

Introduction

This book identifies sociability as being central to the understanding of urban poverty conditions. Although this statement may appear self-evident to the lay reader, for whom it would seem obvious that the daily lives of individuals influence their life conditions, the principal academic debates on the subject have been constructed in such a way as to end up pointing in other directions.

As such, a substantial part of what has been written on urban poverty, especially about Latin America and Brazil, has been polarized by two strong but disconnected sets of arguments. On the one hand, the field has been traditionally occupied by perspectives based on systemic or broad economic dynamics. In the 1970s, living conditions and poverty were derived directly from the specificity of our (peripheral) capitalism or from the dynamics of our labor markets, especially marked by unemployment and informality. More recently, neoliberalism and economic restructuring were brought to the forefront to explain social conditions and poverty, as well as urban precariousness and the appearance of squatters and shantytowns.

On the other hand, poverty was also associated by many authors to individual attributes and behaviors, at least since the conservative 'culture of poverty' debate. Within this same micro-level tradition, the field has more recently become dominated by a literature focused on individual attributes, decisions, strategies and behavior. In some cases, societal elements and processes have been incorporated, but as mere limiting factors in the individual's social insertion, such as in the ideas of neighborhood effects, role model or peer group effects. In all these cases social processes are understood as environmental elements that only influence those individual propensities and capacities already cited, and not as a locus of own dynamics that impact on social conditions.

This oscillation between 'holistic' and 'atomistic' understandings of poverty may perhaps be explained by the hegemony of a vision colored by the economic debate that focuses on economic processes, the existence of monetary income or at most, of individual assets within the boundaries of the discussions of human capital, and associates them with education, good health conditions, etc. According to this vision, the elements in question would be important in permitting the individual access to, or with better credentials to access, structures of opportunity similar to those thought of when only earnings are considered.

Probably the only exceptions worth mentioning are the contributions that mobilize broad sociological and political categories, such as vulnerability or citizenship to analyze Latin America. Although some of these works had shed light to important aspects of our societies, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, they do not explain the processes of poverty production or reproduction in themselves,

nor the poor, but only interpret the consequences of the considered societal characteristics.

The topic's relevance is not only academic but also linked to social policy formulation and implementation. For a long time, policies aimed at combating poverty have departed from the idea that, in the absence of broad social changes, the important thing to do was to endow the individuals in poverty with strategic characteristics to supposedly lift them out of poverty and help them ascend socially. Albeit other dimensions have been incorporated over the course of time, an important part of the public initiatives continues in this vein.

Although I agree with the importance afforded to economic conditions and the labor market, as well as that given to the existence of attributes, credentials and individual behaviors, I nevertheless believe that societal midlevel elements associated with the relational patterns within which individuals are embedded have great importance in the understanding of poverty. They have been undervalued or treated as mere environmental elements in debates on the topic. In order to make advances in the understanding of poverty, a change of focus is necessary if we want to go beyond the atomistic paradigm and incorporate a truly relational ontology in the sense of Emirbayer (1997) and Tilly (2001). For this, we need to drag relationships to the center of the analysis, whilst still affording due consideration to attributes, as they dynamically influence each other on a continual basis. This book aims to show their relevance and to analyze how they operate in the production and reproduction of poverty.

In order to back up this point of view, I have based my results on research into the personal networks of individuals in seven situations of urban poverty in São Paulo selected on the basis of housing and segregation conditions. The study reconstitutes their attributes, the relational patterns in which they are inserted and investigates the conditioners of the networks, exploring their diversity. Since individuals access goods and services through these relational patterns, I investigate the consequences of different networks and sociability in terms of living conditions, as well as analyze their daily mobilization by the individuals. The results allow us to sustain the centrality of networks and of sociability for the reproduction of social inequalities and of urban poverty conditions in the city. Although referring to the city of São Paulo, the results bring important new elements to the discussions of the issue in other urban and metropolitan realities.

