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**Poverty as Deprivation of Freedom: The Case
of Vidigal Shantytown in Rio de Janeiro**

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Abstract

This article applies the concept of poverty as insufficiency of basic capabilities in measuring living conditions of residents of a *favela* (shantytown) in Rio de Janeiro, the Vidigal favela. For this purpose, we develop a methodology to operationalize the capability approach. Our choice of this approach is justified by a perceived discrepancy between the ordinary judgments of the people of Rio de Janeiro, who generally regard favela dwellers as poor, and those of poverty experts, who believe that favela dwellers cannot be considered (income) poor on average. Our results show that while favela inhabitants may not be income poor, they are nonetheless very poor in freedom. Living in a favela by itself imposes a sizable discount on people's functionings. In addition, violence between drug gangs and between gangs and police, a common feature of Rio's favelas, interferes negatively with people's well-being and opportunities for collective action, in such a way that even the traditional social capital often considered a peculiar form of wealth of favela dwellers is being eroded by it.

Keywords: poverty; capability approach; favela; Rio de Janeiro; social capital; index of freedom.

Poverty as Deprivation of Freedom: The Case of Vidigal Shantytown in Rio de Janeiro¹

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Introduction:

The aim of this article is to apply the concept of poverty as insufficiency of basic capabilities in measuring living conditions of residents of a *favela* (shantytown) in Rio de Janeiro. The motivation came from the perception that even though they may not be considered poor in terms of average income, favela dwellers are identified as being poor in the ordinary judgments made by the population of Rio de Janeiro. Are these judgments mistaken?

Some researchers have tried to show that average income in Rio's shantytowns does exceed the poverty lines used by technical and academic observers⁴; and that they are rich not only in social capital, but also in "urban freedom", in that they do not have to abide by building regulations.⁵ Our field study in Vidigal favela found that the average income of its residents indeed does not allow classing them as poor in income terms, but the hypothesis of richness of social capital was not borne out. In a broader sense, using the concept of poverty as deprivation of freedom, which we explain below, we found that these favela dwellers can be considered poor, indeed very poor. The concept of freedom adopted is more far-reaching than that used in the analyses that consider the absence of government regulation of the building of favelas to be an aspect of freedom.

1) Poverty: utilities, income or capabilities?

The concept of poverty starts with the identification of the relevant variables for a person's well-being, which Sen called "value objects". These variables constitute the "evaluation space" or "information base". What distinguishes one approach from the other is essentially the evaluation space considered.

In the utilitarian approach, the information base is the satisfaction of preferences – it is a proxy for people's well-being. The main problem with this approach is that by reducing well-being to preference satisfaction, it neglects the well-known fact that people wind up developing adaptive preferences⁶, in the sense that they adjust their desires to their possibilities. Thus enduringly resource-constrained people tend to develop "cheap" preferences ("they are satisfied with a little"), while people not so constrained tend to develop "expensive" tastes ("they are only satisfied with a lot"). In the income approach, conversely, income is the evaluation space. The main problem here is

¹ The field study on which this article is based was carried out as part of the master's dissertation "Pobreza como Privação de Liberdade: um estudo de caso na favela do Vidigal no Rio de Janeiro", 2007, by Larissa Santos, oriented by Celia Lessa Kerstenetzky. The authors wish to thank Guy Fulkerson for the clarification remarks on Rio's favelas meant for foreign reader.

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⁴ See Valladares (2005), Silva (2005).

⁵ See Abramo (2002).

⁶ Sen (1990).

incompleteness.⁷ For, although in a market economy income is an important resource for well-being, there are components of well-being that are not directly acquirable with income, such as security, health, education and social protection. Besides this, income is insensitive to the physical and social variation among individuals and groups: individuals with different physical and social conditions convert the same income into different levels of well-being.

While multidimensional poverty indicators try to address the incompleteness issue, the approach of functionings and capabilities proposed by Sen tries to cover this and the problem of interpersonal and group variation.

According to Sen (1999), poverty can be viewed as “deprivation of basic capabilities”, instead of a mere lack of income or insufficient access to resources. Two central concepts of this approach are functionings and capabilities.

Functionings can be defined as a set of actions and states valuable to human life, reflecting the quality of life actually lived. The value attached to a state or action may vary among groups and societies, nevertheless, there should be a group of functionings that are universally important, and thus basic, in the sense that a worthy life is only achieved if they are achieved.⁸ In any case, the notion of functionings shifts the focus of attention from the sphere of the appropriation of things to the space of life actually lived (cf. Sen, 1990, p.25). It also draws attention to the fact that in between the possession of goods and services and the life actually lived, an array of variegated circumstances - physical and social - intervenes.⁹ The implication is that the amount and types of resources needed to achieve basic functionings are likely to vary in response to the varied conversion rates of resources into functionings.

If on the one hand functionings are the constitutive elements of individual well-being, capabilities represent the opportunities to choose among different sets of functionings. While a functioning represents what a person really manages to achieve in life, capability means the freedom to choose between one type of life or another. The set of opportunities for choice available to a person constitutes his or her “capability set”.

Individuals’ freedom to choose – since it depends on various elements such as education and health services, political and civil rights, social assistance, participation in the community, self-respect, social capital, access to credit and land, type of employment (formal or informal) – is conditioned by the economic, social and political conditions prevailing in a society. So, to focus only on the process aspect of freedom (for instance the respect for so-called negative rights) when assessing freedom of choice is clearly insufficient. It is also important to take note of the opportunity aspect of freedom. Thus, the capability-functioning approach stresses substantive freedoms, or, in Sen’s words, “freedom as an effective power to achieve what one ... choose[s].” (Sen, 1992: 69).¹⁰

In the capability-functioning approach, freedom is important for at least three different reasons (Sen, 1992, pp. 41): constitutively, since having more freedom is an achievement in itself (it is then a functioning); instrumentally, since exercise of many

⁷ We thank a referee of this journal for the suggestion.

