

# **“Pixação, hygienizing policies and difference in São Paulo”**

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## *Introduction*

Brazil is widely discussed as an emerging economy or “threshold country”. In this context São Paulo, is prominently presented as the pioneering city. Contrasting the threshold-narrative (Caldeira, 2000), focuses on its condition as a “city of walls”, divisions and closures. Over the last decades, São Paulo has become the very symbol of Brazil's 'developedness'. Mainstream media and politicians are not getting tired of representing the city as having achieved “Western standards” of “(world) city-ness” and “urban economic dynamism” (Jennifer Robinson, 2002). This “modernist” achievement is often connected to and mediated through a literally cleansing of the city. Dirt, deviance and even the bodies of the poor are being dragged and pushed to the outer limits of the city, into invisibility.

In this paper, we highlight one practice of opposition to these policies of cleaning and cleansing<sup>1</sup>, by visually intervening on walls in São Paulo's public space. Pixação is a typical style of graffiti writing in Brazilian cities, originally practised by marginalized youth in São Paulo since the mid 1980s. The simple line, muddled typography, commonly painted with black latex ink, evades hegemonic aesthetics. Pixação writers aim to spread their signatures, generally not containing explicit political content, across the whole city, but particularly in representative places such as the centre's skyscrapers' façades.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork and media content analysis, we show how pixação is discursively framed as “sujeira” – dirt, filth, visual pollution. As such it calls into question São Paulo's status as a modern world/global city. City's authorities, as well as private real estate owners make enormous efforts to combat pixação through harsh policing, legally prosecuting writers and large-scale grey painting. After giving a brief historical review of “hygienizing” policies of São Paulo's public space, we show how recent policies, now especially focus on pixação as one of the most important threats to “modern” São Paulo.

In contrast to this framing of pixação, we propose to understand it as the struggle for recognition of, across and through difference, in a context, where urban theory and

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1 Cleaning understood as superficially and/or ephemerally erasing certain elements of disturbance; cleansing in the sense of “purifying” public space by rooting out the social elements considered.

policies largely tend to deny the right to, or even existence of difference, in “modern” metropolises. To conclude, we argue that it is first of all necessary to overcome role models based on Western modernist aesthetics in urban studies, planning and policy making to be able to acknowledge heterogeneity and difference within the 21<sup>st</sup> Century metropolis (Roy 2009).

### *São Paulo – pioneering modernity (?)*

Stefan Zweig's 1941 designation of Brazil as “a Land of the Future” has been commonly cited in recent economic literature on Brazil. Being part of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) association of so called “emerging economies” it has long been discussed as “threshold country”, only one step away from the “door to the first world”. Recent enthusiasm have been calling Brazil a “booming economy” (Rohter, 2012), a “Global Power” “on the rise” (Reid, 2014), or even “the New America” expected to offer “Upward Mobility in a Collapsing World”, a “haven for those looking to make money in a world in turmoil” (Davidson, 2012). Many of these commentators underline that economic progress in Brazil is accompanied by “Good Governance”, “higher-quality democracy” and “innovative social policy” (Montero, 2014). As if to prove that capitalism is a philanthropic mode of production, even in the dictatorship-plagued problem child of Latin America, it is affirmed that “extreme poverty dropped from 23.2% to 5.9% and almost 50 million Brazilians have moved into the middle class.” (OECD, 2014, p. 23).

In this developmental narrative – “from a debtor nation to one of the world's fastest growing economies” (Rohter, 2012); “Democracy and Economy from Bust to Boom” (Montero, 2014, p. 20ff) – São Paulo steadily appears as the pioneering city. Having been crucial for Brazilian economy during the last two centuries – from agricultural to industrial exports, to finance markets (see Carlos, 2004) – in the current discourse São Paulo is not only considered “Brazil’s economic powerhouse” (Yang & Anaya, 2014, p. 12), yet its very “business, financial and cultural capital” (Reid, 2014, p. 14).

Cities as Salvador and Rio (both the former capitals) are often presented as being “marvelous”, “exotic”, “tropical”, characterized by Afro-Brazilian culture, beaches, favelas and carnival. Several travel agents and hostels promise to provide the tourist

with an authentic experience in one of Rio's famous favelas. In contrast, São Paulo has a long tradition of being presented as a Brazilian island of EuroAmerican modernity – a developed, economically prosperous, prosaic, city where it is “all about business” instead of party and beaches (Reid, 2014, p. 14). These discourses are often related to and mediated through racial categories of “whiteness” or culturalisms, reinforcing the middle class condition which Paulistans nowadays supposedly live in. Weinstein (2015) has shown how regional identity in São Paulo emphasizes European origins as aptitude for modernity and progress. This racialized regional identity serves to naturalize the enormous disparities between Brazilian regions, but also to identify poorer, darker-skinned populations within São Paulo as foreign, culturally different, “backward”, “non-modern” and potential threat to Paulistan modernity (Weinstein, 2015)<sup>2</sup>.

