

Injustice and associative cunning in occupations of public schools in Rio de Janeiro in 2016*

Ubirajara Santiago de Carvalho Pinto¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-9010-8431

Abstract

Based on qualitative data collected in a field research carried out in 2016 in five state public schools in Rio de Janeiro, this article examines the meanings attributed to injustice in public schooling practices and how student action in this context shapes the occupation of schools and current student experiences. The analyzes expanded the understanding of the school as a public arena, revealed the various ways in which political ties are formed, broken and maintained in the school and in occupations, and addressed the deficiencies of public schools and the policies for upper secondary public schools in Rio de Janeiro and other states. The research also revealed the uncertain and difficult associative student effort to expose education problems while living in the occupied school. The situations observed bring to light the need for a habitable public school, the ineffectiveness of the schooling offered to poor Brazilian students and young people, and the difficult struggle faced by them to ensure quality schooling and autonomy in the complex, unequal and plural context of current Brazilian society.

Keywords

Sense of injustice – Fair school – Human rights – Student mobilization – Associative cunning.

* English version by Edson Sêda Pereira de Moraes. The translator and the author take full responsibility for the translation of the text, including titles of books/articles and the quotations originally published in Portuguese.

1- Instituto Federal Fluminense, Macaé, RJ, Brasil. Contato: santiagosamba@yahoo.com.br.



<https://doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634202147238861>
This content is licensed under a Creative Commons attribution-type BY-NC.

On the starting point

This article addresses issues central to the occupations of state public schools in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 (PINTO, 2018). Given the complexity of the participatory dynamics revealed by my field research, I focus my analysis here on two topics relevant to the understanding of these movements.

First, based on my empirical findings, I explain the reasons why students decided to occupy schools and the meanings associated with their criticism of schooling conditions in Rio de Janeiro's state public schools. Next, by examining the multiple engagements (THÉVENOT, 2014a), the types of sociality and the creativity (JOAS, 1996) in the course of collective action, I illuminate the efforts and cunning involved in the unstable associative work of students/youngsters, without which the occupations would hardly have lasted long.

The study's theoretical framework is based on the sociology of critical capacity (BOLTANSKI; THÉVENOT, 1991), expanded by the sociology of plural engagements. The first allows us to examine the frameworks of justice formed during student mobilizations, while the second directly addresses how the actions of political communities and their processes of emergence should be observed. These communities are understood in a test taking place over the course of their experiences, considering all the multiple forms of engagement involved (THÉVENOT, 2014a).

Politicizing dynamics depends on the contextualized experience of each occupation, considering its openness to the unpredictable and the situated processes of building commonalities (THÉVENOT, 2014a). To illustrate the point: In the Luiz Reid school lived a certain Mr. Sassá, who was familiar to some students, but not to others. A vulnerable resident, the care students provided to him reveals the ways of acting and evaluating situations within that political community. Before the occupations, the students opposed the school's principal when she tried to remove Sassá from his precarious little room near the school's football field. A care policy suggests the importance of engaging in familiarity, which, by the way, is more difficult to find public expression, as it oppresses the person in the ways of being, acting and living that are accessible only to those who are close (THÉVENOT, 2011).

Why specifically this one?

Basically because the only other school in which I've studied, no, the other only two schools in which I've studied, here in Macaé, one was, like, very, very small. And, like, the school was not bad or anything, it was just very small. And I was very introverted, so, this didn't help me much. And when I came here, I grew up a lot. Both for the very large number of people, and for the infinity of different thoughts and actions and ideas and ideologies, and I got to know a lot of different people. This school gave me that. And when I came to Macaé, it was, in fact, not even one year since my father had passed away, it was only seven months and I was, like, ten years old. And the only place I could feel, let's say, better, in all the time I was here, which I think was 3 years, was here at Luiz Reid. And, like, I met people who are my friends to this day. But, for example, Sassá lives here and, like, she used to give him a lunchbox with a very small amount of food for him. He slept in a very dirty place. And, like, fuck you, you know? He's here, I'm not

obligated to take care of him, but since I was going to take care of him, I'm going to give him the minimum. And since he lives here, why not take care of him properly? And, besides, for example, the dogs take care of the school more than she does. Yeah... they're, like, more respected than she is, for example. If someone tries to do something to Sassá, they start to bark. Like, they attack, for example. Or if someone starts fighting here at school, I saw it myself, you know, for example, the dogs go after them when there was a fight here at school. (Conversation recorded during the occupation of the Luiz Reid school).

As a prelude, Camille evidences the unstable meanings and actions, transiting between injustice and justice, present in school situations: these meanings aim at both social inclusion and the importance of proximity and diversity. Disrespect and carelessness are also injustices often associated with school management, whether the disrespect and neglect are attributed to the state and the governor, or to school boards or to the Secretariat of Education (SEEDUC). Sassá's participation in the action is not of lesser importance to understand what is at stake in the collective management at different levels of engagement than what happened in school spaces. In other schools, other situated ingredients required the making of a commonality according to varying forms of engagement.

For the sociology of critical capacity, the key point is that social actors know how to apply the general criteria of justice recognized in the society in which they live: public action requires legitimate reasons. Boltanski and Thévenot (1991), based on political philosophy authors and empirical research, reconstruct six principles of justice frequently employed in public controversies: the civic, the industrial, the domestic, the inspired, the market and the fame. They compose a "grammar of orders of worth": a set of rules historically and culturally developed to alleviate the tensions involved when common goods are subjected to a situated reality test, that is, they are the object of civic qualification (THÉVENOT, 2014a). This grammar allows for radical criticism and clashes over conflicting qualifications for the common good; liberal grammar, more frequent in American politics, tames divergences and channels them within the limits of interests or preferences expressed in options publicly chosen by individuals (THÉVENOT, 2014a).