⁸ Examples are to be well fed and protected, to live long and avoid preventable diseases.

⁹ See Sen (1999) for more details on the sources of human variability.

¹⁰ For other distinctions Sen makes, see Sen 1992 and 1985.

freedoms permits other achievements (the relationship between freedom to achieve or capabilities and the actual functionings); and because having more freedom enables individuals to realize their condition as agents (to pursue their many objectives in addition to well-being achievements), which is an important source of personal and social change. A life without choices and genuine opportunities for choice will inevitably be a poor life.

When analyzing the well-being of individual members of the Vidigal community, our main hypothesis is that the social circumstance of “living in a favela” significantly compresses the freedom of choice of individuals. Thus, “living in a favela” affects individuals’ well-being in the three senses indicated above: people enjoy less freedom, fewer opportunities for realization and fewer opportunities for collective action. In addition, “living in a favela” by itself imposes on residents a sizable discount on the achievements that would otherwise arise from their access to goods, services and social relations. In order to be able to observe these deprivations and understand their nature, it is important to go beyond indicators of income and access to public services.

2) Operationalizing the concept of deprivation of freedom: the Vidigal favela

2.1 Preliminary description

The field study was carried out in the Vidigal community, located between the districts of Leblon and São Conrado in the city of Rio de Janeiro, between February 3 and March 4, 2007. Like many of Rio’s favelas, it is located on a hillside, in this case one overlooking the ocean, and is separated from the immediate beachfront property (the location of a large luxury hotel and some houses owned by wealthy people) by a narrow and busy winding road. The choice of this community was for two factors: (i) the fact that this favela is not considered poor from the standpoint of average per capita household income and has access to basic public services – the income level is above the poverty line formulated by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA, a government think tank) and there is ample access to water, electricity, sewerage and trash collection, although not universal; (ii) our access was facilitated by acquaintance with some residents, since as is true of many favelas in Rio, it is controlled by drug traffickers.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1. The Questionnaire

The operationalization of Sen’s approach to poverty we undertake here more directly focuses on functionings. This is a consequence of the greater difficulty of measuring individuals’ set of capabilities directly (their freedom to choose) compared to the functionings they have achieved (Sen, 1992, 52).¹¹ We supposed, then, that functionings are indirect indicators of the freedom to choose, that is, we assumed that if an individual has not managed to realize a functioning (for example, if a woman does not consider herself adequately fed, dressed, housed or protected), it is because she does not have the

¹¹ Sen notes: “In fact, the capability set is not directly observable, and has to be constructed on the basis of presumptions... Thus, in practice, one might have to settle often enough for relating well-being to the achieved – and observed – functioning...”. (ibid.)

option to achieve a better condition.¹² Therefore, we prepared a questionnaire aiming to estimate, through the answers to the questions, to what extent families in Vidigal are attaining important functionings.

We formulated the questions based on the generic indications of the capabilities approach, seeking to cover the types of freedom described by Sen, as well as to observe and understand the specific forms of deprivation of freedom that afflict Rio's faveladwellers.¹³ Of course, the choice of the list of functionings is to a certain extent arbitrary and never exhaustive.

We identified thirteen relevant functionings we consider able to cover universal and context-dependent aspects: 1) be well-sheltered; 2) be healthy; 3) do gratifying work; 4) enjoy a good schooling level; 5) have protected children; 6) be free from hunger and undernourishment; 7) dress adequately; 8) enjoy access to public services; 9) not suffer discrimination; 10) live without fear; 11) participate in community life; 12) participate in the associative life of the city; and 13) be happy and proud of oneself. They combine achievements associated with consumption of goods and services, valuable activities (work, civic and political participation), objective states (good schooling level, protected children, live without fear, freedom from discrimination) and subjective perceptions (be happy and have self-esteem). We also collected information on income and reserved it to observe the correlation between it and our measure of achievement.

In evaluating each of the functionings, we posed questions seeking to measure more contextual aspects of the functionings – for example, for the “be well sheltered” functioning, we asked whether the person is ever in some way prevented from arriving or leaving home (violence is a common condition in Rio's favelas), or if the house has plastered walls and is well ventilated. The questionnaire was composed of 91 questions, 69 of them binary (yes or no). The other, non-binary, questions were included to assist the qualitative analysis of the results.

Each functioning had a different number of indicators, depending on its scope, but not its importance. For example, the “be well sheltered” functioning was evaluated through eight indicators, while “eat adequately” included only two. This does not mean that “be well sheltered” is more important than “be free from hunger and undernourishment”, it only means that the former is more complex. Besides this, we sought to include objective aspects of well-being in the functioning indicators (“Does your house have plaster?”, “Does it have adequate ventilation?”) and subjective ones (“Are you happy?”, “Would you like to have studied more?”), considering the local particularities, which again is a peculiarity of the capability approach that accounts for its richness. We also included a perspective of rights (“Do you have a deed to your house?”, “Have you ever been prevented from entering it?”) and of freedom of agency (“Do you participate in an association in the community or city?”), to pay heed to the complexity of freedom. In the approach to freedom, the multi-dimensional nature is not restricted to estimating well-being as a standardized consumption of goods and services, common in social

¹² Here we follow what Sen has called ‘elementary evaluation’, which means that we value the capability set by the value of the chosen combination of functionings, which is obviously an element of the set. Sen (1992), pp. 50-51.

¹³ Thus far, a fast-growing literature has been devoted to operationalize Sen's approach. We refer to the works of Chiappero Martinetti (1994, 2000), Balestrino (1996), Alkire (2005, 2007), and Addabbo and Di Tommaso (2007). For the specifics of a favela, we also availed ourselves of testimonial literature (Perlman 1976; 2005; 2006; Silva & Barbosa 2005).

indicators, but rather views well-being in unconventional dimensions, considering the context-dependent particularities, the perceptions of well-being, the respect for rights (property rights, right to go and come) and agency condition of people (whether they have the liberty to participate in decisions on relevant aspects of their lives). The idea is to grasp as well as possible the “extent of freedom”.

