

“I want to play in peace”: the effects of the discourses produced about the favela in the daily lives of children who inhabit these territories

“Eu quero brincar em paz”: os efeitos dos discursos produzidos sobre a favela no cotidiano das crianças que habitam esses territórios

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Abstract: Starting from Michel Foucault's studies on discourse analysis, this article problematizes the way in which discourses about the favelas of Rio de Janeiro are produced and disseminated. Since its expansion in the late 19th century, Rio's favelas have been associated with places of crime, danger and disease hotspots. Deconstructing the idea that the lack of infrastructure and the limited supply of services in these territories would be failures in the State's actions, the text discusses how the propagation of these discourses has shaped society's relationship with the favelas and their residents. As a strategy to face these processes of subjectivation, groups of favela residents have found in collective actions the strength to survive. As an example of these struggle movements, this article presents a project developed by residents of the Complexo of Favela of Manguinhos that has allowed children to give new meaning to the pain and fears caused by the constant climate of violence present in the place where they live, assuring them a space to play in peace.

Keywords: Favela; Speech; Violence; Children

Resumo: Partindo dos estudos de Michel Foucault sobre a análise de discursos, este artigo problematiza o modo como são produzidos e disseminados os discursos acerca das favelas do Rio de Janeiro. Desde sua expansão no final do século XIX as favelas cariocas têm sido associadas a locais de criminalidade, perigo e foco de doenças. Desconstruindo a ideia de que a falta de infraestrutura e a pouca oferta de serviços nesses territórios seriam falhas na atuação do Estado, o texto discute como a propagação destes discursos tem moldado a relação da sociedade com as favelas e com seus moradores. Como estratégia de enfrentamento a estes processos de subjetivação, grupos de moradores de favelas têm encontrado nas ações coletivas a força para sobreviver. Como exemplo desses movimentos de luta, este artigo apresenta um projeto desenvolvido por moradores do Complexo de Favelas de Manguinhos que tem permitido com que as crianças ressignifiquem as dores e os medos provocados pelo constante clima de violência presente no local que vivem, assegurando-lhes um espaço para brincar em paz.

Palavras-chave: Favela; Discurso; Violência; Criança



In his book *The order of discourse*, Michel Foucault analyzes how the discourses found in a society exert functions of control, limitation and validation of the power rules of that same society. The author understands that discourse is not simply what translates struggles or systems of domination, but what is fought for, the power that we want to seize. We fight through the discourses we produce, but we also fight to produce discourses (FOUCAULT, 1996, p. 10).

To think about the daily life of the favelas is to bring to the analysis the way in which a discourse about the housing of the poor population was constructed as a place of disorder, marginality, diseases and insecurity. These discourses, which can be delivered in different ways and languages, are socially incorporated, passed on and re-signified.

We can understand discourses as produced truths that, after being said, take shape, interfering in the way society works. In this text, for example, we discuss the ways in which discourses about the favela are produced and the effects that these discourses have both on the population that resides there and on those who, seeing it from the outside, are taught to fear it.

According to Fernandes and Costa (2009), the term favela usually refers to a space made up of crowded, often illegal, dwellings established in areas with several alleys and alleys where public services are precarious (electricity, water, sewage, schools, transport, leisure). One of the discursive strands analyzes the precariousness of these territories as an absence of a State. However, the way favelas are governed does not correspond to incompetent management or a failure to provide services. The lack of structure in the favelas is a result of the policy model that is planned for that type of territory. Keeping people in poverty, without access to basic services and at the mercy of the warlike violence of governments and groups that sell illicit drugs, in general in relation to government groups, which end up exercising dominion in these places, is a government objective and not an incompetence. Such an understanding is in line with the perception of Foucault (1979, p.283-284) when defining government as a correct way of arranging things to lead them not to the common good, as the texts of jurists said, but to an objective suited to each of the things to govern, which implies a plurality of specific ends that turn to the strengthening of the government itself.

