Usage of "Luz" and "cracolândia": fieldwork of spatial practices[1]

Usos da "Luz" e da "cracolândia": etnografia de práticas espaciais

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Abstract

Introduction: Everyone, in Brazil, has had heard of "cracolândia", in São Paulo. It is an inexhaustible source of news, stories and panic. The most famous crack place in the country is considered a place that should be avoided, a place of danger. And a place of great attraction. Thinking about it demands creativity and seriousness. Objectives: Contrary to alarmist views, in this text, this place will be described through its relationship with its surroundings, especially the neighborhood of Luz, avoiding approaches that treat such spaces as impenetrable boundaries, physically and, what is worse, morally isolated. Methodology: The large number of people who circulate through there, as well as the different uses and spatial practices, will be highlighted ethnographically. Results: this ethnography intends to give visibility to the disputes, interactions and connections that produce a city and contributes to an accurate view of this place.
Keywords: Crack; Cracrolandia; Luz; Urban Ethnography.

Resumo

Introdução: Não há quem, no Brasil, não tenho ouvido falar da "cracolândia" paulistana. Ela é fonte inesgotável de notícias, de histórias e de pânico. A mais famosa territorialidade de uso de crack do país é considerada lugar que se deve evitar, lugar de perigo, lugar degradado. Também de degredo. E, por isso mesmo e em vários aspectos, lugar de grande atração. Pensar sobre ela exige criatividade e rigor. **Objetivos:** Numa direção contrária às visões alarmistas, esta territorialidade será descrita a partir da sua relação com o entorno, notadamente o bairro da Luz, afastando-se de abordagens que tomam tais espaços como fronteiras impenetráveis, isoladas fisicamente e, pior, moralmente. **Procedimentos Metodológicos:** Serão destacadas etnograficamente a grande quantidade de pessoas que por ali circula, bem como os distintos usos e práticas espaciais observados. **Resultados:** com esta etnografia, pretende-se conferir visibilidade às disputas, interações e conexões que fazem uma cidade e contribuir para uma visão acurada desta territorialidade.

Palavras-chave: Crack; Cracolândia; Luz; Etnografia urbana.

In the É de Lei[2] headquarters they lent me a yellow t-shirt. Then we left, two redutores de danos (Social Workers specializing in assisting individuals with drug problems) and I, heading to "cracolândia", in São Paulo. It was a Friday, around 3pm, immediately after Brazil had been beaten by Holland in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Av. São João, Av. Rio Branco, Av. Duque de Caxias, we were there.

Near the fire brigade headquarters, there was a large number of people hanging around. Crack users, passersby, people outside a bar, still talking about losing the match. In rua Dino Bueno alone, there were thirty people using drugs, standing up, as small pipes had been installed by business owners in the street constantly dripped water, discouraging people from gathering on the sidewalks, which were wet.

A couple arguing attracted my attention. They were young, neither of them older than 20. When they saw me, and before I had had time to introduce myself, the boy said to his girlfriend: "stay and talk to her. She comes here every day'. And they squatted down, near me. It was also her first time in that place, she told me she came looking for her boyfriend as they had agreed that he would enter a treatment center that day. He agreed to go but, first, he needed to collect some money owed to him. That was why they were arguing; she wanted to get out of there and he, before leaving, needed to sort out the affair. That was when he asked me to stay close to her until he came back with the money.

While we waited, we talked a lot. She was slim and dark, wearing a short red top that showed her abdomen and pierced belly button; tight jeans and flat sandals completed the look. Her black hair was artificially straightened and styled with straighteners. She seemed quite vain. I said that she was very pretty and, before I could say anything else, she hurried to say that she did not use drugs: "just him". Within seconds, she began to complain about her boyfriend, saying that she couldn't take it anymore, seeing him in that situation: "He was handsome, hardworking, we lived together for a year at the back

2 A Non Governmental Organization specializing in caring for drug users, as well as in carrying out activities aimed at reducing damage in the area of São Paulo known as "cracolândia". The NGO mediated all of my access to the area and, from this insert, is where this report is located.

of his mother's house, we planned to get married. Suddenly he got involved in this, and he disappeared".

She told me how she was there with his mother, who was waiting in the Praça Princesa Isabel. She said that she wouldn't let her mother in law go there, as she was sure to become upset. The two of them had come from Santos, where they lived, to find him and start treatment. He soon returned, thanked me for staying with her and said he was going to get clean because he loved her. He had some money in his hand, they said goodbye and left.

The social workers also needed to move on; we had been in that one place more than half an hour. I told one of them what had happened and he said he had heard the conversation and had thought about talking to the girl about the Psychosocial Care Center, where there was an open regime, but that they seemed so set on the idea of a closed treatment regime that he decided not to suggest it.

We walked halfway around the block, to the parallel street. Again, there were a lot of people, probably around fifty. Some were standing, others crouching; the "showers" there weren't working. With so many people, I became confused, I didn't know where to look. I could only think that this confusing and heterogeneous dynamic, together with the large number of people, made it pointless to try to understand that place. I started to ask myself, seriously, why I was getting myself involved in this.