At the end of the questionnaire we included a question aiming to attribute weights to the different functionings. We sought to discover the importance each respondent attributed to each of the functionings, so we asked them to assign scores of 1, 2 or 3. We wanted to reduce the degree of arbitrariness in producing the Synthetic Index, so that the distribution of weights would result from a simple social choice in which the ranking of the functionings would be given by application of the majority rule.

2.2.3. Index of Freedom (IF)

Based on the questionnaire, we could calculate an index of well-being for the population of Vidigal, which we call the “Index of Freedom”. Calculation of this index starts from a methodology in many ways similar to that used by Paes de Barros et al. (2003) in constructing their Family Development Index (IDF), a multidimensional poverty index that proposes to adopt a broader information base than the traditional HDI and ICV (IPEA). The IDF includes six dimensions of human life investigated by means of 48 indicators taken from the PNADs. The IDF is essentially based on the access to, and consumption of, goods and services, including context-dependent aspects, but not including subjective achievements, a perspective of rights and free agency. The IF, in turn, is based on 13 functionings, measured by 60 indicators obtained from the questionnaires, including the aspects referred to above. Following the calculation procedure used by Paes de Barros et al., we estimated the IF through the following steps:

- 1) Each indicator is in reality a question posed to a resident. If the response indicates a limitation to the realization of a functioning, a value of 0 (zero) is attributed to this indicator. For example, in the “have good housing” functioning, if the respondent answers YES to the question “Has there ever been a landslide near your house?”, a zero is assigned to this indicator (the question), and a 1 (one) if the answer is NO.

- 2) The IF is then calculated for each household. First the IF of each functioning for that household is obtained by adding the scores of the questions composing that functioning and dividing by the number of questions. To find the household IF, it is simply a matter of taking the average of the functionings’ IFs. We chose to calculate a simple average, since the last question on the questionnaire, referring to the importance the respondents attached to each functioning, or the “social choice”, revealed practically identical weights.

- 3) After calculating the IFs of each household, the next step is to compute their simple average to find the IF of the population sample from Vidigal. The result obtained will be between zero and one. The nearer to one it is, the *greater* is the degree of household freedom, and hence, the *lower* the level of poverty.

After finding the Index of Freedom, it remains to discover whether or not the result obtained indicates a situation of poverty. For this we established a poverty line, drawing inspiration from the methodology of the IDF. Like Paes de Barros and his co-authors, we arbitrarily considered that an extreme poverty line will be 0.5 (1/2) and the poverty line 0.67 (2/3) (Paes de Barros et al., 2003). Those falling below these values will be

extremely poor and poor, respectively. Although arbitrary, the 0.67 line is partially justified by the fact that the indicators utilized to calculate the functionings are, in general, basic indicators (e.g., “house made of bricks”, “sleep more than 6 hours”, “no child dropped out of school to work”). Therefore, it can be expected that such elementary realizations are easily reached by the respondents.

2.2.4. Choice of the sample

Choosing a sample of the population of Vidigal was not an easy task. Initially we intended to construct a sample by random selection. The first step consisted of obtaining a map of the area, with its different sectors and street names, which we obtained from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Then it was necessary to identify from among the sectors mapped for Vidigal those that had characteristics of a favela, since Vidigal also includes privileged areas that cannot be characterized as slums. After locating the sectors making up the favela, it was necessary to identify the names of the streets in each sector. These data were also obtained from the IBGE from data collection sheets from the 2000 Census. The next step would consist of choosing the sample size and making the random selection, which would determine the dwellings whose residents would be interviewed in each sector.

At this step, however, a series of difficulties cropped up. In the first place, favelas are extremely dynamic territories, so that since the last Census, in 2000, many new houses had been built, others no longer existed, new streets had been created and others were no longer known by their official names, but instead by nicknames. In the second place, since the respondents would be women (we explain below), there would be a certain probability that the domiciles in the random selection would not be suitable for the study, since not all of them had a woman to answer the questionnaire. In the third place, a previous visit to the community revealed that a significant number of people would refuse to answer the questionnaire, so there would be a high rate of refusal if we only targeted pre-selected dwellings. Finally, Vidigal favela is nowadays controlled by drug dealers, which imposed severe limits of the circulation of non-residents, and also controls on the entrance and exit of information. So, the visits would have to be monitored by a resident.

Instead of a purely random sample, then, we decided to construct a sample based on practical and intuitively “random” criteria, following the sectorial division of the IBGE. The criteria were the following: i) the size of the sample would be conditioned on the accessibility to the residents and the resources available for the study (essentially time, number of interviewers and community monitors), but the minimum number of domiciles to be interviewed would be 50; ii) the 50 questionnaires would be parceled out uniformly among Vidigal’s 11 sectors and if there was any chance to apply more questionnaires, they would be equally divided among the sectors; iii) in each sector we would follow different streets, always trying to cover the largest number of streets and alleyways; iv) sector number 300 would be outside the study because it is where most of the drug dealing activity occurs; v) the choice of homes would be made in the field, during the survey, since the main criterion shifted to accessibility to the residents.

Since our sample cannot be said to be strictly representative of the population, we declined from expanding it. We sought to make up for this drawback in two ways: i) distribution of the questionnaires as uniformly as possible among the favela’s sectors;

ii) compensating for any loss of quantitative significance by a qualitative gain, that is, by refining the questionnaire with open questions and whenever possible registering the descriptive details given by the respondents.

