

Respect as an Answer to Crime: A study of the prevention of youth crime in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro¹

[Respeito como uma resposta ao crime: Um estudo da prevenção da criminalidade juvenil nas *favelas* do Rio de Janeiro]

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Resumo

Em 2001 a ONG brasileira IBISS iniciou um programa de intervenção contra o crime, “*Soldados Nunca Mais*”. Nesse programa, artes e atividades culturais são usadas para prevenir que jovens entrem no tráfico de drogas e, consequentemente, na criminalidade que domina as *favelas* do Rio de Janeiro. A intenção é dar a esses jovens o respeito do qual carecem na sociedade. O sentimento de ser respeitado previne que crianças e adolescentes se envolvam com o tráfico. Este artigo pretende discutir o uso de atividades criativas nas *favelas* como ação preventiva ao envolvimento com o crime, e irá descrever o programa “*Soldados Nunca Mais*” e o trabalho de campo da autora sobre essa iniciativa.

Palavras-Chave

Prevenção do crime, cultura, tráfico de drogas, menores de idade, respeito

Rio de Janeiro is surrounded by hundreds of *favelas*. Almost every *favela* is owned by one of the three rival drug factions that dominate the city: *Comando Vermelho*, *Terceiro Comando* and *Amigos dos Amigos*. For the inhabitants of the *favelas* the drug trade is interwoven with their daily life. Cocain and marihuana are openly sold on the streets. Violence is characterizing the drug trade in the *favelas*. Almost everyone living in the *favela* has lost a relative, friend of acquaintance because of the violence that accompanies the drug trade. And almost everybody has a relative, friend or acquaintance who is actively involved in the drug trade.

More and more minors are getting actively involved in this violent drug trade (De Souza e Silva & Urani, 2002; Dowdney, 2003). Though the involvement of children and adolescents in armed conflicts is somehow a general international development (Machel, 2001: 7; Sheppard, 2000: 38), a perceptive fact in the case of the youth living in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro is that they chose more or less volutarily to participate in the drugtrade (Van Soest, 2005). But once they are involved, it turns out to be very difficult to find a way out. The NGO IBISS (*Instituto Brasileiro de Inovações em Saúde Social*) has founded in 2001 the *Soldados Nunca Mais* crime prevention program to help minors involved in the drugtrade to get out and to prevent young people from entering.

The organization uses cultural activities as a means of prevention. The underlying thought is that arts and culture will give the *favela* youth the respect they lack in society. This lack of respect is also supposed to be one of the main causes why minors feel attracted to the drug trade. This article is questioning how the lack of societal respect can lead to involvement in the violent drug trade and how arts and cultural activities can be used as a strategy in the prevention of crime. In the next pages the used research methodology will be described, followed by a more detailed description of the *Soldados Nunca Mais* program and its history. Further the article explains how the program can be seen as a new way of crime prevention, how different prevention strategies can be applied to the program and how these strategies form an answer to the idea that involvement in the drug trade are caused by a lack of respect.

Into the field

Outside, on the unmetalled square in front of the building of the Associação de Moradores, are the children of the slum Furquim Mendes playing. Nobody's watching them, because André² is visiting. Inside the concrete building the parents of the playing children and other residents have gathered around their dono. Though André himself has been raised in Furquim Mendes, he seldomly visits his community. Today he is there to discuss his plans with the residents: he wants to open a kindergarten. André never comes alone. On the square, close to the children, his buddies lean indifereent to a car. There handing over a gun, loading it, unloading it, loading again. Somewhat tensed I observe the scene: Why is nobody alarmed? There are children playing outside! But nobody seems to notice. After the meeting I ask one of the parents. They reply: "We are raised with this. We are used to it". I wonder what happens with children being raised in an environment like this. Once, André and his fellows must have played like this as well. Will a similar future wait for these kids?

The case described above is an example of the way I collected the data for the research (2004) I did under my master's degree in cultural anthropology. This article is based on the thesis I wrote as a result of this research. Fieldwork is a keyword to the anthropological researchmethod

²
All names are fictious, except for Samuca and Nanko van Buuren, the founders of Soldados Nunca Mais.

and distinguishes anthropology from other social sciences (Amit, 2000: 1). The researcher needs to be present in the field in order to have “a total experience demanding all of the anthropologist’s recourses, intellectual, physical, emotional and intuitive” (Okely, 1992: 8 in Amit *ibid.*) My fieldwork took place in three of the seven *favelas* where the *Soldados Nunca Mais* had been implemented: Vigário Geral, Vila Aliança and Furquim Mendes. In these *favelas* used participant observation: a method in which the ethnographer takes part in community life while studying it (Kottak, 2002: 34). I took part in activities of the program, went to a soccer game, a *baile funk*, went for a drink in a bar, had a chat with the residents, or simply just “hang around”. Methodical triangulation (’t Hart et al, 1996: 93-94) was applied by combining this method with depth interviews, the study of existing material like scientific literature, newspaper articles, internal documents of IBISS, graffiti writing on walls, movies etc. I selected 22 informants in total, people who were directly or indirectly involved in either the drug trade, the prevention program or both.

