

## It's a bomb! It's a shot! It's violence! Drug wars in the *Cracolândia paulistana*\*

Paola de Oliveira Camargo<sup>1</sup>

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9169-7602>

Michele Mandagará de Oliveira<sup>1</sup>

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7914-9339>

Duília Sadrês Carvalho Lemos<sup>1,2</sup>

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6561-1561>

Camila Irigonhe Ramos<sup>1,2</sup>

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8593-1397>

**Objective:** to analyze and promote reflection on the relationship between the police, the people and the territory where psychoactive substances are used. **Method:** an ethnography search was carried out from participant observation with the construction of a field diary. The participants of the observation were the people who use drugs in the scenes of use and/or who attend the Non-Governmental Organization participating in the study and the harm reduction agents of the same. The study was developed in 2018 in the city of São Paulo. For data analysis, the Interpretive Theory was used. **Results:** police violence is present daily in the lives of the people who are inside the flow of *Cracolândia*. Everyone suffers with the violent acts: the people who use drugs, the harm reduction agents, and even the professionals who are there to promote health and care. There are shots, bombs and repression, but even so, resistance persists. **Conclusion:** in the territory of *Cracolândia*, the war on drugs persists. This hygienist and separatist state policy makes people who use drugs increasingly excluded from society, without rights and without care.

**Descriptors:** Crack Cocaine; Violence; Public Policy; Disease Prevention; Health Promotion.

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<sup>1</sup> Universidade Federal de Pelotas, Faculdade de Enfermagem, Pelotas, RS, Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> Scholarship holder at the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES), Brazil.

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## **É bomba! É tiro! É violência! A guerra às drogas na Cracolândia paulistana**

**Objetivo:** analisar e promover uma reflexão sobre a relação estabelecida entre a polícia, as pessoas e o território onde são utilizadas substâncias psicoativas. **Métodos:** realizou-se uma pesquisa etnográfica a partir de observação participante com a construção de diário de campo. Os participantes da observação foram as pessoas que fazem uso de drogas nas cenas de uso e/ou que frequentam a Organização Não Governamental participante do estudo e os agentes redutores de danos da mesma. O estudo foi desenvolvido em 2018 na cidade de São Paulo. Para a análise dos dados, utilizou-se a Teoria Interpretativa. **Resultados:** a violência policial está presente diariamente na vida das pessoas que estão dentro do fluxo da Cracolândia. Todos sofrem com os atos violentos: as pessoas que usam drogas, os agentes redutores de danos e até mesmo os profissionais que estão lá para promover saúde e cuidado. Há tiros, bombas e repressão, mas, mesmo assim, a resistência persiste. **Conclusão:** no território da Cracolândia, persiste a guerra às drogas. Essa política de Estado higienista e separatista faz com que as pessoas que usam drogas estejam cada vez mais excluídas da sociedade, sem direitos e sem cuidado.

**Descritores:** Cocaína Crack; Violência; Políticas Públicas; Prevenção de Doenças; Promoção da Saúde.

## **¡Es bomba! ¡Es un tiro! ¡Es violencia! La guerra contra las drogas en la Cracolândia paulistana**

**Objetivo:** analizar y promover una reflexión sobre la relación que se establece entre la policía, las personas y el territorio donde se utilizan sustancias psicoactivas. **Método:** se realizó una investigación etnográfica con la observación participante e la construcción de un diario de campo. Los participantes de la observación fueron personas que consumen drogas en los escenarios de consumo y / o que asisten la Organización No Gubernamental y los agentes reductores de daños de la misma. El estudio se desarrolló en 2018 en el estado de Sao Paulo. Para el análisis de datos se utilizó la Teoría Interpretativa. **Resultados:** la violencia policial está presente a diario en la vida de las personas que se encuentran dentro del flujo de *Cracolândia*. Todo el mundo sufre actos violentos, las personas que están ahí consumiendo drogas, los agentes reductores de daños y otras personas que están ahí promoviendo la salud, la atención. Hay tiros, bombas y represión, pero sin embargo persevera la resistencia. **Conclusión:** en el territorio de *Cracolândia* persiste la guerra contra las drogas. Esta política de Estado higiénica y separatista hace que las personas que consumen drogas estén cada vez más al margen de la sociedad, sin derechos y sin cuidados.

