

Amidst the Flow

*Biographical Narratives, Social Trajectories,
and Urban Itineraries of Crack Users in São
Paulo*

By

Richard A. Reichert

**Amidst the Flow: Biographical Narratives, Social Trajectories, and
Urban Itineraries of Crack Users in São Paulo**

By Richard A. Reichert

This book first published 2024

Ethics International Press Ltd, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2024 by Richard A. Reichert

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Print Book ISBN: 978-1-80441-599-3

eBook ISBN: 978-1-80441-600-6

Dedication

To my grandfathers Aldo Reichert (*in memoriam*) and Jair José Formento (*in memoriam*), who faced difficulties and inequalities in access to education, broke barriers, and dedicated their lives to teaching, guiding, and assisting their children and grandchildren in their journeys. You were examples of simplicity, humility, and selflessness. I will always cherish your stories, especially those from your childhoods when you walked barefoot for kilometers on the cold ground in winter to reach school and learn to read. I will hold in my memory, with eternal gratitude and admiration, the memories of our visits to the university and how you awaited my return, the questions about college and my work, and the way you admired and flipped through my books with the curiosity and enthusiasm of excellent researchers. Thank you for everything!

To the late Professor Dr. Alba Zaluar (*in memoriam*), one of my main references in the social sciences since my first year in the Psychology undergraduate program. '*A Máquina e a Revolta*', '*Violência e Educação*', '*Condomínio do Diabo*', '*Drogas e Cidadania*', '*Da Revolta ao Crime S/A*', '*Um Século de Favela*', '*Integração Perversa*', and '*Cidade de Deus*' were books that left a lasting impact on my academic journey, prompting me to critically examine the complexity of human and social phenomena. I will be eternally grateful for the opportunity to have known you, for the conversations (read as lessons) on the way to the university, at events, and at the airport, and for the partnerships that time and life allowed us.

It was in the same perspective as your writings, in the "tension between subjectivity and objectivity, between interpretation and critique, between ideology and science" (1985, p. 59), that this work was constructed. In accordance with your works and what you advocated throughout your career, and with the aim of continuing our dialogues, I will always strive to challenge simplistic reductionisms and

unscientific attitudes that lead to the formulation of inefficient public policies. Thus, guided by scientific knowledge, we will continue to pursue a more democratic, just, equal, and compassionate world.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	xi
Preface.....	xv
Prefácio – Versão em Português.....	xxix
Foreword I.....	xliii
Foreword II.....	xlvi
 Chapter 1: Drug Use – Historical Overview and Theoretical Models	1
The Concepts of Vulnerability.....	3
Drug Use and Addiction Vulnerability.....	6
 Chapter 2: Theoretical, Methodological, and Ethical Research Aspects.....	9
The ‘Flow’: A Note on Denominations	11
A Note on Study Secrecy and Confidentiality	11
A Note on Translation	12
 Chapter 3: Vulnerabilities and Drug Use in São Paulo's “Crackland”	13
Drug Use Patterns	21
 Chapter 4: Experiences – Biographical Narratives, Social Trajectories, Urban Itineraries, and the Use of Crack and Other Drugs	27
Intra-Family Violence	30
Socialization and Institutionalization.....	33
Interpersonal Violence and Crime	37

Chapter 5: Barriers – Living Conditions, Social Exclusion and Repression	42
Living Conditions	43
The "War on Drugs"	66
Chapter 6: Resilience – Social Context, Vulnerability Reduction and Changes in Relations with Drug Use	77
Harm Reduction.....	90
Chapter 7: Weaving Lives: Art as Empowerment and Transformation – An Insight into Harm Reduction Experiences at the ‘<i>Tem Sentimento</i>’ Collective, Richard Alecsander Reichert, Carmen Lopes, Leide Carla, Veronika Verão dos Santos, Eroy Aparecida da Silva	93
Art, Experiences and Memories.....	99
Art, Resistance and Empowerment.....	103
Art, Inclusion and Representativity	109
Art, Creation and (Re)Affirmation of Life	110
Final Considerations.....	112
References specific to Chapter 7 – ‘Weaving Lives’	114
Chapter 8: Open Veins of the Brave Forbidden World – An Analysis of the Historical Origins and Imperialist and Racist Influences on Drug Prohibition Policies.....	120
References specific to Chapter 8 – ‘Open Veins’	152
Chapter 9: Final Thoughts	156
References	158
Afterword.....	179

Acknowledgements

To Professor Dr. Micheline Ramos de Oliveira, who has been by my side since the first year of my undergraduate studies, serving as a professor, mentor, and, above all, as a great friend and partner in various projects. She has demonstrated to me the importance of critical and reflective psychology in the construction of a more just society. I am grateful for all the teachings, debates, problematizations, references, advice, and opportunities you have provided. Most importantly, I appreciate the unwavering trust you have consistently placed in me. This work was only possible with your support, encouragement, and assistance. Reflecting on our first Social Psychology class in August 2015, I wish for you to continue always with the strength and courage that I admire so much. These qualities are essential to confront the injustices and inequalities of this world—a world, as defined by Cartola, that resembles a mill. May we maintain our illusions, ensuring that they are not all lost, and strive to create a future that does not merely repeat the past.

My heartfelt thanks go to Carmen Lopes de Almeida for her warm welcome in São Paulo and for accompanying me during the days I spent in the city collecting data. Her companionship and support were indispensable for the development of the research that culminated in this book. I also value the countless conversations and reflections that contributed significantly to the discussion of the results obtained. Without these conversations at the end of the day, reflecting on everything we have seen and heard, many questions could have remained unanswered. I have deep admiration, affection, and gratitude for the opportunity to work alongside you in the search for a better world. This is reminded of Johann Hari's words in *'Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs'* (2018, p. 120), a book in which you participated: "every small victory in social justice is a small drop in the ocean".

