

Imagination and Mobility in the City: Porosity of borders and human development in divided urban environments

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Abstract

We focus on the notion of borders to explore how mobility and immobility in the city affect the relationship between human development and urban culture. We define borders as a relational space made of territoriality, representations, and different possibilities of mobility and immobility. Drawing on research in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, we suggest a systematic approach to the analysis of borders and identify the socio-institutional, spatial, and symbolic elements that make them more or less porous and thus more or less amenable to human mobility. We highlight the association between porosity in city borders and human development and illustrate the model contrasting two favela communities in Rio de Janeiro. We show that participation in the sociocultural environment by favela grassroots organisations increases the porosity of internal city borders and contributes to the development of self, communities, and the city. To focus on borders, their different elements and levels of porosity means to address simultaneously the psychosocial and cultural layers of urban spaces and the novel ways through which grassroots social actors develop themselves through participation and semiotic reconstruction of the socio-cultural environment.

Keywords

human development, social representations, identity, urban culture, borders, community development, peripheral urbanization, social development, favelas

Introduction

As a site for human development, the contemporary city combines crossings and human relatedness with segregation and sharp territorial boundaries. It is a contradictory socio-cultural environment, made of both freedom and walls, where multiple and colliding forms of life co-exist, challenging rigid geographies and enabling unexpected, original forms of individual and collective action. Cities are demarcated by socio-spatial arrangements, natural landscapes and specific ecologies that both enable and circumscribe human psychology. On the one hand, self-determination, creativity, openness and expansion of experience are an integral part of living in cities, in particular large urban centres (Lefebvre, 2014). On the other hand, urban culture involves segregation and strong spatial demarcations that curtail the experience of individuals and communities. Wandering in public spaces is a regulated practice and cities are not uniformly open for walking (Buck-Morss, 1986; Caldeira, 2014). For many, rich and poor, living in cities means staying inside and moving in very tightly demarcated territories, be it in marginalised or gated communities (Caldeira, 1996; Tonkiss, 2014; Wacquant, 2013).

In this paper, we focus on the concept of borders to explore how mobility and immobility in the city affect the relationship between human development and urban culture. We define borders as a relational space comprising different possibilities of mobility and immobility. We suggest a systematic approach to the analysis of borders and identify the socio-institutional, spatial and symbolic elements that make them more or less porous and thus more or less amenable to human mobility. Central to our effort here is the theoretical assumption that city borders are relational phenomena defined not only by the built environment but also by the practices and symbolic life of its inhabitants (Massey, 2008; Paasi, 2013; Marsico, 2016), of which moving around is one of the most significant (de Certeau, 1984). Mobility, we argue, cannot be

disentangled from the experiences, representations and languages that make the socio-cultural environment of cities a context for human development.

Drawing on research in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, we argue that grassroots' collective action on city borders constitute a paradigmatic case of 1) transformative participation in the socio-cultural environment and 2) reconstruction of semiotic tools such as identity and social representations, both central processes of a socio-cultural approach to human development (Vygotsky, 1978; Valsiner, 2000; Zittoun, 2016). We zoom in the psychosocial dimension of urban cultures and engage with recent debates in cultural psychology that emphasise the twofold nature of borders as liminal spaces that create both separation and contact, being thus fundamental for maintaining stability but also for triggering transformation (Marsico & Tateo, 2017; De Luca Picione and Valsiner, 2017). We show that collective actions of border-crossing, which involve moving through internal city borders and challenging rigid demarcations, trigger a dynamic process, opening up spaces for encounters and communication, in which new meanings and self-understanding arise for individuals and communities.

In challenging societal forces of segregation and dispossession, favela grassroots organisations create increasingly coherent movements that redefine stigmatised identities and disrupt borders, be them physical, symbolic or psychological (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández, 2013). Characterised by urban anthropologists as insurgent citizenships (Holston, 2009), these actions can also be seen as 'tensegrity systems' in states of dynamic tension (Tateo and Marsico, 2019), with potential for destabilising both spatial segregation and the symbolic homogeneity of those living in poverty, challenging dominant representations of marginalised urban areas and reclaiming the right to the city for all (Harvey, 2013).

Cities, Mobility, Imagination

When Simmel wrote about the metropolis and mental life, his point of departure was speed and his natural comparison the small-town characteristic of predominantly rural societies (Simmel, 1948). The city for Simmel was a place of stimulation, constant movement and introduction of difference, in stark contrast to the slowness and relative homogeneity of rural life. Such characteristics of the metropolis created its specific psychology, leading Milgram to conceive of cities as social representations. City residents hold shared imaginations of what their city is like, subjective maps of its space as well as a set of ideas, values and practices related to its different inhabitants and neighbourhoods (Gould & White, 1986; Milgram, 1984). Importantly, cities as representations are not copies of the external geography and do not simply reproduce what is the case (Lynch, 1960). Rather, they include imaginations of what a place can and should be, and how cityscapes enlarge or alternatively undermine the experience of self and community. They comprise relational place-making, which involves the combined social, political and material processes by which people iteratively create and recreate the experienced geographies in which they live (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Pierce, Martin, & Murphy, 2010). Such representations and imaginations circulate as semiotic tools in the public sphere and at the same time mediate and are embodied in the actual experience of navigating and walking the space of the city.