**Descriptors:** Crack Cocaine; Violence; Public Policy; Disease Prevention; Health Promotion.

## Introduction

Social and economic policies are in continuous transformation. The abuse of psychoactive substances, on the national scene, has increasingly worried all spheres of society, becoming a public health and social problem that is aggravated by the inadequacy of policies that think of people who use drugs in an integral and humanized way, with respect and safety<sup>(1)</sup>.

Crack is considered a dangerous drug to the point of believing that it is the rock that consumes the person and not the person who consumes the rock. With these expressions, crack is increasingly used to justify the increase in violence and crime in almost all regions of the country and also around the world<sup>(2)</sup>. By the constant stigmatization, crack users end up choosing to consume the substance in group and in specific places, often as a form of protection from the prejudice they suffer<sup>(3-4)</sup>.

One of these places are the "cracolândias", derived from the term *Cracolândia*, which has gained such a stigmatized connotation that it has been extended from the central region of São Paulo to characterize any place where there is a group of people who use drugs. Many cities already denominate as "cracolândias" several spaces where street people or drug users are gathered, unhealthy places or places of extreme poverty. The "cracolândias" have become places permeated by stigma and the people who frequent them become, for society, invisible subjects from any other point of view than that of prejudice and dehumanization<sup>(5)</sup>.

In an official research on crack in the country, coordinated by Fiocruz, at least 29 large "cracolândias" spread over 17 Brazilian capitals were counted and disclosed<sup>(6)</sup>. *Cracolândia* is one of the largest psychotropic territories of São Paulo and Brazil in which the use of crack and other drugs occurs 24 hours a day and in an already territorialized manner<sup>(7)</sup>. Besides the issue of crack use, *Cracolândia* is also permeated by a history of misery and exclusion<sup>(6)</sup>. The state forces, represented here by the police, are in constant vigilance and repression.

In *Cracolândia*, the most diverse social actors and interests are found, which, tied together in this territoriality, will weave and establish relationships, building connections and connecting dots; a place of people in a situation of social exclusion that make up the army of disposable subjects to the system, apparently, however, necessary for its maintenance<sup>(8-9)</sup>. *Cracolândia* is described as a dropped and abandoned territory, far from the totally accepted, but permeated by relationships and notions of belonging<sup>(10)</sup>. In São Paulo, the most abusive crack users are called "nóias" (similar to "crackhead" in English) and are found in *Cracolândia*, more specifically in the middle of the "flow".

The flow is an agglomeration of people, an allusion to the positive context of fun and party, as it is the name given to the funk street dances in São Paulo. The flux would be the smaller space, a "part" of *Cracolândia*, the place where everything happens. Not only as a territorial cut, but the flux is constituted as a place of relations with and in the territory. It is the occupation of space where there are exchanges and relationships; more than a space of concentration of people, it is a tangle of knots and infinite interactions and movements<sup>(11)</sup>.

The state tries to deal with the issue of drug use through cleanup and repression. This does not make consumption stop or that there are no more users, it only increases the stigma and hinders their access to services. This war on drugs makes people who use drugs invisible and puts them even more at risk<sup>(12)</sup>. The Criminalization of Consumption Policy has not been able, until today, to achieve its objective, which is to reduce the supply and consumption of drugs, thus generating health risks to users, both physical and psychological, especially when they are surrounded by the world of trafficking and police actions.

Anti-drug policies had their bases in the dictatorial period. The process of opening drug policy in Brazil was slow and accompanied by arrangements in the macropolitical sphere that allowed authoritarian and dictatorial practices to continue, even within the Democratic State itself. The "war on drugs" is formed for innumerable reasons, from the economic failure of the 1980s, the unemployment that devastated the country, the scrapping of public education, the precarious education of children and young people, the increase in urban violence, the growth of slums and suburbs, the strong drug traffic and the formation of factions that confronted and clashed directly with the police, as well as the arms market and the increase in criminality<sup>(13)</sup>.

In this scenario, the "war on drugs" becomes an exercise of social control permeated by police and state power and violence. By focusing efforts to combat drug trafficking, the police assume the function of controlling the most vulnerable classes. The practices of the dictatorship, such as torture, for example, are exercised over the poorest population through extreme repression and power, with the justification of defending democracy and exterminating drug consumption in the country<sup>(13)</sup>.

From this, one can understand the impact of stigma on the identity of people who use drugs and, thus, reinforce how ineffective prohibitionist policies are<sup>(14-15)</sup>. In view of the above and the importance of the theme in question, the objective of this article is to analyze and reflect on the impact of police violence in the territory of *Cracolândia*.

