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Rappresentazioni della città come spazio di insicurezza e criminalità. Lisbona (1850-1910)

Representations of the city as a space of insecurity and crime. Lisbon, 1850-1910

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Abstract

Il rapporto tra crimine e città, l'idea che la città favorisca la pratica del crimine è stata ricorrente nel XIX secolo. In Portogallo questa idea riguarda anzitutto la città di Lisbona. Facendo uso di documentazione varia, in questa comunicazione sono analizzate le rappresentazioni della città intesa come uno spazio insicuro e di criminalità, contrapposte alle costruzioni idilliache sulla vita nella campagna ed alle narrative che definiscono la città come territorio di modernità.

The relationship between crime and the city, the idea that the city favoured the practice of crime, was a recurring issue in the 19th century. In Portugal, this idea mainly concerned the city of Lisbon. Using diverse documentation, this communication analyses the representations of the city understood as an insecure and criminal space, as opposed to the idyllic constructions then made about life in the countryside and the narratives that define the city as a space of modernity and well-being.

Keywords

Lisbona, Criminalità, Rappresentazioni,
Lisbon, Crime, Representations.

Introduction

The relationship between criminality and the city, the idea that the city favors the practice of crime, has been a classic and recurring theme since the 19th century. This was a topic that accompanied the urbanization movement [Chevalier 1958]. The theme was explored by a vast group of scholars of the time, from the detractors of modernity to critics of capitalism and the social dominance of the bourgeoisie, to many social thinkers, some novelists (E. Sue, C. Dickens, among others) and journalists [Kalifa 2005]. Academics from emerging scientific fields at the time have also devoted themselves to this issue, one of the most relevant cases being sociology. In addressing the social problems that affirmed themselves with the development of modern cities, many sociologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries referred to the problem of crime. Emile Durkheim, in his work on suicide, published in 1897, states that the passage from rural society to urban society and rapid urban growth gave rise to anomalies and derangements that resulted in suicide, crime and other social diseases [Durkheim 1897].

At the beginning of the twentieth century, sociologists from the Chicago School related the growth and modernization of cities, the new ways of life that were established there, to the increasing levels of crime. The changes that were felt were not only related to the physical structure of the city, but also to changes in the habits, feelings and character of the urban population. In the city, the degree of interconnectedness and interrelationship of people would be scarce, which would allow them to feel less restrained and more easily opt for the practice of crime, namely as a survival strategy. On the other hand, the more anonymous relations that would develop in the urban environment, compared to the greater proximity and interconnectedness that exists in small rural communities, would facilitate the use of complaints and requests for interference from external elements, namely police and the courts, to mediate conflicts. Furthermore, the lesser knowledge of the other that would exist in urban spaces due to the high number of inhabitants would make the "stranger", the

"different", more feared and feelings of intolerance towards practices and behaviours considered as maladjusted would develop.

In the city, there would also be more opportunities to attack the property, because there would be more wealth. The city, given the anonymity it provides, would also lead criminals to consider that they had a greater possibility of fleeing after the crime had been committed and thus more easily engage in its practice. Finally, it was also considered that the city would be at the centre of social disorganisation and this would lead to crime. In this way, delinquency is perceived as a way of life, with preferential implantation in urban environments [Gil Villa 2004, 33-38].

1. Lisbon: insecurity and crime

In Portugal, the association between the city and crime became recurrent, especially in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, an image that criminal justice statistics helped to justify [Vaz 1998]. The high crime rates in Lisbon, higher than those determined for the rest of the national territory both in absolute terms and in relation to the population living there, were demonstrated by criminal justice statistics¹. These were systematically used as a justification for the city's affirmation as a crime space, fuelling the fears that crime was increasingly raising.

In addition to the statistics, the press reinforced this idea. Newspapers devoted considerable space to the spreading news of crimes, especially those that occurred in Lisbon. Generally, such crimes did not have the degree of violence and seriousness that characterized crime in other parts of Portugal, but their number was much higher. Uncritical readings of crime statistics and news published by the press showed Lisbon as a space favourable to the practice of crime [Vaz 2014].

Until the middle of the 19th century, it was mainly rural areas that raised most fears about crime [Sobral 1990]. The geographical isolation, the precariousness of communications and transport, the difficulty of the State authorities, the police and the courts, to exercise effective control there, helped to affirm the rural space as an area of insecurity and crime. Rural areas were also those in which there was greater resistance to the application of criminal laws, insisting that communities continue to manage their daily lives and their disputes with the use of custom, often characterized by the consensual and tolerated use of private violence [Vaquinhas 2001].

The acceleration of the urbanization movement, the growth of the cities in territory and inhabitants, the dynamism demonstrated by the urban spaces, the break of the isolation to which the rural areas were consigned with the development of transports and ways of communication, created the environment that originated a change in this perception. The city emerged as a disorganized space, chaotic and difficult to control and, therefore, considered encouraging the practice of illegalities and crimes.

