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**COLLECTIVE ASPHIXIA:  
THE IMPACT OF  
DISPUTES BETWEEN  
THE STATE AND  
CRIMINAL GROUPS ON  
THE TRAJECTORIES  
OF ADOLESCENTS  
RESIDENTS**

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**Abstract:** The present work is the result of the research “In Fogo Cruzado: The impact of disputes over the management of order between the State and criminal groups on the trajectories of adolescents living in the periphery”, funded by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul - FAPERGS and the PUCRS Student Research Scholarship Program - BPA/PUCRS. The study sought to dialogue with young residents and professionals who work in peripheral neighborhoods in the city of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul. It starts from the idea that these adolescents are directly and indirectly impacted by violence, such as the state’s neglect to provide basic services, criminalization and coexistence with criminal groups. Empirical research was carried out at the Reference Centers Specialized in Social Assistance – CREAS. Geographically distant units were chosen with the aim of meeting young people belonging to different territories and with possible relationships with criminal factions.

**Keywords:** Youths; violence; territories.

## INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The Integrated Management of Public Security Research Group - GESEG/PUCRS dedicates its studies to the themes of violence and diversity. The present research is the ramification of two previous researches by GESEG/PUCRS: “The powers from within the prison: an analysis of the groups of inmates organized in the Central Prison of Porto Alegre” and “The powers from within the prison, second phase: the groups organized among the socio-educational students of the socio-educational service foundation of Rio Grande do Sul”.

The results of the first survey are in line with data from the Atlas of Violence (IPEA, 2020), which brought an increase in the number of homicides in the 15-29 age group

in the State of Rio Grande do Sul from the year 2020 onwards. 2013 and following, decreasing only in 2018. In 2013, for example, 1,078 young people were victims of violent deaths, while in 2014 there were 1,323, this jump coincides with the tension between the existing criminal groups in Porto Alegre, as there was a expansion of the Bala na Cara, a faction created in 2008, and the opposite response, from the creation of the Anti-Bala, a coalition formed between different groups with the objective of stopping the advances of the Bala na Cara, according to studies by Marcelli Cipriani and Rodrigo Ghiringhelli de Azevedo.

The second research interviewed socio-educational students who are serving a socio-educational measure of internment and FASE professionals. The results pointed to the presence of factions in the trajectories of some young people and the silence of the State on the subject. Still, subjects that involved their neighborhoods, such as the feeling of belonging and the friendships established there, were present in the speeches of the young people. Therefore, the present research started in the field of compliance with socio-educational measures in an open environment, in the Specialized Reference Centers for Social Assistance - CREAS, units that serve people who are in a situation of social risk or have their rights violated, according to André Kirst. and Michelle Birnfeld da Luz (LAZZAROTTO et al. 2014, p. 66/67):

Every CREAS unit must perform the Protection and Specialized Assistance Service for Families and Individuals (PAEFI), offering support, guidance and monitoring in situations of personal or social risk due to violation of rights in the imminence or occurrence of: physical and psychological intrafamily violence, neglect, abandonment, abuse and sexual exploitation, withdrawal from family and community life, experience of child labor, homelessness, discrimination and other situations that cause damage and

aggravation to living conditions, autonomy and well-being. Some of these situations can be attended by specific units, as long as they are referenced by CREAS, as is the case, for example, of the Specialized Reference Centers for Women and the Pop Center for the Homeless Population. These possibilities of specific Centers produce a diversity of CREAS's, which meet the demands according to the resources that their respective territories make available.

One of the services offered by CREAS is the fulfillment of socio-educational measures in two modalities: Provision of Service to the Community (PSC) and Assisted Freedom (LA), which are medium-complexity services and are part of the Special Social Protection of Medium Complexity, that is, "require greater technical-operational structuring and specialized and more individualized attention, and/or systematic and monitored follow-up" (BRASIL, 2004, p. 36).

