

RESILIENT REALITIES

How youth civil society is experiencing and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Latin America
Spotlights:
Contemplating
New Realities**

Participatory research
coordinated in partnership between
**Restless Development, Recrear,
& the Development Alternative**

Latin America Co-Researchers



DANIEL CALARCO

I'm a 23 year old law student, originally from Vila do Vintém Favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I founded the International Youth Watch as part of my commitment to support other young leaders in the promotion of human rights and sustainable development at the local and international level.



JIMENA ALMARIO

I am a psychologist, musician, composer, and researcher passionate about the rich social and cultural realities across South America. I co-funded 'la Múcura' (www.lamucura.org), a youth led organisation focused on exploring the relationship between the arts and social transformation in South America. My work wants to contribute to life, beauty and consciousness.

Introduction

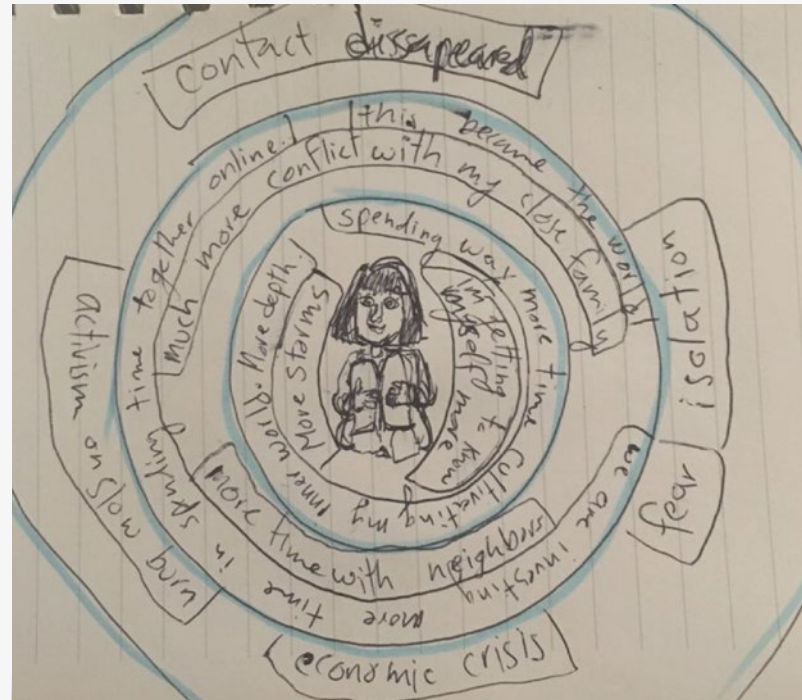
For this research we were curious about how young people have been creatively engaging with this crisis. We understand the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for change, in which some of society's structure can break, leaving space for new ideas and sensibilities. We asked the question:

What new realities are we, as youth organisations, groups and movements, creating today, and what challenges are we facing to realize them?

Daniel: I had the chance to dive into the Rio de Janeiro scene and carried out 5 interviews, a webinar and a series of informal conversations to develop a case study of youth in Brazilian favelas.

Jimena: I led 5 interviews with youth leaders across Colombia, Peru and Ecuador and participated in 5 Youth-led online activities organised by groups in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Perú and Colombia.

Together, we engaged in self-reflective activities and created an archive of art pieces produced during quarantine. An example of one of our activities is cited below:



Reflective Activity

Draw yourself in the centre of a page surrounded by three concentric circles (leave space between each circle to write words or phrases). The circle closest to you represents your family, the second your friends, while the third one represents your wider community. Reflect upon the transformations you see in each of these aspects of your life in the context of the COVID pandemic. Write words or phrases that describe the transformations you see within each corresponding circle.

What We Learned About Our Research Question:

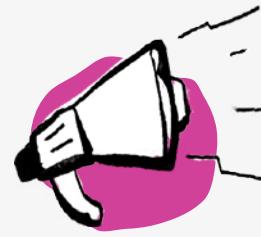
What new realities are we, as youth organisations, groups and movements, creating today, and what challenges are we facing to realise them?



New realities can only be created based on community centered perspectives. Those leading grassroots work need to be able to mobilize political power and overcome social and economic exclusion. We need to put in the public debate young people's day-to-day reality and challenges in order to create inclusive and effective policies.



There is no new reality or new normal without an anti racism approach. The pandemic made clear the role that race plays in social dynamics and how violent the status quo is against black communities and marginalised groups. New realities demand debate and responses to prejudice and racism.



Youth groups need to be recognised for their work at the forefront of the pandemic and be supported as fundamental stakeholders to overcome the impacts of COVID-19. This includes making available financial support, training and mentoring. Plus, to ensure we can create a better, more sustainable and equal world, we need to set up spaces to speak up and share narratives.