De Certeau (1984) suggests that the act of walking is for urban spaces what the speech act is for language, a practice of enunciation. Walking is the way in which the city is 'spoken' by its inhabitants. When city-dwellers walk, they perform a triple enunciation, which includes appropriation, acting out and relating. A walk performs and appropriates the topography of the city, embodying its cognitions and configurations as well as the relations enabled by different positions and dislocations in its space (Tateo and Marsico, 2019). If walking is the language of the city, it then follows that walking is a key indicator of urban culture. From a socio-cultural perspective, we argue that walking is an act of participation in the socio-cultural environment, which mediates

and intertwines the built material environment and the experiential, representational and linguistic elements that create relational place-making.

We know that movement in space is fundamental to human psychology as the mind combines experiential resources accumulated by dislocation through different spatial contexts to interweave the materiality and symbolic resources of built environments into the psychological (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015). Moving from one place to another takes the mind from one sphere of experience to another and builds the foundations for the uniquely human capacity to imagine what is not there (Vygotsky, 2004). Not accidentally socio-cultural approaches to the imagination (Zittoun & Glâveanu, 2017) have linked it to metaphors of wondering, gap filling and expansion. As expansion, the imagination has been conceived as a loop that emerges out of disruption and moves the mind away from the constraints of actual experience to a space beyond and back (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). As gap filler, it resolves the inherent precariousness of humans' relation to the environment, which evolved in phylogeny, ontogeny and cultural history (Pelaprat & Cole, 2011), bridging the absences of human sense-making with creative content. As wondering, imagination enables a relationship with the not-yet there, the elsewhere and the nowhere (Jovchelovitch, Priego-Hernández, & Glâveanu, 2017), each one of them expressing a range of dislocations and interplays between absence and presence, the here and there, the now and then.

The freedom of the imagination, its wondering and expanding capacities and relation to cultural practices make it central to the understanding of how mobility across borders intersects with individual and social development in the cultural context of cities. The constructiveness of the imagination can be seen as the mobility of mind to expand experience, make meaning, fill gaps and wonder, building a healthy omnipotence that develops belief in oneself and one's community (Tateo & Marsico, 2019). This freedom is propelled by the transitional liminality of borders, seen as space with its own set of characteristics that combine ambiguity and instability, the inside and the outside, the

here and there, continuity and discontinuity, separation and contact (Marsico, 2016; De Luca Picione & Valsiner, 2017). Such a zone of tension and contradictions, opens the psychological and social potential for imagining what is not there and wanting to cross to the elsewhere so as to create new narrative forms (De Luca Picione and Valsiner, 2017) for both the individual and the communities doing the crossings.

As we discuss in later sections of this paper, favela grassroots organisations address the nexus mobility/immobility by drawing on the imagination to cross borders and create territories of encounter and mediation in the city. Through arts and cultural production, regeneration of the built environment and innovative partnerships they engage in transformative participation of the socio-cultural environment to redefine semiotic tools that expand the limits of their experience, challenge the reality of urban spaces and ultimately contribute to their own development. These forms of action target directly the liminality of borders in its socio-institutional, spatial and symbolic dimensions. They take place within a contradictory reality of walls and rigid urban borders that create distinctions and segregation as well as new forms of collective action that challenge and overcome distinctions and segregation. The contradictions of border liminality are integral to the experience of city dwellers today and this is what we turn to next.

Cities of Walls: Borders and Territoriality

Cities as distinct as São Paulo, Los Angeles, Miami, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, London, Chicago and Budapest have been referred to as cities of walls (Caldeira, 2000). Concrete walls have a significant place in these cities and beyond – consider for instance the Berlin wall, Trump’s planned wall in the Mexican border, or the Gaza Strip wall. The building of walls is a cultural and political strategy that marks difference, imposes separation, establishes rules of avoidance and restricts movement within and

between urban spaces (Alpar Atun & Doratli, 2009). As physical demarcation, it objectifies segregation and anchors social discrimination, linking the material and the representational into a symbolic artefact that establishes territorial borders and regulates the use of space in cities.