But any chance of linking thoughts together was worthless given the quantity of situations occurring. A boy came up with a used pair of Nike training shoes, trying to exchange them; he was offered a lump of crack costing R$1.50; he agreed to it. Another girl went by, asking for a drag for one real; a guy carrying a pair of flipflops in his hand, taking faltering steps on the hot asphalt, looked at me and said he couldn't walk barefoot on that floor; he gave up trying to exchange his flipflops.

In the middle of all this, while we were distributing the supplies, we were observed by a man who later came up and introduced himself as Alemão (German). He came up to us saying he had been smoking crack "ever since crack had been invented", but he was fine and, indicating others passing by, commented that he was not like them, he didn't have that paranoia. He was wearing a shirt, shorts and training shoes, with lots of rings, bracelets and necklaces, and a cap. To reaffirm he was different from the rest, he showed off his pipe, made of copper, the mouthpiece of which had a small strainer "to filter". It was, in fact, a very well-constructed utensil. It had probably been bought in a nearby construction material store for around seventeen reais. He was also proud he had never shared it with anyone. The social workers told him that copper was one of the best materials to make pipes; it does not poison the user, like aluminum; it can stand the heat, in contrast to plastic; and it doesn't break, like glass. But the disadvantage is that it is more expensive. Alemão listened attentively and told us the story of the evolution of the paraphernalia he had used: before, he used to use a tin can, then a plastic cup, followed by a yoghurt pot, then a lighter, after that, a PVC pipe, then an aluminum and now a copper pipe. He became more comfortable, and affirmed once again that he was not "an addict": "I'm here for the money". He also told us that he had spent six years in prison, but had not smoked crack while inside.

Another man came over and introduced himself: "I'm Rodrigo, another addict". He told us he attended "NA" (Narcotics anonymous) meetings and had not used for a year and forty days. He was very well dressed. Work shirt tucked into his suit trousers, shoes; he was holding a briefcase. Again, he led us to understand that his business was selling. He told us he had already undergone the RDD regime[3] and that he had been in Carandiru prison on the day of the massacre, giving details of the number of people killed: "It's not something I like to remember". He also told us he had been in the army for four years beforebecoming involved in crime. In the army, he had been a gunsmith; he tried to turn the conversation to firearms, but my ignorance on this topic meant we didn't get very far.

I was talking to Rodrigo seated under the eaves of an apartment, the door of which opened directly onto the street. While we were talking, the police

3 RDD - Regime Disciplinar Diferenciado- Differentiated Disciplinary Regime which, as noted by Juliana Carlos (2011), has characteristics of regimes of exception and instruments which are in direct conflict with the Federal Constitution and the 1984 Criminal sentencing Act.

appeared twice; they passed by in a car, pointed their revolvers, asked a man to stop, searched him and let him go. When they arrived, everyone in the street dispersed, the street emptied, but, within a few minutes, they all returned.
(Fieldwork Diary, 02/07/2010).

That was the report of my first trip to the region which was become known as "cracolândia" (crackland), located around the Luz neighborhood in São Paulo. I left conversing with the social workers on the differences and similarities I had experienced and noticed in previous research in other cities. Understanding almost nothing, there was only one thing to say: "It's too much!" We arrived back at the NGO headquarters around 6pm. I stored the material used, said goodbye to the workers and walked to São Bento metro station. From there to Tietê bus station, heading back to Campinas, where I live. On the bus, I was overcome by extreme tiredness. I was unable to think. I slept the whole journey.

The tiredness was real. One single trip to the São Paulo "cracolândia", the most famous crack place in the country, gave a small sample of the quantity of situations which occurred in a short space of time, as well as the diverse types of associations and interaction which mark the everyday life of these users: negotiations, sometimes hostile, sometimes friendly, with local businesses, harassment by the authorities, heterogeneity of crack users and dealers (who are easily confused), tense co-existence with the various police forces (civil, military, metropolitan and even private security firms).

The above are just a short list of the series of other social actors who, each in their own way, also haunt, surround and constitute the entire region. The list continues: local residents, residents from the surrounding area and pensions, retailers and regulars of the district, passersby, workers, members of the press, students and researchers carrying out the most diverse assignments (myself included), members of a variety of religious institutions, of the prefecture, of civil residents' and business associations, non-governmental organizations, groups of artists and their thousand and one interventions, public health services, PCC[4], political and electoral interests, real estate builders, international investors.

So many characters and interests involved led Raupp and Adorno (2011) to think of the region as a "force field", as what happens there involves conflicts which are so interlinked and, at the same time, so independent and spontaneous that they defy any attempt to understand them. No wonder the effort of making sense of it requires so much energy, even physical energy – and this is, literally, tiring.

It is no exaggeration to say that it is impossible to understand all of the interactions existing in that place. It is equally impractical to try to decide which of these interaction is the most relevant to characterizing it. They are so multiple, so diverse and heterogeneous, serve so many interests that it is difficult to pinpoint just one. Many other studies would be needed for such an undertaking.

