Invisible deaths among youth in the south of Buenos Aires: biographical reconstructions and itineraries of the experience of families and friends

Muertes invisibles entre jóvenes en la zona sur de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires: reconstrucciones biográficas e itinerarios de la experiencia de familiares y amigos

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ABSTRACT Many sources of secondary data and some previous studies highlight the magnitude of homicides among young people in marginalized populations of the southern part of the City of Buenos Aires. With an approach that incorporates the perspectives of the sociology of individuation, the anthropology of moralities, and the psychic processes involved in subjectivation, an in-depth cases study was conducted between the years 2014 and 2016. A set of biographies of young people who died in front of other young people were reconstructed through the testimonies of families and friends of dead youth. The work aims to delve into the different contexts and conditions of possibility of the experiences of these actors, in which the process of biographical reconstruction linked to youth sociabilities, along with pain and vulnerabilities after a death, can lead to a social critique of the naturalization of the violence among young people in the everyday life of marginalized neighborhoods.
KEY WORDS Youths; Violence; Death; Biography; Argentina.

RESUMEN Varias fuentes de datos secundarios y algunos estudios previos destacan la magnitud de los homicidios entre jóvenes en las poblaciones marginalizadas de la zona sur de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. Con un enfoque que incorpora las perspectivas de la sociología de la individuación, la antropología de las moralidades y de los procesos psíquicos involucrados en la subjetivación, se realizó un estudio de casos en profundidad, entre los años 2014 y 2016. Se reconstruyó un conjunto de biografías de jóvenes muertos frente a otros jóvenes, con testimonios de familiares, y de jóvenes amigos, de pares muertos. El trabajo se propone profundizar en los diferentes contextos y condiciones de posibilidad de las experiencias de estos actores, en que el proceso de reconstrucción biográfica vinculado a las sociabilidades juveniles, junto al dolor y las vulnerabilidades, tras una muerte, podrían conducir a una crítica social de la naturalización de la violencia entre jóvenes, en la vida cotidiana de los barrios marginalizados.
PALABRAS CLAVES Jóvenes; Violencia; Muerte; Biografía; Argentina.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

In Latin America, the magnitude of youth violence and the growing number of young people dying from violent causes have been signaled by regional reports[1] that call attention to a series of issues: the weakening of formal and informal mechanisms of social protection directed at young people; an exacerbation of the generation gap; feelings of social exclusion, characterized by different forms of physical and symbolic violence directed at youth; and an increase in the number of homicides among young men.

The Latin American region has the highest violent death rates in the world.[2] Victims of homicide in Latin America are primarily young, low-income males. Homicide is the leading cause of death among young people in the region, and in Argentina it accounts for one in every five deaths.[3]

Several studies have attempted to link interpersonal violence and the deaths of young people with a series of social phenomena that are evident throughout the region: conditions of social inequality coupled with youth unemployment; the loss of control over the socialization of young people on the part of families; expectations regarding consumption versus unequal material conditions; a territorial organization of cities characterized by concentrated poverty and high population density; and patterns of violent masculinity as a manner of obtaining social prestige vis-à-vis gender.[3]

In Argentina, few studies have specifically characterized the psycho-social conditions that produce interpersonal violence and death among young people. The National Supreme Court of Justice[4] tracks registered cases of first-degree murder in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) by monitoring court records. State judicial record keepers are involved in all cases of homicide. In 2011, 184 court cases and 190 victims were registered. Given that the monitoring of these cases involves investigating facts related to the homicides, one case may comprise more than one homicide.

It can be noted that homicides are concentrated in urban areas with the most impoverished populations: the so-called *villas de emergencia* [slums], almost exclusively located in the southern section of the city (Villa 21-24, "Zavaleta" Transitory Housing Complex, Villa 1-11-14, and Villa 15), with the exception of Villa 31-31 Bis, which is located in the north of the city. In the City of Buenos Aires, 27% of victims are between ages 18 and 25, 36% of whom live in slums. Situations of interpersonal violence among groups of young people are common, which predominantly take place "on the streets" and involve firearms or other weapons. The leading causes of these deaths in CABA fall under a single category that groups together "fights," "score settling," and "revenge," – which account for 39% – with another 15% attributable strictly to instances of robbery. The georeferenced analysis carried out in the aforementioned study[4] shows that 73% of deaths occurred in the southern part of CABA (Administrative communes 1, 4, 7, 8, and 9). Regarding the motives of these homicides, those attributed to "fights," "score settling," and "revenge" accounted for 59%, compared to 39% for CABA as a whole.