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2 Similarly O'Dougherty (2002, loc. 2972ff.) shows how Paulistan middle class identity needs regionally and racially defined “others” to be constituted – interestingly she conducted her research on “The Politics of Middle-Class Daily Life in Brazil” solely in São Paulo, as if to endorse that this would be the main place to find a middle class reality.



*A typical view of the Centre of São Paulo – find the error in the picture*

*(Photo: Carlos Alkmin)*

In the last two decades theorists and political actors have been progressively led by a new paradigm pigeon-hole São Paulo's “modernness” and pivotal position for Brazilian economy. Urban scholars along with urbanists and politicians had long searched for the right term to approach this city region and started to discuss São Paulo as a “world city” or “global city”<sup>3</sup>. Only recently Sousa (2015) investigates on how these theoretical models, developed to understand the realities of cities in “central countries”, might be appropriate to understand the urban reality of São Paulo, pointing out, its outstanding role for Brazilian economy. Besides the use of these concepts as analytical frameworks, they are applied as “strategic paradigms”, guiding urban policies, aiming to consolidate São Paulo's position in global economy (Sousa, 2008, p. 197). The instrument of analysis becomes a strategic model for urban policies and planning to follow. The World Bank financed study “Rio-São Paulo, world cities”<sup>4</sup> is just one example for research explicitly encouraging such policies (Rezende & Lima, 1999). Consolidating São Paulo's world/global city status, is here understood as the necessary step to place Brazil in a leading position in the globalized economy. Moreover this trajectory quite often is

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3 The concepts of “world city” and “global city” are used almost synonymously in much of the political discourse and literature regarding São Paulo, sequentially we will here use “world/global city” – in full knowledge of the differences these concepts imply.

4 All translations from Brazilian Portuguese to English hereafter by the authors, if not differently indicated.

perceived as the sole way out of “underdevelopment” (see Ablas, 2003), becoming the dominant paradigm in São Paulo’s urban policies and planning. The world/global city model appears as “only option for the development of the city” (Sousa, 2008, p. 213), to spurn the old stigma of the “third world backward” (Ferreira, 2003).

As Robinson (2005) has prominently argued, standardized concepts, as developed by urban theory based on EuroAmerican contexts prove to be inadequate to analyse multiple forms of 21<sup>st</sup> century urban realities across the globe. Moreover, the policies derived from these concepts, have to deal with the practical implications of these theoretical incoherences. Policy makers facing the urban reality of São Paulo, using measures derived from the experience of “New York, London, Tokyo” (Sassen, 2001) to achieve the sought “standard of (world) city-ness” (Jennifer Robinson, 2002, p. 532), might cause quite inappropriate outcomes.

### ***“Other” São Paulos***

„We live in ‘fortress cities’ brutally divided between ‘fortified cells’ of affluent society and places of terror where the police battle the criminalized poor“ (Davis, 1992, p. 224).

While the “threshold” narrative paints a picture of an open door to middle class for all Brazilians, or at least for all Paulistanos<sup>5</sup>, reality for the vast majority of the city’s population looks fairly different: it is walls equipped with electric fences rather than open thresholds that divide the upper and middle classes from the vast rest of the population. Mike Davis’ description of Los Angeles might well be used to describe socio-spatial segregation in São Paulo – the “City of Walls”, as Caldeira (2000) has called it. In the context of São Paulo’s increasing importance as a control centre of global economy, the city enters in crisis, not being able to offer viable conditions of living for most parts of its population (Silveira, 2004, p. 63). In fact huge parts of the metropolitan region might provoke urban theorists to want to use “mega city” approaches and “planet of slums” (Davis, 2006) narratives, instead of global/world city attributions. The richer parts of Paulistan population – those that might actually feel living the world/global city – live in gated communities in the suburbs or closed

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5 those living in São Paulo

apartment complexes in the central neighbourhoods, both equipped with leisure facilities, shopping malls and in some cases even office spaces inside the complexes (Freeman, 2003, p. 183). The other part of the population stays cut off the “modern” São Paulo, by walls, electric fences and security guards, but also through the “mere distance”, combined with inflationary prices for public transport.

O'Dougherty remembers arriving in São Paulo, having a first impression of the “fragmentary first-worldness” (Carreras, 2004):

“Having come to what I imagined to be Brazil's largest demographic pool for the middle class, I was surprised to hear that its members were confined to a couple of bairros or attended very specific schools and were a very specific subgroup.” (O'Dougherty, 2002, p. loc 462).