2.2.5. Why women?

We decided to interview only women residents of Vidigal. We justify our choice by reference to poverty and development studies that have found that, in many developing countries, “men and women systematically [use resources] under their control in different ways,” “that resources controlled by women tend to increase expenditure shares on [child] education relative to resources controlled by men,” and that “increasing women’s control of resources or decision-making power has favorable effects on a number of important outcomes, such as education, child nutrition, and the well-being of women themselves.” (Quisumbing and McClafferty, 2006, pp.5, 12; Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2000; Hallman, 2000). So, when it comes to household well-being, the identity of the person having control of the resources matters. On the basis of these findings, we considered that because they have well being concerns that go beyond their own well-being, not only were women in a privileged position to answer questions that refer to their own well-being, but also to that of other family members, especially children.

Although this choice restricts the interpretation of the information on the household well-being by excluding information on men’s exclusive well-being, there are undeniable information gains as far as women’s and children’s well-being are concerned. Besides this, certain information about the well-being of women also refers to all the members of the same family or household, such as access to and consumption of “public” household goods like food and medicines, dwelling conditions and public services (water, power, sewerage and trash collection), as well as non-household related public goods like transportation, community health clinics and schools. The information on income refers, however, to household income, not just that of the respondent.

3) Results

3.1. IF per functioning

Here we present the results of the indexes of freedom obtained for each functioning of the sample. The functionings are divided into separate tables. The lines contain the questions that made up each functioning, but they have been modified in relation to the questionnaire: they have been abbreviated and rewritten so that a YES always denotes “well-being” and a NO indicates “poverty”. The IF of each indicator also can be interpreted as the percentage of people answering YES to that item.

TABLE 1 – Functioning: “be well sheltered”

Indicators	IF
Have own home	0.742
Adequate ventilation	0.652
Less than 4 people per bedroom	0.833
House made of bricks	1
House has plastered walls	0.742
House never suffered landslide	0.742

Was never prevented from go up the hillside	0.561
Was never prevented from returning home	0.515
Average of the functioning	0.723

The “be well sheltered” functioning presented an IF of 0.723 – a relatively good result when compared to the average of the other functionings. With 0.67 considered as the poverty line, the residents of Vidigal are not poor in this functioning. However, although 74% of those interviewed resided in their own home, only three of them had a formal deed of ownership. Most of the people living in their own dwellings, nearly 73%, do have a document from the community association attesting to their ownership. But this document is only valid within the community, and is not assured legal value. This fact is indicative of a relative deprivation of freedom, because access to bank credit, for example, can be affected by the absence of proof of financial standing (in this case legal ownership of realty) (De Soto, 2001).¹⁴

The best indexes for this functioning were those relative to the type of construction material: all the houses were made of brick; and the number of people per bedroom: in 83.3% of the dwellings there were not four or more people sleeping in the same room. The worst indexes were related to access to the home, whether because of being prevented from going up the hillside (43.9% said they had been prevented) or the impossibility of returning home (49.5% reported they had been impeded from returning home). These situations mostly occur when there are gunfights within the favela, in general between the police and drug dealers (but sometimes between rival gangs as well).

TABLE 2 – Functioning: “be healthy”

Indicators	IF
Sleep more than 6 hours a night	0.662
Do not suffer from stress	0.369
Practice physical activity	0.333
Never was denied treatment by a doctor	0.576
Always have had resources for medicines	0.379
Children <1 year go to the doctor	0.91
Have gynecological exam regularly	0.758
Community health clinics are sufficient	0.108
Never had parasitical infections diseases in the family	0.727
Have already had a mammogram (>40 years)	0.73
Know that health clinics offer contraceptive methods.	0.939
Know how to prevent sexually transmissible diseases	0.97
Average of the functioning	0.622

The result of the “be healthy” functioning revealed an IF of 0.622, which classifies the population of Vidigal as poor. The indexes that most contributed to it were the lack of health clinics in the community; the lack of resources to buy medicines; the small percentage of people who practice some physical activity; and the stress experienced by women, whose reasons given were: (i) worries over money: 38%; fear (particularly of

¹⁴ We are not saying that having a legal ownership document is a necessary condition for having access to credit, but simply that having documented legal ownership gives the owner more collateral options than those who do not have it. This means more freedom in an “options view” of instrumental freedom. Cf. Sen, 1992.

having to leave the children alone at home): 21%; tiredness (work outside the home and keep house also): 17%; others: 24%. Achievement seems particularly constrained by lack of freedom from material needs and to some extent also by gender-related norms concerning time allocation.

TABLE 3 – Functioning: “do gratifying work”

Indicators	IF
Currently employed	0.755
Have a job in the formal sector	0.364
Work up to 8 hours a day	0.509
Would not like to switch profession/occupation	0.338
Would not like to have studied more	0.152
Average of the functioning	0.424

Fewer than half the residents of Vidigal in our sample are gratified with their work. This result suggests, then, that the people of this community are extremely poor in this functioning. Unemployment was 24.5% among the women, and among those who do work, only 48.2% hold down jobs in the formal economy, which represents 36.4% of the total sample. Most of the respondents work over eight hours a day; want to have some other occupation or profession; and would like to have studied more, but did not have the opportunity. Regarding this last item, we asked the respondents what had kept them from studying more and obtained the following answers: (i) had to work: 48.3%; (ii) had to take care of the children: 23.3%; (3) other reasons (laziness, parents did not stimulate it, feared leaving home at night¹⁵, school was far away, etc.): 28.3%. Here the interrelation of deprivation of many substantive freedoms is clearly responsible for the low realization: lack of economic security induces early job taking that then interrupts schooling; lack of public provision of care compounds with gender-related norms concerning childcare to depress expectations of higher levels of achievement in work.

Regarding the fear of leaving home at night to study, the following answers reflect the importance of violence as a factor of deprivation of freedom and achievement in a favela context: “Yes, I’d like to go back, but I’m afraid of gunfire, so I don’t leave home at night. For this reason I haven’t returned to school.” (Diana, 29); “Yeah, I started university but had to drop out because of the [drug] battles. I was afraid to leave my kids at home alone.” (Kátia, 36).

