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Abstract

This paper focuses on housing in the periphery of São Paulo city and household strategies in the context of poor urban infrastructure, social vulnerability, precarious employment, and high levels of criminality and violence. Aggregate social and economic trends during the 1990s and in-depth interviews with residents from two settlements in the periphery of São Paulo city provide sociological and ethnographic perspectives on lifestyles generally and, specifically, the importance of build-your-own home strategies and a variety of collective and individual attempts to reduce extreme social vulnerability.

Resumo

Este trabalho enfoca a autoconstrução nos periferias da cidade de São Paulo e as estratégias domésticas de sobrevivência em contextos de falta de infraestrutura urbana, vulnerabilidade social, empregos precários, e altos níveis de criminalidade e violência. As tendências agregadas sociais e econômicas da década de 1990 e entrevistas em profundidade com residentes de duas comunidades da periferia de São Paulo oferecem perspectivas sociológicas e etnográficas sobre o modo de vida em geral, e em específico, a importância de estratégias como a autoconstrução, dentro de um variado leque de tentativas individuais e coletivas de se reduzir a extrema vulnerabilidade social em que vivem.

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Introduction

This paper belongs to a wider theoretical field of investigation into socioeconomic vulnerability (Kowarick: 2002). It concerns the situation of insecurity in which vast sectors of the population find themselves due to serious constraints in terms of employment, healthcare, sanitation, education and other components that characterize the basic social rights of citizens. Among these issues, housing stands out, and not simply in terms of the quality of dwellings. This is important, but there are other aspects that should be taken into consideration, such as location of the dwellings and the services offered in the neighborhood. The distance between home and workplace is crucial because workers usually spend 4 or more hours a day on public transportation to and from work which, when added to 8, 9 or 10 daily working hours, result in a serious physical and mental drain of energy. In addition, workers often use their free time on weekends to build their homes in settlements and poor neighborhoods, thus facing the long and extenuating process of home acquisition which I call urban spoliation (Kowarick :2000). Urban spoliation should be understood as the sum of losses resulting from the absence or precariousness of public services, which together with access to land and housing are necessary to a good quality of life in the cities.

Another aspect, civil vulnerability, refers to people's physical integrity, that is, the fact that large portions of the population are not protected against crime perpetrated by criminals and the police. Violence takes its ultimate form in homicide, but it is also present in holdups or theft, beatings, extortion, and humiliation inflicted on poor individuals. These usually are not counted in the criminal statistics either because people do not trust the legal institutions or they do not report crimes for fear of retaliation. In this sense, I try to show that in recent years violence has increased in poor São Paulo neighborhoods to become a structuring element in people's lives, as it sometimes constitutes a factor in migrating from one place to another when choosing a location for their homes where they can find the security needed to minimize daily risks.²

Ethnographic research reveals these new forms of organization of daily life, spatial mobility, and the hardships involved in building one's own house. Efforts were made to bring the vivid speech of people interviewed in two settlements in the city outskirts into a sociological context. The analysis tries to assess not only the growth and change of poor urban peripheries, but also changes in the downtown areas in

² São Paulo means the city of São Paulo or São Paulo Municipality (SP), while the São Paulo Metropolitan Region (SPMR) may sometimes be called Greater São Paulo area.

order to render a wider picture of some of the major urban changes in Brazilian society, with a focus in the city of São Paulo.

It should be noted that conducting in-depth surveys in poor neighborhoods may entail personal security risks which were unheard of in the 1970's. Currently, one will not be allowed into a settlement in the poor city outskirts without the help of community leaders who live in the area and know the residents well. The reason for this is people's fear of answering certain questions, especially those related to violence because criminals usually live in the neighborhood. Residents sometimes know them and must take care. Researchers are usually instructed to be prudent: never go alone, never at nighttime, to write down interviewees' words during and after interviews, and later on record on a tape recorder opinions on essential topics: housing, employment, unemployment, and finally, people's perceptions or experiences related to violence. An additional instruction: never insist on learning more about "problematic" issues, especially the presence of crime in the daily lives of people, or about situations that cause "pain" like unemployment, the murder of relatives, or even facts that seem "humiliating" to some residents, such as the precariousness of their own dwellings: special survey ethics are necessary to study poverty in the world (Bourdieu: 1993).

Finally, selecting the interviews that make up the ethnographic materials for this paper had to be arbitrary, in the sense that one had to select only some of them and exclude others, in order to build a narrative line that showed the perseverance of those who, despite their vulnerability, seek dignity in their lives (Weil: 1979).

Building one's own house

"Poor urban peripheries ... In the plural. Because there are thousands of *Vilas* and *Jardins*. And because they are very different from one another. Some are more solid in terms of urban development, others look like encampments without basic services. But, in general, all of them have serious problems related to poor sanitation, transportation, and the lack of healthcare services and schools. Typical dwellings are self-built houses, squatter settlements (*favelas*) or small rented rooms at the back of a lot with baths and laundry places shared by residents: it is the slum".(Kowarick: 2000:43)³

It is important to stress that there are always plenty of plots of land for sale in poor, service-deprived neighborhoods, and these are the lots that large numbers of

³ Nabil Georges Bonduki and Raquel Rolnik had already called attention to the social and urban diversity of the São Paulo peripheries back in the late 1970's: (Bonduki & Rolnik, 79).

low-income workers can afford to buy. However, as soon as improvements are made to the areas – pavement, water supply and sewer systems, schools, and public transportation – the value of land rises and, as a consequence, people are forced to leave, either because they cannot afford the rise of rents, or because owners cannot afford the “price of progress”, which means paying higher taxes. Thus, as services start being offered in the areas and the land becomes more expensive, low-income residents need to look for cheaper, service-deprived, faraway places to build their houses (SANTOS, 1980): therefore, a rarefied peripheral urban expansion pattern is reproduced on a large scale that not only increases development costs, but also gives rise to markedly stressful living conditions for those who choose to live in such regions, where a good number people would build their houses.

In addition, other developments in recent years should be noted: the increase in the distances to be traveled, higher transportation costs and growing unemployment, precarious and intermittent jobs and the consequent drop in salaries have made many give up their plans to build their own houses. They went to live in *favelas* or in areas where house building is not permitted, like the protected water source areas near the Guarapiranga and Billings Reservoirs and Serra da Cantareira area. Or else they move to areas in Greater São Paulo located along major highways and railways, such as Osasco, Barueri, Jandira, Itapeví, or the environs of the Campo Limpo area in the direction of Itapeçerica or Guarulhos, Arujá and Mogi das Cruzes; as opposed to São Paulo, these areas still lack sufficient water, sewer and trash collection systems.

The process of building one’s own house is long and strenuous. It is strenuous because the tasks require a lot of physical effort or energy, and because houses are mostly built on the weekends. It is long because – according to a survey conducted in the late 1970’s – most houses are not ready after ten years of work: 70 percent of our respondents considered that their houses were not finished, and 57 percent of those who had started construction in the 1950’s considered the house unfinished (Department of Economics and Planning, 1979: 78).⁴ In fact, once the lot is bought – and paid for in 5 to 10 years – families build and move into “embryo” houses, which often measure between 16 to 30 m²: only 20 percent move when the house is actually finished. Other rooms are gradually added to this initial small constructed area, according to the financial resources and the needs of the family owning the lot. It is not uncommon that in 125m² lots or smaller two or more houses

⁴ The notes and data here are based on this quantitative survey of auto-construction conducted in the São Paulo Metropolitan Region (SPMR) to assess progressive building of houses started in the 1950’s, 60’s and 70’s. As it will be seen later, this building process has undergone several changes, especially concerning greater use of hired labor to build homes.

are built to shelter relatives, friends and their families, who form a “*mutirão*” (group of friends or relatives who help building the house or a community group formed to perform tasks) for the construction work. It is a process that depends on the family’s savings and the amount of work that can be dedicated to house building: it also depends on the network formed by relatives, neighbors, friends, or friends from a hometown who can be attracted to help out in the building tasks.

Rudimentary construction techniques and the absence of planning cause waste of building materials, repairs or remodeling, producing dwellings that, after years of collective work, display serious defects in terms of finishing, partitioning and airing (including lack of sunshine), and therefore are of poor environmental quality. Rooms are built in a row, one after the other, or on an upper floor according to the imperative equation setting need against financial resource availability, and without any planning for the continuity of the construction work: construction is part of a strategy that is decided according to the income of each of the family members, especially the head of the family’s income.

Young families whose heads have greater potential for retaining salaried jobs or are gainfully self-employed, or may count on at least partial financial help from their partners and children, participate in this long and tortuous building process. Help also comes from the already mentioned network of relatives and friends; in fact, 80 percent of house selfbuilders declare that they had relied on the voluntary aid of relatives and friends at some stage of the construction work. Of course this is a give-and-take relationship because volunteers will also be aided when they need help to build their own homes in the future. In this sense, it should be noted that half of the housing units built did not make use of hired labor. The selfbuilding process usually requires self-sacrifice: both due to the extra work done in the free time, and due to the savings to be obtained from gains in the job market (43 percent), overtime or odd jobs (13 percent), use of the 13th monthly salary (7 percent) and cuts in household expenditures, including expenditures on food (7 percent). Few were the builders who counted on bank loans (7 percent), and almost 80 percent of them mentioned having increased their working hours to continue building the house.

...”It is clear that home building ultimately requires efforts from builders that take individuals’ work capacity to extremes: doing overtime on the job, and performing building tasks in their free time. In addition, basic expenditures on food to ensure adequate nutrition are reduced...” (Department of Economics and Planning, 1979: 110).

It is estimated that half of the permanent houses in the São Paulo Metropolitan Region have been built through this process of construction, and as shown above it is a process that relies on unpaid overwork performed at construction sites, and on remunerated overwork in the form of odd jobs, overtime, or giving up vacation to get the vacation pay.⁵ It should be stressed that home financing alternatives are scarce for those who seek their own house. The absence of necessary subsidized financing for those who cannot afford the high interest rates charged in the market leaves no other choices for the large low-income majority but living in *favelas*, slum tenements (*cortiços*) or renting a place in the poor urban peripheries.

Since house selfbuilding has become more difficult and expensive, at least in São Paulo, the number of people living in *favelas* has rapidly grown in the last decades, while renting a place in *cortiços* or other types of precarious housing adds to already serious social and housing problems, and increases the vulnerability of people as they grow old and have to rely on the little retirement money paid by the social security system. Other issues are illness, on the job accidents, and unemployment, developments that often make people discontinue the payment of rents. Therefore, a house of one's own is a shelter against financial uncertainties, and can help poor people shape a way of life that provides greater protection against the poor living conditions of most working people. It is indeed a long and painful strategy, but compared to others may have comparative advantages.

Is building worthwhile?

This question must be understood – as already pointed out – in the context of the absence of housing policies for the poor. It should also be understood in connection with housing alternatives that are restricted to rental of a room in a *cortiço* or a small place in neighborhoods located many miles away from workplaces. Besides this there are the *favelas*, which increasingly look like settlements in the urban periphery, be it from an urban development point of view, or in terms of home acquisition; at least in the São Paulo settlements, the buying and selling of lots or houses has become the dominant dynamic for the mobility of people who embrace or quit this form of occupying someone else's land.

⁵ In 1975, it was estimated that there were 450 thousand selfbuilt residences in São Paulo and 2.5 million illegal lots in SPMR. (Department of Economics and Planning, 1979). In the 1980's, 63 percent of the houses in the metropolitan area were built by the selfbuilding process. (Pasternak & Maultner, s.d.). On the other hand, selfconstruction in SP continues to be estimated at 35% of the houses built on the periphery. (Pasternak & Balfrusis, s.d.:26).

The words – “my dream is having my own house” or “I need to stop paying rent” – are repeated many times by millions of individuals who want to stop being tenants. Indeed, despite the long years of hardship required to build one’s own house, this is the only form of savings poor people can have since rent is an expenditure that will not lead to asset accumulation. Moreover, paying a rent does not provide stability and many times requires constant dislocation from one place to another. Although house selfbuilding is a wearisome activity if compared to other housing alternatives, it represents at least the possibility of owning property. This means that the owner will reduce expenses once the house is finished, and the value of the house may even increase as public and private services start being offered in the neighborhood; in short, home ownership represents assets that poor families would never be able to acquire if they remained tenants.