Violence and the social segregation of young people: actors' perspectives and struggles for recognition

In recent decades in Argentina, the most impoverished of the urban popular sectors have been socialized in largely homogenous spaces, which has tended to reinforce or lead to social isolation. Shifts in value systems which regarded family, work, and education as the principal spaces of socialization – coupled with processes of urban segregation – have prompted a process of increased socio-territorial exclusion, social fragmentation, and social vulnerability.[5,6,7]

In his analysis of youth violence, Pegoraro[8] notes that there are two frameworks for explaining the "deviant conduct of young people." On the one hand, a "structural framework" that locates violence as a consequence of material need and social

exclusion. The other, a "cultural framework," refers to the difficulties of individuals in incorporating social values due to an "absence of a social morality that respects the rule of law." Much emphasis is placed on the notion of "cultural codes," a group of values and homogenous ways of thinking that transcend concrete actions of social actors, and to which such action must adjust or be held accountable. Similarly, in the majority of the existing sociological literature, youth are conceptualized in negative terms with respect to structural social determinations. Attempts are made, therefore, to ascribe youth sociabilities (family, school, peer groups) and broader processes (fragmentation, vulnerability) to these determinations.

This study suggests that it is insufficient to analyze only the social class structure and homogenous cultural conditions as determinants in shaping the conditions of youth socialization. Therefore, it proposes a third framework that is based on the action of young people and those close to them – taken as singular social agents – which incorporates three types of perspectives: sociological, anthropological, and the psychological processes involved in subjectivation.

From the sociological perspective, it is necessary to take into account the mobility and circulation of young people across different geographical spaces and the ways in which they navigate spaces of sociability.[9] It is also necessary to characterize the social ties of young people residing in marginalized neighborhoods, where violence, crime, and unlawfulness are often expressions of youth discontent caused by perceptions of daily injustices.[10] Additionally, attention should be paid to the struggles for recognition of youth identity, faced with the "fragmentation" of social ties between young people and their neighbors (or even their own peers), and to the "breakdown of shared cultural patterns."[6] Young people may enact "demands for respect" from their peers and neighbors in a context of humiliation, exclusion, and a lack of opportunity in order to construct a socially valued identity. This demand can be understood as an intersubjective capacity for achieving equal recognition, or conversely as a "pure demand" on the part of a subject unilaterally imposing themselves by force over another, establishing a hierarchical inequality.[11,12] Territorial disputes among different groups of young people that involve violence and death stem from a materialization of the construction of a sense of otherness in a context of relatively homogenous youth subcultures.[13] This amounts to territorial restrictions practiced by groups of young people that hedge on oppositional identities – between an "us" and a "them" – producing a segmentation of youth sociabilities that gravitates between "respect" and "anti-respect."[11]

Adopting the perspective of the anthropology of moralities,[14] it can be understood that death – when it results from social disputes among young people – makes actors involved in the specific incident question their thinking. Violence and death forces a rupture in their ways of conceiving the social world, others, and themselves. A tension emerges between the broader view of the community, which judges the behavior of young people by appealing to social values and ideas, and the view adopted by the actors related to the deceased young person. Rather than what has been thought of as a "cultural code," it is necessary to shed light on the diversity of values that enter into tension with and dispute over the meaning of an action.[15] Furthermore, this has to do with the distribution of cognitive and moral resources by actors, and struggles over to whom they should be destined.[16]