Similarly, I extend my thanks to Maria Angélica de Castro Comis and to everyone at the Centro de Convivência É de Lei for welcoming me during my time in São Paulo.

To Professors Dr. Alba Zaluar (*in memoriam*), who read, provided insights, and stressed the importance and necessity of interdisciplinarity and the integration of neuroscience into the social and human sciences—an essential aspect for addressing the theme of this work; Dr. Denise De Micheli, for the friendship and numerous collaborations; MSc. Eduardo Guerini, for life lessons, particularly in politics; MSc. Enis Mazzuco, for critical analysis; Dr. Eroy Aparecida da Silva, for consistently thoughtful contributions; Dr. Fernanda Machado Lopes, for revisions and suggestions, as well as for the various projects we worked on together; MSc. Simone Oliani, for support and encouragement; Dr. Ygor Diego Delgado Alves, for tips during my field immersion; MSc. Yone Gonçalves Moura, for discussions about the project at the Congress of the Associação Brasileira Multidisciplinar de Estudos sobre Drogas (ABRAMD; Brazilian Multidisciplinary Association for Drug Studies, in English); Michel Marques, from the Guarulhos Psychosocial Care Network; Janaina Gonçalves, from Centro de Convivência É de Lei; Dr. Maria Fatima Sudbrack, from the University of Brasília; and many others, for dialogues, reflections, revisions, contributions, and numerous partnerships.

It is also essential to mention all the people who compose the *Intercambiantes Brasil* Collective (www.intercambiantes.org), a social organization committed to promoting and defending policies, interventions, and care related to the field of alcohol and other drugs. Special thanks to the national coordination, the São Paulo nucleus, and the communication team of the Collective: Alda Roberta Campos, Dr. Antonio Nery Filho, Celi Cavallari, Dr. Eroy Aparecida da Silva, Dr. Fabio Mesquita, Gustavo Duque, Dr. Luciana Surjus, MSc., Márcia Lima, Maria Lurdes Zemel, Paula Ribeiro Costa, MSc., Regina Tuon, and numerous other professionals, researchers, and activists guided by ethical, bioethics, and human rights pillars, acting in accordance with

various principles, including Harm Reduction, Anti-prohibitionism, and Psychiatric Reform.

To my family, who always made it possible for me to pursue and achieve my dreams. Especially to my mother, Edicléia Formento, who took care of me, guided me, and provided the most diverse opportunities in my life; to my grandmothers, Cléia M. Formento and Vilma S. Reichert; to my grandfathers, Aldo Reichert (*in memoriam*) and Jair J. Formento (*in memoriam*); to my sisters, Karoline G. Reichert, Nicolý M. Reichert, and Maindra Reichert, the newborn with the curiosity of a little scientist; to my aunts and uncles; to my father, Aldo C. Reichert; to my stepfather, Adriano Belino; and to Ana Mendes, who contributed to my learning process during the first years of my life. I also thank my colleagues and friends for countless conversations, debates, and moments together.

Greetings and special thanks to the teachers who have been part of my journey since childhood, from the early years of elementary school to high school, before entering higher education: Ana Coelho, Fernanda Santos, Marileia Medeiros, Silvia Maçaneiro, Janete Guzatto, Érica Santos, Leticia Nardi, Cátia Inácio, Lourdes Moreira, and numerous other educational professionals who have influenced my trajectory.

Finally, to the research participants, who recognized the importance of the study, welcomed me with open arms, and shared their journeys, feelings, opinions, perspectives, and dreams with me. Thank you for the stories, the dialogues, and the numerous hugs I received, living up to the title of a book that you proudly showed me, '*Cracolândia: Território do Abraço*' ('*Crackland: Territory of the Hug*', in English), and to the name given to the alternative policy of humanized public intervention from which you benefited, '*De Braços Abertos*' ('*With Open Arms*', in English). I echo the words of anthropologist Ygor Diego Delgado Alves (2017, p. 10): there is no greater goal in this work than to recognize your dignity, value, discernment, and will.

Preface

This book serves as an intricate narrative, intimately intertwined with my personal history, academic training, and professional trajectory. At a personal level, the connection is established through my curiosity for continuous learning, discoveries, and a passion for teaching. Echoing the sentiments of philosopher Clóvis de Barros Filho, who defined happiness as sharing knowledge, I find a fervent desire for these moments not to conclude too swiftly, be it with students, teachers, or family members.

This sentiment accompanies me when exploring studies and discussions about human behavior, particularly in the realm of drug use. In my academic journey, this topic serves as a gateway from neurosciences to human and social sciences, unraveling the intricate relationships linking molecules to society, from microstructures to social macrostructures. Addressing drug use demands not only a profound understanding of neurobiological aspects but also a comprehensive perspective that comprehends the complexity of social interactions.

This journey commenced during my undergraduate years and persists to this day. However, I firmly believe that these discussions should not be confined to academic circles; it is imperative to extend the dialogue to the broader community. In these opportunities, my excitement is immense, as I see the potential to disseminate knowledge and foster a more extensive and contextualized understanding of the topic.

Professionally, my entry into the "world of drugs" was not merely a choice but a response to the urgent need for effective and enlightening interventions. As a professor and coordinator of various social and university extension projects, I recognized the necessity for robust actions in dismantling stigmas. It was essential to clarify that drug use was, in reality, a secondary issue in the lives of these children and

adolescents—a multifunctional behavior manifesting in their life contexts. This mission transformed into an ethical commitment to guaranteeing rights and constructing more effective intervention strategies.