Correspondingly Caldeira describes, how recent urban planning and policies incited by crime-discourses leads to separation and isolation of these realities and to the rejection of public space as the place where heterogeneity and difference may appear, encounter and become explicit. Instead, the most feasible way to keep the “world city São Paulo” thesis reliable, seems to be the total denial of difference. In fact, São Paulo's topology and history offers quite different conditions regarding the visibility of difference, poverty – thus the incoherence of the thesis – then for example the nearby metropolis of Rio de Janeiro (Carreras, 2004, p. 313). But besides that, concrete measures have been undertaken to keep these incoherences the less visible possible.

### *São Paulo's visible and invisible (non-)modern*

If São Paulo is understood as metropolis of a “fragmented first world” as Carreras (2004) suggested, these wide-ranging “others” are all living within it, even though in neighbourhoods that might be far away from the central neighbourhoods representing the “modern” world/global city São Paulo. Thus, they keep disturbing the image, unless as they are not made completely invisible. O'Dougherty (2002) declares her astonishment when realizing, that “tourist maps show only the central zone and adjacent middle- and upperclass areas of the south and west zones as 'São Paulo'” (O'Dougherty, 2002, loc. 452).

Contradictory coexistence of various urban realities and their corresponding conflicting imaginaries – world/global city vs. mega city (Roy, 2009, p. 820) –, might be dealt with by policies of obscuring. It is in that sense that Tiburi, in her reflection on *pixação* and the “Visual Right to the City”, claims that “the façade of the white wall” has actually become an ideology in cities like São Paulo. She describes a “closed block of neat, clean persons” being protected by “the hate of the other, the different, the excluded” (Tiburi, 2011, p. 43). In its Silveira (2004, p. 67) points out how the world/global-city model necessarily comes along with new norms in urban policies and planning<sup>6</sup>. (Tomic, Trumper, & Dattwyler have shown how cleanliness can be applied “to distinguish between the modern and the non-modern/'backward' spaces” (Tomic et al., 2006, p. 516) in context Chilean neoliberalisation. Similarly we identify the “cleanliness as modernity” hypothesis in the context of recent Paulistan urban policies and show how “cleanliness” and the construction of “'sanitary' and ordered landscapes” (Tomic et al., 2006, p. 516) is one of the “[i]mperatives of quality” (Silveira, 2004, p. 66) necessary to consolidate São Paulo's world/global city status.

### *Hygienist policies then and now*

A famous historic example of policies and urban development projects aimed to actively reinforce São Paulo's status as “modern” metropolis are the hygienist measures applied during the first decades of the Republic, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A range of urbanistic and social policies, in the name of prevention of plagues and diseases, was supposed to gain control over “dangerous classes” (Carpenter, 2013; Chalhoub, 1996). Inspired by its European predecessors, namely Haussmann's urban development projects in Paris (see Harvey, 2006) and driven by the same ideal of metropolitan modernity, these policies, in the Paulistan context affected especially poor urban populations living in tenements (*cortiços*) and favelas. (Sobrinho, 2013).

In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we can observe certain policies aiming to aestheticize the city's public spaces, especially in the most representative “Big Centre”.

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6 “[T]he force to consolidate the role of the City to be a location of an important parcel of the international division of labour, the globalizing equation gains visibility in forms and norms of life in the City. It is the vocation of 'global city' (Sassen, 1991) that has to be secured [...]. Imperatives of quality, of competitiveness and fluency become norms that will establish an edge, under which we will find the 'non-modern' [...]" (Silveira, 2004, p. 66).

That includes not only the historic centre, but also the two business districts aggregating big companies' offices, in modern glass-and-steel skyscrapers around Paulista and Berrini avenues (Carreras, 2004, p. 314). The later two are kept “clean” more or less successfully, free from all too visible evidence of usages not compatible with the “all about business” São Paulo. Contrarily the historic centre has long been place of encounter of multiple different São Paulos. On the one hand, it still contains an important share of business and administrative offices and the main architectonic and urbanistic symbols of São Paulo's economic rise and “modernization” – Luz Train Station (1901), Municipal Theatre (1911), Italy Circle (1965), Brazil's second highest skyscraper and Oscar Niemeyer's Copan Building (1966). The centre of São Paulo was also location for the telenovela “Tempos Modernos” – “Modern Times”. In order to make the scene compatible with the telenovela's title, the film crew used litres of disinfectants, ten cleaning trucks and had to “gently request” homeless people to evacuate the area. “And it was like this, last Saturday, that the sun had hardly risen and a big part of the centre's problems had been resolved” (Folha de São Paulo, 2009). As general director Villamarin states: “The centre has been revitalized, like Soho, like Barcelona. It is human and aesthetically marvellous.” (Folha de São Paulo, 2009). On the other hand, it concentrates elements of what is often considered a “backward São Paulo” – most prominently represented by the presence of over 3.000 people sleeping in the centre's streets every night (Fórum Centro Vivo, 2006, p. 123), and the infamous Crackolândia, an area close to Luz Station, which is largely occupied by crack users, commonly “considered one of the centre's biggest problems” (Raupp & Adorno, 2011, p. 2615).