In different degrees and through different cultural forms, historical processes of urbanisation have segregated spaces and configured neighbourhoods as bordered territories for different socioeconomic classes, ethnicities and even religious and moral groups within cities. Researchers tend to distinguish between borders, boundaries and frontiers (Strüver, 2004) to demarcate territories as both symbolic and material. While these notions are often used to describe spatial borders, they also convey different meanings such as edge, limit and territorial border, respectively. In the literature, they acquire different connotations as either gateways or barriers, points of contact and/or conflict, places of encounter and/or aggressive assertion of difference. These lines, visible or invisible, demarcate spaces of difference that can, however, be blurred, crossed and disrupted. For our purposes in this paper we use the terms indistinctively, focusing rather on their being constituted, enacted and reproduced in relational terms, as reactions of one system to another (Lamont & Molnár 2002; Corboz 2013; Strüver 2004).

The relational character of borders is evident in border-regions where the construction of national identities happens through practices of Self-Other differentiation and where “othering” (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) is a major strategy. For example, the construction of “peace walls” in Belfast separating Irish nationalists and British unionists territories is a striking example of how physical boundaries become cultural artefacts demarcating contested nationalities and building the Other within the same city (Nagle, 2009). In a similar vein, Márquez (2011) highlights the role of the Mapocho River as a boundary within the city of Santiago separating the proper city from the other side, the “barbarian” city. Corboz (2013), looking at newly impoverished families moving to La

Chaca, an informal settlement in Montevideo, equally discusses the role of a creek running through the neighbourhood in the separation of the settlement in two different areas, La Chaca and La Dominguera. In all of these cases, physical borders become socio-cultural systems for the psychological categorisation of the Other, deployed as mechanisms to organize lives (Lamont & Molnár, 2002), form groups and manage identity (Lamont & Mizrachi, 2012).

The endurance of such processes can also be observed in cities such as Berlin, where despite the fall of the wall as a physical barrier, symbolic boundaries continue to make present the history of East-West relations in the city (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). A parallel situation is described in Sarajevo, where the prohibition of physical boundaries led to bottom-up practices of representation used as tools for spatial demarcation (Rasse, 2015). The division between Sarajevo and East Sarajevo is demarcated by an “urban everyday infrastructure”, where signs in the streets constitute less tangible barriers that nevertheless “provide the operative contexts for semiotic strategies of border-making” (Ristic, 2015, p. 336).

Thus, one key characteristic of the relational character of boundaries is their constant reproduction through cultural practices and representations, which in turn offer the symbolic context in which individuals and communities identify themselves, their group and their neighbourhoods. Internal city boundaries engender a strong sense of identification with a particular territory and the community it contains, leading to specific forms of Self-Other relations as well as the possibility of stigma, conflict and violence for those who inadvertently find themselves in the ‘wrong’ place. A case in point is the reluctance of young favela-dwellers¹ to cross into the wider public sphere of Rio de Janeiro and go out of their communities. Frequently associated with shame – one of the most troubling emotions linked to poverty – the tendency to avoid other areas of

¹ In this paper we use the word Brazilian-Portuguese word ‘favela’ rather than slum, which follows the word elected by community dwellers themselves and avoids the homogeneity and stigma carried by ‘slum’. For more discussion about the word slum see Holston, 2009.

the city, reveals how negative representations erect invisible symbolic borders, which demarcate a youth's sense of self and their understanding of the wider public sphere of the city. Such invisible border between different parts of town puts them in a place represented as wrong and drives the internalisation of this positioning as an identity of exclusion. Another example is the presence of teenage sub-cultures in public spaces, which is frequently represented as threat and transgression, seen as a problem and associated with crime (Sibley, 1988). The question of who belongs in the public space of the city is thus hotly contested and has profound implications for identity, social interaction and participation in society (Toolis & Harmack, 2015).

In this context, territoriality becomes a major marker of city culture, both in marginalised as well as affluent neighbourhoods (Jamil, 2015; Kintrea, Bannister, & Pickering, 2010; Kato, 2011). Territorial demarcation can hide sociabilities and push them underground as it is the case with favelas (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández, 2013), and 'protect' sociabilities by keeping them gated, as it is the case with many upper middle class groups who build exclusive, fortified enclaves for living, leisure and consumption (Crawford, 1992). Looking into young people living in upper middle-class suburban areas, Kato (2011) explores their metaphorical use of the notion of "bubble" to describe their own neighbourhood. The suburban affluent "bubble", just as the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, are considered constitutive of their residents' identities, conferring social distinction in exactly the same way, even if the content is very different, relying as it does on positive representations for the former and negative representations for the latter. The ghettos, bubbles and crossings of urban culture challenge us to rethink mobility/immobility and the imagination of borders in the city, developing categories that can handle more nuanced intersects that include both strangeness and familiarity, inclusion and exclusion (Hall & Savage, 2015). Borders are thus best characterised as peripheral spaces in contact with otherness and strangeness and thus areas of potentiality where transformation can be catalysed (De Luca Picione and Valsine,

2017). They create distinction between different spaces, but also the potential for transformation. The city is thus a tensional integrity system, as crystallised borders are constantly being challenged and reproduced by everyday acts of crossing that present multiple possibilities and formats for the encounter between Self and Other (Marsico and Tateo, 2017).

