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ARTICLE

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Armoured with morality: Parental perspectives on moral education in the violent context of Brazilian slums

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ABSTRACT
This article describes the goals, practices and underlying values of parents raising children in the violent context of Brazilian slums. The results show that mothers act within a multivocal moral framework, combining 'street cultural logic' with 'middle-class' perspectives. Survival and a strong sense of morality are taught through both adaptation to and dissociation from the neighbourhood context. The analyses challenge the idea of a homogeneous 'street' culture in these communities and show that various cultural repertoires and multiple interconnected perspectives on morality are cultivated in response to violence. The study provides ways to interpret parental strategies to organise a moral counter-offensive as a lever for change.

KEYWORDS
Disadvantaged communities; moral education; violence; parenting values; street culture

Over the past 25 years, equity gaps between nations have narrowed, but disparities between communities have often persisted (UNICEF, 2016). In disadvantaged communities, violence and poverty pose great challenges to both children and their caregivers and call for adequate strategies to cope with insecurity and deprivation. Such circumstances might have consequences for parenting in general and moral education in particular. This paper intends to analyse parenting repertoires in disadvantaged communities by exploring parental goals, practices, underlying values and related virtues, and examines how they constitute a framework for moral education in response to the local context.

Cultural repertoires in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Academics from various disciplines have attempted to understand the lifestyles and belief systems predominating in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These studies have resulted in concepts such as 'oppositional culture' and 'street culture' to explain cultural repertoires often considered deviant and morally wanting by dominant society. Phenomena such as single motherhood, loose sexual ethics and dealing in contraband or other illegitimate sources of income, are in public opinion typically associated with disadvantaged communities and labelled as an inherent part of their 'culture'. Such practices are considered deviations from conventional norms and are deemed inappropriate from a middle-class perspective on good citizenship. Consequently, disadvantaged neighbourhoods and their

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marginalised populations are often associated with immorality (e.g. delinquency, antisocial behaviour). These judgements imply that the dominant society and poor urban communities have opposing value systems. From such a viewpoint, dominant society and its middle-class cultural practices are regarded as morally correct, while disadvantaged communities and their cultural practices are labelled as morally wanting (Cohen, 2004; Dixon-Román, 2014; Freire, 2008).

Divergent from conventional norms, street cultural repertoires in poor neighbourhoods are also presented as a deliberate act of resistance. In a recent work on the relationship between poverty, youth and crime, Ilan (2015) presents an overview of the concept of street culture, defining it as 'the values, dispositions, practices and styles associated with particular sections of disadvantaged urban populations' (p. 8). According to Ilan, street culture shares particular principles around the globe, originating from the effects of exclusion. Street culture is generally referred to as a normative system in which violence is viewed as an appropriate means to resolve interpersonal discordance and essential for maintaining a 'tough' reputation (Anderson, 1999). As such, street culture is considered to redefine expectations of personal conduct, making it inconsistent or even bringing it into conflict with conventional culture (Berg, Stewart, Schreck, & Simons, 2012).

However, such a rigid division between middle-class and disadvantaged communities is contested by Ginzburg's (2013) elaborate work on the intricate relationship between hegemonic and popular culture. He proposes that the culture of dominant and subordinated classes are opposed, while simultaneously engaged in a process of 'constant circularity', continuously exchanging cultural elements. Instead of functioning in isolation, they develop in each other's presence. This circularity, he argues, implies a heterogeneity within both cultures, creating a variety of cultural scripts and positions instead of a univocal, homogeneous entity. When relating Ginzburg's ideas to moral education, his perspective ties in with Swartz's (2010) concept of a moral ecology of 'interconnecting systems, complex antinomies, diverse codes, multiple positioning, discordant processes and competing influences, over time and on multiple levels' (p. 305).

If we apply such a perspective to education, moral teaching and learning can be considered a dynamic process characterised by tensions, deliberations and reconstructed meanings in the context of a continuously changing environment (Garland Reed, 2011). This perspective implies both teaching and learning morality are part of a 'constant circularity' involving multiple positions and perspectives. For instance, research on moral education practices in Chinese working-class families suggests their multidimensional nature (Wang, 2017; Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2012). These studies found that discrepancies in parents' moral teachings were related to parents' consideration for situational appropriateness of moral behaviour. Combining Ginzburg's theory with these insights might enrich our understanding of the dynamics in parental moral education and their relationship to the complexities of the environmental context.

Ginzburg's theory also explains why several studies found strong support for 'middle-class' views on morality in disadvantaged communities within domains such as education, work and social life (e.g. Carter, 2005; Young, 2004). In addition, Harding (2011) demonstrated that disadvantaged neighbourhoods encompass a greater heterogeneity in cultural orientations than more affluent areas. He argues that, particularly for youth, the confrontation with multiple cultural models creates ambiguity concerning

how to behave. Residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, rather than being disconnected from dominant society, seem exposed to various, at times contradictory, cultural models. Such a context might pose challenges to the upbringing of youth, since it diffuses the distinction between morally 'good' and 'bad'.