Soldados Nunca Mais

Not every child that is born in the *favela* will be actively involved in the violent drug trade. Still, there is a large chance. In general there is a mon-dial tendency of under-aged getting involved in violent conflicts (Machel, 2001: 7; Shepard, 2000: 38) . As soon as a child or adolescent is getting involved, there seems to be no way back. In the *favela* the general opinion dominates that once a person has entered the drug trade, there is no way out: he will end up in prison or he will find an early death (Van Soest, 2005: 31). The founders of *Soldados Nunca Mais* show there is an alternative to exit the drug trade. The next section explains more about the program, its history and how it can work as a crime prevention instrument.

History

Founder of *Soldados Nunca Mais* is ex-offender Samuca. During his adolescence he got involved in organized crime and is mainly involved with violent robberies and the kidnapping of entrepreneurs (Almawy, 2002: 21). At a certain moment Samuca belonged to one of the most wanted criminals of Rio de Janeiro. At the age of 22 Samuca was sentenced to an imprisonment of seven years. While being in custody Samuca changed his viewpoint. He started writing social critical lyrics. After his period of custody, Samuca returned to his community, Vila Aliança. With a group of friends he establishes a hip hop group named “Banda Ponto BR”. With this group he started performing the lyrics he wrote while being in prison. The band decided to set up a social cultural project in order to change the reality of children and adolescents who live in the *favelas*. “*After I left the cell, I could have harmed society again, but a liquidation in jail changed my vision on life. I want to leave a different, bigger hallmark: not allowing that because of a lack of opportunities and self-esteem other adolescents make the same mistakes as I did. It feels like a victory to hear them saying: ‘If Samuca did it, I can do it too’*” (Samuca in Almawy, 2002: *ibid.*). Samuca met the manager of the charity IBISS for the first time in 2000.

The Brazilian non governmental organization (NGO) IBISS, localized in Rio de Janeiro and founded in 1989 by the Dutch Brazilian Nanko van Buuren, aims at the most deprived groups of the Brazilian society (IBISS, 2002). IBISS defines itself as “a weapon in the fight against social exclusion”. Nowadays the organization claims to have over sixty different social projects. Before the establishment of the interventionprogram *Soldados Nunca Mais*, Van Buuren got into contact with youngsters involved in the drug trade through other of his projects set up in the *favelas*. These contacts made Van Buuren think about offering an alternative to the drug trade. Contact with local drug bosses stimulated him to turn this thought into reality: *“At a certain moment we tried to offer a few lads who expressed that they wanted to leave some sort of different perspective. And we started talking about this idea with some people of the tráfico, what they thought about it, and to our great surprise especially the elder bosses of the tráfico found it a really good idea. [...] These elder drugbosses, both of the Comando Vermelho and of the Terceiro, were sharing the same ideas. They have the idea that they’re locked up. You can’t get out, you can’t visit your family anymore.’ If I would have had the chance, I would have left’. Samuca also thinks often how his life would have been when he had met a project like this at his 14th.”*

So the meeting of Samuca and Nanko van Buuren in 2000 resulted in the founding of the program *Soldados Nunca Mais*. While Samuca and other coordinators are responsible for the content of the program in Vila Aliança, IBISS facilities in a more organizational and financial way. At the moment of research, the program was transferred to seven different *favelas*. In every community IBISS looked for charismatic, natural leaders as Samuca – the so called *soldados do bem*, soldiers of the good- able to convince adolescents to leave the drug trade or to prevent them from entering and to offer them other activities as an alternative.

Local examples

As mentioned above my research took place in three of the *favelas* where *Soldados Nunca Mais* was implemented. In the neighboring communities Furquim Mendes and Vigário Geral a soccer school was founded in 2003. The 35 students in the age of 15-24 could train for free every day from Monday to Friday. Though the students come from both communities, IBISS decided that the training sessions should take place in Furquim Mendes. After the police caused a massacre in Vigário Geral in 1993, this *favela* became very popular to social projects in order to improve the violent climate. According to IBISS, Furquim Mendes could be seen as a somewhat “forgotten” *favela*. The soccer school is one of the first social projects.