A third perspective – psychological and regarding the subjectivation process – brings together different fields of study in order to link biographical reconstruction with the spaces of sociability that subjects navigate, the pain caused by death, and the processes that led to the vulnerability of actors close to the deaths.[17] This constitutes a process of *ego disintegration*, that initiates processes of psychic transmission in biographical events, which give way to possibilities for a "psychological and historical inscription" of violence and death.[17,18]

Vulnerability as a process and the experience of actors following a death

Rather than conceiving of the categories of risk and vulnerability as time-specific situations, here vulnerability is understood as the result of a historical process that comprises three intersecting dimensions.[19] First, the *personal trajectories* of actors: second, the *connections* and *interactions* that can transform these personal trajectories into social ones; and third, the *social and institutional context* in which personal and social trajectories are inserted, which can facilitate or inhibit access to certain material and symbolic resources.

It is therefore necessary to connect this concept of vulnerability to a characterization of the experience of actors close to the young person who has died under such circumstances. Following François Dubet's[20] sociology of individuation, social experience stems from the action of agents and not from an analysis of the social structure. Social actors are charged with the work of cognitively resolving the "paradox of dual affirmation of the influx of the social and the autonomy of the actor." An attempt is made to reveal the manners in which the social is metabolized and produced through multiple *logics of action*. Nonetheless, rather than exclusively privileging rational action and actors' cognitive activity, the focus of their experience is giving meaning to the experience of living in society. This presumes objectives that are affective, identity-based, and symbolic, through the constitution of a "self" and the organization of collective life. Actors construct multiple categories in different, coexisting contexts of experience, which are not necessarily rationally coordinated but that connect them with other actors.[21]

Elsewhere I have analyzed and discussed three contexts of experience among family and friends of young people who have died in situations of interpersonal violence involving peers:[22,23] a) the clarification of the reasons behind the young person's death, as well as attempts to reorder and create ruptures in social ties in the aggressor's family;

b) the ideas and moral categories that the actors employ in order to establish arguments regarding the young person's death, thereby constructing a moral and social reputation of the deceased,[24] for which a range of cultural repertoires are employed by actors; c) a process of ego disintegration, the associated pain, and an experience of bodily vulnerability brought about in actors when faced with a violent death.

The present study seeks to delve deeper into the ways in which these contexts articulate with each other, enter into tension, or become differentiated in the experiential itineraries of these actors, as well as voids in meaning that cannot be explained. When the family members of young people who have died in situations of interpersonal violence involving peers produce a biographical reconstruction, and when friends of the deceased reconstruct their own lives, how are different contexts articulated in one experience for actors? What difficulties arise in connecting the process of memory construction with youth sociabilities and with family sociabilities? In what ways can the experience of actors metabolize the social relations of the deceased young person and call into question the naturalization of violence among young people in the social context of the neighborhood?

METHODOLOGY

In-depth exploratory and descriptive case studies were carried out with an inductive approach, using qualitative techniques for the construction and analysis of data.[25] This allowed for a comprehension of the meaning given to social action in the context of personal experiences and from the perspective of subjects.[26]

Two groups were chosen for the study, from marginalized populations living in *villas* in the southern part of the City of Buenos Aires:

- Family members of young people (aged 15 to 25) who died in

situations of interpersonal violence with peers, in order to reconstruct their life stories.

- Young friends (aged 15 to 25) of other young people who died in situations of interpersonal violence with peers, in order to reconstruct the life stories of the former.

The perspectives of the biographical method and the reconstruction of life histories were applied, which have been utilized in previous studies.[27,28] The methodological process implemented in this study included:

a. Four to six in-depth interviews were conducted, which included topics such as: the description of the specific circumstances surrounding the death of the young person; the description of the principal spaces of sociability that they navigated; and a selection of the major events in the biography of the young person being discussed, that marked a "before" and "after" in their life, along with the events that led to them.

b. The interviews were transcribed and copies were given to subjects so that they could read the material and make comments or observations.

c. Biographical events were ordered by the subjects themselves over the course of subsequent interviews, according to their own criteria of importance.

d. The construction of a life narrative, which included the presentation of the young person profiled (either the young person who died or a friend of the deceased young person) and the biographical events in accordance with the order of importance determined by the subjects themselves.