Parenting as a situated cultural practice

The line between 'good' and 'bad' in a risky environment may in actual fact be quite tenuous. For example, although the majority of the population in disadvantaged neighbourhoods may prefer peaceful modes of interaction (Harding, 2010), there is evidence that parents teach their children to adopt a 'code' of aggression, at least superficially, in order to prevent victimisation (Anderson, 1999; Mullins, 2013). These parents are often considered by outsiders as irresponsible or incompetent, because they fail to impart certain forms of morality to their offspring and foster antisocial behaviour. Such a view is supported by studies that indicate parenting styles as the prime cause of 'dysfunctional' child development in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (see, for an overview, Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). These studies mostly overlook the potential adaptive value of parental repertoires in their context.

In contrast, Gillies (2008) provides evidence that parents from disadvantaged communities are guided by a strong moral framework in their childrearing practices, although this diverges in some aspects from middle-class educational values. He shows how working-class parents in the UK wield an 'alternative moral logic' that concentrates on care and protection, originating from their lived conviction that the external world is dangerous. Instead of teaching their children skills in reasoning and negotiation—as preferred in middle-class families—these parents focus on equipping their children with the abilities to deal with instability, injustice and hardship. In a profound ethnographic work on urban poverty and violence in Brazilian slums, Goldstein (2003) found a similar 'survivalist ethos' among the poor working class. In a context with many hazards and limited control, middle-class parenting, characterised by democratic decision-making, might not only be less relevant but can even be considered harmful or at least risky. It has been argued that in these circumstances an authoritarian parenting style might be more adaptive and is often believed to function as a buffer against deviant peers and neighbourhood violence (Furstenberg et al., 1993; Kriesberg, 1970; Tolan, Sherrod, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2004). Likewise, Goldstein (2003) also found that harsh parenting was used as a strategy to discourage children from gang involvement. Such marked deviant parenting practices might actually be part of a dedicated moral parental discipline. Dixon-Román (2014) considers 'deviant' cultural practices as non-dominant forms of cultural capital, containing meaningful 'pedagogical' resources in the context of marginalised communities.

The heterogeneity of contradictory cultural models on the one hand, and contextual demands related to restrictive and street cultural parenting practices on the other, presumably have consequences for parents' perspectives on moral education and choices required to raise their children. According to Ginzburg (in Aguirre Rojas, 2008), the exchange between hegemonic and subaltern cultures does not involve a passive acceptance of hegemonic culture by subordinated classes, but includes a recodification of hegemonic culture, 'customising' certain elements to fit the specific context. This implies

an opening for individual agency and empowerment, offering people the possibility of navigating between various cultural repertoires and re-appropriating 'inherited' cultural practices and the underlying moral values. A similar process of appropriating sets of beliefs has been found by scholars studying urban disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Rio de Janeiro (Cunha, 2018; Steele, 2011). Both ethnographers show how moral principles related to religion are adapted to fit the challenging circumstances of Brazilian slums. Steele (2011) describes how traditional moral codes on teen pregnancy are loosened to fit the context of opposition to abortion and valorisation of motherhood in communities characterised by violence and a competitive religious marketplace; while Cunha (2018) shows how urban popular culture is updated with Pentecostal moral principles and symbolism, producing new ways of coexistence representing a struggle between good and evil.

This study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of parental repertoires in disadvantaged communities heavily marked by violence, since to our knowledge there is little empirical evidence on the moral reasoning of parents in violent contexts. The central question addressed in this paper is how communities afflicted by poverty and violence deal with the moral socialisation of youth. Which educational goals do parents pursue? How do they teach their children about morality? Answers to these questions are explored using interview data from an ethnographic study conducted in three communities in the slums of Salvador, Brazil. Considering its high degree of segregation, the Brazilian context might prove informative for societies facing an increasing gap between various population groups.

Study setting

Salvador, capital of the north-eastern state of Bahia, had a population of nearly three million people in 2016 (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2016). During colonial times, the city thrived on the export of sugar, coffee and tobacco, harvested by a slave workforce (Schwartz, 1987). Salvador's history is reflected in its current racial composition: according to a census in 2000, 75.2% of the population identified themselves as 'black' or 'mixed race' (Carvalho & Pereira, 2008).