Due to the panorama of urban violence that indirectly and directly impacts young people living in the peripheral neighborhoods of Porto Alegre, this article aims to present the results of the research "In Fogo Cruzado: The impact of disputes over the management of order between the State and criminal groups in the trajectories of adolescents living in the periphery", financed by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul - FAPERGS and by the PUCRS Student Research Scholarship Program - BPA/PUCRS.

The research aimed to verify how the State assists these young people, from the promotion of citizenship and the presence of services, analyzing the structure of these urban spaces and the spaces of social assistance, as well as the police performance in these neighborhoods, without ignoring the deep roots of authoritarian practices that persist in the police institution in a vigilant attempt by the State to "support the proposition of a peace order" (BASSO and AZEVEDO, 2009,

p. 22).

At the same time, an attempt was made to determine the impacts felt in the daily lives of young people resulting from conflicts between criminal factions, such as limitations on urban circulation and the risks of displacement. Furthermore, the presence of criminal sociabilities in the daily lives of adolescents was examined (as in the culture of weapons and consumption), from the point of view of the imbrication between their place of residence and the greater or lesser proximity and connection with the dynamics of criminal groups.

The results presented here come from the application of interviews through semi-structured questionnaires with adolescents who fulfill socio-educational measures in an open environment and live in precarious urban spaces and with professionals such as social workers, lawyers and psychologists. The semi-structured questionnaires were designed to have open questions, avoiding discomfort in adolescents and allowing them to narrate their trajectories spontaneously.

This article will briefly address social assistance in Porto Alegre, based on exploratory visits carried out at the Specialized Reference Centers for Social Assistance - CREAS by the co-author and through the treatment of interviews with CREAS professionals when working on the concepts of "CREAS" and "CRAS". Finally, propositions for the problems brought will be exposed. It is reported that the propositions are based on the authors' experiences, therefore, there is no pretension to exhaust the subject or bring unquestionable results. Far from it, the idea defended is networking and collective construction.

## THE SUBJECTS MOST AFFECTED BY CRIMINAL DYNAMICS AND THE ROLE OF CREAS

Within the Central Prison (PCPA), in a context of institutional violence and state bankruptcy with the material assistance of the inmates, the Falange Gaúcha, the first criminal group in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, emerged in the late 1980s. what Renato Dornelles characterizes as the “prehistory” of organized crime in RS:

The members of Falange signed a pact according to which those outside the prisons must send money to those who remained in prison. These amounts were used in particular to finance escapes and purchase drugs. A mandatory code of conduct was established, on a path with no return or right to regret: non-payment of debts, betrayal of companions, non-compliance with tasks established by superiors in the group hierarchy resulted in punishment, which could be death ( DORNELLES, 2018, p. 10).

The mass incarceration policy that led to overcrowding in prisons and was accompanied by disrespect for the rights of prisoners <sup>1</sup> is associated with the emergence of criminal groups in different states of the country. Bruno Paes Manso on “the outsourcing of control to prisoners”:

[...] Overt policing, improved police management, arrests in flagrante delicto, in the end, ended up producing unexpected side effects, such as massive incarceration and loss of control inside the prisons. Or rather: the outsourcing of control to prisoners, who had to establish a self-management scheme to survive in those environments that the state did not seem to have the competence, money or even interest in managing (FBSP, 2019, p. 37).

After a period of intense turmoil at the

Central Prison, throughout the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, the Military Brigade started to manage the establishment. In order to reduce the riots, riots and homicides that occurred between prisoners, the police began to separate them according to the alliances and rivalries they had on the streets or, if he is not a member of any group, according to the neighborhood in which he lives. and the faction that controls it (CIPRIANI, 2016, p. 110/111). Sidinei Brzuska states that the manifestation of the factions in the Central Prison is related to the State's lack of providing dignity to the convict:

Today, if the guy has a family, he has a chance. If he doesn't have a family, it's complicated. Because if he has a family, the family keeps him in jail. Today, a prisoner costs, for the family, R\$ 700, R\$ 800 per month. Inside the Center. But for families, PASC is more expensive, because the family pays for it every week. Because the prisoner doesn't receive a bar of soap to wash himself, he doesn't receive a toothpaste, he doesn't receive a plastic spoon to eat, he doesn't receive a pot to put food in, he doesn't receive anything. Who has to give this to him is the family. If he has no family – these things he needs! – who is going to give it to him? Who will give it to him is the “city hall”. And she will even give it to him, and if you go to talk to the prisoners and the factions, they will say the following: that they are making a gesture of charity. They are supporting, helping, being supportive. That's the speech. And it's still true. It's true, they are supporting, they are helping, they are providing service.

