

## **Performances of masculinity, practices of subversion: the consumption of cell phones among low-income youth**

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### ***Performances de masculinidade, práticas de subversão: o consumo de telefones celulares entre jovens de camadas populares***

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### *Performances de masculinidad, practicas de subversión: el consumo de teléfonos móviles entre jóvenes de grupos populares*

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**Abstract** *Basing my analysis on an ethnographic approach in this article, I discuss the role of the consumption of cell phones in the construction and expression of subjectivities among young people, particularly males. Throughout the analysis, I argue that various consumption practices involving cell phones - such as listening to loud music in public spaces - reaffirm elements of hegemonic masculinity such as aggressiveness, public performativity, corporeity and sexual activity.*

**Keywords:** *Youth. Subjectivity. Cell phones. Hegemonic masculinity.*

**Resumo** *A partir de uma abordagem etnográfica, discuto neste artigo o papel do consumo de telefones celulares na construção e expressão de subjetividades entre jovens, em especial os do sexo masculino. Ao longo da análise, argumento que diversas práticas de consumo envolvendo celulares – como, por exemplo,*

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*ouvir música alta em espaços públicos – reafirmam elementos da masculinidade hegemônica, tais como a agressividade, a performatividade pública, a atividade sexual e a corporalidade.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Juventude. Subjetividade. Telefones celulares. Masculinidade hegemônica.*

**Resumen** *A partir de un enfoque etnográfico, discuto en este artículo el papel del consumo de teléfonos móviles en la construcción y expresión de las subjetividades entre los jóvenes, en especial los de sexo masculino. A lo largo de este análisis, argumento que diversas prácticas de consumo en que están incluidas los móviles –como escuchar música alta en los espacios públicos– reafirman los elementos de la masculinidad hegemónica como la agresividad, la performatividad pública, la actividad sexual y la corporalidad.*

**Palabras-clave:** *Juventud. Subjetividad. Teléfonos móviles. Masculinidad hegemónica.*

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## **To “become a man “and “to be a man: from hegemony to masculinities**

The lower-class district, which I will call here Morro São Jorge - where the ethnography for my PhD thesis (SILVA, 2010) was carried out, is located in the central part of the city of Florianópolis; about three thousand people live there, the majority being children and young people. When I decided to carry out a research about the practices and representations attributed to the cell phone there, based upon an anthropological perspective, I confess that, in principle, the aspects I will approach in the course of this article do not constitute a relevant part of the scenario which guided my first interviews and observations. To reflect more thoroughly about the intersections between masculinities and cell phones was something which fieldwork provided me<sup>2</sup>, but it served to emphasize the fundamental argument: much more than a mere communication device, used merely to make and receive calls, the cell phone has important symbolic functions in the community of Morro S. Jorge. Among them the one I pick out for the discussion in this article is the role of cell phones as an element of the constitution of a masculinity style – particularly in the case of young people – as well as an element which re-modernises determined practices linked to traditional masculinity, also called hegemonic in the field of masculinity study (KIMMEL, 2004; GROSSI, 1995).

In favour of the argument of this article, I would like to put forward elements proposed by the theory which influence the constitution of the young masculinities of Morro S. Jorge and are relevant to it. I say “masculinities” here, because the field of gender studies, as Cecchetto (2004) and Almeida (1995) remind us, which very much privileged the study of masculine homosexuality by dealing with the study of hegemonic masculinity, criticises it in a second stage of the studies. Thus the funda-

<sup>2</sup>The ethnographic material which provides the basis for the reflections I present here consists of observations in the public spaces of the district, I did in the course of the eleven months of fieldwork, between 2008 and 2009, and also of the thorough interviews with seven of my interlocutors: five young bachelors, a young eighteen-year-old man, married and a young twenty-eight year-old woman.

mental question is to think of masculinities, like this, in the plural. As Cecchetto (2004, p. 38) affirms in his study on violence and masculinity styles among young people of lower-class people of Rio de Janeiro, when the point is to study masculinity anthropologically, not within essentialist paradigms, “there are masculinities and masculinities.” The author reminds us that there are variations which depend on the local context and on the notions of masculinity which are in force there. In this sense our research inserts itself into the proposal of the studies of social masculinity construction, trying to indicate here that the ownership and the use of communication and information technologies, such as cell phones, plays a role in these processes, which are in constant construction because, as Almeida (1995, p. 128) reminds us “to be a man” is not reduced to the biological condition, to the possession of a penis, “[ ] but to a set of moral behaviour attributes, socially sanctioned and constantly re-evaluated, negotiated, reminded.”