Salvador is characterised by high social inequality and is comprised of neighbourhoods with diametrically opposed standards of living (Carvalho & Pereira, 2008). Almost one third of the city's population lives in slum areas known as *favelas* (IBGE, 2012). The income per capita in the metropolitan area of Salvador was 874 reais per month in 2010 (approximately USD 275). Although the UNDP poverty rate declined from 27.6% in 2000 to 13.2% in 2010, the Gini coefficient to measure inequality remained remarkably high (0.64 and 0.62 respectively) (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2013).[1]

Salvador is relatively well known for its high crime rates, particularly regarding violent offences. In 2015, Salvador had a homicide rate of 45.9 per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to an average rate of 28.8 for state capitals (FBSP, 2016). Violent offences, and homicide in particular, mostly occur in the city's *favelas* (Espinheira, 2001). The Secretary of Public Security indicates that almost 70% of incidents involving excessive violence are related to drugs (Conselho Nacional do Ministerio Público [CNMP], 2013).

The relationship between violence and drugs is reflected in the perception of drugs as highly problematic among slum residents. Goldstein (2003) for example outlined that in

the community that she studied, consumption of drugs was considered a great risk because it required contact with drug trafficking gangs and thus meant endangering oneself and their family.

Method

Data for this study was collected among mothers of pupils from three community preschools in three *favelas* in Salvador. It concerns two adjacent neighbourhoods on the city's outskirts and one in a more central area. All data was collected by the first author in Portuguese during 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork, which consisted of daily participation in the community preschools and taking part in the family life of several guest families.

Ethnographic research is characterised by a dynamic process of searching for an equilibrium between inclusion and exclusion. The researcher—being a white European, highly educated, non-native speaker—arrived as an outsider. The distinct realities of ethnographer and participants might have been a limitation but also had advantages, as participants were more inclined to explain their beliefs because of the ethnographer's presumed ignorance. Meanwhile, participation in everyday life and shared characteristics such as being female contributed to developing a mutual understanding.

Although various types of *ethnographic data* (Blommaert & Dong, 2010) were gathered (e.g. field notes, photographs, recordings), in this paper we concentrate on semi-structured interviews held with mothers to explore their perspectives on the topics of educational goals and values, parenting strategies, and the neighbourhood context. Examples of interview questions are listed in Table 1. Informed consent was obtained in all cases and mothers who agreed to participate were carefully informed about the purpose of the study and their right to quit at any time. They were invited to take part in an individual interview conducted at the preschools. To minimise intrusiveness, only audio recording was used.

Participants

Participants were female caregivers (n = 26) of pupils from the preschools. At the time of interview they were the primary caregivers of at least one biological child, except for one grandmother who was raising the daughter of a deceased son as if she was her own. All caregivers will be referred to as 'mothers'.

The mean age of the mothers was 32 years, with the youngest 19 and the oldest 44. Approximately half were married (n = 12) and the remainder were raising their children as a single mother (n = 14). In the majority of the single mother households, there was no or limited contact with the children's father(s). Half of the married mothers had older children from previous relationships and several mothers raised children who were not biologically their own. On average, the mothers had 2 to 3 biological children, with a range between 1 and 5 children.

The majority of the mothers had primary education level or less. Six mothers reported secondary school as their highest level of education and four mothers had completed vocational education. Most were unemployed at the time of interview (n = 17). One mother had a fulltime formal job. Several mothers were running small-scale informal businesses,

Table 1. Examples of interview questions.

PART A—Demographics
- Where were you born and where did you grow up?
- What is your family composition? Who do you share a house with?

PART B—Parenting goals and practices
- What do you find important in your child's education?
- I would like to learn more about the values parents transmit to their children. By values I mean moral values, or fundamental ideals about what is important in life, that gives direction to people's behaviour. Which values do you find important in your child's education? Which values do you think are not important or wrong and would you prefer not to transmit to your child?
- In relation to the values you believe are important, why do you find this value important? Can you give an example of how you teach this value to your child? Does your child learn this value at other places than at home?
- What rules do you have at home?
- Which type of behaviour do you try to encourage/discourage in your child? How do you encourage/discourage this behaviour?

PART C—Perception of school environment[a]

PART D—Perception of neighbourhood environment
- How do you like living in this neighbourhood?
- What kind of behaviour do children learn in the streets?
- Which rules apply to your child in the streets?
- Which values in your opinion are most relevant to the streets?
- Do you think the neighbourhood is a safe environment for your child? Why or why not?
- Does the presence of gangs in the streets affect the children in this neighbourhood? Does it impact the education of your child? If yes, in what way?
- Is the street environment different from the home environment? In what way?
- Which skills or capabilities do parents need to raise a child in this neighbourhood?

[a]Part C of the interview has not been incorporated in the analysis of the results discussed in the current paper.

such as selling lottery tickets or household items. A few mothers had informal jobs—as a nanny or a manicurist.