However, my comprehension of the topic was not always as nuanced. Like the majority, my introduction to this field was characterized by a simplified perspective and, at times, influenced by stigmas surrounding drug use. During my undergraduate studies in Psychology, while delving into psychosocial care for psychoactive substance use within an academic discipline under the guidance of Professor MSc. Maria Celina Lenzi, I encountered one of the initial opportunities to dispel deep-seated misconceptions. In an evaluative exercise where we were tasked with determining the accuracy of statements, I encountered the assertion that "In general, the estimated lifespan of crack users is eight months". Naively, I endorsed it as true, having been exposed throughout my life to narratives about the harmful potential of crack and other drugs, particularly their perceived association with social issues such as violence.

However, the assertion was false. I discovered that, in reality, even when crack use is present, the main cause of death related to users is external, resulting from their adverse living conditions and structural violence arising from the prohibitionist and repressive perspective. This shocking revelation was a turning point in my understanding, encouraging me to question and deepen my understanding of the subject. Since then, I have dedicated my work to deconstructing stigmas and promoting a more humanized and contextualized approach in the field of drug use.

It is evident that, in a scenario of criminalization, the deconstruction of misconceptions and myths related to drugs is configured as a "deviant act", as defined by Howard Becker, one of the fundamental theoretical bases of this study. As my thoughts and attitudes towards the topic moved away from the conventional view, I became an "outsider". In this condition, the need for deep reflection arises, seeking to understand the

influences, inclinations, and underlying motivations that led me to this position.

The career concept proposed by Becker proves to be particularly useful for understanding the sequence of stages or steps that culminated in this way of thinking. This includes the notion of “career contingency”, which encompasses both political-sociocultural factors and changes in individual perspectives, motivations, and desires that influence mobility from one position to another. My trajectory, marked by the deconstruction of stigmas related to drugs, is intrinsically linked to this contingent dynamic, where changes in society and in my own motivations play significant roles in my evolution as an “outsider”. This theoretical approach provides a valuable conceptual framework for analyzing not only the specific field of drug use but also the broader nature of deviant movements in complex and morally charged social contexts.

Before proceeding, it is crucial to pay attention to the fact that this brief report only addresses a selection of relevant points that led to the construction of this work. Many important episodes may be inadvertently omitted, considering the complexity of the route. This gap in the narrative is supported by the perspective of philosopher Dr. Marilena Chaui, who, when addressing the definition of ideology, highlights that history does not strictly follow a chronological succession of events or a linear progression of ideas. On the contrary, it dynamically reflects how human beings shape, reproduce, or transform social existence across diverse cultural, political, and economic dimensions.

In this context, understanding the evolution of my ideas and practices in relation to the topic of drug use requires a deeper and more contextualized consideration. The influence of social contexts, individual experiences, and significant events over time paints a complex and multifaceted narrative. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that this report does not fully cover this trajectory, being a

limited but enlightening representation of some of the crucial moments that shaped my perspective.

On a personal level, from family experiences to experiences in the community, the topic of human behavior has always sparked my interest. Encouraged from an early age to read, research, and write, the complexity of human interactions became a focus of special interest. In the community, even before the first week of Psychology undergraduate classes, the shocking case of the death of a well-known man provoked a series of questions. His suicide was correlated to alcohol consumption, an explanation that, in a decontextualized and simplistic way, could end there. Considering the effects of alcohol on the central nervous system, especially in high doses, its ability to depress higher cognitive functions is understood, impairing judgment processes, inhibitory control, and decision-making.

Surprisingly, this topic was addressed in the first undergraduate class, in the subject of basic psychological processes. So, I realized that this explanation was only one part of the complex picture of human behavior. In a deeper analysis, influenced by phylogenetic, ontogenetic, and sociocultural variables, Professor Dr. Eduardo Legal mentioned the books *'The Demon-Haunted World'* by Carl Sagan and *'Everything is Obvious'* by Duncan Watts. These works highlight the complexity of human behavior and warn about the harmful impacts of pseudoscience and simplistic conceptions.

It was in this context that I encountered B. F. Skinner and radical behaviorist philosophy, as well as behavior analysis. Returning to my readings of Charles Darwin and contemporary researchers such as Dr. Paulo Dalgalarondo (*'Evolution of the Brain: Nervous System, Psychology, and Psychopathology from an Evolutionary Perspective'*), I grasped that the organization and functioning of the central nervous system require a profound understanding of the environment in which the organism is situated. This worldview and understanding of human beings became my guiding principle in subsequent stages of the quest for a broader,

more contextualized, and humanized understanding of human inclinations.

In the following semester, my academic journey underwent a significant shift when I encountered Professor Dr. Micheline Ramos de Oliveira, a psychologist with a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology. From the very first Social Psychology class, Micheline managed to captivate my attention in an extraordinary way. Her ability to brilliantly present classic works of Anthropology and Sociology highlighted her incredible critical and reflective vision.

The first book Micheline recommended for class discussion was '*A Máquina e a Revolta*' ('*The Machine and the Revolt*', in English) by Alba Zaluar, a pioneer in the field of Urban Anthropology in Brazil. In this work, Zaluar criticized the dichotomous models and simplistic theses often present in discussions about drug use and trafficking, violence, and crime. She also explored relationships of reciprocity and the formation of subjectivities, offering a broader and deeper perspective on these social phenomena.

One aspect that stood out was Zaluar's reflection on ethical issues in research, highlighting the importance of alterity marked by differences and respect for the customs, behaviors, and practices of the social groups studied. This ethical and sensitive approach to the social context resonated deeply with me and directly influenced my approach to the study of drug use. From that moment on, Alba Zaluar became one of my main theoretical references, inspiring me to adopt a more comprehensive, contextualized, and ethical perspective in my research and professional practice.