Among the elements of hegemonic masculinity which are relevant to my discussion, I would like to emphasize the following ones: the connection of the constitution of the masculine with sexual activity and corporality, which can be translated into a predatory sexuality and into the valorisation of the virile body; the aggressiveness linked to the pleasures of risk-taking and of competition and, finally, the necessity of a public performativity of masculinity. Let us see these elements in a more detailed analysis.

The constitution of the hegemonic masculine in our culture fundamentally occurs in opposition to the feminine (GROSSI, 1995; WELZER-LANG, 2001). Thus to be a man, mainly in Brazil, means to have sexual activity with women and to dominate them, since, on the one hand, masculine infidelity in love affairs and marriages tends to be valued and, on the other hand, feminine adultery is the greatest fear, so that the woman converts herself into a source of humiliation instead of honour (FONSECA, 1991; ALMEIDA, 1995). “To collect women and not to be betrayed becomes a certificate of virility; “an ambivalent sexual morals” is being established” (ALMEIDA, 1995) in which the status of

lover or husband, who have parallel affairs, is socially accepted among men. To be a man is not to be<sup>3</sup> “gay”, “queer” or “*bicha*” [a pejorative word for “homosexual” in Brazilian Portuguese] – homophobia is an important element of hegemonic masculinity (WELZER-LANG, 2001). In the conversations among the young people of Morro S. Jorge, I observed how much the homophobic discourse was present in the conversations and jokes. It is fundamental to show that you are not “gay” by speaking badly “of them”, by devaluing them. Another way to enhance masculinity is to demonstrate many contacts to the opposed sex, providing opportunities of sexual contacts, that is to say to be recognized by one’s peers like a “womanizer”. In this sense, the use of agendas of cell phones is indicative. For example, in the cell phone agenda of one of my young interlocutors, Patrick, there are only two “men’s” phone numbers and the rest are girls’ phone numbers. According to him, the only motives to have a man’s phone number in one’s agenda are, firstly, if it is a relative, and even more important, if it is a great friend – “it is strange if a guy has lots of men’s phone numbers in his agenda”. You only give your own phone number to a man you know. With regard to the girls, it is different – the more possibilities of contact with girls, the better it is.

As important as sexual activity is the question of corporality in the constitution of the masculine. Understanding the body as a basic element for masculinity construction which serves as a support in the constitution of its different styles, Cecchetto (2004) emphasizes its connection with the thematic questions of identity, of sociability, of violence and of the relationship between the sexes. The question is to think of a virile, muscular body, developed for fight and resistance to pain, besides a sexually active body. The painful rites of the boys’ initiation in simple societies can be related to the terms of complex societies, for example, through the valorisation of resistance to pain and to the expertise in competition sports such as martial arts or rugby (GASTALDO; 1995; RIAL, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> It is important to say that, in Brazil, to have sexual activity with men in the condition of “active”, that is to say of penetrador [the one who penetrates], does not mean to be considered homosexual (GROSSI, 1995).

For the purpose of the argument I want to discuss, I emphasize that it is necessary to evoke this symbolic importance of corporal style and to perceive the body as going beyond the purely physical and biological aspects, as Mauss (2003) taught us. Thus the turn becomes a support of meanings which transcends the physical and it is like this that I interpret the relationship between music, corporality and masculinity performance among the young people of S. Jorge. In this sense, Borelli and Rocha (2008) present a theoretic vision which, I think, is significant for the argument I propose as follows: the authors see the intersection, for example, of communication and information technologies and juvenile bodies in the urban scenes by proposing to think of such bodies as “media- bodies” – the bodies are re-appropriated by mass media as well as by digital media, and can be thought as juvenile strategies of “being in the world” (BORELLI; ROCHA, 2008) which, regulated by consumption and communication, search for visibility. My argument here is that, by listening to music without headphones, the boys of the community develop a corporal technique which expresses their virile identity. By occupying the sound space around them, they also re-modernize a strategy of masculinity construction which, I think, can be equated with that of the virile and muscular body that dominates the space around oneself. In this sense, the cell phone and its sonorous possibilities are understood as an extension of the body, as McLuhan states it. (1995). According to Borelli and Rocha (2008, p. 31) to think young people and youths involves considering how they “[...] invent and communicate by means of languages of their own – and this seems even more evident in the use of the new, mobile and interactive technologies [...]”.