During the last decade, a range of policies uttered rhetorics of “revitalization” and “cleanliness”. Extremely repressive measures were applied to control and expel popular groups from the centre, executing a “true hygienization and social cleansing” (Fórum Centro Vivo, 2006, p. 12). Especially affected was the Luz Station area, which was planned to be “regenerated” through the urban development project “New Luz”. Under the name of “Operação Limpa” – “Operation Clean” Gilberto Kassab, then vice-mayor, increased police pressure on homeless population, informal street vendors and waste collectors and used the occasion to “criminalize poverty, social movements and human

rights activists” (Fórum Centro Vivo, 2006, p. 185ff.). The operation had aimed at dispelling respective elements from the centre, yet achieved their mere replacement to other streets and places nearby (Raupp & Adorno, 2011, p. 2616). Due the extremely violent measures employed, the city government was accused of human rights violations by an association of affected groups and social movements (Fórum Centro Vivo, 2006). Other hygienist policies in the following years – like the “Integrated Operation Nice Centre” (Operação Integrada Centro Legal) in 2009 and the “Operation Suffocate” (Operação Sufoco) in 2012 – employed similarly repressive measures (Carta Maior, 2014).

As Raupp and Adorno stress, these hygienist policies claim to “cleanse the Centre from degradation” by expanding the concept of cleansing “to persons and activities exercised in these spaces” (Raupp & Adorno, 2011, p. 2620). Conversely, it is quite surprising that Caldeira, when comparing Paulistan hygienist policies from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with contemporary cleansing policies, states that in “contemporary São Paulo the project of cleansing the city is quite different from the ones put forward a century ago”, being its principal target not the “control of epidemics, not even the control of the dangerous classes; rather, it is controlling the mass of signs that both the administration and the citizens believe are visually polluting the city.” (Caldeira, 2013). What Caldeira refers to is the discourse in which the passage of the 2006 “Clean City” bill was embedded.



The "clean city", as presented in the brochure accompanying the programme. Interestingly the Paulistanos showed in the figures are mostly of white skin...



...except for those working in street advertisement, hence the very opponents of the Clean City programme.

("Cidade Limpa" n.d.)

the Clean City Programme, declares São Paulo's urban landscape, to be one of the city's most dignified assets: "We will wage an urban war to guarantee our civility." Elaborating on the need for such cleaning policies, she poses the rhetorical question why Brazilians commonly undertake the long, wearing travel to Europe, while not even knowing the cities of their own country<sup>8</sup>. She answers: "It might be our desire to get to know structured, organized cities, rife with characteristics that make us dream." (Regina Monteiro, 2013).

According to the programme, the creation of a clean, ordered urban landscape ("Cidade Limpa," n.d.) has to put greatest emphasis on the "combat of visual pollution". Another announced objective expected to be achieved through the reduction of "visual pollution", is to "amplify fluidity and comfort of pedestrian and vehicle locomotion and

### "Clean City"

The Clean City Programme was launched in 2006 during the administration of mayor Gilberto Kassab. According to the dispositions of the Municipal Legal Act 14.223-2006, the programme determines to "order the elements that make up the urban landscape"<sup>7</sup>. While the overall effect of the law would be to prohibit publicity in public space, the discourse in which it was embedded focused significantly on issues of "dirtiness".

Regina Monteiro (2013), director of the department of Environment and Urban Landscape in the Municipal Company of Urbanization, and principal creator of

7 Article 2<sup>nd</sup> of the Legal Act 14.223/2006

8 She seems to be referring to Brazilian upper and middle classes. Needless to say that the vast majority of Brazilians can not afford to visit Europe regularly.

to reinforce security of buildings and population.” (“Cidade Limpa,” n.d.).

The Clean City Programme has claimed attention of urban planners throughout the world and won several awards in the United States, in Germany, Shanghai and London, as Regina Monteiro (2013) proudly remarks, “the whole world liked it. The whole 'world' really!” Even though the advertisement industry complained considerably and tried to sue the city government, some commentators discuss the Clean City Programme as part of a “growing tendency” (Iveson, 2012, p. 160), or even a “Sign of Things to Come” (Penteado & Hampp, 2007). Nevertheless, summarizing the programme's achievements regarding graffiti and pixação Caldeira notes that,

“[...] while the city has been remarkably successful in dealing with ads and commercial signs, it has failed as remarkably in controlling more transgressive practices such as graffiti and pixação. As advertisements are removed and buildings painted anew, they are graffitied and tagged.” (Caldeira, 2012).