The following year, I commenced my role as a teacher and coordinator in various social and university extension projects, working in contexts of high social vulnerability, mainly with adolescents. Right from the start, I was often asked to address the issue of drugs, a topic that gained prominence at teachers' meetings, always approached in an alarming and sensationalist way. Fellow teachers suggested that there was an

"epidemic of drug use" in schools, especially in relation to marijuana, which was considered the central problem. Some even insinuated that students were involved in drug trafficking.

However, having established a close relationship with the students, I knew that this view was incorrect. Firstly, there was no "epidemic of drug use" in schools; even if some students did use drugs, it was a very small proportion of the population. Secondly, among those who did use some psychoactive substance, alcohol was the main one, but curiously it was never mentioned in the concerns and discussions among teachers. However, it is well known, according to information from various institutions, including the World Health Organization (WHO), that alcohol is the most widely used substance globally and can have more serious social and health consequences when compared to other substances.

In addition, those communities faced other pressing issues that should be the focus of concern and discussion, including poverty, which meant that many students didn't even have enough to eat at home. Along with poverty, many students' life stories were deeply marked by episodes of violence and violations of fundamental rights. Therefore, when some psychoactive substance was consumed, the behavior played some role in the environmental contingencies and social reality in which these students were immersed, from a sense of group belonging and pleasurable sensations to the relief of aversive emotional states.

Recognizing this does not imply denying the potential risks and harms associated with substance use, nor does it constitute an apology for drug use. It is undeniable that young people in the process of development need health care, especially during adolescence, when processes of brain maturation and refinement of cognitive functions are still ongoing, being crucial for adult life. However, this care should not be limited only to concerns and measures related to the use of psychoactive substances but also include arrangements of living conditions favorable to the full healthy development of these young people. A broad and contextualized understanding of the complex

social realities of these communities has become essential in my approach, directly influencing my professional practices and emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive view of the health and well-being of adolescents.

In meetings between teachers, where the complexity, multifactoriality, and pluridimensionality of issues relating to drug use are often unknown, countless suggestions for "preventive" strategies emerged. It is common in these educational environments to observe a certain lack of knowledge about mental health topics, especially drug use. Furthermore, families are often blamed, and responsibility is transferred to other sectors, especially public security.

In this context, one of the recurring ideas among the most outlandish "preventative" strategies was the holding of a cinema session for students, showing the film "Christiane F.". This film portrays the possible negative consequences of drug use based on the life story of a young woman classified as a "drug addict" and "prostitute". However, this approach, in addition to being simplistic and stigmatizing, tends to perpetuate harmful stereotypes and does not address the underlying complexity of the topic.

At the extreme, among the most authoritarian and perverse proposals, measures of reporting to the police and expulsion from the school context were suggested. These actions represented yet another chapter of exclusion and marginalization in the life stories of those students. Instead of offering support, understanding, and resources to deal with the challenges faced by students, such extreme proposals contribute to the perpetuation of a cycle of stigmatization, further harming the development and well-being of these young people.

Given this scenario, it is imperative to promote a more humanized and contextualized approach, which recognizes the complexity of issues related to drug use and prioritizes prevention and intervention strategies based on evidence, inclusive and sensitive to the realities of students. This implies the promotion of open, educational, and non-

punitive dialogues, involving not only educators but also mental health professionals, social workers, and the community in general.

In the following year, I chose not to return to my role as a teacher and decided to continue in the school context, this time working on the implementation of a project I had designed. In partnership with other university students, especially my friend Rodrigo Silva, also a Psychology graduate, the project began with the intention of addressing issues related to drug use. However, we were already fully aware that drug use constituted a tiny, if not insignificant, portion of those students' lives.

Given this understanding, we decided to expand the scope of the project, completely removing the focus from drugs and highlighting the human beings before us. This approach was in line with reflections by important researchers in this field, including professors Elisaldo Carlini from the Universidade Federal de São Paulo, a pioneer in studies on the therapeutic applications of Cannabis, and Antonio Nery Filho from the Universidade Federal da Bahia. Both defend the idea that we should not talk about drugs but rather about human beings who use drugs.

In this way, we executed the project in a school whose management and teaching staff were concerned about the dropout rate and the constant absences of students. Surprisingly, we managed to attract dozens of after-school students to participate actively, proactively, and collaboratively in a small classroom. All the students, including those classified as the "worst students in the school" – the "outsiders" – were enthusiastically involved. Even on rainy days, in communities prone to flooding, the students continued to attend the project, staying twice as long in the school environment.

In the midst of music, painting, cooking, and other activities, important issues arose, including mental health demands. In addition to the support of students and professionals who collaborated on the project, the students developed a significant support network among themselves. Notably, drugs were not the central focus of the project; on

the contrary, we sought to promote the general well-being of the students, stimulating the development of skills, creative expression, and, above all, the building of a more resilient and connected community. This experience reinforced the conviction that people-centered approaches have the power to significantly transform educational and social dynamics, moving away from stigmas and promoting a more inclusive and enriching environment.

All the stories we encountered among the students had a profound impact on our lives, demonstrating in practice what we had studied in theory regarding the role played by environmental contingencies in the behavior of individuals. One particularly striking case illustrated the effectiveness of interventions focused on changing living conditions, while at the same time dramatically pointing to the failure of institutions to deal with the reality of life and the vulnerabilities to which their students are exposed. This case involved a student abandoned by his parents, under the care of a frail grandmother with health problems.