The motives for collective action, however, cannot be previously established: frameworks of justice are mobilized in concrete situations. Legitimate motives can be claimed and forged based on the experience of the actors: their socializing environments can provide them the elements for the formulation of their criticisms (JOAS, 1996).

According to the sociology of engagements, human action depends on the surrounding environment, taking also into account the various conventional formats of engagement available for action. The actors are capable of both self-coordination and coordination in view of commonality. But the construction of commonality generates tensions – which go beyond a mere individual/society opposition – because plural engagements involve a variety of goods – the execution of a plan, familiarity itself, common goods – and of evaluation and information formats (THÉVENOT, 2006).

Initially, three regimes of engagement can be pointed out: 1) the regime of action plan; 2) the regime of engagement in familiarity, central to occupations and, to a certain extent, made invisible by studies that, despite their contribution, do not address the daily

work of political association and the tensions arising in occupations (BARRETO, 2016; CORTI; CORROCHANO; SILVA, 2016); and 3) the public regime, which requires attitudes adjusted to the conventional constraints imposed on the public presentation of legitimate motives (THÉVENOT, 2006).

The actors deal with the objective-effective issues emerging in the action: it is necessary to organize the demonstrations and define the slogans, but also to secure certain bonds of familiarity, as stipulated by the informal rules that limited access of newcomers to the occupants' rooms, among other issues related to proximity. Between public worth and familiar engagement, there was an intermediate level in which meal preparation and the organization of the school should be guaranteed, for example.

This scenario is supplemented with the concept of public arena (CEFAÏ, 2002). This concept intends to fill the space left to the empirical research of public action in the democratic regime by the "constitutional, institutional and legal architecture that founds a public order, regardless of its historical genesis or sociological existence" (CEFAÏ, 2002, p. 64). For Cefaï (2002, p. 65):

[...] [the] understanding of the democratic and republican experience makes use of all these records, such as the categories of ordinary language and common sense reasoning that articulate our apprehension of public causes. (CEFAÏ, 2002, p. 65).

The concept of public arena aims to understand these arenas in their dynamics of emergence. The term *arena*, due to its dual connotation of a place of combat and of a stage for presentations in front of an audience, allows us to distinguish it from the concept of public space, which tends to be too static and does not hold a dramaturgical connotation, marked by the reading of Habermas. The idea is to demarcate a difference between the approach adopted here and that which reduces the formation of the public sphere to the logic of market equilibrium, or the approaches that adopt the concept of field, which emphasize the conflict between actors to define reality and impose a certain legitimacy, evidencing the relationship between the temporality of strategic interactions and the construction of social problems, but that tend to not escape the confines of a structural analysis (CEFAÏ, 2002).

What is emphasized is the process is in its public experiential dimension, with its invention of rules, conventional practices, objects, images and theories. This process is linked to the construction of individual and collective actors (whose identity is not fully established in advance, but is shaped instead in the course of the interventions and interactions) and to a dynamics of elaboration of public cultures, in the form, for example, of arguments and vocabularies of motives (CEFAÏ, 2002).

It is in this scenario that, after analyzing the plural senses of injustice and the associative cunning involved in the occupations of upper secondary schools, I elaborate some conclusions about questions of justice posed by the occupations regarding the processes of school socializing in Rio de Janeiro's state public schools, the educational policies and the complexity of direct political participation in the school.

Capturing school occupations in action: another way of approaching the school as a public arena

In recent times, there have been three cycles of occupations of state public schools in Brazil. The first, in São Paulo, dates back to November 2015. High school students opposed a school reorganization initiative that, according to students and teachers, was conducted in an authoritarian manner by the then governor Geraldo Alckmin (Brazilian Social Democracy Party - PSDB). According to occupants and teachers, the reorganization proposal was developed without dialogue with them and aimed at reducing costs in a way that would further impair the school system and jeopardize the right to education. The students carried out a series of demonstrations. As there was no dialogue with the education department and the state government, they decided to occupy the schools. Faced with the tenacity of the students, who occupied more than 200 schools for almost two months, the government suspended the measure.

In addition to neglecting the schools' shortcomings and needs, the cost cuts would affect the routines of more than 300,000 students, teachers and other civil servants, with the closure of more than 90 schools and possible layoffs. To the motives related to the right to a public, democratic and effective education were added the familiar and affective engagements that surround the school routine.

In March 2016, Rio de Janeiro's state schools were the stage for the second cycle of occupations. The occupations were preceded by several student demonstrations, in the wake of a state teachers' strike that lasted from March to June. The *Mendes de Moraes* state school was the first to be occupied on March 21: at the peak of the movement, about 80 state public schools were occupied in Rio de Janeiro and, for a shorter period, some Education Department's buildings and other spaces. The state public high school system totaled around 1,300 schools at the time.

The strike initiated by the Union of Education Professionals of Rio de Janeiro (SEPE), in March 2016, took place in a context of an increasing fiscal and budgetary crisis in the state. Hence the reasons for the strike: successive delays in the payment of state civil servants, layoffs of outsourced employees and, more generally, the deterioration in teachers' working conditions, especially regarding the valuation of teachers and the guarantee of adequate school conditions. The state's cuts in social investment directly affected the education system.