Thus, in a very modest way, respecting the limits of my ethnography and the confrontation and dialogue between it and between what can be gleaned from newspapers, reports and other academic studies, I chose, in this text, to discuss the history and dynamics of this place, highlighting the large quantity of individuals who circulating around there (and, therefore, constitute it), as well as the distinct uses, disputes and appropriations which can be made of this space.

Thus, the text is divided into two parts. The first contextualizes "cracolândia" in historical and spatial terms, which is to say, on the one hand, it reformulates issues regarding the perennial process of itinerant occupation and, on the other, places it within a wider scene, the Luz neighborhood which, like "cracolândia" is also composed of many social actors and urban facilities, as well as being equally delineated by fairly fluid boundaries. In both cases, the existing literature will be extensively used.

In the second part, I present the various modes in which the circumscribed region known as "cracolândia" is appropriated, based essentially on

4 Acronym for the Primeiro Comando da Capital, a group of prisoners, the formation of which, according to Karina Biondi (2010), can only be understood in the context of political measures taken by the government of the state of São Paulo after what became known as the Carandiru Massacre in 1992; among them, the sharp increase in the prison population in the state of São Paulo and in the construction of prisons in cities in the interior or regions distant from the greater São Paulo area.

ethnographic data collected between 2010 and 2011, together with crack users, mediated by the É de Lei NGO. More specifically, with this topic, I aim to show how the large number of social actors in an urban area which is fairly visible (and seen), the strategic scene of countless feuds, shapes the dynamics of consumption.

Following these two directions, with this article I propose that, instead of thinking of places where crack is consumed as excluded from urban dynamics or from its forms of government, the scene highlighted, when observed closely, seems to tell us that what goes on there is exactly the opposite. In other words, that it is in the most precarious and deprecated places that the city and life is notable, confrontations and atrocities occurring in an "inexhaustible richness of varieties" (Benjamin, 2000).

Luz, "cracolândia": history of use and interactions

To continue with the description, it is first necessary to take a step back and remind the reader that occupation of this space is nothing new. From the beginning of the 1990s there are records of the center of São Paulo, especially the Luz neighborhood, attracting concentrations of crack users (Silva, 2000; Mingardi and Goulart, 2001). This date is around the same time as the appearance of the first records of the drug in Brazil which, however, interestingly, had arrived first in the East Zone of the city (especially in the São Mateus neighborhood then, later, in the Tiradentes and Itaquera regions of the city). According to Uchoa, in *O caminho das pedras (*the path of the rocks*)*,

> The São Mateus neighborhood, in the East Zone, with three populous districts, [...] became known as the entry point for crack in the city. From 1989 onwards, the word *crack* came to be a type of synonym for the neighborhood (Uchoa, 1996, p. 103).

There is no way to verify the truth of Uchoa's journalistic records. When they became part of the book, they became important as they figured in the narrative of the entry and the route of the drug in the city and in Brazil. However, this narrative becomes of interest because it leads us to ask, even if the response is unobtainable, about the process through which as small part of the central region of a major Brazilian city became nationally known as a "crack land" - "cracolândia". It moved from the outskirts into the center and territorialized it, and the effects and consequences of this public appearance are undeniable.

I would go as far as to say that there is no one, in Brazil, who has not heard of "cracolândia". It is, now, the unquenchable source of news and stories and, also, if panic. It has inspired dance, photography, artistic interventions, videos, TV programs, sites, comics and missionary or care placements. It is a place to be avoided, a place of danger and degradation. And also of exile. It is for exactly these reasons, in many ways, a place that exerts great attraction.

However, as has been said, it was not always this way. At first, when people spoke of "cracolândia" it was, above all, as a "stronghold of crack sales" (Uchoa, 1996, p. 73); later it became the least likely place in São Paulo for crack to be found. Selma Silva's report shows that there was a time in which there was a small number of individuals on the streets using crack after a 1997 police operation[5]:

> Currently, after the police operation which began at the end of 1997, and other which followed, there was a lower presence of this population [*crack* users] in the region [of "cracolândia"]. There was some circulation, but very small compared to what it was like before. Today, seeking and using it occurs within the hotels in nearby streets (Silva, 2000, p. 45).

Years later, these users roamed the streets and defied all control, leading to a series of public and private attempts to manage, intervene, help, incriminate and repress.

In January 2012, overt conflicts and interventions brought with them new effects, placing "cracolândia" at the center of contemporary Brazilian social issues. Once again, the area became the target of a violent police operation, Operation Sufoco – Choke –

5 To all appearances this is "Operation Dignity", described by Frúgoli Jr (2006), which started with the dealers and extended to other segments, initiating what was called "war for the center."

which, openly enforced "pain and suffering", aimed not to care for the users but a retaking of this space in the city by the authorities – leading to institutional crisis, power struggles between government sectors, complaints to the Defensoria Pública, protests in the press and criticism by a significant part of the population. Likewise, in 2013, in January (the favored time in the São Paulo calendar for state violence), the absurdity of the proposals and attempts at compulsory mass internments meant the area was making headlines again. And, turn and turnabout, innovations in health care services, management technologies and governmental monitoring in the area were announced. Almost all of which were doomed to fail and be replaced right from the start.