In Vila Aliança the program is executed by *Projeto Ponto BR*. The project includes courses in soccer, music, graffiti, arts and crafts and offers homework assistance. Every discipline has its own teachers. Classes are held twice times a week and are freely accessible. By the time of this research in 2004 IBISS estimated the number of students at about 160.

Soldados Nunca Mais: A new way of crime prevention

His mother can give Thiago anything he desires. Still, he enters the drug trade. He feels attracted by the smoothness enveloping fancy women. In the drug trade Thiago occupies the position of chief of his best friend, who is the general manager of all the drug sales points in his community Vigário Geral. After being involved for 1,5 years, Thiago gets caught by the enemy. He is captured and tortured. He considers it a miracle that he survives. Full of shame, he returns to his community. He doesn't want to have anything to do with the drug trade anymore. Meanwhile, his best friend has also left the drug trade and works as a personal assistant for IBISS' manager. Thiago aspires a career at this NGO as well. He applies for a job in the organization of the soccer school in Furquim Mendes and takes part in one of IBISS' educational programmes. A year after leaving the drug trade Thiago has completed this training and is legally employed.

I felt surprised after hearing Thiago's case. Thiago is working the prevention of the crime he was committing himself. He returns to his own community, where he might have made victims too. Without being prosecuted, he continues his life following education and finding a job. Thiago is a good example of IBISS' crime prevention policy. For its program *Soldados Nunca Mais* IBISS deliberately employs staff with a background in drug crime. This policy fits in a renewed way of thinking about crime prevention. In the more traditional way of thinking a strategy of control and repression responds to criminality and violence (CESC, 2004; Moser & Van Bronkhorst, 1999; The World Bank, 2003). In a more modern way of thinking more and more attention is paid to prevent criminality and violence in an early stage. According to this approach delinquent behaviour does not happen in a "vacuum", but is being developed in a social context. The more desperate this context, the more support the child will need to be able to survive and to develop in a positive way (Burt, 1996: 1 in Moser & Van Bronkhorst, 1999: 6). This thought is underlying to a more comprehensive approach of violence and criminality.

The way a child is raised, the neighbourhood it lives in, the friends it has, the education it receives, all these aspects influence his development. In this context the CESC (2004: 3) speaks of an "epidemiological approach of violence". Violence is considered as a multi-causal problem, as a problem of the "public health". Thiago's case can be seen as an example of this approach. Traditionally delinquent individuals were isolated from their community, but nowadays this response is considered a short-term solution. Eventually, soon or later, the same individuals will return to their community. Programs that aim the reduction of criminality and violence are therefore often rooted in the community. Often, these programs do not only focus on the problems of a community, but also on its strength (The World Bank, 2003: 13).

Phases of prevention

Crime prevention is "any policy which causes a lower number of crimes to occur in the future than would have occurred without that policy" (Sherman, 1998a: 2-3). Prevention can be considered a continuum: it can take place in an early stage when there is (still) no crime committed, or it can take place when delinquent behaviour -either incidentally or structurally- is already happening. According to Barker & Fontes (1996, in Moser & Van Bronkhorst, 1999: 8) the prevention continuum can be differentiated in three stages. Primary, secondary and tertiary phases of prevention correspond with primary, secondary and ter-

tiary phases of risk. Children and adolescents who live in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro automatically find themselves in the first stage of risk because they live in poor neighbourhoods where criminality is a dominant phenomenon. In the second phase the amount of risk has already been increased. For example, the child of adolescents has already contacts with the drug trade. Once in a while he does the trafficker a small favour. In the third stage someone is structurally involved in criminal activities. He is becoming a real so-called *bandido*. The program *Soldados Nunca Mais* works all these stages of risk. While studying the program, I observed the prevention strategies described below.

Applied strategies in *Soldados Nunca Mais*

Depending of the stage of risk, different prevention strategies will be applied. In case of *Soldados Nunca Mais* I define four strategies which are used in all stages of prevention: conversation, social control, mirroring and culture. In stage two and three there are some complementary strategies, like negotiation with the traficante about allowing someone to leave, offering protection against the drug manager or police and assisting someone to find a job. Although those strategies are of a great importance to the program, this article will only focus on the first four.

