

Pedrinho, religiosity and prostitution: the managements of an ambivalent young man¹

Pedrinho, religiosidade e prostituição: os agenciamentos de um ser ambivalente

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Abstract

Studies about youth and courses life takes show the ambivalence between the desire to be and stay young and imagination about the “dangers” posed by this group. Several discussions focus on the discussing problems involving poor young people, especially those who use drugs, towards whom the approach is imbued by absence, criminalization or medicalization. From a social understanding of the subject and the deconstruction of stereotypes downtrodden in the social imagination, we seek to identify formal and informal social networks of young people claiming to use illegal drugs, on the urban outskirts of a midsize city of Sao Paulo State. Therefore, a two-year field study, based on ethnographic research, was conducted with those who claimed to need or to have needed some aid due to drug use. It presents the story of Pedrinho and his way of getting support focused on his mother, on a fellow prostitute and on two religious leaders, a pastor and a *pai de santo*. The analysis of social networks, especially those of a religious nature, highlights the ambivalence present and reveals the support provided in regards to the people, deconstructing discourses about the “salvation” of drug users through faith. The informal nature of his networks demonstrates managements brought by life, allowing us to nominate Pedrinho as part of a possible reality transcending formal institutions of aid, which did not offer consistent responses to his reality.

Keywords: Youth; Drugs; Social Networks; Ambivalence.

Resumo

Os estudos sobre a juventude e os cursos da vida revelam a ambivalência entre o desejo de ser e permanecer jovem e o imaginário em torno dos “perigos” trazidos por esse grupo. Diversas discussões encontram-se focadas nas problematizações em torno de jovens pobres, principalmente aqueles que fazem uso de drogas, sobre os quais se realiza uma abordagem imbuída pela falta, pela criminalização ou pela medicalização. Partindo de uma compreensão social sobre o tema e a desconstrução de estereótipos calcados no imaginário social, buscamos identificar as redes sociais, formais e informais, de jovens que dizem que usam drogas ilícitas, na periferia urbana de um município de médio porte de São Paulo. Para tanto, realizou-se um trabalho de campo de base etnográfica, por dois anos, junto àqueles que nos diziam que precisavam ou já precisaram de algum auxílio devido ao uso de drogas. Apresenta-se a história de Pedrinho e os seus caminhos tecidos para a obtenção de suportes, centrados em sua mãe, numa colega da prostituição e em dois líderes religiosos, um pastor e um pai de santo. A análise de suas redes sociais, principalmente as de cunho religioso, ressalta a ambivalência presente e revela o suporte fornecido na relação com as pessoas, desconstruindo os discursos acerca da “salvação” de usuários de droga pela fé. O caráter informal de suas redes demonstra os agenciamentos trazidos pela vida, permitindo-nos alicerçar Pedrinho como parte de uma realidade possível e que transcende as instituições formais de auxílio, que não ofertaram repostas condizentes à sua realidade.

Palavras-chave: Juventude; Drogas; Redes sociais; Ambivalência.

Introduction

In recent decades, the number of studies on contemporary youth has increased due to the need to understand this population and to create specific knowledge which aims, among other objectives, to conduct social interventions with which to control it. The debate takes place within a context characterized by rapid changes in sociability, values and lifestyles which influence investigation into who the youth in modern society is (Abramo and León, 2005).

One of the issues currently associated with youth is drug use and the social image, or “fetish”, of the “problem” (Santos and Soares, 2013).

Such an approach requires differentiation according to social class. The association is often made with poor young people, due to alarmist public debate, characterized by disqualifying those who make use of certain substances, without mentioning other, legal, substances, nor mentioning drugs used by the middle and upper classes (Fiore, 2005). There is a notorious differentiation in understanding what is viewed as a problem and, consequently, in the responses applied to specific groups, depending on their social class.

Thus, two of the premises involved come to the fore: social class and generational diversity. For the former, this work examines a reality marked by socio-economic cutoffs. It recognizes that the chances that individuals belonging to economically disadvantaged social classes have of gaining access to their social rights - education, culture, health, among others - to material goods and to the world of work, are marked, even if only partially, by their class (Malfitano, 2011).