According to the Brazilian Public Security Yearbook, published in 2019, deaths within the criminal world and its networks, that is, wars between factions, “represent around 75-80% of intentional violent deaths in Brazil, stable proportion in recent years” (FBSP, 2019, p.

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1 According to the monthly report of the National Registry of Inspections in Penal Establishments (CNIEP), linked to the National Council of Justice - CNJ, the State of Rio Grande do Sul has 103 prisons, of which 53 are considered to be in poor condition, 05 are bad, 27 are regular, 13 good and 01 excellent. The Central Prison in Porto Alegre is in dire straits. Available at: <[http://www.cnj.jus.br/inspecao\\_penal/mapa.php](http://www.cnj.jus.br/inspecao_penal/mapa.php)>. Accessed on 23 Dec. 2019.

31) and the profile continues to be recurrent: young black people and favela residents:

The profile of victims in Group 1 (deaths within the criminal world and its close networks) is also regular over the years, and mostly composed of low-level operators in the illegal markets (drugs, weapons, stolen vehicles, smuggling, etc.). **They are, therefore, commonly young black males, with outdated schooling, residents of slums and urban peripheries, often with criminal justice stints.** (underlined).

These deaths are somehow related to the dispute over the management of order in urban spaces, for example, who sets the rules (such as the curfew), who supplies the drug and who profits from its sale. Unlike what happens in São Paulo, where the Primeiro Comando da Capital - PCC group seems to have hegemony and “implements pragmatic mechanisms to reduce internal conflicts in the criminal universe” (FBSP, 2019, p. 33), other Brazilian states, such as Rio Grande do Sul, live, since mid-2013, the effervescence of disputes between factions, according to Gabriel de Santis Feltran:

If the faction wants to grow its business to other states, it needs to occupy the territory of another, and wars break out (including against the PCC in several states). If there are deaths in these wars, there will be revenge, and homicides increase in Group 1. Even if there is hegemony of an armed faction in a state, therefore, in this model the level of homicides tends to be higher than under the hegemony of the PCC, which excels in regulating markets and controlling the use of weapons, without armed territorial domination. The faction’s internal justice mechanisms, moreover, try to break the chains of revenge at all costs (FBSP, 2019, p. 34).

The strategy used by the Brigada Militar, the ERGS police, to separate the inmates according to the faction they belong to

2 Available at: <<https://gauchazh.clicrbs.com.br/geral/noticia/2014/01/como-morrem-os-detentos-que-cumprem-pena-nas-cadeias-do-rio-grande-do-south-4393777.html>>. Accessed on 23 Dec. 2019

the neighborhood they live in contributed to a “calm” within the Central Prison – which remains with low rates of instabilities of all kinds.<sup>2</sup> However, it manifests itself in revenge, violence and disputes in the streets of Porto Alegre, especially in peripheral neighborhoods. In the social fabric of these urban spaces – known locally as “villages” – are the subjects most affected by criminal dynamics: young people, susceptible to both criminality and criminalization, because:

who is there on the corner is not Pedro, Roberto or Maria, with their respective ages and life stories, [...] your emotions and fears. [...] who is there is the dangerous brat or the *lost girl* (MV BILL; ATHAYDE; SOARES, 2005, p. 175).

According to the 2020 Atlas of Violence, “homicides were the main cause of death among young men, responsible for 55.6% of the deaths of young people between 15 and 19 years old; 52.3% of those between 20 and 24 years old; and 43.7% of those between 25 and 29 years old” (IPEA, 2020, p. 20), which is worrying not only for human factors, but also economic ones. In the Atlas of Violence study, it was found that death rates among young men are higher than among young women, which reinforces the premise that male adolescents have greater relationships with violence than female adolescents.

