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NPGA, School of Management

Federal University of Bahia

Get a Job, You Tramp! Deviance and Stigma in the Work of Street Artists and Its Organizing Implications

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Claudia Antonello

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Ana Carolina Assis Sampaio^a

Marcelo de Souza Bispo^b

^a Federal University of Pernambuco, Recife, Brazil

^b Federal University of Paraíba, João Pessoa, Brazil

Abstract

The aim of the current study is to analyze the work of street (circus) performers at traffic lights, from a sociological perspective. Therefore, this article focuses on contributing to improve debates about work, by going beyond the individualistic psychological perspective prevailing in the Business Management field and in organizational studies. By assuming work as social practice arising from organizing processes, it uses the classic concepts — deriving from Sociology — of stigma and deviance, as well as takes a critical position about neoliberal rationality, to theoretically contribute to process to think about work based on a non-traditional logic. It analyzes organizations outside organizations, such as family, the streets and the city. The main findings observed in the current study, based on eighteen semi-structured interviews conducted with street artists, enabled seeing that stigmas, such as tramps and filthy people, imposed on these artists, as well as difficulties in their relationship with their families, are the main obstacles to the type of work carried out by them. It was possible concluding that market-oriented neoliberal rationality, which appropriates people's work and turns profit maximization into the very rationality of life, contributes for circus artists who work at traffic lights to be considered deviant and stigmatized, as well as opens room for angry discourses capable of promoting violence and prejudice. Thus, it is necessary changing the “get a

job, you tramp!” statement into understanding of and respect for different individuals.

Keywords: deviance; neoliberal rationality; street artist; stigma; work.

Introduction

Debates about work have transdisciplinary nature and take place from different perspectives. Discussions held in the Business Management field mostly comprise people management issues, from an individualistic (psychological-subjectivist) perspective about the meanings of work (Colet & Mozzato, 2019; Silva, Brito, & Campos, 2020; Werner, Girelli, & Dal Magro, 2017) by taking into consideration topics such as quality of life at work, career and skills. Organizational studies about work overall focus on investigating its precariousness, whereas few studies address how work can be the means to best understand other social orders (Graceffa & Heusch, 2017; Siqueira, Dias, & Medeiros, 2019) or organizations outside organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). The discussion held in the current article heads towards the organizational studies' field, since it treats work as relevant social phenomenon to help better understanding other organizing forms that have economic, political and social implications (Delbridge & Sallaz, 2015).

Thus, the current study focused on investigating work-related prejudice and marginalization, which can affect organizations, such as family, the streets and the city, by taking as reference the work performed by street artist, more specifically, by circus performers at traffic lights, from a socio-structural perspective (Bridi, Braga, & Santana, 2018; Sorj, 2000). The aim of the study was to analyze the work of circus performers at traffic lights from a sociological perspective.

Street artists' work is often associated with begging, poverty and child labor (Marina, 2018; Palacios, 2011; Simpson, 2011). These artists are sometimes seen as filthy (Douglas, 1966) and tramps, and they are also attacked by those who marginalize them and who do not see circus arts presented at traffic lights as a job. It seems contradictory for a society that stigmatizes circus arts performed at traffic lights to be willing to pay for the performance of artists working in traditional canvas traveling circuses (Aguiar, Carrieri, & Souza, 2016; Natt, Aguiar, & Carrieri, 2019). Presenting a sociological perspective on how the ideas of stigma and deviance associated with the work performed by circus artists are built, based on the experiences reported by these artists, themselves, is what motivates this research. This motivation is in line with the increased interest in the concept of stigma observed in organizational and business management studies (Campana, Duffy, & Micheli, 2022; Roulet, 2015; Tracey & Phillips, 2016; Zhang, Wang, Toubiana, & Greenwood, 2021).

The perception of street artists as marginal individuals may be associated with high crime rates (Rodrigues et al., 2022; Soares, 2014) and social inequality (Campello, Gentili, Rodrigues, & Howell, 2018) in Brazil, a fact that makes life on the streets even more stigmatized, since it is considered violent and associated with lower social status. Violence attributed to, and the exclusion of, those who live and/or work on the streets are often seen in the literature about topics such as drug trafficking, odd jobs, violence and homeless populations (Barbosa, 2014; Botti et al., 2010; Ecker, 2017; Zaluar, 1994).

Violence becomes part of everyday life for those who perceive the streets as workplace — such as street art workers or people who engage in other activities like prostitution —, rather than just as passing place (Oliveira, Guimarães, & Ferreira, 2017; Sanders, 2016; Silva & Cappelle, 2015).

The street, itself, is perceived as place of vulnerability and risks. Performing circus arts at traffic lights brings along a series of elements associated with urban violence and dangers inherent to circus activity (Mandell, 2016), in addition to health risks, such as the incidence of sunlight, which can damage peoples' eyesight (Rincón-Suarez & Jiménez-Barbosa, 2017).