## Method

This is an ethnographic study, qualitative in nature, developed from participant observation, field diary construction, and ethnographic interviews. "In anthropology, or in social anthropology anyway, what practitioners do is ethnography"<sup>(16)</sup>. To do ethnography is to perform a dense description of the fieldwork, escaping from the superficial analysis of the facts and diving into a complex and deep interpretation of everything that is produced, perceived and felt in the field.

The study was conducted in the central region of the city of São Paulo (SP), in the spaces in which a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) operates and that are frequented by people who use drugs and/or are on the streets. The participants were people who use drugs in the scenes of use and/or frequent the referred NGO and the harm reduction agents of the same. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, we identified the people who use crack by star names; the harm reduction agents, by non-binary nicknames and other social actors, present in the territory, had their names replaced by other fictitious names.

Data collection lasted six months, during the months of March to August 2018, totaling, on average, 60 days in the field and more than 300 hours of observation, which resulted in 450 pages of field diaries. The field diary becomes indispensable during observations to record what is observed and could be lost due to the density of information at the time of collection<sup>(17)</sup>.

The data analysis occurred concomitantly with the fieldwork through detailed reading of the field diary and the transcripts of the interviews conducted. The Interpretivism or Interpretive Theory written by Clifford Geertz was used. To perform an analysis based on the Interpretive Theory is not to interpret only the worldviews that the interviewees pass on to the researcher, because a good interpretation requires the essence of what is intended to be interpreted, whether it is a culture, a group, or a territory. In order to understand a culture or society, it is necessary to observe its existence and functioning. In order to interpret, it is essential to get close to what is real and observe the signs that are offered<sup>(16)</sup>.

From the Interpretive Theory, it is possible to perform an analysis that goes beyond the object of study, but that penetrates its body. This type of analysis facilitates the understanding of the signs and meanings, and, in order to write it, the researcher needs to be able to feel everything around him. It is necessary to experience and interpret the facts to, only afterwards, draw conclusions and interpretations, intertwining these issues. The forms of society are the substances of culture, and when one knows how individuals or groups live and

relate to each other, one is able to interpret their culture and meanings<sup>(16)</sup>.

In Interpretive Theory, it is not only the intersubjective encounter between researcher and research participants that must be considered, but also the context of this encounter and the process of constructing interpretations. To interpret is not only to decode the symbols shared by individuals, but to analyze them and reflect on them<sup>(16)</sup>.

The project was forwarded to *Plataforma Brasil* for the choice of the Ethics and Research Committee (REC) and approved with Opinion number 2,446,542 in the year 2018. The ethical principles considered for the elaboration of this thesis met Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council, of the Ministry of Health, on Research with Human Beings.

## Results

Police violence in the *Cracolândia* territory can be observed in the field diary excerpts from one of the most violent days experienced during the research, July 14, 2018. A day of bombs, shooting and death, evidence of the terror of police violence in this territory was July 14, 2018 when the following scene took place.

*A little after 5pm, we heard a noise, it was a muffled bang: Boom! Bete said, "It's a bomb!" Elias replied, "No, bomb is boom, boom, boom!" And before he could even finish speaking, five more bursts. They were bombs, and they were coming from the stream. The users were mostly in Largo Coração de Jesus and Barão de Piracicaba. Huddled together, scared. We found some very injured, open wounds from the shots (it could have happened to us), we talked to some people, who reported that the cops started the action for no reason. From outside, the population was shouting that there was a dead person, that it had been an omission of help. The residents were indignant, they were cursing the police, calling them murderers and saying that the man was dead. One of the girls from the collective went to the scene and asked for information; the death was confirmed. The scene: three policemen standing next to the body, a fire truck arrives, rolls up the body and takes it away. The truck drove away with the body of a person who, probably, will not be missed by society, because, for the State, they were just one more "nóia" (Field Diary).*

The next observation describes a moment of resistance of a user before the police cordon, denouncing, in his own way, the violence he suffers daily.