Exploring City Borders: contrasting open and closed borders

In Sennett's radical rethinking of modern cities (Sennett, 2011), he argues that we need to reconceive where the important places of city life lie. For him, they are not in the centre but at the edges, in 'the lines and zones which separate different ethnic communities, economic classes or functional activities'. The public realm of cities are open systems and border are both connecting and separating structures: their power is not to erase difference but to establish connections between what is different, while at the same time preserving diversity (Sennet, 2010; Español, Marsico, & Tateo, 2018, Marsico, 2016). Sennett's point is to assert the value of the open and incomplete, against closure and rigidity of form; his account is compatible to the socio-cultural psychology of borders as tension systems of meaningful relations (Marsico and Tateo, 2017). His argument is that we have focused too much on the centre as the space for bringing together the community and building social cohesion. In doing so, we forget that edges are equally important.

The multiple porosities that are at the borders and boundaries between and within cities, which could already be sensed in the way our ancestors used walls and waterways, are vital for avoiding isolation and encouraging integration. We have always lived with walls and borders and it would be superfluous to classify them as either bad or good. If we did not demarcate space, there would be an endless homogeneity and if we did not draw boundaries, identity itself would be impossible.

Borders are thus spaces of tension between stability and change, a plastic and dynamic structure tending towards a dynamic balance that unifies distinctions by establishing a system of relations (De Luca Picione and Freda, 2016).

The extant empirical literature on urban borders shows that the dynamic structure of borders can be demarcated by multiple factors, including religion, ethnicity, social class, or specific institutions, such as the police or the narco-traffic (Nagle, 2009; Neofotistos, 2004; Wacquant, 2013). City borders also demarcate moralities in space, as when 'red light' districts or any other form of transgressive sexuality is spatially identified. These demarcations are socio-institutional, spatial and symbolic inasmuch as they involve legal-normative, material and representational processes. For instance, there are neighbourhoods that are 'known' as places of violence and crime, or 'no-go' areas in the city, demarcated by semiotic tools of identity and representation. Urban public spheres 'think' through and about demarcations, creating social representations about places and peoples, which in turn define social identities and the scope of action within and across neighbourhoods in the city. In this sense, the socio-institutional, spatial and symbolic factors making up borders not only create the borders; they also create the conditions under which borders are more or less porous and can be overcome (Marsico and Tateo, 2017).

Studying the different dimensions that make up the liminality and plasticity of borders so as to diagnose their levels of porosity plays an important role in the analysis of exclusion and social development in the cultural context of cities. Psychologically, borders can be more or less plastic, depending on defensive or polyphonic developmental possibilities. Defensive development stiffens entities and curtails relational systems towards repetitive and dominant narratives and normative paths. Polyphonic development tends towards connection and coexistence of diversity. Each characterises a continuum in which borders can be crossed with ease, crossed with resistance or blocked (De Luca Picioni and Valsiner, 2017: p.540). A compatible

conceptual model at the level of community and urban space applies. Different dimensions of borders can be empirically evaluated by indicators, which in turn point to different levels of porosity and associated psychosocial dynamics, ranging from open to close borders. We argue that different levels of plasticity and porosity can lead to stiffening (closed) or transformation (open) at the level of individual narratives as well as community development and urban crossings.

Socio-institutional elements are manifest in unequal access to, and unequal distribution of, power, resources and social opportunities; physical/spatial elements are concrete markers of the natural and built environment that demarcate use of territoriality in the city; symbolic elements refer to meaningful distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, time and space. Important indicators of such elements are 1) the institutional framework present in an area of the city, including number, type and diversity of state and non-state institutions; 2) leisure possibilities, considering the spaces of sociability and interaction of a neighbourhood, and how people use them, whether they stay inside the neighbourhood or move across town; 3) the location of the neighbourhood in the city, considering how remote or close a neighbourhood is and how difficult or easy it is to go in and out of it; 4) the presence of urban connectors, including public transport, parks, cultural spaces and centres for sociability and 5) the social representations and everyday systems of shared knowledge that express the manner in which urban publics think about specific neighbourhoods, peoples and areas of the city. Table1 presents the overall model.