Studies available in the literature about street artists performing at traffic lights link street arts practiced at traffic lights to social exclusion (Ataíde, 2016; Ecker, 2017) and even treat this artistic activity as begging (Buscariolli, Carneiro, & Santos, 2016; Leal & Montrone, 2018). However, street artists are more of a sort of character who works at traffic lights (Façanha, 2007; Infantino, 2021). The study by Buscariolli et al. (2016) raised this discussion based on the following question: can street arts be considered work? The aforementioned authors analyzed different street art types, such as music, dance, performing arts, painting and juggling/magic/entertainment, and reported individuals' difficulty in seeing the circus category as arts. On the other hand, there are also studies (Duprat, 2014; Palacios, 2011) focused on investigating how different levels of circus moves, either acrobatic or based on using toys (juggling, balance, manipulation), require significant training and absolute mastery of the performed exercise. According to circus tradition and history, circus is featured by nomadism and by the need of being on the streets to approach popular art by performing in squares and fairs (Bolognesi, 2003; Carrieri, Quaresma, Palhares, & Aguiar, 2020).

The current study has analyzed the work performed by circus artists at traffic lights, from a sociological perspective, to help improving the debate about work as social organizer capable of explaining other social phenomena. It is necessary understanding work as an organizing process (Czarniawska, 2008) embedded in a set of social practices and material arrangements (Schatzki, 2005). Therefore, work is herein understood as a constant act of organizing, with emphasis on what circus artists working at traffic lights do and on how it happens (Schatzki, 2006). This factor opens room for analyzing what is done by circus artists who work at traffic lights beyond the usual understanding of established groups in society (Becker, 2008).

The present research contributes to the organizational studies' field, in the sense that it helps better understanding how different ways of thinking about the work phenomenon are arranged in a broader social structure, unlike the business management mainstream, where a psychological and individualistic perspective about work prevails (Colet & Mozzato, 2019; Werner et al., 2017). Based on the idea of work as organizing process, the current study adopted the concepts of stigma and deviance (Becker, 2008; Elias & Scotson, 2000; Goffman, 2008), as well as a critical position towards the neoliberal rationality about work (Carmo, Assis, Gomes, & Teixeira, 2021; Dardot & Laval, 2016). It was done to theoretically contribute to thinking about work, based on a non-traditional logic (Bridi et al., 2018; Dubar, 2012), to help better understanding other forms of social order, from the work perspective.

Work seen as organizing process

The organizing process comprises the articulation between humans and non-humans around a given social practice (Czarniawska, 2008). It represents the way of organizing a given collectivity, and it enables identifying the organizing process, itself, as organization and social practice. Thus, adopting the idea of organizing process, rather than that of organization, has two purposes, namely: not reducing the understanding of organization as formal institution (organization as noun) and not

using the term organization as adjective, in order to determine *a priori* what comes to be, or is, organized. The assumption is that organization is something in constant movement, a process that gives rise to thinking about it as verb (organizing). Thus, it is possible accessing and understanding social phenomena from multiple perspectives and understandings that enable perceiving what is done and how it is (in practice), rather than how it should be done, or how it should be (prevalence of the dominant view) when it comes to some social phenomenon, like work, for example.

Thinking about work as organizing process is a way of looking at what practitioners understand as a specific social practice. Therefore, instead of assuming *a priori* what work means and of classifying what fits, or not, into this classification, work is understood as social practice (Schatzki, 2005) resulting from a constant organizing process (Czarniawska, 2008) that helps us to have other perceptions about social phenomena and what can be considered organization (Duarte & Alcadipani, 2016; Possas, Medeiros, & Valadão, 2017).

As the result of an organizing process, work is a social practice that takes on multiple organizing forms. The work performed by circus artists at traffic lights is one of these organizing possibilities of work as social practice. This understanding implies realizing that work establishes mutual relationships with other social practices in order to constitute, and to be constituted by, these relationships. Thus, the streets, the city and the family, for example, are other organizing processes that influence and are influenced by work as social practice.

The mutual influence of social practices and organizing processes lead to different constructions and perceptions about what the streets, the city, the family and the work, itself, are. Opening room to understand things as they happen (Schatzki, 2006) provide the opportunity to understand multiple organizing ways that receive the same name (such as work), as well as help better understanding how dominant ideas and ideologies are consolidated as “the truth” or “the right thing” and generate stigmas (Elias & Scotson, 2000; Goffman, 2000) that end up being classified as deviances (Becker, 2008) in a continuous social control process. Debating whether what circus artists do at traffic lights is work, or not, should not dismiss these individuals’ own perception about what they do. At the same time, this “doing” (social practice) influences and is influenced by other social practices, as well as by different control types exercised by dominant ideas and ideologies in different societies. Neoliberal reason (Dardot & Laval, 2016; Goergen, 2019) is one of the aforementioned forms of social control with direct implications on what is, or is not, work, and on its organizing ways.

Work based on the neoliberal rationality

Neoliberalism aims at “re-introducing work as economic analysis field” (Foucault, 2008, p. 303) through the human capital theory, with emphasis on an exclusively economic-financial bias, according to which, workers are their own company — they are “entrepreneurs” (Bridi et al., 2018; Sorj, 2000). Workers are seen as a machine, a body that generates profit through its workforce, skills and competences (Foucault, 2008; Harvey, 2005).

This “neo-subject” perspective emphasizes a set of features associated with individualization and competition (Dardot & Laval, 2016; Goergen, 2019). Social issues become the responsibility of individuals, since only they can change their own destiny based on the skills they have developed

(and made the option to develop) throughout their lives (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal thinking is not only observed in the work field; it is a rationality capable of pervading the entire social structure, with implications for the ways of thinking about the legal system, education, and health care, among other social orders, by assuming that the capitalist business logic should be the reference for all individual life and institution scopes, with emphasis on the governmental one (Dardot & Laval, 2016; Paulani, 2006).