*The user, then, simply turned around and continued shouting in front of the Metropolitan Civil Guard (MCG) (who, at that moment, was still making the human cordon to close the street). Earlier, there was also another user, who, shirtless and with a bottle of "Corote" in his hand, stayed for more than half an hour shouting and doing body acts in front of the police cars and police officers. Many times, these attitudes are the users' form of resistance to deal with the police oppression they face*

*daily. Standing there with their chests open, facing those police officers, may be the only way to vent all the violence they suffer in their daily lives. The relationship between police and flow is one of violence on the part of law enforcement agencies and resistance on the part of users (Field Diary).*

The next excerpt describes the reality of police repression even toward professionals that work in the logic of harm reduction. On this day, the researchers were questioned and questioned twice by the municipal guards that do “the security” of the territory. For them, according to the account below, the care based on Harm Reduction was an apology to drugs.

*In fact, there were two approaches: first, a MCG, who had taken pictures of us, went to talk to Ka and find out what we were distributing, also taking pictures of the supplies. I even observed this moment, it caught my attention when I noticed that Ka was talking to a policeman. Bê and I were together with the users, so it was not possible, at that moment, to know exactly what was going on, I could only observe that the policeman was holding a cell phone in his hand, while Ka was showing the supplies that were in the cartridge. Later, another MCG approached the three of us, right there in the middle of the flow, to ask what we were delivering to the users. The three of us together (me, Bê and Ka) answered that they were condoms, leaflets, cocoa butter and silicone cigarette holders. When we talked about the bedpipes, that started the discussion (it wasn't discussion in the sense of a fight, but of actually discussing public policies and debating about the issue). The MCG said that we couldn't distribute the chewing gum bottles, that condoms, okay, were to protect against diseases and pregnancy, that even cocoa butter, although they didn't deserve it, was also a form of protection, but that the chewing gum bottles were illegal, it was an apology for drugs. He said that they had arrested a guy a few days ago who was selling antenna to make a pipe, and that giving out chewing tobacco was like the same situation (he clearly meant that we could be arrested) (Field Diary).*

There is not much progress in relation to the dichotomy between health and security/justice, because they are spheres that prioritize and defend different ideals in relation to drug use and care for users, which results in many obstacles and setbacks in the implementation of public policies aimed at this population. It is necessary to make a reflection that walks this side of the duality between care and violence. Both are professionals, reducers and police. What makes one so different from the other? Why is it that one is willing to enter the territory and take care/protect, and the other remains on the sidelines oppressing and hurting?

Other social actors, present in the territory, also suffer from police violence, especially those who choose to be on the inside of the flow, that is, on the side of the users. The following account describes a day in

the field when we witnessed the “bread brother” being repressed by the police. Even religion is not respected. If it is defending the flow, the police forces pass like bombs (literally) over everyone who is on the side of care and humanization. In the following excerpt, which describes a situation that occurred in the middle of the *Festa Junina* (traditional celebration in Brazil during the month of June) promoted by the professionals and activists of the territory, it was observed, once again, the gratuitous violence that was witnessed daily during the whole period in the field. The “bread brother” is a religious man who has been working for many years in the region distributing food, also offering his listening and care to people who use drugs and/or are on the streets in that territory.

*The bread brother asked for Ju the speaker and went off shouting his prayers. I commented that the guards would soon get upset, since they had argued with him earlier and he was somehow provoking them by shouting even louder with the speaker. Ju and Lu said no, that he was a pastor and that, at least him, the guards should respect. I said that I doubted it very much and it didn't take long for the same guard, who came to ask us to leave during the cleaning, to ask us to remove the pastor's loudspeaker. I just looked at the kids and shook my head, because, really, the police in that territory are totally oppressive. There is no way to describe it any other way: they don't respect the health professionals, the social workers, the religious teams, militancy and anyone who goes there to stand up for the rights of the users. One girl arrived asking the pastor for bread, who gave us back the speaker and left with her shouting in the direction of the flow, saying that yes, there was bread, there was God and that nobody would shut him up and stop him from doing his work (Field Diary).*

The next observations will describe and analyze the dynamics of cleaning, the “rapa” and the impact of this sanitation and repression on the flow and care of users. Urban cleaning in the city of São Paulo, at the time of data collection, was performed by an outsourced company that worked for the city government. In the *Cracolândia* region, this moment was accompanied by the Metropolitan Civil Guard (MCG), which organized all the dynamics of cleaning, closing and opening streets in the territory. In the excerpt below, it is described the first day in the field in which it was possible to follow the exact moment in which the cleaning of the streets happened, followed by police violence and oppression.