The most promising recent strategy to overcome the opposition between macro and micro-sociological analysis of poverty was developed by the urban sociology literature. The city-wide social precariousness multiplier effects were integrated into the analysis, mainly in terms of the cumulativeness of negative processes, leading to some of the most important contributions of recent decades (Wilson 1987; Massey and Denton 1993). The spatial concentration of poverty and the separation between social groups caused by residential segregation were indicated as some of the most important elements in the chain of poverty and inequality reproduction, leading even to social exclusion according to a part of the debate (Levitas et al. 2007, Mustered and Murie 2002). Segregation was indicated as a

major cause for the reduction of connections between social groups, as well as the diminishing of the sense of belonging that individuals have to collectivities (Wilson 1987; Jargowsky 1997; Mustered, Murie and Kesteloot 2006). Since then, several studies have highlighted the importance of segregation for poverty in Europe (Mingione 1996; Mustered, Murie and Kesteloot 2006), the US (Briggs 2005; Wacquant 2007) and Latin America (Auyero 1999; De La Rocha 2001).

The connection between space and poverty has also been incorporated by public policies since the 1980s, resulting in State actions operationally focused on the territory, such as the French 'Politique de la Ville' (Le Galès 1996; Bréville 2011). The introduction of these elements and the construction of policies orientated in this direction represented an advance, although not necessarily a solution (Lelévrier 2011; Le Galès 2005), especially because there is no identity between neighborhood and community (Blokland 2003). The presence of policies in this direction, however, is taking a long time to reach Latin America and Brazil (Torres 2005b and Marques and Torres 2005).

These negative effects of segregation may be counterbalanced or reinforced by various local factors, such as the role of the State (Wacquant 2008; Roberts 2005 and Marques and Torres 2005), broad societal institutions (Wu 2004), urban violence (Wacquant 2008), the family (Gonzalez de la Rocha 2001 and Wilson 1987), or by a combination of elements (Mustered, Murie and Kesteloot 2006, Mingione 2005, Andreotti 2006) all helping to explain differences among countries and cities. The presence of several patterns of social connections can also reduce the transformation of spatial isolation into social isolation. Social ties, in this sense, may help people bridge space or construct social cohesion through the bonding of identities (Briggs 2001), as well as provide several kinds of social support, associated with the neighborhood and the family (De La Rocha 2001), informal ties (Mingione 1994; Pamuk 2000) or communities (Small 2004).

In general terms, the question addresses the relations between social structure, geographic location and the relational social structure composed by the networks. More specifically, the question concerns the inequitable access of individuals to material goods derived from services, policies, labor markets or immaterial elements such as repertoires and ways of life. In this sense the networks could help to overcome geographical and social spaces and give individuals access to, or place them within, somewhat broader social circles. So, although with crossed signals, social networks and segregation mediate the accesses individuals have to the different structures of opportunities (Kaztman 1991), or to the different sources of welfare (Mustered and Murie 2002).

As such, networks must necessarily be incorporated into any model seeking to explain the reproduction of poverty if we mean to study it in a relational and multidimensional form in the sense afforded to the term by Mingione (1999) and Levitas et al. (2007). For this reason a substantial literature has cited the connection between networks and the realization of status throughout the life cycle (Lin 1999b) – the acquisition of individual characteristics that are constructors of social hierarchies, such as income, schooling, culture, etc. According to this conception

various processes and attributes would depend on the existence of social capital composed of collectively produced and stored elements beyond the level of the individual, more precisely within their web of relationships (Perri 1997), including connections between social groups (Briggs 2005). For those authors who attempt to link social capital to networks, characteristics such as mutual trust and principles of citizenship (as from Putnam onwards) would be generated and produced by networks. This aspect has been highlighted by an important number of recent international diagnoses of the matter (Policy Research Initiative 2005a and 2005b, Cechi, Molina and Sabatini, s.d., Perri 1997, Levitas et al. 2007).

However, we should avoid relying on normative understandings of networks, as do the majority of the debates on social capital and on social exclusion. As will be seen in the first chapter, each network may produce negative or positive consequences (sometimes at the same time) and identical networks may be used differently by different individuals or by the same individual in diverse situations. Regardless of the importance of contributions relating urban living conditions and networks, such as Briggs (2005), Small (2009) and Blokland and Savage (2008), the focus and the proposal of this book – to systematically investigate the importance of networks on poverty comparatively among segregated situations – remains unexplored.