To better grasp "cracolândia" one needs to take into account that it is far from being a mere physical street, given that it has been changing and shifting over the last two decades, around the Luz neighborhood and others nearby. Guaianazes, do Triunfo, Vitória, Mauá, Glete, Helvétia, Ana Cintra, dos Protestantes, dos Gusmões, dos Andradas and General Couto de Magalhães streets; Largo General Osório, Dino Bueno and Barão de Piracicaba boulevards; parts of Cásper Líbero, Duque de Caxias, Rio Branco and Ipiranga Avenues; Princesa Isabel and Júlio Prestes squares; all of which addresses give us clues to the proximity of concentrations of crack users. Such a quantity of individuals smoking the drug nearby and, at the time of this research, a large part of them concentrated in Helvetia street, even altered the routes of municipal buses and garbage collection and of many of the city's inhabitants, who avoid passing through the area, especially at night.

The practice of mapping these movements consistently recurs when studying or talking about the area; it is a methodological proceeding, almost obsessive, both on the part of scholars and of journalists revealing an effort to grasp these movements geographically. Aiming to cover them conceptually, Frúgoli Jr. and Spaggiari (2010) postulated that the so-called "cracolândia" region should receive analytical attention both as an *itinerant place* and as a *field of relationships*. As an *itinerant place* it is located in a specific urban area, but is subject to shifting which varies according to repression and intervention being exercised, as well as to the dynamics of internal relationships. As a *field of relationships*, the region also comes to be a synonym of degradation, of urban criminality due to the high presence of crack users, men, women, boys and girls and boys living on the street or working in prostitution, in the streets and the neighborhoods; all of them, as we know, urban actors associated symbolically with a series of stigma such as dirt, danger, threat, drugs, trouble and shame. The authors also highlight that, as an *itinerant place* and a *field of relationships*, its identity is incorporated in crack users or buyers, that is to say, *cracolândia is wherever they are* – a more than perfect simulacrum, mimicking body and space.

We cannot neglect to mention that crack users are important figures in understanding the local dynamic, although they are not the only social actors who frequent and inhabit, and even dispute, the region. In other words, "cracolândia" is more than an *itinerant place* with the characteristic of being mobile, although relatively able to be mapped in the city of São Paulo. And it also includes or is driven by a perimeter which has been treated as a priority by urban renewal policies, begun more than two decades ago in an effort to transform Luz into a cultural hub, with the potential to attract members of the middle and upper class to consume cultural goods and, ideally, businesses, investment and new residents (Frúgoli Jr., 2005; Frúgoli Jr. and Sklair, 2009; Frúgoli Jr. and Spaggiari, 2010; Schicchi, 2011; Talhari and col., 2012).

An imbalance has, therefore, been created, which is pointed out in the literature: "cracolândia" is characterized as being itinerant, but the actions of the authorities are aimed at a fixed territory – specifically around Luz station which, in the maps above is bounded by a pentagon.

More relevantly: this is not any old part of the history of the city, as Luz was the scene of the first expansion of the center and the location of the splendid railway station linking the interior of the state to the port of Santos. An architectural landmark of the profits from the coffee economy, in the mid-19th century it was the gateway for both immigration and modernization and remained so with the installa-

tion of the metropolitan bus station, which was only transferred from there in the early 1980s. Commonly known as "trash gateway"[6] back in the 1950s the region was already viewed as "decaying" and since then (in a complex process involving, among other things, the creation of new centralities in the city, the construction of new public transport and automobile hubs as well as the elite abandoning central areas - (Frúgoli Jr., 2006), it today contains several significant cultural amenities which, over time, have received interventions and reforms.

If we follow the route plotted by Heitor Frúgoli Jr. (2008) and a research team, it is possible to leave Luz metro station, stroll in Parque da Luz park and the State Pinacoteca (hosting art exhibitions), enter Julio Prestes station and see the Sala São Paulo, home of the State Symphony Orchestra. The stroll can continue observing the businesses in Santa Ifigênia and, with a contact (which was the case here), visit the occupation of a building in Mauá street. On this stroll alone, the most varied situations, scenes and urban situations can be seen: prostitutes, homeless, customers of the stores, art lovers, tourists and those living in the occupied building.

Following another itinerary, also followed, on the same day, by Heitor Frúgoli Jr. and Bianca Chizzolini (2012), but this time following in the footsteps of D. Norma (resident in the Porto Belo building, one of the best known in the area), it is possible to take Protestantes street, in the direction of Cásper Líbero avenue (where the supermarket she uses is located). From there, to Luz station, again passing, although not entering Jardim da Luz, the Pinacoteca and a sector linked to the Museu da Língua Portuguesa – Museum of Portuguese Language, to then observe José Paulino and Prates streets, where she bought some clothes. Next, stopping a while at a newsstand in Mauá street, after, skirting around a series of demolitions. Before you know it, you're on Cleveland street, the continuation of Júlio Prestes station, then the crossing with Helvétia street, from where it is possible to see a large number of crack users. Walking through them, you head to the Sagrado Coração de Jesus church, a notable contrast, as the authors observed:

> We entered the Sagrado Coração de Jesus church, and the contrast was glaring. We left the street marked by the movement of police and users, by the physical decay of the buildings, the presence of people dressed in rags and blankets, in a precarious state of health and well-being to, a few steps away, enter a calm, sumptuously decorated church. Silence reigned and it was like we were not even in the same place (Frúgoli Jr, Chizzolini; 2012, online).