"As a young black woman it is really unusual to be perceived as a leader. It is not a place that we occupy very often. I am trying to redefine what it means to be a leader from a community perspective, in which all roles are important. Being a leader is a role of active listening and effective response to collective demands."

Mariana Galdino, LabJac

A stylized illustration on a pink background featuring several protest signs and a raised fist. The signs are white with black outlines and contain various symbols and text, including a wavy line, a flag with horizontal stripes, and a large sign with horizontal lines. A hand is shown holding one of the signs. A raised fist is depicted in the lower right quadrant. The entire illustration is rendered in a simple, bold, black-and-white style.

Youth Organising in Brazilian Favelas: Fighting Racism, Marginalisation, State Violence and COVID-19, at Once.

By Daniel Calarco

In Rio de Janeiro, a city of 6 million inhabitants, 2 million live in favelas¹. I grew up in the favela Vila do Vintém and I returned to my family home in March 2020, when the COVID-19 crisis began. Over the last four months, I had the chance to witness the fight against COVID-19 from the perspective of youth in favelas and informal settlements.

Here, the virus spread in a context that lacked infrastructure, public investment, and social services for the local population. The government resorted to quarantine as an emergency measure. Yet imposing quarantine without planning had a huge impact on our economic and human rights. In a short span of time, a scenario of denial, political debate, and fake news resulted in social collapse.

1 Favelas are informal settlements often characterised by a lack of public policies, infrastructure, and the presence of unlawful authorities due to the absence of the State.

Having no access to hospitals, marginalised communities are not being tested – their deaths are not even properly tracked.

For young people in favelas, the fight against COVID-19's spread became a fight for survival. The majority of people here are labour force workers, in informal positions or in atypical contracts. They can't work remotely and they have little or no access to government support and labour protection. The Emergency Support from the Government took months to be released and youth under 18 could not even be beneficiaries. The impossibility to go out to work meant people in favelas had no means to access income. In many favelas of Rio de Janeiro, the response to the situation was youth-led. The youth stood up and filled the gap of public support to save lives, spread awareness, and create new realities by redefining their community power and presence in the city.

Young leaders active in social projects decided to get together in collaborative and self-organised spaces in their favelas to identify problems, create solutions, and mobilise resources. Thiago Alves, Mariana Galdino, Kawan Lopes, and Ricardo Fernandes are examples of leaders coordinating "Crisis Cabinet" in their communities. In Jacarézinho Favela, more than 120,000 reais, about 24,000 US dollars, was raised to buy food supplies for more than 2,000 families. In the City of God, they coordinated more than 10,000 food basket donations. In Santa Cruz, they supported more than 3,000 families. These numbers

demonstrate the great impact and power young people have to lead the fight against COVID-19 here in Rio.

In Brazilian favelas, race is also an important aspect to understand marginalisation. In my country, black and brown communities are already more likely to be killed by violence, and they are now twice more vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the youth vulnerability index², a young black man is three times more likely to be killed than a white one, and youth represented more than half of the violent killings in the country despite being only 23% of the population. Violence, as the occurrence of armed conflict and the extrajudicial killing of black young people, is another layer of this lethal pandemic.

The Supreme Court had to step in after many police interventions resulted in various casualties of young black people in favelas during the COVID-19 crisis. This opened up a debate about which bodies deserve to be protected: what does it mean to value black bodies, poor bodies, youth bodies? Now favela community leaders are fighting racism, marginalisation, state violence against favela and black youth, and the virus at the same time.

"Is quarantine a right or privilege? From theory to reality".

This was one of the questions I posted on my social media. The response was unanimous: it should be a right, but it's a privilege.

2 'Culture of Peace in Brazil' UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/brasil/expertise/culture-peace>

Dynamics of race, age, gender and territory can determine if you can afford to be in quarantine or not. The majority of people here are labor force workers, in informal positions or in atypical contracts. They can't work remotely and have little or no access to government support, unionisation or labor protection.

Young people have an important role not only by developing actions to mitigate COVID-19, but also to create a more sustainable future focused on promoting human rights, equality and economic inclusion. From favelas to government and international organisations, now it is time to make sure that youth are not stopped, but supported in leading change. These local youth leading grassroots work must be included in the decision-making process, adding to the public debate and providing an accurate picture of the day-to-day realities and challenges of their communities.



Daniel Calarco
@CalarcoDaniel

Quarentena é direito ou privilégio? Da teoria a prática.

Is the quarantine a right or a privilege?
From theory to reality.

Activity:

Write a tweet (up to 140 characters) to yourself back to the beginning of the quarantine. It can say whatever you want, being a question, learning, advice, or a support message.



The Power that Resides in Looking Within

By Jimena Almarino

Over the last four years, I have been travelling around Latin America as a researcher and artist. During my trip, I have been hosted by community leaders and social groups of all sorts, developing close friendships all around the continent. For this research, I had the chance to go back to this network and carry out in-depth interviews to sense how community leaders have been experiencing the COVID-19 crisis.