We asked the respondents what their professions were and if they would like to change to another one. The large majority worked in the services sector (over 90%), 26% of them as household servants. It comes as no surprise that 64% of the interviewees said they would like to have another occupation, since most of the jobs held by them are very low paying, require physical exertion and/or are not highly esteemed. However, the ambition for professional upgrade was modest: 13% (the mode) said they would like to take up nursing, while others mentioned hairdresser, secretary and veterinarian (7% each). One woman said she would like to be a doctor and another president of Brazil. We cannot help noting here one aspect of enduring poverty that is particularly emphasized by Sen’s approach, i.e., preference adjustment.

TABLE 4 – Functioning: “enjoy a good schooling level”

Indicators	IF
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¹⁵ Some schools have night sessions for students who have to work or adults returning to school.

Attended high school (whether or not graduated) or entered college (whether or not graduated)	0.363
Schools in the community are sufficient	0.338
Average of the functioning	0.351

This functioning had one of the worst results among those chosen for this study, indicating that the community can be considered extremely poor in terms of schooling. A minority of 33.8% feel there are enough schools in the community, although many among them expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the teaching, shortage of teachers or inexistence of alternative study periods for those who work. Although only a partial view of the education realization, the indicator on the level of schooling already reveals a very low level.

TABLE 5 – Functioning: “have protected children”

Indicators	IF
There are fewer than 3 children in the family	0.879
There are no children not in school	0.983
There are no children working at present	0.931
No child dropped out of school to work	0.627
Children play sports	0.545
There has never been a teenage pregnancy in the family	0.583
Average of the functioning	0.758

The “have protected children” functioning presented a good result. Note, however, that the items related to violence and drug dealing were excluded from this functioning, since we decided to create one exclusively to capture these dimensions.

It can be seen that families in Vidigal are becoming small, certainly smaller than they were in the past. This certainly results in a smaller level of vulnerability for the children, in the hypothesis that one more child in the family increases the vulnerability of the others. We practically did not find any children under the age of 14 out of school or working. Those who responded that they had a child in the family who dropped out of school to work invariably were referring to themselves. In contrast, the percentage of children who play or practice some type of sport and the incidence of teenage pregnancy denote poverty, which contributed to the fall in the IF of this functioning. We asked those interviewed who answered that there had been a case of teenage pregnancy in the family for the reason: 85% said it was an accidental pregnancy and only 15% reported it was planned. Lack of freedom related to lack of information and existing social norms may have an influence on unwanted pregnancy, compounding the lack of freedom of choice.

TABLE 7 – Functioning: “enjoy access to public services”

Indicators	IF
Have access to electricity	1
Have piped water at home	1
Transportation service is sufficient	0,379
Have trash collection service	0,788
Have proper drainage for sewage	0,879
Street paving is adequate	0,773
Street lighting is adequate	0,409
Policing is sufficient	0,524
Average of the functioning	0,719

In terms of public services, the favela in our study does not rank as poor, although it is near the poverty line. Water and power service is now universal in Vidigal, although there are still many who resort to illegal hookups. The indicator on sewage drainage also showed a good result, although we noted open gutters carrying sewage near some of the homes. There is good trash collection coverage too. Street paving was considered adequate for most of the dwellings, but access them is hampered by steep stairways that are very lacking in safety features. Only 40.9% of the respondents were satisfied with the street lighting – many saying that the residents address this problem by installing lights themselves. Only 37.9% considered public transportation sufficient; the others alleged they have to use alternative transport within the favela. It can be concluded that even though the IF of this functioning does not indicate poverty, the residents of Vidigal still suffer a series of privations, more related to the precariousness and lack of safety than to the actual absence of basic services (except for transportation and street lighting).

The “policing” indicator deserves attention. When we asked the respondents if there was a lack of policing in the community, most of the women reacted by smiling ironically. This was also the question with the highest percentage who refused to answer. In all our visits to Vidigal, the police presence at the entry to the favela was ostensive, although the majority of the residents had led us to believe that they did not feel protected by the police. In the spontaneous responses, the policing was viewed as more of a threat than protection. Again, we cannot help concluding that the focus on the level of provision proves misleading if it is not qualified by the realization itself, as reported in people’s perceptions.

TABLE 8 – Functioning: “have not suffered discrimination”

Indicators	IF
Have never suffered discrimination for being a favela dweller	0.682

Have never had to omit address in filling out a job form	0.818
Do not need to dress well to be respected in the community	0.831
Do not need to dress well to be respected in the city	0.530
Never failed to be hired because of living in a Favela	0.844
Have rights guaranteed just as much as people living in the city	0.197
Average of the functioning	0.650

This functioning also revealed the poverty of the population in our sample: 35% of the respondents said they had been victims of some form of discrimination. Although nearly 80% said they had never lost a job opportunity because of living in a favela and that they did not need to dress well to be respected in the community, only 53% said they did not need to dress well to be respected in the city and 20% felt that their rights were guaranteed just as much as those living in the city. The residents nonetheless judged it more important to dress adequately to be respected in the city than in the community, possibly for fear of the discrimination they could face in the city.

The questions regarding discrimination showed many disparate and perhaps inconsistent responses. For example, while nearly 70% of the respondents claimed they had never been the victims of discrimination, 80% had never needed to omit their address to get a job and 85% had never failed to get a job because of residing in a favela, nearly all of them said that they knew someone in Vidigal who had experienced one or more of these situations. In the spontaneous responses, the residents complained that people in the city associate the hillsides with drug dealing and violence and also of the difficulty to find a job because of the “warfare” in the favela (“They ask me how I’ll get to work when there’s a war on,” according to one respondent). So, the negative connotations in non-favela dwellers’ minds of merely living in a favela may be directly seen as a source of deprivation: it may hinder access to job opportunities that are at the same time constitutive and instrumental to freedom.

