Ethnographies in hazardous locations: education and poverty in militia-dominated territories[1]

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Abstract: This article discusses the possibilities and challenges of doing ethnography in dangerous, impoverished, and violence-ridden places. It studies situations of disputes and reconfigurations of favelas that have passed their control from organized crime to militias. This is a combination of a literature review of ethnographic studies and a case study in a school in the Rio das Pedras favela in Rio de Janeiro, a territory dominated by the Militia. The article focuses on conducting ethnographies in hazardous locations. One of the objectives of the basic research was to investigate, analyze and describe the relationship between poverty, education and migratory mobility from the Northeast to the Southeast of Brazil. As a result, it is concluded that ethnography in dangerous places involves complexities that can force multiple constraints, restrictions and even abandonment of the research field. Consequently, this leads to the impoverishment and compromise of the data collected.
Keywords: ethnography; education; poverty; violence; territories in conflict.

Introduction

What is a dangerous topic? Sometimes, even a simple topic can be a challenge to conduct research or write an article. It's no wonder so many people get tense when they're asked to write a research paper on controversial topics, some of them are very difficult to deal with, because they can turn a civilized discussion into a verbal fight. Others are controversial, but we have to face them. So, the question arises: How to deal with difficult themes in ethnographic research? What has been considered a difficult topic in the literature on ethnography? How to work the field of research in hazardous locations? To answer these

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[1] Article translated from Portuguese to English by Rafael dos Santos.

questions, we start from research developed by Rosa (2019)[2] on the theme *Migration from the Northeast to Rio das Pedra* , which will serve as a database for the writing of this article.

To better understand the object of study of this article, some examples of these topics are cited, they are: abortion; child marriage; harassment; domestic violence; homophobia; religion; surrogacy; obesity; psychiatric diseases; child imprisonment; troubled adolescents; body deformities; sex workers; single mothers; witches; criminal life; femicide; elections; immigration; white supremacy; drug legalization; marriage between people of the world; same sex; *bullying;* Gun control: climate change; privacy rights; death penalty; transgender rights; financial debt; political conflict; health care system; elderly care; family structure; euthanasia, etc.

The subject of this article is dangerous places, we start from the assumption that – Whatever the topic chosen, it should be studied from all aspects and only then, choose the point of view about which it is going to be written. It is necessary to be careful and objective, without omitting the facts that support the various points of view, one must pay attention to the controversial in research, learn to look at the topic chosen for study, from all possible sides in order to maintain focus. It is necessary to anticipate the dangers in the field of research and prepare answers for the participants even before they arise. To this end, it is suggested that action protocols be prepared to deal with possible problems. Codes should also be established to warn about the possible dangers of the practice of empirical research, so as to maintain open communication with those outside of it and who can monitor and maintain the safety of the researcher.

The objective of this article is to report the difficulties encountered in conducting ethnographic research, especially related to the *loci* of the studies. The main data are derived from Rosa's (2019) research carried out in the favela of Rio das Pedras, in the western region of the city of Rio de Janeiro. The objective of this study was to understand the migratory movement of the research subjects from the Northeast to Rio das Pedras and its consequences in the educational environment. The subjects were the 4th grade students of the Luiz Gonzaga School (fictitious name) and their families. The study lasted 4 years and the field research was carried out between April and December 2016.

A section of this article will be dedicated to describing this research. Next, the *loci* are presented in order to explain why they constituted a danger to the researcher. The favela of Rio das Pedras, its surroundings and the daily life of the residents will be described from their point of view.

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[2] Rosa, Antônia Valbenia Aurélio. **Migration from the Northeast to Rio das Pedras: an ethnographic case study**. Thesis (Doctorate in Education). Faculty of Education, State University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2019, 151p.

At the time of data collection, Rio das Pedras was facing a bloody war between the criminal factions that held political power in the area, among them: the Comando Vermelho (CV, Red Command, our translation); the paramilitary groups; the Rio de Janeiro military police and the Militia (a group that became known as the crime office). The conflict took place, and still is, over the control of the geopolitical power of the territorial and economic space over the inhabitants of the favela. This struggle peaked between the years 2016 and 2019.

Although the object of the study of Rosa's (2019) research was the diasporic movement from the Northeast to Rio das Pedras, the conflict in the place became a challenge to carry out fieldwork. These threats were mainly characterized by: limiting access to the Luiz Gonzaga School (fictitious name) with the prohibition of its permanence on certain days; prohibition of visits to family homes; physical threats and intimidation suggesting that the researcher give up the work; prohibition of the collection and recording of data by images in photographs and videos, and finally, the imposition of fear as a way of controlling the coming and going of the researcher in the favela, putting at risk her physical integrity and the performance of the research.

Located in the West Zone, metropolitan region of the city of Rio de Janeiro, Rio das Pedras was founded in the early 1950s. It is worth explaining that there is a discussion at the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in a document entitled: *On the change from Subnormal Agglomerations to Favelas and Urban Communities* (2024, our translation) which deals with the terms favela and community. However, Rio da Pedras has been named as a community by most of its residents, by the media and official and academic documents. In this document, the IBGE defines the term favela as a subnormal agglomeration of irregular occupation, with land owned by those who live in it, generally located in urban areas, characterized by an irregular urban pattern, with a lack of essential public services and located in areas with restricted occupation, either due to the danger of landslides or the proximity of highways and railroads.

To understand the origins of the conflicts in Rio das Pedras, we revisit the research of Marcelo Burgos (2002), in his book *Utopias da Comunidade Rio da Pedras: a favela carioca*, the author presents a study of an anthropological-ethnographic nature. The research is important because it describes the creation of the favela in a solid, detailed way and with different analytical categories. For the author, there are three factors that differentiate Rio das Pedras from other favelas in Rio de Janeiro: the first is the number of residents; the second is due to the fact that Rio das Pedras is immune to the violence of drug trafficking, which is an attraction for residents, who saw in this the possibility of physical and social security not found in other favelas; the third was the fact that 60% of the residents were from the Northeast (Burgos, 2002, p. 34).