It should be noted that recent years have been marked by economic downturns, which have resulted, among others things, in declining incomes, precarious jobs and rising unemployment, as shown in Table 1

Table 1. São Paulo metropolitan Region, labour force, 1989 & 2000

Characteristics	1989	2000
Total employed (in 1000)	6438	7596
Average income (rate)	100,0	70.2
Manufacture	100,0	70.6
Commerce	100,0	59.1
Services	100,0	74.6
“Flexible” Contracts*	20.9	35.4
Unemployment (percent)		
Open	8.7	17.6
Hidden by discouragement	6.5	11.3
Hidden by precarious jobs	0.7	1.7
Over 12 months	1.5	4.6
Unemployed (percent)	2.9	22.3
Heads of families (percent)	4.1	10.4
Average job search (weeks)	15.0	48.0

Source: PED (Survey of Employment and Unemployment). Dieese/Seade, São Paulo

* Uncovered wage earners, outsourced workers, self-employed who work for one company.

However, even considering an average 30-percent decline in salary levels, and the fact that the number of unemployed doubled – also affecting heads of families – and the brutal increase in the time people spend looking for a job, besides the precariousness of employment that over third of the labor force is subject to,

housing rental has decreased and home ownership has gained increasing significance, as the data in table 2 below indicate.

Table 2. Tenure of dwellings and housing conditions per family cycle, São Paulo Metropolitan Region, 1990-1998, percent

Family Cycle	Tenure of Dwellings				Housing Conditions			
	Owned		Rented		Unsatisfactory		Satisfactory	
	1990	1998	1990	1998	1990	1998	1990	1998
Young	19.6	34.2	49.5	36.9	52.5	36.0	47.5	64.0
Adult	64.4	65.1	20.8	17.1	29.5	26.2	70.5	73.8
Senior	66.2	78.3	16.3	10.7	20.9	13.5	79.1	86.5
Total	53.1	58.4	28.9	20.0	34.8	32.0	65.2	68.0
Senior/ young	46.6	44.1	-33.2	-26.2	-31.6	-22.5	31.6	22.5

Source: Fundação SEADE, Research on Living Conditions, PCV, 1990 to 1998.

Tables prepared for the project by L. Kowarick: Living At Risk, 2000.

In the course of the 1990's, a reduction in the number of rented homes (-8.9 percent) and an increase in the number of homes owned (+5.4 percent) became evident. It is likely that such an increase in home ownership was not even more significant due to the rise in the number of *favela* dwellers. In fact, housing units in squatter areas almost doubled to reach 9 percent of dwellings in the Greater São Paulo area, which means an increase of about 800 thousand people or a population over 1.6 million of *favela* dwellers in the late 1990's.

A survey per family cycle shows that the process of aging – independent of considerations about the financial situation of low-income families over the years – plays a significant role in the rate of home ownership. It shows that both in 1990 and in 1998, as the family ages a massive mobility occurs with people moving into their own houses; only 10.7 percent of the senior group paid rent at the end of the decade, when almost four fifths of the senior group lived in their own houses. It should be stressed that this situation improved during the 1990's since over the entire decade there was an increase in home ownership for all family cycles: in the late 1990's, the number of young families owning a house increased by 15 percent (-12.6 percent of families living in rented houses), although for adult families changes were less significant. Senior families displayed more massive changes in that over 12.1 percent of such families started to live in their own houses, 5.6 percent of them ceasing to pay rent.

If we believe as previously claimed here that it is true that renting a house means an expenditure that will not lead to any form of savings, and, conversely, owning a home means a form of protection against the vulnerability faced by many

low and middle income population layers, especially as individuals age, then the performance in the 1990's was positive in terms of home ownership. In fact, a substantial number of people could secure their own homes, and this helped them face the momentary crises that affect groups that are deprived of social and economic protection. However, it should be noted that the number of people in squatter areas grew in the years 1990-1998, involving all types of families. This meant a movement towards poorer living conditions for many: although some *favelas* have managed to get improvements in terms of basic urban services, in many of such squatter settlements there are still a number of unhealthy and contaminated sections that make residents feel unsafe and at risk.

Statements that the 1990's were not a lost decade for housing should be understood as indications of a complex, broad and varied process, since one should not forget that in the same period a substantial number of people were living in *cortiços* or precarious rented homes, the number of *favela* dwellers grew, vast numbers of homeless took to the streets, not to mention the poor conditions of many selfbuilt houses.

However, such indications gain more significance if we consider that the quality of housing improves when we shift from younger to older family groups. It should be emphasized that for the general population, improved housing quality was not very significant in terms of numbers. Housing quality was better for the younger family groups since 16.5 percent more people enjoyed satisfactory housing conditions in the late 1990's and were seconded by the older family groups (+7.4 percent). There is no information available to help in the analysis of this apparently paradoxical process, but one may assume that perhaps younger families had more opportunities for jobs and sustained income in moments of reduced employment opportunities.

These data concur with the previous indications supplied here, according to which the 1990's were positive in terms of housing quality. This is true if we consider the progress of the family cycle since both in the beginning and in the end of the period, senior families had better housing conditions than younger families, 31.6 percent and 22.5 percent, respectively. It is true to say that a substantial portion of this population enjoyed better housing conditions, living in their own homes (many of them selfbuilt homes): if this is true, the long processes of house building by owners which are – and this should be repeated as many times as necessary – markedly spoliative end up producing satisfactory dwellings from the point of view of quality, that is, a house made with appropriate materials, and including separate kitchen, bathroom and laundry sink, and enough room to accommodate all family members.

In a daring manner at the time, and for me in a convincing manner, this argument was first developed, at least in the case of Brazil, in the middle of the 1990's, when compared with other housing alternatives, the advantages of selfbuilt owned homes were highlighted:

It is the concrete possibility to save, to accumulate ... It also means living for some time in a house at zero cost, a fundamental aspect when we consider that expenditures on rent weighs heavily... Finally, it means the possibility of making the house fulfill the desire of the family, incorporating work and resources that materialize an asset that grows in value to the benefit of the owner" (Bonduki, s.d: 323)⁶

Similarly to the developments in the 1990's, housing data from the early 1980's also show a higher concentration of house owners among the senior population, including better housing conditions, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Tenure of dwellings and housing conditions per family cycle among different income ranges, São Paulo Metropolitan Region, 1981, percent

Family Cycle	Tenure				Housing Conditions	
	Owned		Rented		Poor	Not Poor
	Poor	Not Poor	Poor	Not Poor		
Young	7.4	19.3	61.2	70.4	36.4	87.8
Adult	57.7	76.9	28.9	18.5	53.5	75.8
Senior	76.1	74.4	12.2	20.5	88.8	93.1
Total	48.9	59.7	33.1	34.2	58.2	83.6
Senior / young	68.7	55.1	-49.0	-49.9	52.4	5.3

Source: Pesquisa CEDEC/DIEESE, (Bonduki: s.d.)

In fact, comparing the senior category with the young category it is clear that the movement towards home ownership was concentrated among lower-income groups, and that these groups and higher-income layers fled from paying rent in almost identical numbers: this was due to the fact that a third of the poor young were in a different situation, that is, living mostly in places provided by others as a provisional stage before home ownership. Satisfactory housing conditions among the lower-income ranges should be noted, since the majority of higher-income groups have always had this in the course of their lives: this achievement by lower-income layers is to a large extent associated with the strenuous process of building one's

⁶ Research based on a population sample of the SPMR, by DIEESE in 1981. See also Brant, 1989, Ch. 4.

own home, in which, as analyzed here, a large amount of time and family savings – overtime earnings, vacation money, money from odd jobs in their free time, and others – are used to build the family home.

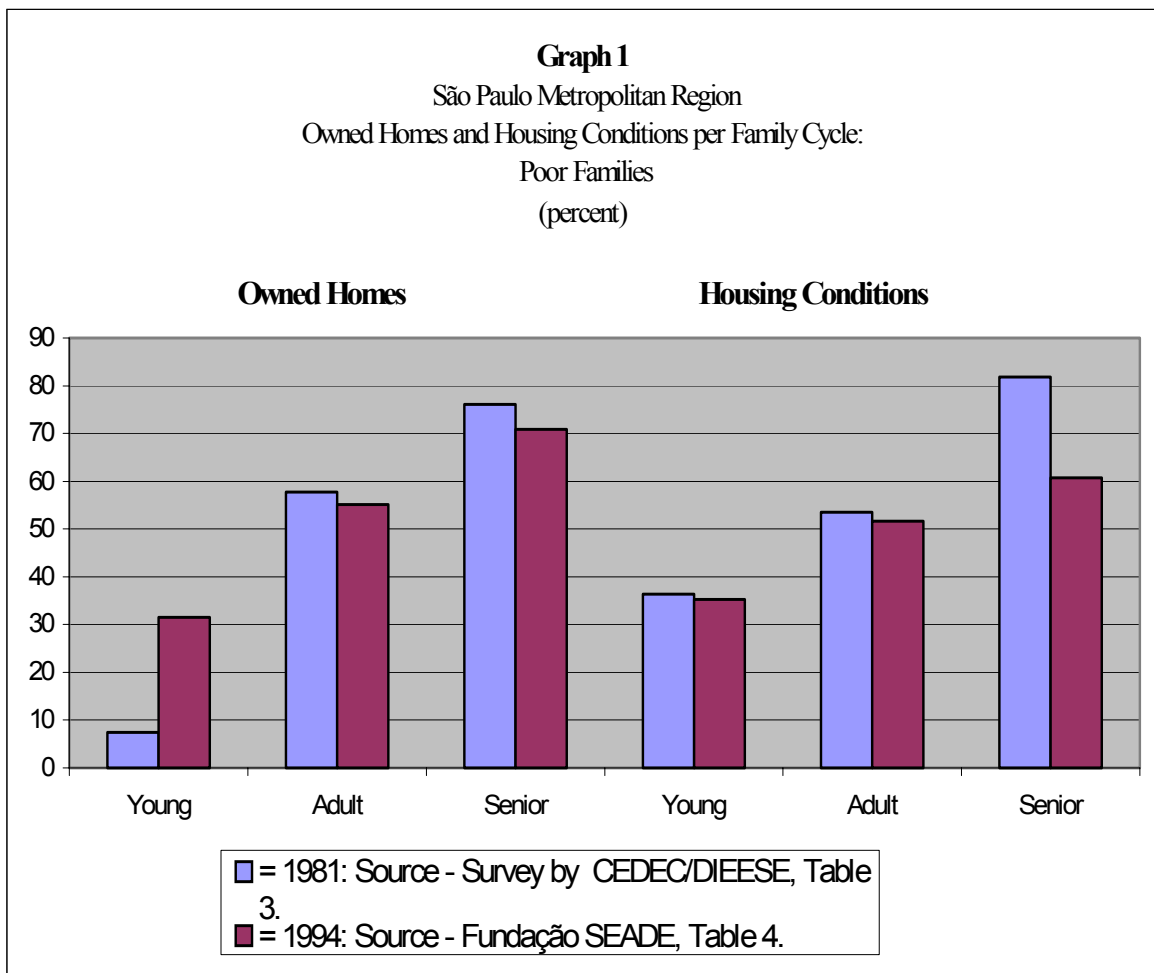
In this sense, it should be recalled that the decade preceding the year 1981 saw intense economic activity, with an average annual GDP growth of 8.8 percent. It was a period of high employment where the number of jobs per household doubled, which to some extent compensated for the drop in wage levels. As to the access to selfbuilt homes, the increase in job offers – whether salaried jobs or not – meant continuity in the sources of remuneration for more family members. This was a decisive factor in improving or resuming construction, an activity that may last 10 to 15 years. Conversely, in the period from 1983 to 1993, annual GDP grew only by 2.3 percent, with 4 years of minimal growth, which was more strongly felt in 1990. In 1990, during the Collor Administration, GDP fell by 4.35 percent, and 1 million jobs were lost. But even then, in an economic situation highly unfavorable to workers – unemployment, informal jobs, etc. – the housing situation improved for the poor when one compares the various age groups, with a sustained mobility towards home ownership. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Tenure of dwellings and housing conditions per family cycle among different income ranges, São Paulo Metropolitan Region, 1994, percent

Family Cycle	Tenure				Housing Conditions	
	Owned		Rented		Poor	Not Poor
	Poor	Not Poor	Poor	Not Poor		
Young	31.6	44.2	32.2	36.6	35.3	69.3
Adult	55.0	66.6	23.3	24.3	51.7	81.7
Senior	70.9	83.8	10.4	11.1	60.7	89.1
Total	48.0	62.6	24.8	25.5	46.3	78.9
Senior /young	39.3	39.6	-22.8	-25.5	25.4	19.8

Source: Fundação SEADE. Tables prepared for the project by L. Kowarick. Living At Risk, 2000.