Aggressiveness, competition and the taste for risk are other characteristics of constitution of the masculine which can be compared to the social and cultural practices related to cell phones, as we will see later on. In his study on the funk gangs of Rio de Janeiro, for example, Cecchetto (1998; 2004) relates the ritualized quarrels and fights present in the funk parties to the constitution of a warrior *ethos* in the juvenile entertainment of the lower classes, characterized by the “disposition to

quarrel” and by the search for excitement, expressed in the native category of “emotion”, related to the delight they take in the tension and the risk which exist in these fights. I present two arguments here: firstly, that, by being present in the funk songs which are played on the cell phones, the elements of aggressiveness provides a *locus* in which violence is stylized and not experienced in such a direct way, as in the quarrels of the funk parties; secondly, that the strategies used to “cheat the operators”, as my interlocutors say, reveal a similar dynamic: a taste for subjugating an adversary – institutional, which is the case here – which involves risks and generates emotion.

Another element which characterizes the masculinities is the question of their public performance. Almeida (1995) describes this process, as a process which already begins at the end of childhood; since the boys are being more and more stimulated to become independent of the feminilized spaces of their home and neighbourhood, the girls, on the contrary, co-dominate them with their mothers. Thus spaces of exclusive masculine common life are necessary, spaces, of which the “street” is a special marker of masculinity, because it belongs to the domain of the public and of the masculine, whereas the space of the home belongs to the private and to the feminine. Young and adult men perceive that domesticity feminizes and they express some discomfort with the idea to stay at home: “to be at home ‘is harmful’, ‘effeminates’” (ALMEIDA, 1995, p. 64). If in primitive societies there were the “men’s houses”, spaces prohibited to women, in complex societies privileged man’s sociability spaces constitute themselves, such as, for example, pubs – where the practice to watch football matches collectively provokes verbal duels (GASTALDO, 2005); cafés and night clubs (ALMEIDA, 1995) and spaces of sports practice such as jiu-jitsu (CECCHETTO, 2004); full-contact (GASTALDO, 1995); judo and rugby (RIAL, 1998). It is important to say that word and rhetoric are very important in the practice of the “men’s house”, as Almeida (1995, p. 189), points out, where the verbal perspicacity, the report of exploits and the capacity of replying are verbal arts which counterbalance sexual and physical aggressiveness.

Referring to sports, Rial (1998, p. 251) observes that the spaces of man's sociability are diminishing more and more due to the increasing presence of women. In this sense, Almeida (1995, p. 179-190) perceives that the intensification of the globalisation processes bring new masculinity possibilities – through the consumption of mediatic contents which present diverse masculinity models (in this case, the exhibition of Brazilian *telenovelas* [TV series] in Portugal) as well as through the greater access to consumption goods. Among the goods the author identified as valorising agents of masculine identity are cars and motorbikes. Thus “with young people, who are motorised and consumers, other traditions are being invented in the pubs and discos, where another masculinity is being constructed *in praesentia* of the young girls who are schooled and freer in terms of mobility” (Almeida, 1995, p. 190).

Finally I would like to emphasize here the link between the consumption of communication and information technologies – cell phones, notebooks – and an emergent masculinity model called hegemonic and globalised in which mobility is fundamental. This model is a re-modernization of the model of masculine “success” which is based upon prestige and wealth and which Almeida (1995) already identified, in his study of the village of Pardais in Portugal. This global model promotes a dialogue with other masculinities called peripheral and subordinates them (KIMMEL, 2004). In the author's words:

[...] the global dominant model of hegemonic masculinity, with which all the local, regional and national masculinities are compared and which are more and more referred to. The global emergent version of hegemonic masculinity is easily identifiable: you can see him sitting in first class waiting rooms of airports or in elegant business hotels of the whole world., wearing expensive suits, speaking English, speaking on his cell phone, his portable computer plugged in any electric plug, whilst he is watching CNN International on television (KIMMEL, 2004, p. 415).