On average, the mothers had been resident in the neighbourhood for 22 years. Half had been born and raised in the community (n = 13), while those who grew up elsewhere generally had been living in the community for over ten years. Some mothers grew up in other Salvador slum areas or in towns nearby. Many had moved several times between and within neighbourhoods and cities. Reasons for migration were changes in relationships, search for employment or, when experienced during childhood, the death or 'elimination' of a parent.[2]

Procedure

All recorded interviews were transcribed by the first author and four local research assistants. Transcripts were checked against the audio recordings for accuracy. The transcripts and field notes were entered into NVivo 11 for analysis. Elements of a grounded theory approach to data coding were applied (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), using both inductive and deductive codes, with the main analytical focus on 'deviant' and 'conventional' cultural practices and values. The analysis paid special attention to how mothers endorse or resist these practices and values, potential contrasts in their discourse and how they construct a sense of morality in relation to the violent neighbourhood context. The analytical framework is presented in Table 2 and consists of two main research questions, each encompassing several questions for analysis.

Using this framework and grounded theory principles as a starting point, a comprehensive multi-phased process of thematic analysis was employed, as described in detail by Braun and Clarke (2006). Themes addressed in participants' statements

Table 2. Research questions and related questions for analysis.

1. How do mothers describe their parenting goals, practices and underlying values and how do they relate these to the violent neighbourhood context?

- What do mothers find important in parenting and why?
- How do they describe their parenting goals and the practices they use to achieve these?
- What values do mothers wish to impart to their children and why?
- What child behaviour is considered 'good' and 'bad'?
- What parenting practices are considered 'good' and 'bad'?
- Do mothers seek support from others in the general and moral education of their children?
- How do mothers reflect on the violent neighbourhood context and its consequences for parenting?
- What role does perceived danger play in their parenting practices?
- How do mothers reflect on the pedagogical relevance of their parenting practices in the neighbourhood context?

2. Do mothers experience multiple value systems and, if so, how do they navigate between them?

- Do mothers experience a difference between moral standards in dominant society and in their neighbourhood context?
- Do mothers experience tension between value systems in various contexts within the neighbourhood (home, school, street, other environments)?
- How do they reflect on multiple value systems and their consequences for parenting practices?

were identified and coded into categories by two primary coders with expertise in qualitative research methods. A coding tree was developed based on the first three interviews and progressively modified as subsequent transcripts were analysed. During the coding process, themes were checked for internal coherence, consistency and distinctiveness and their validity in relation to the original dataset.

Results

Morality in an 'immoral' environment

When asked what they found important in the education of their children, almost all mothers, regardless of their backgrounds, immediately introduced morality and the distinction between good and bad as central issues. They declared that raising their children to be 'good people' was their principal aim. When invited to reflect on the values they wished to impart to their children, they motivated their choices in light of behavioural norms in the neighbourhood which they considered 'immoral'. As such, they positioned their focus on teaching morally correct behaviour explicitly as a counterpoise to impure elements of the environmental context, stressing the importance of offering their children a contrasting perspective on how to act. For example, three-quarters of the mothers regarded 'honesty' as a central hallmark of a 'good person'. Honesty was seen as an overarching concept that included speaking the truth, but above all meant no 'thieving'. The mothers deemed it extremely important to explain to their children that, although the neighbourhood environment may teach them otherwise, stealing is forbidden. Jacira, a 40-year-old mother, described how she teaches her 6-year-old to be honest:

> 'And mine [her son], when we go some place, I told him: 'Everything here, it is not yours, it's someone else's, you cannot touch nothing, you cannot take anything'. 'My name is not on it right, mum?'. 'No way. If it were mine it would have been written here, "Jacira". It's from Jacira for Mateus. And then you could. But if it's not the case, you ask, whose is this?' 'It's mine'. Also, whatever I find in his backpack, I open his backpack and look: 'Whose is this dear?'. 'Ah mum, I found it over there'. 'Let's go there and put it back on the same spot where you found it'.'

In this extract, Jacira emphasises the importance of, and obviously took pride in, teaching her child that stealing is wrong. In doing so, she positioned herself against her description of the neighbourhood context, in which these values she argued are not shared by all residents.

Besides honesty, the mothers considered politeness an important aspect of a good person and contrasted it with 'uncivilised' and 'immoral' behaviour present in the neighbourhood. Being polite means greeting other people, saying 'thank you' and 'excuse me' and not using abusive language. These might seem trivialities but the mothers strongly linked them with staying on the right track and refraining from involvement in delinquency or sexually immoral behaviour. The emphasis mothers placed on raising their children as 'good' people through imparting values such as honesty and politeness was presented as a moral counteroffensive against the neighbourhood context of 'immorality'. As Jacira stated: 'When you live in a certain *ambiente* [environment], it doesn't mean that you have to get involved in bad things'.

Survival and self-preservation

Obviously distinct from their focus on decency the mothers' accounts reveal safety as another principal aim of their parenting efforts. They emphasised values aimed at 'survival', such as vigilance and combativeness. The mothers believed that people should be tough, meaning that one should never give up and have the strength to endure hardship. They found it important that their children learned to persevere despite adversity. As Lisandra, a 35-year-old single mother explained:

> 'Since I have never gained anything easily in life, that is what I pass on to them, you know. Today, nothing comes easy, I always tell them this. If you give up, it will only get worse. You cannot give up. However difficult life might be, you can never give up.'