The third cycle of occupations took place in the second half of 2016. The movement opposed measures both unpopular and inconsistent with the public funding of education, health care and social security, and which were conducted, according to the students, in an authoritarian manner by the interim president Michel Temer (Brazilian Democratic Movement - MDB) and his party. In all three cycles, there was a criticism of the implementation of governance by standards, objectives and results, which is marked by a hypertrophy of industrial efficiency associated with market worth (THÉVENOT, 2011, 2014b). Such policies obliterate the plural goods existing in the affected communities. They produce pressures and oppressions that affect both the familiar engagements and those aiming at ascribing qualifications for the common good: they suppose the possibility of

objective measurement of the engagements that constitute an organization (THÉVENOT, 2011; CHEYNS; THÉVENOT, 2019).

Entering the schools: the methodological dimension

I enter, now, the second cycle. After visiting 20 public schools in Rio de Janeiro, I turned my attention to five state schools in the north of the state: Matias Neto, Luiz Reid and Vanilde (in Macaé), Cinamomo (in Rio das Ostras) and Jamil El Jaick (in Nova Friburgo). In Macaé, the occupations began on April 5 with the occupation of the Matias Neto School. On April 12, it was Luiz Reid's turn, followed by Vanilde Natalino Mattos. The others were also occupied in April.

I focused on these schools for three reasons: the priority given to the situated monitoring of "collective action" (CEFAÏ, 2007), the anchoring of the object in close relationships and the urgency of the task, given the uncertainty about the duration of the protests. The fact that I live in Macaé also contributed to the decision. The frequency of my visits to the occupations was uneven, due to their simultaneity.

Participant observation requires negotiation, closeness and the building of relationships of trust and collaboration, without which acceptance in the political community is difficult. Being present in the Luiz Reid's occupation from the beginning facilitated the approach: there I was able to do many hours of audio recording. Central to both the city's geography and the student mobilizations, the school gave access to the activities taking place in the other schools in Macaé and in Rio das Ostras' Cinamomo: people and information transited between them.

In addition, I conducted interviews and organized focus groups at the schools I visited less often and recorded activities of and reports from different actors – teachers, activists, civil servants and others who were there – in various circumstances. Finally, I formed a collection to allow a thick description of these communities and their actions in different spaces. The analysis of the material gave me access to various dilemmas and conflicts occurring in schools, in the occupations and in the social experiences of the young people who attended them. Data collection was authorized by the students/youngsters, who were previously informed about the scientific purpose of the collection and had their identities protected. Pseudonyms are thus always used in this article.

On the population profile and composition

Analyses and observations showed that each occupation had a different population composition. Some of them admitted people linked to political parties and groups provided that no flags were raised, that is, as they said, as "private individuals," others were composed of students from the school itself, others were disputed by groups, such as the Mendes de Moraes. There were schools more permeable to alumni, friends and friends of friends, students from other occupations and homeless people, as the Luiz Reid. In general, between 5 and 20 people spent the night at the schools. Student numbers varied

between them and there were moments of greater influx in each one, depending on the activities, the days of the week and the period considered.

Working-class young people predominated in these spaces, usually from peripheral neighborhoods, with a less significant presence of *batalhadores* from the emerging middle class (SOUZA, 2011). In general, participants were young people between 15 and 20 years old, of both sexes, with a marked presence, in the schools of Macaé, of young people openly from the LGBT community (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender). The youthful condition of this population refers to their life situation, that is, to the socially constructed meaning of this phase of life, but also to the objective way in which life is experienced, considering the differences in social conditions – of class, gender, ethnicity, etc. – affecting life experiences (DAYRELL, 2007).

In a way, the difference inherent to this youthful condition is manifested in the reduced presence of teachers and in the dynamics of reciprocal support between teachers and the young students. Ascribing the character of *minor* to the young people was done even by the teachers and activists who collaborated with the occupations. Nevertheless, there were demonstrations that brought together students and teachers, and several complaints – about working and financing conditions, school deterioration and management problems – were convergent.

The data analyzed in this article were selected for their relevance to the issues of injustice and to the associative cunning required over the three months of school occupation in Rio de Janeiro.

(In)justices in the foreground

Living together in schools and closely observing, in various spaces, the student movements over the months made it possible to expand the definition of the *school as a public arena*. In fact, the motives for these demonstrations are layered and do not provide a color palette defined enough to sketch an explanation for school injustices. On the other hand, throughout the assemblies and the days of coexistence in schools, the young people were forging the vocabulary of motives (TROM, 2001) that led them to occupy schools.

The occupations were not equally understood by everyone. There was resistance and divisions among the school population. Occupying a school meant imposing a ban on the way it was habitually used by everyone. This boundary of prohibition excluded the possibility of using the liberal grammar of individual choice – restricted to individual options, and not covering common goods – which is illustrated below mixed with meanings associated with civic worth by the student Isaac:

I'd like to ask the leaders of the occupation why the secretariat is not working and also [say] that, as you have the right to occupy, we also have the right to come to school and have classes with the teachers who want to teach. Teachers want to teach? The school is a public place. Teacher wants to come to teach, he comes. Student wants to attend classes; he attends. The school is public, no one can block [the entrance], lock the gate, prevent students from entering. (Meeting at Matias Neto, April 13).