This logic, which is rooted in social structures, starts to influence people's behavior, as well as their ways of seeing and understanding the world. Neoliberal reason understands social policy as harmful to economic and social balance, since individuals are masters of their own destiny to the extent that they have skills and competences to compete in the market, which is guided by meritocracy and free competition. According to Becker (2008) and Souza (2019), socially imposed rules are associated with political and economic power, since established groups (the elites) are able to impose rules in a way to favor themselves, under the meritocracy label (Sandel, 2020; Souza, 2019).

Neoliberal rationality not only pervades penal policies, but it also transforms social and economic relationships by making work precarious and by dismantling organized movements, such as unions (Dardot & Laval, 2016; Harvey, 2005; Paulani, 2006). This concept is not far from the circus' labor history. Brazilian circus started as family-circus and underwent a capitalist transformation at the end of the 20th century, when large companies organized shows based on "specialized labor contracts" (Bolognesi, 2003, p. 49). According to Bolognesi, the business model used by large circus companies aimed at "exclusively favoring the entrepreneur" to the detriment of artists, and it led to disunity in the circus class, as well as to work precariousness (p. 50).

The performance of circus artists who work at traffic lights is a new circus reality that sought to stay alive, despite the structural changes resulting from the capitalist and neoliberal logic. It is a circus *sin carpa* (Infantino, 2013) whose artists perform at traffic lights and collect money contributions by passing the hat (Marina, 2018). Circus performance at traffic lights is close to large circus companies, in some aspects – i.e., the nomadic aspect, the pursuit of autonomy and freedom (Werner et al., 2017) – whereas in others – such as neoliberal marketing logic – they move away from them (Bolognesi, 2003; Infantino, 2013).

The consequences of the neoliberal model – i.e., weakened institutions, disarticulation of social movements, lack of state social policies, wage deflation, increased social inequalities, precarious labor relations, competition as lifestyle – make it increasingly hard for individuals to achieve social/financial balance. This difficulty is even worse for street (circus) artists who are sometimes seen as beggars (Buscariolli et al., 2016; Leone, 2012).

From the functionalist perspective of labor (DUBAR, 2012), activities are divided into profession and occupation: professions are associated with qualified individuals (from a social and educational perspective), whereas occupations are associated with individuals who do not have training in one of the careers seen as professions. Based on this reading, street artists are not seen as professionals.

This hierarchy between professions and occupations can be understood through the logic of the "productive subject" (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 325), according to which, in a utilitarian and social distinction way, individuals must be as effective (i.e., profitable) as possible at the time to perform

their work. Profession holders are rewarded, both financially and with social status (being a doctor; for example), whereas occupations attributed to other workers are limited to money-work exchange as a way to survive, with little or no social acknowledgement at all. According to circus artists “without canvas”, their work is seen as occupation and does not have the same social status as that of traditional circus artists. This factor leads to the social understanding that street artists are people who do not work and who do not make art; therefore, they are deviant (Becker, 2008; Elias & Scotson, 2000).

Circus performance at traffic lights seen as a circus of deviant and stigmatized individuals

The deviant denomination is attributed to groups that do not belong to, or do not fit, socially established groups. They are those who hold the smallest power, the group with “the lowest human value” (Elias & Scotson, 2000). Individuals’ interest in complying with the rules is not enough for them to be considered normal (established) or stigmatized (deviant); it is a “matter of the individuals’ condition” (Goffman, 2008, p. 139). Deviants only exist because there is a group that names them in such a way. Every group has rules of conduct, either formal or informal, which set the right and wrong actions. Individuals seen as outsiders (deviant) in a specific group may be actually inserted in the “proper behavior” category of other social rules that are not followed by the group of established individuals (Barros, Cappelle, & Guerra, 2021).

Based on the established-deviant relationship, the power exerted by established individuals can be observed in different ways. One of them lies on the self-image presented by the established group and on the stigma it imposes on outsiders, by classifying them as anomic, by attributing bad features to them, and by associating them with disorder, filth and mistrustfulness in order to assure their superiority (Elias & Scotson, 2000). However, attributing self-image features is not the only way established for individuals to exert their domain. Besides being morally downgraded, deviants subjected to stigmatization may suffer either formal or informal sanctions. Nevertheless, according to Elias and Scotson, “one group can only effectively stigmatize the other when it is well established in power positions that the stigmatized group is excluded from” (p. 23). Certain groups (often, the elites) seek to structure/formalize rules understood by them as right in order to impose them on society (Souza, 2019). There are formal and structured rules legitimized in the form of law, which allow the State to coercively act through the institutions enabling them, such as the police and the judiciary power. There are also informal rules, such as agreements “newly established or settled through the sanction of age and tradition”, which address informal sanctions (BECKER, 2008, p. 13).