According to Burgos (2002), these differences are due to the voices of the members of the Association of Residents and Friends of Rio das Pedras (Amarp), who want to project an image of the reality of Rio das Pedras distant or socially distant from the other favelas of Rio de Janeiro, perceived as disorganized and violent. Burgos (2002, p. 63, our translation) explains that "[...] apparently, the security of Rio das Pedras is the responsibility of police officers who live in or frequent the favela, and who, due to their professional condition, find it easy to mobilize colleagues in order to curb undesirable practices."

The following figure shows the geography of the Rio das Pedras region and its surroundings, composed of an area of vegetation that is part of the Tijuca National Park. Its access roads are Avenida Engenheiro Souza and Estrada de Jacarepaguá, which connect Rio das Pedras to several adjacent neighborhoods, such as: Freguesia, Itanhangá and Barra da Tijuca. The reference points for access to the *loci* of Rosa's (2019) research were: the headquarters of Amarp and Rio das Pedras, which gave rise to the name of the favela. The residents' association is located on the border of two sub-areas: Pinheiro and Rio das Pedras, a central part of the community that corresponds to the first occupations of the site from the banks of the river that cuts through the favela in a peculiar way and demarcates the central region.

Figure – Rio das Pedras Favela

Source: Custódio Coimbra, *O Globo* (2020)

The photograph shows the huge area occupied by the favela and the complexity of the site. Also, according to Burgos (2002), the physical-geographical characteristics of Rio das Pedras and its form of occupation, almost exclusively by northeastern migrants, stimulating the cultural manifestations and identity of its inhabitants, in direct opposition to the

cultural characteristics of the carioca in general. This represents a tension between the two groups, with room for mutual expression of prejudices, a fact that is currently verified.

The time spent on Rosa's (2019) journey during her research to the *loci* was approximately two hours. Along the way, it was possible to observe how the buildings were erected on the site, exposing a population distribution that occupies the geographical space with inequalities. This allowed us to think about the ways in which this space shows the precariousness in terms of the electricity network, sewage, garbage collection, among other issues that dialogue with those experienced in the daily lives of the residents and reported by them.

Amarp plays the role of mediator between the policies of the state and the needs of the community through assistance policies, expansion of areas for the construction of residences, and other basic services constantly highlighted by the media. Thus, linked to security and insecurity, Amarp has been questioned about its performance, especially after the collapse of two residential buildings in the Muzema area, causing the death of residents, in 2019.

On April 15, 2019, the newspaper *O Dia* reported on an investigation into the relationship between Amarp, the presidents of the Muzema residents' association and the Militia. News such as these have often been published in national and international newspapers, where the criminal actions of the Militia lead to question, how the residents of Rio das Pedras tolerate such disrespect for their fundamental rights.

Among the news published in 2019, the issue of transportation on ferries that circulate between Lagoa da Tijuca and Areinha draws attention. The ferries provide the crossing of residents between Rio da Pedras and the Jardim Oceânico Metro station. The transport service was pointed out by the Public Prosecutor's Office of Rio de Janeiro as irregular, the official state agency argues that the service is used to raise funds for the Militia that dominates the place. This irregular extension of the public transport service created subdivisions in the area: Areal 1, Areal 2, Areinha, Casinhas, Pinheiro and Pantanal. Such areas also define the social position and the place of belonging of their residents in the community. Therefore, a form of hierarchy within the community – from the periphery to the center, signifying the social condition of the families and demarcation of territory of control among the members of the Militia. In the reports cited, there was an image of a leaflet given to the residents, indicating that the transport service was an initiative of Amarp, an open communication about the separation between the actions of the Militia and the Government.

Even occupying the areas of the community that are exposed to flooding and with the absence of basic sanitation due to the condition of the soil next to the Tijuca Lagoon, the families cited by Burgos (2002, p. 49, our translation) declare that if "[...] they feel protected by the mechanism of social control that exists in the favela that ensures their physical integrity and ownership of their possessions." The conflicting interactions between the resi-

dents of Rio das Pedras and its surroundings are linked, not only to the presence of Amarp in constant crisis with the Militia, but also to the abusive ways of raising financial resources with the justification of maintaining order. The power of the Militia replacing that of the State has as a consequence the exploitation and violence against the residents, especially those related to the real estate sector.

2 From *the micro* to the *macro*: ethnographies and their characteristics

The dichotomous processes: *micro-macro* and *quali-quanti* in qualitative research and ethnographies in education will be discussed in this session with the aim of dimensioning and positioning the research carried out by Rosa (2019) regarding *loci* and their dangers.

Qualitative research, in combination with quantitative research, has been used for the formulation and planning of public policies both in Brazil and abroad (Bachtold; Robert, 2022). The incorporation of this combination, which is still incipient, however, is in full process and legitimized and ascended in research bodies in Brazil. As an example, we have the investigations of the Institute of Economic and Applied Research (Ipea), linked to the Ministry of Planning and Budget (MPO), the body responsible for formulating and coordinating government actions in public policies. IPEA, in turn, has been recognizing the complementarity between *quantitative-qualitative* research. Within the scope of this work, it is possible to understand the functioning of government programs using ethnography, especially participant observation. This approach dialogues with the daily lives of populations and assists in decision-making by government managers.

According to Bachtold and Robert (2022), professionals in government departments have requested contextualized information and on-site research more frequently in recent years. This demand is a reflection of the complexity, diversity of interests, perspectives and difficulties involved in the implementation of public policies with frontline citizens in urban services.

The authors indicate that, based on larger data, but with local – qualitative – *perspectives*, ethnographies are being incorporated into official research institutes every day as an important contribution to questions and reflections on the reality of the daily life of the population and smaller institutions such as schools and families, providing reliable analyses of these contexts.

Ethnographic research of critical-epistemological-methodological approaches has contributed mainly to the understanding of social inequalities, understanding of social contradictions and to coping with unjust situations experienced by subjects (Erickson, 1988). As this method of investigation, the researcher acquired a different place in relation to other research methods by focusing on the dialectical view of culture as a system of meanings

and mediators between social structures and human action, inserting social actors with an active participation in the process of transforming social structures and by contributing to understand the interactions closely in some spaces such as the school (Mattos, 2001).