*Today I was able to follow all the dynamics of the cleaning, which I had not seen before. The cleaning happens four times a day, at 7am, 10am, 2pm and midnight. Gradually, everyone who is in the Cachimbo square goes to the other block of Helvétia, between Dino Bueno and Barão de Piracicaba. Some pass by alone, others in groups (which is rarer), others, carrying bags and purses on their backs, pulling mats or cloths with bags and suitcases on top, others, carrying market carts, pulling old*

*suitcases, carrying boxes and crates. They make this crossing carrying everything they own, be it clothes, food, what they use to build their shacks, the objects they sell to save money. It's a very peculiar dynamic: for about an hour, they move from the Cachimbo square and the Recomeço block (where we were) to the other block so that the cleaning truck and the garbage collectors can sweep and clean with water jets. Then they pass by the police and crowd to the other block where the flow stays until the cleaning is finished. Few people stay in the Recomeço block and in the Cachimbo square there is no one left. Those who insist on staying are removed by the MCG so that the cleaning can take place. It is a bizarre sanitation dynamic in the XXI century that occurs four times a day, and exactly at these times (especially at 7am and midnight) that the biggest and most violent police actions occur, exactly when there is no one outside to watch, film, report. The users are already used to it and act naturally: most of them move on their own from one block to another when the cleaning truck approaches. This routine is already part of their lives, of the territory's daily life, and, like trained robots, they slowly move and form another flow in the block ahead. It was during this walk that many of them stopped where the team was, got the materials and, especially, took a drink of water. One of the MCG policemen came up to us asking how long we would be there. Lu answered that until the end of the afternoon. The guard then said that it was better for us to leave that place and go somewhere else. Marcelo said no, that we would stay there to pick up the cleaning. The guard retorted saying that the flow could turn and we would be left. Lu said he was grateful for the concern, but that we would stay there and there we stayed. (Field Diary).*

## Discussion

Security and public health policies often fail to comprehensively address the care of people who use psychoactive substances. Moreover, illicit drugs, especially crack, are often associated with something bad, dirty and evil. These facts, associated with the hygienist culture, make spaces like *Cracolândia* and the people who go there be seen as something that must be "cleaned", thus becoming socially accepted. For this to happen, force is used: police violence.

*Cracolândia* is configured as a place where users strengthen affective and social ties, as well as protection and care. The people who are there, in a way, maintain an affective relationship with the territory, a relationship of belonging to the place<sup>(18)</sup>. The region known as *Cracolândia Paulista* is located near two train stations and the old bus station in São Paulo. Surrounded by very low cost hotels, the region and its surroundings receive a large flow of people who use the suburban trains, becoming known by many as a territory of psychotropic use. Many people who use drugs and go there do not settle in the area and find themselves on the streets, becoming a transit space for many users and other social

actors. *Cracolândia* is a public space in almost all its extension. The people who are there perform most of their tasks on the street, exposed to whoever passes by, reinforcing, in a way, the stigma of the region as a unique identity of drug use<sup>(10,19)</sup>.

In 1879, the *Luz* neighborhood emerged as a residential area in order to establish the São Paulo coffee elite in that region. However, with the coffee crisis, in 1929, and the urban growth that occurred at the time, the place also began to be inhabited by low-income people<sup>(6-20)</sup>. In 1953, the area is considered to be of moral degradation and receives the first intervention from the government, at the time led by Lucas Nogueira Garcez. In 1961, the old bus station is inaugurated in the region and, already at that time, there was no longer any identity of the area as aristocratic and bourgeois. In 1982, with the displacement of the bus station to another area, the marginalization in the region became stronger and stronger<sup>(20)</sup>.

Since then, many actions have been persistently carried out by the city government to put an end to the area as a place for drug consumption. Since the late 1980s, several municipal policies have been created with the focus of transforming *Bairro da Luz* into a cultural area. Historic buildings have been restored, cultural institutions opened, theaters inaugurated, among other actions, as a way to valorize the area and bring back the middle and upper class population to circulate in the region<sup>(10-11)</sup>.