It is worth emphasizing that deviants cannot be considered a homogeneous category, since deviance is created by society, itself (BECKER, 2008). The place individuals occupy in the social structure is a central point in sociological analysis (GOFFMAN, 2008). Deviance becomes “a consequence of the application of rules and sanctions by others” (BECKER, 2008, p. 16), a fact that ends up labeling both acts and people. Deviants cannot be understood as uniform class because labels can be mistakenly placed on people. Individuals can perform deviant acts without being discovered, or they can even be labeled deviant without having committed any infraction. Deviances, as part of the identity construction process, are aspects that individuals seen as “normal”

would be ashamed to express, since they are not associated with roles that should not be socially performed (Goffman, 2008).

Methodology

Qualitative approach was herein adopted to interpret the work performed by circus artists at traffic lights. Semi-structured online interviews were carried out to help better understanding the experience lived by these individuals, since they enabled seeing inside the universe they are part of (Stake, 2010).

It is worth emphasizing that the first author of the current study has worked as street artist from 2015 to 2019, a fact that helped building the interview script, as well as the analysis. Based on her experience and on readings about the topic, it was possible seeing that this activity was loaded with prejudices that extrapolated the very accomplishment of the work, itself. She has experienced different types of aggression - which also emerged in interviewees' speeches - during the period she performed circus activities at traffic lights. This experience, together with evidence found in academic studies that revealed society's recurring thinking – i.e., the one that does not see circus activity performed at traffic lights as work – encouraged our research group to conduct this study. Thus, its focus on stigma and deviance was defined *a priori* based on the first author's experience with circus performance at traffic lights.

In total, eighteen interviews were carried out by following a script based on the deviant features presented by Becker (2008) and Elias and Scotson (2000), as well as by focusing on prejudices and difficulties experienced by the interviewees. The semi-structured script was divided into topics focused on approaching respondents' life trajectory, initiation in their profession, relationship with their family and time of experience in this type of work. In addition, it questioned respondents about the violence types experienced by them at the time they performed their activity at traffic lights. Interviews took place between June 24 and July 12, 2020; they lasted 1 hour, on average. They were recorded upon participants' authorization; subsequently, they were transcribed.

The first author contacted individuals she already knew from the time she juggled at traffic lights. The initial contact was made via Instagram, WhatsApp or Facebook, in order to ask about individuals' availability/willingness to be interviewed. Interviewees were informed about the overall topic of the study, and their structural ability to access computer/mobile devices and stable internet was checked. All interviewees were born and live/travel in the South American territory. Interviewees' names mentioned throughout the current study are fictitious to ensure their anonymity. This territorial amplitude was only possible due to online data collection that, on the one hand, enabled higher diversity of respondents, as well as time flexibility to talk to the artists. On the other hand, there was a limitation associated with the impossibility of making field observations (due to the Covid-19 pandemic), which could bring along other elements that cannot be accessed through interviews.

Table 1
Interviewees' profile

Fictitious name	Age	Nationality	Experience time	Schooling
Adriana	27	Brazilian	8 years	Incomplete Higher Education (Dance)
Ágata	26	Brazilian	1 year and a half — no longer performs	Complete Higher Education (dance)
Andres	40	Argentinean	15 years	Complete High School
Beatriz	26	Brazilian	6 years	Complete High School
Celso	36	Colombian	5 years — no longer performs	Complete Higher Education (Accounting)
Cristian	29	Argentinean	6 years	Incomplete Higher Education (Music)
Débora	31	Argentinean	12 years	Incomplete Higher Education
Eliana	25	Venezuelan	7 years	Complete High School
Gabriel	38	Argentinean	4 years	Technical course (<i>3D multimedia designer</i>)
Iago	21	Brazilian	5 years	Complete High School
Ian	26	Brazilian	3 years	Complete Higher Education (Geography)
Jorge	33	Brazilian	15 years — no longer performs	Complete Higher Education (Tourism)
Laura	29	Argentinean	10 years	Incomplete Higher Education (Visual Arts)
Lilian	31	Argentinean	4 years — no longer performs	Complete Higher Education (Dance)
Maurício	27	Brazilian	5 years — no longer performs	Complete Higher Education (Geography)
Paola	21	Brazilian	4 years	Complete High School
Rebeca	21	Brazilian	6 months	Complete Higher Education (marketing)
Valéria	26	Brazilian	3 years — no longer performs	Incomplete Higher Education

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, interviewees were asked to check their respective transcripts to see whether they were in compliance with the information they wanted to convey.

Interviewees' speeches analysis focused on identifying how the concepts of stigma and deviance are built on the work performed by street artists. Therefore, the herein conducted analyses focused on identifying how stigma and deviance regularities and orders, associated with the work performed by circus artists at traffic lights, are built. The idea was to identify a set of common elements capable of emphasizing and explaining how the ideas of deviance and stigma are formed in the work performed by circus artists at traffic lights. This perspective moves away from an

individualistic pursuit of the meaning of work (Colet & Mozzato, 2019; Silva et al., 2020; Werner et al., 2017) and gets close to the sociological imagination (Mills, 1972), which lies on the pursuit of awareness about the social structure the investigated phenomenon takes place in. It is about articulating and presenting real situations in a coherent manner. The goal is to understand that phenomena do not emerge in certain ways by chance, since there are always interests at stake in any investigated reality.