Mattos (2004, p. 66) explains that ethnographic research comprises two levels: *macro* and *micro*. The *macro* is based on the descriptive-analytical framework of dense description presented by Clifford Geertz (1989), for him, with this type of description it is possible to understand, in a broader and more qualitative way, the universe to be researched, without losing sight of the more complex power relations. As for the *micro*, it is based on the analytical framework of face-to-face interactions outlined by Erving Goffman (1985); the micro-ethnographic works created by Erickson (1992); Kendon's ethnography of the image (1990) and the gang studies carried out by Becker (1963).

For Mattos (2004), the *micro* level is complex, as it involves a careful look at interactions between people in particular spaces and starts from nuances, often invisible to the researched subject himself. In this microanalytic view, while allowing the emphasis on the meanings of the forms of involvement of people as agents of their own realities and histories, microanalysis "[...] requires the researcher to take a careful and detailed look at verbal and non-verbal actions, looks, pauses, tone of voice, details of the interaction, which are coated with meanings and become objects of microanalysis" (Mattos, 2004, p. 69 our translation).

Regarding the *macro level*, Mattos (2001) explains that it has to do with the understanding of the local culture. She points out that, during the fieldwork, it is necessary for the researcher to be immersed in the local culture for a long period in the search for typical and atypical events of the subjects' ways of life and

> Ethnography is a guided process that literally preponderates the ethnographer's questioning sense. Thus, the use of ethnographic techniques and procedures does not follow rigid or predetermined standards, but rather the sense that the ethnographer develops from the fieldwork in the social context of the research. In this view, the research process will be determined explicitly or implicitly by the questions proposed by the researcher (Mattos, 2001, p.1, our translation).

In studies aimed at people who live in a process of exclusion and violence, listening to the voices of the subjects implies deepening the knowledge about them and their realities, which often does not happen. When performing ethnography at school, the researcher "(...) seeks a dense description not only of the spaces, but of the symbolic interactions existing in the institution, above all, in the teacher-student relationship" (Borges, 2018, p.40, our translation). Thus, researching the Luiz Gonzaga School is a way of portraying the reality of Rio das Pedras and allowed us to understand it in its network of meanings and practices, mediated by the cultures and knowledge of the research participants.

The *macro* and *micro levels* of ethnography, to which this article refers, is not only focused on *the micro-micro* of microanalysis, but more comprehensively, portrays the tensions between places and everyday phenomena captured by the researcher. In the *study loci* of Rosa's (2019) research, the *macro* was the neighborhood of Rio das Pedras and its geopolitical complex in relation to the city of Rio de Janeiro. Smallerly, the Luiz Gonzaga School is located; the residences of the students' families; Amarp's headquarters; the surroundings of the river divides Rio das Pedras etc. While the *micro* is defined: by the complex social interactions and interrelationships of people and their local histories; by the Militia and the power relations it involves; families, their composition and experiences in the neighborhood and at school; students and their relationships with teachers, principals, school staff and with other students. Therefore, all the tangled plots are described in the interviews and observed in the field.

In the case of the Militia, present in the daily life of the population of Rio das Pedras. And the same goes for other gangs that define a parallel power, most of the time, these interactions are announced in the interdiction of spaces, mediated by the "unsaid" or, what is said in the most diverse ways, but always permeated by fear and by the incorporation of this reality in the organization of school, family and work. as well as in all other aspects of crime-ridden community life.

Thus, ethnographic research is defined as, more than a set of resources to collect data, it develops a more sensitive look at the less visible issues in everyday school life (Castro, 2015). In this sense, according to Mattos (2001, p.13-14) it is important to highlight some methodological elements to be considered by the researcher when carrying out ethnographic fieldwork, namely:

> (i) extensive work over a long period of time in the field at a particular location; ii) a careful record of the events that took place in this place: field notes, records of files and documents, recordings of images and audio, memoranda, files, records; iii) an inductive analysis of the data, starting from the particular to the general and returning to the particular in an enriched way; iv) a dialectical relationship between objectivity and subjectivity; v) an analytical reflection of these documents collected in the field and the recording of the meaning in a dense and detailed description, using narrative vignettes, quotations from interviews, descriptions of places and situations observed, general descriptions in the form of graphs, tables and statistical descriptions; (vi) a multi-level interpretation of data; a concern with the influence of history on the reading and interpretation of data and vii) a constant concern with an ethical stance of the researcher. (Mattos, 2001, p.13-14, our translation)

Still in relation to fieldwork, Mattos (2005) states that it involves procedures in which the inductive process is fundamental in the choice of categories, which are not chosen in

advance, but from the insertion into the field. In the course of the process of field research, the data found may be different from the initial hypotheses of the research and thus, the re-signification of the initial hypotheses are constant, this process was called by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) progressive hypotheses. By this movement it is understood that the participant observer can enter the field with a predefined list of items, with predetermined questions and hypotheses, or with an observation scheme defining, *a priori*, the behaviors or events to be recorded. In this case, it is understood that, if the researcher's engagement in ethnographic research does not obtain depth in observation, the degree of credibility of the observation system is compromised.

When considering what Mattos (2001, 2005) described, it is understood that ethnographic research and inductive data analysis require time and knowledge of the basic ethnographic principles from the researcher, in order to obtain a report of the study that portrays the investigated reality and not only research results. And within this perspective, the parallel power present in the *loci* of research is both the object of analysis and the delimiters of the construction of the field itself, affecting its description. In the words of Szeremeta (2017, p. 5 our translation), " The ethnographer notes, registers, catalogs the present event, which exists at that moment of field research, which can be consulted, again from his research organization, diaries, notebooks, etc.".

As Burgos (2002) points out, in the case of Rio das Pedras, the Militia assumes local security due to the absence of public security from the State, it gains strength in vulnerable places and areas considered to be at risk where the State is not present. The Militia explores: the real estate sector with the construction of buildings: essential services – gas control, distribution of access to the internet network, alternative transportation, etc. The *macro* and *micro dimensions* of ethnography allow us to understand how the spatial configuration is affected by militia power.