This focus on survival is also reflected in the importance they attached to 'vigilance'. They expressed the essential importance of teaching their children to be alert at all times, paying attention to their surroundings. The mothers deemed this important because, as they said, the streets are unpredictable; violent events might happen unexpectedly, such as a shooting, a fight or a mugging. Furthermore, they found vigilance fundamental in relationships with others: people are not to be trusted. This line of thought is conveyed by Vanessa (38 years):

> 'I look at *alerta* [alertness] like this: like attentive and vigilant, because of the place where I live, you know. So there are things that I say to my sons: 'Always be watchful, always be alert, never fall for nothing, if someone calls you "Take this here to try, to sniff", don't go, stay alert'.'

This mother, as well as the others, strongly connects the importance of teaching children vigilance to the dangers she perceives in the neighbourhood. Although they demonstrated great concern for their children's safety due to various hazards such as speeding motorcycles and unfenced sinkholes or cliffs, they mostly referred to gang-related violence. The mothers articulated a deep anxiety about their children getting caught in the crossfire, either literally, by being killed by a 'stray bullet', or indirectly, through being lured into gang life.

While their focus on imparting 'good' morals was positioned as an act of opposition towards the 'bad' morals in the neighbourhood environment, their focus on survival was presented as an adaptive strategy for protecting oneself against that environment. Both can be considered modifying strategies, developed as an adaptation to the context as well as a means to counter it. However, they also reflect the ambiguity of what can be considered 'good' and 'bad' and how these conceptions of good and bad are positioned in moral education. This is further illustrated by the mothers' approach to violence as outlined below.

The dialectics of violence

The mothers thus appeared to focus on two principal goals: being a good person and staying safe. In some respects, their aim to impart a strong sense of integrity and good manners interfered with their aim to teach survival skills. This conflict is reflected in the ambiguity regarding violence. For example, despite the widespread condemnation of parents who instruct their children to retaliate, several mothers demonstrated an ambivalent attitude as to whether violence is an acceptable way to defend oneself. In the following fragment, Lisandra obviously struggles with her son's aggression towards peers, condemning and punishing him for it, while at the same time downplaying and justifying his behaviour:

> 'There are mothers (...) who encourage that if a classmate hits, hit back. I think this is a bad influence, right, that we order that child to do this, but many of them say this (...) Daniel is 7 years old but he fights a lot in school. I received many complaints about him, really many. Because he beats his classmates, and he has a deficiency in his eye so they call him 'Eye something, where is your eye?', they call him *cabeção* [blockhead], *orelhudo* [chump], and he does not accept provocation and so he goes and beats them. And so I always receive many complaints about him (...) there are mothers who even threatened me. I condone it, you know, because they are children's things. We talk about it. Me, my dear, I talk a lot with Daniel. I talk to him, punish him, sometimes I even give him a *chinelada* [strike with flip-flop], some *cintadas* [blows with belt] but it's pointless. Daniel, only God himself. His development is difficult.'

Lisandra described the ambivalence towards violence in the community in many ways. Violent child behaviour is obviously perceived as problematic, while at the same time it is rationalised as 'children's things'. Furthermore, threatening with or using violence is presented as a solution to conflict for both children and adults. The dilemma of allowing or prohibiting violent child behaviour and utilising or refraining from violence as a parent are reflected in this mother's references to the difficulty of parenting. Such an internal struggle reveals the friction between the two goals of teaching children 'survival' skills and raising them as 'good people'. It also reflects how mothers navigate between various cultural scripts, from disapproval to tolerance and utilisation of violence.

Other mothers stated to reject aggressive child behaviour to all intents and purposes, despite their understanding of its origins. They explicitly stated trying to teach their children to refrain from aggression and to circumvent situations likely to result in violence. For example, Sílvia (42 years) explained how she teaches her 17-year-old son to respond calm and controlled to provocation:

> 'My son, he is a good boy, but I think due to his age, he does not accept provocation. And so I tell him there are things that you need to hear and ignore, just let it go. Right, and then something is up and he has to act like: "Ah, because this and this, and I don't know what" {raising her voice}. And I told him, because some guy looked at him and he didn't like it, I said: "My son, there is no harm in looking, let him keep looking. Accept it." Sometimes there are things that we see that we don't like, but when we don't accept it . . . we have to ignore it and let it go.'

Regardless of her understanding for his urge to 'react', Sílvia finds it important to teach her son to control himself and disregard what she considers a relatively harmless affront. Her silence after saying 'when we don't accept it', accompanied with a well-meant look, seemed to imply that answering a provocation in a combative manner might lead to a problematic situation. Despite her choice for a non-aggressive solution by avoiding conflict, her main concern seems to be the same as Lisandra's: protecting her son from harm and teaching him how to 'armour' himself against potentially violent situations.