For Isaac, it is an injustice to bar teachers who want to teach and students who intend to attend classes from entering the school: it would clash with the public significance of the ordinary use of the school. The occupants, on the other hand, refer to the respect for divergence and the guarantee of free access to the school: they defend another view on the civic significance of the school as a place for the learning of citizenship and the legitimacy of the civil servants' strike in the context of the deterioration in work conditions and of schools, in short, they claim the impossibility of maintaining learning processes during the ongoing crisis.

[...] at the end of the year the state will want to allow everyone to pass [the school year], I'm in the 1st year, I will not want to pass without learning, as you who are in the 3rd year will not want to pass without learning. [...] we don't have to think only of us, but I also have my memory, as my grandmother studied at this school, I also studied [here]. [...] would you want your son and daughter to have that right? [...] it is our right to fight for our right. You pay taxes to have a quality education, you know, not for you to come to school and take two classes. (Meeting at Matias Neto, April 13).

Criticisms of shortcomings in plans, processes and objects of an industrial/bureaucratic nature were cross-cutting issues for schools. In his speech, Fênix employs certain criteria of justice: 1) the inspired criterion, expressed in wanting to know for himself; 2) the industrial sense of criticism of the inefficiency in the use of public money and in school education; 3) the domestic criterion, which refers to the family and relationships "in this school;" and, finally, 4) the civic sense of "fighting for our right." Then, Vitória, bringing information about the meeting of the Rio de Janeiro's occupation command, reinforces the civic sense of the cause and the worsening of school inequalities: the precariousness of public schools highlights the injustice of the unequal conditions of competition in ENEM (National Examination of Upper Secondary Education) faced by young people from state public schools.

[...] we got to know other schools that are also occupied, and we heard the stories they had to tell! It is the entire state that is [increasingly in a precarious condition], and it is an immense [precariousness]! There is ... lack of teachers, lack of meals, lack of hygiene, lack of doorman, lack of a lot [of things] ... Three years of precarious classes, without any conditions, with that low-quality education, and then competing in Enem with students from a private school, who will have had a lot more classes than us, much better classes than ours, I think it is unfair to say that we have to compete with this type of person. (Meeting at Matias Neto, April 13).

Dissatisfactions and issues of justice go beyond the schools: their deterioration is accompanied by other problems that affect the young people's daily life, social recognition and expectations for the future. To the industrial/civic sense of the criticism is added the issue of school habitability, which requires investment and changes in how schools are organized.

[...] the view they have of us is that [each of us] is just another jobless [person], or that the boys who live in the communities are slum dwellers, they don't care about us. [...] because if they cared, we'd have more culture, we'd have sports in our school – not for free, because we paid for it with our taxes – we'd have athletics [training], we'd have lectures, we'd have the opportunity to watch videos and movies in our school. [...] It needs money, it needs investment and we need willingness, because just like the teacher, without money, he won't want to work, I, without encouragement, won't want to study, because I'm tired of a school that doesn't give me encouragement. (Meeting at Matias Neto, April 13).

But there are other reasons, not only based on interests and political strategies played on other fields. The social disparagement of state public schools sometimes goes hand in hand with the stigmatization of working-class youngsters/students.

It is a lack of respect from society. But let's say it is the student's fault. It is a minority and they generalize and brand [all of us]. Then it is branded as if every student in the state network did that. There is no commitment, no respect. They think that the state student is a vagabond, that he has no future, that he is not interested. (Recording of conversation at Luiz Reid).

For her part, Gaia provides justifications for the occupations: she summons up civic senses, which point to autonomy, domestic senses, which place the most experienced as those most prepared to protect young people, and the social conditions of working-class youngsters that the school should consider.

At home we have education, in school, instruction. So, it's education and instruction, they look alike, but there is a difference, and here at school, we learn, we leave home and start living with other people from an early age. So we start to receive that social learning. And this is something that over the years we see that the school has lost this role of teaching people to live out here. I see the occupation and all these demonstrations as a return to that. [...] [We] used to study at home. That was a long time ago. Things began to change and only those with money went to school. And men, as everyone knows. But we have to go back in time to remember and understand what is happening today. When we started to come to school ... that education comes from home. Here, you'd come and there was the paddle, traditional education and whatnot. It was more rigid, so you didn't need to bond with your student because you were there to teach. Because education came from home. Time passes, society changes, studying changes. And since that happened, there are people there ... And it has been happening over the years that we... the school now... teachers have a duty to educate and teach. Educate as in for life. We, teachers, now have to teach teenagers to live, children to live, to walk with their own legs. Because the family doesn't have time for that anymore. The parents work two jobs, the mother works and everyone is out of the house all day and that's it. (Interview recorded at Luiz Reid).

For Gaia, it is an injustice, given the broad social and historical changes that have occurred in Brazilian society and in the lives of high school students, for the public school to not change in order to meet the educational needs of working-class youngsters

(DAYRELL, 2007, p. 1116). She postulates that the school is a crucial institution for expanding the youth's horizon towards greater autonomy. Dayrell (2007) and Sposito (2010, 2014) argue along the same lines. They point out changes in society, in the school population composition and in how the youth experience life. The young person's status does not coincide with the demands on the student, and the school as an institution was not prepared to deal with this (DAYRELL, 2007). The daily life at school was profoundly affected and the school was not equipped to face the challenges of recognizing the youth condition and the different contexts in which it is experienced, "in a society in which the construction of the self is fundamental to the full assumption of autonomy" (DAYRELL, 2007, p. 1126).