By analysing funk sociability through the lyrics of some songs<sup>4</sup> Ceccheto (2004, p. 239), gives us a good example of how this model of masculine “success” incorporates the consumption of cell phones, imported cars and motorbikes as power objects; signs of economic power. The author observes that now women tend to valorise more, in the first place, the ownership of consumer goods; in the second place, the permanent disposition to sex and much less the masculine corporal characteristics. Quoting Castells (1999), Cecchetto calls this behaviour “consumerist sexuality”. For the young people of *morro* S. Jorge, like Patrick, seventeen years old, pupil of the sixth grade of Primary School, as far as age as well as the scarce economic power is concerned, it is difficult to have a car or a motorbike. In this case, the cell phone plays its role as an important object in the masculinity performances. Patrick told me that the cell phone model impresses the girls and works as the possibility of approaching them. Once, he tells me, they were listening to music all together, he, his cousin and his friend *Pernão* [Big Leg] (the use of nicknames is very common at São Jorge). “And then she came and wanted to see everybody’s cell phone, one after the other, *Pernão* said that she was examining the cell phones in order to see which one was the most beautiful.”

### **To occupy “where there is nothing”: about music on cell phones, public corporality and performance**

The practice of listening to cell phone without headphones seems to be disseminated among young people in Brazil. In metropolises such as São Paulo, in the street as well as in collective transport; occur even challenges between girls and boys on the bus and underground carriages in order to see whose sound is louder. The most played musical genres

<sup>4</sup> I transcribe some passages of the words of the *rap* *Citröen*: “You looked at me and looked, too / But not at you, I looked at my beautiful *Citröen*/ Which, when I saw it, impressed me / And it is like this that I fell in love with you. But this is not important and what drew my attention / It was your golden collars / And your *bip* [cell phone] in your hand [...]” (CECCHETTO, 2004, p. 239).

are, in order of preference, funk, hip-hop, *pagode* [kind of informal party with a type of samba music], rock and *sertanejo* [Brazilian folk music] Calderari (2009). On the other hand, to give an example of cultural variation related to the use of cell phones, Okabe and Ito (2005) relate that on the Japanese public transport to speak on the cell phone on public transport is not socially accepted – people prefer to send text messages or to check their e-mail. Certainly the practice of listening to loud music without headphones would hardly be tolerated.

I well remember that on one of the first times I walked across the *morro*, I noticed the resonant scenery of the place: it was very frequent to hear, from far or from nearer, the sound of rap or funk or also *pagode* music. With time passing, I noticed after a short time that the cell phone was an important part of this resonant ecology: the music which was played in the street most of the time came from them. Played and listened to by all those who were around there, since they did not use headphones. I perceived that this practice of listening to music on the cell phone without headphones was mainly performed by young boys, particularly in the pre-adolescent age and up to the age of eighteen, twenty.

I began to pay more attention to this practice and to include this questioning in the interviews and the conversations with my interlocutors. In the hands of the boys who came back from the district school, of those who got off at the bus terminal, on the top of the *morro*; of the boys who walked in small groups on the lanes of S. Jorge; of the boys who flew a kite on the wasteland, of the kids<sup>5</sup> who watched on strategic points or of those who passed their afternoons sitting on the low walls of the small houses of the city hall housing project, they were there, omnipresent: cell phones playing rap and funk, at high volume. Besides confirming the habit of using cell phones to listen to music in the community, Patrick, relates the urgency young people feel to listen to music to the necessity to fill a sort of emptiness: “yes, this is what more exists here.

<sup>5</sup> “The *guris* [kids]” or “the boys” is how they call the *olheiros* [from the verb *olhar*: to look; people who watch the arrival of the police in order to help the drug dealers to flee] of drug dealing in the community. At S. Jorge, dealing tends to be subtle, but it exists.

So you go to some place where *there is nothing*, you put on a little music, you fly a kite... at any place... at the shopping centre..."

"It is like hell", an evangelical elderly woman complains. "You are on the bus and there are always those kids listening to *that* music very loud. If at least it were a song speaking of our Lord Jesus or something softer, but it is nothing but swear-words and noise." Although this comment expresses the tensions related to the generation and also to religiosity, the relationship between young people, music and cell phones intrigued me more and more. Even more because the literature about cell phones in the view of social sciences – with which I had dealt before the field-work – although it abundantly associates young people with cell phones, did not describe anything similar or related to the practice I observed at S. Jorge. Literature focusing the middle-classes of European, North American and Asian countries presented analyses mainly related to the use of text messages (SMS) and their consequences in the adolescent sociability and in language; something which is also outstanding are the analyses of the cell phone as the expressions of adolescent aesthetics and identity, besides the study of the intersections between adolescents, cell phones and inter-generational communication (LING, 2004; CARON e CARONIA, 2007). Which is the relevance for these young people to listen to loud music, occupying the sonorous space around them?