The second point refers to the multiplicity of possibilities of coexisting with youth in contemporary society, drug use being part of everyday life for a certain group, although not a pasteurized or generalized experience. From a generational perspective based on social and human sciences, the term “youth” finds itself inscribed in an historically constructed social category and, therefore, able to modify itself over time (Abramo, 2007; Pais, 2009). According to Adorno et al. (2005), this sociological nomenclature views youth as a field of innovation, generating new identities, discussing roles and questioning the con-

servative character of institutions, of social norms and values. In this broader understanding, beyond the perspective of generation, it becomes coherent to use the term in its plural form, in order to cover the multiple possible situations, depending on the social, cultural, political and economic perspective, as well as that of gender, among others, creating a complex mosaic of experiences (Sposito, 2003).

For poor youths who use drugs, especially illegal drugs, the discussion usually focuses on discussing problems concerning an approach imbued with absence, criminalization or concentrating attention on dealing with the products, losing sight of the socio-cultural issues of their use (Bardi, 2013). This leads to pejorative understanding, associated with violence, crime, dealing and “gangsters”. Thus, these young people usually bear a trace of this phenomenon, characterized by the stigma of social condemnation, by increased controls placed on them and by greater restriction on opportunities for inclusion (Pereira and Malfitano, 2012).

In response to the issues of drug use by the general population, society has acted through its institutions, especially through health, tending to medicalize the objects of interventions in the most diverse areas of the interface between health and social aspects (Fiore, 2005). However, this path has been shown to have problems responding to its goals, as many health care services are not prepared to care for the young people, as in the example of the Psychosocial Care Centers (Caps)² in this country, which do not yet include the issue of youth in any differentiated way (Malfitano, 2008; Scadutto and Barbieri, 2009). Thus, there is an evident need to become closer to, and to understand, the contemporary phenomenon of drug use based on those who are in this alarming situation; young people.

From this perspective, beyond explaining the contrary positioning of practices related to drug use that restrict liberty, or defend abstinence as the only possible approach to the issue, it is proposed that young people using drugs be listened to, from

the perspective of getting to know them and, from there, to understand the issue. Bearing in mind that, currently, the socio-cultural contexts in which drugs are produced, distributed and, especially, used, have not often been approached so as to demonstrate formal and informal norms and rules which serve as a reference for these activities, we decided to focus on the formal and informal social networks of young people who use drugs (Macrae e Vidal, 2006).

We place emphasis on social networks as a possible strategy of the actors in constructing stronger social ties, seen as indispensable in being able to face up to adverse social situations in the context of their lives and to give access to wider social circles, or to be included in those circles (Martins, 2004; Marques, 2009). The networks may be formal, represented by cooperation between governmental agencies and/or with social networks, private organizations or groups, enabling them to deal with problems; or informal, when referring to the set of spontaneous interactions which can be described, these being composed of friends, family members, religious support and illegal elements, among others (Pakman, 1995).

Based on these concepts, we seek to identify the formal and informal social networks of young people who use illicit drugs on the urban outskirts, taking into consideration the following issues: are these young people close to people or services on whom they can rely in situations of possible difficulties stemming from drug use? What are these relationships like? Moreover, we also seek to understand the networks which impose on their lives resulting from society’s mobilization on this topic.

However, not just any concept of such social networks can be used; there is specificity in the search. The aim is to discover the relationships established from the perspective of these young people’s life development and not from that of instruments that measure risk and protection factors, in accordance with the dominant social way of thinking about drugs, from the single perspective of family “breakdown”, lack of religious beliefs and individual factors

² According to official Ministry of Health documents, of the mental health care instruments, the Caps are of strategic value for the Brazilian Psychiatric Reform in organizing an alternative network to that of the psychiatric hospital. Among their attributes is their provision of clinical care to individuals with serious and persistent mental disorders in a regime of daily attendance, thus avoiding hospitalizations. The CapsAD are strategic tools for caring for patients with alcohol and other drug “addiction” and/or harmful use (Brazil, 2005).

to “explain” use. In our proposal, social networks effectively contribute to understanding the life of marginalized young people in Brazil, as well as the phenomenon of drugs itself.

To do this, a two-year study was undertaken, following young people from a specific place who were previously known to the researcher through participation in community university activities organized by METUIA UFSCar Centre³. Those who claimed to use drugs, and to be in need of some kind of aid because of this, were invited to take part in this study.