Among the different types of constructions of houses, buildings and commercial establishments are: bars, restaurants, pharmacies and lottery houses, residents' associations, public and private schools and daycare centers. In these places, the comings and goings of the people who circulate shows the precariousness of these services, especially the electricity network, sewage, garbage collection and other essential services, which dialogue with the vulnerabilities of the residents in their daily lives. The perception of everyday life is based on theory.

We agree with Mattos (2004) that developing ethnographic research in education, particularly at school, is a complex action because it involves conceptions of an already known space. Hence the importance of triangulation for data validation, which occurred in the Author's research through the use of various collection methods, allowing the perception

of divergences and anchorages in the research process and the confirmation or not of the information collected.

Regarding the ethnographic case study, it can be said that the choice for this instrument is different in ethnographic research than in other methodological approaches, theories and practices. Its format is important for studying at school and in other social spaces. André (1984; 2013) presents the main characteristics of a case study in ethnography in his essays. The author reveals that ethnographic case studies have been increasingly used in research on the school. The author suggests that the case reports show a narrative style and form of vignettes, because her "[...] concern is with the direct, clear and well-articulated transmission of the case" (André, 2013, p. 101, our translation). For the researcher:

> The case study begins with a very open piano, which is more clearly outlined as the study progresses. The research has as its starting point a problem, which can be translated into a series of questions, critical points or provisional hypotheses. The problem may originate in the literature related to the theme, or it may be an inquiry arising from the researcher's professional practice, or it may be the continuity of previous research (André, 2013, p. 98, our translation).

3 Research in Rio das Pedras

In Rosa's (2019) study, the following research instruments were used: participant observation with the use of audiovisual resources; ethnographic interviews conducted with the participants at school, in visits to the students' homes in places where the researcher may have contact with other subjects secondary to the work; This is a case study of the Luiz Gonzaga School and, complementing these instruments, documents produced by the students and the school related to academic activities were collected.

Participant observation and interviews contributed significantly to the study. With the reports of the families, we sought to understand the facts that were part of the daily lives of the students and other participants in the research.

Participant observation was the main data collection method used in the research. The observed events, when possible, were recorded or annotated in field notebooks, which allowed them to revisit them *a posteriori*. In addition to observation, ethnographic interviews can be used to deepen knowledge about the facts and people observed. Due to the complexity of the observed phenomena and the limits of information processing by the researcher to understand all aspects in a single observation, Erickson (1988, p.15) states that:

> Through repeated observations of a particular type of event, the researcher can give selective attention to different aspects of the event, thus developing, over time, a

> cumulative understanding of the entire event, which would not be possible in a single observation. (Erickson, 1988, p.15 our translation)

The interview used as a data collection instrument contributed to the identification of evidence from the participants' perspective on how events are interconnected (Mattos; Castro, 2015). Through ethnographic interviews, Rosa (2019) obtained the families' stories, often recorded in audiovisual. The type of interview used by the author was based on the assumptions of Frederick Erickson's work. For him, at first, it is not possible to detail through participant observation the nuances of interactions and the understanding of cultural facts around them. The author says that one of the goals is to provide evidence, which can be confirmed, or not, by a process of data triangulation.

Erickson explains (1988, p. 18) that "[...] The inferences about the participants' views that were made by the researcher based on participant observation,"(our translation) are compared with the new evidence across different data sources, in a process he calls triangulation. For the author: "[...] the interview, the collection of written records, advertisements, memoranda, and letter ... provide a greater triangulation by which interpretive inferences can be tested, since they offer evidence about events that the observer cannot directly witness" (Erickson, 1988, p. 18, our translation).

For Rosa (2019), the simple act of writing in her field notebook constituted a dangerous action, the recording of images and audios was prohibited and access to the *loci* controlled. At all times, the researcher had a feeling of being subjected to an invisible vigil, a panoptic control (Foucault, 2004), sometimes her fear was introjected into her mind, in a mixture of inadaptation to the local culture and terror, foreseeing the consequences that her actions could have, without knowing well where the sanctions derived from them could come from.

In the classroom, during participant observation, the researcher intended to identify the student's origin. For this, a written activity with the title – The place where I was born, based on Mattos and Castro (2005) in their studies on the reality of students. On November 9, 2016, the collaborating teacher started a class with the question (our translation):

> Professor Maria – Has anyone watched television today or the internet?
> Student Bruno – What's important?
> Student Pedro – Ah, the election in the United States, Trump won.

The class started a discussion about international immigration, they were based on the difficulties faced by people trying to live in the United States and who enter the country illegally. The teacher asks and then answers (our translation):

Professor Maria – immigrant: what does it mean to be an immigrant? These are people who left their place and went to live there.
Several students say together: "Oh, Donald Trump doesn't like immigrants

Thus, the researchers asked the students to rewrite a text, or to draw a picture about the theme of their research. A total of 36 drawings or texts were produced about the family context of migration. After the analysis of the material, the place of origin, the affective and mobility relationships of the families were identified. The result indicated that the investigated classroom is composed mostly of students of northeastern origin, who are themselves immigrants and/or sons and daughters of immigrants. This data collection instrument contributed to understanding the lives of the residents of Rio das Pedras and to selecting the families that were visited for the interview.

These facts are reminiscent of the studies by Green, Dixon and Zaharlick (2005, p 18), about the surprises and questions that arise during fieldwork. For the authors, the ethnographer should "(...) seek to give visibility to their daily practices that are invisible to the cultural group that is involved and to describe them, making them material resources that ethnographers use in the construction of a theory of culture based on these principles" (Green; Dixon; Zaharlick 2005, p. 29, our translation).

Based on the voices of the subjects participating in Autor's (2019) study, to live in Rio das Pedras is to experience the northeastern culture, and its identity can be seen in the signs and banners of the shops, characterized by the migratory process from the Northeast Region to Rio de Janeiro.