This leads us to a phenomenon, specific to São Paulo's urban landscape – pixação. Often being referred to as “dirt” or “filth”, sometimes as “epidemics” calling in mind rhetorics of early 20<sup>th</sup> century hygienist discourse, city authorities officially approach pixação as “visual pollution”. Indeed Regina Monteiro affirms that: “More than ever before, pixação is responsible for major part of visual pollution in the City.” (Prefeitura da Cidade de São Paulo, 2007).

### ***Pixação***

Pixação, or pixo how it is often called to by practitioners, is one out of a great variety of visual interventions in Brazilian urban space. However, while most of these are influenced by and clearly comparable to visual interventions like graffiti, street art, etc. in other urban contexts around the world, pixação differs from those in multiple ways – its stylistic pattern; the way it is criminalized; and the techniques developed to adapt to financial condition of the practitioners and the specificities of Paulistan urban landscape. Given these special qualities pixação has long been unique to the Brazilian metropolises. In fact, increasing interest in pixação from international social scientists, artists and the art market within the last years indicates that this time it might be the São Paulo experience that will influence similar practices elsewhere.



*Praça Ramos Square in the very centre of São Paulo, does not comply exactly the image proposed by the Clean City Programme.*

*(Photo: Larruscahim & Schweizer)*

writers – pixadores – aimed to spread their signatures, not necessarily containing explicit political content, across the whole city, but particularly to representative places such as the centre's skyscrapers' façades.

Pereira (Pereira, 2010) points out that *pixadores* are generally male originated from the marginalized classes living in the city's outskirts – the *quebradas*. As some of the literature on *pixação* points out many of the first *pixadores* worked in São Paulo's central business districts, as officeboys (see Caldeira, 2013). *Pixadores* from the most distant suburbs and peripheries of São Paulo started to meet up in the centre and to “institutionalize” these weekly meetings as “points”, places to organize themselves in groups or crews, so called *turmas* and *familias* to promote their logos (*grifes*) and signatures throughout the city. *Pixação* gained special attention due to the venturous acts

The word *pixação* derives from “piche”, which means pitch or tar, the dark viscous mixture obtained by destructive distillation of wood, coal, peat, but is nowadays commonly used to appoint scribblings or scrawlings. The orthographic subversion – from “pichação” to “pixação”<sup>9</sup> (the pronunciation does not differ) – indicates a subcultural practice which follows certain intern codes and exhibits distinct stylistic pattern: a simple line, muddled typography, commonly painted with black latex ink, evading hegemonic aesthetics. *Pixação* (with “x”) originates from São Paulo in the middle of the 1980s, becoming viral in the early 1990s. Ever since *pixação*

9 Good part of the commentators does not follow this distinction, we do. Nevertheless the spelling “pichação” (with “ch”) will appear in citations wherever it was used by the originators.

of scaling skyscrapers' façades that pixadores perform in order to place their signature on the most visible and prestigious spots in the city's central neighbourhoods. This feature – a way to relate with the physical spatial conditions that São Paulo's urban landscapes offers – distinguishes Paulistan pixação from similar practices in other Brazilian metropolises like pixação in Salvador or *xarpi* in Rio de Janeiro (Pereira, 2013).

Social scientists debating the political dimension of pixação attribute ambitious titles like “The Politics of the Poor” (Warsza with Franco, Djan Ivson Silva and Rafael Pixobomb, 2012), “urban protest” (Larruscahim, 2014), or even “An Alphabet of Class Struggle” (Warsza, 2012) to it. Snider (2012) claims attention to pixação as a powerful tool to denunciate social inequality:

“[not] the painting itself is the explicit political message; rather, it's the painting's location, on buildings and spaces that are economically and politically out of reach for virtually all of Brazil's urban poor, that makes the statement political.” (Snider, 2012).

While it is actually hard to find any point of view within the city region from which the viewer will not see any pixação, in regard to the location's importance to grasp pixação's potential political relevance we might mention some interventions, that due to their location claimed special attention in public discourse. Pixação legends like Tchentcho and Krellos, already in the early 1990s, placed their signatures on the most prestigious spots of the city, including the very symbols of “modern” São Paulo – the Italy Circle, the Bank of Brazil's and the Itaú bank's headquarters and Oscar Niemeyer's Copan Building (“Lendas da Pixação – Tchentcho e Krellos,” 2015). More recently pixadores media-effectively scribbled on spots like the Municipal Theatre (Folha de São Paulo, 2013b), the São Paulo Biennials of 2008 and 2010. When pixadores “attacked” the Bandeiras Monument with phrases like “Bandeirantes Assassins”, they referred explicitly to the *bandeirantes'* role in violently colonizing the Sao Paulo region. These Portuguese settlers, gold seekers and indian-hunters are honoured by an enormous monument in front of the famous Ibirapuera Park's entrance (Estadão, 2013).