These revitalization, sanitation, and removal actions still occur, year after year. Demolitions and closing of businesses and hotels also occurred during other researches and are reported in other works<sup>(18,21)</sup>. During data collection for this research, in the year 2018, it was possible to follow one more of the State's tireless attempts to remove everything and everyone that is undesirable from the region, always with a greater and more profitable goal for the Government and private society. Now, the ball of the moment was the construction of a unit of the Pérola Byington Hospital, even if it cost the rights to housing and dignity of countless families. One of the projects carried out in the region, in 2005, by the mayor José Serra and called "Nova Luz", was based on a hygienist and aristocratic thought and triggered a series of violent actions and repressive interventions against the people who lived and circulated in that region. One of these actions was "Operation Clean". In a truculent way, the action aimed to expel people who used drugs from the streets, to close the hotels in the region, and to interdict bars and places frequented by the population. These actions would justify an initiative of urban requalification of that territory. However, even with the attempt of expulsion and control, people kept resisting, just changing their

circuits of use and their circulation in the streets, moving to other blocks, but without leaving the region<sup>(10,19,21)</sup>.

In 2008, another major revitalization action occurs. Public agencies were transferred to the region and tax incentives were offered to companies that wanted to invest in the area, in an attempt to clean up the area and encourage new investors. Buildings where hotels were located were demolished, and the City Hall revitalization showed, more and more, its hygienist face. However, even with the management claiming the end of *Cracolândia*, people continued in the territory, resisting the State and proving that *Cracolândia* is itinerant and will not end easily, because it will be wherever there are people who constitute themselves as members of this territory. *Cracolândia* is an itinerant territory, which shifts according to the actions of repression and interventions exercised, as well as the dynamics of internal relations themselves<sup>(11,19)</sup>.

In 2009, other actions were instituted in the region, such as the "Centro Legal Integrated Action", which followed the same principles of Operation Clean and, like the previous one, did not achieve the expected results<sup>(21-22)</sup>. In January 2012, there was another major state action, called "Operation Suffocation". Visibly, it did not aim to care for people who used drugs, but the appropriation of the territory by the public power through another violent and repressive intervention<sup>(6)</sup>. This new attempt by the state to stop the flow of drug use in the region, using extreme police force to expel people who used drugs from that territory, gained national notoriety at the time, especially for the debate about compulsory internment. But, again, this whole policy permeated by repression and lack of dialogue did not achieve the results expected by the state agencies involved<sup>(18-19,21)</sup>.

The Regional Medical Council of the State of São Paulo (2012) pointed out that in most of the interventions, especially the one carried out in 2012, violence against the population is the flagship of the actions and, however, reduces the complexity of the theme to strictly a public safety and police issue, not taking into account the plurality that involves the place and the people who circulate in it. Coincidentally, also in January, but the following year, again, there were more actions permeated by the lack of human rights towards people who used drugs in the region, especially, because it dealt with issues involving compulsory internment, which gained space in the media and generated a big clash between different parts of the population, which supported or repudiated such interventions<sup>(18)</sup>.

Many projects, both municipal and state, were put into practice over the years, but *Cracolândia*, constituted as a kind of itinerant territory, was moving around the adjacencies. Many times, changing blocks or perimeters,

depending on the type of intervention or repression exerted, besides its own internal dynamics and, with this, it has always remained "alive" and growing in the streets of downtown São Paulo. *Cracolândia* may be in constant migration and thus resurface at any time and in any location in the region<sup>(20)</sup>. The flow can be compared to a Phoenix due to its capacity for strength and recomposition. While the data collection for this study was taking place, it was possible to follow one of the changes, when the flow migrated from one block to another, due to the construction of the sewage system of the housing buildings that were erected in Helvétia with Dino Bueno.

As it is possible to see, *Cracolândia* is repeatedly the state object of numerous attempts at urban and social reform. *Cracolândia* continues to be the stage of confrontation between different social agents, with a strong appeal from the State to control people who use drugs whose consumption is already territorialized, combined with political issues and the large real estate speculation in the region<sup>(6,11)</sup>.

Bloodshed has gained strength in state policies. In a war, there is never any concern for the uniqueness of the individual, and in the war on drugs this is no different. In every war, the other is reduced to an object that can be isolated, tortured, imprisoned<sup>(5)</sup>. *Cracolândia* lives an eternal construction and reconstruction, whether of affective ties or of its physical and geographical form. The people who live there constantly see their lives destroyed by social repression. They live in an eternal movement of starting over, which shows the resistance of that population that sees its territory occupied, all the time, by police and state actions through an inhumane and hygienic policy.