TABLE 9 – Functioning: “be free from hunger and undernourishment”

Indicators	IF
Have never needed to reduce the quantity of food	0.485
Have never had to switch to cheaper foods	0.275
Average of the functioning	0.38

An IF of 0.38 denotes extreme poverty in Vidigal in this functioning: 51.5% of the interviewees had at some point had to reduce the quantity of food the family consumes and 72.5% of them needed to switch from their habitual foods to cheaper ones.

TABLE 10 – Functioning: “dress adequately”

Indicators	IF
Have enough money to buy clothes and footwear	0.424
Average of the functioning	0.424

The single indicator of this functioning shows that only 42.4% of the respondents are able to dress adequately with the money they have, so that Vidigal can be considered extremely poor in this aspect. The eat and dress functionings are those most directly associated with income. However, approaches to poverty as insufficiency of income do not directly capture the adjustments made to the budget earmarked for food (or clothing) because of other needs, according to the criteria established by people themselves.¹⁶

TABLE 11 – Functioning: “participate in community life”

Indicators	IF
Can count on the help of neighbors	0.712
Have relatives in the community	0.727
Participate in cultural activity	0.167
Participate in an association in the community	0.121
Average of the functioning	0.432

Only 43.2% of the respondents participate actively in the life of the community, making the residents of Vidigal extremely poor in this functioning. Although most of them can count on the help of neighbors and have relatives in the community, only very few participate in some form of cultural activity and in some association in the community. Very often the respondents reacted curiously to the question “Do you participate in some association in the community?” They showed an expression of surprise and vehemently said no, as if they were being offended or accused of something. The reason for this became clear at the end of the study: for many women, participating in a community association meant having some involvement with drug dealing, since it is dominated by drug traffickers. This probably is the reason for such a low percentage of residents who reported they participate in some community association. For many Vidigal residents showed themselves to be well informed and knowledgeable of their rights, of the specific problems of a favela, and aware to the importance of solidarity by the residents (“It’s important for us because we have to unite, because here it’s a different world than out there [in the city]”, one resident said). There is a perception of the existence of two worlds, of the omission of the government and of the need to submit to the rules of the drug gangs (“In my opinion this is a gated community. There are two sides and people have to get in line, in step with the internal laws. Because we have two laws,” said another respondent). Clearly more government intervention to secure people’s effective rights (especially political and social) would produce more freedom to realize and more agency freedom for Vidigal dwellers.

TABLE 12 – Functioning: “participate in the associative life of the city”

Indicators	IF
Participate in an association in the city	0.03
Average of the functioning	0.03

We decide to include this functioning in the poverty analysis because participation in associations in the formal city is a way for a favela to be more politically visible in the city and to have at least some influence in decisions that crucially affect the functionings of its dwellers. Among the women interviewed, however, only 2 participated in some association in the city.

¹⁶ Because of lack of conviction, we declined from presupposing an objective standard of quality of nutrition and clothing adequacy.

The “participate in community life” and “participate in the associative life of the city” functionings together permit us to infer important aspects of the social capital in the favela. The very low IFs found go against the widespread thesis that favela-dwellers are rich in social capital. This requires some justification. According to Granovetter (2005), besides fortuitous meetings among individuals that do not manage to establish significant links, there are two central categories of ties by which individual interact in a social structure: strong ties and weak ties. The former are those ties that are established between close friends and relatives, while the latter are those that form between people who are less intimately connected, although they do get together regularly, such as the relations with coworkers. Based on this distinction, the author asserts that information on *new* opportunities flow more intensely between individual united by weak ties than strong ones: relatives or close friends tend to move in the same circle, and thus tend to receive and transmit the same information. What we perceived in the sample from Vidigal is precisely this contrast between the high presence of strong ties – most of the respondents had relatives living in the community and stated they could count on the help of neighbors – and the near absence of crucial weak ties – almost nobody said they participate in an association in the community or the city proper. The Vidigal of our sample seems to be rich in “poor” social capital, but very poor in “rich” social capital, which may not contribute much to expand their freedom of choice.

TABLE 13 – Functioning: “live without fear”

Indicators	IF
Gun battles are not frequent	0.833
Nobody in the family has been hit by a stray bullet	0.894
Never suffered police brutality	0.742
Never had house invaded	0.727
Not afraid to leave home	0.394
Have not changed habits because of violence	0.333
Have not lost a friend/acquaintance in a gunfight	0.348
Violence is not destroying friendship relationships	0,303
Average of the functioning	0.572

The indexes here show that the residents of Vidigal live in fear.

Although only 16.7% of the respondents said gun battles are frequent, the majority of them said “not now, but they were” to this question. Furthermore, in 10.6% of the families someone had been hit by a stray bullet, and 27.3% of the homes had been invaded by the police, although 74.2% said they had never suffered any police brutality. Worse still were that 60.6% of the residents said they were afraid to leave home, 66.7% said they had changed their habits and routines because of violence, 65.2% had already lost a friend or acquaintance to a gun battle and 69.7% declared that violence is destroying the friendship relations in the favela.

It was evident during this survey that the main source of complaints and dissatisfaction of the residents of Vidigal is having to live permanently with the fear of violence. For 80% of the respondents, the worst characteristic of the community is associated with one of these factors.

Regarding the open question “What is your greatest fear for you children?”, the following answers are representative: “That I won’t manage to improve things and get out of here, because I don’t want to raise my child here. I grew up here and never got involved, but him, I don’t know.

My son is three and already knows what a gun is. I'm afraid that this will influence him." (Juliana, 19);
 "Of going to jail, because I've got two sons who are already involved." (Vera, 42).

TABLE 14 – Fears regarding children

Response	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Involvement with crime	38	0.59
Involvement with drugs	20	0.31
Unemployment	2	0.03
Other:		
stray bullet	1	0.02
Jail	1	0.02
that I won't be able to get out of here	1	0.02
leave them alone at home	1	0.02

It can be seen that fear of future unemployment for their children is virtually absent and that above all they fear that their children are unsafe. It is worth registering some of the spontaneous responses to the questions on the "live without fear" functioning, because they give hints about the causes of these low realizations, as well as the mechanisms to reduce cognitive dissonance (adaptation of beliefs and behavior to expectations, humor and irony being some of these mechanisms):

- Are you afraid to leave home because of violence?