The study group was composed of six families of young people aged 15 to 25 who had died and 8 friends of young men who had died, all of whom were young men aged 15 to 25.

Fieldwork was carried out in two *villas de emergencia* in the southern part of the City of Buenos Aires. The researcher responsible for this study was able to gain access through work at a primary healthcare facility. Participant selection and work with the study population was carried out between July 2014 and July 2016.

Multiple methods were used to gain territorial access to subjects: through community leaders (primarily at local "community kitchens"); through institutions that work with neighborhood youth; through family members of deceased young people, via their acquaintances who were in contact with the researcher responsible for this project at the primary healthcare facility; or though young people who attended this service or who were acquainted with the researcher responsible for this project.

The study design and informed consent document that would be provided to participants were submitted for evaluation by authorities at the Ministry of Health of the Buenos Aires City Government.

An interview guide was developed for each of the study populations. Data collection was audio recorded with participant informed consent. For data analysis, interviews were transcribed and a system of qualitative coding was developed to input the information of each study subject. Primary information and codes were input into Atlas.ti software. Coding of the primary data was then carried out. Finally, the data were analyzed and connections among codes were established, which allowed for the identification of analytical categories.

SOCIABILITIES AFTER DEATH, RESENTMENT AND REVENGE

Immediately following the deaths of young people, tensions and overlaps can be observed with regard to three contexts of meaning. First, the clarification of the motives leading to the death and a reordering of social relations. Second, feelings of resentment are triggered along with bodily pain and a desire for revenge and the elimination of the aggressor and those close to them. Lastly, a series

of thoughts and values emerge aimed at fulfilling these desires. This involves constructing a negative reputation of the aggressor and those close to them.

Actors primarily characterize the circumstances surrounding the deaths as:

a. Confrontations between groups of young people from different sections of the same neighborhood or groups from different neighborhoods, in which one group attempts to steal goods that have been obtained by the other group through robbery, or in some cases may include disputes over romantic relationships with women. These disputes are circumscribed by struggles over territorial control of power and the symbolic prestige conferred by material goods. They may also include revenge on victims who do not actively form part of any group in the neighborhood, but who may have some relative affiliation based on contact or connections with an established group.

b. Deaths attributed to revenge for robbing other young people or community members within the neighborhood. This is what young people call *rastrear* [tracking]. It may involve groups or young people acting alone. In the majority of cases this is directly related to obtaining resources to purchase drugs.

c. Violent robberies among young people on an individual basis, either within the neighborhood or elsewhere.

d. Deaths linked to drug trafficking within the neighborhood. Two common situations are: score settling by a drug trafficker – known as *tranzas* [dealers] – against a young person who owed them money; or young people killed for revenge by a *tranza* over having robbed one of their clients.

When family members seek to establish these circumstances, their relation to youth sociabilities is pertinent. In the majority of cases, the young person lived with or maintained close ties to family members, who were for the most part familiar with their groups of friends and therefore could establish the situations that led to the young person's death, and in some cases even anticipate it and warn them about the need for protection. On the other hand, in some cases family members were unaware of the social circles the young person navigated, due to the fact that they no longer lived with them, and were therefore unable to establish the causes of the death. This creates a void in meaning that generates an experience of uncertainty regarding relationships with neighbors, as well as the psychic and social processing of the death.

Along with feelings of resentment that lead to the desire to eliminate others, the bodily experience of pain can alternatively become an experience of vulnerability in the form of possible aggressions directed at the family members themselves. This generates a process of isolation and a restriction of social relations and neighborhood circulation. The desire to eliminate aggressors may therefore become a paradoxical experience, given that the families on either side of the conflict often form part of the same context of neighborhood sociability and may even have previous relationships. This results in an experience of extreme vulnerability, which has no other outcome than resentment. Family members cannot physically distance themselves from the aggressors and their relatives, and are forced to live alongside them and share spaces of daily neighborhood circulation.