Although he used marijuana sporadically, the student only discussed his use with us when we established a relationship of trust based on respect and reciprocity. On the contrary, he vehemently denied it to the school's management and teachers, who stigmatized, blamed, and threatened him. The student shared his story of abandonment, broken bonds, and violence suffered throughout his life. In some moments and situations, especially in social interactions and periods of sadness, the use of alcohol and marijuana was present.

In order to reduce the vulnerabilities and possible risks to the student's well-being, resulting mainly from the lack of education for autonomy and health promotion, we collaboratively built a life project. Respecting their autonomy and protagonism, we outlined objectives and the means to achieve them. We obtained a partnership with a university extension project that promoted the professionalization of students in the manufacture of surfboards and taught them the sport.

In a short time, we saw not only a change in the student's substance use patterns but also greater engagement in various social activities. However, the student was inexplicably expelled from school, and we haven't heard from him since. Once again, an abrupt rupture marked his life, highlighting the urgency of rethinking institutional practices and investing in approaches that are more understanding and focused on students' needs, rather than perpetuating cycles of exclusion and marginalization.

Two years before carrying out the study that resulted in this book, I took part in a congress of the Brazilian Psychological Society held in the city of São Paulo that year. At that time, in a year before the presidential and state governors' elections, São Paulo's so-called "*Crackland*" was once again at the center of the candidates' attention. This period coincided with significant challenges in Brazilian history, including the institutional coup of 2016, which was accompanied by the intensification of conservatism in the country. We saw the exacerbated rise of authoritarianism, constant threats to democracy, human rights violations, and the suppression of social and health policies.

During this period, countless repressive actions were carried out at drug consumption scenes, creating images that resembled a war scenario. In the places I went, I was constantly warned about the risks of getting close to "Crackland" and the users, who were often pejoratively labeled as "zombies". On the day of my return home, in the car on the way to the airport, the driver stopped at a traffic light and suddenly a man threw himself at the windshield of the car. Contrary to what the driver thought, it wasn't a robbery, but a person intent on cleaning the glass in exchange for some cash to survive on the streets.

Once again, I witnessed in practice the iatrogenic effects of policies of prohibition and repression, which transform places of greater social vulnerability into zones of conflict and constant violation of human rights. Instead of "putting an end" to "Crackland", the repressive actions resulted in people dispersing to different parts of the city, representing a negative result in terms of health care policies since many care

strategies took place where people were previously. With the repression, people began to feel more suspicious and reactive, distancing them from care.

In addition, the general population was fearful, given the stigmatizing images constantly conveyed in the media, associating crack use with violence. This allowed candidates to pursue political campaigns against this population, using crack as a scapegoat. Thus, repressive policies prevailed to the detriment of policies based on Harm Reduction, such as the 'De Braços Abertos' Program, which represented a paradigmatic change in the field of health care and the human rights of these people.

So I made a personal decision to return to São Paulo to better understand that reality, the history of those people, their living conditions, and the motivations behind their use of crack and other drugs. At university, initially, few professors and advisors encouraged the idea of going to another state to carry out research like this. However, as always, it was different with Micheline, who always supported and contributed to my ideas and projects. Our partnership went back a long way, with Micheline involving me in various academic research projects, as we were both scholars in the field of violence and shared many common interests.

Micheline had set up a center for contemporary studies in administration and public policy management. I presented the research project to her, and together we managed to secure funding to carry out the study. Years of searching for funding and research grants, often without success, reflected the words of neuroscientist Carl Hart, who in one of his articles (*'Viewing Addiction as a Brain Disease Promotes Social Injustice'*) addresses the social injustices arising from research in the field of drug use, highlighting the multimillion-dollar funding of studies that ignore aspects of the social factors related to drug use.

This time, however, we were successful and obtained funding, albeit limited and insufficient to carry out the research in full. Even so, we continued, and the study was carried out. The data and reflections from

this immersion in this context are described in this book, representing not only an academic effort but a personal and ethical commitment to a deeper understanding of the realities faced by those who are often marginalized and stigmatized by society.

Before arriving in São Paulo, I had the privilege of meeting Carmen Lopes, a social worker who played a crucial role in the '*De Braços Abertos*' program. After leaving the program, Carmen continued to care for people in the "*Crackland*" territory, creating a Collective focused on generating income and promoting humanized strategies for the population served, mainly transgender women and transvestites in situations of high social and programmatic vulnerability. It was with Carmen that I entered the field of research, sharing experiences and daily observations. Our conversations, held every morning, afternoon, and evening, were fundamental to understanding the realities experienced by the study participants. With her, various issues were discussed and clarified, contributing significantly to the construction of the reflections in this book.

In addition to Carmen, I also had the opportunity to meet Dr. Eroy Silva, a researcher linked to the Universidade Federal de São Paulo (UNIFESP; Federal University of São Paulo, in English) with extensive academic production in the area of drug use. My contact with Eroy was the first step towards joining UNIFESP and starting my doctorate in the Department of Psychobiology, in the area of Medicine and Sociology of Drug Abuse. Our conversations mainly dealt with the ineffectiveness of criminalization and punishment policies in the region and were fundamental to the construction of the reflections in this book.

A few months before arriving in São Paulo and making my first observations in the field, I was already organizing an academic conference that would be attended by numerous researchers, professionals, and activists in the field of drug use. At this point in the story, some events intertwine in a significant way. The week before I left, I shared some incredible news with Micheline, my advisor: I sent

an email to Alba Zaluar. Surprisingly, she promptly replied, agreeing to take part in the event.

The congress I organized brought hundreds of people, including researchers, health professionals, activists, teachers, teenagers, and the community in general. The choice to hold the event in the week of my birthday turned out to be a remarkable decision because during the congress, I was presented with a series of important and memorable events in my academic training in the field of drug use studies.