BORDERS	Socio-institutional	Spatial	Symbolic
INDICATORS OF POROSITY	Institutional Framework: number, type, diversity	Location: remote or close; easiness or difficulty of access	Social representations, discourses, identities
	Leisure: Across town, inside or outside community	Urban Connectors: Public transport, parks, cultural centres, centres for sociability	

Table 1: Borders: typology and indicators of porosity

Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández (2013) suggested this model to produce psychosocial cartographies (Rolnik, 1989) of different favelas in Rio de Janeiro, where some communities present very rigid and closed borders (defensive) and other multiple and challenging porosities (polyphonic). Contrasting Vigario Geral and Cantagalo, two favela communities situated in different locations of the city, they found that Vigario Geral is at the end of the continuum, with tightly closed borders. This could be concretely identified by indicators such as poor transport links, a very remote location in the city, and an institutional framework marked by the scarcity of state institutions and the heavy presence of armed narcogangs in territorial dispute with the police or rival gangs. To go in and out of Vigario Geral, involves crossing a 'border bridge' controlled by narcogangs. Moreover, very few outsiders would visit Vigario Geral given the negative representations related to violence and crime attached to the community. As much as bottom-up community organisations work to counteract this situation, there is a rigid border between inside/outside made of socio-institutional, spatial and symbolic elements, which keep it isolated and relatively homogenous.

On the other end of the continuum is Cantagalo, a favela community situated at the top of a hill between the affluent neighbourhoods of Ipanema and Copacabana, with access to multiple state institutions and urban connectors such as a lift and open road that enables smooth mobility between the favela and the wider city. Cantagalo has

multiple social projects supported by the Brazilian state and international organisations, epitomising the representation of ‘favela chic’. It is one of the favelas most visited by tourists, who enjoy one of the most spectacular views of the city. Both Vigário Geral and Cantagalo classify as favelas, yet they present different types of borders, different levels of porosity and therefore different possibilities of mobility and developmental pathways (see Figure 1 for a comparative map of border porosity).