*The Monumento às Bandeiras "pixado" in 2013. In this case with an explicit message: "Bandeirantes Assassins". (Folha de São Paulo, 2013a)*

### **Talks on pixação**

“A spectre is haunting Brazil – the spectre of pixação.” Marcia Tiburi uses Marx and Engels' famous metaphor to indicate how pixação seems to hit the sore point of Brazilian society – causing debate and demand for radical repressive interventions, just like the spectre of communism in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe (Tiburi, 2011, p. 40). The analogy might be exaggerated, but indeed pixação causes controversies – commentators show themselves enthusiastic, distressed, hectored or furious.

Since its very first appearance in mainstream media in the late 1980s, the dominant media discourse has tended to frame pixação (then called pichação) as “dirt”, “vandalism” or in many cases even as “terrorism”<sup>10</sup>. Hardly any report in São Paulo's main newspapers does without the term “sujeira” – “dirtiness”, “filth” – when writing on pixação. Titles like, “Monuments of SP [São Paulo] deal with problems like pichação, excrements, urine and filth” (Folha de São Paulo, 2012), indicate the reader how to perceive pixação. Some reports even paint a picture that remind us of late 19<sup>th</sup> century hygienist discourses, when affirming that: “Pichação and the pichadores have turned into a social epidemic and as such they should be treated.” (Correio Popular, 2003). Moreover, pixação is often discursively connected to issues of fear, insecurity,

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Tiburi will pursue her reflection designating pixação as nothing less than “theoretical terror” (Tiburi, 2011).

insufficient interventions by the authorities and impunity<sup>11</sup>. Consequently, policy-makers have long been stipulated to act against the "nocturnal vandals" and "enemies of the City" (GSA, 1989). Carlos Zaratini, secretary of District Councils, denounces three great problems of contemporary São Paulo: “pichação, the scattered waste and theft of cables and wires.” (Folha de São Paulo, 2004). During the last three decades we can identify several strategies to cope with the first of this “great problems”.

### ***Criminalization and Repression***

Already, in 1988 mayor Jânio Quadros announced a war on pixadores. In the Official Gazette of the Municipality of São Paulo he claimed they would be “processed with the utmost rigor” and could soon “scribble on the chain [in prison]” (Suplemento do Diário Oficial do Município de São Paulo, 1988). From the late 1970s until the late 1990s, although pichação has never been criminalized with a specific legal act, it was always repressed, fined and framed as a crime of damage against property. Additionally to federal legislation in São Paulo the legal act 10.315/87 of the City Hall, which regulates the public cleaning, prohibited to scratch, smudge, write and paste posters in public space. In 1998, after nearly seven years of debate in the National Congress, the Environmental Crimes Bill (Law 9605/1998 ) was enacted. This defined both grafite<sup>12</sup> and pichação as acts of “conspuração” – “defilement”, “soiling” – and as acts “against the urban order and cultural heritage”. In 2011 the original text of the legal act 9605/98 was modified to establish two different legal categories of visual interventions in public space: grafite and pichação. According to this legal act, the practice of grafite, when

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11 Regarding media discourse on crime and deviance, see moral panics concept coined by critical criminologists as Stanley Cohen and Jock Young: A moral panic is a moral disturbance centring on claims that direct interests have been violated – an act of othering sometimes expressed in terms of demonization, sometimes with humanitarian undertones that are grossly disproportionate to the event or the activities of the individuals concerned. It is presented in stereotypical terms. In the modern period, this involves the focusing of the mass media, buttressed by scientific experts and other moral entrepreneurs, and the mobilization of the police and the courts and other agencies of social control. Such a process of mass stigmatization involves a widely circulated narrative on the genesis, proclivity and nemesis of a particular deviant group that tends to amplify in intensity over time (particularly in terms of the number of supposed incidents) and then finally extinguishes. It very frequently results in a process of deviancy amplification, a translation of fantasy into reality, where, in certain aspects, the initial stereotypes are self-fulfilled. (Young, 2009).

12 We will use here the Brazilian term “grafite”, which of course derives from “graffiti”, but describes a practice differing slightly from what the term denotes in most European and Angloamerican contexts. “Grafite” in Brazil designates not only stylised letters but all kind of typographic, figurative or abstract painting on walls. Even though partly criminalized “grafite” is commonly conceived to be a legitimate artistic practice.

allowed by the property's owner "performed with the objective to artistically valorize" the painted object, is not considered crime. Pixação on the other hand, still is considered as to defile, to soil, to pollute – thus being continually criminalized.