Thus, “in comparison with the rates of other age groups, however, it is possible to affirm that the cause of death by homicide affects more young women and men than individuals of any other age group” (Ibdem). Alba Zalar (2004) draws attention to the concept of “hypermasculinity”, which currently permeates the “culture of ostentation”, and, for the anthropologist, seems to attract boys to the world of crime:

It seems to me that some (young males) are seduced by an image of masculinity that is

associated with the use of firearms and the willingness to kill, having money in their pockets and showing off for some women. From interviews my team did with young drug dealers, we defined this as an ethos of hypermasculinity. This is a phenomenon that is being studied a lot in the US and Europe and concerns men who have some difficulty building a positive image of themselves. They need admiration or respect through fear imposed on others. That's why they show themselves with weapons and show cruelty before the enemy.

However, during the treatment of the interviews with 08 adolescents and 05 professionals who care for the young people, it was possible to verify the desire that the adolescents they must have branded items, but this does not seem to be the preponderant entry factor into the "criminal world". Regarding the reasons, there is financial help for their mothers and grandmothers, the feeling of belonging to their neighborhoods, the affective bonds created there and the attempt to distinguish themselves, that is, to feel special, which implies the self-esteem of young people, such as what is done by the "Bala na Cara" (BNC) when they call themselves the "lions of the jungle", according to interviews:

The bums put in the minds of the minors that they are going to do and happen and be safe. They say, I'm going to leave you with a gun, a motorcycle and a girl (young man, 14 years old, CREAS).

At Bom Jesus, if your husband hits you and you call the kids, they send the guy out of town. There can't be any fights there and they help to recover what was stolen (young man, 16 years old, CREAS).

One day I want to visit the Guaíba coast. Low town I've never been, there you can't. Neither does ZN. I stay here a lot, I have my friends, my girlfriend (young man, 16 years old, CREAS).

Bullets are known as the lions of the

jungle as they have the power. They are on Facebook... Just looking for someone with a profile with a picture of a lion, it's a bullet... the girls are the lionesses... They have no pity... (young, 15 years old, CREAS).

The Bala na Cara, unlike the other factions operating in Porto Alegre, such as the Abertos and the Manos, did not appear in the prison galleries as a response to prison, along the lines of the Falange Vermelha, later Comando Vermelho, in which the slogan was : "the enemy is outside the cells, inside we are all brothers and companions" (AMORIM, 1993, p. 18). The "lions" or "mouth takers", as the BNC are known, appeared on the streets of Porto Alegre and began to territorialize the streets and later the galleries of the Central Prison.

In the words of Achille Mbembe (MBEMBE, 2016, p. 135) when studying the colonies, which we can contextualize for the spaces of Porto Alegre:

Colonial occupation itself was a matter of apprehending, demarcating, and asserting physical and geographic control- inscribe on the ground a new set of social and spatial relationships – territorialization.

Thus, territorializing a space means dictating the rules of coexistence, exercising a kind of control. According to CIPRIANI (2016, p. 126):

The Bullets appeared in Bom Jesus village. There, there were several homicides – homicides, not trafficking, involving rival families: the Bragés and the Mirandas, several deaths between them. And from that rivalry that arose there, a very big hate relationship also emerged, where the esculacho shot came from, right, which is the shot in the face, to make the family bury the guy with the closed coffin. And that's where the name came from, they say. And these people started to, along with these wars, get involved with drug trafficking. If you take today the main exponents of Balas – Schultz, Sapó, they are all from there in

Vila Bom Jesus and have a very close bond. So these people get together, start selling, in a little while they start to be arrested... They will stay in the same gallery... Suddenly you have a “faction”. And the Bala, for a while, were the armed wing of the others, they did execution services for them. Today it is already at a higher level, because it is more profitable to dispute the sale. They were the only ones that emerged outside Central, and today they still use these executions to take points by force. Do you want to be a Bala? So take that gun and sell our drug. Don't you want to go over to them? Then they will “pass” [kill] the guy. (OJ02).