It would be superfluous to discuss changes occurring as one shifts from the young to the senior group. In general, the trends are the same as those discussed in connection with the 1981 data. The mobility in the early 1980's and mid-1990's is shown in Graph 1, referring to poor groups only.



Comparing the two situations should be a cautious task, considering the different methodologies used to compose the family cycles and the standards to measure housing quality. However, they are based on the same definition of poverty – per capita expenditure corresponding up to double that for the staple basket – and, ultimately, age characterizations and satisfactory housing conditions bear similarities.

It should be noted that despite the fact that both years show similar numbers of homes owned, in 1981 there is a large gap between young and senior families not only in terms of this process, but also as to improved housing conditions: by contrast, 1994 saw more intense mobility to homes with more satisfactory conditions. Also in 1994, more young people owned their homes, while proportionally fewer senior families did, and housing conditions were less favorable for all age groups, especially senior groups: in mid-1990's, people achieved home ownership earlier, but home improvement was less substantial, which may indicate difficulties in continuing or finishing the house to attain environmental and sanitary well-being.

It has been demonstrated that the way families protect themselves from economic crises, or take advantage of situations of economic growth is not uniform;

differences in income levels, family composition in terms of age and gender also count (Brandão Lopes & Gottschalk, 1990). But it is also relevant to note that both in positive situations (1981) and negative situations (1994), low-income families manage to own homes or enjoy better housing conditions.

As discussed in more detail below in our in-depth assessment of the interviews, it takes quite a long time for people to finish building their homes. Houses are built room by room according to family needs – or affordability –, sometimes on sloping ground, and in some cases when it rains, parts of the building are swept away. Houses are largely selfbuilt, although some hired work may be involved due to the availability of odd-jobbers among local residents. All families interviewed considered their homes unfinished after many years of work, and indicated that construction had to stop due to unemployment, income reduction or the head of family's death; in general, all residents reported enormous hardships in resuming the building of the house. On the other hand, it is common to see more than one family house on the same lot. A common activity is a barbecue on weekends for the *mutirão* who will help build the roof. These are moments of revelry after the long toil that involves children, youths, adults and elders of both sexes in the enterprise aimed at freeing them from life in the *favelas* or paying rent for some precarious place. Is building worthwhile? The answer is complex, difficult, variable, but for those who entered the spoliative house selfbuilding process, it is after all, and for various reasons, worthwhile to build one's own home.

On the periphery

Before we analyze the two settlements surveyed and the testimonies of their residents, it is convenient to make some comments on the poor urban peripheries of São Paulo, which as mentioned before may vary a lot in terms of patterns of urban development and socioeconomic level of their inhabitants: they hold 4.9 million people, and have a population growth rate three times higher than the general São Paulo population. In the 1990's, these areas in the outskirts of the city, most of them squatter settlements (*favelas*) had their population leap by 84%, while the average income of heads of family declined by 26 percent.⁷ However, it is important to note that there was a significant increase in the supply of basic services in these areas, so that water, sewer and trash collection systems now serve almost all households. This

⁷ The Center for Studies of the Metropolis, CEM – CEBRAP, estimated the population living in *favelas* in São Paulo to be 1.161 million persons, living in 292 thousand domiciles, 96 percent connected to the water system, only half with sewer and 82 percent with trash collection service. The average income of the heads of families is R\$335.00, well below the \$R 1,325 in SP overall. (PREFEITURA DO MUNICIPIO DE SÃO PAULO, 2003:15).

is a substantial change if we consider that in 1960 supply rates for these services were 48 percent, 59 percent and 84 percent, respectively. But this does not mean that all this is equal and uniform. If we look carefully at the areas, at individual neighborhoods or even at individual houses, we see that the urban fabric remains unequal in terms of quality of life for the people who live in countless “*vilas*”, “*jardins*” or “*recantos*” (Torres & Marques, 2001 and Torres et al: 2003): by developing the concept of hyper periphery – that is, areas even more degraded, where residents are even more vulnerable from a social and economic point of view, these studies review the problem of spatial differentiation and the very concept of poor urban peripheries as places homogeneously marked by precarious living conditions..

The two settlements studied, Três Marias and Vila Guiomar/Jardim Silvano are located in the district of Jardim Ângela, on the protected water basin of the Guarapiranga Reservoir. Três Marias lies in the extreme south of Jardim Turquesa neighborhood, known as the Ângela “backland”; Vila Guiomar/Jardim Silvano in the area bordering the municipality of Itapecerica da Serra. Before going into details about these two areas and the lives of some of the people living there, it would be convenient to point out some characteristics of this vast area located in the South of São Paulo. Together with 4 other districts – Campo Limpo, Vila Andrade, Capão Redondo and Jardim São Luiz – Jardim Ângela is within the geographical limits of the former Campo Limpo Regional Administration, which has been subdivided into two Sub-Municipal Administrations, M’ Boi Mirim (Jardim Ângela and Jardim São Luiz) and Campo Limpo (Capão Redondo and Campo Limpo). It is a vast area of almost 100km² bordered by the municipalities of Taboão da Serra, Embu, Embu Guaçu and Itapecerica, with a population of almost 1 million inhabitants. This region has been the stage for intense urban workers’ movements since the early 1970’s, and in the late 1970’s the region saw many workers’ strikes.

The symbol of these heroic struggles of workers and residents is Santo Dias, a metal worker who was killed by repressive police forces in 1979. He was a worker’s leader connected with the Catholic Church’s Workers’ Commission who led a strong people’s mobilization against the military regime.⁸ Also strong in this region was the movement for more daycare centers for the children, which gave rise to the *Movimento Contra a Carestia* (a movement against the high cost of living). This movement collected one million signatures and gained strong social and political resonance, paving the road for the Amnesty in 1979.

⁸ Information collected in an interview with Father Jaime of the Santos Mártires Church, in the Jardim Ângela

In the 1980's, the situation changed. While the country moved slowly and gradually toward democracy, the economy faced a recessive downturn that also affected the southern part of the city of São Paulo, a region that was already in a process of increasing deindustrialization. Big corporations, such as Caterpillar, left the region, while Caloi reduced its workforce from 5,000 to 500 employees. The economic crisis and technological developments accelerated unemployment, labor precariousness, outsourcing, and informal jobs for large numbers of workers: in 1983, the movement of the jobless invaded the SINE (National Employment System) building and set up an encampment on Ibirapuera Park near the State House of Representatives. The movement structured its activities in associations engaged in the struggles of local factory workers and neighborhood movements. Another important movement in this region was the "Panela Vazia" ("Empty Cooking Pans") of 1988. On the other hand, this period is characterized by the growth of violence and crime; a macabre personification of this violence is Cabo Bruno (Corporal Bruno), a "*justiceiro*" (or justice maker, which is a euphemism for a hired gunman). Cabo Bruno perpetrated around 150 killings ordered by local merchant associations.

In the 1980's, the population in the region grew in a period when population growth rates in São Paulo dropped dramatically. This growth concentrated particularly in the protected water source areas, which received vast numbers of people in *favelas* and clandestine settlements near the Guarapiranga Reservoir basin: the 1978 water source protection act had an adverse effect on the environment because it prohibited construction in lots measuring less than 500m². This made the price of land drop, and as no public controls were created nothing could be done to stop the illegal, chaotic occupation of the area by poor families and the resulting environment contamination. It is estimated that 700 thousand people inhabit the Guarapiranga Reservoir basin.⁹ Five hundred thousand of these inhabitants live within the boundaries of São Paulo. This huge population discharges about 100 million liters of untreated sewage into the reservoir every day, producing enormous environment degradation. (Folha de S. Paulo, 2000 : C1).

Jardim Ângela, a typical example of this process of predatory territorial occupation marked by improvised and incomplete urbanization, displays high unemployment rates and a high percentage of families living on a few minimum wages a month. A 1999 survey shows Jardim Ângela as the São Paulo district with the highest infant mortality rate – 134/100 thousand inhabitants – and that year, the

⁹ Data provided by Celso Mazotini Saes, a technician with CETESB. He also reports that on the rolls of the agency, the numbers vary from 550 to 800 thousand residents living in the area of this reservoir basin.

district had the highest murder rate in the city: 126.23 per 100 thousand inhabitants. Among all districts in São Paulo, Jardim Ângela was the worst in the Social Exclusion Index comprising 47 variables (PUC-SP & INPE & PÓLIS, 2000:17), and ranked third worst in the Social Vulnerability Map, which is based on 11 indicators (CEM & São Paulo City Social Assistance Department, 2002).

But still, it is a region marked by heterogeneous socioeconomic and urban development standards. Três Marias and Vila Guiomar/Jardim Silvano are examples of such variations. After a lot of residents' struggle, Três Marias became an area of more consolidated urban development, while Vila Guiomar/Jardim Silvano lies on the outlying portion of the São Paulo urban sprawl, in an area of low population density and poor infrastructure. In the region there are still forested lands, which will certainly become illegal selfbuilt settlements, thus continuing the endless chaotic expansion of poor urban peripheries, which at their first stage of expansion will be destitute of public services that are essential to life in the cities.

The ethnography of the Três Marias settlement

"It's been a battle since the beginning. On the day we came here, municipal employees came by and said we couldn't live here, we had to take our furniture away. Then the folks that were building here, well, Mr. Hélio who was building with us started to go to Resolo.¹⁰ Then we found things out on a paper I had filed with the Real Estate Registry ..."

Três Marias is one of many irregular settlements on the Guarapiranga water basin. It emerged in the early 1990's from the parceling of a 27 thousand-meter property into 240 lots, most of them measuring 75m². To acquire one of the lots, buyers would make a small down payment and then pay 24 monthly installments of 1 minimum wage each. It was an affordable price for poor workers, but the lots were totally irregular under the land use legislation and there was no guarantee as to land titling; in 1992 only 9 families lived in the settlement. At that time, the place lay within woods, and had a few streets and lamp posts; the hills nearby were practically uninhabited and full of *ipe* trees; from the few grazing cows on the hills residents could buy "fresh milk right after milking". The real estate broker's promise of water, electricity and sewers, was a hoax. These services had to be requested of the public authorities, and this was no easy task because, after all, the area was "just another *morro do piolho*" (a faraway, desolate place).

¹⁰ Department of Land Titling, RESOLO, whose purpose is to promote land and urban regularization of the settlements.

In the mid-1990's, an initiative of some residents formed the *Associação dos Moradores do Loteamento Horizontal Três Marias* (Três Marias Settlement Association), with legal assistance from the Centro de Direitos Humanos, CDHEP (a human rights organization), and support from Santo Mártires Parish located in Jardim Ângela. This parish has developed intense community outreach since the 1970's, and its Fórum pela Vida (Forum for Life) congregates some 250 grass-roots associations which are active in those areas: "There they told us we had to fight for our rights. So we started to pay our installments to the legal authority, and all that. I was scared. What if I lost everything? Thanks God, we haven't lost anything, and I'm not scared anymore."

In order to regularize the lots, it was necessary to produce a land description project showing the physical conditions of the settlements, and the location of homes. To that end, the Association hired an architect. After all, through the efforts of some committed residents, Três Marias was considered more "regular" than other settlements in the area, a fact that made it become eligible for the Emergency Plan, a program that regularizes water supply. But water "won't fall from heaven, so to speak": it is necessary to work for it. At first, residents would walk to the avenue to get water, a serious problem for those who lived on top of the hill, a very steep hill indeed. The first solution came with a hose and pump to pump water uphill. Next, a large water storage container was bought, but as water supply reached only some of the houses, conflicts between the "folks on top of the hill" and the "folks at the foot of the hill" erupted. Finally, in late 1990's, they paid a SABESP (São Paulo State Sanitation Company) employee to make a clandestine connection to the public water supply system; only in 2001, under the Emergency Plan, did residents finally get their water supply regularized to reach all households in the settlement.

Public lighting in the settlement's common areas is extremely poor, and people are usually afraid to walk around at night, especially because of holdups and drug dealing; gunfire battles and showdowns are also frequent, and dead bodies are frequently found in the environs. Sewage usually flows to cesspools tanks, but due to the steep topography of the area, it is not an unusual occurrence for sewage to run off into the neighbor's backyard down the hill. On rainy days, the settlement's main road becomes a muddy swamp, and this is a serious problem for people who need to go to work. Road paving came in 2002, at a cost of R\$ 70.00 per resident, plus the work of a weekend *mutirão* of residents. Paving was important because now the trash collection truck can go uphill.