After the interviews were transcribed, it was possible seeing the experiences and violence types shared by interviewees, as well as data repeated by all interviews. The transcripts were segmented based on topics often observed in interviewees' speeches; data were triangulated among the authors of the current article. Thus, interviewees' own statements allowed identifying persistence in classifying street artists as tramps, which gave rise to category "Get a job, you tramp!"; this category represents how a significant part of society classifies circus artists who work at traffic lights, based on evidence observed in the analyzed reports. Results were organized by initially explaining the concept of tramp, how it unfolds in other dimensions of the work performed by circus artists at traffic lights — the marginal circus — and how this context leads to the understanding that what these artists do cannot be called work. Thus, although the current study initially took into consideration the ideas of deviance and stigma, the categories presented below result from what was learned by our research group during the interviews. Therefore, we herein present how the organizing process of circus performance takes place at traffic lights based on workers' experiences, themselves.

Get a job, you tramp!

"Get a job, you tramp!" is a sentence often heard by street artists. This aggressive sentence represents the way society, in general, perceives circus artists who work at traffic lights and it holds a series of meanings. In addition, it highlights the hard time many individuals have to perceive the activity performed by these artists as work. Thus, they are considered tramps, individuals who do not generate wealth for society. These artists have a lifestyle of their own, which is not guided by neoliberal reason (Dardot & Laval, 2016; Harvey, 2005; Paulani, 2006), a fact that differs them from those considered established (Becker, 2008; Elias & Scotson, 2000) or "normal" (Goffman, 2008) in society, since they are travelers and escape socially imposed living standards.

Respondents have mentioned difficulties in adapting to the organizing process the neoliberal capitalism is established in (Dardot & Laval, 2016). The deconstruction of socially established standards, whether for social, aesthetic or work-related issues, was often observed among participants. One of the artists made the following statement after she was asked about the difference between "normal individuals" (Goffman, 2008) and artists who work at traffic lights:

The normal person always follows the pathway set by society. . . because society pressures people, right?, to follow a given route, their parents, as a whole, so . . . in exchange, in arts, we are free, right? We are free to think what we want to think, free to do what we want to do. . . we do it as self-management, we live what we want to live, right? There is no pressure at all. . . we do not follow society's stereotype. (Eliana, 2020)

Eliana explains that individuals who make the option for this lifestyle do not follow what is understood as right by common sense, a fact that brings along the deviant perspective (Becker, 2008; Elias & Scotson, 2000). They move from the normal status to the stigmatized one, and undergo a self-knowledge process, a new way of understanding themselves in the process to build a new identity. They can also “play both roles in the normal-deviant drama” (Goffman, 2008, p. 143). What is right for this group can be considered wrong for the rest of society. In addition to financial support, artists seek to be free from social stereotypes. According to Eliana’s (2020) words: “to be free to think what one wants”.

It is possible associating the autonomy generated by arts performed at traffic lights with a social criticism to standards and rules set by the dominant organizing process imposed by the “normal” ones. The idea of not having a boss is one of these criticisms. However, not having a boss is not to be mistaken by the idea of entrepreneurship associated with the neoliberal logic (Dardot & Laval, 2016). Jorge shows this idea in the fragment below.

So, social criticism is implicit, I am not going to work for a boss, . . . to spend fourteen hours of my day, you know? To earn a wage determined by him/her, to follow a time schedule determined by him/her, right? I can only have a day off on the day determined by him/her, so if I get sick, if I need something, it is my problem; so if it is my problem, I take the reins of my life and work for myself, right? (Jorge, 2020)

Jorge’s speech reveals the common thought among artists, namely: not having a boss. Jorge lists a series of items to justify his activity. According to him, juggling at traffic lights represents independence and quality of life. Given the precariousness of the labor world, this activity gives workers the freedom and comfort that other jobs fail to provide.

Artists have trained and got qualified to be able to exercise their craft, although this activity is not considered professional from a functionalist perspective of labor. However, it is possible assuming the activity performed by artists who work at traffic lights as profession, if one considers it from the ‘interpretivist’ and critical perspectives of professions (Dubar, 2012), or simply by understanding that there may be different organizing processes for one to carry out a given job or profession. According to Dubar, artists choose to carry out activities that “are not reduced to the financial exchange of energy expenditure for wage” (p. 354); the aforementioned author presents a new identity for the idea of profession, which collides with the prevailing neoliberal reason.

On the other hand, Jorge’s speech makes it clear that how artists, although seeking to provide social criticism through their work, cannot fully escape the neoliberal reason when, for example, they assume the total risks of their work and life activity (Dardot & Laval, 2016; Harvey, 2005; Paulani, 2006). In addition to the risks inherent to the circus practice itself (Mandell, 2016; Rens & Filho, 2021), there are also risks associated with the workplace. Thus, these artists, who are inserted in the context of precarious work (Benavides; Silva-Peñaherrera, & Vives, 2022) and neoliberal reason, behave as subjects-companies, by acknowledging and appropriating dangers typical of their work. Neoliberalism is so intrinsic to the way of seeing the world that it even imposes itself on those who are trying to escape these shackles, and it proves that individuals cannot fully isolate themselves from the social order imposed by neoliberal rationality.

It is possible perceiving the impositions of neoliberal rationality among street artists when they take risks at the time to perform their activity. Among them, one finds physical risks associated with the activity itself, such as eye strain (Rincón-Suarez & Jiménez-Barbosa, 2017), muscle injury, violence and being run over. According to participants, members of the audience can also be dangerous.