Mobility as a central category of analysis showed how the process of "coming and going" is, that is, how moving from one place to another can contribute to explain population growth and real estate exploitation in Rio das Pedras. In this study, the "going" signifies the other, here understood as geographical alterity because the other is a place, city, state, that is, a relationship of absence and presence based on distance. The "going" is understood, in the voices of the subjects who left the Northeast for Rio de Janeiro, as leaving their place of origin in search of better social conditions. While "coming" means returning to the place of origin, returning to the place of birth to maintain family ties, or areas close to it, to what we understand as return migration, that is, the return to the place of belonging.

Access to the loci of the study took place with the mediation of a member of the Center for Ethnography in Education (NetEdu), a research group associated with the School of Education of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (Ufrj-EDU). The member of the nucleus decided to collaborate with the research, due to the fact that she had family members who lived in Rio das Pedras. Using the criterion of immigrant family from the Northeast and with sons and daughters enrolled in public school, it was possible to meet families in mobility from the states of the Northeast to Rio das Pedras. Thus, the observations were initiated,

weekly, the researcher went to the field making a total of 20 (twenty) visits with regular meetings with the subjects and people of the community.

The primary participants of the research were 41 (forty-one) students of the 4th year of elementary school, with three families; the secondary subjects were: principal, coordinator, teachers and staff, members of the school community and two other migrant families from Maranhão and Ceará. The dialogue with the participants occurred through the trust that was established between the researcher and the research subjects, for the interviews, which were recorded with audiovisual resources. Knowing the school that is close to the homes of the families participating in the study was fundamental, as it was there that the contacts for data collection came from.

Among the interviews carried out, the report is Josefina, a 32-year-old woman, resident of Rio das Pedras, with her husband and a 6-year-old son, she tells her experience working in a restaurant and reveals that with the end of the rental contract of the property where the restaurant operated, she became unemployed. Josefina explains that paid activities for men are in general: in civil construction; in evening services in restaurants and pizzerias. While for women they are daytime activities such as: salesperson; attendants in opticians; diarist; Cleaning lady; pharmacy and supermarket cashier.

From Josefina's statement, it is concluded that the tension generated by the instability in the job and the mismatch of work schedules between the couple brings difficulties to the families in relation to raising children and meeting the demands of the school. The "coming and going" of people in families causes instability in the attendance and permanence of children in school, it is concluded that with the increase in the territorial occupation of Rio das Pedras and the growing demand for places for students at Luiz Gonzaga School, many students are left out of it.

In Rio das Pedras, the Militia is the power, it operates in various spaces and in people's lives. The subjects participating in Autor's study confirmed that they and the local merchants pay bribes to the Militia to maintain life in the favela. The funds are allocated to: infrastructure (construction and renovations); house rent; alternative transportation and to use basic services with: cooking gas, water, internet, cable TV, among others. It has been noticed that the militia has expanded the already exploited real estate sector, with the construction of buildings, one of the ways to acquire financial resources and enrich the businesses of those who lead the region, as well as to act in the control of the residents.

For the school's managers and teachers, the student is the one who needs other experiences to acquire knowledge. However, they do not have, or have few opportunities to visit exhibitions, museums, cinemas, theaters and it is through the activities offered by the school that they become familiar with the culture of Rio de Janeiro. In general, the family is absent due to situations such as: parental separation; difficulty for the mother to take her

child to school; permanent violence in the community; and also, the machismo characteristic of Northeastern women and men. Consequently, the school faces difficulties in dealing with the students.

Parents, on the other hand, justify that they have little time to talk to their children, to read and discuss issues such as violence in the community, in the family and in domestic organization. In this way, the school is a space that replaces families in the sociocultural formation of children. However, family values are different from those at school, causing other forms of conflict.

In this context, many children experience social and educational exclusion. On the other hand, schooling is seen as an opportunity, a condition for access to employment, better salaries and as part of the student's social ascension. However, the social conditions of their families and their mobility almost always cause the early departure of the student who enters and leaves the school during the school period, a fact that justifies, in the view of the school managers, their low academic performance.

The statements of the subjects participating in the study revealed violence and human rights violations. This was verified not only in the course of the research but was permanently observed in the daily life of Rio das Pedras.

In Rio das Pedras' research, the Militia has control of spaces, time and people, which implies control of the school. For example, carrying out a routine school activity, such as the class council, requires negotiation with the militia chiefs. The meeting does not take place without prior communication and consent from these bandits. Sometimes, the school needs to dialogue with the official public power and uses the intermediation of the parallel power if it wants to be heard officially, because without going through the sieve of the Militia, the government officials do not waste time in listening to the demands of the school.

Having briefly described Rosa's (2019) research, we summarize other ethnographic researches carried out within the scope of NetEDU/UERJ and which also presented difficulties and restrictions because they were developed in dangerous places.

4 Other ethnographies: different locations and the same challenges

This session focuses on other ethnographies, which, such as Rosa's (2019), demonstrate how, in ethnographic practice, the researcher can face dangers related to: difficult topics to research, complicated places to carry out fieldwork; research subjects who demonstrate illegal behaviors and actions during the researcher's observations, and; situations beyond the researcher's control.

The goal is to demonstrate through these ethnographies the *dangerous loci*. We chose the following researches: Borges (2018); Vasconcelos (2016, 2010); Almeida (2013)

and Castro (2006). They have in common: they are the result of academic work at the end of a graduate course; be ethnographies and, therefore, use instruments common to this methodology such as participant observation, interviews, case studies and documents; have the same academic advisor and thus follow similar rules and procedures; use the *bottom-up* analytical framework, created by Mattos (2022); almost all of them use computational analysis to generate their results, and finally; describe in vignettes the results that included the difficulties in their realization.