The following originated in a technical relationship through our participation in social services, depending on the research in question. In order to follow, it became clear that we would need to be available for relationships of exchange, in order to be able to be close to the participants. Thus, ethnographic contributions were resorted to, such as immersion in daily life, using field diaries and analyses based on this process (Gomes, 2008). Thus, we circulated in spaces frequented by young people through systematic visits to their neighborhoods, between two and three times a week, over a two-year period. This helped us to understand the meaning of their experiences and the strategies they use to face up to daily life (Dalmolin et al., 2002).

Based on interactions with the young people and the actors belonging to their social networks, we present part of Pedrinho’s trajectory, represented by narrations of episodes in his life or taken from interactions with him. The concern here is not to present an historical record, we do not aim to recount the story of this young man’s life, but rather to draw attention to specific experiences related to drug use, characterized as moments which do not represent the entire history of his existence.

Focusing on the social networks constructed by our collaborator⁴, we aim to discover some of the

trajectories, facts and paths followed in order to illustrate the possibilities of a life in communication with different managements, including with drugs. We understand that, within the spaces of circulation, the mediations and connections established simultaneously reaffirm and go beyond their local character, with dialogue between the moment experienced and the macro-social implications involved (Kleinman et al., 1997). From this perspective, we shed light on some of the moments in Pedrinho’s life.

Pedrinho and his managements: ambivalence as a strategy of social support and of life

Young (18 years old), homosexual, *montado*⁵ for prostitution, living on the outskirts and a cocaine user, Pedrinho appears to unite diverse types of stigma imprinted by specific understanding of social imagination. To deal with such stigmas, he adopts strongly ambivalent life strategies to support himself as a possible reality in the middle of all the “brands” imposed on him. However, such pejorative labels are known to be shaped by his socio-economic condition and his age group.

Pedrinho lives in a small house with his parents and two brothers, on the outskirts of a medium-sized city in the state of Sao Paulo. He also has a sister who lives nearby with her husband and three children, and another brother, who was in prison. Pedrinho is the thinnest of the children and has delicate features, a characteristic he makes good use of when he dresses up to go to the avenue where female and transvestite prostitutes congregate.

The young man began to use drugs through interactions with friends. His mother, Lúcia, indicates that when her son was very young, around 9, he got to know a girl in the neighborhood who used drugs and, out of curiosity, he began to use too.

3 Set up in 1998 as an inter-institutional group acting in the areas of teaching, research and extension activities in the defense of the population’s citizens’ rights in processes of breakdown of social support networks. Among its activities, the project has conducted occupational therapy intervention programs in its interconnections with sectors of social care, culture, education and health (Barros et al., 2007). Currently, there are three centers in action: in the Universidade Federal de São Carlos (UFSCar), the Universidade Federal de São Paulo (Unifesp) and the Universidade de São Paulo (USP).

4 Pedrinho and other young people participating in this study were included as employees of the process category that indicates a breakdown of places of production of knowledge or understanding of the research process (Schmidt, 2008).

5 Expression used to talk about cross-dressing.

During our first meetings, knowing the motive with which we sought him out, Pedrinho told us how he had been admitted to a treatment center in another municipality for six months. Just before being sent there, he said that he was feeling very poorly due to using drugs, he was depressed, did not want to do anything; so he asked his mother for help. The two of them went to a service with this recognized aim, the municipal mental health service (CapsAD) where the professionals entered into dialogue with the judge responsible for referrals to treatment centers or clinics outside of the municipality, as the city could not meet the demand.

Pedrinho told us how he remained clean whilst he was in the center. However, within a fortnight of returning home he had begun to use drugs again, in increasing quantities and frequency. Today he says he has no desire to return to a rehab clinic although he made many friends there, whom he misses, he thinks that spending months there would not *solve the problem*. He returned home and missed everything he had *left behind, including drugs*. He used to say that if he decided to stop taking cocaine he needed to do so in his own neighborhood, together with his family and friends as, whatever happened, he *would have continue living there*.

Whilst monitoring Pedrinho's everyday life, we were able to understand a dimension of it which was very noticeable: his religiosity. From childhood he had been interested in *candomblé*, an interest that still exists, as every week he was involved in some kind of activity in the *terreiro*, be that decorating the crown for the festival of an *orixá* or preparing some delicacy to offer to *Pombagira*, for which entity he felt a *real passion*. Involvement in such tasks was the source of much animation and, according to him, this religion occupied first place in the possibilities for help in difficulties resulting from drug use. This is because *candomblé* entertained him and led him to think less about the drug, making it seem he *no longer needed it so much*.