There are several situations that expose how the State is self-centered in its own rationality and how it exercises power from the biopolitical control over the population.

As Simões (2021, p. 157) points out, the production of discourse on the need for security, for example, has become a mechanism widely used by the State to cover up racist practices in the name of a rationality for peace. However, it is clear that this desire for peace is selective and maintaining the discourse of peace for some means making any possibility of peace unfeasible for many others.

Coimbra (2001) reminds us that the origin of favelas is marked by the gentrification process, which historically pushes poor families to live in peripheral regions. According to the author:

In the history of cities, it can be seen how such territories, as they are economically valued, have their populations pushed to other less important regions. The so-called "poor peripheries" survive without the minimum conditions of basic sanitation, housing, transport, etc. - spaces where, according to the hegemonic discourse, violence, banditry and criminality thrive (COIMBRA, 2001, p. 81).

Since the end of the 19th century, when the city center concentrated a large number of poor people living in tenements, a series of information began to be publicized classifying that region as synonymous with crime and disease. This initiative was part of a set of urban changes that bet on the beautification of a region to obtain profits from its real estate exploration. Thus, the government won popular support for those houses to be demolished and their residents removed to other regions of the city, removing the supposed risks of contamination.

The subjective productions around what is understood as a favela induced and to this day instigate the practices of interventions in these types of territory. Favela residents are seen as responsible for the city's insecurity, affecting public policies on urbanization, health, education and especially security. In other words, “the discourses underlie the interventions and the interventions legitimize the discourse” (GONÇALVES, 2019, p.118). As a political strategy, knowledge about the favela was created that would come to incorporate much of the literature on poverty and on the way of understanding and looking at the favela.

The favela is produced and publicized in such a way that outsiders see it as ‘a place of ill repute, populated by men of ill repute’, just like the city of the colonized, described by Fanon (1968). Based on Fanon's analysis, it is possible to make a correlation between the way favela residents are treated and the practices that were applied in the

concentration and extermination camps, in which those individuals who were not interested in the Nazi command were imprisoned and discarded.

Both the presence of the police and the illicit drug dealers somehow affects and shapes the subjectivity of the people living in the territory. When we say this, we are referring to the way residents need to behave within the favela due to repression and/or violence committed by groups that sell illicit drugs, as well as the constant violations committed by the police (authoritarian approaches, slaps in the face, breaking into houses without a court order, destruction of cars on the sidewalks, presence of the *caveirão* invading the streets, etc).

In this context of permanent climates of tension and surveillance that affect these territories, associated with the presence of groups that sell illicit drugs and the discourse that the media spread about the favela, the subjectivity of the residents ends up being shaped. We can understand subjectivity as ways of being, desiring, acting, perceiving the world. Guattari and Rolnik (2005) state that our subjectivity is produced through:

[...] everything that is produced by capitalistic subjectivation - everything that comes to us through language, the family and the equipment that surround us - is not just a matter of idea or meanings through significant statements. Nor is it reduced to models of identity or identifications with maternal and paternal poles. These are systems of direct connection between the great productive machines, the great machines of social control and the psychic instances that define the way of perceiving the world (GUATTARI; ROLNIK, 2005, p.35).

The daily life of the population living in slums, especially people with black skin, has become the setting for a horror movie. The intense police operations, which are said to be strategic for the protection of the population and the elimination of dangers, are put at risk and threaten the lives of people residing in the poorest regions. In a territory believed to be a concentration zone for 'bandits' and dangerous people, the imprecision of shots fired from the top of a helicopter or a control tower becomes irrelevant. According to Silva (2021, p 93), the control exercised in a tyrannical way through the use of weapons and the constant violations suffered can produce a frightened, silent, docile favela resident, etc., or even the opposite of it all. Such practices denote that this protection and elimination of dangers is a policy intended only for a certain part of the population.