In relation to the way these ethnographies approached the subjects. They made use of the *bottom-up* process of analysis, which means that they considered the subjects' perspectives as priorities, respecting their voices, which preponderate in relation to the other participants in the work. For Mattos (2022), this analytical construction is anchored in the social reality experienced in the daily lives of the participants, the "bottom-up" look contributes to the reflections on the Brazilian public school, as the dialogic analysis constructed by the speech's contrasts with the usual *top-down* power relations. *Bottom-up relationships* are the result of a constant movement, which inverts hierarchical power relations. For Borges (2018, p. 64), the process of dialogic analysis is one in which interactions occur between the text, the voices of the research, the theoretical reflections arising from the reviewed literature. In addition to the work of Mattos (2022), Borges understands that research takes place in a "top-down" and "bottom-up" relationship and the meaning given to the data is created from the perspective of the researched subject, for this reason the voices of the subjects in mobility are always privileged, as well as that of the other collaborators with the study.

The *loci* of research in the work of Borges (2018) was a school in Austin, a neighborhood considered one of the most violent places in the municipality of Nova Iguaçu, in Rio de Janeiro. The researcher traveled a long distance to get to school and, due to delays in local public transportation, he could not always arrive in time for the start of school activities, this fact proved to be a difficulty for him, because he often waited in the schoolyard, where he witnessed illegal activities of the students, such as: taking drugs and jumping over the walls of the school. Dealing with this information put him in a fragile situation – should he hide these facts from the school authorities or not? Was he contributing to these events becoming more extreme, so that students would become involved in more dangerous illicit activities or even with the police? These reflections, taken from the notes in Borges' field notebook, show the difficult decisions that permeated his research and that he faced in the task of doing ethnography.

The research of Vasconcelos (2016, 2010) dealt with a controversial and complex topic, for her, for the researched and for society as a whole – school failure. Not regular repetition, but that which occurs repeatedly, in the most severe cases reported, 5 times or more. The relationships between the students participating in the study, their families, teachers

and school staff were strained by the turbulence caused by the experiences of these people, in school and outside of it. Although the research took place in a quiet neighborhood in the city of Cabo Frio, a region of lakes and a scenic paradise in the State of Rio de Janeiro. The sensitive, not to say undesirable, subject of Vasconcelos' research put it at risk, as well as the consequences arising from the results of his work. Vasconcelos had access to more than 800 confidential documents from the school, including medical and paramedical reports and reports from: psychiatrists, psychologists, speech therapists, educational advisors and teachers.

The following quote is an example of the transcripts of class councils, interviews, and conversations between Vasconcelos, the teacher, and the principal of the school studied.

> [...] Families involved with drugs ok, yes... [...] children who live with stepfather and is.... Family quarrels with mom, dad, and stepdad, yes.... There's even a case of prostitution, a case of child prostitution in the class, yes.... There are very serious, very serious cases of hygiene...
>
> [...] I went to pick her up at home, because the school suggested that she stay at home to treat lice and scabies and never came back, so much so that she gave 97 absences and I went to her house to find out if she had died, right? Then I got there, I talked to my grandmother, I talked, I talked, I talked, since then, she has never missed it.
>
> She had scabies and she had it, doesn't justify the 97 ta, but she had scabies and she had lice. And we suggested, it was even one of the lines at her house [...], but we weren't the ones who didn't let her go to school, it was the school that suggested it..., then I said: 47 days? Because then it's not possible, she has a history too, I've already been prepared for that. But the justification is that we have no way to attest to it, I don't know if this also serves to justify it, but she had scabies and lice and had to stay at home for treatment, so much so that she shaved her head.
>
> And you also know why she's not coming, because she didn't treat the lice, she shaved her head, so much so that I bought her some, she said: auntie, it's ridiculous! she keeps that cap, I said: Larissa, for God's sake, drop that cap, look at the smell. Claudia, who was away from school, is [...] she was away from school to treat scabies, she had scabies and lice, you know! He even had to shave his head, and is wearing a cap all the time (Vasconcelos, 2010, p. 37-28 our translation)

Vasconcelos complements his analysis with data from documents he had access to in the 2016 research, where he can ratify, with these documents, the justifications for disapproving the child who was the focus of the aforementioned conversations. In this case, there are two documents, an electroencephalographic examination report and the opinion of the doctor who examined the child:

Mapping - Cerebral Electroencephalographic: Examination performed in good conditions of cooperation, patient in wakefulness. Mapping of the basal brain electrical activity showing adequate organization and symmetry, with a predominance of the alpha frequency (9-10 Hz) in the posterior regions of both cerebral hemispheres (color graphic images). The mediated analysis of the epochs identified in the computerized electroencephalogram as Identification showed the presence of abnormal slow-wave activity (delta theta) of projection predominant in the right cerebral hemisphere (color graphic images) The images observed dynamically, as a result of the computerized processing of the instantaneous variation of the amplitudes of the brain rhythms, confirmed the findings described above.

Conclusion: Computerized electroencephalographic mapping showing abnormal electrical activity by predominant projection slow waves in the areas of the right cerebral hemisphere.

Medical Opinion: Patient with ADHD, having undergone E.E.G with Brain Mapping who presented Brain Slowing Started Specific medication (our translation, Vasconcelos, 2016, p. 148).

The facts described in these documents are recurrent in the numerous documents to which Vasconcelos had access during the 6 years of research at this school. They denounce the type of violence experienced by the subjects surveyed and the solutions found by the school authorities to justify the repeated failures. We believe that a simple complaint, the authorities linked to the Department of Education of the State of Rio de Janeiro (Seduc), could provoke an administrative inquiry for the school and professionals involved given the seriousness of the facts and the carelessness or trivialization of the conditions of vulnerability of some students. For Vasconcelos, the "tight skirt" to which she was exposed was to know the facts and to have to distance herself from them in order to continue the work she set out to do. To the detriment of the child's well-being, the silence imposed on him by the facts collected in the research, obeying the ethical principles involved, corrodes his soul. The violence and neglect promoted by the school leave their mark on the researcher, who had to deal with these difficulties as part of her ethnographic work.

In addition to NetEdu's ethnographies, there is the research developed by Castro (2006), which demonstrates the intricate craft of being an ethnographer. The theme of this research was control. The research took place in a school on the edge of Avenida Brasil, one of the most dangerous roads in Rio de Janeiro. The access itself demanded attention and care, but it was at school that Castro experienced extreme situations: in the classroom, in the teachers' room, in the schoolyard and outside of it. As an example, a classroom situation stands out.