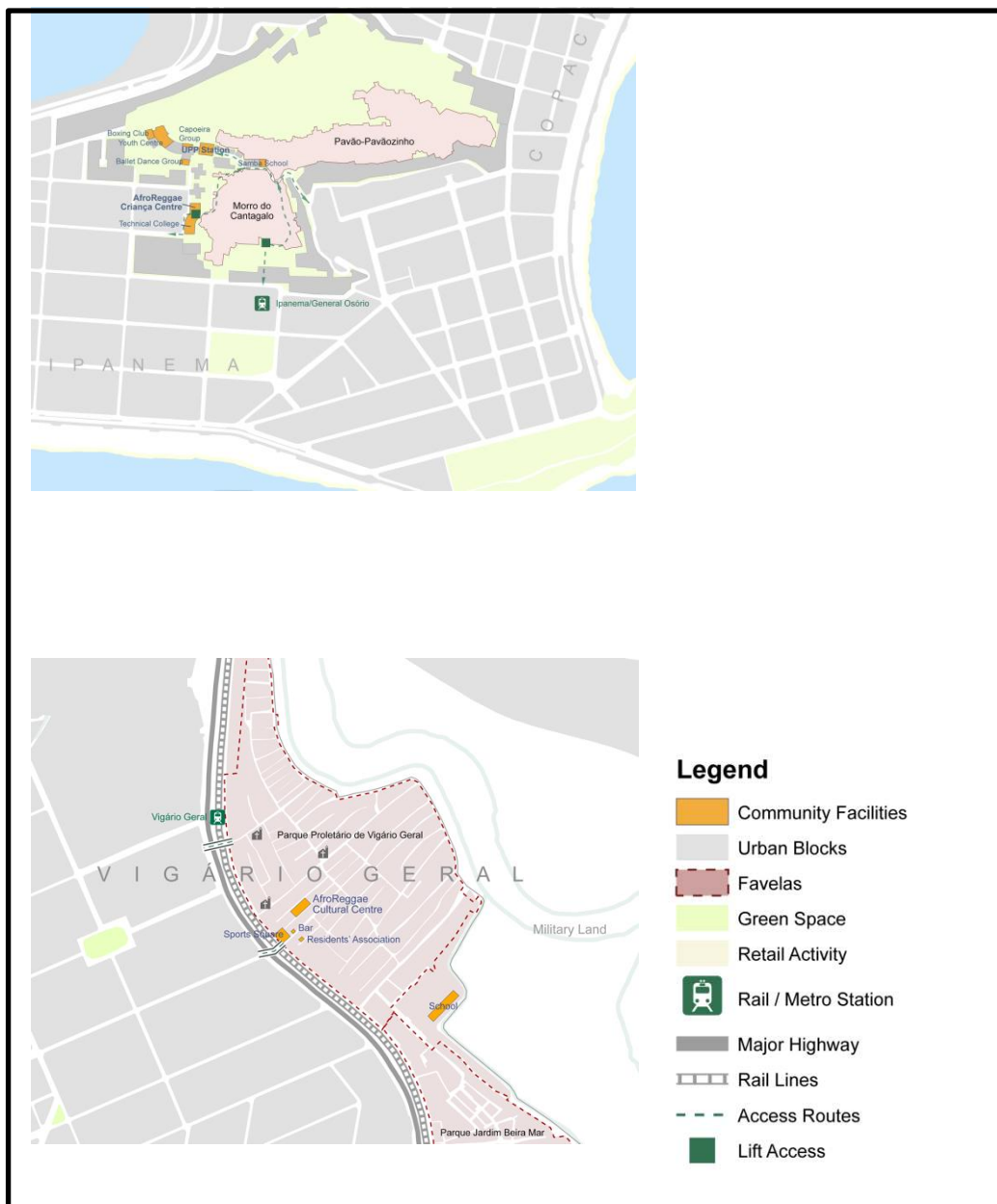


Figure 1: Porosity of Borders maps, Cantagalo and Vigário Geral, Rio de Janeiro

Research has shown that more or less mobility across socio-institutional, spatial and symbolic boundaries intersects with specific psychosocial outcomes in terms of identity, social representations and Self-Other relations in different areas of the city. Rigidly closed borders keep difference away and undermine communication with the Other, being typical of the ritualistic purification that underpins geographies of exclusion and segregation (Sibley, 1995). On the other hand, flexible and porous borders enable communication between people, experiences and ideas across neighbourhoods and geography. Whereas strong control and defence of space are linked to place attachment and a sense of belonging (Lewicka, 2008), research shows that too much emphasis on own territoriality makes for inward-looking communities, increases the likelihood of violent conflict with outgroups, deters young people from exploring other parts of the city and blocks access to a more diverse set of social networks and opportunities (Atkinson & Kintrea, 2004).

For disadvantaged neighbourhoods, rigidly closed borders accentuate inward-looking perspectives and extend the social and economic isolation experienced by these communities. It also reinforces spatial taint, a novel and distinctive phenomenon in which negative representations are attached to place and create territorial stigma (Wacquant, Slater, & Pereira, 2014). Alternatively, researchers have shown that in contexts of segregation, awareness of cognitive alternatives and porosity of group boundaries enhance self-esteem, performance in intellectual tasks and collective action (Jetten, Iyer, Branscombe, & Zhang 2013; Iyer, Zhang, Jetten, Zhen, & Cui, 2017). Social movements that reject being corralled into homogenous and antagonistic groups in divided cities are able to mobilise plural identities and promote non-sectarian politics, thereby creating inter-communal networks, fostering public debate and challenging the rigid use of segregated space (Nagle, 2013).

Borders are thus central to urban culture and a necessary tool for building identity and community in the complex landscape of cities. As sites of relationality, they connect

and separate; unite and differentiate, offering analytical and empirical categories for studying human participation in urban cultures. Furthermore, the different dimensions of borders, which comprises a nexus of symbolic, social and physical elements, underscores the importance of treating context beyond a single one-dimensional homogenous 'variable' shaping human psychology. The distinctiveness of a socio-cultural approach to the study of urban culture is precisely the careful unpacking of context as a site of socio-institutional, physical/spatial and symbolic determinants that humans co-construct and participate as they develop themselves and their life trajectories. In the particular case we are discussing, it also contributes to debunking the homogenisation of contexts of poverty and marginalisation, a frequent and recurrent trend in psychological research studying people who experience contextual adversity.

Imagination, Mobility and City Borders: bottom-up social development in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro

So far we have explored urban culture as a space of freedom and walls, open to walking, wondering and exchanges as well as closed by segregation, stigma and territoriality. We proposed a model of urban culture centred on the analysis of porosity of urban borders and drew on previous research on favelas to illustrate its use as a diagnostic tool in assessing communities that present very rigid and closed borders or alternatively multiple and challenging porosities. In the reminder of this paper, we turn to experiences of bottom-up social development in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro to examine the strategies used by favela organisations to increase the porosity and polyphony of city borders. As we discuss, the actions of these organisations on borders are transformative of borders themselves, through new forms of mobility that cross spatial boundaries, redefine semiotic tools of identity and representation and challenge the socio-institutional context. Through specific forms of participation in the socio-

cultural environment, they become agents of human development at multiple levels that include their communities, their city and their own selves.

The emergence of organised groups of favela dwellers is widely considered a novel development in the Brazilian public sphere (Ramos, 2006). These groups give new visibility to peripheral actors who had traditionally been 'invisible' or 'underground' in relation to the wider political and social life of the country. While peripheral urbanisation generates exclusion, insurgent citizens challenge their exclusion and trigger processes of change by bringing the edges of cities and the transformative potential of liminal spaces (De Luca Picione and Valsiner, 2017) to the centre of urban space. They challenge social positioning and rigid categorisations, being comparable to other forms of insurgent citizenship emerging in the global south (Holston, 2009). In Rio de Janeiro, these organisations comprise young, poor and mainly black social actors, who live in peripheral communities in the edge or hillsides of the city.

Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández's (2013) analysis of the projects implemented by these organisations has shown that they address multiple levels and scales, drawing on actions and methodologies that encompass the individual, the community and the city. Their participatory actions move from the micro to the macro scale, targeting schools, international organisations and state institutions in addition to the children, young people and women of their communities. The evidence suggests that they are focused on their communities but their outlook is much wider, demonstrated by their work in multiple and complex partnerships with industry, government, international organisations, the media, academia and social movements (Ramos, 2007). Their objectives and methodology show focus inside and outside the favelas, supported by an explicit vision of crossing urban borders and acting beyond their own territories and in-group. Their strategy of individual and social development aims to increase self-esteem and re-write threatened identities, enhance social cohesion and internal networks inside the community, while seeking bridges and communication with the city

as a whole, through performance, public debate, spatial regeneration and mobility (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández, 2015; see also Burdett, 2013; Nagle, 2013).

Three strategies of participation in the socio-cultural environment are of particular importance to highlight *how* the work of these actors disrupts internal city borders and stimulate mobility, imagination and human development in the city: use of arts and cultural production, regeneration of built environment and development of partnerships, each one of them corresponding to the symbolic, spatial and socio-institutional dimensions of borders.

Arts and cultural production work at the *symbolic/socio-institutional* dimension of borders. They offer a prime context for showcasing positive representations and destabilising homogenous representations of drug trafficking, violence and criminality. These actors are active in giving visibility to the vibrancy of favela culture and in projecting positive representations and cultural practices related to their identities, communities and cultural heritage. They educate and create, forging spaces for thinking and imagining that develop conscientisation and move the mind towards the not-yet, the elsewhere and nowhere (Jovchelovitch, Glaveanu & Priego-Hernandez, 2017). They are practical in offering material incentives such as food to increase the participation of people who experience poverty and hunger. They also provide those who have very little institutional and family support, everyday routines and structures centred on education and the development of competences and skills. Artistic performance, pictorial representations and graffiti (Hedegaard, 2014) tell a proud story of life in the periphery and the intangible heritage of African culture, challenging territorial stigma and rigid categorisation. Such stories retrieve the culture of the favela and its African matrix while foregrounding cultural resources of conviviality, solidarity and resistance to negative representations. Teachers, activists and favela-dwellers who succeed as artists become role models and a concrete instantiation of what the future of favela youth can be. For the self, the arts also fulfil the function of offering

opportunities for leisure, learning and activation of body experiences, all of which relate with possibilities of crossing material and symbolic borders (Watzlawik, 2014).

Regeneration of the built environment is a strategy deployed to physically transform neighbourhoods, squares, flyovers and buildings into cultural centres and zones of encounter that challenge the mobility/immobility nexus in the city and alter the *spatial dimension* of borders. These actions are characterised by improvements in the spatial environment of favela communities and the appropriation of border zones as positive and vibrant urban locations. A prime example is a flyover in the Madureira neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro surrounded by favela communities (the *Viaduto*), which for many years was a 'no go area' used for drug consumption and criminal activities. Through mobilisation of resources and partnerships with industry and government, the *Viaduto* was entirely renovated to become a lively location where workshops, sports and artistic performances are held, attracting residents from the favelas and the wider city. Other examples include Centro Cultural Waly Salomao in the favela Vigario Geral, north of the city and the Centre *Criança Esperança*, in Cantagalo, a favela close to Ipanema and Copacabana.

Transforming the topography of favelas, spatial regeneration increases the openness of the mobility/immobility tension as a continuum that counteracts the need for mandatory mobility. Research shows that the idea of '*circulação*', or circulation, becomes a powerful metaphor for insurgent citizenships to carry their identities and alternative cultural productions into multiple areas of the city (Caldeira, 2012). On the one hand, these groups understand well the insurgent nature of moving physically around the city and being present in neighbourhoods where they are not expected. For example, the social movement around '*rolezinho*'² takes walking and performance to the city by seizing places such as elite shopping malls, traditionally demarcated as

² '*Rolezinho*' is a term that comes out of the Brazilian Portuguese slang, '*dar um rolê*', meaning literally to wonder, to walk around.

bordered areas for the affluent, white middle and upper classes. Using skates, the motorcycle and parkour, all with strong roots in urban peripheries, peripheral youth cross into multiple 'wrong' locations and occupy spaces from which they are traditionally kept apart. On the other hand, because favela populations can be easily driven out of their own communities by stigma, poverty and gentrification, immobility is equally important and regeneration of the built environment offers possibilities to reclaim, care for and enjoy one's own space, making possible to "stay put" (Fosberg, 2019; Thieme & Ghimire, 2014). Here, it is the spectrum mobility/immobility, not necessarily the ends of it, which constitutes the right to the city.