In these conversations, I have reflected on how much frustration young community leaders experience about governmental responses. The challenge is that, even though we still recognise the urgency of participating collectively in public policy spaces, our power

as youth led grassroots organisations is still very limited in formal decision making spaces.

Anthony, from the group Clave de Sur in Guayaquil, Ecuador shared with me:

"I am sad and angry at politicians and the authorities in my country. It's sad to see how they take pride in their positions or power to do or undo as they wish [...]. Corruption is coming to light amongst 'the great, the powerful and the important' of our country. Meanwhile, my mom was affected by one of those mass layoffs. There was also a reduction of minimum wage (from 400 to 200 US dollars). If salary wasn't enough before, now it's worse."

The most unsettling experience as a community organiser is that of feeling robbed of spaces for public engagement. Now that we don't have the street to take action or our community gathering to save us, what can we do? This question led to two responses. On one hand we found digital ways to come together with our collectives and communities.

Miguel, from Casa de Semillas in El Retiro, Colombia tells me:

"Our activism has had its ups and downs, conditioned by quarantine and its restrictions. But we haven't stopped moving towards our mission and vision as people, as a collective. We keep thinking, feeling and doing. The methods have changed, but not the heart of it. I am, we are still mobilizing..."

On the other hand, we recognised our importance as individuals who are part of a whole. We took advantage of the pandemic to look within. We don't do what we do for the money - we recognise that funding is scarce, and the sphere of decisive political participation is far off and murky. So, what sustains our actions as youth led social grassroots organisations in quarantine? If our scope and political impact is limited and we barely manage to sustain ourselves, why do we keep doing this? Why do we continue to knit ideas, thoughts, dreams of a society?

There is a power in looking within, in recognising what systems we belong to and what systems we are sustaining through our consumption, the relationships we create, the conditions we live in. This has been the

first exercise in pandemic power; to empower ourselves with our own choices, decisions, and consumption patterns. We begin to discover the immense responsibility that resides in our individual decisions and how unstoppable we are when we decide to take actions that contribute to the common good. Anthony reflected that during quarantine he learned to administer his expenses: "I now see that we 'spend for spending's sake'. Most of the time we spend money on things we want, but hardly ever on what we need." (Anthony, Clave de Sur, Guayaquil, Ecuador).

Going inward we strengthen our confidence of being part of an intelligent ecosystem that regulates and builds itself on principles of love and hope. This recognition helps us see that in each action there is infinite power: each one is mirrored by thousands of small daily actions that also seek reconciliation with the planet and with our own species.

Looking inward we can choose, transform and reaffirm our life choices and decisions so as to see ourselves as part of a system that really contributes towards life. For now, that's where we're at.

A post pandemic prelude: Forgetting

By Jimena Almario



Some countries start to move towards the “new normal”: tired of quarantine, liberty comes with a mask on our face and the hope of continuing to enjoy life. But, what is this pandemic chapter leaving us with? Besides innumerable questions and the reality that in the face of disaster we are a bunch of obedient bodies, resilient and reflexive, we are left with the challenge of the post-pandemic.

We have seen the world mature through our screens, we have had time to value the small spaces of silence caressing the big cities; we were moved by images such as a dolphin in a murky ocean, or a jaguar on security footage.

The unwanted prelude is a homogenised forgetting. Will normality return? Will it return with restless striving, thoughtless movement, naive action? And, if so, for what? If this pandemic gave us the time to look inwards and to be conscious of the power that we exercise in our decisions, post-pandemic

challenges beg not to forget what we have lived and felt and maybe always known.

We cannot forget the blessing that resides in pause, in the infinite present that calmness brings. We cannot forget that we don’t need to consume that much to live and that there is nothing more important than life, health, collective creation and healthy sustainability. We cannot forget that our health systems collapsed because they have not been the priority, they have been a service in a commercial marketplace. We cannot forget that for some governments reactivating the economy was more important than health, we cannot forget those people who could not work and earn a living, those who were further excluded and forgotten, we cannot forget the helpful hands and our capacity to reinvent ourselves. We cannot forget. More than anything else we cannot forget the fragility of our existence and the power of our interconnectedness.

We are left with a few big questions:

- 1. How do we enable youth leaders and youth organisations from marginalised communities to lead the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic considering that they have been disproportionately impacted by it?**
- 2. What are the new spaces to exercise power, and how can digital mobilisation be used to empower youth as a stakeholder in the public debate ?**



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The background features a vibrant, abstract composition of overlapping organic shapes. A large, central blue shape dominates the middle, with a smaller orange shape above it and a teal shape below it. The entire design is set against a solid pink background. The text 'RESILIENT REALITIES' is centered within the blue shape.

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