The *locus* of research was the classroom of a 4th grade of elementary school, a space where Castro, (2006, p. 90, our translation), experienced a situation of extreme violence demonstrated by an outburst or outburst by the teacher. She yells at a student in a frightening way, the scene goes like this;

Sheila: Shall we settle down? Gerson (misspells student's name) ... Let's stop the need to show up! Let's sit down... I want you sitting...
Gerson: But I'm sitting...
Sheila: Philip, have you done your homework? Sit in your seat!
Sheila: Look, I don't want anyone standing. Otherwise, I can't see it. (At this point all the students are seated).
Sheila: Marcelo, go sit in your seat!
Marcelo: I don't want to sit down!
Sheila: You don't want to sit around, do you? So, I'm going to take your chair away and I'm going to leave you standing until the end! Is that okay?
She drags her chair to the front of the room. He strolls around the room.
Sheila: But you're also going to stand there!
She resumes the text and Marcelo lies on the floor, placing his backpack as support.
Sheila: Marcelo, are you going to stop clowning around or am I going to have to take you out of the classroom? (Now the student is on his knees and leaning on the table). Grab your chair! Go there.' (the student does not get up and the teacher takes the chair)

The fact could be interpreted as another event of insubordination of a student; however, the theme of the class was the use of drugs and the student in question was the nephew of a drug dealer who had been decapitated and his head placed on the walkway that gives access to the school the day before the event. The boy, certainly, revolted by the barbarism promoted by the Rio de Janeiro police, was vulnerable at that moment, the class provoked a crisis and as a consequence, the desperate cry of the teacher.

The analysis that can be made of Castro's (2006) experience in this classroom shows that the researcher can, at any moment, become a victim of a crisis or outbreak on the part of the subjects who are in the *observed locus*. In this case, she experienced the teacher's violence and, on the other hand, the students, only later, seeking to understand what happened, she experiences up close, how much the school and the subjects researched were involved with criminal activities experienced by people around the school.

The last study to be explored in this session is that of Almeida (2013). She researched women incarcerated in two prisons: one in Rio de Janeiro and the other in Brasilia, in the Federal District. In general, women's prisons are unique, so it is difficult to avoid identifying them. However, for ethical reasons, Almeida walked among the facts that he experienced in the field of study in a singular way, avoiding constraints for these institutions and thus the limitations imposed on the work. In the context of dangerous places, prisons are particularly representative, in this case, the women were mothers and, for the most part, were accompanied by newborns.

The research took place under the constant resistance of those responsible for the institutions, the entry of Almeida and his team was judicially authorized and determined by authorities outside the institutional scope. Although the "make-believe" in the statements of

the local authorities was that they collaborated with the work, some characteristics of the development of research in these places showed their unacceptable presence. For example, one of the interview locations was the guard room with the presence of the police officers, which restricted and intimidated the inmates and researchers. The police chose the inmates to be interviewed – it is known that those who were perceived as less problematic were chosen.

As an example of the dangers that the researched, Almeida and his team were exposed to, in the prison of Brasilia, the inmates lived side by side, with a cell reserved for rapists – convicted men, who, according to the authorities of that institution, would be at risk of death, if they served time in male prisons. Not infrequently, we found these rapists working in the gardens around the prison, they whistled at the girls on the staff and mocked them under the gaze of the policemen who accompanied them. Certainly, in the early days of the visits, Almeida and his team were unaware of who they were and how dangerous they could be.

The difficulties faced in Almeida's (2013) research were extreme, resulting in a lot of stress for all researchers. To cite one more example. The searches in these *loci* were authorized by judges of authorities higher than the local administration of the prisons. These authorizations took months to obtain, but they allowed the use of video recordings of all research procedures. Therefore, a lot of equipment was part of the apparatus for entering the *loci*. However, in all visits, during the two years of the research fieldwork, the guards at the entrance of these spaces forgot about the researchers at the entrance, for hours (between 1 and 2 hours), only after this long waiting period were the research team allowed to enter. Sharing the same data, but with different themes, the research in prisons was published in the form of books by Almeida (2016) and Mattos *et al* (2016).

5 Final considerations

Ethnographic studies are able to obtain information not captured by quantitative research in general. The decision-making by the researchers implies information that helps the managers in public policies that, when they have access to this type of research, cannot underestimate the sociocultural facts and the daily life in the *researched loci* and thus, they can visualize the realities of the violent territories, the inhumanities, the vulnerabilities of the researched subjects and, above all, the implications of doing ethnographies in dangerous places.

This sense of security in relation to the State and the Militia itself persists to this day, as residents prefer to pay for illegal services rather than have legal access to these services and, therefore, suffer shredders from the owners of the favela. These raids range from un-

expected visits by these bandits to homes with threats, to the extermination of entire families or some of their members, with the expulsíon of their homes. On the other hand, given the urban complexity that surrounds the city of Rio de Janeiro, the favela of Rio das Pedras is perceived by its residents as a peaceful place, compared to other places in Rio de Janeiro, which suffer daily from the violence of the police, members of organized crime, the Militia and other offenders who circulate in these spaces.

Regarding the favelas in the city of Rio de Janeiro, in general, a recent survey by the Data Favela Research Institute (2023)[3] revealed that there are more than ten thousand favelas in Brazil. In the city of Rio de Janeiro alone, they add up to more than two thousand, 790 (seven hundred and ninety) recognized, named and mapped by the city hall[4]. With approximately 16,615,526 (sixteen million, six hundred and fifteen thousand, five hundred and twenty-six) inhabitants, Rio de Janeiro has 10% (ten percent) of this population living in these urban agglomerations. With approximately 27,573 (twenty-seven thousand, five hundred and seventy-three) inhabitants, Rio das Pedras is the third largest favela in Rio.