Firstly, I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Denise De Micheli in person, one of my main references in the neurobiological issues of substance use. We talked about projects aimed at adolescents, my research in São Paulo, and ideas for future books. Together with Eroy and other colleagues, we organized several books, including *'Drugs and Human Behavior Biopsychosocial Aspects of Psychotropic Substances Use'*, published by Springer Nature. Denise also invited me to do my doctorate at the Universidade Federal de São Paulo.

Secondly, during a personal conversation with Professor Simone Oliani, we began organizing a book on behavior analysis and substance use, entitled *'Behavior Analysis and Substance Dependence: Theory, Research, and Intervention'*, also published by Springer Nature.

Finally, the remarkable presence of Dr. Alba Zaluar was the highlight of the event. I picked her up at the airport with great emotion, and she closed the congress on my birthday. In a packed auditorium, she announced that she would be giving me a present. Showing a slide with the phrase by Lende and Downey (2012) – "For psychoactive substances to become catalysts and objects of pleasure and desire, they must circulate not only through the blood, the brain, and other parts of the body but also through social contexts" – she introduced me to the field of neuroanthropology, enriching my reflections on issues related to drug use, which culminated in this book.

Prefácio – Versão em Português

Este livro representa para mim uma narrativa intrincada que se entrelaça de maneira íntima com minha própria história pessoal, minha formação acadêmica e minha trajetória profissional. No âmbito pessoal, essa ligação se estabelece primordialmente pela minha incessante curiosidade por novos aprendizados, descobertas e pela paixão pela docência. Como expressou sabiamente o filósofo Clóvis de Barros Filho em sua definição sobre felicidade, ao compartilhar conhecimentos sobre o tema com diversos públicos, seja composto por alunos, professores ou familiares, experimento um desejo fervoroso para que esses momentos não se encerrem tão rapidamente.

Esse mesmo sentimento me acompanha quando mergulho nos estudos e discussões sobre o comportamento humano, mais especificamente no tocante ao uso de drogas. No contexto da minha formação acadêmica, o tema tornou-se uma porta de entrada para transitar das neurociências às ciências humanas e sociais, explorando as intrincadas relações que conectam moléculas à sociedade, das microestruturas às macroestruturas sociais. O desafio de abordar o uso de drogas não exige apenas um entendimento profundo das questões neurobiológicas, mas também uma perspectiva ampla que compreende a complexidade das interações humanas.

Essa jornada começou há anos, nos primeiros passos da graduação, e persiste até hoje. Contudo, acredito firmemente que esses debates não podem limitar-se aos círculos acadêmicos; é imperativo ampliar o diálogo à comunidade em geral. Diante dessas oportunidades, minha empolgação é imensa, pois vejo nelas a possibilidade de disseminar conhecimento e promover uma compreensão mais ampla e contextualizada do tema.

No âmbito profissional, minha incursão no "mundo das drogas" não foi apenas uma escolha, mas uma resposta à demanda urgente por

intervenções efetivas e esclarecedoras. Como professor e coordenador de diversos projetos sociais e de extensão universitária, percebi a necessidade de uma atuação contundente na desconstrução de estigmas. Era crucial esclarecer que o uso de drogas, na verdade, era uma questão secundária na vida daquelas crianças e adolescentes, sendo, na verdade, um comportamento multifuncional que se manifestava em seus contextos de vida. Essa missão tornou-se um compromisso ético pela garantia de direitos e pela construção de estratégias de intervenção mais efetivas.

Entretanto, nem sempre minha compreensão do tema foi assim. Assim como a grande maioria das pessoas, quando adentrei neste campo, possuía uma visão simplificada e, por vezes, marcada pelos estigmas que envolvem o uso de drogas. Foi durante a graduação em Psicologia, ao cursar uma disciplina de atenção psicossocial ao uso de substâncias psicoativas ministrada pela Professora MSc. Maria Celina Lenzi, que me deparei com uma das primeiras oportunidades para desconstruir alguns mitos arraigados. Em uma atividade avaliativa, na qual deveríamos assinalar "verdadeiro" ou "falso" para uma série de afirmações, deparei-me com a assertiva de que "Em geral, a estimativa de vida de usuários de crack é de oito meses". Ingenuamente, assinaliei a afirmativa como verdadeira, pois ao longo de toda a minha vida havia ouvido falar sobre os potenciais danosos do crack e de outras drogas, especialmente sua devastadora relação com problemáticas sociais, como a violência.

Contudo, a assertiva era falsa. Descobri que, na realidade, mesmo quando o uso de crack está presente, a principal causa de morte relacionada aos usuários é externa, resultante de suas condições adversas de vida e das violências estruturais advindas da perspectiva proibicionista e repressiva. Essa revelação impactante foi um ponto de virada em minha compreensão, instigando-me a questionar e aprofundar meu entendimento sobre o assunto. Desde então, tenho dedicado meu trabalho à desconstrução de estigmas e à promoção de

uma abordagem mais humanizada e contextualizada no campo do uso de drogas.

É evidente que, em um cenário de criminalização, a desconstrução dos equívocos e mitos relacionados às drogas configura-se como um "ato desviante", conforme definido por Howard Becker, uma das bases teóricas fundamentais deste estudo. À medida que meus pensamentos e atitudes em relação ao tema se distanciavam da visão convencional, tornei-me um "outsider". Nessa condição, surge a necessidade de uma reflexão profunda, buscando compreender as influências, inclinações e motivações subjacentes que me levaram a essa posição.