It takes some 30 minutes to get to the nearest school, and transportation is limited to one bus line that passes along Três Marias Street. For many residents, the

only option left is to climb the steep road to M' Boi Mirim Avenue, where there is more transportation available and a bus connection to Ana Rosa subway station. At any rate, residents usually spend 4 hours every day on trips to and from work, 6 hours on rainy days. Public healthcare clinics are distant, and it takes one to two months to get an appointment with a doctor; the nearest hospital is in Campo Limpo, a very long way from the settlement, and lacks capacity to serve the surrounding population. In the settlement there are 4 small businesses: a building materials shop and 3 bars. Três Marias Street has 15 stores that sell goods at higher prices, and a Pentecostal church "*Deus é Amor*" (God is Love). The great innovation is the use of conventional or mobile phone services to order home delivery of pizza, *feijoada* (meat stew with black beans), cooking gas containers, water and medicine; delivery services are very convenient because they save people the stress of going out when it is dark. But many believe that the neighborhood needs further "progress", that is, banks, lottery stores, post office, open-air market, more stores, schools, healthcare clinics, and efficient police patrolling because "cops never show up: the criminals are stronger than the police".

In 2000, a wall was erected around the settlement to separate it from the neighboring woods, and a big slide gate is operated day and night by hired guards in a sentry box. Security charges are R\$ 20 a month for those who can afford it. The reasons for building the wall are varied: to avoid animals coming in, for security reasons: "but after the wall the problem is inside the settlement, the holdups continue". In 2000, there were 250 housing units in the settlement.

Table 5. The characters*

Name	Age	Schooling	No. of people in the household	Total income R\$	Per Capita Income R\$	Former residence in São Paulo	Time at present residence (1)	No. of rooms in the house (2)	Means of construction (3)	Notes
Marli	42	6 th grade	6	275	46	Rented room	5 years (i)	1S, 1C, 1B, 1Q	Ac, Tpt = only for cesspool and electrical installation	José's widow and Paulo's mother
Fernando & Eridan	42 47	High school, SENAI Technical course (1) 8 th grade	4	-x- 250	63	2-room house: ac	9 years (i)	2S, 1C, 2B, 3Q	Tpt: the whole house.	(1) small entrepreneur
Rosemerie & Edson	32 33	8 th grade 5 th grade	4	550(1) - (2)	138	<i>Cortiço</i> : Rented room in slum tenement	8 years (i)	1D, 1B, 1C	Tpt: the whole house	(1) job + transportation + school = 17 hours. (2) jobless

* data collected in 2001-2002.

(1) finished = a; unfinished = i;

(2) living-room (S); kitchen (C); bath (B); bedroom (D); other rooms (O);

(3) selfbuilt (Ac); paying hired workers (Tpt); *mutirão* (M).

Marli, 42, was born in Itabuna, State of Bahia, and so were her 4 children and late husband José. José came first, in 1988, and two years later was joined by the family: "My first impression when I arrived in São Paulo was bad," says Marli, "the houses were so tiny, no backyard, no windows. Only an entrance door, bedroom, kitchen and a bath." The house was in a slum in Piraporinha, Santo Amaro district, where people shared a yard for washing and drying clothes: "There was a bunch of little houses with one yard for all: one washing sink for all, when one wanted to do the laundry, others wanted to do it too at same time" Her husband José, a self-employed builder, with the help of their older son Paulo, managed to rent a better house in the same neighborhood: "The house was more comfortable, better structured, the washing sink, the yard, was all ours; the street was quieter, with a bakery, drugstore, butcher's, grocery store and even an open-air market nearby, nothing of that business of a bunch of houses with a yard for all, all that cramming." They stayed for 3 years in that house, while José and Paulo built houses for their living. In 1995, the family started the process of acquiring their own house: the lot in Três Marias cost R\$ 3.200, 800 as down payment, and the rest exchanged for building work on

weekends, at 60 reais a day: "People said they didn't want to buy land there because of the violence." She says that even bus drivers refused to drive in the area. "It was like living in the backlands, all woods, no water supply".

Building a house means serious privations, and the first step is paying a cheaper rent: "Then we moved to a cheaper place; it wasn't really a house; we had a room to sleep in and a kitchen, no bath. To buy the lot we had to live in that place. The yard was dirty and messy. We had to share a bath, washing sink; no place for the children to play, many family quarrels." The road to selfbuilt home also requires cuts in expenditures on food: "We started to buy only basic, essential food. No chocolate." Father and son worked over 8 hours a day, including holidays. They would work fast to do more and more jobs during the week, so that they could have the money to buy the building materials to build their own house on the weekends: "My son was the assistant; instead of paying an assistant, the boy worked and saved us some money."

Everyone in the family helped out, including Marli's older daughter's boyfriend and one of his brothers. To build the roof, Piraporinha friends also came and enjoyed a barbecue: "We had the barbecue fire here, close to the door." They moved into the new house in 1996. The house, without any finishing at all, included a bedroom, a living room, a kitchen, and a bath. José and Paulo built the whole house, except for the cesspool and electrical installations. The house is on the top of the hill, but only in 2001 was the street paved. Before the pavement, it was all mud on rainy days, and "many people would slide on the mud and fall down". Water supply was only recently regularized: "water was gold". "When water happened to get here, it was only for two hours in the morning; I'd stay up, waiting for the water to come, it was clandestine water". Before moving into their new house, they had to live for some months in a rented house in the settlement.

The house has a ladder that goes up to the roof, and this usually means an intention to build an upper floor. Marli's was never built. On December 31, 1997, at a New Year's party at a neighbors' house, José and Paulo were killed by two intruders who came by and started harassing people. Father and son reacted and were shot at a close range: it was a tragedy that marked Marli and her daughters' lives forever, and they refuse to talk about it.¹¹ Some people in the neighborhood talked about some *umbanda* (an Afro-Brazilian religion) ritual taking place on that night. For fear of worse developments, and listening to friends' advice, Marli and her daughters left the settlement. First, they moved into a house in Capão Redondo, then moved to

¹¹ According to the survey guidelines, interviewers have not urged Marli or her daughters to talk about the subject.

Formiga, in the State of Minas Gerais. They returned to Três Marias over one year later, in 2000.

It is an unfinished, all women's house, where Marli lives with her daughters Andreia, Elisangela and Lidiani, all in their twenties, poor schooling, and her two grandsons Rubens, 6, and Paulo Gustavo, a couple of months old. The children's fathers do not live with them. Currently jobless, the girls have always worked as maids or cleaning women, but so far have not managed to get stable jobs: they are "migrants in the job market". Thus, it is Marli who supports the family with her work at a laundry shop for a net salary of 275 reais: "Young people don't deal well with laundry, I can see it from my daughters. People my age do it easily, they know how to wash well, to iron well. People must have the knack for it. If the girls were working, and our monthly income were 1,000 reais, we would have the money for other expenditures, to mend things in the house; but as it is, the money goes only to the grocer's."

Every day, Marli wakes up at 4:30, and at 5 she starts climbing the steep road to M'Boi Mirim Avenue, a twenty-minute walk. After two hours on a bus – sometimes more when the traffic is heavy – she gets to work at 7:30, and starts working half an hour later. She leaves work at 5 pm and gets home at 8 pm. That is, 8 working hours plus five and a half hours for transportation: "What kills is not the work, it's the travel time. It tires one out more than the work itself."

Besides transportation, other public services are poor. The public healthcare clinic is far away, and people must take a bus to get there. A half hour walk is needed to get to the Agenor de Oliveira School; and, as to the school in Jardim dos Reis, "nobody dares attending that school... too much dealing and mess". Piraporinha in the early 1990's was also violent: "At that time, I never imagined I was living next to a criminal, I only knew that the people in the house across the street sold grass." In Três Marias in the late 1990's, besides the murder of José and Paulo, holdups were frequent. Around the settlement, criminals were in full operation: "Down there many people died. The majority of them died, you know, one wants to be the boss and kills the weaker guys, and killing by killing, everyone gets killed. The same in Jardim São Lourenço, the settlement beyond the woods; we hear the noise of gunfire almost every night. In São Paulo there is violence and people simply accept it. People see it but are afraid to talk, they never say a word and so crime grows. People keep quiet and lock themselves in their houses...on buses, brawls and holdups almost everyday...Some bus drivers put on a sign "Reserved" on the buses as they approach, so that they won't have to pick up passengers, for fear of holdups."

Marli's house remains unfinished, no upper floor and there is a depression on the bath floor: "José made infinitely more money than we do. He didn't have to pay anyone to do anything, he did it himself. Now we need to pay to fix the bathroom floor". Is life better now than before? "At least we have a house, and this is not a squatter settlement. If we had a bunch of little houses here, this would be a slum. The slum is different, it is a bunch of little houses forming a corridor, with the same yard, same space to do the laundry. I live in my own place and it's like a dream come true, it is much better, I don't have to share a yard with anyone".

The death of the beloved ones will be mourned forever. For Marli, the word worthwhile has a deeper meaning than the house itself. "Building was worthwhile, it paid the toil in the end. My dream is: finishing the house. It's a dream. But reality is something else".

Fernando, 42, was born in the city of São Paulo, finished high school and has a technical school degree in precision machining from SENAI. In 1998, he opened a small business, but the business folded with the energy crisis at the beginning of the next decade. To support the family, including the two children, Shirlei, 19, and Rafael, 9, his wife Eridan, 42, sews clothes and sells home-made ice cream in the neighborhood.

A specialized metal worker, Fernando worked for KRON for 5 years, and then came the 1991 recession during the Collor administration: "Production stopped and employees had nothing to do... the advantage of [adhering to] the job severance pay program was getting a lifesaver to go on swimming. People who were dismissed were not able to achieve anything later." Then he worked for Fei Mechanic: "Salaries were considerably reduced. At that time, three years ago, my last salary was R\$ 1,700 in the machining sector and we could get some extra overtime money, now overtime is forbidden and the highest salary in R\$ 1,200."

Then KRON outsourced a sector. The company would provide machines at low cost, and Fernando would repay the machines with the money obtained from the parts he produced for the company: "Each machine cost R\$ 18,000, but they charged me only R\$ 4,000 to be repaid with my work, but the company wouldn't order parts all the time." In 2001, he decided not to pay for a second lot of KRON machines and used the money to maintain his firm and build the house. The house is big for the settlement standards – 2 living/dining rooms, 3 bedrooms, 2 baths and a kitchen. Finishing has stopped since then: "In moments of crises, Eridan helps out because I earn almost nothing."

An activist in the Catholic workers' movement, Fernando was one of the founders of the Três Marias Settlement Association. The association struggled for the

settlement's regularization and improvement, especially for regularization of water supply and road pavement that finally reached the top of the hill: "I feel proud for having participated in this process, demanding improvements from the authorities, seeing things flowing. Our association was in the forefront of the battlefield, participated in meetings in all regions in São Paulo." There was a strong sense of community then: "Today, people would rather pay a builder's daily wage than participating in the *mutirão*. At that time – the early 1990's – the communal spirit was stronger. We were all newcomers, all having similar needs, and people were more open to help one another. Today people do not seem to be willing to help out."

Before coming to Três Marias, Fernando and his family lived in a rented house in Diadema. In order to spare the rent money, the family built a tiny house in Fernando's parents' backyard: "I had no expectations about owning a home, the access was difficult. I even thought about squatting, but Eridan is too proud to take it. But when the opportunity with my father came, I worked very hard. There was no way out of the rent then... otherwise we would end up as squatters."

As the house was too small for 4 people, Fernando saw in Três Marias the chance to build their own home. He bought the lot with the promised [but inexistent] "infrastructure" on installments, without knowing that the land was not regularized: "I didn't know anything about the land. In fact, I didn't know what a protected water source area was, as many people here still don't." On January 1, 1993, the family moved to the settlement's only paved road, Três Marias street; no public or private services were available then.