And the major risk lies on the possibility of some crazy person who does not like what you are doing decides to hit you or shoot you straight away, right? To shoot you, right there. I do not know, there are a lot of crazy people in the streets. (Gabriel, 2020)

Gabriel explains that the major risk lies on the possibility that some individual who “does not like what you are doing” decides to attack him. Paradoxically, those who pose the greatest risk to artists are exactly the ones who fear them and who classify them as marginal. It does not mean that there are no other forms of violence and conflicts in the streets, such as dealing with other traffic light workers and beggars.

Verbal attacks are frequent and associated with the non-acknowledgement of circus performances at traffic lights as work. Violence takes place because these artists perform their craft outside the place where it is acknowledged as work activity.

They even said “get a job, you tramp!”, I think this is the most frequent one, right? (Iago, 2020)

. . . the traffic light got green and the person shouted “get a job”, and things like that. . . , you know? (Ágata, 2020)

. . . they do not like what we are doing and yell “get a job, you tramp”. (Gabriel, 2020)

Iago reports that “get a job, you tramp!” is often heard in the streets. This sentence was recurrent in several interviews (Ágata, Gabriel, Eliana, Paola and Celso). Although this term was not directly mentioned in other speeches, other similar expressions referring to the idea that street artists were tramps were reported by participants (Rebeca, Celso, Cristian, Débora, Jorge and Valéria). Violence against female artists is even more challenging, given the chauvinism faced by them on a daily basis, in the form of sexual harassment (Paola, Adriana, Ágata, Laura, Eliana and Beatriz) and their association with prostitution (Laura, Lilian and Beatriz). Lilian reported that “many people also think that we are whores because we are working on the streets, right?”

Overall, people who perform circus arts on the streets choose to be peaceful or to ignore aggressions to escape conflicting moments due to their vulnerability. Part of this vulnerability derives from the association of street circus activity with begging. This aspect was evident and represents how a significant part of society perceives these artists as beggars, as well as disregards the labor nature of this artistic activity. Valeria, Débora and Celso reported that they are often mistaken for beggars.

. . . I did not want them to see me as if I were a beggar, right? I really wanted to convey that it was an art, that I was dedicating myself to it . . . (Valéria, 2020)

. . . I think they see. . . like something vulgar, like something filthy, like we are begging, as well . . . (Débora, 2020)

So, I got to the conclusion that juggling at traffic lights is an activity marginalized by society. . . . No matter how clean the artist is or how perfect his presentation is, this activity is somehow marginalized by the fact that it is not seen by many people as a job, but as begging, right? People see it that way. . . . They think that jugglers at traffic light are tramps, right? I think this stigma is there. (Celso, 2020)

Celso explains the traffic light artists' condition as deviant: "no matter how clean" or "how perfect the presentation is", society will continue to treat these artists as marginal individuals, as deviants, to disregard the activity performed by them as work and to treat them as delinquents. According to Elias and Scotson (2000), whenever there is significantly large difference in power between the established and deviant ones, deviants are "considered filthy and almost inhuman", although the first designation (filthy) could be understood in its literal sense "given the precarious conditions experienced by many outsider groups" (p. 29). This association also refers to what Mary Douglas (1966) said about the construction of the sense of filth in society. According to her, it emerges from established people when they are faced with elements or facts that cause disorder and represent impurity. The work performed by street artists disrupts the traditional understanding of work, and it leads individuals to label this activity as "impure" and associated with filth. Organizing processes differing from the dominant ones are often pejoratively described as a way of defending and reinforcing the organizing process accepted as "normal" or "the best".

The deviant condition is also observed in the family context, in the case of deviant nightclub musicians, as described by Becker (2008).

. . . my family, it is rough. . . I never had any support from them, I never really felt comfortable, no. . . they asked me when I was going to get a job [laughs] when I was going to grow up [laughs] . . . (Jorge, 2020)

At first, it was very impactful, my mother did not accept it, like . . ., she said that she was going to become a homeless person, that I was going to get addicted to drugs, that this was not the life she wanted for me, she wanted me to study, so it was very hard for me to face my family. . . but, nowadays, my mother is proud of me. (Paola, 2020)

. . . they never understood it and did not accept the fact that I was working at traffic lights, but it is all a matter of time, right? Time went on and nowadays it is. . . my mother accepts it, my father, not so much. . . [laughs]. But little by little they are getting to the point to accept and understand it. (Cristian, 2020)

At first, I think they did not like it very much. Not for work itself, but for the lifestyle of traveling and staying away from them, . . . later on, when I got . . . to show them my work. . . then, they changed. . . they found what I do really cool, cause I can live from what I like to do and they support me. (Laura, 2020)

Similar to deviant nightclub musicians (Becker, 2008), traffic light artists often do not receive support from family members; consequently, sometimes they give up living with their family in order to keep on working. This situation is not exclusive to street artists, since people who work with prostitution (Oliveira et al., 2017; Paiva, Pereira, Guimarães, Barbosa, & Sousa, 2020; Sanders, 2016; Silva & Cappelle, 2015) also report similar issue, since their families and most of society do not acknowledge these activities as work, or decent work, since it represents a form of social disorganization.

Another aspect of family conflict lies on the nomadic condition experienced by street artists, as seen in Laura's speech. According to her, the dissatisfaction of her family members is associated with physical distance, and she argued that the real dissatisfaction of family members often lies on artists' physical separation from the family nucleus, since many of them start travelling to other places.