• Conversation

By conversing with the (potential) participants the coordinators of *Soldados Nunca Mais* in the different communities try to raise their awareness. They try to make these children and adolescents aware of the fact that the reality they are living in is not obvious. They want the participants to realize that they do have a different future perspective, other than the drug trade.

"So we talk with them, we're always talking and explaining, because lots of lads are in there [in the drug trade, FvS] because they have a lack of information. They lack information about live, about work, they don't have information about anything. So we talk to them, we explain them that there are different possibilities, not only the drug trade, but that there are different possibilities for them to earn their money" (Eduardo, coordinator of the soccer school in Furquim Mendes/ Vigário Geral).

• Social Control

In general most of the coordinators and participants of *Soldados Nunca Mais* live in the same neighbourhood and know each other as an acquaintance, friend or relative. Therefore, social control almost automatically takes place. If someone oversteps the mark, it comes out very soon. Social control seems to be an important strategy in the project. Nobody ever likes to lose face. Sense of shame and disgrace can be a bigger threat than any form of punishment (Tittle & Logan, 1973).

Fábio works as olheiro and security at one of the drug outlets in Vila Aliança when he gets to know Samuca. Samuca tries to persuade him to leave the drug trade. He visits Fábio almost every day and finally attains his end: Fábio leaves the drug trade. He starts participating in Soldados Nunca Mais and follows classes in percussion and graffiti. Until one day Fábio's grandmother gets sick and Fábio needs to earn a living. He finds a job in a bakery, but soon he gets fired and returns to the drug trade. "I betrayed Samuca's trust. He trusted me, gave me a place in the project. I betrayed him, I felt guilty. I want to apologize, but I don't know how I can go to him and tell him this". Fábio leaves the drug trade again.

• “Mirroring”

Taking examples can be marked as a third strategy. The participants can compare their own lives with those of the project managers. In this way or another the managers are role models, success stories from the *favela*. When Samuca tries to persuade lads to leave the drug trade, he refers back to his own history. He tells them how he was deeply involved in crime and that nowadays he has become the singer of a band, the coordinator of a social project and employee at a NGO. Samuca’s right-hand man, Jorge, has an impressive story as well. Some considerable time he was involved in the drug trade. Nowadays he is well-known as a graffiteur, teaches graffiti courses in the project and is preparing for the academy of arts. Eduardo, coordinator of the soccer school in Furquim Mendes/ Vigário Geral, doesn’t have a history in the drug trade himself but he still is a great example of a successful *favelado*. He joined international soccer clubs and played for different countries, including Ecuador and Ajax and FC Groningen in Holland. The employment of role models is another way to bring word: being born in the *favela* doesn’t mean one has no chance in life. The drug trade is not the only option.

• Culture

Through cultural activities “culture” is represented clearly in this prevention program. As is mentioned above, several courses are offered. These activities are used to attract participants: *“In Brazil it works like this, wherever there rolls a ball, people play, so soccer is a way to attract”* (Bruno, coordinator soccer school Furquim Mendes/ Vigário Geral). However, in *Soldados nunca Mais*, culture has a bigger meaning than an activity alone.

The way De Ruiter (2000: 6) founded on Werck, (1995) defines culture, explains the significance of culture within the program: “[C]ulture, including the accompanying identity constructions, exists by the grace of the construction of similarities and differences between persons, objects and events. All of us differentiate, according to certain standards, in similar and different, in and out, us and them, me and the other”. Hip Hop, for example, can be used to express protests against society. In this way it creates boundaries between “us” and “the rest of society”. Awareness of differences and similarities can lead to the development of one’s own identity. In this way culture responds to the lack of respect that could be underlying to the choice of young people to enter the drug trade. Samuca in an interview: *“There are different reasons [for minors to enter the drug trade, FvS] [...] But it is mainly a matter of invisibility. They don’t feel respected”*.

Respect

If I ask Marcelo, an adolescent what he wishes for his future, he replies: *“Having a motor, a car. Working, man. Being respected”*.

According to Sennet (2003: 13), a lack of respect hurts. A lack of respect means a lack of acknowledgement as a person. The other is not being seen as a person “of full value”, as a human being that matters. In our modern society a human being can get respect in three main ways (Sennet, 2003: 69-79): getting self respect by working one’s talents, getting social honour by looking after ourselves and getting both by helping others, giving something in return.