In 1993, the house had a kitchen, a bath and a bedroom; 4 years later, another room, and three bedrooms and a bath upstairs. Only the roof was *mutirão* work, with the traditional barbecue on the day it was finished. At the time, Fernando earned enough and could also work overtime for some extra money. Thus, it was more convenient for him to work overtime and hire, at low pay, jobless builders from the settlement itself: "There was a crisis of unemployment then, and neighbors who thought they had learned how to build started to offer their services for a low pay. For money that people could afford. It continues to be so nowadays, some builders charge 25 reais a day's work, while others charge 50 reais. Well, at the time I could afford hiring people; I didn't use the *mutirão* because I did not have relatives to help me, and I myself am not keen at building. I wish I could have had a *mutirão*. I could have used the money spent to provide the house with better finishing." As mentioned before, the "neighborhood needs improvements". More stores, and services like schools, healthcare clinics and a hospital, and more bus lines. But telephone service got better, and food delivery grew; in the evening, pizzas and *feijoadas* make the

party. Before that, you had to go to the phone booth to order and the lines were enormous. Telephone service has really helped to develop the area.”

For Fernando, violence is a problem of the nearby neighborhoods, Jardim dos Reis, Turquesa, Santa Paula, São Lourenço, never a problem of Três Marias’, where, besides the murder of José and Paulo, there are holdups: “But we can’t say anything because the complaint is registered. Well, there were only one or two cases, otherwise it’s ok here. There was a time when the neighborhood was violent. Holdups on buses, and so forth. But criminals don’t live long. The gangs that were here when we came are all gone.” But, 5 years ago, one of Fernando’s brothers was killed in a brawl in the squatter settlement across Três Marias: “He was one more of Jardim Angela’s victims. There is no patrolling inside here; it would be good if we had it, although there are no problems inside this place.”

The house was built by hired labor and not by the owners themselves, and has sufficient space for all members of the family. The family is undergoing financial problems. A former specialized metal worker and small entrepreneur, Fernando’s potentialities were stifled by economic recession. As long as the family’s financial difficulties last, the house will not be finished. There is always time to have dreams: “We have other expectations, a house on the beach, well, the struggle goes on”. “Having one’s own house should not mean stop dreaming. We need to go on, to dream about the future,” Eridan adds.

Rosemerie is 32 years old, and works as a maid – cooking and cleaning – in five different homes, in five different neighborhoods: Bexiga, Vila Mariana, and places near the Anchieta and Dutra highways. At night she goes to school; she is an 8th-grader at an adult primary school. She is on her feet almost 20 hours a day: school time, plus her jobs as a maid, her own housework chores, and transportation time. A tireless worker, every 15 days she cooks for people on weekends, and the efforts provide her an overall monthly income of R\$ 550 to support her family: Anderson, 12, and Éderson, 13. The boys are 6th graders, as well as her husband Edson, 33, jobless for over a year, and doing odds jobs or holding temporary work for a decade. Rosemeire comes from a small town in the State of São Paulo, Edson from the State of Minas Gerais, and they have been married since 1990. After 4 years of marriage they came to São Paulo: “I’d rather live in a *favela* than here”, says Rosemerie. “In a *favela* you know everybody, people help each other. There are people who live in a *favela*, but are not that poor. They live there because they don’t pay for water, for electricity. I pay a lot for electricity; I pay for those who don’t.”

Before coming to Três Marias, they lived in a slum in Parque Santo Antonio: “Two families in one house. Then I moved to another slum, where I lived for two

years, and then to another house in a really bad slum; a row of houses, only one bath for everybody.” In 1994, they bought a 75m²-lot and moved into a “bare” little house: “If I’d seen the lot before, we wouldn’t have bought it. I really cried my eyes out... I felt miserable because I’d never lived in an ugly house before. When we moved in, there were no windows, I had to put pieces of canvas to cover the holes, the house was full of holes.” The house has a bath and two other rooms; one used as a kitchen, the other as a bedroom. A wardrobe is used as a partition for the improvised bedroom: on one side of the room are the beds for Edson and Éderson, and on the other those for Rosemerie and Anderson. “I told Edson to sleep on the other side because he snores a lot.”

They paid builders to build the house, including two bedrooms and a space for laundry on the upper floor, which have not been used so far: “It takes such a long time to build, it’s like an eternity.” At the beginning, it was necessary to carry water from other places, now water supply is regularized. But the neighborhood is poor, the prices are too high, and transportation too far: “In my case, I go up to M’Boi Mirim Avenue. I leave home at four in the morning. It is still dark, and I feel scared walking on the unlighted streets, the police never come around here. This neighborhood offers me nothing. I don’t like it here, never saw a place without buses nearby.”

Rosemerie definitely does not appreciate the settlement and its surroundings. If she could choose, they would go back to Parque Santo Antônio and, contrary to the other residents, she sees no reason to hide her opinion about the violence inside and outside Três Marias: “There are schools here, but they are dangerous. At 10 pm., students have to leave because the dealers order them to close. Some of the criminals don’t live here, but they drop the bodies of their victims here. In that *favela* down there they killed six from the same family last week. So, as one can see, our situation here is terrible. It’s sad, you go out and you’re never sure you will come back.” And in the settlement? “Here there is much wrongdoing. Many holdups, even after the wall. If I get in trouble with people, I might get a bullet in my head. I don’t let my boys go out... they never cross the gate without me.”

The only advantage is not paying a rent; this is convenient especially because the father cannot help to support the family: “It is a relief not paying a rent. It is money that you spend and will never return. In your own house is different, the little money you get you may use to mend something, knock down a wall here, build something there. This would never happen in a rented house.”

The only stable job Edson ever had was at Kibon, from 1987 to 1993, where he assembled and operated machines. Once fired, he roamed from one small builder job to another, or held temporary jobs in several firms. For a couple of years now,

three times a week he goes out searching for a job; he thinks he should go out every day, but this would mean spending money with transportation and a snack, some R\$ 10, which is a lot for the tight family budget. A quiet, shy man, Edson laments his plight: “When you don’t have a job, friend, you do anything it is offered you!” And adds: “When you’re out of a job, people stay away from you.” Rosemerie is the opposite: she is good-humored, bold, she speaks her mind and has superb looks: “I can support my family pretty well, don’t need a man to survive... if you’re not afraid of life, you’ll go on. That’s why I want to be a receptionist, it’s a beautiful job. You need schooling for the position, I want to be chic. The pay is little, but it’s so charming”.

Ethnography of the Vila Guiomar/Jardim Silvano settlement

The Amaleto family plantation, known from the mid 19th century, underwent successive divisions over time, and around 1950 the property was once again dismembered. The paltry agricultural benefits deriving from the land resulted in new subdivisions, and by the 1960s there were two owners of some of the lands which would become the future Vila Guiomar. The area was divided into small lots and put up for sale at the beginning of the following decade. At the same time, *grileiros* [persons who take possession of lands through false title certificates] sold lands in the north section as well as part of the neighboring subdivision, Jardim Silvano. The residents of these neighborhoods continue to search for the old property owners in order to obtain the property rights, since the contracts under which the parcels were sold have no legal status because the land is in an area of protection of the water sources.

The two neighborhoods are located on the border between the city of São Paulo and the town of Itapeccerica da Serra. The land was subdivided and sold illegally and nevertheless the residents paid the city property taxes (IPTU), one of the basic conditions for winning suits to gain land titles in the courts, since the settlement of Vila Guiomar, like its neighbor, Jardim Silvano, is not recognized by the two city governments. This is not due to the fact that they are in precarious areas from the urban point of view, with little immediate possibilities of commercial and real estate development, but because they are located in the Guarapiranga Reservoir basin. With their 570 families and 2,400 residents, the majority of the lots measure 70m², 85 percent of which house construction: “There are 7 lots; one man came and sold these lots to the people who are there today. Just this land here and another part down there were left, but it seems that this part belongs to the São Paulo. But his part really was this stretch from here to the back – that would be 7 lots. I reckon there must be 14 houses or more, because it’s all subdivided. Understand? All

subdivided.” And that’s the reason the recently connected water doesn’t “come out of the faucet during business hours” in certain parts of the neighborhoods. In fact, it only reaches the cisterns around 5 or 6 in the morning for short periods of time and on unpredictable days. In summer, the situation is even worse since SABESP rations, alleging that this is an irregular area, “the water comes on at 6 and off at 7. We don’t have water here. There’s nothing in the faucet. It’s really just an hour from 5 to 6 or from 6 to 7; when things are good, we have it from 7 to 8 or 8:30. After that, there’s no water; the cistern fills up and then it stops. By nighttime the cistern is empty.”

Some residents consider that their homes belong to Itapecirica since they pay taxes to that town, even though São Paulo provides their electricity and water: “The problem now is the post office. The post office used to deliver Silvano residents’ mail to me. But I left to do some work for 15 days and the mail got behind – credit card and telephone bills. They complained at the post office. The post office took away the guy who had delivered here and said that Jardim Silvano is an unknown address. They don’t deliver mail to anybody. No one is getting mail here. This thing with the borders is a drag. Here is Itapecirica, and it is official with the post office. The border over there is São Paulo; I’m here in Itapecirica. But over there is more Itapecirica and Vila Guiomar is more São Paulo. Everything’s mixed up. It’s a mess. No one knows whether they belong to São Paulo or Itapecirica.”

The neighborhood has no bus lines or van transportation leaving from nearby. To get a bus, one needs to walk about 30 minutes to Vila Calú or Jardim Capela and then wait another 40 minutes. Those who work in São Paulo put in 4 to 6 hours of travel time daily. The elementary school is 30 minutes away by foot, trash collection only at far away points, and there are no hospitals. Lighting is precarious and the steep terrain places buildings at risk on stormy days. Not to mention the muddy roads and lack of services and stores. Both settlements are surrounded by large green areas with little construction, which probably will be broken down into future illegal subdivisions. In a certain sense this area on the frontier of the expanding outskirts of São Paulo is similar to that of Três Marias at the beginning of the 1990s; at that time it was a green area with sparse population, lacking infrastructure, public services, and devoid of commerce and private services: “We don’t have schools, public healthcare clinics, drugstores, or big supermarkets with better prices. Public transportation is terrible. The neighborhood is abandoned to its fate. Because we just pay taxes and we don’t have anything in this neighborhood. We did get the pavement; we, the residents paved the roads. We don’t have a city council member to fight for the neighborhood. In our neighborhood association, people aren’t very

interested either. To have a good neighborhood, you have to have a good community. A united community. And that's not the case in our community.”

Despite the denial of some residents, it is a violent region. In the past there was a chop shop for cars on Guiomar street, run by a group of young people who also held people up in the surrounding areas: persecuted by “*justiceiros*”, the group was dismantled, whether by its members being jailed or meeting with death, or due to the arrival of organized crime in this part of south São Paulo. Drug dealing started at the beginning of the 1990s when Boy, a local smalltime criminal, bought the Mirante da Serra bakery which was located on the line between Vila Guiomar, Jardim Silvano, Jardim Capela and Vila Calú, seven blocks away from where our interviewees lived. They knew about the violence: “He doesn't steal from anyone. He just deals.” He doesn't pressure kids to get into drugs, nor to sell them. The guys who work with him do, but he doesn't encourage anyone. And he makes that very clear. He gave a talk at the soccer field some years back. He said, ‘I'll never encourage the children of anyone who lives here to get into this life. I will never do that. If I can advise someone not to get into it, that's what I'll do. Now, whoever wants to, can get into the life.’ Now the people who work with him, that's different, they don't think like he does. He helped the community a lot, but today he doesn't anymore. First of all, because he disappeared. But he was always one to help the community. Whatever you needed you could count on him, that he would be there to help.”

Boy's criminal activities prospered and he became influential in the residents' lives: the “community criminal” decreed that there would be no more robberies or homicides in the region, the use of cocaine was forbidden for residents and the young people in his “domains” had to attend talks given by him and his group. Another determination was that local young people would not be drafted into his gang. Only those who persisted in their desire would enter into the “function” and become part of the “organization”. But rival dealers moved into the area soon enough – the most important was Bronx from Jardim Nakamura, and beginning in 1997, a war among the factions started: “There is a dealing site, so they fight over the control of it, so that only one gang stays. That's when the massacres happen. This week on Saturday, they killed an innocent working man: they riddled his face with bullets, because he turned around to see what was happening and said, ‘I'm not running, 'cause I don't owe you a thing!’ So he ended up dying innocently.” There were several shoot outs and deaths in front of the bakery, culminating in Boy fleeing to Rio de Janeiro and Mato Grosso do Sul, where he tried to get help from other criminal groups. “The Fall of Boy”, as the local young people refer to it, made way for the return of more traditional criminality, with the come back of holdups and chop shops

in Vila Guiomar. One group of thieves that lived nearby went to prison, but that didn't stop the residents from being "marked for death". They stole big things like cargo trucks. They threatened the neighbors by telling them what would happen if they reported them. They went to prison but continue to threaten to return to the neighborhood when they get out of jail to kill whoever turned them in.