Circus nomadism was interpreted by Bolognesi (2003) as survival strategy. The aforementioned author advocated that, in order not to be repetitive and based on a competitive logic, these artists adhere to nomadism so they are always new in the cities they arrive in. Whether it is just done as travel resource, survival strategy or desire for freedom, this group represents a specific lifestyle that symbolizes its own organizing process and ends up oftentimes diverging from what is accepted in the understanding of established individuals. This lifestyle, which depicts a well-defined group, separates street artists from "normal subjects" (Goffman, 2008).

The marginal circus

Street art is not just an artistic manifestation; it is also an act of resistance towards a society guided by neoliberal rationality and by a set of prejudices. Thus, making art at traffic lights is a way of establishing a **mandatory stop** (Façanha, 2007). Adriana said the following after she was asked why artists choose traffic lights over other spaces:

Because it is a bug, right? It is a bug in the system, it is a place that was already used. . . to sell products. . . it is the right shot, because we are in a place where we know people will have money. . . because they have a car. . . and it is a space in time where they [people] have nowhere to hide. . . they are there, the lights are red, they are there, they have to stop there, they will stay there, we have that time to do what we want and within that space in time we can still earn some money this way. (Adriana, 2020)

Adriana emphasizes that the selection of this workplace is planned, rather than merely accidental. The traffic light is not a space originally programmed for artistic performances or trading, but to help maintaining the traffic in cities. Adriana treats this aspect as a "bug in the system", since

not only artists, but also other traffic light characters (Façanha, 2007), use this space for commercial exchanges. It is a place - designed by cities' urban planning teams to manage urban mobility - that has constant audience. This factor indicates that the audience "has nowhere to run". The artists select a space – that was created by state mechanisms – in order to perform their art; they deconstruct the original idea of traffic light so that

. . . the crosswalk was my stage and the cars were my audience; so I had to know the time of the traffic light and do a routine of juggling movements, stop, bow to the audience and collect the money within that time . . . (Beatriz, 2020)

As evidenced by Beatriz's speech, the traffic light transforms itself. Not only is the space transformed, but the person itself, as well. Based on the concept of space as place for presentation, the person becomes an artist as he or she builds his/her performance (Goffman, 2002, 2008). The artist and the stage come together in the deconstruction of a public space in order to turn it into a workplace. This space was chosen because it represents a more certain gain, a "*certainty that there will be an audience*" (Gabriel, 2020) enabling work in any location.

Because it is the fastest . . . the traffic light is constantly changing and the place where ... there is constant audience (Andres, 2020)

Man ... I think it is because it is the fastest way there, the most practical one, right? . . . because it is easy to be in a place, working at a traffic light and, suddenly, we can organize our things and go somewhere else, without being tied to the pervious place, right? So, I think that is the reason why, too. (Rebeca, 2020)

Andres and Rebeca explained why they chose the traffic light as workspace. According to Andres, it was the fastest way to obtain financial resources, as well as to guarantee a constant audience. Rebeca highlighted the autonomy aspect associated with locomotion, since artists can "organize their things" and "go somewhere else".

This class - which is tramp and filthy in the eyes of a significant part of society - has its own organizing process. They go against several things that society sets as right, for example, having a permanent address, formal education or a formal job. However, artists seek to be "free to think what they want" (Eliana, 2020); they seek to live outside the social rules set the established ones (Becker, 2008; Elias & Scotson, 2000). They want to bug the system by presenting a different organizing process about work and coexistence in society. They appropriate something created by the system itself in order to guarantee their personal satisfaction and sustenance. They deconstruct the traffic light and the traditional sense of what work is. Therefore, artists challenge the very system that is so settled in our bodies, thoughts and lifestyle.

I am deviant; therefore, I do not work

Traffic light circus performers do not fit in as jugglers, circus performers or backpackers, for example, in the eyes of society. The fact that they carry out this activity on the streets relates them to the deviant (Becker, 2008; Elias & Scotson, 2000) or stigmatized (Goffman, 2008) category. According to Goffman, it is a group that deviates from what is considered a “normal” lifestyle, mainly due to its nomadic lifestyle, as well as to its way of dressing, behaving and working. In other words, they do not have a job or a profession in society’s eyes (Dubar, 2012). Artists detach themselves from the socially imposed aesthetic standards because they do not have formal work ties, they carry out their activity wherever they are, and they do not need customers’ approval to do it. They use “improvised costumes” with “some type of accessory referring to the circus culture”, such as vests, striped socks, suspenders, because “most of them identify with an alternative style” (Adriana, 2020), which is seen by some as an “identity” (Ágata, 2020). When participants were questioned about their permanence in the activity and about the meaning of the street and circus art, they associated the street, the traffic light and juggling with freedom:

Man, what kept me going was precisely and . . . freedom of expression, right? Something I had already said that I did not have in other jobs, you see? So, having this freedom to be able to come in and introduce myself, to show who I really am. . . The street means freedom of expression. (Ian, 2020)

Freedom, expansion, you know? Within oneself, of conscience, of conviviality, right? of learning. (Ágata, 2020)

State of freedom, state of freedom. (Maurício, 2020)

It is a mix of freedom over the circus (Bolognesi, 2003; Carrieri et al., 2020) with a new concept of street. Artists are part of a group that is different from all other groups that experience the streets and the traffic lights, such as graffiti artists, artisans, vendors (for example, fruit, water, *cocada* [traditional Brazilian coconut confectionery] and candies), pamphleteers, windshield wipers, *flanelinhas* [people who have as main activity guarding or keeping an eye on cars parked in several streets in certain places], beggars, drunks, people living on the streets, among many other characters in these places. They form a category that has its own way of seeing things, based on its own idea of autonomy and independence (not having a boss), regardless of difficulties imposed by the neoliberal reason.