Since the emergence and the great profitability of the Bala na Cara, the figure of the drug dealer “Robin Hood”, in Porto Alegre, has been removed:

The drug dealer Robin Hood was very common. You heard the saying that “we feel more protected with trafficking than with the police”. That no longer exists. For about five years now, I would say, the community has not felt protected by trafficking. Even less with the police, you know, she often feels violated by the police (woman, CREAS professional).

Traffic is there and has taken people out of the house, that didn't happen. The justice thing that there was in the community... Trafficking solves it, but you are in debt (woman, CREAS professional). difficulty in carrying out the measure due to the risk or impossibility of moving the young person from their territory to the unit:

Yes, there are cases of adolescents who cannot comply with the socio-educational measure, cannot walk the streets of the same neighborhood, for example, in Cruzeiro, several streets can be territories of different factions (woman, CREAS professional).

It was even seen the difficulty of some young people to enjoy the city of Porto Alegre itself, because because they are identified as belonging to a certain faction, they cannot

enter rival territory. However, the Porto Alegre City Hall does not seem to take this factor into account when it states that the CREAS that serves certain regions is not located nearby. In an attempt to avoid this problem, professionals write down in the Individual Assistance Plan - PIA the region where the young person lives and their level of involvement with the factions:

Normally, we make an observation when we are building the PIA and we forward the report to the Judiciary. Sometimes teenagers are ashamed to speak, then we'll only find out when he's not coming right; others speak on the spot. Everything is a construction (woman, CREAS professional).

CREAS Leste stays here at this address because it doesn't have the political will to get us out of here (laughs). **We serve the entire eastern region that is Bom Jesus, Morro Santana, Chácara das Pedras, part of Itú Sabará, Cefer, Ipê. So this region that we are in is completely out of the way and against the majority of the people who need to be attended here.** It's a little tricky, as many of them are at risk of getting here. **All of them who come from Bom Jesus, for example, need to go through Vila Jardim and that in itself is a challenge.** Then we look for alternatives so that this kid doesn't suffer risk and doesn't stop the fulfillment (of the socio-educational measure). We go to where the young person lives, which makes work difficult, because while we could perform four appointments, we performed one. While we could call and expedite the referral of the young person to some service, we will only do that the other day. Difficult (female, CREAS professional).

It has happened that the young person is in attendance and people “against” circulate by car here on their way back. We noticed and took the kid out of the entrance hall (women, CREAS professional).

The absence of the State is accompanied by the substantial presence of its armed wing, after all “the police have been at the center of

public debate and have been used by populist politicians to assert the idea that confronting the criminal and the use of violence are the its primary mission” (FBSP, 2019, p. 58). Although the primary mission of the police is to guarantee citizenship, at CREAS this is not what happens on a daily basis:

A young man reported at the reception that the policeman used drugs in front of him. Who will you complain to? (female, CREAS professional).

According to the study by Rolim and Hermann (2018), which sought to determine the relationship of trust between the population of Porto Alegre and the Military Brigade, it was found that negative perceptions about the work of the police are among the youngest, the poorest. and the less educated:

Among those interviewed, 58.7% understand that military police officers are not violent and that they act respectfully towards people. Among the younger respondents – especially among those aged up to 24 years, but also among adults between 25 and 39 years old (Test carried out: Logistic Regression. Sig = 0.000) – there are more negative evaluations of the Military Brigade regarding police violence. Likewise, self-declared black people (black/brown) (Test performed: Logistic Regression. Sig = 0.031), with lower education (Test performed: Logistic Regression: Sig = 0.041) and with lower income (Test performed: Logistic Regression: Sig = 0.006) tend to evaluate the BM as being violent and disrespectful (HERNANN; ROLIM, 2018, p. 197).