Scheinvar (2008, p. 6) even emphasizes that it is not poverty that is the problem, but being out of order, either because of being poor or because of being 'distracted'. The

State does not implement strong actions to eradicate poverty, it keeps the poor increasingly on the margins and claims that they live as poor people: “with their aspirations, with their survival strategies, with their dreams, under conditions of extreme difficulty and adverse to life, which lead to them, the poor, being recognized as violent” (SCHEINVAR, 2008, p. 6).

The way the favela resident lives is uncomfortable because it differs from a model of behavior accepted as normal, being classified as crooked and, being crooked, it is assumed that there is a correction that needs to be made. However, how to have a life within the normalized standards when one wakes up with a shooting at the door of the house, sometimes articulated with the forces of the State or with its consent? Isn't that the same State that claims to be an organization in charge of caring for, protecting and bringing security to the population? And who protects the population that lives in the favelas? How are these people going to survive having to protect themselves even from who, according to liberal discourse, should be protecting them?

In the city of Rio de Janeiro, not by chance, such subjectivity has been produced and disseminated in order to criminalize favela residents, because once subjectivized in the condition of 'bandits', the population living in the favelas has been a constant target of a politics of death, especially under a state government that identifies with the idea that 'a good criminal is a dead criminal'. The framing of who should be considered a criminal has opened up the racism of the State. Police officers have had more and more autonomy to mistreat and shoot to kill those they consider 'bandits', or even 'suspects'. As stated by Simões (2021, p. 73), all this to the applause of a population captured by this subjectively produced discourse that dangers must be eliminated.

This discourse on security, as presented by Foucault (2008), is a powerful device that produces fundamental modes of subjectivation to criminalize certain groups of people and generate demands for greater intervention and control. As a result, society begins to feel unprotected and starts to defend that the State uses its police apparatus to invade territories considered dangerous to establish peace. The strength of this discourse even captures the favela population itself, which will be the target of violent interventions by that same State.

Media devices, supported by economic-business interests, almost always act in association with the violent practice of the State. By positively portraying the role of

police officers in operations in favela territories, they spread the farce that such actions aim to combat drug and arms trafficking. What is not shown in these media are the effects of these policies on the daily lives of the population residing in these peripheral areas. What is it like for these people to have to naturalize the coexistence with the constant moments of tension and risks of death with the shootings at the door of their homes?

The production of subjectivity manufactured from hegemonic discourses and disseminated by these media produces the desire for the naturalization of the “war on trafficking” as a solution to the problem of drugs, violence, and illegal drug dealers. So you get the idea that after the war there will be peace and security in society. This production reaches not only those who live outside the favela, but also a large part of those who live in it. When favela residents look at their surroundings and, in a way, feel tired of living with war weapons, intense shootings, whether by the police or armed groups that live in the favela, they see in the media discourse a confirmation of what their eyes are present and he believes that the solution is police incursions, even if the entire favela suffers the consequences of this violent policy. Thus, it has been increasingly common to find angry statements on social networks, in circles of friends or even in family groups, repeating expressions such as “a good criminal is a dead criminal”, “human rights for right human beings” and “whoever wants to defend a criminal to take him to your house.”

As Simões (2021, p. 5) argues, in this same perspective of the State, which in its rationality offers a discourse of freedoms and, in parallel, exerts a biopolitical control of the limits of the population's freedom, it also produces a discourse on danger and the need for security, placing itself as an institution responsible for promoting peace. But from whom does the population need to be protected? Or what part of the population needs to be protected?

By persisting with the discourse of the war on drug and arms trafficking, the State gains even more popular support to normalize the violent and discriminatory practice in the favelas. Meanwhile, the life of favela residents is being scourged in the name of protecting the lives of the rest of the population, even in the face of facts like this that show that, if the State were really interested in fighting the illegal drug trade, the target of operations would need to be modified.