By catching a more thorough glance at this question, the first thing I discovered was the importance of the functionality of the cell phone for the circulation of songs among young people. It is the *bluetooth* – wireless data transmission designated by this English word which is difficult to pronounce (the young people of S. Jorge said "*blutufe*", "*blutufi*" or even "*blutú*", spellings I will maintain further on in the transcription of the interlocutors' speeches.) I rapidly perceived that to have a cell phone which played music in the format MP3 was not enough – to have a cell phone with bluetooth was what they all wanted, as James, twenty, explains to me: "There comes a chap from school and he has a cell phone *with everything* There is a song which is being launched, we want to listen to it, if the cell phone does not have *blutufe* there is no access."

“Does yours have got *blutufe*?” was the question I heard more than once in the conversations of the small groups of the boys of the “small houses”, whilst I was passing by to go to some place of the *morro*. More than once, I admit, I feigned to being waiting for someone just to listen to what they said. Thus I also discovered that to have a cell phone which plays very loud is a much valorised attribute. This valorisation of the bluetooth at S. Jorge contrasted with the use of the cell phone when compared to the middle classes to whom I had contact in daily life. The bluetooth was far from being so important and was never or rarely used. A colleague of mine from the post-graduate course even asked me what it was. At S. Jorge, the bluetooth, as I mentioned above, is fundamental if you want to obtain contents for cell phones, video files, pictures, or songs. It is through the bluetooth that the young people of the community “passed songs” to one another – and what is relevant, without any cost.

Patrick and James, like many other young people of the community astonish me with their expertise and rapidity to pass the files from one phone to the other, while I could not do it. With time passing, I got more skilful and acquired the habit to exchange files with the young people there as often as possible.

By observing, interviewing and exchanging files via bluetooth I could prove S. Jorge young people’s preference for the styles of rap and funk music. In the case of funk, a special preference for the style known as *proibidão* [“forbidden”: name given to a certain kind of electronic funk music produced in Brazilian *favelas* (slums)] or bandit funk, term used by Fátima Cecchetto (1998; 2004) in her analysis of the links between funk, violence and masculinity styles. Although she refutes a mechanical link between the frequency of funk parties and the eventual violence of their frequenters, the author recognizes the constitution of an warrior *ethos* through the organization of the parties and the songs with sounds of shots and machine guns and lyrics which refer to the criminal factions, theft and drug dealing. An example of the lyrics of the song “*Humildade e Disciplina*” [“Humility and

Discipline”] by MC Menor do Chapa, which is propagated at Morro S. Jorge. In the lyrics there is the reference to CV (Comando Vermelho [Red Command: criminal organisation of Rio de Janeiro) and they solicit the freedom of one of its leaders, Marcinho VP. Another funk tendency, which is more recent, analysed by Cecchetto (2004, p. 231 – p. 245) is the so-called *porno-funk*, also present on the cell phones of Morro S. Jorge. If, according to the author, the masculine universe was preponderant before, now the interaction between the sexes appears on the scene, with explicit references to sexual activity which emphasize men’s virility and women’s passivity.

Nonetheless, as Patrick relates it, there is a prohibited space for the *proibidão* and the *porno-funk*: school. Patrick and his chaps listen to music on the cell phone even in the classroom, when the female-teacher allows it; but this permission depends on the kind of music. Until the middle of 2008, Patrick relates that he was the only one of his class who had a cell phone and his chaps wanted to listen to music:

Then the teacher allowed me to put the cell phone in a corner of the classroom and we listened to music while writing... [*She allowed me to play*] *Exaltasamba, Jeito Moleque*, ah, various songs... but not MV Bill, Menor do Chapa, she did not allow these. Something *light* OK, but she does not allow bandit music.