A concepção de carreira proposta por Becker revela-se particularmente útil para compreender a sequência de etapas ou passos que culminaram nessa forma de pensar. Isso inclui a noção de "contingência de carreira", que abrange tanto os fatores político-socioculturais quanto as mudanças nas perspectivas, motivações e desejos individuais que influenciam a mobilidade de uma posição para outra. A minha trajetória, marcada pela desconstrução de estigmas relacionados às drogas, encontra-se intrinsecamente ligada a essa dinâmica contingente, onde as mudanças na sociedade e nas minhas próprias motivações desempenham papéis significativos na minha evolução como "outsider". Essa abordagem teórica proporciona um arcabouço conceitual valioso para analisar não apenas o campo específico do uso de drogas, mas também a natureza mais ampla dos movimentos desviantes em contextos sociais complexos e moralmente carregados.

Antes de prosseguir, é crucial atentar para o fato de que este breve relato aborda apenas um recorte de pontos relevantes que conduziram à construção deste trabalho. Muitos episódios importantes podem ser inadvertidamente omitidos, considerando a complexidade do percurso. Tal lacuna na narrativa encontra respaldo na perspectiva da filósofa Marilena Chauí, que, ao abordar a definição de ideologia, salienta que a história não segue estritamente uma sucessão cronológica de eventos ou uma progressão linear de ideias. Pelo contrário, ela reflete dinamicamente como os seres humanos moldam, reproduzem ou

transformam a existência social em diversas dimensões culturais, políticas e econômicas.

Nesse contexto, compreender a evolução das minhas ideias e práticas em relação ao tema do uso de drogas exige uma consideração mais profunda e contextualizada. A influência de contextos sociais, experiências individuais e eventos significativos ao longo do tempo desenha uma narrativa complexa e multifacetada. Desse modo, é imprescindível reconhecer que este relato não abarca integralmente essa trajetória, sendo uma representação limitada, mas elucidativa, de alguns dos momentos cruciais que moldaram minha perspectiva.

No âmbito pessoal, desde as vivências familiares até as experiências na comunidade, o tema do comportamento humano sempre despertou meu interesse. Encorajado desde cedo a ler, pesquisar e escrever, a complexidade das interações humanas tornou-se um foco de especial interesse. Na comunidade, antes mesmo da primeira semana de aula na graduação em psicologia, o impactante caso da morte de um homem conhecido provocou uma série de indagações. Seu suicídio foi correlacionado ao consumo de álcool, uma explicação que, de maneira descontextualizada e simplista, poderia encerrar-se ali. Considerando os efeitos do álcool no sistema nervoso central, sobretudo em doses elevadas, compreende-se sua capacidade de deprimir funções cognitivas superiores, prejudicando processos de julgamento, controle inibitório e tomada de decisão.

Surpreendentemente, essa temática foi abordada já na primeira aula da graduação, na disciplina de processos psicológicos básicos. No entanto, compreendi que essa explicação era apenas uma parte do panorama complexo do comportamento humano. Em uma análise mais profunda, influenciada pelas variáveis filogenéticas, ontogenéticas e socioculturais, o Professor Dr. Eduardo Legal mencionou os livros *'The Demon-Haunted World'*, de Carl Sagan, e *'Everything is Obvious'*, de Duncan Watts. Estas obras destacam a complexidade do comportamento humano e advertem sobre os impactos prejudiciais das pseudociências e concepções simplistas.

Foi nesse contexto que me deparei com B. F. Skinner e a filosofia behaviorista radical, bem como a análise do comportamento. Retomando as leituras de Charles Darwin e de pesquisadores contemporâneos como Paulo Dalgallarrondo (*'Evolução do cérebro: sistema nervoso, psicologia e psicopatologia sob a perspectiva evolucionista'*), compreendi que a organização e o funcionamento do sistema nervoso central demandam um entendimento profundo do ambiente no qual o organismo está inserido. Essa visão de mundo e de ser humano tornou-se meu guia nas etapas subsequentes da busca por uma compreensão mais ampla, contextualizada e humanizada das inclinações humanas.

No semestre seguinte, minha trajetória acadêmica ganhou uma reviravolta significativa ao conhecer a Professora Dra. Micheline Ramos de Oliveira, uma psicóloga com doutorado em Antropologia Social. Desde a primeira aula de Psicologia Social, Micheline conseguiu cativar minha atenção de maneira extraordinária. Sua habilidade em apresentar brilhantemente obras clássicas da Antropologia e Sociologia destacavam a sua incrível visão crítica e reflexiva.

O primeiro livro indicado por Micheline para discussão em sala de aula foi *'A Máquina e a Revolta'*, de Alba Zaluar, uma pioneira no campo da Antropologia Urbana no Brasil. Nessa obra, Zaluar teceu críticas aos modelos dicotômicos e teses simplistas frequentemente presentes nas discussões sobre uso e tráfico de drogas, violência e criminalidade. Além disso, ela explorou as relações de reciprocidade e a formação das subjetividades, oferecendo uma perspectiva mais ampla e profunda sobre tais fenômenos sociais.

Um aspecto que se destacou foi a reflexão de Zaluar sobre questões éticas em pesquisa, destacando a importância da alteridade marcada pelas diferenças e do respeito aos costumes, comportamentos e práticas dos grupos sociais estudados. Essa abordagem ética e sensível ao contexto social ressoou profundamente em mim e influenciou diretamente minha abordagem no estudo do uso de drogas. Alba Zaluar tornou-se, a partir desse momento, uma das minhas principais referências teóricas, inspirando-me a adotar uma perspectiva mais

abrangente, contextualizada e ética em minhas pesquisas e prática profissional.