Without investing in improving work conditions and consolidating a socialization program that is aware of the current school population composition and its complexity, the school will continue to produce injustices. In this sense, it is worth remembering the occupations' and teachers' civic criticism of SAERJ (Education Evaluation System of the State of Rio de Janeiro), an instrument of governance by objectives and results (THÉVENOT, 2014b). SAERJ is a state test aimed at assessing the performance of public upper secondary students in Rio de Janeiro. The classification produced was used to allocate more resources to schools whose students obtained better results, thus completely obliterating the differences in how the youth condition conditions is experienced and worsening school inequalities. Engagements that are (qualitatively) situated cannot be reduced to measurable properties (CHEYNS; THÉVENOT, 2019).

Some forms of cunning in collective action and the support of life in common

One of my first concerns during the field research in the occupations of public schools in Rio de Janeiro was that they could be over at any moment. Not because of the obvious fact that the course of human events is uncertain. Especially because, since I had began to observe the engagements necessary to maintain a common life, it became evident to me the instabilities, efforts, tensions and an intense associative work crossed by recurring demands, both related to the test to the publicity of the frameworks of justice already exposed and to the test of the daily living together in occupied schools.

Certainly, in more routine periods, the collective experience of attending schools is also crossed by multiple regimes of engagements that are often strained for different reasons: disputes over criteria of justice or organization, the use of objects and spaces, the definition of situations and action plans, among other diatribes that emerge in the public arena of the school.

However, school occupations were an absolutely new experience for most of the youngsters involved. Certainly, the arrangements involving the engagements of fragile youth identities (BREVIGLIERI; STAVO-DEBAUGE, 2004), the serious demands of living together in the school and the publicity of the cause, in addition to the difficult living conditions of the working-class youth, demanded efforts and forms of cunning that were fundamental to maintain the occupations for an average of three months.

It is the efforts, reassessments, adjustments and, above all, the capacities employed to address the diatribes and tensions, as well as to overcome the difficulties that emerged, that I call here forms of associative cunning. They were fundamental to the maintenance of these political communities that were constituting themselves when the occupants lived together in the schools. Below, I examine some emblematic situations, anchored in the experiences of the making of commonalities (THÉVENOT, 2014a) in three of the five school occupations studied.

Reciprocal care

I have commented, together with other authors, about the composite and plural character of the engagements that constitute the contemporary social organizations and, with greater openness to creativity and the fusion of elements, the social movements themselves (CEFAÏ, 2007). Regarding the occupations of these public schools, I have argued, in fact, that they were constituted on the basis of multiple engagements of varying intensity.

What I call here associative cunning in occupations carried out by upper secondary students does not refer to actions based on calculation, persuasion or aiming at specific interests. On the contrary, I refer to forms of action that, in these situations, indicate the efforts made to overcome emergencies and concerns arising in the course of events. A series of engagements relevant to the continuity of different instances of collective action and different organizations would not be understood through analyzes restricted to the strategic model (DE CERTEAU, 2014). Such situations were not uncommon and, more often than not, were unexpected by the actors: they needed to be managed in order to maintain the political community.

Hence, in this sense, I present a first scene. It combines issues related to living together in the school and to the use of its objects, but brings to the fore the fabric of reciprocal care weaved by the occupants, as they focus on resolving the tensions and concerns that have arisen. On April 25, 2016, Govinda tells an episode that generates a series of caring interactions between them. He and Fênix, who both would sleep in Vanilde that night, need to return to Luiz Reid in order to take care of their colleagues.

- Tamara saw a child running back there. Then I went to talk to Isadora. She started to cry. Then she told Isadora that she had some things to say that weren't cool, you know? Then Isadora started to cry. Then Fênix and I came from Vanilde. Then, when we arrived here, near the gate, Isadora came crying, talking to us ... then Fênix had to talk to Tamara, Golias and Luthor.

- About?

- About what is happening. These spirits and such. Then they solved everything. [...] Fênix and I went back to Vanilde. Fênix took his things, came back here and slept here. Then the night was quiet, you know? He came, made dinner, they had dinner and slept. (Report recorded in Luiz Reid).

Several youngsters who were at Luiz Reid were socialized in environments permeated by religious forms that evoke spirits and mystical practices. Tamara, who "saw a child," is no different. The reported event is not free from misunderstandings. It was enough

to cause Govinda and Fênix to come to Luiz Reid, with the purpose of taking care of friends. It was necessary to carry out further reassessments of the actions in progress: the event cannot be addressed by a direct calculation of means and ends. The categories that organize the occupants' experience thus evidence a whole creative effort, anchored in elements of the occupants' previous socialization, but employed in an unexpected way. This creative action (JOAS, 1996) is fundamental in adjusting to the disruptions that affect the life in common.

Living together and alterities

Engagements in collective action mobilize meanings and know-how originated in past and current cultural experiences. It is possible to say that they allow the existence of relationships of care and self-care (FOUCAULT, 2017; CAILLÉ, 2007). In this regard, the occupation of Luiz Reid was an arena for the occurrence of episodes filled with motives of a religious nature. These incidents gave rise to activities that demanded the coordination of the occupants to deal with spirits and "*encostos*" (evil spirits) that attempted to incorporate in some students.