Another point that drew attention in the interviews was the absence of paternal presence, some young people reported that they do not know or have no contact with their parents, which also appeared in the statements of CREAS professionals. The people who circulate in CREAS - when there is monitoring - are mothers and grandmothers and if there is such monitoring, according to professionals, young people are more likely to

comply with socio-educational measures.

When there is an apparent conflict in family relationships, there is an attempt by CREAS, during the fulfillment of the socio-educational measure, to alleviate it, such as the search for the recognition of paternity or meetings with family members:

We seek to strengthen ties between the youth and the family. For example, there is a socio-education student who really wants to find his mother again, however, she filed a complaint against him. So, we are starting the dialogue between her and him (female, professional at CREAS).

The Specialized Reference Centers for Social Assistance - CREAS are public social assistance units that “assist people who are at social risk or have had their rights violated”. On the other hand, the Social Assistance Reference Centers - CRAS offer Social Assistance services and aim to “strengthen the coexistence with the family and the community”.<sup>6</sup>

The difference between them is that CREAS aims to stop or re-signify any violation or risk of rights, while CRAS seeks to inform the population about their rights and to be the mediator so that the citizen can enjoy some benefit. This time, socio-educational measures in the open environment are the responsibility of the CREAs. For Alex Vidal (LAZZAROTTO et al. 2014, p. 207):

As part of the PSC, adolescents are allowed to live together in their community, but they are required to dedicate time to community work as a form of compensation for the infraction committed, as well as an opportunity to learn.

In theory, young people go to the measurement execution unit and perform some activity that enhances them as a human being and is beneficial to society, such as working in a library, a school or a print shop. In practice, in some CREAS visited, there were few vacancies in executing units, implying,



sometimes, that the measure is fulfilled in CREAS itself, which challenges the creativity of professionals.

## CONCLUSION

To envision different trajectories for young people, it is necessary to know their narratives, giving voice to their experiences, in addition to working in a network. In all the spaces we occupy, networking will be defended. It is necessary for the Judiciary to work together with Social Assistance in order for the socio-educational measure to be guided by the needs and realities of young people. That is, if the young person is at risk of moving along a certain street in Porto Alegre, it is useless for the measure to provide service to the community to have this street territorialized by the opposing faction as its execution. Perhaps, in this case, it is possible to build partnerships with higher education institutions to propose workshops and compliance with the measure in spaces considered “neutral”. It is essential, then, to work taking subjectivities into account.

Considering the results of this research, the lack of effectiveness in public policies in peripheral neighborhoods, given the lack of social and fundamental rights, brings to young people and residents daily problems of violations and violence. In addition, it causes society problems to be faced, such as the emergence, maintenance and expansion of criminal groups and, consequently, disputes over the domain of the illicit market that increase crime and insecurity.

Other historical problems to be faced are police violence and the fear that young people feel of the police. modify the *statu quo* of the police is not an easy task, especially in “strongly hierarchical realities, such as the Brazilian one”, as Jacqueline de Oliveira Muniz (2015) rightly asserted, but something needs to be done. In our reality, a partnership between the

Public Security Secretariat of the ERGS and the Public Security Observatory of PUCRS is proposed so that debates and actions within the scope of the Military Brigade, Civil Police, Porto Alegre Observatory and PUCRS can be carried out.

Finally, it was found that issues such as the phenomenon of “hypermasculinity” and profit are present in the narratives of young people, but, diverging a little from Alba Zaluar’s vision about the seduction of young people that results in the “culture of ostentation”, in this research, young people showed a willingness to make use of brands and products exposed in the mainstream media. However, this is not the only factor that leads a young person to participate in a criminal group. Speeches were seen about providing better lives for their mothers and grandmothers, in addition to the great feeling of belonging to their neighborhoods, which demonstrates the need to study geography, citizenship, urban law, such as housing issues, to make interfaces with Public Security. As Vera Regina Pereira de Andrade (2003) has demonstrated, the field of violence involves more citizenship than Criminal Law, it is necessary to take into account their neighborhoods, the processes of gentrification and the citizenship offered to propose public security policies of the type non-penalty.

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