Leaving the church and heading to Barão de Piracicaba Boulevard, you pass houses, restaurants, the fire brigade headquarters. Going to the Santa Ifigênia region, you can see musical instrument shops and, finally, arrive at the Estrela Building, where D. Norma lived for some years.

It is, therefore, a central region, not only in geographical terms, but, above all, as formulated by Frúgoli Jr. (1995), dense spaces "not only because of the concentration of activities and groups, but also because they embrace various meanings which, at the same time, intersect, complement and contradict each other" (p. 12).

Some scholars of the area, such as Maria Cristina Schicchi (2011), emphasize that, even though the facilities and the different uses made of the space are side by side, intersecting, this should not be confused with integration. Quite the opposite, for her,

> the neighborhoods of specialized businesses have their own dynamic and their own passersby, workers, consumers, as well as those going to the museums and commercial spaces seem to ignore the heartbeat of those heading to the station and to other cities. The countless institutional and educational buildings represent another logic of circulation, as do the paths of residents in surrounding neighborhoods [and] the places selected by the homeless population... (p. 48)

In turn, Frúgoli Jr, together with his students, provided more ethnographic visibility to the insertion of these relationships, observing the interaction of residents and visitors to the area with crack users, aiming to escape from the Luz-"cracolândia" polarization. Using the perspective of the social actors (which is exactly the case of D.Norma), moves

6 Reference to the story "trash mouth" can be found in Perlongher (2008).

the location of the conflict, pointing out connections and empirically showing that there are many more than just two sides[7].

In summary, this is a region of large traffic flows, which intersect and sometimes interact, sometimes no, throughout its history, which has been abandoned by the São Paulo elite, became popular and, gradually, decayed. For a long time now, as has been mentioned, it has been the object of attempted urban and social reforms[8].

Added to this is the fact that the supposed degradation of "cracolândia" has consequences for the whole surrounding area. Associations of residents and property and business owners in the region, although defending divergent agendas, agree in their criticism of the devaluation of real estate. Thus, it is not difficult to see that the Luz neighborhood does not want to be confused with "cracolândia", especially as it discomfits, perturbs and provokes them, and produces, and is, an excuse for any type of intervention in the surrounding areas. It is, therefore, a component of the territory which is in dispute, involving much strife; the best empirical expression of the "war of places", reflected on almost two decades ago by Antônio Augusto Arantes (2000): in this area tjere are contradictory boundaries which, at the same time, separate conflicting practices and worldviews (leaving conflicting world views) and being them into contact – in the majority of cases, through dispute.

For all of these reasons, use of the term "cracolândia" seems, in itself, to be dangerous, to the extent which it can be confused with the neighborhood, stigmatizing it and contributing further to it depreciation, both material and symbolic. As was recently stated by the militant Luiz Kohara, in an event named "Nem cracolândia, nem Nova Luz"[9] Neither cracolândia, nor Nova Luz, this nickname is probably the worst case of socio-territorial bullying in the country. This creates a political situation in which it is imperative that certain texts (such as the by Schicchi, written in 2011) be reformulated without using this term, even once. Although it is not explicit, the objective is clear: to avoid the identification between Luz "cracolândia".

Although recognizing the effort made, in my case, this procedure is not viable. Not only because this is how the crack users there refer to the space, not even because this name has consequences and effects which go beyond the location (and need to be observed), but also, and above all, because in the streets most circumscribed by this use, constituted by the passage of users and their interactions with a series of other social actors, a society is created. Thus, conscious of these struggles, but considering the aims of this study, it was impossible not to use this term, although I decided to use it in quotation marks, with the aim of recalling this perception.

Added to this, is something which is even more perplexing and perhaps reveals the disaster of this "socio-territorial bullying": the term "cracolândia", gradually overflowed the immediate vicinity of Luz and came to be used, even as a nickname, for other places and other groupings where crack is used, in other Brazilian cities. It has even come to be used descriptively (and analytically) in official research concerning the drug in Brazil, coordinated by Fiocruz, using the term to count and divulge places in which the drug is used. According to the preliminary information from this research, Brazil has at least

7 Along the same lines and to have a better idea of other possibilities of ethnographic cuts, I recommend reading Dossiê Luz, organized by Heitor Frúgoli Jr. (2012), with the participation of other researchers from the Anthropological City Studies Group (GEAC-USP). Available: <http://www.pontourbe.net/edica011-dossie-luz>. Accessed: 11 jun. 2013.