The authoritarian and violent relationship generates a resistance from those who suffer the abuses: these are the exchanges that keep happening. For a long time and until today, these people are in a power game between Criminology and Psychiatry, sometimes incarcerated in prison, sometimes in psychiatric hospitals, but always submitted to the power of the State/Justice/Security/Medicine through discipline and normalization. The daily struggle of people who use drugs, as well as the actions of the Damage Reduction Program (DRP), is for the users to effectively stop being considered as sick people in need of cure and to be seen as people who need care<sup>(23)</sup>.

Based on culture, the way in which the other subjects will be treated is discussed. If, in a certain culture, the form of treatment is guided by rivalry, if the other is not treated as a subject in law, but as an object, in a sub-human situation, the discourse generated will be one of hate. This generates thousands of deaths caused, daily, by the war on drugs and by the

prohibitionist policy, which generates practices aimed only at the scope of justice and security, devaluing care. When we think of a war in which we are in a battlefield, what we want is to defeat the enemy and, for this, the army arms itself for defense and attack<sup>(5)</sup>.

Prison functions as a filter, with political and economic purposes, serving to isolate and confine undesirable people from the social environment<sup>(24)</sup>. The police are used, in the territory, as the main figure to materialize this strategy of cleaning and exclusion. These mechanisms represent the hygienist policy, which contaminates the view of society and gives the false impression that there are no other forms of care. The State deals with the issue of drug use through cleansing and repression. This does not make consumption stop or that there are no more users, it only increases the stigma and hinders their access to services. This war makes people who use drugs invisible and puts them even more at risk<sup>(11)</sup>.

Police repression is present in *Cracolândia* on a daily basis. The presence of security, both public and private, is part of everyday life in the area. Police officers are present every day to watch the people who use drugs and control the territory. This reflects in the large circulation and transit of this population in the region, forced to move from street to street, block to block, corner to corner, in an attempt to escape from the view and actions of the police<sup>(11,25)</sup>.

*Cracolândia*, therefore, contrary to what many people think, is not a place where the State is absent; on the contrary, it is present, helping or repressing, punishing or caring, letting die or giving life opportunities, depending on the way it decides to act and the people who are behind the action. An example are the two state spheres most present in the scene: public security, represented by repression, and medical assistance, represented by health. Far from walking together, they base their actions on opposing ideas and have their relationships permeated by disagreements and disagreements, because they think and act totally differently within the territory and in the way of thinking of the people who are part of it<sup>(10)</sup>.

Even today, Damage Reduction reduction is criticized by some segments of society, like the Catholic Church and the police, for example. Both see Harm Reduction from the point of view of stimulating drug use and as a service that defends users and dealers. They don't understand the complexity of the actions that are aimed at the health of these people and the reduction of the damages caused by the use or abuse of drugs, that guarantee the right to health, which is already guaranteed by the Federal Constitution. Many obstacles in the implementation of Damage Reduction actions were and are, until today, due to police repression, that

does not know the meaning and importance of the work and still believes that the treatment for people who use drugs should be based on moral judgments, violence, prejudice, intolerance, abstinence, hospitalization, and social exclusion<sup>(25-26)</sup>.

It is not new that the State tries to extinguish the *Cracolândia* scene. As previously reported, in almost every year, major police and/or assistance operations take place, aiming, in particular, to draw society's attention, through the mainstream media, that the State is trying to do something to control the situation. However, the results of the operations are non-existent, since everything goes back to the way it was before. What occurs is only a movement of people who frequent the territory, but not the effective removal of them from the region<sup>(10)</sup>.

During a field research in the streets of downtown São Paulo, one could notice several users scattered around and many police officers and cars around. This fact corroborates the thesis that police repression, constant in that territory, causes a certain change in the dynamics of users occupying the spaces, often forcing them to move around the region, without settling in one place. By reinforcing, again, that *Cracolândia* is where people are, it exists not only as a geographical space, but as the world of those individuals and it will go wherever they go<sup>(21)</sup>.

Police action in the *Cracolândia* region and at the scenes of use is constant, not only for the purpose of crime repression, but also with the goal of organizing and regulating the drug-using population or those living on the streets, who live or are in that territory. The presence of the police force has always been strong in the region, aiming to destabilize the activity of users and trying to create a movement that will result in their departure. However, on the other hand, these actions are not effective, since there are no strategies for treatment and care of this population. The issue of hygienization has always remained strong for the State, even though it is already proving to be as ineffective as the lack of Public Policy actions for the care and welcoming of this population<sup>(25-26)</sup>.