Caldeira's observation on the grown concern in "controlling the mass of signs" is surely valid. Nevertheless, the conclusion that authorities had lost interest in controlling the bodies of the dangerous classes seems premature to us. As showed above, policies as "Operation Clean" still target the poor as dangerous classes. The same can be affirmed for repression against pixadores. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the supposedly diseased bodies of the poor, framed as dirt, illnesses and contamination, represented a threat. Nowadays, the poor's presence in the metropolis might be most successfully visualized through inscriptions in urban space. Understood as such, pixação can be conceived as the very portrayal of this threat. Furthermore, it is important to note that even though pixação's subversive potential might be situated in the domain of signs, this by no means assure the integrity of pixadores' bodies. Serious cases of police violence against pixadores recurrently prove the opposite.

Acts of police violence range from psychological to the harshest physic violence. The most ordinary one is the famous "ink shower", that consits of pixadores having their bodies painted with their own paint, or even being forced to drink it. One of the most serious cases of violence against pixadores is the murder of Alex Dalla Vecchia Costa (whose pixo was ALD, from the *JETS familia*) and Ailton do Santos (NANI, from ANORMAL) in July 2014. They were supposedly murdered by five military police officers when caught red-handed scribbling on the rooftop of a building in São Paulo's East Zone.

### ***Cleaning policies***

Besides criminalization and repressive policing of the very bodies of pixadores, the second extensive strategy against pixação is to push it back into invisibility – that is through immediate cleaning or grey-painting. Since the campaign against visual pollution manifested through the Clean City Programme, the municipal government has engineered enhanced measures to clean the city's walls. The Department of Historic Heritage states that "every one of the 31 districts has an antipixação truck on its

disposal to clean up the filth. [...] Monuments, frequent targets of pichadores, receive special treatment”, being cleaned up to once a week (Jornal da Tarde, n.d.). In 2007 the municipal government instituted the Antipichação Programme in the Municipality of São Paulo (Lei nº 14.451, de 22/6/2007) to assure “the recuperation of façades of public and private real estate which has been scribbled on” (Prefeitura da Cidade de São Paulo, 2007). Despite all endeavors made by local authorities, at the end of mayor Kassab's term, pixação was as omnipresent in São Paulo's urban landscape as it was ten years earlier. This might be one reason for current mayor Haddad (Workers Party – PT), to focus on another strategy of fighting pixação (repressive and cleaning measures keep being applied). As some knew already more than a decade ago: “Until now grafite is the only resort” (Correio Popular, 2003).

### *Prettify the city with “art” in public space<sup>13</sup>*

For Alexandre Youssef, at that time representative of the municipal Coordination for the Youth, besides “immediate painting over” there is a second way to combat pixação: “to invest in urban art and grafite” (Folha de São Paulo, 2004). Even though the repressive discourse was always the most dominant one, already in the early 1990s another idea of how to cope with pixação was existent. Based on the same assumption that pixação was “dirtiness”, some commentators and policymakers saw the possibility to use the “beautiful” to fight the “ugly” – employing “art” in public space. This is transcribed into policies at two levels: firstly, using projects of art in public space to occupy walls, assuming that pichadores will not dare to write over; and secondly by using grafite as an educative means to bring “errant youth” back on the right path.

Brazilian and especially Paulistan “grafiteiros” and “street artists”, like Os Gêmeos became world-famous and worldwide sold at high prices during the last decade, as current mayor Fernando Haddad proudly emphasises (Jovem Pan, 2015). “Our grafite is recognised in the whole world.” Subsequently he states that “besides Europe and the United States, São Paulo's [artistic] heritage is one of the biggest in the world. [...] Not even Tokyo has an archive like that of São Paulo.” As “urban art” or grafite have now been recognised as potentially promoting São Paulo's “world/global city-ness”, São

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13 We just could not forgo to cite Lefebvre in this occasion. “To put art at the service of the urban does not mean to prettify urban space with works of art” (Lefebvre, Kofman, & Lebas, 1996, p. 173).