Fábio, the *pai de santo* in the *terreiro* the young man attended, had helped him on occasion when he was feeling bad because of drugs, talking openly to him about various topics and maintaining a close and understanding relationship with his diverse difficulties and dilemmas. One day, in the middle of a

conversation, he said that he was very worried about Pedrinho because of his drug use. He related various situations in which he had *taken that shit and flushed it down the toilet*, when Pedrinho turned up wanting to *snort*. He also told us how he sometimes received the young man after he had been missing for days, using drugs; there he was able to wait for the effects to pass, take a bath and eat, only returning to his own home when he was in a better state.

Fábio was a transvestite, a fact which may partly explain the support given to Pedrinho with regards his sexual orientation. They shared wigs, makeup tips, outfits; they were part of the same universe, which seemed to strengthen their complicity. However, Fábio did not appear to agree at all on the issue of prostitution; it was not uncommon to hear him say that Pedrinho needed to *value himself as a homosexual* or, even, that he needed to be a *queen with dignity*, someone who worked just like everyone else *has no need to prostitute themselves*.

It can be observed that Fábio stands out as an important source of informal social support for Pedrinho and that he is more than a *pai de santo* for him, but also a friend on whom he can rely in any difficulty.

Another important source of informal social support in his life is found in the figure of Melissa, a transvestite friend and colleague, with whom he has a fairly volatile relationship. She can often be seen putting Pedrinho down, making jokes about his body, saying he is too thin, does not have any curves, unattractive for clients in the sex trade who look for archetypal women. Melissa, in turn, was an attention-grabbing transvestite: tall and strong with a body shaped over many years by silicone and hormones.

Melissa reported incidents that occurred while walking the street. Reports of intense late night cocaine and alcohol use were not uncommon: *Pedrinha* (she referred to Pedrinho using the feminine version) *drinks a lot, uses a lot of drugs and then keeps feeling poorly. Then I have to help her until she feels better*.

Little by little, it was revealed that Melissa played a critical role in help given to her friend due to drug use, mainly because she was the person at his side at the most critical moments.

Even Pedrinho's mother, who did not like Melissa, thinking she was a *bad influence* on her son, recognized that the transvestite had been important at diverse moments of extreme risk. One example is when Melissa called an ambulance after finding Pedrinho passed out in the gutter in the middle of the night because of taking drug and alcohol. Right after the ambulance arrived, she ran away, fearful of being held responsible for the situation. Another episode involved conflict with clients, in which she had used her strength to defend her much frailer friend.

Thus, in the day to day life of pleasures and struggles, they need to watch out for each other at times of difficulty. Comradeship is a strategy for doing this in an environment which is marked by frequent disputes and by competition. Thus, when used to seeing a friend high on drugs, she sought to help him, be that through conversing, holding his wig while he vomited or calling an ambulance if she thought there was a risk of overdosing. The same attitude, in turn, was expected of Pedrinho if Melissa were ever to be in a dangerous situation.

In principle, Melissa's role can be seen as paradoxical, as the person who provided help at times of need was also the one who had introduced him to prostitution and drug use. However, on further reflection, we began to understand that the care given to Pedrinho and all of the advice given to him was part of his introduction into prostitution and drug use. In Pedrinho's life, Melissa appeared to perform the function of a more experienced user (of cocaine and of the path to prostitution). She had internalized the "world of deviance" longer and deeper than Pedrinho and, at those times, was responsible for his introduction into the careers of drug use and prostitution (Becker, 2008).

Thus, Pedrinho's condition remained more or less stable. He used cocaine almost every night while walking the street and prioritized using the informal social networks of his mother, sister, *pai de santo* and Melissa when he felt the need or when these individuals perceived him to be in need.

This panorama was apparently radically altered when Pedrinho began to behave differently. At first glance, it was possible to note significant differences in his clothes and in the way he dressed and behaved. The clothing attracted attention as it no longer had

feminine aspects, his hair was shorter, even his way of speaking changed, becoming less spontaneous, more serious. After a while, he revealed to us that he had stopped walking the street and using drugs.

The changes took place suddenly, and originated in a watershed event involving a client: the young man had turned a trick, but afterwards the client did not want to pay, leading to an argument between the two. Pedrinho was very high on drugs and physically attacked the client. The situation ended with the police being called by neighbors who heard the altercation. The man was arrested due to Pedrinho's age (17, about to turn 18) and the young man was taken to a Child Protection Council. The incident was reported in a local paper, exposing the young man to constant commentary from neighborhood residents.