8 During the research, in 2010-2011, the main proposal for 'revitalizing' the area was materializing in the Nova Luz project, headed by the prefecture of Sao Paulo and by the Nova Luz Consortium, the official text forecasting "valuing historic buildings, reforming public spaces, creating green, leisure spaces and improving the region's urban environment". This project can be read as a local update of increasingly global gentrification policies. Policies which, in the words of Frúgoli Jr. and Sklair (2009), are characterized by creating middle and upper class residences in central urban areas, in a coordinated process of expulsing lower classes from the sector, aiming to change to social composition of a particular place, generating socio-spatial segregation and controlling diversity. With the change in municipal administration in 2012, and after civil action, the project was frozen

9 The event "Nem Cracolândia nem Nova Luz: quais são as propostas para Santa Efigênia e Luz?" took place in Casa da Cidade, in São Paulo, on 10 June 2013. It can be viewed at: www.postv.org. Acesso: 11 jun. 2013.

29 large "cracolândias", spread throughout seventeen state capitals.[10] Crack and "cracolândia" seem to be becoming synonyms; where there are users of the drug, "cracolândias" blossom – which seems to denote the construction of an imaginary headquarters, produced by what is said about it; it is, then, a social place and also a discursive place.

As my research has little to do with this imaginary and discursive extension and as my description of the conflicts and contours between it and the Luz neighborhood seems to me sufficient to fill this text, from here onwards I will explain what was possible to learn locally, with the crack users.

Spatial practices in "cracolândia"

For the remainder of the text, there was one question that challenged me: if "cracolândia" is this place fraught with disputes, conflicts and tensions, why do so many people insist on using crack there? Far from supplying an answer, it is creating the question itself that is of interest, as it enables me to look more closely and incorporate spatial observations to descriptions of practices – which I will do next.

As with other areas with large influxes, "cracolândia" attracts and concentrates a wide variety of crack users, as can be seen in a simple glance. When you arrive in the surrounding streets, reading the crowd's body language is a procedure prior to thought. In the crowd, young men of between 20 and 40 stand out. Looking more closely, you see adolescents, children, elderly individuals and women. Most of the time they are talking a lot, conversing, reliving, exchanging objects, telling stories or hurling insults. Their bodies touch, they exchange looks; sometimes they greet each other, sometimes they provoke. All these voices together are noisy, talking at the same time. However, nothing is more disconcerting than when they fall silent.

There, as has been explained there are also passers-by, motorists, waste pickers, residents, street sweepers and people from the city hall; fathers and mothers take their children to the Sagrado Coração de Jesus school; various types of care, (public and private) health care, diverse police and members of different churches. If it was not for the large quantities of rubbish in the streets, the explicit crack use and the rundown appearance of many of the users, nothing would differentiate it from the traffic passing through any large city center.

However, that which from afar is viewed as a crowd, begins to be nuanced. Gradations are seen more clearly as more time is spent in that place. The bodies concentrated in the streets come to have individual names, the individuals have their histories and everything becomes still more complex. Different crack users and different uses also have their own space in "cracolândia". Although grouped around using and selling the drug, it needs to be understood that not everyone is there doing the same thing, nor with the same objective, and nor is everyone using crack with the same intensity.

Gomes and Adorno (2011) have already written about this, and show three distinct uses being made of this space based on the cases of Vejota, Oseias and Shirley. After leaving prison, Vejota only smokes marijuana and sells crack there. Although he sells the drug and is recognized as a dealer by those who are buying, he passes himself off as a user to the police. He sees little point in being among the users, but he mixes with them to protect himself from the police and protect his livelihood. Physically, Oseias is a crack user of the *nóia* (paranoia) type, although, in his narrative he distinguishes himself from them, saying his smoking is not out of control, and he would not do anything to get hold of it. After he left prison he had nowhere to go and no one to rely on, he decided to pass himself off as a *nóia* and stay in the region while he decided what he was going to do. Shirley, in a weakened state of health, told us how she refused to use health care services and preferred to go without smoking, but still be in the middle of all the action. She has friends and business there and, above all, a shared history. I could give many

10 Preliminary divulgation of the research published in the O Estado de S. Paulo journal and entitled "Brasil já tem pelo menos 29 grandes cracolândias, dispersas por 17 capitais". Available: <http://www.estadao.com.br/noticias/internacional,brasil-ja-tem-pelo-menos-29--grandes-cracolandias-dispersas-por-17-capitais,809340,0.htm>. Accessed: 12 Dec 2011. More consistent results of the research were published in the third quarter of 2013 and can be seen using the link: <http://portal.fiocruz.br/pt-br/content/maior-pesquisa-sobre--crack-j%C3%A1-feita-no-mundo-mostra-o-perfil-do-consumo-no-brasil>. Accessed: 23 Dec 2013.

more examples, recorded in my field work notebooks, but, given the space available, these three are sufficient to continue with the description.

It is noteworthy that when someone who comes looking to buy crack has some distinguishing feature, physical or social, they are immediately identified by the other users. Everyone takes not of their presences and comments on it. This identification is very rapid, instantaneous and, as you would expect, follows common sense values. This noting of distinguishing characteristics happens, for example, with a series of individuals who were known, above all, for their previous professions. There was the nursing assistant, the doctor, the lawyer, the publicist and the stylist. All of these categories indicated trajectories differing from those of the vast majority of individuals there. We analysts have to be on our guard in front of them as they are discourses which are frequently mentioned as soon as they arrive there, exactly because they have the potential to "prove" the supposed degradation undergone by those who consume the drug and, mainly, to reaffirm the diversity of individuals who are there.