Being unexpected and unpredictable events, addressing them required a joint effort from the occupants: it took their time and energy. In the creativity of action (JOAS, 1996), new information can always be capable of altering the goals initially established, producing new processes that shape both the experience and the scene. I refer to cunning and efforts as well, because having to drive out the *encosto* and spiritually purify a colleague was not something they seemed to find agreeable: the episodes were filled with tension. Some were afraid and preferred not to talk about it much: people who "don't understand" could make fun of and aggravate the "problem."

Yeah, it got a lot better. We just didn't comment on the issue with the people who got here today ... because we chose to keep it quiet. But those who don't understand would want to joke about it and would have caused it to get even worse ... (Conversation recorded at Luiz Reid).

On April 22, already informed about it, I talked to Isadora, in order to explore the issue and collect versions about these activities.

- Luthor said that Castro had an episode of incorporation; did it happen? - It happens in the best families. [...] Yes, Golias went there. They told everyone to stay here in the front. Then Golias went there and I don't know what he did. But he is better. [...] He asks all the time, why are you afraid of me? I say, "I'm not afraid of you". (Conversation recorded at Luiz Reid).

The practical coordination of actions around Castro (and the *encosto*) evidence, therefore, the efforts made to mobilize the knowledge and methods of a plural culture (DE CERTEAU, 2014). In the meantime, relaxed, we were making lunch, as the purification work was beginning. I even had to reposition myself in the scene in order to proceed with the activity of registering the developments. Among those present, a good part is locked in the kitchen. In the courtyard, Luthor, Fênix and Golias seat Castro on a chair. They made

around him a circle of coarse salt, which, according to them, serves to trap the *encosto* inside. At the same time, they place a bowl of water in front of Castro, who is already seated, instructing him to put his feet in it. Water, as I learned, is used for purification purposes. One of them held Castro, the others prayed with their hands on his head. They pleaded with the *encosto*, asking it to go away.

Fênix: He's calmer. But this is not for lack of warning, I told him to pray yesterday. But he didn't want to pray. Since last night he was like this. It happened last night. I told him to pray Psalm 91 and pray the "Lord's Prayer" two "times. He didn't. He didn't want to pray, even the "Lord's Prayer."
Golias: If it's a demon it isn't in one session, it isn't in two, it isn't in three, it isn't in four, it isn't in five sessions, it [would need] more than ten sessions, if it's really a demon.
Fênix: It's not witchcraft, man. What's in him can go away.
Golias: But it can't run out or run in. It's a circle of salt. (Recording of the scene at Luiz Reid).

Such situations are theorized in their reasons for occurring. The conditions in the school combine with a charged environment and with the memory of other critical situations associated with the terrain on which the school was built. The creativity and uneasiness surrounding the action are clearly perceived: "Every time new people come here, this happens. Just yesterday two people from Matias came and then this happened," says an occupant. Emotional scenes and tensions that intimacy and care alleviate are a relatively frequent experience in the occupations.

Closing the eyes: to conflicts and differences

Objects and access – to cooking supplies, keys and certain facilities in each school – are some of the other components of life in common demanding decisions that qualify the appropriate ways of living together. Depending on what happens with such objects and how they are used, tensions arise. Efforts, cunning, reassessments and adjustments are called for. On April 23, 2016, Govinda reports the disturbances that occurred with the momentary loss of the key to the school at Luiz Reid.

We solved everything, but yesterday it was very stressful. [...] Yesterday, Calíope and I were at the entrance. Then, Golias went out and threw the key. Then, Mafalda, who is from the kitchen, took the key and left it on the table. Then it fell off the table, then he took it and put it inside the notebook. [...] Then we didn't find the key. Then Golias and two other girls arrived. Then he started shouting outside, stressed. Because of the key. Then the boy came here, opened the notebook and the key was there. Then, he opened the door and he asked to call everyone here to talk. He wanted to talk about the key and the sound cable that had disappeared ... then everyone was stressed, he argued with Mafalda. So, I think Mafalda will not come back. Calíope and I gave up. As soon as we found the key, I didn't stay at the gate anymore, I started walking, then I went there to Vanilde. I stayed there and came back at night. [...] But I said, "I'm leaving tomorrow morning." Cassandra talked to me and with Calíope, then I decided to stay. [...] I just think it was unnecessary for him to do what he did because of a key. Then there was a moment when I went down the stairs, he was lying down, then I sat down to talk. Then he started shouting: are you

even going to sit down to rest? Then I said: “Wow, I’m tired.” Then he said: “Are you stressed? I’m the one stressed.” Then I went there and drank some water and went inside. (Conversation recorded at Luiz Reid).

At the epicenter of the episode is Golias, Luiz Reid’s “head of security.” Perceived as a person of energetic temperament, he often focuses on *doing*, aggrandizing, as Govinda recalls, the “sacrifice” he makes for the safety of the school and his colleagues. Despite his involvement in various heated arguments related to proximity, he became a reference for his willingness to do what has to be done.

The tension caused by closeness highlights the recurring relevance of proximal engagement in occupations. Golias has once attended Luiz Reid, knows several people who attend Matias Neto, has friends and is close to many who were regulars at the schools and other spaces in the city. At the beginning of Matias Neto’s occupation, he became involved in a conflict over the burning of a poster and graffiti, which he qualified as vandalism. Golias, agitated, demanded punishment for those who violated the occupation’s rules. I saw him wielding a club in Matias Neto’s courtyard, advancing towards one of the perpetrators. The activist Karenina, a member of PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers’ Party), eventually dissuades him: she argued that “the colleague made a mistake and has already apologized” and “has contributed a lot to the struggle.” The situation demanded appeasement efforts, both argumentative and bodily. Karenina stands between Golias and one of the boys who had burned the poster.