Parenting practices in a violent and immoral context

Besides the reflections on parenting goals, the parenting morale of these mothers was also constituted by their ideas about what parents should and should not do to raise their children as decent citizens and keep them safe. The majority of the mothers expressed a strong belief in the power and responsibility of parents to prevent negative influences in the neighbourhood from gaining hold of their children. A 32-year-old mother stated this conviction in highly expressive terms:

> 'Who wants to, fights and succeeds. I'm not saying it's easy. It's no fairy tale, it's no soap series, it's no animated movie. It's difficult. It's a tough struggle, to be a parent. (...) Raising a child is a daily struggle. You don't kill one lion a day, no, you kill one lion, one cobra, you kill an entire fauna. But you will succeed. It's difficult but you will succeed.'

In addition to her assured sense of agency, this excerpt also reveals that parenthood is conceived as an arduous task. The mothers were particularly concerned about losing control and therefore emphasised the need to be strict. The two above-mentioned goals (staying safe and being a good person) were reflected in rather controlling parenting strategies directed at keeping bad influences out and creating an alternative, safe community with high moral standards. Their approach was characterised by restriction and confinement as well as creative circumvention, and consisted of several parenting practices, which will be further outlined below.

Exercising authority

The mothers mentioned using reinforcement strategies to exercise their authority, such as rewarding positive behaviour, punishment by withdrawing privileges and applying 'time out' periods, for example using a 'naughty chair'. Furthermore, several mothers reported physical punishment or the threat of it as a strategy to enforce obedience and considered other methods insufficient. As Jacira explained:

> 'They learn bad things in the streets. For example, mine [my son] is playing, he has some relatives, God have mercy, I don't let him [play with them], no way. Swearing all the time, it's horrible. So I tell him: 'if you swear, I will stick your eyes out and put them in your ears. Because then you will not hear it and will not see it'. So he got scared. 'And

> something else, I will cut your tongue so you won't be able to speak at all'. But I would never do something like that. But you have to make them fear something.'

Jacira presented the threat of excessive physical punishment as a strategy to maintain authority over her son, instead of 'losing' him to what she defined as the immorality of the streets. The mothers clearly differentiated between physical punishment as a corrective strategy and domestic violence, involving excessive force and cruelty. As Fábricia, 36 years old and raising two daughters with her husband, explained: 'What's not normal is to injure your child, right. Get to the point that you draw blood from your child, tie up your child. That's a more severe thing'.

Whether making use of physical punishment or not, most mothers described themselves as controlling and strict. Being tough and uncompromising was considered commendable and they reflected upon harsh parenting as an expression of engagement and love, which prevented their children from going off the rails.

Close monitoring

The mothers expressed the belief that parents must be very alert to the potential corruption of their children and that supervision prevents them from adopting 'immoral' norms and slipping into delinquency under the influence of others. Such monitoring meant demanding to be informed about how their children spend their time and with whom, as well as inspecting their bags, and at times even following them to make sure they have not lied about where they are going. A 40-year-old mother described how she checked her teenage son's backpack:

> 'But I tell them straight, if you have whatever type of backpack, I look at everything that's inside. When he comes home (...) I look at everything. He says: 'Oh mum, there is nothing in there'. I don't even want to know what I'm looking at, it's only stinky shoes, only dirty socks.'

This same mother explained how she closely monitored her son by following him in the streets:

> 'I let him go ahead, after 5 minutes I go after him, I go following, he goes that way and I go this way, hiding myself. When I arrive there, he enters the church. Because many lie to their mothers you know. 'I am going to this place', and they go somewhere else. Like a nephew of mine, I am sad about him because he has the same age as my son. Today he is in a *boca* [crack house] and my son is in church. Thank God.'

The mothers repeatedly stated that parents should always question whether their children are telling the truth. Such distrust was based on their anxiety about the surrounding social world's destructive influence. This was also how one mother justified following her son:

> 'They might be called to do something and afterwards they are *lá dentro envolvido* [involved, inside], without me even knowing of nothing. I mean, the mother is always the last to know. Everyone knew about it, and us mothers are the last to know.'

In this extract, she clarified her wariness, clearly expressing her fear of experiencing the fate of so many mothers in the community, whose children end up involved in gang life. Despite, or perhaps because of, this anxiety, many mothers clearly judged other parents who do not

strictly monitor their children. They regarded permissive parenting practices as extremely harmful and as a manifestation of carelessness. Joselina, a 32-year-old recently divorced mother of five children, explained why it is so important to monitor one's children:

> 'Today many [children] at the preschool come home with a pencil, they [the parents] do not even try to find out whose [pencil] it is. In my case, if he turns up with a pencil or whatever, I want to know who gave it to him, I go and ask all that, you know. Us parents have to check this out always, because afterwards if it turns into things that are no good, people will say: 'The mother is to blame, it's the mother who did that, the mother did not teach them about right and wrong', you know. So that's why I make a fuss. Because I have three boys and two girls, and today we know that to enter the world of crime it doesn't matter if they're male or female, they enter just the same.'