Menor do Chapa is Fabrício de Souza Batista’s artist name, twenty-seven, funk singer, inhabitant of Morro do Turano, in Rio de Janeiro. In 2005, he fell under the Narcotics Law and was indicted for drug dealing apology. In 2006, his name was involved in a polemic: the police of Rio started an enquiry to investigate the sale of cell phone ring-tones of *proibições*, by the operators Vivo and Claro. Beneath I transcribe the lyrics of one of the songs, “*Humildade e Disciplina*” [“*Humility and Discipline*”], which was propagated at Morro S. Jorge:

So what, brother? /Humility and discipline, Mad life/Directly by Chapa, just go on/ Turano more wired aê.../Fundament of the CV/If he comes ordering, he is going to take the French leave/In humility, freedom, for Marcinho/tranquillity, Turano, neither better, nor worse../It is the crew of Menor/It is faith in God “, Colombia is pure indeed /It is only relic, Bolado Black Panther/Get real, 157 just wired /It is “the forty thieves “ PJI! (Paz Justiça Lberdade) [Peace Justice Freedom]/ for all my brothers, it is the red/ back to the farewell *morro* this is the intrigue /It is with the anti terror, we revenged the player /So what brother?/Humility and discipline, Mad life/directly by Chapa, just go on /Turano more wired aê...

Another interesting thing I found during my research occurred when I went to interview another girl, who was not at home. But I started talking to her sixteen-year-old daughter. She is listening to funk on the cell phone –, which is worthwhile mentioning- because it tells the life and death of a young dealer-soldier from Morro S. Jorge, killed by rivals of another community. “A *rapper* of Porto Alegre did it, he was his friend, lots of people at Morro who have got this song on their cell phones”.

Thus the preference for funk and rap of many boys and young people of S. Jorge shows a masculinity model which tends to constitute itself through aggressiveness. Carlos Alberto, twenty-four, a young leader of the community who belongs to the hip-hop movement, comments the role of music for the boys:

There´s a lot of this, to listen to loud music... They listen to much rap, so it is a question of identity, to show a characteristic of the young boy. of how he is, of how he wants to behave, to act... Whether you like it or not, rap is aggressive in the lyrics, in the way of singing. Thus depending on the way he sings and transmits, it will say how the boy feels. The music he adopts as being great has much to do with his characteristic.

## Practices of subversio: the pleasure of competition and of risk

“Sandra, it is only *mané* who puts credits on the cell phone.” It was Celinho, fourteen year-old boy, with whom I spent a couple of months, son of a female interlocutor who drew my attention to the somewhat illicit strategies they use to speak on the cell phone without paying. The usual sentence the interlocutors told me was; “my cell phone does not have credits”. A traditional and normative, not subversive strategy to circumvent this situation is to make collect calls – practice which I discuss elsewhere (SILVA, 2010). Taking into consideration that in the slang of Rio de Janeiro “*mané*” means “hard-working” (ZALUAR, 2004), the one who lives according to the norms, I decided to make a catalogue of some of these “practices of subversion” which tend to invert the power relationships between users and cell phone operators. I could perceive that “to cheat the operators” was part of a discourse of exploit and success narratives. “Cheating the operators” can occur in two ways: a more passive one, so to say, in which one takes advantage of the operators’ technical faults and administrative errors – but they get satisfaction from subjugating the enemy; and a more active one, in which they provoke some kind of breakdown or they share strategies to overcome obstacles imposed by the operators – such as the blocking of cell phones. In the first case the reports about the operator Vivo, the technical failure champion, are very frequent at São Jorge “With TIM this already occurred, but not as constantly as with Vivo”, says James. He and Caio tell me with many details:

When Vivo started, after midnight it was free of charge, because their net always failed. When there was a problem, they did not control it exactly, so there was a breakdown because there were many calls. You made free calls the whole night. I called from my father’s house. [*James gets excited: when there was a breakdown. I informed everybody, oh, call the Morro!*] Who did not have a Vivo cell phone ran to borrow one from whom had one, and kept calling. Sometimes there was a breakdown at Vivo’s also in the afternoon, independent.