Some time later, already “head of security” at Luiz Reid, he forbade the entry of the perpetrators: “So, if I forbade their entry, it’s because they did something to be banned from entering.” Such events originated some deliberation in assemblies at the two occupations: which increased the tensions. The reassessment carried out in the assemblies evokes a “third aspect” associated with the maintenance of a good life in common and with the qualification of the frameworks of justice, and, in this sense, the search for the meaning of the rules that have been established (BREVIGLIERI et al., 2006).

One of the things I like most about being here is that everyone treat each other well, even with everyone so stressed out here, we’re playing, we’re laughing, we’re having fun. But there are people who can’t [maintain] the order, [who can’t recognize] the fact that [it’s necessary] to have obligations. (Golias, former student of Luiz Reid, recording of conversation during the occupation).

There were other scenes I could have presented here in which efforts and cunning were intensely mobilized in order to maintain the daily living together in occupations and among occupations. The conflicts and divergences between the occupations of the three schools in Macaé were often overlooked and relegated to the background in other situations. Reciprocal food donations, mutual aid, information exchange, joint demonstrations, apologies, acceptance of explanations and the strengthening of friendship bonds evidence some forms of associative cunning that involve the competence – of the occupants – to close their eyes (BOLTANSKI, 1992) to tensions and divergences, and thus

remake, in the course of time, the commonality in the plural (THÉVENOT, 2014a) that characterizes these mobilizations.

Some brief conclusions

The analysis of the meanings and engagements that constituted the occupations in 2016 allows us to broaden the definition of the school as a public arena: close engagements and plural contributions must be fully considered in addressing the dynamics of the current political socialization in the school and its dilemmas. The examination of the forms of engagement and the frameworks of justice in the defense of public education and schools reiterates the importance of this institution in building the autonomy of the youth in contemporary complex, plural and unequal societies. A tutored process of autonomy building, according to many of the youngsters who occupied schools, is the main purpose of education, despite the evidence of the difficulties involved (DAYRELL, 2007). This issue is raised by the students when they expose the inequalities and conflicts, the public authorities' neglect of the situation of public education and the deterioration in schools in Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian states.

Certainly, the risks to the education of young people do not originate only in the school: there are other vulnerabilities, evidenced in their multifaceted criticism of the conditions in which they live, which goes beyond the school walls (DAYRELL, 2007) and is taken to the occupations. However, despite the diagnoses of the educational system indicating it is a factor in the reproduction of inequalities, it is necessary to seriously consider the issues of justice arising in the school, which involve more than structural inequalities: they are closely related to dilemmas experienced in copresence and face-to-face interaction, in the closeness and visibility of persons in the different participatory spheres of the school routine.

It was possible to access, based on the categories of youth experience (RAYOU, 2005), the meanings associated with the school and with the injustices that permeate the public upper secondary education system in Rio de Janeiro. In the expressiveness proper to young people, other problematic goods are revealed, whose deficient access contributes to make the school experience more difficult: work, decent housing, public security, social recognition and decent treatment are among the issues of justice mentioned.

The combination of the various engagements that occur in schools is not made of simple ingredients. Contemporary research on education, health policies and even on forms of work control point to a hypertrophy of forms of governance by rules, objectives and results. They put pressure on organizations, oppress other forms of engagement and give rise to feelings of injustice that do not always have public expression and visibility (THÉVENOT, 2011, 2014b). These governance policies have had a strong impact on education and school systems recently in Brazil, and have been addressed by the literature on occupations: whether using the concept of neoliberalism as a policy of adapting the population to market forces (BARRETO, 2016), or when referring to administrative efficiency policies (CORTI; CORROCHANO; SILVA, 2016).

Governance policies by objectives and results put middle professionals in a difficult situation. The art of combining different types of engagement required of these professionals makes them indeed an exploited class, as it has neither recognition nor remuneration.

[...] the increase of inequality turns the beneficiaries of these services into a population which grows more and more distant from the formal requirements of planned tasks; the development of proceduralisation also strengthens the formal tools which are supposed to provide transparency. (THÉVENOT, 2011, p. 59; 2014b).

But the qualification of different goods associated with living together in the school and the sense of justice pointed out by the youngsters in the occupations show that the school is not constituted only under the logic of domination and power. Although the school does not guarantee social mobility and the disruption of the prevailing forms of domination, it allows young people to experience, even when criticizing its deterioration, plural engagements – among their peers and with adults – that point to a sense of justice crucial to the difficult process of building the self with a view to achieving greater autonomy. They express it when they talk about the art of bringing together the teachers and school workers who get close to them, care about their dilemmas and do more than they “ought to do.”

Despite their desire to change the school, the youngsters also view its positive impacts in their lives. They report the presence of fair and caring behaviors, consistent with the recognition of their condition, when they manifest the various bonds forged in the school life: closeness, tutoring, care, friendship, interaction, common plans, the relationship with knowledge and the respect for the most experienced. And all this represent another undertaking to be performed soon to provide greater continuity.

References

BARRETO, Bruna Amaral Lanzillotti. Ocupar é resistir: um estudo sobre as ocupações secundaristas do Rio de Janeiro em 2016. **Em Debate**, Florianópolis, n. 16, p. 73-94, 2016.

BOLTANSKI, Luc. **L'amour et la justice comme compétences**: trois essais de sociologie de l'action. Paris: Gallimard, 1992.