"Yes, I got panic syndrome. Every time I hear a loud noise, I think it's a gunshot." (Laura, 32).

"No, because I'm not a turkey who's going to die the night before. (laughs)" (D. Neide, 65).

- Have you lost a friend to a gun battle in Vidigal?

"Friend, no, but I've seen kids born here, watched them grow up, get involved with crime and die." (Dora, 52).

- Are the gun battles in the community frequent?

"It depends on when. Now it's calmer. But stray bullets have entered my house [showing a hole in the wall]. When there's a shootout I turn on my stereo and pray. But when they shoot out the transformer [on the power pole], then I can't even turn on the stereo. My neighbor's son had a nervous attack during a shootout and they moved away from here." (Tereza, 36).

- Has violence changed your habits in any way?

"Sure. I can't go to the dances I used to go to. The gang running them now is another and they shave the heads of the girls from here and beat us up if someone goes there. Imagine if I had to go to work with a shaved head!" (Rosa, 35).

- In what way is violence harming the friendship relations among residents?

"Fear of making friends with the wrong people. For example, if my friend is going out with a bad character, I won't be her friend anymore." (Juliana, 19).

"We're afraid, we can't stay in our doorways talking. It's like a time bomb." (Joana, 26)

"Nobody trusts anybody anymore, because you don't know who to trust." (Helena, 37).

"Any argument people call on the bandits instead of resolving it themselves. People are standoffish." (Diana, 29).

"When a son gets involved the neighbors look askance at you." (Vera, 42)

- Has your house ever been invaded?

"No, because they [police] ask to look around. I know they don't have the right without a warrant, but I'm a woman, I was alone at home. I let them. There's lots of cowardice around here..." (Juliana, 19).

"Yes. They were tall men all dressed in black with huge weapons. I thought it was BOPE¹⁷." (D. Aparecida, 61).

¹⁷ BOPE is the Portuguese acronym for Special Operations Battalion, akin to a SWAT unit.

“No, but about four years ago a bullet broke my electricity meter. The next day they went to see if I was ok, and alive! And they fixed my meter! (laughs)” (D. Judite, 82).

It is interesting to observe the interaction of violence with the “participate in community life” functioning, especially with the part of the social capital where favela-dwellers are so rich, because violence is eroding the friendship relations among residents, diminishing the number of contacts among them, making them more selective in these contacts, reducing the relations of trust and transferring the solution of interpersonal conflicts to “bandits”. Added to this is the reduction in opportunities for collective action because of the contamination of the community association, making the limited capacity of these residents to change their lives – their agency condition – a particularly worrying point.

TABLE 15 – Functioning: “be happy and proud of oneself”

Indicators	IF
Happy	0.864
Proud to live in Vidigal	0.727
Would not trade house for one in another part of the city	0.364
Would not like to see children and grandchildren leave the favela	0.212
Average of the functioning	0.540

The average of this functioning indicated poverty. The results of this table, however, are quite conflicting. Although 86.4% of the respondents declared they were happy and 72.7% were proud of living in Vidigal, most of them would trade their homes in the favela for one with the same size and price in another part of the city and would like their children and grandchildren to leave the favela.

When asked if they felt proud of living in Vidigal, most of the respondents who answered “yes” presented reasons consistent with the following ones: “Yes, because I live in a big house, without plenty of space. What’s the good of living down below in a small room?” (Vitória, 47); “Yes, because I was born here, raised my kids here and nobody in the family got involved in the drug dealing.” (Marta, 49); “Yes, because those who can’t afford otherwise live in favelas, and this is one of the best, access is easy and you don’t have to ask for authorization to enter.” (Leticia, 32); “Yes, because here everybody is friends, everybody helps each other, everybody respects each other. Here we can sleep with our front doors open.” (Aline, 36).

Other residents, however, gave incoherent responses or contradicted themselves during the interview. More than half of the women (52%) who declared they were proud to live in Vidigal went on to say that they would trade their house in the favela for one in another part of the city. Some responses were: “Yes, because you have to accept things as they are, don’t you? Nobody lives in a favela out of pride.” (D. Antônia, 63); “Yes, because people have to be proud of what they have. (Bárbara, 26).

It must be noted that living in a favela meant a very different thing in the past than it has come to mean in the last two decades, with the rising level of violence (Perlman, various), so much so that even with the amelioration of social indicators, perceptions of poverty are still deep. This may provide a partial key to understand people’s pride in where they live: violence may not be an intrinsic aspect of a favela. However, some answers suggest that the strongest reason may be desire adaptation.

3.2 Index of freedom

There are two natural ways of calculating the Index of Freedom for the sample of the Vidigal population: i) take the average of the indexes for each functioning; ii) take the average of the indexes found for each family. Both forms of calculation obviously lead to the same result: an IF equal to 0.51, indicating that the people of Vidigal are poor, on the verge of extreme poverty.