But family members are also subject the societal gaze of neighbors who pass judgement on the social trajectories of young people linked to violence, crime, and drug abuse, who make arguments that legitimize forgetting and eliminating these young people from the community. Young people are often established as an internal enemy on which the local community places blame for all that is morally questionable.[29] On a daily basis, these deaths are considered *warranted deaths*,[24] "a private matter among young people that have no social importance"[30]; and their relatives become part of a long list of people who experience and suffer their pain privately. The moral categories of society at large obstruct the public visibility of the

loss and the suffering of those close to the deceased. Even so, the experience of family members is called into question by these societal judgements, so they must exhibit a public presentation in the face of this societal scrutiny. What cultural and material resources do family members possess in order to construct a social reputation for the deceased young person, for themselves, and regarding their relationship with the these young people, that does not appeal to violence as the primary available resource? The possibilities to articulate a moral reputation for the deceased young person and for the family are linked to two coexisting dimensions. Firstly, this is a political issue, based on the symbolic and material power possessed by each family. Here, the relations of deceased young people and their families with institutions and social organizations are fundamental in assigning social visibility to the deaths. However, the family's possible links to criminal networks – whether it be robbery or drug trafficking – can also lead to a preservation of the social invisibility of these deaths. Secondly, family members may cite intergenerational power struggles over authority with young people, in several respects. This could be indicative of what has been described as the "growing gap between symbolic and material consumption" of goods and services on the part of young people,[31] wherein they demand objects of consumption from their family, who are unable to respond to these demands. For this reason, young people question the authority of the family and become autonomous through youth sociabilities linked to crime in order to satisfy these demands. Family members may highlight their differences with youth – linked to work ethic and education – and in many cases may even embody these expectations in their own trajectories. Intergenerational conflicts are also expressed in accentuated power struggles between family sociabilities and youth sociabilities, wherein an attempt is made to retain young people within the former. Here, the autonomy of young people regarding access to and possession of firearms also plays an important role.[32]

In a previous study I have analyzed how socialization processes and trajectories of young people lead to the formation of sociabilities linked to violence, crime, and drug abuse.[23] A number of useful categories emerge for explaining the functioning of these groups of young people. First, this has to do with gaining the identity recognition that is achieved by establishing a violent and unequal relationship with "others" – a sort of *demand for respect* – and a relationship of mutual recognition among "peers," a *demand for equality* within the framework of their sociability. This respect is gained through two categories that are fundamental to actors: on one hand, acquiring *plata fácil* [*easy money*] – primarily through robbery, but also through participation in networks of drug dealing; on the other hand, the figure of the *joven ganado* [*"street success story"*], which in the context of youth sociabilities refers to the esteem commonly granted to young people who have achieved success in street crime and serve as a model for their peers' aspirations.

The death of a friend – when the young people in question share patterns of sociability with the deceased – can lead to rifts, debates, ambiguities, and contradictions in their experiences, which call into question the relation between these categories and the actions of agents. Rather than reinforcing a *cultura del pibe chorro* (a category similar to *thug culture*, but that alludes specifically to young people who engage in theft) – that is, a of translation cultural beliefs into actions that would ensure the social reproduction of crime and violence[33] – the social relations and the cultural and subjective motivations of actors become detached and fragmented.

Immediately after the death of a young person, the range of categories that include the acquisition of both respect and *easy money* along with aspirations of becoming a *joven ganado*, undergo a profound cleavage into two dimensions that enter into tension with each other, based on the *competition between young people*. On one hand, there is a reinforcement of violence through the ideation of getting revenge on the group of aggressors, which in some cases is attained.

At work here is a logic of regaining lost respect among young people, based on material and symbolic inequality, where vulnerability and pain are translated into resentment. On the other hand, inside the group, young people question their mutual recognition based on equality. Competition based on individual consumption reveals a distrust towards peers, who were assumed to be equal. Peers are both object and subject of *envy*. This *"distrust of the envious"* reveals an experience of vulnerability and denotes the resentment of pain. Those who were thought to be friends can *ditch you* or *leave you for dead*. The logic of inequality is therefore implanted in a group of peers who considered themselves equals, based on the idea that *"everyone wants to be a leader, to feel better than everyone else; everyone wants to be in a group."* Therefore, the cultural dimension of consumption that accentuates the individuation process creates a *fission* in the process of group socialization.[34] Additionally, it should be noted that this debate is related to the differences in generational perspectives among youth within the same circuits of sociability. Often, young people over the age of twenty are critical of the consumption expectations and the values of those younger than them, thirteen- or fourteen-year-olds, who begin to form part of their social group.

