent offender” places the young person on the edge of reason, this individual seeks to establish themselves in a rationality which emphasizes the concrete challenges of their life. In the socio-educational system, life should be guided by projects that, established as goals, result in young people prepared to participate in society and - principally - who do not reoffend⁷; it is, however, an unequivocal and widespread finding that the daily life of adolescents is full of precariousness, and the future uncertain; according to the young people, one needs to “have a mind” to deal with the unpredictability of a “craze life”.

The domain of the “mind” and redefining vulnerability

The profile of the young people who participated in the study was characterized on two basic points: the adolescent’s family situation and their relationship with drugs. From characteristics of personality development to environmental factors (home environment and social reference groups), these young people were characterized based on institutional discourse, as clues of deviant behavior and involvement in situations of “conflict with the law”. The institutions select the aspects which help them outline the problem - the causes of maladjustment, the elements to be repaired - based on the facets of the young person’s life which are evaluated.

The socio-educational system’s horizon is to maintain a discourse in which the emphasis is on the social - it is living conditions which lead to vulnerability and it is, therefore, possible to understand the empirical reality and change it according to psychological diagnoses and socio-educational measures. The system’s intervention practices, however, follow an instrumentalizing and individualizing approach, both with respect to the environment (context of

7 In the document guiding the national socio-educational care policy (SEDH, 2006) socio-educational practices should revolve around making the adolescent “[...] an autonomous and conscientious citizen, better able to relate to themselves and to others and with everything in their situation, without reoffending” (SEDH, 2006, p. 48); or even “[...] provide the adolescent with access to opportunities to overcome their exclusion, to redefine values, as well as to create values for participating in social life” (Idem).

vulnerability) and to the individuals (delinquent behavior), as the sum of diverse factors accessible to analysis by specialists. Socio-educational psycho-social technologies evaluate whether the individual has correct judgment of intentions, beliefs and values, as well as normal reasoning. According to Ivan's report, in order for his measure to expire, he had to: behave in accordance with the requirements, control rebellion and desires while serving the socio-educational measure, manage his private and emotional life by strengthening family ties and stop using drugs.

The content of psychological normality expected required abandoning aspects of speech, of dress and of leisure habits, as if the adolescents' lifestyle was itself a symptom, a manifestation of psychological disorders. As this is not the case, vulnerability in the social and family environment are the elements used to characterize these young people as "abnormal". For those who are outside the behavior pattern considered "normal", the trend is for them to be characterized as "abnormal" in some way - whether because of their drug addiction, family breakdown or any other individualizing factor of vulnerability. Vulnerability outlined in psychological reports is not only economic and social; it is also a device to allow the environment (considered vulnerable) to come through in behavior.

During the field work, we observed that the psychological criteria for characterizing adolescents were recurring: analyzing personal memories, the trajectory of their family lives, their ability to see reality, the permanence, or lack thereof, of personality and character traits. The centrality of psychological knowledge is not random. As demonstrated by Nicolas Rose (2008), psychology is a social science that finds its place as a regulatory technique, a presumed knowledge of people with the institutional objective of managing, shaping and reforming them. This is largely the case in the use psychology is put to in the field of executing socio-educational measures. In addition to institutional use, however, some of the principle terms used by the young people serving socio-educational measures - "intelligence", "mind", "conscience", "attitude" - have also been disseminated by psychology over the last few decades.

These adolescents find themselves ensnared in

different codes, the homogenous treatment, outlined by the notion of vulnerability and applied by the system and its agents, obscures the young people's own interpretations and leads to an incessant struggle between domination and resistance within the system. A significant part of socio-educational practices are established as means to "objectify" the subject (Rabinow, 2002), combining the mediation of scientific disciplines (such as psychology and psychiatry, for example) and the practice of exclusion, generally in a spatial sense (confinement or segregation), and always in a social sense. In the socio-educational system, a young person should recognize their own situation of vulnerability and accept changing their lifestyle in order to be included; they need to show they are biologically, subjectively and socially healthy, that is, be entirely subjected to a vision of a "healthy life". To do this, they need to distance themselves from specific conditions and behaviors, such as vulnerability.

The notion of "mind" redefines living conditions and situations that fit in with the definition of vulnerability; it creates new interpretations of a scenario analyzed in technical-scientific discourse as vulnerability as producing violence; from this perspective, it is capable of creating a re-reading of vulnerability on the outskirts of São Paulo - a re-reading which emphasizes a vision of structural violence. On the outskirts, violence, poverty, adversity and lack of structure which impact on quality of life are the principal elements which the young people have to face and overcome. It is important to note that Ivan's interpretation of the adversities in his life was with the sense of outlining his need for a "mind" to deal with them.

One of the most revealing points of the "mind", observed in the way it was explained by our interlocutors, is that it requires the young person to think; it is not a state of pure physical action, uncontrollable but inexorable brute force. In the contexts studied, the young people serving the socio-educational measure can and should think about the diverse relationships in their life (private - the neighborhood, friendship and family - and public - generational, institutional, national and global) and, based on the "mind", make judgments on the particular situation of being (according to

the legal, judicial and moral frameworks established in Brazilian society) an individual “in conflict with the law”. Positioning themselves with a “mind” is always a personal formula, but the elaboration of the “mind” in language-action is shared by their peers in a neighborhood considered vulnerable. Ivan got this education, trying to develop his “mind” and apply it in everyday situations.

The socio-educational system does not have tools to evaluate the “mind” in the sense it was given by the interlocutors in this research. For them, the “mind” does not fit in an average profile, located using symptoms or trajectories of life. According to my interlocutors, the “mind” cannot be mapped using a “cerebroscope” - “[...]a device capable of thoroughly scanning the brain states of a person, telling us what they are feeling, longing and even thinking” (Costa, 2005, p. 14). The “mind” is defined by choice; it is living, it acts. The “mind” is expressed as a narrative in action and its consequences in terms of power and status. The “domain of the mind”, in our analysis, is a native version of intelligence for a young person who has to deal with adverse situations and contexts, commonly characterized by the socio-educational system as factor of vulnerability.

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