BOLTANSKI, Luc; THÉVENOT, Laurent. **De la justification**: les économies de la grandeur. Paris, Gallimard, 1991.

BREVIGLIERI, Marc; STAVO-DEBAUGE, Joan. Les identités fragiles. La 'jeunesse' et l'immigration. *In*: CICHHELLI, Vincenzo; CICHHELLI-PUGEAULT, Catherine; RAGI, Tariq Ragi (dir.). **Ce que nous savons des jeunes**. Paris: PUF, 2004. p. 59-76.

BREVIGLIERI, Marc *et al.* Tenir ensemble et vivre avec: le temps des cohabitations. *In*: HUYNH, Phuong Mai (coord.). **Habitat et vie urbaine**: changements dans les modes de vie. Paris: La Défense: PUCA, 2006. p. 45-56.

- CAILLÉ, Alain. **La quête de reconnaissance**: nouveau phénomène social total. Paris: La Découverte, 2007.
- CEFAÏ, Daniel. **Pourquoi se mobilise-t-on?** Les théories de l'action collective. Paris: La Découverte, 2007.
- CEFAÏ, Daniel. Qu'est-ce qu'une arène publique? Quelques pistes pour une approche pragmatiste. *In*: CEFAÏ, Daniel; JOSEPH, Isaac (ed.). **L'héritage du pragmatisme**. La Tour-d'Aigues: L'Aube, 2002. p. 52-81.
- CHEYNS, Emmanuelle; THÉVENOT, Laurent. Government by certification standards the consent and complaints of affected communities. **Revue des Droits de L'homme**, Paris, n. 16, 2019. Disponível em: <https://journals.openedition.org/revdh/7156>. Acesso em: 20 abr. 2021.
- CORTI, Ana Paula de Oliveira; CORROCHANO, Maria Carla; SILVA, José Alves da. Ocupar e resistir: a insurreição dos estudantes paulistas. **Educação & Sociedade**, Campinas, v. 37, n. 137, p. 1159-1176, 2016.
- DAYRELL, Juarez. A escola "faz" as juventudes? Reflexões em torno da socialização juvenil. **Educação & Sociedade**, Campinas, v. 28, n. 100, p. 1105-1128, 2007.
- DE CERTEAU, Michel. **A invenção do cotidiano**: artes de fazer. Tradução de Ephraim Ferreira Alves. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2014.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. **O que é a crítica? seguido de a cultura de si**. Tradução de Pedro Elói Duarte. Lisboa: Texto & Grafia, 2017.
- JOAS, Hans. **The creativity of action**. Tradução de Jeremy Ganes e Paul Keast. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- RAYOU, Patrick. Crianças e jovens, atores sociais na escola: como os compreender? **Educação & Sociedade**, Campinas, v. 26, n. 91, p. 465-484, 2005.
- PINTO, Ubirajara Santiago de Carvalho. **Vozes na ocupação**: sociabilidades, envolvimento e sentidos de (in)justiça nas escolas públicas do Rio de Janeiro. Tese de doutorado. Campos dos Goytacazes: Universidade Estadual do Norte Fluminense, 2018.
- SOUZA, Jessé. A parte de baixo da sociedade brasileira. **Revista Interesse Nacional**, São Paulo, v. 4, n. 14, p. 33-41, 2011.
- SPOSITO, Marília Pontes. Transversalidades no estudo sobre jovens no Brasil: educação, ação coletiva e cultura. **Educação e Pesquisa**, São Paulo, v. 36, n. spe, p. 95-106, 2010.
- SPOSITO, Marília Pontes. Ação coletiva, jovens e engajamento militante. *In*: CARRANO, Paulo; FÁVERO, Osmar (org.). **Narrativas juvenis e espaços públicos**: olhares de pesquisas em educação, mídia e ciências sociais. Niterói: UFF, 2014. p. 97-130.
- THÉVENOT, Laurent. Autorités à l'épreuve de la critique. Jusqu'aux oppressions du "gouvernement par l'objectif". *In*: FRÈRE, Bruno (dir.). **Le tournant de la théorie critique**. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2014b. p. 269-292.

THÉVENOT, Laurent. **L'action au pluriel**: sociologie des régimes d'engagement. Paris: La Découverte, 2006.

THÉVENOT, Laurent. Power and oppression from the perspective of the sociology of engagements: a comparison with Bourdieu's and Dewey's critical approaches to practical activities. **Irish Journal of Sociology**, London, v. 19, n. 1, p. 35-67, 2011.

THÉVENOT, Laurent. Voicing concern and difference: from public spaces to common-laces. **European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology**, London, v. 1, n. 1, p. 7-34, 2014a.

TROM, Danny. Grammaire de la mobilisation et vocabulaires de motifs. *In*: CEFAÍ, Daniel; TROM, Danny (ed.). **Les formes de l'action collective**: mobilisations dans des arènes publiques. Paris: L'ehess: 2001. p. 99-134. (Raisons pratiques; n. 12).

Received on: May 30, 2020.

Revised on: July 23, 2020.

Approved on: November 24, 2020.

Ubirajara Santiago de Carvalho Pinto is a professor of sociology at the Fluminense Federal Institute/Macaé (IFF). He holds a bachelor degree in sociology from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), a master's degree in letters from UFMG and a PhD in political sociology from the Fluminense North State University (UENF). He is a member of the *Pragmaticus* research group.