Table 16 summarizes the main results:

TABLE 16: Synthesis of the IFs by functioning

Functionings	IF	DEGREE OF POVERTY
Be well sheltered	0.723	not poor
Be healthy	0.622	Poor
Do gratifying work	0.477	extremely poor
Enjoy a good level of schooling	0.351	extremely poor
Have protected protected	0.758	not poor
Enjoy the access to public services	0.719	not poor
Do not suffer discrimination	0.65	Poor
Be free from hunger and undernourishment	0.38	extremely poor
Dress adequately	0.424	extremely poor
Participate in community life	0.432	extremely poor
Participate in the associative life of the city	0.03	extremely poor
Live without fear and with hope for the future	0.572	Poor
Be happy and proud of oneself	0.54	Poor
Average	0.51	Poor

The low values of most of the functionings considered in our research in Vidigal, since the functionings match quite well with Martha Nussbaum's (2006) capabilities,¹⁸ may be understood to reflect the lack of most of the basic capabilities she lists:

TABLE 17: Nussbaum's partial list of capabilities and our list of functionings

Capabilities	Functionings
Life	Be healthy.
Bodily health	Be healthy; be well sheltered; be free from hunger and undernourishment.
Bodily integrity	Be well sheltered; live without fear; be healthy
Senses, imagination, and thought	Enjoy a good level of schooling; have children protected
Emotions	Live without fear; have children protected
Affiliation	Do not suffer discrimination; participate in community life; participate in the associative life of the city; be happy and proud of oneself
Control over one's environment	Participate in community life; participate in the associative life of

¹⁸ Nussbaum (2006: 77/78) suggests ten basic capabilities and we were able to match our own list of functionings with seven of her list of capabilities.

	the city; be well sheltered (property rights included); live without fear; do gratifying work; enjoy the access to public services.
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Only seven families obtained an IF above 0.67, meaning only 11% of the households in the sample are not poor; 41% scored between 0.5 and 0.67, and the remaining 48% obtained an IF under 0.5, classifying them as extremely poor.

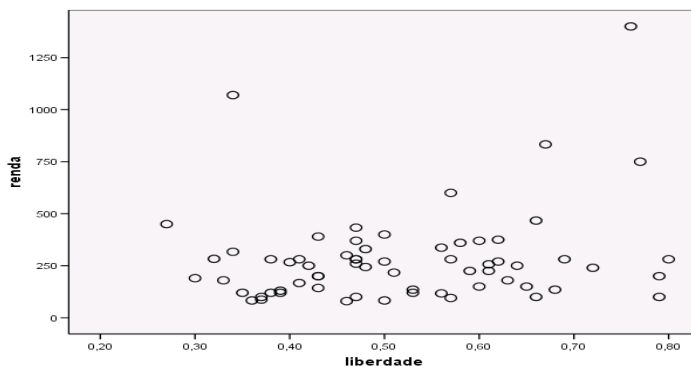
4.3. Comparison of freedom with income

An assumption of the capabilities approach is there does not have to be a correlation between insufficient income and lack of freedom to choose. In this section we try to verify whether this premise holds when we compare the per capita household income in Vidigal with the respective freedom indexes.

We consider for this analysis the poverty line of one-half the minimum monthly wage in Brazil (R\$180.00 in February 2007, around US\$ 100) used by IPEA. For the respondents who did not want to declare their family income (9% of the sample), we attributed the average monthly per capita household income obtained for the sample (R\$281.00). While by the criterion of freedom, 89% of the families were classified as poor or extremely poor, according to the income criterion, only 35% of the families were below the poverty line.

In comparing the “income poverty” with “freedom poverty”, we found an equivalent result in 28 families, representing 42% of the sample. We also noted that the final averages demonstrate that the Vidigal depicted in our sample is not poor in income, but it is poor in freedom. The graph below shows the correlation between the income and freedom indicators.

Graph 3: Correlation between income and freedom



Pearson’s correlation coefficient showed that the results of the association between these two variables are not statistically significant ($r = 0.209$ and $p > 0.05$).

4. Conclusions

Residents of Vidigal are very likely poor in freedom, or on the verge of being extremely poor.

The factors that most contributed to these results were the low indexes of freedom obtained for the “enjoy a good schooling level”, “be free from hunger and undernourishment” and “participate in the associative life of the city” functionings. The best results were observed for the “be well sheltered”, “have protected children” (the indicators of violence were not included here) and “enjoy the access to public services” functionings.

Some numbers obtained in this study are corroborated by the statistics compiled by research institutions. This is the case of the information on the public services, schooling level, and in part the labor market. We obtained indicators for electricity, piped water supply, trash disposal and sewerage compatible with those of the Pereira Passos Institute (IPP 2006). The indicators of schooling level were just as bad as those of the IPP. The rate of people working in the informal sector was very near that found by the Society and Labor Studies Institute (IETS): 58% according to the IETS (1998) and 50% in this study. Unemployment in this study, however, was well above the IETS indicator: 10.8% in 1998 according to that Institute versus 25% today according to our study. But our sample was composed only of women, which might have caused some difference in the result.

Other results of this study, though, run counter to disseminated beliefs on favelas. While the income insufficiency criterion classifies the residents of Vidigal as not poor, our work shows that according to the IF measure they are poor. Furthermore, while some studies on favelas have stressed the value of their social capital (Abramo, 2002)¹⁹, this study showed that the residents of Vidigal may be “poor” in social capital, since their social relations connect them with a limited set of opportunities for choice.

More than this, we found that violence, a condition so widespread in the favelas, has been undermining the realizations of favela-dwellers. It affects the housing conditions (the residents are sometimes prevented from going up the hillside and returning to their homes), health (increasing the stress associated with, for example, fear of leaving children at home alone and fear of gun battles), gratification with work and schooling (hindering studying at night to improve in life), trust in the ability of the police to provide protection (the police are perceived more as a threat than protection), respect and self-esteem (the negative perception of city residents of favela-dwellers in associating them with criminality), job opportunities (the “warfare” is seen as affecting people’s ability to commute to work, making hiring them risky), and finally, the conditions to overcome these deprivations through some means of collective action (with the takeover of community associations by drug gangs). Perhaps more perversely, the violence thrusts itself into the intimacy of strong ties, causing fear of leaving home, of talking in front doorways and making friends with the “wrong people”, and transferring to the “bandits” the role of mediating disputes. Our study then corroborates Perlman (2005) findings in that we also found that even the traditional social capital, the greatest richness of a favela, is being eroded by the violence.

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¹⁹ Perlman 2005 is an important counterexample in that her research concludes that favela’s social capital is being deteriorated by violence.

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