To understand the heterogeneity of users and influxes into the area, it needs to be remembered that many users go there, smoke crack and then leave, as do other occasional users who cannot easily become part of the place but who go there to buy crack. They lurk around the edges until someone who is already known there gets hold of the drug for them. This individual provides a service of mediation in exchange for commission in the form of cash or drugs, this being a common way for those more at home in the place to get resources, fighting competing between themselves for "clients".

There are also those do not travel far, but have known and been around the place since they were children. Such as Mariano, a crack user who spent his childhood and adolescence (in the 1980s) in a tenement near Luz, where he played with friends, grew up and experienced crack for the first time, when it was still made in the pressure cooker. The center is his neighborhood. He told me that, just like him, many of those there are well known, having been there a long time, but that the majority come from neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city of São Paulo. This being a common thesis.

Such statements are not groundless. In fact, the majority of the stories involve influxes from the outskirts towards the center, from the countryside to the capital, from the North and Northeast regions to the Southeast. Stories mixing poverty, scarcity and broken family ties, uncertain employment, violence, both committed and experienced. To these are added stories of institutionalization, of homelessness, prison and quarrels – which, to a certain extent, have many similarities to reflections on the journeys of children (Gregori, 2000) and adults living on the street (Frangella, 2009), to those of seasonal workers, of prostitutes (Perlongher, 2008) and of drug dealers.

The same stories, time and again. Paying attention to them does not mean jumping to hasty conclusions which social sciences have already rejected, that poverty, criminality and drugs are connected. Neither does it imply reviving moribund theses on "family breakdown". These stories matter as they make us discuss the problem and take another careful look at diversity itself. If, on the one hand, it is necessary to understand distinct individual experience in order to grasp what goes on here, on the other, we have to investigate what makes this a social experience.

So far, then, "cracolândia" can be viewed, with all the above mentioned care, as the most radical centrifugal point of urban poverty, as well as a local par excellence for all types of users and all types of crack users. Once again, I emphasize that, in order to understand such variety it is necessary to intimately link individual diversities and social invariants. That is the first point.

However, "cracolândia" is also a huge information desk, there you can discover who provide the drugs, the best ways to take them, differences in quality, price and coloration. Here, ways of making money with which to buy the drug are launched, as well as learning on whom you can (and cannot) count. News items abound in this area: shots exchanged the night before, the user who had some kind of health complication, which police are most aggressive, the private security guard who decided to go in plainclothes while providing cover to a journalist and who was chased away, the user who had to be rushed to hospital to give birth, the *patricinha*

*(*snob) who has just arrived in the region, the mother searching for her child, who has been arrested and who just got out of prison.

In constant contact with the diverse social and health care services, you also learn how to treat ailments which are common around here: discover how to reduce the harm using crack causes, to whom to apply for help in case of some kind of complication, how to resolve legal issues, how to re-do lost documents, how to get referred to a refuge. Here you also learn about the specifics of each service and their opening hours; where food is provided, where it is possible to take a bath and use the toilet, where you can sleep, where you can get in touch with treatment centers, where you can find help seeking work. And you also have contact, there with all kinds of churches and beliefs, even procuring your own "conversion" (Fromm Trinta, 2012, 2013; Spaggiari et al., 2012).

"Cracolândia" is also a place of negotiation, favoring entrepreneurism, a "land of opportunity". Things such as shoes, clothing, cigarettes, food, electronics found in the garbage Santa Ifigênia, recyclable materials, can all be exchanged with the greatest of ease. Once there and aware of the network of suppliers, it is possible to buy a large piece of crack for 10 or 15 reais and then sell flakes of it for at least 50 cents each. Variation in size mean the portions cannot be packaged. It often, spontaneously, happens that the flakes are carved off in front of the buyer, then disputes he best price with a third individual. You often hear: I've got one for one real, for fifty cents, for two reais, etc. If the dealer can be taken for a user, the opposite is also true.

There are even some services which have sprung up around the area: pensions offering a bath for five reais, others offering modest rent, others providing rooms which can be used for privately taking drugs or for sex. Some shops have come to sell material used in producing pipes, bars increase their stocks of cigarettes, of pinga (sugar cane rum) and lighters, investing in the difference between glasses made from plastic or glass (which varies according to the clients' taste) and there is even a retired couple, later followed by a string of other micro-businesses, selling cake, coffee and juice in the area.

A zone with a high concentration of people is, as can be imagined, also an area with lots of conflicts. The longer you stay in "cracolândia" the more possible it is, when you least expect it, that you will see one of these fights. On one of the research days, I saw a circle composed of around thirty people form rapidly, wanting to beat up a man who was thought to look after the 'bosses' money. He told her he had been beaten by the Guarda Civil Metropolitana (Metropolitan Civil Police Force) and that they had taken all of the money. Several hours later, the money was discovered in his own pocket. Everyone agreed that he deserved a beating, but one single, strong young man took it upon himself to attack him. He balled his fists and began to hit the other man who, cringing, tried to avoid the punches, but was prevented by the crowd, who approved of the beating. I did not observe how the situation ended. I asked the social worker if we could leave.