After this incident, embarrassed, Pedrinho retreated to his house, which only his female neighbors and evangelical friends were able to persuade him to leave. These women were also present in his life and it was through their voices that the story was first accessed, as the young man avoided talking of the incident. Many dialogues were necessary before he could open up about it. He spent days and days as a recluse. Pérola, one of the neighbors closest to him, due to his friendship with her daughter Suelen, invited him to leave the house, but he refused. After various attempts, which ended in vain, another neighbor and friend, Eliane, persuaded him to take a motorcycle ride, the only way he would accept being out on the street: wearing a helmet on his head. At home, the young man was advised by Pastor Josué, Eliane's husband.

After this, he stayed away from the *terreiro* and started to attend gatherings at the *Assembleia de Deus* church, where Pastor Josué was minister. After many invitations from Pérola, Suelen, Eliane and others in the neighborhood, Pedrinho's attendance in the church resulted in another watershed incident: his acceptance of the invitation at that time was a motive for great rejoicing, the result of much perseverance on the part of those women. After this, the credit for all of the changes in him was given, by those individuals, to the church and, mainly, to God, who had *touched his soul*. With the same clarity, they attributed his previous drug use to *candomblé* practices.

For Pastor Josué the church and seeking the divine are the only *solution* for Pedrinho. It was necessary to find ways to encourage the young man to spend the maximum possible time in the church as, in that way, according to the pastor: *the word of God to his people would touch his soul and bring about changes in conduct* - some of which had already begun following his first visits. Again according to the pastor, Pedrinho enjoyed attending the *Assembleia de Deus* church and prayed fervently. But he did not yet have enough strength to stay on that *path*. Thus, those around him needed to contribute; they *incessantly invited him, competed with other plans, insisted on the idea and accompanied him to church to protect him from any temptations which might appear*. Thus, the pastor repeated: *the Word can make him free, the interactions here within the church, Jesus can free him*.

On the topic of homosexuality, pastor Josué had other discourses. He said that his religion did not accept homosexual practices, which went against God and the nature He created: male and female. God would see this as very serious and it would mean being sentenced to suffering after death. Moreover, homosexuality meant carrying a demon within, being possessed by an evil spirit from which he needed to be freed. Pedrinho himself, according to the pastor, *needs to break free of this and become a real man*.

At the same time, for the religious leader, the young man's attendance in *terreiros* was the cause of his possession by demons and spirits. Pedrinho's friend Suelen, an ex *candomblé* adept, also made the same type of attribution, saying that such practices had led to his downfall, as while he still believed in the *orixás* he did not have a job, depended on others, *was in debt* and had *even resorted to stashing drugs in his own home*.

In these statements, we can identify a discourse common to neo-Pentecostal religious adepts when, during their rituals, which are often televised in religious programs, they testify to conversions presenting themselves as former *terreiro* attendees who "confess" to the evil they had done (*encostas* - black magic), assisted by the Afro-Brazilian entities. Many such programs show "reconstructions of real cases" or dramatizations in which symbols and elements of Afro-Brazilian religions are portrayed as spiritual

means used only for doing ill (Silva, 2007).

Analyzing such practices, Birman (2009) indicates that evangelicals usually relate accusations of sorcery with criminal and gang practices, emphasizing the powerful enemy within, the "gangster" or "drug dealer", living in the community. Through this process, the "believers" or "evangelicals" gain "saintly" public recognition at the same time as they construct accusations of sorcery as criminal practices. Thus, the image is created that those who practice other religions (especially Afro-Brazilian religions) are gangsters or drug dealers. The evangelicals, on the other hand, are "correct". Thus, the duality experienced in communities between the "innocent" and the "guilty", the "saintly" and the "demonic", is reinforced (Birman, 2009). In this social place, therefore, Pedrinho would distance himself from the stigmas which used to *disturb* him, according to the pastor. However, we have still to discover whether the young man had completely left *candomblé*. Or, to put it better, discover whether *candomblé* had, in fact, left him.

Throughout the field work observations, we were able to witness how diverse discourses and practices resurged in Pedrinho's life. He started to wear feminine clothing again, painting his nails and using eyeliner. He also returned to walking the street and to using drugs. We also noticed how he gradually drew closer to *candomblé* practices once again, thus frequenting both religions.