Lisbon received a large number of new inhabitants who went there in search of work and better living conditions [Pineiro 2011]. However, expectations were not always met. Those who arrived in Lisbon often faced serious difficulties of insertion in this new social space. Difficulty in adapting to different habits, customs and ways of life, classified as more civilized and more modern. Difficulty in finding work and ensuring survival, difficulty in obtaining acceptable living conditions, difficulty in adapting to the work discipline imposed in the city, particularly in industrial work.

It was in this context that a metamorphosis gradually took place in relation to the representation of urban space. Idyllic visions were affirmed about life in the countryside and those who lived there, about their healthy way of life and work. In the social analyses produced at the time, a new space emerged that fostered fears and a new disturbing protagonist of the social and legal order that wanted to be respected. A new social image of

¹ *Anuário Estatístico de Portugal*. 1875- 1916, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1877 – 1918.

the "savage" was affirmed [Perrot 2001, 351-364]. He was the person from the popular media who lived in the city, but who maintained forms of life and work that were not in line with the habits, customs and discipline that we want to see implemented in the city [Vaz 2014].

However, contrary to what happens in other countries, the weak development of the industry in Portugal conditioned the composition of the image of the new "wild". Referred only at the beginning of the twentieth century for the city of Lisbon, the figure of the "Apache", who was considered to constitute an "army of evildoers" in France, is regarded as still in its infancy in Portugal. The "Apaches" of Lisbon, compared with the Parisians "Apaches", who lived in the periphery from where they raided the city centre, the "Apaches" of Lisbon lived in the popular districts of the city, dedicated themselves to vagrancy, were ruffians and disobedient to authority².

The poor living and working conditions in which the urban working classes survived helped to affirm the city as an insecure space, inviting the practice of illegalities, immorality and crime. The criminality practiced in Lisbon was mostly attributed to the popular groups and workers who inhabited the city. At the end of the century there were catastrophic theses about the high degree of disintegration of urban life, the irreversible chaos towards which life in big cities would go and the physical and mental degeneration manifested by its inhabitants³.

2. The causes

The scholars of the time sought to determine the factors that conditioned the portrait of the spatial distribution of crime and the strong incidence of crime in Lisbon. In this way, they tried to define among the Lisbon population and their lifestyles, especially among those who had already been accused or convicted of crimes, which factors could justify the high crime rate.

The analyses were diversified. In 1880, one of the main exponents of positivist criminology in Portugal, the psychiatrist Roberto Frias, warned of the danger that "civilization", exemplified by the city, would mean in terms of increased crime, causing the exodus of populations from the countryside to large urban centers where the mixture of "civilizations", "races" and "religions" would enhance the outbreak of conflicts, causing an increase in crime⁴.

In the vast group of criminologists who approached the theme of the association between urban life and crime, two positions can be detected. Firstly, those who considered that there would be a direct relation between the growth of cities and the increase in crime, arguing that the existence of a vast and heterogeneous number of people living in close contact would generate conflicts and crimes. Cities would also be centres of greater accumulation of wealth, which led to a higher number of crimes, including attacks on property⁵. A second position is based on the consideration that there would be an indirect relationship between the city and crime, i.e., that in the city a set of factors, such as poverty, isolation, segregation, among others, that could lead to physical and moral depreciation and, subsequently, to the practice of crime, were more easily achieved. Economic difficulties would lead to physical and moral corruption of individuals and thus put them

² *Galeria dos Criminosos Célebres em Portugal*, vol. VI, Lisboa, Palhares, 1907, pp. 89-118.

³ Basílio Freire, *Estudos de Antropologia Patológica. Os Degenerados*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1886, p. 262.

⁴ Caetano Roberto Belarmino do Rosário Frias (1880), *O Crime. Apontamentos para a sistematização da criminalidade*, Porto; transcrito parcialmente por Luís de Pina, «Doutrinas criminológicas e sistemas carcerários em Portugal – aspectos histórico-críticos», *Boletim da Administração Penitenciária e dos Institutos de Criminologia*, n.º 19, 2.º semestre de 1966, pp. 39-107.

⁵ Lopes, Alfredo Luís, *Estudo Estatístico da Criminalidade em Portugal nos anos de 1891 a 1895*, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1897.

on the path to crime⁶. It was also considered that in Lisbon subsistence was more difficult to guarantee and food more expensive.

Making concrete a kind of synthesis of the negative aspects that the city would represent, the writer and journalist Raul Brandão describes it as a mixture of misery and crime, the epicentre from which one would see the disintegration of society⁷.

Connoted with the "civilization", it would be in the city that would exist the elements that the modernization would allow to affirm. Newspapers, books and films were elements considered as being able to encourage the practice of crime. Many of the stories and events reported by them, often in an epic way, referred to the practice of crimes, considering that, through imitation, they encouraged their practice.

The press is constantly target of criticism. The treatment it would give to crime cases and the role attributed to it in the increase of crime in urban spaces led to debate. The physician Roberto Frias, previously mentioned, included it in the set of factors that caused the raise of the crime, due to the disclosure that the criminal actions deserved in the newspapers of the time, leading them to be imitated by some⁸. No other element was considered to be able to give such a great knowledge and diffusion of the cases of crime as the press. With this attitude, the press would only seek sensationalism, arousing the interest of readers through the disclosure of crimes.