The cleaning that occurs daily in the flow is a result of this policy of sanitization and invisibility of the people who remain resisting from the inside. The cleaning is the responsibility of the City Hall and is done by an outsourced company. Typically, they occur three to four times a day, in the morning, afternoon and evening. The presence of MCG in the territory is justified as a way to protect the professionals in the process of cleaning the streets, however, it is known that this is not what the police are doing 24 hours a day in the territory.

The population present in *Cracolândia* draws a big imaginary line between the figure of the security agent

and the health agent, precisely because of the way they are treated. Everything they experience in the hands of public or private security agents makes the people who circulate in that territory have an image of security as threatening, that is not there to care, only to punish. Therefore, for the users, the police is a sphere that does not walk on the same side as them, but walks on the opposite side. Besides security, another public service that is strong and constant on the site is health. However, many times, the state uses public health actions to justify hygienist interventions<sup>(10)</sup>.

Most of the time, the police do not offer solutions to the vulnerability of the territory and the people in it, they only reinforce even more the urban violence, abusing aggressiveness and violence and, many times, infringing the human and citizenship rights of that population<sup>(10)</sup>.

*Cracolândia* and drug scenes are ideal places for public security managers to exercise the power that has historically been granted to them, justifying the violent approaches, arrests and human rights violations that occur in the actions carried out<sup>(10)</sup>. All these truculent and repressive actions reinforce the stigma that is held about people who use drugs as criminals who deserve to be treated inhumanely. Repressive and violent interventions are an attempt to supply the need for social control and authority present in the history of the public security sphere.

Police repression only reinforces the lack of care and shelter policies and actions<sup>(26)</sup>. It is known that there is a gratuitous police force against the population of *Cracolândia*, externalizing an unnecessary tyranny, as if the people of that place deserve to be humiliated by the condition in which they live and this goes beyond the role of the State, which should be to maintain public order, becoming an instrument of power<sup>(10)</sup>.

This study, despite addressing the problem of police violence in depth, through an ethnography, focuses on a single space, and thus cannot be generalized. However, this limitation does not reduce the importance of the results and of the discussion about the theme of police violence, observed and problematized by those who suffer from it and not by those who produce, manage and encourage it.

### Final considerations

Police violence was one of the most impacting issues that made the research heavier and more painful. The war instated in the territory of *Cracolândia* is based on a hygienist policy, it wants to remove undesirable bodies, modify and mold a culture and it is important to think about this relationship established between the flow and the force of the State. Exchange relationships do not only occur in a positive way, there is also giving

for good and for evil. The gifts and the gifting go beyond just positive relationships, but must be interpreted according to the relationships that are established, whether these are relationships of peace or of war. Violence is a vertical and authoritarian relationship in which exchanges take place. The police throw bombs and, in exchange, you have death and suffering.

The "war on drugs" gained strength in the 80s for countless reasons. From economic failure, unemployment, the decay of public education, the increase in urban violence, to the growth of slums and peripheries. In this scenario, in which we still live, the "war on drugs" failed, serving as an exercise of social control permeated by police and state power and violence. By focusing efforts to combat drug trafficking, the police assume the function of controlling the most vulnerable classes.

In this sense, it is necessary to problematize and deepen the relations established between the State and the population that uses psychoactive substances in spaces shared by different people, aiming, in the end, to question and propose a revision of the current policies for security and fight against drugs, which are not effective in the care and security of Brazilians.

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## Author's Contribution

**Study concept and design:** Paola de Oliveira Camargo, Michele Madagará de Oliveira. **Obtaining data:** Paola de Oliveira Camargo. **Data analysis and interpretation:** Paola de Oliveira Camargo, Michele Madagará de Oliveira, Duília Sedrês Carvalho Lemos, Camila Irigónhé Ramos. **Drafting the manuscript:** Paola de Oliveira Camargo, Michele Madagará de Oliveira, Duília Sedrês Carvalho Lemos, Camila Irigónhé Ramos. **Critical review of the manuscript as to its relevant intellectual content:** Paola de Oliveira Camargo, Michele Madagará de Oliveira, Duília Sedrês Carvalho Lemos, Camila Irigónhé Ramos.

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Corresponding Author:  
Duilia Sadrês Carvalho Lemos  
E-mail: [duilia.carvalho@gmail.com](mailto:duilia.carvalho@gmail.com)  
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6561-1561>

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