To understand the local characteristics, it is important to analyze the role of the Militia in the command of the Rio das Pedras favela, its actions and the way in which human rights are violated there. In this sense, initially, it is necessary to understand the concept of Militia. The concept created by de Zaluar and Conceição (2007, p. 90) was chosen to explain the supposed security offered by this group of criminals. The authors explain that "(...) the term covers a multiplicity of situations ranging from unpaid residents tasked by neighbors with securing the area, or even paid residents for the same purpose who would be vigilantes, to former police officers" (Zaluar; Conceição, 2007, p. 90). The authors explain that the Militia is paid for local security activities, called vigilante residents who correspond to a group that may have had a mandatory military service; they fit the profile of militia members in other parts of the world as well. In Venezuela, for example, the Militia corresponds to a group sympathetic and defending the government against the invading forces, composed of civilian associations with actions similar to the military, but it is recognized by the government and receives remuneration from it.

Even knowing the possible limitations, Rosa (2019) defined Rio das Pedras as the *loci* of the research. This was an important option because the favela is a huge urban social conglomerate whose population is almost entirely from the Northeast. This characteristic, associated with the complex mobility of families, brought to the study novelty and innovation in the area of Education. The impacts of this diasporic movement of the population among young people, mostly born in Rio das Pedras and enrolled in the Luiz Gonzaga School,

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3 https://wikifavelas.com.br/index.php/Data_Favela

4 https://wikifavelas.com.br/index.php/Lista_de_Favelas_do_Rio_de_Janeiro#Lista_de_favelas,_de_acordo_com_a_prefeitura_do_Rio_de_Janeiro

contributed to understanding the subtleties that involve the lives of the residents and their pedagogical experiences inside the school. Thus, based on the discussion about the characteristics of ethnography as a methodology, the work of Rosa (2019) is described.

The comprehension of what is happening in the surroundings and inside the schools is not revealed by *macro-quantitative* studies such as those carried out by school censuses. Studies carried out by the IBGE guide policies, but do not reveal their nuances like *micro-qualitative studies* such as ethnographic studies, which can outline the profile of people and their cultures. In the case of Brazil, these are realities marked by deep inequalities, violent political and economic disputes, and the parallel powers of groups, factions, and militias, which trivialize official power.

The researcher must be able to move easily between micro-macro *levels*, and have the ability to evaluate the use of *quali-quantitative* resources, in order to identify phenomena that often appear before his eyes, but that are invisible to most people. He must be attentive to listening to voices inaudible to common sense. Possess the ability to read realities and their surroundings. Be prepared to deal with adverse conditions. This can only happen through a solid ethnographic training, in dialogue with other areas of knowledge.

In Brazil, one of the most violent countries on the planet, being an ethnographer means facing risks and difficulties during all stages of research. Thus, in a school, for example, employees run the risk of being canceled, expelled, asked to resign or to retire early.

Sensitive to the characteristics of an ethnographic research and aware of the reality of Rio das Pedras, the researcher was unaware of the limitations she would face during the development of the fieldwork but considered them a challenge to the continuity of the research. In many circumstances, the use of images and sounds cannot be done. A simple class council, to be held by the school, and/or observed, required the authorization of the Militia, due to the criminal movement present in the place.

Another delicate aspect of ethnographies is their performance in the field, both at the exit and at the entrance, the exposure of the researcher and his collaborators is enormous, and the consequences and unpredictable repercussions are the most diverse. This imposes a deep ethical reflection on the extent to which one should or should not request this collaboration from an *insider*, although without it the research is compromised in terms of reliability. The costs of collaboration can be high, and this fact cannot be disregarded by the researcher (Mattos, 1995)

Another difficulty arises for ethnographic research, that of approving it by the ethics committees of universities and research institutes, since the members of these committees do not always understand the specificities of this type of work. It is up to the researcher to be explicit about the justifications for carrying out the work, because the data obtained can be fundamental for the construction of new knowledge and theories, for the dissemination of

information about relevant phenomena about the places and people researched, or even for the possibility of assisting in the formulation of public policies, organization of schools and school systems.

In conclusion, it was the object of this article to offer subsidies to think about the theme: ethnographies in dangerous places. A topic that is not widely disseminated in the vehicles of academic publications, however, urgent to be discussed, especially due to its practical implications, namely: withdrawals from academic training work; conflicts with researched communities; prohibitions of academic research in places considered difficult; funding limitations due to the possible unfeasibility of the projects; conflicts between researchers and researched subjects, making fieldwork and scheduled interviews unfeasible; stress and other psychosocial disorders experienced by the researcher given the working conditions; limitation of resources that facilitate data logging; limitations in relation to the authorizations necessary to carry out the work, among others.

The text was developed in five sections; the first introduces the theme and describes the *loci* of the research that served as the basis for the content of the text; the second explains some of the characteristics of ethnography as a theoretical-methodological-epistemological approach; the third reports the research in Rio das Pedras, the study that gave rise to the text; the fourth summarizes other ethnographic research and its difficulties; and the fifth concludes the text.

The authors' interest is to contribute so that researchers and ethnographers in education realize that they are not isolated about the problems they experience in the field of research and thus expand these discussions by dedicating a space – time in their work to describe their difficulties in doing ethnography.

Having described the ethnographies in dangerous terrains, it is hoped that this article has fulfilled the task of alerting researchers of the difficulties that can be faced from the choice of the research theme, whether ethnographic or not, but that in the case of ethnographies the situations are complicated given the specificity of the work in the field of observation and the close coexistence of the researcher with the subjects researched.

The favela of Rio das Pedras has one of the most powerful militia groups in Brazil. Conducting ethnographic research in that location is both a dangerous and challenging activity. Analyzing migratory flows and poverty and their impacts on education in this reality could only be accomplished with solid theoretical training, accompanied by the care and precautions narrated here. Otherwise, the risks would have been much higher.

Exposure to the parallel power, barbarism and humor of the militiamen could inevitably lead the ethnographer to a tragic outcome. On the other hand, it would be illusory to imagine that ethnographic research is immune to risk. The intention of this article was both

to narrate the experience of this research, and to think of ways to carry out similar studies without exposing the researcher to dangers that could have been avoided.

This is a discussion that will remain open, and it was our proposal to offer elements for the improvement of ethnography in education in dangerous territories in the hope that the reader has been able to extract a report that is useful and with elements for conducting research in similar situations.

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