Self respect refers to the development of one's talents. A person who knows how to develop one's talents, will be socially honoured. Sennet compares a person who is naturally gifted, but who does nothing with its talents, with a person who has less talents but succeeds in a maximum development. The first will be less honoured than the second. For in a modern society waste is being rejected and efficiency is rewarded. So how does this way of respect fit to an average *favelado*? It will be difficult for a person who lives in a slum to receive respect in this way, for he doesn't get much opportunities to develop his talents. He often quits school early and starts working early, jobhopping between low-paid jobs or having no job at all, trying to sustain his family (Van Soest, 2005: 32-35). He won't find much possibilities to develop or even discover his talents.

But there are other ways to get respect. Being able to look after ourselves is also highly valued. A independent person who doesn't need the help of others, will get respect as well. Also for this reason, young guys will find themselves attracted to the drug trade, for it seems to offer a possibility to earn money independently. The money earned in the drug trade will enable the lad to support his family, to buy clothes and by his own weapon. His appearance is meant to be a proof of his independence and will probably impress others. But is the respect he gets *real*? In a certain way the lad is harming his environment. Relatives and friend might be concerned or scared. And besides, the respect he gets will often end shortly. For the most, the armed drug trade will have an unfortunate end. According to the inhabitants of the *favela* one will either find death or jail. The one who manages to survive in drug trade, can expect a problematic future in which he will have to depend a lot on his environment.

Still, there is a third possibility for the young adolescent in the *favela*, the most timeless and universal of the three. He can give society something in return. Giving something in return, will increase the importance of the other person. The result is a relation of mutual dependency. As we learn from the concept "reciprocity", one cannot give without having received. Mauss (in Zolner, 2000: 31) divides reciprocity in three stages: to give, to receive, to return. Though it will be difficult for a poor guy from the *favela* to give something material, this concept includes also the exchange of emotional values. But if I think for example of Fábio – mentioned in the the case described above- what could he give society in return? For he didn't receive anything. He hardly knew his father, his mother maltreated him before she left. He is constantly quarreling with his drug addicted grandmother. How can this boy get respect from society?

This theory shows the vulnerability of a young person living in the *favela*. With *Soldados Nunca Mais* IBISS responds to his need of societal respect and consequently prevents him from entering the drug trade or assists him leaving. Director Nanko Van Buuren: *"At this moment Jorge really has big status as a graffitiur. He thinks he's more important in the neighbourhood than when he was still involved. [...] To get the chance to be on stage with MV Bill [a famous rapper in Rio de Janeiro, FvS]. That means status. Some group of guys who do some kind of hip hop break behind him. [...] Status and adrenaline when you enter the stage"*.

Conclusion

Favela youth can suffer from a lack of respect. In a modern society there are three ways to get respect: to develop one's talents, to look after one self and to give society something in return (Sennet, 2003). For young persons living in the *favela* it can be difficult to get respect in one of these ways. It is this need of respect that can lead them to the drug trade. The drug trade offers an easy access to money and arms and therefore can give a person the feeling of having "status". Unfortunately this feeling will only last for a short period. Most persons involved in the violent drug trade die young or end up in prison. The Brazilian NGO IBISS offers youth at risk in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro an alternative option. Its crime prevention program *Soldados Nunca Mais* uses different strategies that work all stages of risk. Conversations with children and adolescents who find themselves in a risky situation, social control and the use of role models ("mirroring") are strategies applied in the three stages of the prevention continuum. The fourth one discussed in this article is the use of culture. A strong sense of culture can help a human being shape his identity. Therefore, arts courses and diverse cultural activities are not only used to attract children and adolescents. By offering courses and activities, the employees of the crime prevention program *Soldados Nunca Mais* give the participants of the program the possibility to get respect in the ways described above. Respect is their answer to crime.

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Glossary

- *Amigos dos Amigos*
Friends of Friends. Third largest drug faction of Rio de Janeiro
- *Associação de Moradores*
residents association
- *Baile Funk*
parties that play funk music. These parties are often held in *favela* communities
- *Bandido*
term used in the *favela* to refer to persons actively involved in the drug trade
- *Comando Vermelho*
Red Command. First and largest drug faction of Rio de Janeiro.
- *Dono*
refers to the highest ranking in the hierarchical drug trade system
- *Favela*
slum, shanty town
- *Fiel*
personal security guard of the gerente
- *Instituto Brasileiro de Inovações em Saúde Social*
Brazilian Institute for Innovations in Social Healthcare
- *Envolvido*
term used by inhabitants of the *favela* to refer to persons involved in the drug trade
- *Olheiro*
lookout, one of the lowest functions in the drug trade
- *Soldados Nunca Mais*
Never Childsoldiers Again
- *Terceiro Comando*
Third Command. Second largest drug faction of Rio de Janeiro