Initially, this moving between the religions caused us to ask: how can one be connected to two such different beliefs in such a short space of time? What kind of social support does each religion offer him? However, the field data revealed that it was no longer a transitory situation, as the young man was not moving in one direction or the other. It was a situation of ambivalence, as Pedrinho continued to frequent both religions depending on the time or the day, connecting with each when he felt it appropriate, enjoying the different informal networks in his life.

According to Bauman (1999), any experience which escapes efforts to objectively classify it, which does not occupy a predefined place, laid down by the segregating development of language, is ambivalent. Ambivalence defies the classification of objects and events into distinct and mutually exclusive

classes, defying the capacity of language to order the world and eventually produces disquiet due to the feeling of randomness and contingency. This is why human societies have, throughout history, striven against it.

Pedrinho seems to encapsulate the concept of ambivalence which troubles so many. He unites various ambivalent points in a set of experiences; his cocaine use, for example, went from one extreme to another. Pedrinho began to use marijuana and cocaine routinely, which then got *out of control*, this was when his family and social services came into the picture, classifying him as a sick individual; he stopped using drugs completely when he was in the treatment center; returned to extreme use; stopped again when he was attending the Assembleia de Deus church and, finally, returned to his initial pattern of consumption.

During these oscillations, Pedrinho was also subject to different frameworks: his family, the mental health service (CapsAD) and treatment center professionals viewed him as an *addict*; neighbors as a *vagabond*; Melissa as *irresponsible*; members of the Assembleia de Deus church as *possessed*; the *pai de santo* in his *terreiro* as *someone in need of help*. But he was also *good company* for a neighbor who shared the occasional joint with him and for other friends with whom he took drugs. He was also a potential consumer for drug dealers in the neighborhood. He was constantly dealing with the different views of him which existed in his social circle and often had to accept the consequences from such sources of “understanding”.

If, on the one hand, this condition was frequently tense, on the other it shows the efforts made by diverse institutions and individuals to include the young man in some kind of category. In some way, although the possibilities on offer were not satisfactory, it seems to us that Pedrinho managed to escape from certain previous determinations which could condemn him: “unassimilated”, “hopelessly ambiguous” and “chronic outsider” among others (Bauman, 1999).

The stories about Pedrinho told here and experiences shared with him are not the experiences of a passive being who is merely carried along by the classification imposed on him. This is not the

case. The young man appears to have the capacity to manage the categories available in the network surrounding him, struggling to attach him to one point. He shows that ambivalence is a possibility amidst all attempts to destroy it. He is capable of living this ambiguity and ambivalence with all of the challenges his condition poses, even those which culminate in violence.

A concrete example of Pedrinho’s acquired capacity to manage the social networks in his life can be seen in the moment he uses the fact of supposedly undergoing treatment at the municipal mental health service (CapsAD) to obtain access to public transport together with the social assistant from the Social Assistance Reference Center (Cras). He needed to go to the city center, but had no money for the bus. So, he took the opportunity to gain access, based on the expected discourse, even though he had no intention of going to the CapsAD and had not maintained any connection to either health or social services. He saw the opportunity of getting some kind of benefit for himself which, in his assessment, could serve his needs (as, according to his own report, attending those institutions did not bring him any benefit whatever). Thus, Pedrinho demonstrated his knowledge of formal dynamics, using them as part of his formal network, although directed at something he saw as benefitting him.

Another piece of information revealed on analyzing these stories is that the aid given to Pedrinho by the religions was concentrated in relationships with individuals - the *pai de santo*, the pastor and the religious communities - and not in the divinities of either of them, as was initially thought. This is not a case of “salvation through faith” but rather support provided through relationships with **people**. Thus, we questioned the divine power which is so emphasized by the social image, held by religions, especially Catholic and Evangelical, and the literature (Sanchez and Nappo, 2008; Dalgalarondo et al., 2004) regarding drug use or treating “addiction”. We have the perception that these supports were not necessarily related to the beliefs of the subjects connected with the religions, or, at least not only to this.

In the Assembleia de Deus church or together with neighbors who attended this church, Pedrinho

had access to a fairly unique form of support, as he was treated with privilege necessary for him to actually enter that religion. Neither the pastor nor the flock taxed him with his drug use or prostitution, or being homosexual. This occurred indirectly through recurrent discourses on these practices during the rituals. But “sinners” only had to come closer for the possibility of conversion to transform their supposed relationship with evil and death, which would be the destiny society reserved for the majority of them (Birman, 2009).