The literature about Latin America, however, had been preoccupied with other kinds of processes. The study of poverty has been marked, since the 1970's, by structural and systemic approaches informed by Marxism and by Dependence theory (Perlman 2008; Kowarick 2005 and Ward 2004). Since the 1990's different approaches have emerged, parallel to the discussion of the 'new poverty' developed in the Global North (Mingione 1996). Differently from abroad, however, the debate has been polarized by two different (and contradictory) developments. On one side, the field has been hegemonized locally by a literature focused on individual attributes and economic processes, with social dynamics understood solely as a set of constraints over individuals. At the same time, a tradition of other sociological studies has emerged, taking into account the multidimensionality of poverty and focusing on survival strategies, political participation, violence, residential segregation and the role of the State and of sociability, (Gonzalez de la Rocha 2001; Roberts 2005; Marques and Torres 2005; Ayuero 1999; Perlman 2008, Silva Telles and Cabannes, 2006, Kowarick 2009).

The analysis of the impact of social networks, however, remains unexplored by the literature about Latin America, in spite of the general citation of the associations between social networks and poverty. The truth is that we only start to learn how they really work beyond their metaphorical reference. In the same way, we can only intuit, from fragile empirical bases, their influence on the process of poverty reproduction, even if Latin America presents one of the highest presences of both urban poverty and social inequalities. This book aims at closing this gap by answering four associated questions on the topic:

- What are the networks of Brazil's metropolitan poor really like, and what conditions and influences them?
- What types of networks exist and how are they associated with distinct sociability patterns and with urban segregation?
- What consequences do these networks have for individuals and for poverty in general?

Considering that networks mediate the access individuals have to the various elements that constitute their welfare, this third question involves at least two sets of elements: the access to goods and services obtained in markets (in mercantile exchanges) and outside markets, both through social assistances from other individuals (in personalized exchanges) and from organizations and the State, since even in face of the universalistic logic of citizenship, the access to policies is mediated by social relationships.

However, networks are structures and as such they may lead to different results depending on their use by social agents. Consequently, our understanding of the causal elements associated with the above cited regularities will not be understood unless we incorporate the study of network mobilization by the individuals. This leads us to a fourth challenge, which is to understand:

- What are the mechanisms by which networks influence living conditions, poverty and social inequality through the daily lives of individuals?

The evidences presented in the following chapters indicate the existence of great heterogeneity in the networks of those individuals in situations of poverty. Their networks are, however, generally smaller, more local and less varied in terms of sociability than the networks of middle-class individuals. The results suggest that certain types of networks of those individuals in poverty are empirically associated with better life conditions, employment and income. This serves to demonstrate the relevance of the sociability of individuals for the definition, in a broad sense, of their social situations, and of poverty in particular. On the other hand, observation of the mobilization of the networks by individuals suggests that important regularities, associated with social mechanisms, are hidden behind the phenomenon's heterogeneity. As we will see, these mechanisms explain a great part of the heterogeneity of networks, as well as mediate the individual's access to opportunities and everyday assistance. They therefore contribute decisively to the production (and reproduction) of urban poverty.

Before properly getting into the topic however, it is important to establish a few methodological standpoints. The present work analyzes the main conditioners of personal networks in low income locales, as well as exploring their structure and variation, further down the line investigating their consequences. All this involves complex multicausality associated with the articulation of various processes and conditioners. The result is strongly influenced by the combination and order of the existing processes. For this reason the research was developed via detailed,

intentionally chosen case studies, carried out in areas of concentrated poverty that evinced different segregational conditions, on a citywide scale (macro-segregation). The aim was not to statistically represent the dwelling places of the city's poor to later expand the sample and determine the types of networks of those living in poverty within São Paulo, but rather to cover the variability found within situations of urban poverty by means of a logic of case studies. This point will be expanded upon in the second chapter, as will the other methodological approaches adopted.

In technical research terms, the objectives of the investigation led to my using both qualitative and quantitative techniques, involving network analysis, geoprocessing, statistical tools, such as regression, and exploratory techniques such as factorial and cluster, as well as the carrying out of in-depth interviews. This is an important element as the utilization alone of a broad set of methods made for the understanding of the nature of the phenomena being studied (Wilson 2002 and Small, at press).