Foucault (1996) points to the principle of exclusion in speeches and illustrates that the speech of the madman since the high middle ages did not circulate like the others, because often their words were judged as useless and were not considered. In the same perspective pointed out by Foucault, the reports of favela residents denouncing the processes of violence and neglect they face in everyday life end up being attributed to a place of non-truth and non-importance, and therefore, are not seen as a counterpoint to the hegemonically produced discourse. However, despite all the violence and terror spread in the favelas through the instituted policy of death, some movements of struggle and resistance emerge in these territories, giving breath to a (re)affirmation of life.

Small groups of favela residents have sought to assert their powers through dialogic initiatives, integrating neighbors in a call to fight for survival. In the midst of so many situations of suffering, we are faced with reports of hope as we see articulations between residents to build self-care and self-protection alternatives. Experiences of community mobilization that, despite not calling themselves resistance movements, represent the struggle of a people to stay alive.

All this daily vulnerability that plagues life in the favela directly affects the lives of children, who have the possibility of playing peacefully in the streets restricted due to the constant atmosphere of war with the recurrent shootings and the presence of police in the surroundings of their homes (and often inside them). It was thinking about these effects of violence and precariousness in the routine of children that, in 2015, a group of residents of the Complexo de Favelas de Manguinhos decided to organize themselves to carry out recreational and cultural activities with them. The project ‘Recriando Manguinhos’ was born there.

According to residents involved in the project, it became common to hear complaints from children that, when they were not at school, they were afraid to play in the streets and squares near their homes. Thus, the group of neighbors gathered adults interested in taking turns, on Saturday afternoons, to perform different types of games with the children of that territory using objects, games, music, drawing, painting, writing activities, among others.

Seeking to understand how these recreational activities worked and if in some way the children expressed their perceptions about this violent daily life in the neighborhood,

we had access to an archive of materials produced by the children of the project¹. Behold, we were touched by handling some paintings and drawings in which the children transcribed part of their memories and feelings about life in the favela. We didn't get many copies because we were told that at the end of the activities the children can take their work home and others are given to the families in a get-together that the project's coordinating team usually organizes at the end of the year.

Along with a set of papers with drawings, paintings and collages, we were given a kind of pamphlet that explained that the 'Recriando Manguinhos' project aims to work with children from 6 to 14 years old through activities such as music, storytelling and arts and which has five pre-defined objectives:

- Contribute to training on rights, based on the local reality of Manguinhos, through art, culture and education;
- Stimulate a culture of community participation and solidarity among young people and children;
- Dialogue with other educational spaces as a training continuity for these young people and children;
- Contribute to the creative, imaginary and active process of young people and children;
- Stimulate public policies for children and young people based on dialogue with experiences in the territory.

In addition to this information, the pamphlet contained some images that bring together photos of activities carried out with the children, both in their own territory and on trips to other areas of the city:

¹ Access to the material with the children's drawings was based on a working partnership between one of the authors of this article and the coordinator of the project 'Recriando Manguinhos', within which the drawings were produced.

Picture 1: Photos of trips carried out with the children of the project:



Source: Pamphlet from the personal archive of ‘Recriando Manguinhos’.

Picture 2: Photos of games played with the children of the project:



Source: Pamphlet from the personal archive of ‘Recriando Manguinhos’.

Picture 3: Photos of toys produced by children in project activities:



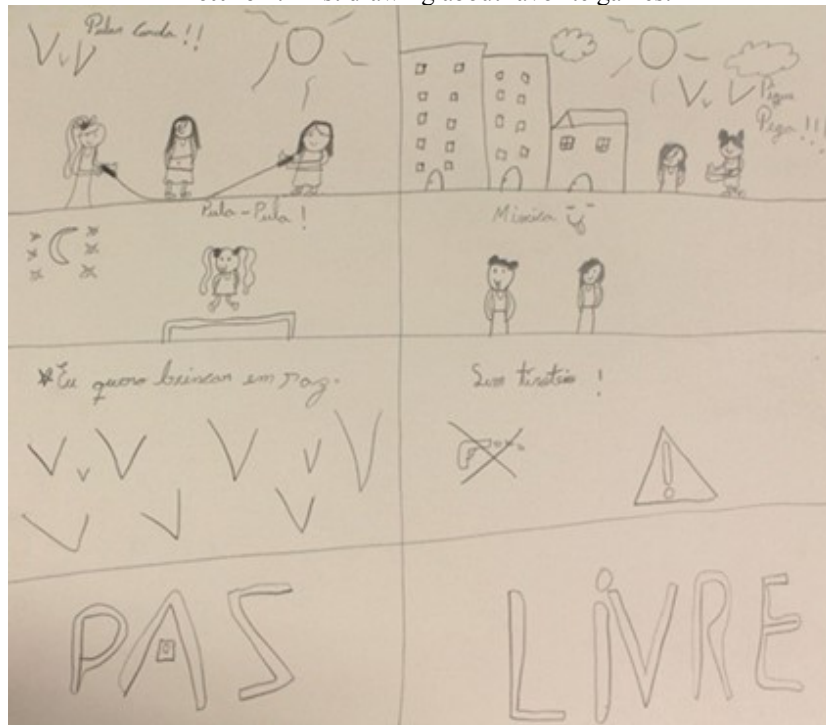
Source: Pamphlet from the personal archive of ‘Recriando Manguinhos’.

After analyzing the content of the pamphlet, we identified a material produced by the children in an activity in which they were asked to represent in the form of drawings what their favorite games would be.

Below we present some of these drawings in which it is possible to observe that, in addition to the representation of their affective relationships with family members and neighbors and the daily routines in their territory, children end up reproducing some discourses that reach them as truths, such as the the culture of peace, justice and incarceration itself as a solution to the problems faced in the daily life of the favela.

In the first drawing analyzed, one of the children emphasizes her desire to play in peace, without shooting, in a free way:

Picture 4: First drawing about favorite games:



Source: Personal archive of the project 'Recriando Manguinhos'.

In the second drawing, in addition to portraying his favorite games, another child builds the scene of a murder and ends with the phrase: “it is necessary not to run from gunfire”:

Picture 5: Second drawing about favorite games:



Source: Personal archive of the project 'Recriando Manguinhos'.

The third drawing is more colorful and, although it does not contain scenes of violence, it highlights a sentence in which the child claims his right to play in the street without having to run from gunfire. In the same drawing, she makes a reference to councilor Marielle Franco, murdered in 2018².

² On March 14, 2018, councilor Marielle Franco had her 'mandate' interrupted by a brutal murder that reached great proportions in the international media. The attack that took the councilor's life took place days after she posted on social media complaints about violent police actions in outlying communities in the city. As a member of the Special Commission for monitoring the federal intervention, Marielle was receiving reports from residents about abuses by police from the battalion in the Acari neighborhood, known as the battalion that kills the most in Rio de Janeiro.

Picture 6: Third drawing about favorite games:

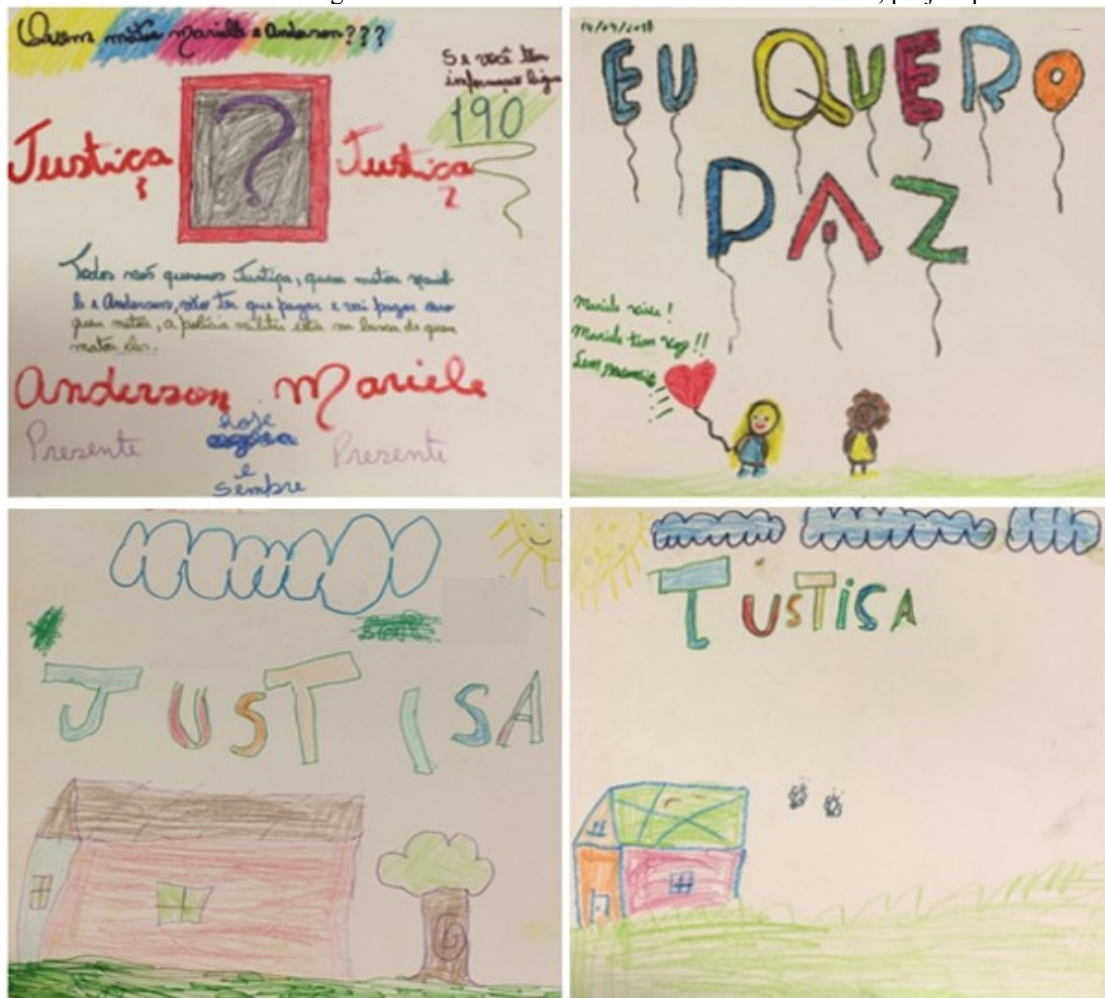


Source: Personal archive of the project 'Recriando Manguinhos'.

Other drawings we had access to also made reference to Marielle's murder. According to one of the coordinators of the activity developed, the councilwoman's death had a lot of repercussion in the communities of Manguinhos, especially because she was born in a favela complex next to them and also because she developed activities in that neighborhood during her term, including in partnership with the project team. Thus, the team of entertainers decided to do an activity to address this issue with the children.

As can be seen in the figures, the children's manifestations are full of affection, but they also bring messages with requests for peace and justice:

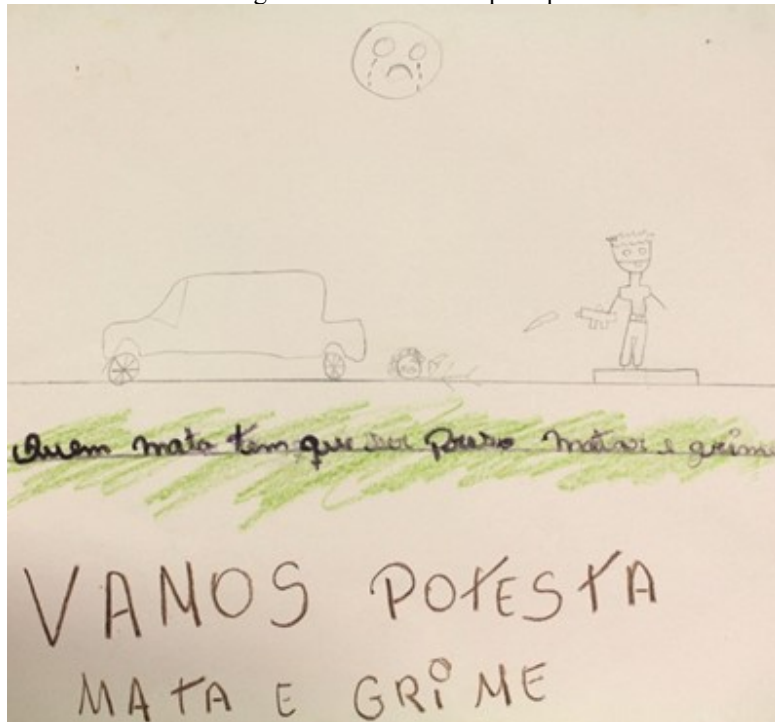
Picture 7: Set of drawings related to the death of councilor Marielle Franco, project partner:



Source: Personal archive of the project 'Recriando Manguinhos'.

In the following materials, it is possible to identify other elements that appear in the children's memory and that are related to the context of such constant violence in the territory where they live. In the drawing below, for example, the child portrays a scene of a murder and soon afterwards calls for a protest, emphasizing his understanding that killing is a crime and “*whoever kills must be arrested*”:

Picture 8: Drawing related to children's perception of violence:



Source: Personal archive of the project 'Recriando Manguinhos'.

In the last drawing made available to us, the child portrays an incarcerated man and three women who are apparently thinking about this man with affection.

Picture 9: Drawing related to the family with the theme of violence:



Source: Personal archive of the project 'Recriando Manguinhos'.

The drawings presented here are examples of how the lives of these children are affected by the practice of violence in their territory and the constant armed interventions of the State at the door of their homes and schools. Situations such as murder, imprisonment and the danger of playing in the streets appear recurrently in their thoughts, as well as the desire for justice. The reality of these children is present in the drawings, showing affections, scenes and impacts that make up a discursive order of everyday experience.

By analyzing the way in which the concepts of justice, crime and prison appear in the speeches of these children, it is possible to perceive how their lives are crossed by hegemonic speeches that reproduce regimes of truth in which power relations weigh. However, the conflict of ideas is noticeable when this discourse collides with the daily suffering experienced by these children. When dealing with the issue of incarceration, for example, it is possible to identify that the discourse of prison as a solution to violence changes when the person who allegedly committed a crime is someone for whom the child has an affectionate relationship.

In repeated speeches calling for peace and justice in the expectation of being able to play without being afraid of violence, they demonstrate that they understand justice from the power of intervention of the judiciary or the executive to modify the relationships they have lived in the territory. These inferences demonstrate that the reasoning of these children is motivated by the discourse that the possibility of facing and changing the reality in which they live would be through the institutionality of state apparatuses, without questioning that it is this same apparatus that produces this situation of violence in the territory, criminalizing its residents. As stated by Aguiar and Berzins (2014, p. 441), the criminalization of poverty is a contemporary discursive practice that creates the conditions for violent incursions by public security agents in the poorest areas. Such a practice has been open in the most brutal ways, which go beyond the use of force.

The marks of the policy of death instituted in the favelas as a form of government have become part of the daily lives of those children who see in the ‘Recriando Manguinhos’ project an opportunity to re-signify the pain and fears caused by the constant climate of violence present in the place where they live. This initiative is an example of the struggle of parents and neighbors who believe in the strength of the collective as a

device to survive and mitigate the effects of this uncontrolled terror policy on the lives of children in the favela, assuring them a space to play in peace.

The existence of these spaces and resistance movements is configured as an opportunity to deconstruct the hegemonic discourses about the daily life of favelas, enabling a critical view of violence and the appreciation of public spaces, as a matter of citizenship.

Contribution

Gabriel Lima Simões: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Michelly Ferreira da Silva:** Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Received on 04 April 2022

Accepted on 20 July 2022

Published on August 2022

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