The second modality of “practices of subversion” is much more active and brings, besides the satisfaction to see the enemy – institutional<sup>6</sup> – subjugated, the pleasure of competition and risk. The first time we talked, Ricardo drew my attention by saying that he had changed the operating system of his cell phone. With this expertise, Ricardo helps his friends who have technical problems with their phones. At the age of eighteen, having completed secondary education, with a stable job, married, the father of a three-month old baby, he also revealed that he is keen on “cheating the operators” due to his technical skill:

In order to cheat the operator, you must try to find out the failures of the system, sometimes such as sending messages free of charge, making calls free of charge, using the internet free of charge... like the chip I took from a friend of mine, which was totally modified, and I used the internet free of charge for two weeks, e-mail, msn, I used it permanently. Very often it is the failure of the very operators, they give free access, they forget... Like once we had a good time for one or two months because the apparatus just did not charge the call... It was a failure of the operator. Who had credits called and it was not debited from the credit, everybody who had a Vivo cell phone. But it was three or four years ago.

Another strategy Felipe uses is information sharing, via the Internet, with young people all over Brazil. On these sites, there are reports which echo the “exhibitionism” of the exploit narrative like the one imagined by Almeida (1995):

<sup>6</sup>To make hoax calls, on the fixed phone or on the cell phone, to the police, to the firemen, to people or shops of the neighbourhood, according to what I noticed at S. Jorge, is also a practice connected to the constitution of masculinity through the exposure to risk.



You find everything on the Internet in order to unblock, to change the characteristics of the apparatus, and it is easy. For ninety per cent of the apparatus with a basic search on the Internet you get a tutorial to unblock the apparatus. There are also a lot of forums on the internet speaking specifically about cell phones. I access, search, and use all the tutorials I need. In order to attempt to repair when there is a default, to get recommendations.

Patrick does not have a computer with internet access at home, nor the technical skill to cheat operators Ricardo has got. But his cell phone is always without credit. According to Patrick, to put credits on the cell phone is a question of having money, which is rare, because it is his mother who sustains him and he collaborates in the domestic budget doing sporadic jobs. He also thinks that the cost of the calls is high and exaggerated. Generally he puts a ten *reais* credit [the *real* is the currency of Brazil; plural *reais*], but he tells me, while snapping his fingers, that the cell phone “has been like this for quite a long time, hey”, without credits“. You put ten *reais*, it’s all very quick, you just speak, hey, for eight minutes. You spend it all.” “Quite a long time”, I succeed in discovering, for him means “a couple of months”. He just does not lose the line, says Patrick, because of the operator’s bonus, which, according to him, he keeps getting normally. Thus one of the possible strategies to save money, he says, consists in “taking it on the net” (to get credits on the internet): “just hook the cell phone, you see, there is a page, but the police must not come to know this, if they do, you get caught.” I assured him that I am neither policeman nor judge (and Patrick knows this, because at the time of the interview, he had known me for more than five months – we had spent time together in a revenue generation project in the community, which he had participated in for some time) I ask him to tell me more. But I think that he recognizes his error, because he says to me:

I have not yet discovered how to do it, it is my cousin down there who knows, he puts fifty, hundred *reais* at a time, and uses it all and then he goes there and puts again... [*I insist and ask if you need a password if want to get credits on the Internet*] You go there, put a password, digitize and it works... My friend succeeds in doing it, but I don't know how to do it. I never discovered how it is.

Before the dissemination of cell phones in the community – which had occurred some five, six years ago, – there were frauds at the ordinary card pay phones and phone cards. Caio's father had a friend who sold these cards and he taught Caio a strategy: “[...] there was a way to scratch the card which put credits on the card, so you put into the card pay phone, moved in a certain way and it worked.” The story of the card pay phone is even more interesting when told by James, as far as the involved risks and the public performance is concerned:

But there is the story of the card pay phone. You pulled a wire off a cable, fixed it well and connected it to your home phone. And you made calls and went on and on. you called whom you wanted to. Then you didn't pay anything. But normally who knows this were people who had already worked there, who already provide information. These people say that you are going to open the card pay phone, you are going to cut the wire, to unsheathe the wire, to connect it like this to your phone and it will work. You bring any telephone from home and do this. Then you are going to dial from your apparatus and not from the public phone. I already saw people doing this and I already called from the public phone near the *crèche*. “The guys” did it and left it this way so that everybody could call... Everybody called quickly, called and got out fearing that the police would come. You had to cross your fingers that you would not be there at that moment. The police came and smashed it all. After the police had arrived, smashed and had taken the home phone which was there, “they” did it again.