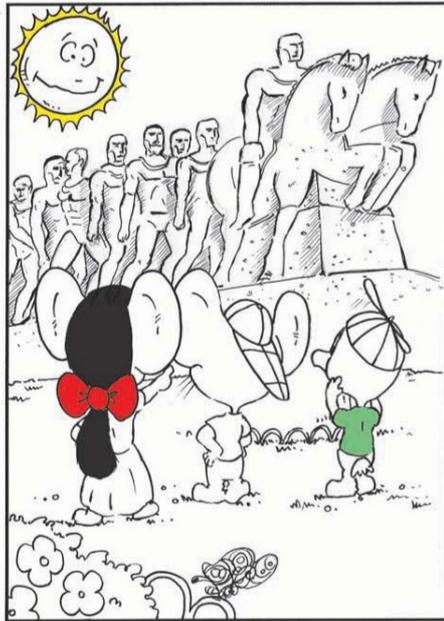
Paulo's Council Hall, under Mayor Haddad, promoted a range of project of grafite or art in public space. In order to fit São Paulo to the image of a clean and pleasant, but also colourful, cosmopolitan, cool and arty city (Reid, 2014, p. 14), urban policy makers have been reinforcing the opposition between grafite and pichação, framing grafite as "art", rigorously differentiating it from pichação – still understood as "dirt" (and crime). To dismiss criticism concerning the murals along 23 de Maio Avenue commissioned by the municipality, Haddad indicates, that the respective walls were formerly "full of dirt and pichação" and had to be cleaned by the city's antipichação trucks every month. Thus, grafite turns into an instrument for "modernization", attracting "tourists who come to São Paulo to see its grafites" and preventing pichação at the same time. (Jovem Pan, 2015). However, the team in charge of cleaning and grey-painting São Paulo's urban landscape occurred to erase several authorised murals, some even financed by the Council Hall<sup>14</sup>. "The employees decide what is grafite and what not. He might look at it and say: 'That is ugly, I'll erase it.'", explains a municipal officer (Folha de São Paulo, 2014). After some public quarrels between grafite artists and the Council Hall, representatives assured to improve the cleaning policies' "precision". Municipal Secretary of Culture, Juca Ferreria affirms: "The order is: pichação is erased and grafite is kept." (Folha de São Paulo, 2014).

Assumed that Paulistan "modern" public space is a place full of "citizenship", "participation" (though not for homeless people, crack users and pichadores) and "art", what would it be without the "modern" subjects to live it? – As early as 1988, Juneca, one of the most infamous old-school pichadores, was cited in a local newspaper as follows: "It's a year that I don't do pichação, now I make only art." (Folha de São Paulo, 1988). Even years later newspapers talk of Juneca as the "regenerated pichador" who, "now that he turned into artist, scribbles on those who soil the city" (Jornal da Tarde, 2002). This model has been applied in educational policy programmes for civic education focused on behaviour in public space. These point out the importance of "understanding differences between pichação (closed code with little variation, used by specific groups to demarcate an area) and grafite (language developed by artists to

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<sup>14</sup> Regarding this quarrel between São Paulo's Council Hall and grafite artists, see the movie "Cidade Cinza" (Mesquita & Valiengo, 2013).

transmit an ideology)” (Araújo, 2007). An educational booklet published by the Foundation Educating Dpaschoal tells the story of the city's children, guided by protagonist “Felício Happy”, deciding “to tell all their friends that the inks used to scribble on walls and monuments should be used to prettify the city” or be delivered to teachers so that these could “use them to teach grafite, an art form that is expressed on the streets...” (Secco, 1999, p. 12f).



*“So Felício Happy decided to reunite all the friends, to see how they could help. They talked a lot but did not understand how some children even older than them, could muck about spoiling what is of others or of all, instead of helping to preserve the city.”*

*The monument that Felício and his friend are worried about, is exactly the Bandeiras Monument, mentioned above.*

*(Secco, 1999, p. 5)*

responses to pixação we showed how measures of repression and immediate cleaning, “beautifying” through “art” projects and finally educational policies are applied to comply images of a “clean”, “modern”, “rife with art” world/global city, and the corresponding “clean” civic subjects.

As Tiburi suggests, we understand the white façade as suppressing “other” truths and

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we discussed urban policies in São Paulo in the context of development narratives regarding Brazil. In these São Paulo plays an accentuated role, due to its specific history and current importance for Brazilian economy. We discussed recent hygienist policies with focus on how they adopt imperatives and aesthetic perceptions tied to world/global city models. We showed how current cleansing policies frame certain populations and activities in semantics of “dirtiness”, implying not only these element's “backwardness”, but also a potential threat to “modernnerss” that might emanate from them.

Pixacao – visual intervention wide spread in São Paulo's urban space – evades unidimensional interpretations, but is here conceptualized as expression of difference in the 21<sup>st</sup> century metropolis (Roy, 2009). Focusing on policy

different realities. In that sense we propose to understand pixação as a “struggle for social visibility” (Franco, 2010), and explicitness of difference. As such, its subversive potential lies exactly in its capability to evade simplistic explanatory approaches<sup>15</sup>, to “undermine modernist dichotomies” (Varley, 2013), to express the “heterogeneity and multiplicity of metropolitan modernities” (Roy, 2009, p. 821). In this sense it is invigorating to see how irritated commentators react when having to admit that pixação reached the middle class, that the “urban tribe” was “no more only of youth from the periphery” (Folha de São Paulo, 2003).

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15 It is astonishing also to note how well Jean Baudrillard's (1978) reflection on early 1970s New York-graffiti might be assigned to 1990s São Paulo-pixação. Indeed one could argue that the later fits much better to Baudrillard's argument, which he developed lacking solid empirical knowledge on the matter.

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