There are fewer murders than in some of the nearby neighborhoods. Yet, for the residents, the sight of dead bodies lying around is routine since there is no police presence given that the area is not legally recognized by the city of São Paulo or the town of Itapeverica: Jardim Ângela's popular maxim – "the police only come when someone dies" – also applies to Vila Guiomar and Jardim Silvano. The residents report that noises from fights and shots coming from the bakery are frequent and cause so much fear that the interviewees don't let their children leave the house after seven o'clock at night.

The area is one of the frontiers of the expanding urban periphery, which has now spilled over São Paulo's city limits, where small cheap lots have been put up for sale due to illegal land parceling and the lack of public services. It is in these areas, far away from the employment centers, that the poorest population can acquire land and build their houses with their own hands, or more recently, also with paid help. In this particular case, the situation is aggravated further because residents, due to being on the city limits, don't know who to pressure to legalize the area and obtain public benefits and services.

Table 6. The Characters*

Name	Age	Schooling	No. of people in the household	Total income R\$	Per capita income R\$	Former residence in São Paulo	Time at present residence (1)	Nº of rooms in house (2)	Means of construction (3)	Notes
Elza(1)	39	Higher Education in-complete	4	3000	750	Own house in the same neighborhood	4 years (i)	4S, 3D, 2B, 1C, 1O	Tpt	Owner and principal of Conto de Fadas School
Ronaldo & Ivonete	29 21	5 th grade 6 th grade	4	570	143	Squatter Settlement, border w/ Diadema	5 years (i)	2D, 1C, 1B	Tpt e Ac	Another 5 relatives live in 2 houses on the same lot.
Zaqueu(1) & Tereza	40 28	4 th grade 4 th grade	4	600	150	Rented 2 rooms and bathroom	15 years (i)	2D, 1C, 1B, 1S, 1 ^o	50% Tpt e 50% Ac	Unemployed, does odd jobs.

* data collected in 2002.

- (1) finished = a; unfinished = i;
 (2) living room (S); kitchen (C); bathroom (B); bedroom (D); others (O);
 (3) self construction (Ac); work paid to 3rd parties (Tpt); *Mutirão* (M)

Elza is 39 years old, was born in Umuarama, State of Paraná and came to São Paulo while still a child, about 26 years ago. She married twice and lives today with her husband Roberto, 41 years old, and children, Fabiano, 17, and Dayane 12. She studies pedagogy at the Faculty of Taboão da Serra and owns and runs a school – Conto de Fadas School – in her house. Her gross income from the school is R\$3,000, and her net monthly take is about R\$ 2,000. Her husband finished fifth grade and works as a wall painter. However, he is presently unemployed and not receiving a salary due to lack of work at the company where he is registered. He does occasional odd jobs and manages to make R\$ 500. Fabiano is in the second year of high school and works as an accountant's assistant. His salary is R\$500. Dayane is in the sixth grade.

Their house stands out in the development due to its size and the degree of finishing. On the ground floor, it has a living and dining room, kitchen, bathroom and laundry room and upstairs there are 3 bedrooms, two rooms and a bathroom. Construction began in 1993 and four years later the family moved to Vila Guiomar. The land was leveled, but even so when it rains the lower part of the lot floods. The

sewer was connected in 2002. The street is paved and has trash collection, which is not true for other parts of the neighborhood. The different construction phases were done with hired labor, aside from the cement roof slab, “only on the roof did we really do the construction ourselves. There were some friends of the family who helped finish the roof. It was on a Saturday and a Sunday. We had a barbecue.” She considers the house to be unfinished just like the school, alongside the house, where they need to finish one classroom and build another. “I’ve already spent about a hundred thousand reais or more. The only things I didn’t buy were school supplies, a table, the cabinets and chairs which I got from the city government.”

Before moving here, she lived with a brother in the same neighborhood in a jointly owned house, also built by paying third party labor. She lived on the lower floor where there was a living room/bedroom, kitchen and bathroom and rented out the upstairs. Presently both floors have renters and the rent money is shared with her brother. A house of her own for Elza means, “having your space, your land, having something one can leave the children”. It also means greater security since “today you have a job, and suddenly tomorrow you don’t. And then you have no way to pay rent. The owner of the house isn’t going to wait for you. You are out on the street.” It is also an escape from the discrimination that falls on those who live in squatter areas, since “people discriminate against folks who live in a *favela*” “A *cortiço*” would be unthinkable, since “life in the tenements is terrible. Just thinking about those bathrooms with everyone using them, using the same sink.”

Medical services and schools are in nearby neighborhoods, about an hour away on foot, counting the round trip from one’s home. Transportation, as has also been pointed out, is slow and faraway. When Elza was a salaried worker, she used to spend four hours per day between home and job: between 1989 and 1999 she was a manager of a store on Peixoto Gomide street, making R\$ 1,200 a month. “One day I told my boss I wanted to resign, and we had an agreement; the agreement money was invested in my house and school”. The idea for the school came “like a flash”, initially with a partner, but for the last 2 years she has administered the daily life of Conto de Fadas alone: “Since I wasn’t educated, I wasn’t a teacher or anything and I had a sister-in-law who was a teacher, so we went ahead. I called her and said, ‘Let’s start a school’ She said, ‘how, where?’ I said, here. I will pay the expenses and you will do all the rest. She left in 2000.”

Elza thinks the neighborhood got better after some of the people who “chopped” cars in front of her house went to jail: “The neighborhood isn’t really violent, here on my street. I’ve had problems with violence here, but those people were boys who lived here, because they didn’t have a school, they couldn’t go to

school. So, these boys became real rebels. They ended up getting into a life of crime and today they are prisoners. So it's like this, the street is calm, there are always problems in the neighborhood, but they're caused by people who come from outside." Another problem is Antonio's bar on the street corner of her house. She says that there used to be a lot of noise and confusion around there, but that, due to a robbery, the situation improved: "Now they've stolen the sound equipment from Antonio's bar. So now there's no problem. But it was noisy because well... it's the neighbors, the workers who drink some after work. They get violent and aggressive and start to shoot and turn up the sound to the max. They drink and go looking for trouble. So, we have had that problem here on the street."

Even though she doesn't consider her neighborhood to be a violent place, she does recognize that's not true of the surrounding areas, "the regions of Jardim Capela, Vila Calú, Jacira, and Vera Cruz are violent". Nevertheless, she also refers to violence in the neighborhood and on her own street: "They stole cars and left them here in front of the house. They just took the accessories from the cars. They were a gang – the kids who are in prison now. They stole and brought the cars to dismantle them here. And you couldn't say anything. One day I said , because I knew them, "Don't do that here, it's not cool doing this here." And they said to me 'shut your mouth and get on inside lady, and mind your business."

According to Elza, neighborhood crimes are generally committed by young people, often involved with local drug dealers. Robberies of neighborhood bars are quite frequent: "It's mainly the young people. They use weapons and rob the businesses. Antonio had his bar robbed by kids at 7 p.m." The police are also a problem: "Sometimes instead of doing good things, they do really awful stuff. If you are robbed and call the police, they take forever to get there. More than hours. If you get some money together for the police, they catch the criminals. I saw the police shoot some suspects in front of my house, about four years ago. If there is anyone you can trust, it is the neighborhood security people, it certainly isn't the police. There isn't any security here. God is our security."

The local drug stop is a shack built of wood, cement and tiles next to the Padaria do Mirante bakery, also known locally as "Boy's Bakery". The bakery is a few blocks from Elza's house. "Boy's sister used to encourage young people to get into the life, telling them they would make more money. So, she encouraged them by giving them everything, taking advantage of them. These kids who took apart cars, they were good kids, they were studying, but didn't have jobs and then their father lost his job. Then she showed up and called them over, saying 'let's get to work, that's how you'll make some money'. About 6 months later they were killing and

stealing. And they wanted more and more. If they got 100 today, tomorrow they'd want 200, they thought they were going to have lots of money by stealing. But it turned out to be the other way around. Now they are hungry and in jail."

There's no decent police service in this neighborhood and the residents experience the fear and challenges of living in one of the most dangerous areas in São Paulo. "As much as you say, 'I am not afraid' you know that way back there you are and you also know that you are liable to be victimized. So you say, 'I'm not afraid?' I, in fact, know almost all the kids around here, from Capela, but you can never say 'it won't happen to me'. You never know."

Elza is extremely enterprising and doesn't accept her husband's unemployment: 'The person feels inferior. My husband hasn't worked since November. He only gets part time gigs. He could do some things around the house. He could help out at the school. But he won't. He is a lazy bones. He is an honest, excellent person and a lot of women want him. But he would really be a man if he were to get the lead out of his body and the laziness out of his head. His boss owes him R\$ 8.000 in back wages, 13th month and holiday pay, plus fines. If it were me, I would already have received it, bill by bill."

Cheerful, talkative and with lots of ideas and initiative, Elza has precise plans for the future: "I want to be a public school principal. This year I took a test to be a teacher with the city of São Paulo and with Itapeverica. But I will keep Conto de Fadas. It's my big accomplishment, my dream, my favorite. If I don't get to be a school principal, I'll stay right here. My school is my way of making a living without a boss, I am independent thanks to teaching. After finishing pedagogy, I'm going to take psychology. My life has taught me that it is never too late. I went 26 years without studying. I never got discouraged. Giving up is not my way."

Ronaldo, 29 years old, from the State of Pernambuco, works as a doorman, went to school up to the fifth grade. He is married to Ivonete, 21 years old, from a small town in the State of São Paulo, who finished the sixth grade and is unemployed. They have two children, 4 year old Rodrigo and 2 year old Vitor: "There was a time when I was alone, without a girlfriend and suddenly she appeared. So I dropped by the house and she was there in the door. We got together one Sunday and it was great. At a certain point we got closer: 'Want to live together?' 'Let's.' That was in the *favela* Pantanal on the border of Diadema, last stop before arriving in Jardim Silvano. "Then some people invaded land there in Diadema. My father bought a lot really cheap. It was illegal, but we lived there. We built there, in concrete. It wasn't good, but we stayed there 8 years. So you ask, was it worth it? Who knows?"

It's hard to live in a *favela*. I'm going to fight not to have to go back. If I do have to, I will, but with a lot of pain."

The pain comes from the fact that one of his brothers was murdered: "It's bad there. A good person gets involved with bad people without seeing. The police killed him. People use drugs on the street, right in front of you, in front of their kids; they offer you guns for sale right in front of everyone. You are on red alert all the time. I was afraid to leave home to work, I was afraid to come home. I just put my head down and went home shaking. I knew that a lot of bad things went on, like shoot outs. It's hard to know who you are with, there are people who aren't good...my brother..."

When Rodrigo was born, Ronaldo decided to get out of the *favela*. His parents also thought it was a good idea to look somewhere else: "It came to me to get out of there, since I'd set things up with my brother and everything and with my buddies, I said, 'We have to get out of here somehow'. My mother also wanted to get out of there any way she could. We saved money and bought this lot for cash. Then we started to build. And it is what it is: just this size".

They've been in the Jardim Silvano for four years on the lot where, besides Ronaldo and his family, there are two brothers-in-law in another house and a third where his parents live with a brother. They used their income to pay the builder and buy construction materials to build the houses little by little, and everyone worked on them during their free time: "I built my house and then I told my mother: "Now we'll build yours. Because I had a way to do it bit by bit. At first, we didn't hire a builder for the foundation. My uncle did most of the work. Then we realized he didn't know what he was doing and called a builder. Of course I did my part and helped my parents with most of their house. Later, my father came in with most of his money. Then we managed to build this entire downstairs area. It was only then that my mother said, "Let's build the upstairs'. Then my brother who had lived downstairs in Diadema came to work too and stayed on to live with us. In the end, the family was at peace. The lot is large and there is room for everyone. It was just my house that got built alone, by struggling. The family helped out when things got tight, but I helped more. Big families are like that. And after the thing with my brother. I just wanted to get out of there, to live somewhere decent and peaceful. It was worth it, there is more security here."

In the neighborhood, "peaceful, fresh air," there are some problems with health, education, and transportation services already pointed out by the other interviewees. In addition, there is no sewer system; there is a lack of quality electricity: the light is bad and is always flickering". There is also the problem of

school violence that is considered to be the most serious for the children's future: "What worries me is the school later, when they are older than 12. I see the things that go on there and it worries me a lot. What worries me is the involvement, I am very concerned. If they don't get involved everything is all right. And later? How am I going to influence their minds? That's why I would like to move to the country. It's more peaceful in the country. The school is the same, even better, and it's more peaceful."