Another aspect of the fundamental method, which needs explaining, is that the research analyzes personal networks, and not community networks, or individual's egocentered networks. Community networks may be spatially or thematically constituted, and are the relational environments that surround individuals within a given context, occurrence or process, such as throughout a social mobilization, within an organization created to deliver a given public policy, in the interaction between organizations, or in the familial or economic relationships amongst patriarchal families, to proffer just a few examples. The present study analyzes networks that differ from these, looking at the networks of individuals and considering their sociability as the topic or theme upon which the interview questions are to be based. On the other hand the networks considered are not limited to the egocentric networks of individuals (or egonets), that take into consideration only information as to the individual's primary contacts and the ties between same of them¹. Unlike the greater part of the international literature I consider that an important portion of the sociability that influences poverty and living conditions occurs at greater distances from the ego than its immediate surroundings², this being the reason for picking here the networks of the individuals entirely, without placing prior limits on their size.³ This decision worked out well as the networks

1 Primary tie here is a technical denomination and refers to the direct ego ties. In other chapters I explore the primary bonds in a sociological sense.

2 Or, technically, at just a step from the ego.

3 For operational research reasons a limit was placed on the number of rounds of interviews, which theoretically placed limits on the size of the networks chosen. However, in the case of those individuals in situations of poverty, the name generator reached the edges of the networks before this, and, as such, we may consider the networks constructed as corresponding approximately to representations of the total networks of the interviewees. Chapter 2 presents the method in detail.

found in the research varied in size from five to 148 nodes, that is to say the method itself caught the variability of the phenomenon.

The decision to center attention on personal networks was based on the assumption that, it is through these (either in isolation or nested within other networks) that individuals obtain access to the diverse elements involved in their social reproduction and which contribute towards their well-being. This delimiting however, possesses mere analytical sense, given that these networks represent methodological snippets of broader societal relational contexts in which all individuals and entities are involved. In spite of making methodological use of individual networks, the research nevertheless considers a strongly relational social ontology. The elements involved in this starting point are discussed in detail in the first chapter.

The research information, on the other hand, was derived from interviews with the actual egos of the networks. The data are of a cognitive type – they pass through the individual's understanding and perception of their own networks (Marsden 2005). This method may appear initially problematic as we run the risk of being led astray by the participant given the differences in understanding of their own networks. It is true that significant differences were observed during the interviews in relation to the individual interviewee's understanding of his or her network. I nonetheless consider that this did not introduce bias into the analysis, but rather represents part of the observed phenomenon's own dynamic. Individuals mobilize the relations (and the relational patterns) as they understand them, and if they understand them differently, tend to use them differently in their daily lives. In truth, if we adopted a non-substantialist conception of the networks, we would arrive at the conclusion that the networks are exactly as the individuals in question take them to be, and not structures hidden somewhere whose 'real' configuration is to be discovered by the method. As such, considering that the way individuals understand their networks is what defines and orientates their everyday social use, what we obtain from the method, based on cognitive data, is what is really important for the reproduction of the social conditions of the individual.

With this methodological framework in place, we can now succinctly describe the research. The study chose the personal networks of 209 individuals in situations of poverty, and 30 individuals of the middle class, the latter so as to set up a basis for comparison. To explore the effects of spatial segregation on personal networks I chose locales, all quite distinct from each other from an urban insertion standpoint, taking as a starting point previous studies on the spatial distribution of social groups in São Paulo. Approximately 30 personal networks were chosen in each locale studied, apart from the middle class control group, without specifying dwelling place. In truth, if we had controlled the residential location of the middle class we would have found a pattern concentrated in the expanded center of the metropolis, although their networks fan out over a wide territory and include virtually nobody in their immediate physical vicinity, in a pattern similar to that which Wellman (2001) has denominated as personal communities, as we shall see in Chapter 1. This pattern is very distinct from that found amongst individuals in

situations of poverty, which in itself indicates enormous differences in relational patterns and the ways in which those relations might be utilized.

The choice of locales studied resulted from an intentional sample of the locations of individuals in situations of poverty in the city from the standpoints of distance from center, the degrees of consolidation of the areas in question, housing patterns and levels of State intervention. Within the locales studied the most centralized locations included city center slum tenements. The most segregated and distant locations included a 'favela' on the peri-urban fringe of the metropolitan region, between the municipalities of Taboão da Serra and São Paulo – Vila Nova Esperança -, a large scale housing project on the fringe of municipal São Paulo's urban Eastern Zone – Cidade Tiradentes – and a fairly peripheral area of the Southern Zone, the so-called 'fundão' of Jardim Ângela. Apart from the above mentioned, social networks were also researched in two very large 'favelas' located fairly close to the expanded center – Paraisópolis, the object of innumerable previous studies, contiguous to Morumbi, a very high income neighborhood, and Vila Nova Jaguaré, bordering on middle and upper class neighborhoods and near the University of São Paulo. A third small 'favela', near to the municipal center of Guarulhos, and within an industrial district – Favela Guinle – completed the set of locales studied. The interviews were carried out on weekdays and weekends between September 2006 and August of 2007.