This mother speaks of a 'slippery slope' of crime, starting with stealing pencils at preschool, and the responsibility of parents to intervene. The mothers emphatically distanced themselves from parents who fail to do so, emphasising the importance of being strict and keeping tabs on your children at all times. Parents who let their children play outside without monitoring them are labelled irresponsible and negligent. The mothers deemed them preoccupied with their own comfort and convenience. Taking such a perspective, they seemed to align themselves with the judgemental position of the dominant discourse in Brazilian society that blames *favela* residents for the hardships they are facing, in particular as related to the issue of violence. Apparently, the mothers adopted this stigma while simultaneously opposing it by dissociating themselves from 'the other parents' in their community. Most of them voiced a very resolute stance in this regard, adamant about their 'verdict' and refusing to feel sympathy towards these parents. The recognition of parenthood as an extremely difficult responsibility looked like the only moderation of their determined judgement. A few mothers additionally stated that in some cases children follow the wrong 'path' by their own choice: parents tried everything they could but their child chose to be disobedient and to enter the world of crime. Dolores, a 29-year-old single mother made a clear distinction between these two options:

> 'There are some classmates at school of whom I believe their parents are not really interested in passing along what's right. Or it comes from that child himself and the parent is unable to work on it.'

Limitation of social contacts and creating safe spaces

Close monitoring and restrictive parenting were also applied in the selection and limitation of social contacts. Mothers were exceptionally transparent about their preference for preventing their children from developing strong friendships. They deliberately limited and meticulously regulated their children's peer relationships. This strategy is clearly conveyed in the response of Claudiana, a 36-year-old mother raising two sons as a single parent, when asked what she avoids imparting to her children:

> 'Too much friendship I don't like. Children very close together I don't like. To play I have to be present. Because children are not easy. (...) Because, look, there are children who lie. They put things in the heads of others. The other day I overheard a friend of his saying: 'Let's go man, are you a loser? Let's go man, your mother will not know'. (...) I went to this boy's mother and said, 'I don't want your son hanging out with mine'.'

The mothers' view of the social world surrounding their family as unreliable and treacherous is an important motivation for limiting and strictly monitoring the social network. Restriction of social relationships, therefore, also served to teach children that they cannot rely on other people. In the following excerpt, Claudiana explained:

> 'He sees how I am on my own, I walk alone, it's just me and God, me alone. He knows that. 'Mum, why don't you hang with nobody?' I tell him: 'Because the strong always prevail over the weak'. Because if there were 25 boys playing, everybody is going to run and leave you alone in the hole. And who is going to get you out? Nobody.'

In an exception to such isolationism, the mothers had formed close relationships with a few carefully selected people in whom they confided. They encouraged a strong bond between these people and their children. Likewise, many mothers indicated investing in the establishment of an intimate connection between their children as siblings. They created a small but tight and trustworthy network around themselves and their children.

Due to the perceived danger of the street environment, which mothers described both in terms of physical threats and behavioural influence, all of them sought to create safe spaces that provided their children with the 'right' values. In this effort, the mothers applied restrictive measures; for example, by literally locking their children inside the house. However, to expand their horizons, the mothers also sought other safe zones, such as leisure activities provided by community organisations. The mothers explained that these activities keep the children off the streets, 'distract their minds' and offer safe, supervised surroundings, providing alternative moralities to those they might otherwise experience on the streets. The same characteristics are attributed to catechism groups and church in general. Many mothers believed the environment of 'the church' to provide the 'right' moral teachings and to function as a buffer for entering the drugs scene. This is clearly stated by Luiza (42 years):

> 'When I go to church I bring them with me. In order for them to stay on the right track. (...) Thank God my daughter does not involve herself with these things, no drugs at all. She likes to party, the oldest, but thank God these days she is already quitting with that. She is going to church, so for me, it's good.'

Church is presented as a favourable environment and Luiza, like most mothers, perceived religion and attending church in particular as an effective instrument for achieving her goal to teach good morals while providing protection from the world of crime. As such, religious environments played a central role in the mothers' attempts to create safe and morally 'approved' educational spaces.

A multivocal framework for moral education?