There, Pedrinho was more than welcomed, he took upon himself the mark of saintliness impressed on the figure of the evangelicals when he felt labelled by prejudiced understandings (druggie, transvestite, rebel). He could be free, if only temporarily, of judgments made by other neighborhood residents (the non-evangelicals and those who did not share the recriminated practices with him). The relationships the young man had in the Assembleia de Deus church appeared to act as an escape valve for him when things were not going well on the street, when he had problems due to his drug use, when Fábio argued with him for not doing things properly in the *terreiro*, among other situations.

In the case of his connection with *candomblé*, which was not seen as the promise of salvation, Pedrinho was treated in the same way as always, since he had started going there, many years before. Fábio was a *pai de santo* and a friend, with whom Pedrinho was able to talk about the latest goings on, even if those involving drugs and prostitution. He was free to show himself as he really was. Being there led to several stigmas being attached to him, such as “wizard”, “black magic practitioner”, “possessed”, “bedeviled”, but this did not seem to bother him very much. He had a place where he could talk about what he wanted and where he felt important; he had tasks and responsibilities to meet. He also enjoyed a network which supported him, allowing him to get back to normal before going home - for example, after a night walking the streets.

Thus, making use of different support networks, Pedrinho experienced diluted ambivalent relationships in his private life. His multiple introductions and networks showed his resistance to normalization, that which separates objects and

events into distinct classes, in a resistance exercised by individuals (Bauman, 1999). In this way, Pedrinho could become “just” a druggie, or a vagabond, or a transvestite, or a possessed being, or one God had liberated, or any of the many other types of individuals which society can conceive of and over which they exercise control. Pedrinho passed between the contradictory labels, in the ambiguous search of the multiple networks for his life.

In his ambivalence, the young man seemed to know how to effectively administer visits to the Assembleia de Deus church and to the *terreiro*; he knew what to say and what not to say in each place, how to gesture, with whom to speak. He knew the codes, conducted a profound analysis and, then, made the necessary adjustments. Thus, in order to manage this ambiguity and make it viable, he needed to make a personal effort which, however, could only be understood in function of the benefits received from being in each of those spaces.

Final considerations

From Pedrinho’s story, we can perceive that it is in the informal field that this young man’s social networks can be found. Through the stories told it can be seen that he had significant support together with his mother and sister, people he judged he could count on in moments of difficulty, including difficulties arising from drug use. In parallel, he also counted on religious support from two different beliefs: *candomblé* and Pentecostalism.

In an ambivalent experience, these religions provided Pedrinho with different types of support, as they have different readings concerning his existence and, more specifically, his drug use. The young man, who went from one to the other, appeared aware of the “benefits” to be had in each, seeking them out at specific points in his life, depending on what he was experiencing. One thing, at least, in common to both was the fact that the support provided to the young man was concentrated through the religious leaders.

Finally, the informal sources of support included Melissa, who shared his most critical moments of drug use. When he did not listen to her, Melissa promptly intervened to get him to the places he

would be assured of receiving the necessary treatment. We can see, then, that she was of great importance in Pedrinho's life as, of all those who were concerned about him, she was the one who most helped him. This is because she shared his everyday life. Pedrinho and Melissa went through situations together, shared pleasure, solutions, frustrations and difficulties.

Regarding Pedrinho's management of social networks, it can be said that he, like many others in our unequal society, from the most varied perspectives, is one more ambivalent being, with all of the challenges his condition poses. He carries with him the brand of a social group. The brand of socio-economic poverty, which is fairly determinate of his possibilities in life (Abad, 2003). Although he can manage diverse ways of assimilating or nor assimilating, he has little chance of breaking away from his condition, living with a constant feeling of helplessness towards a world whose control seems to slip through his fingers, experiencing the world as a trap always ready to catch him.

Understanding Pedrinho's social networks, however, shows us the concrete possibilities of living and the supports which make up his life. The potential of approaching the everyday, giving in to the constant "contamination" with subjectivity, accepting other possible realities, can give clues as to possible introduction into formal networks, as long as they can count on effective, not moralizing, strategies and are based on the other and their concrete life possibilities. In Pedrinho's trajectories, formal institutions did not offer responses appropriate to his reality.

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