In the context of the gap between the acquisition of respect and the visibility of competition among young people, actors' experiences give way to processes of vulnerability in their own bodies and in their social ties. Resentment directed at aggressors and at members of their own peer group is also confronted with the distress associated with the possibility of one's own death through bodily experience. This is described as *cajeteo*, referring to the fear or hesitation experienced when faced with having to commit violent acts again. In this sense, actors reflect on how *others wasted their life, and that makes you think about what you want for yours, how you should be careful when robbing*; they relate their own social trajectories with those who have died within the framework of their shared sociability. This often coincides with a moderation of violent acts.

The process of vulnerability triggered by a death and by the increased distrust of others often involves a reordering of sociabilities and of the social positions that actors adopt, which can lead to a number of outcomes: at times, a greater distancing from their peer group and inclusion in different sociabilities; being *on their own*, along with the intensification of drug abuse or crime, or alternatively as a way to avoid conflicts; the dissolution or regrouping of young people linked to the imprisonment of their peers; or attempts to control crime within their own neighborhoods – *tracking* – through a critique of and moral dispute among those who commit crimes *"inside"* and *"outside"* of their own community. Lastly, vulnerability after a death is related to a political dispute involving the power of drug traffickers and young people who commit acts of robbery. A robbery might be questioned by the power of drug traffickers, by the direct and indirect interactions among young people, and even by the families that participate in drug trafficking and robbery.

THE LIMITS OF MORAL CATEGORIES AND IDEAS: ACTORS' CRITIQUES

Moral hierarchies surrounding death is an issue of biopolitics and the *unequal distribution of vulnerabilities* within territories, which has not been considered in the literature on violent deaths.[35] Zaffaroni has used the term *genocidio por goteo* [*drip, drip genocide*] to refer to the fact that youth from marginalized urban populations in Latin America are left to kill each other amongst themselves, and their deaths remain socially invisible.[36] Mbembe[37] has developed a conception of sovereignty characterized by the "capacity to define who has importance and who does not, who is deprived of value, who is easily replaceable, and who is not." This sovereignty can be delegated by the State to community groups within a territory, and may engage in direct or indirect exchanges with them.

Both the families and the youth included in this study repetitively call on formulaic phrases regarding these deaths foretold: *you know that if you rob or deal drugs you might end up dead.* In the biographical reconstructions of young people's trajectories, family members moralize the series of circumstances that led to and directly caused the death: drug consumption with a peer group on "*the street corner*"; participation in robberies with other young people in order to obtain *easy money*; the distancing of the young person from their family; not listening to advice from family members and others close to them, feeling that they were older than they were and able to make their own decisions, and considering school *boring* and *for "giles"* [*chumps*]. The latter term is used as a pejorative epithet among young people.

Families and young people internalize social conceptions regarding the elimination of young people, even when the values under consideration enter into tension with the actor's experience. An attempt to rationalize young people's deaths is made, but actors are constantly faced with pain and unresolved questions posed by the deceased, who remain present and interact with those close to them in the testimonies of the latter.

A series of moral categories and notions are questioned, leading to an unexpected limit in the experience of actors. At the beginning of interviews – both with family members and with young people – the debate that dominates has to do with the conception of friendship that mediates relations among young people. This is presented as an issue that needs urgent explanation. For family members, this line of questioning takes on meaning, in the first place, with respect to disputes over the sociability of the deceased's peer groups: *they say that they are your friends, but what have they led you to?* They are the *bad crowd*, a sociologism for the social influences that corrupt the purportedly ideal family sociability, which was never able to take hold. However, following this, family members transform this questioning into a social critique that both implicates and distances them. As consumption is the sole mediator of relations in youth sociabilities – *you're only their friend if you have something, your friends abandon you* – friends are not present when a young person dies, nor do they remember them. This questioning also implicates them in the formation of intergenerational conflicts, in which the authority of adults in the family is also mediated by consumption – if it is not made possible, an impasse in meaning is installed. Therefore, this constitutes another paradoxical experience: a social critique is levied by family members at the consumption that constitutes youth sociabilities, but they also feel responsible for being unable to respond to this and exercise the necessary authority to put limits on the consumption demands of young people.