A semi-open questionnaire and a name generator were used in all of the locales where interviews took place. The choice of interviewees in each field was purely random and took place whilst traversing the chosen locales. Individuals were approached in public spaces and at the entrances to their houses on both weekdays and weekends. In some cases entrance to the locales studied was mediated by participants of previous pieces of research or members of local associative movements.⁴ Throughout the work in each field, the sample of interviewees was controlled by certain basic social attributes such as gender, age, migratory and occupational status, and dwelling place within the locale being studied. This control had uppermost in mind the guaranteeing of a reasonable correspondence to the average characteristics of the local population and the avoidance of bias. As we shall see, the comparison between the interviewees' characteristics and that of the population studied suggests that this aim was achieved with no little success.

Middle class was defined in a broad sense, mixing income and professional criteria and included the liberal professions, civil servants, persons involved in intellectual activities and owners of commercial establishments. The delimiting of the group had no other conceptual or methodological concerns, given that the

4 I would like to thank my colleagues Encá Moya, João Marcos de Almeida Lopes, Teresinha Gonzaga, Letizia Vitale, Gabriel Feltran and Henri Gerveseau who, at various times helped with contacts for interviews. In the case of Favela Guinle, Rafael Soares carried out the interviews in their entirety for his Masters dissertation. Rafael subsequently made this raw data available to me for use in the present work for which I am heartily grateful.

objective of the interviews with the individuals so classified was simply to set up a level of comparison for the analysis of those individuals living in poverty. The information derived from the middle class networks was just used as a parameter and never in more fundamental or conclusive analyses.

The sets of information thus generated were subsequently run through social network analysis tools resulting in 239 personal networks. I then explored several characteristics of the networks of individuals living in poverty, trying to access their principal conditioners and the processes that influenced their formation and dynamic, and how this differed from the middle class networks. The processes of creation and maintenance of ties, the dynamics of homophilia⁵, and the social conditioners of network construction and maintenance were all studied. The networks differed in certain key attributes and specific variables, amongst which were gender, life cycle, and migratory and occupational status. As a general rule, relationships between individuals of different social and income groups were found to be practically non-existent. This is, perhaps, one of the most important characteristics of the role of these networks in the perpetuation of poverty and social inequality. The problem itself does not, of course, originate in the networks but just represents a relational facet of the Brazilian social structure.

With the statistical analyses already carried out, I chose a set of personal networks with which to undertake the qualitative part of the research. Criteria for choosing the cases combined types of network found, the fields studied and the personal characteristics of the interviewees. In all, qualitative interviews were carried out with twenty individuals, between the end of January and the beginning of May 2008. The interviews explored the networks' transformations since the first interviews, done one year before. The interviews dealt with, amongst other things, how the networks are used by the individuals in their daily lives, such as in migration, the obtaining of work, how they may help in health related matters, with child care, with accommodation, in the acquisition of various types of loans as well as in providing access to emotional support and public policies. This information enabled me to understand the dynamic of relational patterns and their mobilization by individuals. The patterns and the recurrences observed led me to delimit social mechanisms responsible both for the networks' constitution and transformation, and for their mobilization by individuals in their practices.

The structure of the work follows the four questions previously presented. In the first chapter I perform a succinct review of the literature relating to poverty, segregation and social networks, highlighting those elements most important to the arguments of the research. However, more than just exhaustively following the debates, the chapter's objective is to formulate the conceptual bridges necessary for the articulation of various elements of this research, given that it is located at an intersection point between the debates on poverty, networks and segregation.

⁵ Homophilus relations are those holding between persons of the same attribute. The following chapters will explore this important dimension, which associates the production of relationships to attributes.