To summarise and conclude this result section, the narratives of these mothers can be interpreted as revealing a strong, multivocal moral framework related to their two principal parental goals: teaching 'survival' skills and raising 'good people'. Firstly, their parenting was directed at the organisation of a moral counteroffensive in response to the perceived immorality of the streets, articulating a strong feeling of responsibility for teaching their children right from wrong. Secondly, their parenting focused on adaptation to the contextual demands of their surroundings, instead of opposing and

dissociating themselves from their neighbourhoods. Sometimes these multiple goals collided and caused conflict, as was demonstrated by some mothers' ambivalent attitude towards violence and aggression. Such friction was reflected in contradictory perspectives on the function of violence, in particular regarding conflict solution. Such a multivocality in their approach to the moral education of their children can be considered an expression of Ginzburg's (2013) circularity, constantly modifying cultural elements to fit the local context.

Their everyday experiences with violence run as a common thread through their accounts of parenting. Despite the apparent lack of control over the violent context, the results show that the mothers' choices are determined as much by the limitations as by the possibilities the context offers. Notwithstanding the fact that they view parenthood as an arduous task, the mothers clearly expressed a sense of agency with respect to parenting and its outcomes. For example, they considered controlling practices such as limiting social contacts and close monitoring essential to keep their children on an honourable path. A failure to strictly supervise children was deemed irresponsible, and laissez-faire parenting practices were strongly condemned. In addition to such restrictive parenting, which might lead to a certain degree of isolation, the mothers directed their efforts towards creating alternative sub-communities with high moral standards. These function as safe spaces, regulated by trusted networks, which allow children to grow up with a different moral perspective. The stark contrast between 'good' and 'bad' delineated by the mothers, might very well offer the much needed 'grip' while surrounded by a street environment that blurs the dividing line; an environment they interpreted as 'no good' and threatening their children's physical safety as well as their moral socialisation.

Discussion

This paper intended to provide insight into the pedagogical relevance of certain parenting practices which, although sometimes considered deviant or harmful from a middle-class perspective, might be highly adaptive in a context of conflict and violence. In line with Gillies's (2008) study on the moral framework of working-class parents in the UK, our analyses suggest that parental repertoires in *favelas* in Salvador have a distinct logic directly related to the situated context of risks that the mothers experience in their neighbourhood. The narratives of the mothers involved in the study revealed a multivocal moral framework consisting of educational goals, values and related virtues that combine 'street cultural logic' with 'middle-class' perspectives.

Mothers used strategies to cultivate a certain morality, partly based on middle-class customs, to resist and distance themselves and their children from the neighbourhood context. Simultaneously, they used and taught their children strategies usually associated with 'street culture' in order to 'survive'. They educated their children to protect themselves from the dangerous outside world by teaching them its rules, while also imparting that they have to dissociate themselves from that world. In other words, our analyses challenge the idea of a homogeneous 'oppositional' or 'street' culture in these communities and support the notion that various cultural repertoires are combined in an adaptive response to the violent context. Alternating between these repertoires, the mothers appeared to navigate between the daily reality of violence and the need to endure it, and their efforts to transform that reality by raising good people. As such, they did not passively accept hegemonic or

'middle-class' cultural repertoires, nor did they submit indifferently to their neighbourhood circumstances. Rather, they creatively designed a patchwork of various strategies that fitted their contexts but simultaneously contributed to the—at least partial—reconstruction of the reality their children were growing up in. These results address the context-specific 'customised' dynamics of cultural parenting scripts, as outlined in the ideas of Ginzburg (2013), and underline the perspective of Swartz (2010) and Garland Reed (2011) on cultivating morality as a dynamic process involving multiple positioning and dialectical tensions.

We would like to conclude by considering some potential implications for social programmes directed at parents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Although an ambivalent attitude towards aggression presumably reinforces a spiral of violence, several mothers clearly regarded aggressive behaviour as a necessary evil to keep their children from harm. Teaching these mothers to exclude aggression altogether might therefore not fall on fertile ground, nor offer a solution. Appealing to their ambition to raise good people by strengthening their strategies to organise a moral counteroffensive might prove a more useful lever for change. Establishing trustworthy social networks consisting of carefully selected people and spaces, played a key role in their efforts. Social programmes directed at families in violent neighbourhoods might obtain better results by strengthening such trusted networks and reinforcing their attempts to create educational spaces with alternative standards of morality, instead of remodelling parenting practices from a perspective that condemns their ambiguous attitude towards aggression. Moreover, as our analyses show, the mothers' practices can be considered adaptive and functional in the context of violence. Although often deemed harmful in Western settings, in these neighbourhoods elements of authoritarian parenting are accepted as expressions of involved parenthood and seem fundamental to their moral education. We hope to have shown that social programmes directed at these parents would profit from a perspective on morality that takes into account the local dynamics of 'good' and 'bad' in settings of extreme violence.

Notes

1. UNDP Brazil determined the poverty rate in 2010 at a monthly household income per capita of 140 reais.
2. Family members often assume care for one or multiple children when the mother dies or is unable to raise them due to addiction or domestic difficulties, often involving a spouse who is not the biological father of the child.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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