No ano seguinte, dei início ao meu trabalho como professor e coordenador em diversos projetos sociais e de extensão universitária, atuando em contextos de alta vulnerabilidade social, principalmente junto ao público adolescente. Desde o início, fui frequentemente procurado para abordar a questão das drogas, um tema que ganhava destaque nas reuniões de professores, sempre abordado de modo alarmante e sensacionalista. Os colegas docentes sugeriam a existência de uma "epidemia de uso de drogas" nas escolas, especialmente em relação à maconha, considerada o problema central. Alguns até mesmo insinuavam a participação de alunos no tráfico de drogas.

Contudo, por ter estabelecido uma relação mais próxima com os alunos, eu sabia que essa visão estava equivocada. Em primeiro lugar, não havia uma "epidemia de uso de drogas" nas escolas; mesmo que o consumo fosse uma prática presente entre alguns estudantes, tratava-se de uma parcela muito pequena daquela população. Em segundo lugar, entre aqueles que faziam uso de alguma substância psicoativa, o álcool era a principal delas, mas curiosamente nunca mencionado nas preocupações e discussões entre os professores. Entretanto, é notório, segundo informações de diversos órgãos, incluindo a Organização Mundial de Saúde, que o álcool é a substância mais amplamente utilizada em nível global e pode acarretar consequências sociais e à saúde mais graves quando comparado a outras substâncias.

Além disso, aquelas comunidades enfrentavam outras questões urgentes que deveriam ser o foco das preocupações e das discussões, incluindo a pobreza, que fazia com que muitos alunos sequer tivessem o suficiente para se alimentar em casa. Junto à pobreza, as histórias de vida de muitos estudantes eram profundamente marcadas por episódios de violências e violações de direitos fundamentais. Portanto, quando havia o consumo de alguma substância psicoativa, o comportamento de uso desempenhava alguma função nas contingências ambientais e na realidade social em que esses alunos

estavam imersos, desde o senso de pertencimento grupal e de sensações prazerosas até o alívio de estados emocionais adversos.

Reconhecer isso não implica em negar os potenciais riscos e danos associados ao uso de substâncias, tampouco constitui uma apologia ao consumo de drogas. É inegável que jovens em processo de desenvolvimento precisam de cuidados à saúde, especialmente durante a adolescência, quando processos de maturação cerebral e refinamento de funções cognitivas ainda estão em curso, sendo cruciais para a vida adulta. Contudo, esses cuidados não deveriam se limitar apenas a preocupações e medidas relacionadas ao uso de substâncias psicoativas, mas também incluir um arranjo de condições de vida favoráveis ao pleno desenvolvimento saudável desses jovens. O entendimento amplo e contextualizado das complexas realidades sociais dessas comunidades tornou-se essencial na minha abordagem, influenciando diretamente minhas práticas profissionais e enfatizando a importância de uma visão abrangente sobre a saúde e o bem-estar dos adolescentes.

Nas reuniões entre professores, onde muitas vezes a complexidade, multifatorialidade e pluridimensionalidade das questões relativas ao uso de drogas são desconhecidas, surgiam inúmeras sugestões de estratégias "preventivas". É comum nesses ambientes educacionais observar um certo desconhecimento sobre temas de saúde mental, em especial sobre o uso de drogas. Além disso, é frequente a culpabilização das famílias e a transferência da responsabilidade para outros setores, especialmente para a segurança pública.

Nesse contexto, uma das ideias recorrentes entre as estratégias "preventivas" mais mirabolantes era a realização de uma sessão de cinema para os alunos, apresentando o filme *'Christiane F'.* Este filme retrata as possíveis consequências negativas do uso de drogas a partir da história de vida de uma jovem classificada como "drogada" e "prostituta". No entanto, essa abordagem, além de ser simplista e estigmatizante, tende a perpetuar estereótipos prejudiciais e não aborda a complexidade subjacente ao tema.

No extremo, entre as propostas mais autoritárias e perversas, eram sugeridas medidas de denúncia à polícia e expulsão do contexto escolar. Essas ações representavam mais um capítulo de exclusão e marginalização na história de vida daqueles alunos. Ao invés de oferecer suporte, compreensão e recursos para lidar com os desafios enfrentados pelos estudantes, tais propostas extremas contribuem para a perpetuação de um ciclo de estigmatização, prejudicando ainda mais o desenvolvimento e bem-estar desses jovens.

Diante desse cenário, torna-se imperativo promover uma abordagem mais humanizada e contextualizada, que reconheça a complexidade das questões relacionadas ao uso de drogas e priorize estratégias de prevenção e intervenção baseadas em evidências, inclusivas e sensíveis às realidades das alunas e alunos. Isso implica a promoção de diálogos abertos, educativos e não punitivos, envolvendo não apenas educadores, mas também profissionais de saúde mental, assistentes sociais e a comunidade em geral.

No ano subsequente, optei por não retornar à função de professor e decidi continuar no contexto escolar, desta vez atuando na implementação de um projeto que havia idealizado. Em parceria com outros estudantes universitários, especialmente meu amigo Rodrigo Silva, também formado em Psicologia, o projeto começou com a intenção de abordar questões relacionadas ao consumo de drogas. No entanto, já tínhamos plena consciência de que o uso de drogas constituía uma parcela ínfima, se não insignificante, da vida daqueles alunos.

Diante desse entendimento, decidimos ampliar o escopo do projeto, retirando totalmente o foco das drogas e colocando em evidência os seres humanos que estavam diante de nós. Essa abordagem estava em consonância com reflexões de importantes pesquisadores nesse campo, incluindo os Professores Dr. Elisaldo Carlini, da Universidade Federal de São Paulo, pioneiro nos estudos sobre as aplicações terapêuticas da Cannabis, e Dr. Antonio Nery Filho, da Universidade Federal da Bahia. Ambos defendem a ideia de que não devemos falar sobre drogas, mas sim sobre seres humanos que usam drogas.