Although these stratagems to speak free of charge on the phone are propagated mainly among men and boys, it is not exclusively theirs. Let us see Larissa's case, for example, one of my privileged interlocutors, she was born and grew up at Morro São Jorge, and is twenty eight. Already at the end of the fieldwork, I tell her about the idea of this article, I also show her the proposed abstract and I make a short comment on the ethnographic material I had collected up to that moment, especially the story of the breakdown at the Vivo operator's aeriels, which Caio and James had related before. She laughed: "that was a time of great fun, but it was eight or ten years ago. Everybody who had a Vivo cell phone knew that one could call without paying after midnight." Larissa says that there is an interesting story she wants to tell me. Now she is married to a woman, but when she was younger, adolescent, she had love affairs with various boys. One of them was, as she herself says, "quite a tough guy" and he knew the stratagems to cheat the cell phone operators. The privileged information consisted in having a code – a sequence of eleven numbers, followed by an asterisk, after which you could dial the phone number you wanted. Larissa reveals that this privileged piece of information was propagated among the boys of that determined band her boyfriend belonged to. One day, Larissa tells me,

I heard when he got a call and I went quite near, from the back, while he was talking. Then I saw this strange number on the screen. But I kept cool. Only later I asked, very nicely, what was this call, love? It had a strange number, what was that? But he did not think of telling me what it was. Afterwards he told me that it was a secret, an advantage that they and their friends used to call without paying. I did not give up until he told me exactly what it was and gave me all these numbers. But it was quite difficult, you see. I had to kiss him a lot. But how he managed, he did not tell me, in no way. But there is one thing, Sandra, this trick only works when you call from a public phone or from a fixed telephone to a cell phone number. If you try to call directly from a cell phone, it does not work.

Curious, I ask her if she has still gotten this number. Larissa says that maybe she had written it down somewhere, “but it is a long time ago that I do not use it anymore, I think it does not work anymore, only at that time, I think they already discovered it” She also tells me that when her boyfriend gave her the sequence of the numbers, he asked her not to tell it to anybody, which did not prevent Larissa to give the number to her three sisters, “and we kept calling”. As she notices my slight disappointment because of the lack of the number, Larissa gives me another data, which her younger sister, nineteen, “has another trick, which is more recent, but you must call after eleven pm.” I was informed by Larissa that this sister’s husband was in jail at the time of my fieldwork. It was not possible to come to know if, in Larissa’s case, the stratagem also was provided by people who were involved in illicit activities. Nevertheless, what Larissa’s testimony shows us is that, although women also use such “tricks” to cheat the operators, the means to access to such privileged information leads to men.

### **Final considerations**

Through the ethnographical material I presented, I tried to relate one of the elements which compose the new hegemonic globalised masculinity (KIMMEL, 2004) – that is the use of communication and information technologies as a sign of masculine success – to the *periferia* masculinities [*periferia*: outskirts, suburbs often related to poor neighbourhood around a big city] such as they are present among the young people of Morro S. Jorge. In the trajectory, in which I analyse two sets of practices related to the use of cell phones, I present some interpretations in the light of the masculinity theories, comparing them with the theoretical field which aims at studying the means of communication in the perspective of social sciences. I suggest that communication and information technologies, particularly cell phones, can be taken into consideration as a constitutive element of the processes of the incorporation of masculinity nowadays. In the case of listening to music, espe-

cially funk, without headphones, I believe that the practice to occupy the sound space around you, in public space, provides a correlate of virile masculinity related to the body aesthetically muscular. I recognize that such somewhat daring proposal needs a relativization of the concept of body, which I could not deepen on the small space of this article. Nevertheless I hope to have been able to indicate possible thought tendencies. I equally suggest thinking of sociability provided by the exchange of music among young people via *bluetooth* as well as by the exploit reports and information exchange in the forums about cell phones as a space of *man's sociability* – spaces which enable a public performance of masculinity. I also argue that the “practices of subversion” confer upon young people and men a capital of prestige which comes from the fact to be able to subvert, if only to a certain degree, institutionalized rules and not to be a mere “*mané*”.

Thus global technologies are impregnated by local knowledge and activities, revealing masculinity styles which constitute themselves in the interaction and the meanings of which are constantly renegotiated, very often re-modernizing, in new forms, hegemonic masculinity strategies such as activity, aggressiveness and public performativity. At the same time they indicate new styles of “becoming” and of “being” a man.

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