Ivonete reports that there was too much violence in the *favela* Pantanal in Diadema. There were always shootings and she witnessed killings in the streets. "There is lots of stealing here, it's always happening. But I never saw anyone killed here. Here it's more peaceful. I think that it's more violent over there, beyond the bakery: that's where the people are dangerous. Capela, Horizonte Azul are the violent neighborhoods in the region. There are shootouts there and massacres. There was a shootout at Boy's Bakery in Mirante and a little girl who was about to turn 10 was killed."

The Mirante da Serra "is wild. That's where a lot happens. Here it is more organized, if someone is killed, there is a reason that they were. I'm afraid of my children being kidnapped. We're not immune to these things just because we are poor. Drug dealers are everywhere. I think that there are people who know who the dealers are, but don't report them because they are afraid." Thus like Ronaldo, Ivonete is fearful for her children's future, when they grow up, are adolescents with more independence. They got out of Pantanal. Now they want to move to the country, where it is more peaceful: which means looking for a less violent place to live, where their children will be better protected from involvement with the world of drugs.

Ronaldo has always worked as a doorman at condominiums. For six years in one building in Itaim, making R\$ 570 plus overtime and lots of times he went a month without a day off. His work day plus travel time was almost 12 hours: "I leave home at 4:10, get the bus at 4:20, 4:25 and get to work at 5:30, 5:40. I change quickly. It's more complicated on the return trip: I leave work at 2 p.m. and get here at 3:40 or 4:00. It's a rough life".

Ivonete has been looking for work for six months. Her last permanent paid job was in 1995, as a domestic worker: "When you work outside the home, you feel valued. Just the fact of working is something else. I feel more useful. I think that I will get a job, some have already been offered. But if I had accepted one, very faraway from here, I would have to leave really early, at 4:00 in the morning." Introspective, she has difficulty relating to employers: "I think it is my appearance, or my face, I

don't know what gets in the way, but something really does. It's not because of my color, black. Maybe it's my teeth. I am really shy and that holds me back."

Ronaldo is extroverted, a battler, left the *favela* to get away from the violence and managed, together with the family, to acquire the much desired house of his own. "I've given the best part of myself to this house and to Ivonete. To leave here and go to the country is the dream. To have a more peaceful place for them to be able to play, study, and live with more stability. But, here, even the way it is, the house got better; and that's as far as we got; we didn't manage to finish it, but it gave us shelter."

Zaqueu, 40 years old, was born in the State of Bahia and arrived in São Paulo at the end of the 1970's. An electrician by profession, he completed the fourth grade and has been unemployed since 1997. Tereza is also from Bahia and arrived in São Paulo at the beginning of the 1980's. She has the same amount of schooling, works as an assistant at a school in Santo Amaro and makes R\$250 on the job and an additional R\$ 200 from renting out a room. Her children are Diego, 16, who is in high school and Dayane, 10, who is in the fourth grade. They acquired a lot in Vila Guiomar in 1982 and five years later moved into a house with a bathroom, service area, two rooms and a large living room that had been a workshop and now is rented out.

The lot measures 175m² and is extremely steep: 'The water ran right by out on the street, which had no curbing then and so it hit my wall directly. Then it happened. It was on my daughter's birthday. The wall fell, landed in the middle of the living room and invaded the kitchen. It took everything and buried it here inside. Everyone ran out and the water was running and destroying everything. Then I made a hole down here and the water passed through and flooded everything here. But if it had continued above, it would have destroyed more and swept us away. I experienced a day of terror. I was getting ready for the party and suddenly everyone started crying for fear the house would collapse. Everything shook and that was the end of the party; we lost everything on the same day. We even lost face. Now the water runs along the curbs and drops here in front. Now it only causes humidity and a few leaks: that's better, isn't it?"

Between 1987 and 1990 they "raised" the service area and the kitchen, while the living room-workshop was only built at the end of the following decade: "Today we have only three rooms. The bathroom doesn't count. Half we built ourselves and half I paid for. But it ended up being a weak building. At the time I did everything in a rush and it ended up being badly done, not worth anything. I live here because it's mine. I don't pay rent, but if I had to pay rent for a house like this, I wouldn't rent it".

The family came to help with the roof: “We always help one another, each grabbed a can [of cement], threw it up there, then another grabs another can. No one pays for this kind of work, to fill the roof platform, setting up the structure: a little barbecue, a little beer”.

When Zaqueu was working, his salary was enough to pay for the labor on the more difficult construction tasks, structure and the columns for the house and part of the finishing: “There were no big sacrifices to start the construction, but to finish I am making a lot, due to his being out of work. We need to finish, but there is no money. And there’s no way to finish, everything is without paint.” Before, they had lived in a rented house with two rooms and a bathroom in Jardim Jacira, near Vila Guiomar: “That was a house more or less like this one. The difference is that I paid rent for the other. This is mine, really mine! “

The neighborhood continues to have water supply problems “because SABESP of São Paulo rations water to us”. The sewer system has arrived but has not been connected to her house. As everyone says, public services continue to be irregular: “...there’s no school, we don’t have security, there’s nothing here. There’s no police here, they only come when there are murders. Life is really hard here. So with a job and a safer house, I am leaving here”.

From 1992-95, Zaqueu worked as a freelance electrician with the Zacarias chain of tire stores. For the next four years, he worked for PCC Engenharia, as a salaried worker making R\$450 a month. He used to leave the house at 6 in the morning and because he did a lot of overtime, he often only got home at 9 pm. after a ten hour workday: “The thing is travel time. That’s the killer. If you get to work late, the boss cusses you and fires you. The son of a bitch has no idea what time you left home. Sometimes you leave at five and arrive at 9. I don’t know how many times I’ve heard, ‘go back home today and mind you’re not late tomorrow”. That was his last job, since then he’s only had part time work: “I’ve missed out on jobs as an electrician due to my lack of schooling. At 40, I’m also a bit old. The cost of looking for a job is higher than what I make. The cost is 10 reais per day. It’s a month of work for every 10 days looking. I didn’t do anything for my future this last week. I stayed home, washed dishes and cleaned the house. I did work I shouldn’t have to. Lots of the time, I don’t do anything.” For Zaqueu daily life is marked by fear of violence. His children always go out together with their mother, they never stay out in the street and never go out at night: “There’s a lot of violence here, more than in other places. In the wealthier neighborhoods there is more security. There I’m not taking chances, but here in the settlement, I become a victim. The fact is we live on the periphery with no security, no help from the government, the mayor. No one cares about us.” He

was there when the bar was held up: “It was really awful: They didn’t take anything from me. I didn’t even see. I lay down and hid, he [the criminal] told us to lie down and I was the first. Nobody messed with me. I don’t know about the others”. He thinks there are other places worse than the settlement. “Capão Redondo and Jardim Ângela are worse than here. Over in [Jardim] Ângela it got better because they have a police station now”. That’s the reason Zaqueu complains that, with the new police station there, things have gotten worse in his neighborhood. “Everyone comes over here, the police chased everyone out, and they’re all in hiding around here. This place is dangerous, this neighborhood. Anyone who stays out late, yikes! Midnight and you can’t be out! Over there at that crossroads there, no one can stay any time. Capela is a problem!”.

The family has experienced several robberies “They robbed Diego in Santo Amaro last year. They took his money”. Zaqueu too: “They put their hands in my pocket and took my wallet”. In Santo Amaro too. Teresa was robbed about four months ago. She says that one of her brothers who also lives in the area and owns a small business is frequently robbed. Yet he never made a police report. “If I decide to call the police and that bunch of police cars shows up here at the house, the criminals sit tight and observe, they have their eye on me then. If you call the police you are a marked person, you can even be killed. The way out is to let them take what you have and not to react. Why would I call the police if I already gave them what I had? It’s not worth it to make a police report. Once I phoned in a report on the chop shop here in front of my house. I don’t report anything anymore. Me, I’m not going to go around saying anything, I pretend I don’t see a thing. If I report it and they know it was me...then, things are very bad for me. I reported one guy when I had a phone, I even sold my phone line because I was afraid. I called the police and said: “There’s a car here on the street above my place, these guys left the car there, they’re dismantling it’. So, I was proud of myself, good citizen reports crime, and suddenly the phone rang and it was the police captain: ‘Hello, is this Mr. Zaqueu?’ ‘Yes’. ‘I sent my men over there and they aren’t finding any car’. Then I thought: “How do they know my phone number there?” And if the criminals recorded my phone call during this conversation too? And if the bastard saw my face? And if the police are there with the guy? And then I thought, Well! From now on I no longer own this phone and I sold the line. And I told Tereza: “If I ever get another phone, I’ll never do that again. Never.”

And Zaqueu added: “I don’t trust any of the police or the criminals. I think it’s safer to trust criminals. But it’s all the same. Because at least they won’t do anything to me. The police come ready to beat me up, order me to put my hands up on the

wall. That happened in Joaquim Nabuco. I was walking home from the airport, there where the Extra store is. There were three of us – me, my son and my brother. We had this deal about carrying our *marmitas* [tin containers for food] with our lunch to the job, each day one of us would carry the three *marmitas* in a plastic bag. Then, it was funny, it was right there at the bus stop when the Rota [police] showed up: ‘Ok, everyone up against the wall, all three of you.’ They put us up against the wall and began to shout: ‘So there, what’s happening? Do you have a little something there?’ Since my brother stutters, he started to stutter. Then they thought we were joking around because of the stuttering, or that there was something wrong with us. So the idiot cop grabs the bag with the *marmitas* from my brother’s hand and throws it on the ground and they made that loud sound right next to the bus stop. The woman at the stop started to laugh and everyone was making fun of us. The worst is they left the *marmitas* there on the ground and left making fun of us, too. I felt like a fool, lower than a flea, lower than a snake crawling on the ground.”

They don’t usually go out at night: “I am afraid and don’t stay out at night. The children only go out with their mother. This is routine. I think of it as a preventive measure. But it doesn’t guarantee anything.” For him, the problem lies in the lack of jobs: “Unemployment. A guy is unemployed, has children at home to feed, he has to find a way, go out after something. He has to get food somehow. And if there’s no way and he can’t get back on top? He doesn’t have a way out, but he has to get money! How can he feed his kids if he isn’t working, if he’s unemployed? This is on the news every day. He kills, steals, does whatever the hell, just doesn’t rape because that is too low.”

Zaqueu is cheerful, playful, always smiling as he talks: “The advantage is that I don’t pay property taxes for a real estate agent. I pay everything for myself, in my name. Anyone, right up to the President, can look me up in the tax system computer and see ‘this man is a Brazilian citizen’. I want to do a cement roof up there, and add on a nice second story, my own house for me, for my son, my daughter, for the future. If everything goes wrong, they will still have a place. I want to build at least 6 rooms; I’m one who wants to have 6 rooms.” This means saving face, recovering his “honor” that was lost on the day of terror, the house collapsing on Dayane’s birthday: “I keep trying to do things, struggling along to see if I get somewhere. If I don’t manage to win! What can I do? What I like to do best is my part, working with electricity. I want to learn more, the electronics of radio and TV. I already mess around, but just for me, I do some odd jobs just for myself.”

Daily life in the neighborhoods studied

For homeowners on the poor urban periphery, the effort lies in mutual aid to improve the neighborhood and build the houses, even if most of the labor in building of one's own house has been paid. Cooperation is necessary for getting urban improvements, since the settlement depends on collective efforts to develop its environment and not to become just a passageway en route to getting the bus, going to school and shopping. Its evolution in obtaining public and private services depends, in good measure, on demonstrating that it is not just another "*morro de piolhos*", a mere "people warehouse", but a group of families capable of battling to acquire benefits. Thus the need to exercise basic rights of citizenship, which begins with acquiring title to the land. Afterwards it is necessary to get water and paving for the streets and for that, it's necessary to "get folks together" and form an association, since nothing just falls from heaven: it is necessary to have a city council person to fight for the neighborhood and to have a united community. When this doesn't happen, the neighborhood goes without nearby schools and public healthcare clinics, improved transportation, as well as drugstores, open air markets, supermarkets and stores that offer more products at lower prices.

In sum: neighborhood improvement from which derives a large part of the quality of life of the residents of the poor urban periphery, and this comes in part from the collective action of its inhabitants. This means that the endless "*jardins, vilas or recantos*" need to create a social identity that agglutinates their interests and to build an association that represents them and mobilizes the residents around collective demands; that they organize around the problems in the settlement.