Finally, the *use of partnerships* is a key strategy of participation that alters the *socio-institutional dimension* of borders. Grassroots organisations develop multiple actions to connect different groups and moderate contact between them, finding common ground and avenues for reconciliation. In addition to unconventional partnerships with industry, media and academia, these groups tackle difficult relations in the city, bringing about collaborations between very disparate actors exposed to protracted conflict and everyday violence. A typical example of mediation exercises is that between favela dwellers and the police forces: these groups have been historically in conflict, with material, social and human casualties in the process. Working together in musical projects, bands, spaces for conversation and joint work, they build common ground and stable alliances that lead to changes at the level of institutions and everyday life in the favelas. These actions express not only classic psychosocial recommendations for contact and reconciliation but also equally a home-grown approach to mediation that privileges work on identity, both within the in-group and in difficult, sometimes painful, dialogical negotiation with out-groups.

Embedded in these different strategies of socio-cultural participation are political, cultural, social and psychological action that range from caring for vulnerable individuals in the community and parenting by proxy to educational workshops, the

creation and maintenance of musical, theatrical and literary output, to partnerships with industry and government to stimulate exchanges, communications and physical spaces of encounter in the city (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández, 2013, 2015; Ramos, 2007; Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernandez, 2013, 2015 Yúdice, 2001). They work both as social movements and as grassroots organisations delivering programmes that escape the traditional model of the NGO bringing together a business-like vision of sustainability and a model of boundary-crossing intervention that targets the individual, community and societal levels. They challenge stigma and negative representations of their communities, regenerate the physical spaces they inhabit, and walk across into the city projecting pride and attachment to their own identities, community and the city as a whole. These new actors are thus exemplary of the transformative potential of peripheries and liminal spaces, acting directly on border crossing through novel forms of participation in the socio-cultural environment, which enable its (re)construction and reconfigure semiotic tools across personal, community and city scales.

Combining immediate and long term aims that include symbolic, institutional and spatial transformation of city borders, such strategies of participation in the socio-cultural environment demonstrate the agency and resilience of marginalised actors to positively redefine context and reconstruct identities, representations and Self-Other relations, with wide and positive implications for human development. The increase in communication between peoples and neighbourhoods, transformation of negative representations of the favelas and regeneration of liminal territories of encounter between the favelas and the city opens up alternative routes of developmental pathways and transforms individuals, favela communities and the overall public sphere of the city.

Conclusion

In this paper we have focused on the notion of borders to explore how mobility and immobility in the city affect the relationship between human development and urban culture. We introduced the contemporary city as a space of both freedom and walls, combining crossings and human relatedness with segregation and sharp territorial boundaries. Cities are made of symbolic, material and socio-institutional borders that demarcate its spatial reality and shape territoriality, identity and social representations of people and communities in urban space. We argued that borders are relational phenomena and drew on research in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro to propose a model based on their socio-institutional, spatial and symbolic elements, each expressed by corresponding indicators that point to different levels of porosity and associated psychosocial dynamics.

We argued that experiences of bottom-up social development created by grassroots in Rio de Janeiro constitute an exemplary case of participation in the socio-cultural environment. Through the arts, spatial regeneration and innovative partnerships, favela actors challenge rigid city borders and provoke dislocations, relocations and exchanges between people and lifeworlds, in which new meanings and new self-understandings arise for individuals and communities. These forms of collective action emerge in liminal spaces and edges of the city and work through the contradictory and tensional system of borders, enhancing polyphonic developmental outcomes and avoiding defensive ones. They build on the creative potential of borderlands to reshape practices and representations of self, other, and the environment (Marsico, 2016).

This type of socio-cultural participation has implications to both people and the urban environment itself. At the level of individuals, it contributes to the re-writing of self and its identity, increasing self-esteem, exposure to networks and opportunities. At the level of neighbourhoods, it challenges stigma and negative social representations, opening up areas of the city and increasing social capital both in its bridging and

bonding dimensions. At the level of the city, it contributes to its reimagining beyond negative representations of violence, segregation and exclusion.

Central to what we sought to demonstrate here is how two universal processes of human development – participation in social practice and the construction of semiotic systems - are realised in the particular cultural niche of cities. The analysis of internal city borders, their different elements and levels of porosity makes possible to address simultaneously the psychosocial and cultural layers of urban spaces and the novel ways through which grassroots social actors develop themselves through participation and semiotic reconstruction of the socio-cultural environment. In describing and theorising these processes we also seek to challenge widespread assumptions of the poor as a homogeneous mass (NAS, 2018; Pearce, 2007). Human psychology in contexts of disadvantage is agentic and co-constructive, producing rich and plural identities and representational fields that mediate human development just as they do in any other context (Dedios-Sanguineti, 2019, Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernandez, 2013).

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