Thus, thinking about the work performed by street circus artist invites us to see work as enunciator of other organizing forms (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). In other words, it is possible identifying how work tells us about different ways of living in society, which are reflected in different organizing processes to help better understanding the family, the streets and the city. In addition, one finds different understandings of how poverty and violence are organized in a work context different from the socially dominant one. All these configurations of social and organizing order are in constant dispute among different worldviews. Thus, the dominant idea (of the established ones) about how these social systems and organizations should be enables identifying, through work,

stigmas that are used as justifications to define and determine what is, or is not, work and who has a profession (career) or “just” an occupation (Dubar, 2012).

Conclusions

The current study has investigated the work performed by circus artists at traffic lights, from a sociological perspective. Based on the ideas of deviance and stigma observed in neoliberal rationality, it presented the social order of artists who perform at traffic lights. It was done to emphasize traffic light circus artists as a stigmatized class, as well as to provide a scientific interpretation of how their ways of living and working represent organizing processes that do not fit the so-called established individuals who live under the neoliberal logic, a fact that gives rise to different forms of prejudice and violence.

Understanding the work performed by street artists is a way of highlighting the existing prejudices towards this working class, mainly in Brazil, which has millions of unemployed people (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2021) and towards others who have informal jobs. At the same time, it shows how different ways of living and working challenge (somehow successfully) the neoliberal rationality that appropriates people’s work and turn profit maximization into the very rationality of life (Bispo, 2022). It happens when the means (work precariousness, unemployment, wealth concentration, and increased poverty and social inequality rates) justify the ends (maximized profit).

The current study has contributed to improve the debate about this topic, based on the available literature, by highlighting work within a given social order (a structure), rather than just as an individual-subjective element investigated from a psychological perspective (Aguiar et al., 2016; Colet & Mozzato, 2019; Natt et al., 2019; Silva & Cappelle, 2015; Silva et al., 2020; Werner et al., 2017). Therefore, we understand that more than stating how people feel at the time they perform a given activity, mainly an activity that is not seen as profession (Dubar, 2012), it is also important to (re)acknowledge that eventual meanings of work depend on a given social order and on organizing processes (practices) comprising rules and standards that group and coerce people to be acknowledged as belonging (established) to a given social group, or not (outsiders). Coercion happens through the idea of deviance and stigma.

In addition, the current study took a step towards showing that a closer look at work highlights the need of broadening the ontological debate to enable perceiving and understanding several organizing forms taken by work (Graceffa & Heusch, 2017; Siqueira et al., 2019), as well as its direct implications for organizations outside organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). Based on the work performed by street circus artists, the current study has contributed to organizational studies by highlighting the effective possibility of understanding other organizing forms outside organizations, which have direct influence on the way of coexisting in society, by taking into consideration its political, economic and social aspects (Delbridge & Sallaz, 2015).

The current study is expected to give some visibility to street artists and to provide a more dignified perspective about these individuals. Whenever a given group is socially excluded and marginalized, society’s discourse can become angry and generate violence, as in the case of the

murder of Matías Galindez (Bernardi & Fernandes, 2017). Thus, it is necessary changing the “get a job, you tramp!” into understanding of and respect for what is different and, most of all, for art.

Understanding the social order of street art is the only way to promote more respect for these artists, who face the neoliberal rationality system with love, with art and with a smile. After all, smiling is free of charge!

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Notes

1. The search conducted by our research group on the online journals' portal belonging to the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes - Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior) resulted in only nine articles focused on addressing this topic; none of them was published in management journals. The following Search descriptors such as "Buskers", "Jugglers in traffic light", "Artistas circenses" [Circus performers] and "Artistas de rua" [Street artists] were used to select articles that, at some point, addressed circus artists who perform at traffic lights.

Authorship

Carolina Assis Sampaio

Master's student in Business Management at Federal University of Pernambuco. Member of AKAFANS' research group.

E-mail: anacassissampaio@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0999-6193>

Marcelo de Souza Bispo

PhD in Business Management at Mackenzie Presbyterian University, post-doctorate in Social Theory at University of Kentucky (USA). Nowadays, he is professor of the Business Management department and of the Post-graduation Programs in Business Management (PPGA / UFPB) and in Sociology (PPGS / UFPB) at Federal University of Paraíba. He is co-leader of the Center for Studies about Learning and Knowledge (NAC-CNPq).

E-mail: marcelodesouzabispo@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5817-8907>

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Authors' contributions

First author: conceptualization (equal), data curation (lead), formal analysis (equal), investigation (lead), methodology (equal), original draft writing (lead), manuscript review & editing (supporting).

Second author: conceptualization (equal), data curation (supporting), formal analysis (equal), investigation (supporting), methodology (equal), original draft writing (supporting), manuscript review & editing (lead).

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