



Paulo Lins: 'The place where you are born is the center of the world'

Author responds to interview as one of the characters in his new book, a man who lived with his family in the community of Mãe Luiza, in Natal, graduated in literature and now lives in Santa Teresa, in Rio.

By Bolívar Torres — Rio de Janeiro

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Writer Paulo Lins has always created remarkable characters. Just like the classic "City of God", his most recent fiction, "Creating a New Sun", brings a gallery of charismatic figures. O GLOBO invited the author to answer an interview as if he were Chico, one of the characters in the new book, which portrays the formation of the community Mãe Luiza, in Natal (RN).

New book: Mãe Luiza, the other 'City of God' by Paulo Lins, but with a happy ending.

Discreet and studious, Chico is the opposite of his brother, Fefedo, who becomes one of the most feared local drug dealers. Today, Chico is a "resident" of the Santa Teresa neighbourhood in Rio. He worked as a gas station attendant, graduated in literature and now works as a public-school teacher. He left Mãe Luiza, but the memory of the place remains with him.

Chico, your family helped raise Mãe Luiza, where you grew up. How does it feel to have witnessed the formation of a community?

The place where one is born is the center of the world, where one learns to converse with animals, plants and even stones, with its ground still dry due to lack of rain, and that's why I had to leave there. There was no water, but there was no soul of my ancestors protecting me. Mother Luiza was not my world. There were several people in misery, in an unhealthy place where violence was as natural as the rivers that dried up in my land. In my luggage, I bring the strength that poverty gave me to fight for a world with more social and racial equity.

What is unique about Mãe Luiza — and what is similar to so many other communities in the country?

The communities, favelas, have in common the contempt, the neglect of the authorities, the prejudice and racism of the financially upper classes, which are white people who enjoyed government privileges before and after the slavery period. Most of Brazil's favelas are made up of people descended from enslaved and enslaved people and drought refugees.

What are your best memories there? And the worst?

The most comfortable position a human being can find is when he is helping. And the other is when you are being helped. So, my best memory is the help my family received from Mãe Luiza as soon as we got there. And the worst memories are those that are still present in this racist, prejudiced country, with a lack of social and racial equity.

Fefedo, his brother who became a drug dealer, didn't want to work for the rich. Was it his way of seeking social justice? Or do a lot of people romanticize this?

A person enters into this type of crime as a child. My brother, when he was young, was already aware of social inequality. We starved, we had no government support in the face of drought. He knew why the rich were rich and the poor were poor. With him, the revolt, faced with hunger, spoke louder than the alienation that many exploited people have in the face of social injustices.

Since you left Mãe Luiza, the community has been transformed. It is an example of social project and solidarity. What is the secret?

People only had the basic things to live in peace: food, health, education, housing and water. If in our country these human rights were normal, as they should be, there would not be the violence that took over that place for so long. People are the same. If we put the middle and upper classes made up of European descendants in the conditions that people from the lower classes live, the violence would be the same. There's no way to escape it.

How do you see the possibilities of social ascension in the country?

It is still very difficult to ascend socially. We need a policy that does what Padre Sabino and the Ameropa Foundation did in Mãe Luiza. The example is given. Governments that do not follow this example are due to pure omission, racism, neglect, prejudice, badness and bad faith.