So called community union is hard to achieve and is certainly more fragile and occasional now, when one takes into account the social struggles that occurred in the 1970's and 1980's, which paved the way for improvement in some basic elements such as water, sewer, electricity, paving, trash collection and public transportation. Nevertheless, organizing around urban demands continues to exist, linked to human rights organizations, agencies that provide professional or social welfare assistance to a wide range of NGOs, various party politicians, and the religious groups, mainly Catholic, which develop social-pastoral work with the local population. These social and political networks continue to be of vital importance to the evolution of the settlements, mainly when dealing with illegal neighborhoods established in protected water source areas. The efforts of the residents of the poor urban periphery are directed toward building their homes. And it is there that the savings and energy of the families who opt for this housing modality are concentrated over a long period. Everything indicates that more paid labor is used now than in former decades, and it

is true that the building of the initial stages is quicker, given that from 1950-1980, most of the property owners still didn't consider their homes to be finished even after working on them for 10 years. In any case, all the families in the two settlements who began to build on average 7 years ago, state that their houses are unfinished. Thus the greater utilization of paid labor, which depends on family savings, starting in the 1980s but subject to the vagaries of unemployment, did not substantially alter the time at which building is considered finished: "We got it up, but not finished", "it is weaker, needs finishing, but we're out of money mostly due to the lack of work", are statements that express the difficulties in continuing the construction process.

On the other hand, the sacrifices made to be able to have a home of one's own continue to be notable, meanings drastic restrictions, including in the purchase of food or the privations from living in a *cortiço*, "Filthy yard, really a mess", fights, living in a single room, sharing a bathroom. These are the practices necessary to be able first to buy a lot and then start buying cement and bricks. The price to be paid is high, and there is always the risk of "losing face", the house ready to collapse on a stormy day, on your daughter's birthday.

Advantages and disadvantages

The houses in the two settlements vary significantly in terms of size and quality as shown in Tables 5 and 6 of the last chapter. As pointed out in the field observations, the interviews undertaken as well as the available literature, there is more use of hired labor than was true during the period 1950-1970, when half of the residents lost their steady jobs (Pasterenak & Baltrussis, 2000). From the sampling done of 52 of the 200 households existing in the Três Marias settlement in 2001, it was discovered that half of the homeowners hired outside labor, 20 percent paid to others and also built themselves and only a quarter of those who built their houses relied entirely, in different forms, on the voluntary cooperation of neighbors, family members and friends. Thus, the data point to a greater utilization of paid work during the first stages of building the house, opted for not because the production process requires it, but due to the large number of unemployed and underemployed available to work on house building at very low levels of remuneration. But the use of hired labor has apparently not redounded in improvement of the quality of the houses. The fact is that there are unemployed builders who charge half price and this can become the most advantageous way to build for someone who is employed or who has amassed an amount (usually through severance pay [FGTS]) to invest in building a home. Or it can happen simply because there is no one in the family or neighborhood to participate in the *mutirão*, which requires someone who knows how to build to

coordinate the work on the construction site. Or further, because community spirit is vanishing and mutual aid that is, lending a hand here, another there, is a thing of the past.. With few exceptions, the residents interviewed consider that, despite all the sorrows, their housing situation improved. Notwithstanding the precariousness of the neighborhood, the houses were being built and if there was still a long way to go, they had at least managed to make the leap that freed them from paying rent.

The residents of the poor urban periphery frequently live close to or alongside *favelas*, and probably many of them lived there for a certain time: they are known as places discriminated by the police, where one should not return. The perception of the *cortiços* in the areas of the periphery is that of a mountain of little houses, on the same lot, using the same space: everyone massed together, using the same bathroom and sink, very crowded, disorganized and dangerous.

It's not possible to live with the family there. To be here and not there produced explanatory categories that structure peoples choices, based on the adjectives used according to a hierarchical scale of values and what is better or worse, or less worse: *barro amassado* [a muddy place] means a faraway place, lots of sacrifice to build a house, lack of work, long travel time on public transportation, lack of public and private services, but it also means escaping renting and the hope of having something in the future: they are limited choices, since the alternative – it is reiterated – for the poor classes, when they do not opt to build their own house, is to live in the so called *favelas*, the slums of the urban periphery or the tenement houses in the downtown areas.

It takes 4 hours per day to get to work from the urban periphery, without mentioning the rainy days that turn the streets into muddy swamps, increasing the time en route. Perhaps this is the main problem for those who opted to be home owners of houses that are most often in places far away from available employment: to get up at 5 in the morning, to be fired due to arriving late and be told to get up earlier the next time: what kills is not the work, it's the travel time, is a frequent refrain of residents of the urban periphery. It sums up a highly extenuated way of life, since in time paid by a job there are many hidden daily hours of travel time: this is in fact, a kind of overtime, a necessary condition for completing the work day for those who live on the urban peripheries. This is also true of the round trip to school that can take an hour per day, of the tenuous lighting of the streets, of the distance from the public healthcare clinics, where one waits several weeks to get an appointment or in the limited range of services that restricts one's choice of products and makes them more expensive and difficult to obtain. This is without mentioning the police who don't even come near, letting the criminals to become stronger than the public safety

forces. These are aspects that are condensed in the phrase “the neighborhood is weak”, it needs to evolve.

The big advantage lies in escaping the rent, that useless expense. Getting out of it is a relief; continuing as a renter can mean spending the rest of one’s life in the *favela*. For the poor, escaping rent and owning a brick house is very different from having a house in a slum or one in a squatter area. It also means having more security; today one has a job, tomorrow is uncertain and there is always the risk of being evicted. It allows one to build little by little, paying for oneself. Having a house means realizing the aspiration of living under a roof of one’s own, having space of one’s own and something to leave the children. It also means, in the end, to be able to construct a future, leaving “the best part of oneself” in that house. What validates the sacrifice of building a house and living far from everything is freeing oneself from being eaten alive by paying rent and creating, to the extent possible, a property that does not just provide shelter against the vagaries of life such as illness or unemployment, nor just an insurance against old age. It is all this and realizing the dream of owning one’s own private space, built by the effort of the family group that spent its energies in achieving a goal of grand material and symbolic value.

In sum it is realizing oneself as a private citizen, which means creating a project centered in the reclusion of the domestic sphere, supported in the mutual aid of primary sociability and building a public space in counter position to the world of the street known as a place where arbitrariness and violence predominate as a result of the fragility of the civil and social rights of citizenship (Kowarick, 2000: chs. 5 & 6).

Violence and fear

There are massacres and deluges of bodies in the surroundings of both the settlements studied and a chop shop for cars in one of them. Drug dealing, disorder and no one dares to study in one of the neighboring schools. Almost next door, just beyond the woods, are the frequent sounds of gunfire and in the *favela* further down a lot of people have died, six at once. There are fights and holdups on the bus. Sometimes the bus drivers don’t even stop for fear of being robbed. Inside Três Marias, even after being walled in, the robberies continue. Vila Guiomar/Jardim Silvano are close to Mirante da Serra, a place of frequent homicides, and where, they drilled an innocent person just a few days ago. There you can’t stand in the crossroads any time of day or night, here in the settlement it is more organized. When someone dies, it is someone who should. The gang who dismantled the cars made threats to the residents. The bar was held up. In the end, safety in the poor urban periphery is in the hands of God. People are afraid to go out when its dark and

it's better for everyone to stay locked in their houses, because when they go out "they don't know if they'll be back".

Violence has become routine for residents of the poor urban periphery. Habits and routines are developed on the basis of daily experience, learning of occurrences that put the lives of people at risk. These can be reports from the neighbors or the TV as well as events witnessed directly. The sense of fear is based on living with close and imminent danger, an imponderable that can explode at any moment. The real and imaginary perception creates a consciousness of violence, about the criminals and the places where one shouldn't go, as well as about the police and the places they never go. Explanations are developed about the causes of crime that run from unemployment to drug dealing, touching on the perspective for the future, and its effect on young people. Finally, more than in other areas of the city, one needs to learn to live with the fear that has become a structuring element in the life of its inhabitants.

These are recent occurrences in São Paulo, since the multiple manifestations of criminality only began to take on a greater and wider significance at the end of the 1980's. In this sense, one can affirm that in recent years, a strong sense of fear and the practice of talking about crime have consolidated:

"conversations, stories, rumors, jokes, and histories with crime as their theme. (...) Fear and talking about crime not only produce certain kinds of interpretations and explications (most often simplistic and stereotypical) but also organize the daily strategies for protection and reaction that restrict people's movements and shrink the universe of their interactions."(Caldeira, 2001 : 22-3)

In the two settlements on the urban periphery, those interviewed knew of the existence of the local criminals, and even knew them personally, but didn't live so closely as to maintain a permanent relationship with the outlaws. Residents are workers who fear and avoid the presence of criminals, since they know of the dangers of being hit by one of the criminals or being victimized by arbitrary police actions: the sensation of living at risk is something rooted in people's daily lives, especially in the secluded, poorly lit locales, where the police only go after a crime has been committed. The leadership of Boy, the "community outlaw" was an exceptional moment, since he decreed that there would be no more robberies or deaths in the region. He gave speeches on the soccer field and forbid the young people in his domain from using cocaine and gave permission only to recruit those

who insisted on trafficking. He was an educated outlaw who respected the workers and sought to guarantee the inviolability of his terrain. (Zaluar, 1994, p.21). This was not the case of his sister, who encouraged neighborhood children to get into the drug business. He lost his drug business to Bronx's gang and the massacres began, lots of death and shoot outs. That is why it is absolutely necessary to know where one cannot go: the crossroads is fatal, a place where workers can't be at any time under risk of being murdered.

As mentioned, the police are inefficient and only show up after a murder has been committed. The police are noted for their absence and can't be relied upon to protect the neighborhood; the police do good and bad things. Often people trust the dealers more. The police arrive and want to start hitting: they order you to put your hands on the wall; everyone laughing and you feel like you are "crawling like a snake".

It's better to trust the criminals who at least don't harm the workers, if they don't get in the way. With no public safety, workers view the police with distrust, when not as a source of threats, since they use violence in an arbitrary manner with impunity. But even so, there is no protection coming from the criminals, who often disrespect and intimidate the local residents. The fear of robbery and death comes from them, causing residents to practice calculated, defensive detours to get to the seclusion of their homes. They stay home at night, not so much to rest, but to escape possible violence: there are schools where one cannot go, busses that refuse to stop for fear of being held up, the least thing one says can be recorded and, above all, one cannot look around to see what is happening. Some residents have been marked for death by the criminals who suspect that they reported them, and it is best for everyone to mind their own business because they are "watching". That is, individual and family protection are vested in rules of withdrawal that erect barriers to the emergence of citizens who exercise the right and duty of denouncing violators, since their proximity represents threats and frequently risking one's life. The solution is to pretend one knows nothing, practicing what has been called the civic culture of dissimulation (Santos, 1994, p. 4).

Thus violence becomes an element that also structures the daily life of persons, marking spaces, selecting appropriate times and forging defensive postures and behaviors aimed at diminishing the risks and that imply practices of withdrawal. In some cases it prompts migration from one neighborhood to another, or even a change of cities: the decision to leave dangerous places and find more peaceful places becomes a strong component in the choice of places to live and in this way, violence constitutes, together with the search for work, basic sources on the scales of

values for renting or building a home. I'm not referring just to the hope of escaping a place that has become "a real mess", to the desire to move to the country or return to the Northeast due to the potential for involvement of their children who find themselves in the areas where criminality is present. I am pointing to the case of a person who, after the murder of her husband and son, moved from the settlement where she lived, only to return three years later, or the one who, after his brother had been killed could only think of getting out of there.

These statements reveal the knowledge of who committed the crime and the fear that the killer, in order to avoid being reported will carry out even more violence. We are speaking of a sinister means of self protection, since the law of silence can be broken at any time, putting at risk not just the executioner who committed the crime, but the victim who can be subjected to lethal reprisals. The choice can be to wipe out the opponent through reporting him or with the help of local criminals, both choices being extremely daring. The most rational, because it is the least dangerous, lies in avoiding confrontation, which means moving from place to place, far from the spaces of the criminals who have irreversibly penetrated the private circle of domestic life. And this can be called urban migration provoked by violence, present in the reports of some of the interviewees. It is a new process emerging from the motivations for territorial mobility.

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