However, for family members, this discussion of consumption also generates a debate regarding trajectories of drug addiction and consumption among deceased young people, which also leads to objections over the wide availability of controlled substances and the power of drug traffickers who act with impunity in young people's socialization process, which families are largely unable to contest.

When delving deeper into young people's analysis of the origins and causes of the competition among peers for symbolic and material goods that leads to violence and death, they refer to an accumulation of anger in their experience. The category of *juntar broncas* [*built up anger*] triggers pain that is converted into resentment when an act of aggression is committed, and alludes to the convergence of multiple interactions. First of all, a number of situations within the family itself are mentioned as sources of pain for the young person. In particular, these include having witnessed situations of gender-based violence, having been the victim of different forms of physical and emotional abuse, or situations of abandonment. Secondly, frequent mentions are made of involvement in everyday injustices in public spaces; these primarily include job market discrimination – based on coming from stigmatized neighborhoods like *villas* – and violent encounters between youth and law enforcement. Lastly, peer

relations are also cited, as youth often perceive a friendship to be nonexistent, apparent in the previously mentioned categories of being *ditched* or *left for dead*.

In this sense, violence and death – understood as the imposition of unequal recognition among youth – can be thought of as an unresolved problem of historicization, of the recognition of young people and their relation to pain through multiple sociabilities and interactions, which go beyond confrontations among peers. Nonetheless, the accumulation of incidents and of feelings of resentment can incite acts of violence among young people. Different perspectives have suggested analyzing violence in situational contexts rather than in reference to actors' autonomy and motivations. This suggests prioritizing the analysis of the "linking together" of different situational contexts and "trickle down" of violence on the part of actors in a specific territory.[38] The problems posed by the experience of young people included in this study are not solely related to the linking together and trickling down of violence in different contexts of interaction. They have to do with the possible ways in which other contexts are loosened through specific confrontations among young people, the ways in which feelings of resentment are distributed regarding other interactions, and their possible transformation into other types of pain.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: THE PARADOXICAL EXPERIENCE OF ACTORS AND THE *IMPASSE* OF PAIN

The present study reveals actors' complex experiences related to the deaths of young people. The task that is imposed upon them of confronting the social relations of the deceased – in which they are implicated in one way or another – along with the various ideas and categories that they employ in order to construct arguments reveal limitations and dead ends with respect to meaning. The vulnerability and pain that permeate these experiences can at times lead to attempts to

construct meaning through a reactivation of violence based on appeals to the notion of revenge or the goal of reestablishing tarnished respect. However, such experiences dominated by feelings of resentment often generate more questions and voids in meaning than they seek to resolve.

In order to uphold this argument, it can be contended that unless actors carry out the work of subjectivation that includes bodily and social recognition of their pain as well as the vulnerabilities that it causes, they will be unable to carry out the work necessary for the reordering of their social relations or to come across opinions or ideas that allow them to explain the violence that led to the death in question.

Research in sociology, the anthropology of morality, and cultural criminology with which this study enters into dialogue allows us to explain the processes of social exclusion and territorial segregation, as well as identity-related disputes over recognition and values implicit in interpersonal violence and death among young people. The issue that appears to be problematic – and that this study seeks to characterize – are the conditions under which actors' experience with pain and with the retrieval of memories of the death would allow them to develop a critique that questions the social relations and community-wide perspectives that legitimize violence and death.