Given the relative newness of the topic, a number of research instruments were developed, or adapted, to facilitate the carrying out of field research and the obtaining of information. The second chapter presents the principal instruments of research that were applied, as well as putting the reader in the picture as to the general characteristics of the metropolitan space of São Paulo, its poverties and the locales studied.

The third chapter starts with an analysis of the collected data, exploring the attributes of individuals and of their networks. It is the first exercise in approaching the problem, and addresses the first question, outlined at the beginning of this introduction – what are the networks of individuals in situations of poverty like and what conditions them? I start the analysis with a characterization of the interviewees, their networks and their sociability, then immediately move on to investigate the associations between social attributes and relational patterns. Although the exercise is essentially descriptive, some important results do emerge. When we compare these with the middle class networks, we discover that the networks of those in poverty tend to be smaller, more local and less cohesive and possess a less varied sociability. In spite of this, within the living in situations of poverty group, the variation found is considerable, and some networks were found with rich and dynamic relational characteristics and sociability. The networks also evinced intense variability where basic social attributes such as sex, age, income, schooling and migratory patterns were concerned. More segregated locales, on the other hand, have networks evincing little difference in size and cohesion, although they do house less local networks, in average terms, contrary to what one would intuitively anticipate, suggesting that some networks at least have successfully integrated some spatially segregated individuals. Taken together, the information indicates the heterogeneity of the networks of poor individuals and the existence of non-direct and considerably complex associations between networks and social attributes.

The question posed initially therefore, unfolds in the investigation into the networks' patterns of variation, so as to explore their heterogeneity. The fourth chapter develops this analysis, delimiting the types of network and sociability present, with the objective of answering the second question – what types of networks exist and how are these associated with distinct sociability patterns? The data suggest the existence of different (and very regular) network types depending on the size, structure, urban insertion and sociability contained within them.

The fifth and sixth chapters analyze the consequences of the networks for the living standards of individuals, in particular for the presence of situations of poverty and social precariousness, attempting to answer the third of the questions that guide this work – What consequences do these networks have for individuals and for poverty in general?

The fifth chapter investigates the effects of the networks on access to markets. Using the previous types of networks, together with socio-economic variables classically considered as central to the characterization of poverty, I quantitatively analyze the consequences of networks to the access of goods and services.

Then, the investigation explores the main conditioners of those individuals with employment, those who have employment with some degree of protection, and those in situations of social precariousness, as well as their respective per capita income. The results suggest the central position occupied by the networks and sociability in the definition of each of the above mentioned elements, demonstrating the necessity of their integration into both studies of the topic and into those policies geared towards the combating of poverty and the promotion of well-being.

Nevertheless, as I consider poverty multi-dimensionally, the analysis would not be complete if I did not take into account the elements that generate or mitigate situations of social privation, but are obtained outside markets through personalized exchanges not subject to the usual mercantile logic. The sixth chapter explores this aspect, analyzing the effects of the networks upon access to goods and services mobilized on an everyday basis by individuals outside (or partially outside) markets. Using the information garnered from the qualitative part of the research, I discuss how relational patterns influence the mobilization of those goods and services that make for the solution of such daily problems as child care, care of the elderly, the obtaining of small loans, tools, food and appliances, or emotional support, and how these all contribute towards the mitigation of poverty.

The seventh chapter addresses the last question – In what way do the networks influence living conditions, poverty and social inequality through the daily lives of individuals? –, discussing the transformations undergone by the networks and the relational mechanisms present in the studied situations. These substantially explain not only the great differences between the networks of individuals, but also their differentiated mobilization in the solving of everyday problems, thereby generating unequal access to help and relational opportunities. Whilst this difference is merely analytic, and in practice the processes are often concomitant, in the first case the networks are impacted by the mechanisms, while in the latter access to opportunities is mediated by mechanisms that involve networks. The results confirm what was discussed in earlier chapters, namely the central role played by sociability in determining conditions of life. Quite apart from this, it also allowed us to pass from the correlations to the mechanisms, specifying in what way the networks matter and helping us understand their specific role in the reproduction of conditions of life and poverty.

Finally I sum up the presented results and briefly discuss the consequences for public policy of the patterns found. The set of results allows us to affirm the relevance of sociability to the explanation of situations of poverty. It also throws light on the differentiated effects of diverse relational contexts in the individual's access to structures that affect life conditions and poverty.