Partying is carried out with the same intensity as fighting. During the field work, then there was threatened police oppression, it was common to see a *roda de pagoda* form. The users grouped themselves into a rough circle (usually standing), starting to sing and, after, to fraternize. Things collected from the street quickly became transformed into percussion instruments. You would see people dancing, singing and using crack, all at the same time. It was not uncommon for this to happen next to large piles of rubble. When the North American anthropologist, Philippe Bourgois, observed this oft-repeated scene on his visit to the area, it was highlighted in an important journal[11]. According to the text, this was the "[...] most sociable and friendly crack scene" that the specialist had ever witnessed; it was not as violent as the scene in Colombia or Canada; it was much more settled than the North American scene and the only place with which it could be compared was Amsterdam. He did not hesitate to link it with "[...] the social character of Brazilians".

Far from being irrelevant, it highlights the fact that violence should not be seen as a contrast with

11 "'NUNCA VI CRACOLÂNDIA TÃO SOCIÁVEL', DIZ EXPERT". O Estado de S. Paulo, 10 Dec. 2010. Available: <http://www.estadao.com.br/noticias/impresso,nunca-vi-cracolandia-tao-sociavel-diz-expert,652090,0.htm>. Accessed: 26 Dec 2011.

an apparently "lighter" sociality or with bodily deterioration. They are part of the same continuum and field of possibilities. From my point of view, being aware of these types of connections are important in understanding the scene better. Not to exalt it.

It is also impossible to forget that the passage of time solidifies relationships and that it is also capable of leaving its mark: holidays and nationwide and citywide events, dates important in personal histories, such as birthdays. They are all celebrated there.

It seems clear that there are, therefore, many continuities with the rhythm of the city. In this sense, "cracolândia" is not an island surrounded on all sides by the "center" or by "Luz". Quite the opposite, in the same way as within these areas, in "cracolândia" too, diverse use of the spaces can be made. It may act as both a confluence of the flows of people and money as well as an information desk and a land of opportunities. An area of conflicts and parties and, above all, a huge market, inside of which crack is bought and sold, exchanged, negotiated and, essentially, exploited.

Final considerations

Based on what has been said above, and the description, I aim to distance myself from narratives about "cracolândia" which focus on want, on human misery, on alienation from the surroundings, the "kingdom of the zombies", absence of the state, the exotic, the ugly, things which should be avoided. All of these fail in that they do not mention the connection between legality and illegality inside this place and between it and other urban spaces – which encourages this area to be viewed as an impenetrable frontier, physically and, what is worse, morally, isolated. If this plural dimension of this area is not taken into account and its being locked within itself is casually insisted on, we run the risk of not knowing all of the conflicts, influences and connections of which it is made.

Thus, I postulate that we urgently need to reconnect this seeming "other world" with the city as a whole, push them both into contact and erase the borders. The point is not to romanticize the scene. If there are a variety of uses, there is also much perversity, especially concerning commercial transactions. But, as a counterpoint, this is also true of other types of markets. As Ruggiero and South brilliantly point out (1997, p. 68), "[...] one of the problems of black markets is the fact that, in many ways, they are very similar to legal economies."

I also point out the persistence of itinerant methods of occupation of the area as a strategy of resistance in the face of violent repression and control. Likewise, I emphasize that the game between violence, resistance and vulnerability, when examined ethnographically, allows us to observe a more complex dynamic between legal and illegal, legitimate and otherwise, moral and immoral; it also enable us to be aware of the connections between the production of the vulnerable and a whole logic of formal and informal treatment, care and conversion – revealed best in the expression "information desk" – which articulates, once more, corporal production and living strategies for roving resistance in an urban place.

Having said this, I conclude with the idea that there are many analytical benefits to observing the interactions and connections between "cracolândia", Luz, the center and even the city and all of its flows of population. Especially because this helps us inordinately in expanding our vision of this scene and ceasing to stigmatize is as a separate world, embedded in the heart of São Paulo. Thus, I opted to describe the connections which link, unite and connect them for the very reason of not treating these spaces as if they were separate or as if they had independent spatial and moral dynamics.

As I hope I have shown in this text, I believe there are countless connections which culminate in a "richness of varieties" (Benjamin, 2000: multiple social actors, disputes over the area, simultaneous and apparently contradictory forms of treatment by the state, various attempts on the part of mediating agents, different ways of using this space. In summary, "cracolândia" is better viewed as a huge market for sensations, from both legal and illegal sources, encouraging multiple entrepreneurs. It is also an information desk, a place to be alternative and, not without contradiction, a place of great exploitation. The crack land moves because of and according to all of these contents and meanings and, as I perceive it, its fascination and power lie herein.

Writing in 2013, and confirming the persistent presence of crack users in this space, year after year and subjected to so much humiliation and attempts to eliminate them, I cannot help but conclude that such insistence is, for me, the most complete and dramatic proof of the strength of spatial practices, as well as of the disputes for the uses of a city. Finally, as Michel Agier (2011) observed, linking yourself to the space is to promote a life policy which endures.

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