The biographical perspectives of family members and friends of deceased young people reveal experiences in which a gap exists between social perspectives and "individual motivations," "culture and social structure become separated" and identity "becomes a growing tension between identity for others and self-identity."[39]

In the case of family members, this is a paradoxical experience. They must overcome the challenge of reconstructing the lives of deceased young people, a *prueba social* [*social test*].[40] On one hand, they are forced to construct a reputation for the young person and for the family in the presence of relations, conflicts, and social ideas that seek to eliminate these young people from the

community. On the other hand, they must recover the memory of a personal experience of pain and of ego disintegration. This suggests a discrepancy and a paradox: family members must account for their personal experience of the deceased young person's social relations, but recounting these relations causes them pain; furthermore, they are questioned by the moral judgements directed at youth violence. The experience of pain can both legitimize and call into question the community morality activated by violence and death. Actors may personally question the reigning morality, but given that there is no social recognition of pain in public spaces, there are scarce opportunities for a social critique and the construction of an alternative community morality that questions violence and death.[41] The analysis of these experiences reveals that these are not deaths "to be mourned" because there are no social norms that recognize them as precarious and vulnerable throughout their social trajectories.[42]

In the case of the young friends of deceased peers, it is possible to frame and characterize a paradoxical experience of recognition in which three different dimensions interact, enter into tension with each other, and contradictorily coexist. In the first place, there are demands for recognition among young people based on a hierarchical inequality, imposed by the socially naturalized exercise of violence and death.[13,11] Here, demands for recognition are put into motion by groups of young people or individually, based on the acquisition of material and symbolic power. This occurs in conditions of social exclusion and segregation, in which day-to-day survival is subordinated to networks of microeconomic illegality linked to theft and drug dealing. A second dimension is constituted by demands for mutual respect as equals. These include ongoing claims regarding friendship, loyalty, camaraderie, and non-abandonment among young people facing the possibility of death. This occurs with respect to group sociability, which is called into question when young people perceive that consumption and individual interests are put before relations among peers. Lastly, this

experience leads to a need in other young people to recognize their own pain, in that the loss of a friend is related to their own biographical reconstruction and to the circuits of sociability that they shared with the deceased. Personal trajectories may become social trajectories by appealing to memories that traverse socialization groups.[43] Young people compare themselves to their deceased friends and achieve mutual recognition in the experience of shared pain and in sociabilities that experience violence and death, expressed in the recurrent phrase *you used to see death from the outside, but now it hits close to you*. This mourning processes becomes engraved into biographies as an experience of social vulnerability, consisting of the recognition of bodily vulnerability with respect to others.[17] This can lead actors to begin taking action to care for themselves and others, by seeking to separate themselves from the sociabilities that encourage violence and death in favor of others. On the contrary, *built-up anger* can transform pain into resentment, and lead to a denial of bodily vulnerability causing an escalation of violence following a death. In this way, feelings of resentment can echo back to the experience of demanding recognition of hierarchical inequality among youth, causing them to seek a new opportunity to dismiss the bodily experience of insecurity.[17]

What is paradoxical in relation to these three dimensions of recognition are the different possibilities for appeals to memory in actors' biographies in regards to the naturalization of events that led to the experience. Actors construct identities based on an otherness amongst themselves, which they utilize to confront and humiliate each other through violence and death, disputing over material and symbolic consumption objects. These, in turn, permit them to disconnect themselves from common origins and social trajectories which socialize them as equals.

For the impasse in meaning of actors' experiences to find other outlets and inspire a broader social critique, it is necessary for memory and pain to be explicitly related to sociabilities and interactions in public space in the here and now. It is possible to trace an

itinerary of socio-territorial interventions with families and young people close to the deceased taking pain and bodily experiences as a starting point, in which actors' experiences can be translated to public spaces within the neighborhoods. This is accomplished in two ways: first, by hanging images of the memory of deceased young people, they attempt to dispute community judgements that seek to eliminate such memory; and, second, it promotes expression and the sharing of pain within similar sociabilities with other social actors and institutions. In this sense, the social production and installation of portraits, photographs, and audiovisual material can prove to be beneficial when accompanying the experience of actors.[44]

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