It was unanimous that it would be especially harmful to divulge true or romance stories, in which the "evil" would emerge triumphant. A consideration that was extended to books: many novels would also help to spread "bad examples", contributing to the increase in crime⁹.

In the first years of the twentieth century, cinema also appeared in the set of factors with special implantation in urban spaces that were considered as being able to encourage the practice of crime. It is described that in Lisbon, the influence of "certain films" would cause an excess of work for police officers¹⁰. Like press and literature, cinema would also give rise to imitation phenomena that would affect the younger population in particular. Many films, containing scenes of violence, theft and crime, would be examples for the actions of marginal youth and considered a danger to morality and public tranquillity in the city.

However, the most evoked reasons that would make Lisbon a propitious space for crime were of an economic nature and focused mainly on the poor living and working conditions of the urban low-income class. The misery in which they survived put them on the path of degeneracy, revolt, vice and crime¹¹. For them, the economic growth that they saw would not have meant an improvement in their living conditions, but rather would have led to an accentuation of the difficulties they were experiencing¹².

Industrial work itself, an activity with special incidence in urban centers, was described as being developed in a harmful environment, the factory, thus contributing to

⁶ Mota, Ignácio Silveira da, *Estatística da Administração da Justiça Criminal nos Tribunais de 1.ª Instância do Reino de Portugal e Ilhas Adjacentes durante o ano de 1880*, Lisboa; Imprensa Nacional, 1884; Ferreira Deusdado, «Psicologia criminal», *Revista de Educação e Ensino*, vol. IV, 1889, pp. 289-307; Francisco Ferraz de Macedo, «A Vadiagem Infantil», in: *Galeria de Criminosos Célebres*, vol. 7, Lisboa, Tipografia Palhares, 1908, p. 102.

⁷ Raul Brandão, «A cidade», *Correio da Manhã*, de 26 de Janeiro de 1896.

⁸ Caetano Roberto Belarmino do Rosário Frias (1880), *O Crime. Apontamentos para a sistematização da criminalidade*, Porto; transcrito parcialmente por Luís de Pina, «Doutrinas criminológicas e sistemas carcerários em Portugal – aspectos histórico-críticos», *Boletim da Administração Penitenciária e dos Institutos de Criminologia*, n.º 19, 2.º semestre de 1966, pp. 77-78.

⁹ Faustino Fonseca, *Trez meses no Limoeiro.*, Lisboa, Livraria Bordalo, 1897, p. 15.

¹⁰ Eduardo de Noronha, *Diário de um polícia. Scenas da política e da rua, anotadas pelos jornais*, Lisboa, Guimarães e C.ª Editores., 1919, p. 148.

¹¹ Basílio Augusto Soares da Costa Freire, *Estudos de Antropologia Patológica. Os criminosos*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1889.

¹² *Galeria de Criminosos Célebres*, vol. 7, Lisboa, Palhares, 1908, p. 94.

the physical and mental depreciation of workers. Industrial work was harmful to those who developed it, since it involved specialisation, mechanisation of tasks, separation of the worker from the final product, a tendency for the worker to consider himself the victim of injustices and the affirmation of a growing antagonism between the worker and the employer¹³.

However, the transformation of agricultural populations into industrial populations was considered an inexorable sociological law impossible to contradict. Listening insistently to the benefits of industry, attracted by the higher salaries and greater freedom of labour, the abandonment of the fields, facilitated by the new means of transport, was seen as an unstoppable movement. However, in the city, the workers often faced difficulties and situations of unemployment and misery.

The city would not only have an environment that encourages the practice of crime, but it was also considered that there would be greater difficulties regarding the possibility of social reinsertion of ex-convicts. Unable to find work and a way to survive, they would relapse into crime¹⁴.

The question of recidivism was raised with special acuity for the city of Lisbon. This idea was maintained throughout the period under analysis. The "individuals who leave the penitentiary for the big urban centres" would find major impediments to redo their lives, which began immediately by the difficulty in finding work¹⁵.

Ignácio Silveira da Mota, an important jurist at the time, was concerned with studying crime between 1878 and 1880, facing the great incidence of crime in Lisbon. For Silveira da Mota, the explanation would lie in the specific characteristics of this space: it was the largest urban centre and administrative centre in the country. He adds two more reasons. First, Lisbon was the privileged destination of the migratory current that went from the countryside to the cities, causing the city to house a vast population that, often, failing to fit into the economic and social life of the city, led to the existence of vast fringes of marginality and crime. Secondly, the fact that it was the political and administrative centre of the country made it an area where efforts to implement formal mechanisms of social control were greater, the commitment to ensure the safety of people and goods was more accurate, a place where crime, besides being pursued more effectively and with more means, suffered fewer gaps in its statistical record (Gonçalves, 2012).

With more simplistic readings or trying to understand and analyze the complexity of the theme, the association between the city and criminality remained current at the beginning of the twentieth century. But critical perspectives also began to assert themselves. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when analyzing the effects of urbanization, Bento Carqueja, a professor at the University of Porto, addressed the issue, referring, contrary to what many had been saying until then, that crime was neither an exclusive nor a major problem in cities¹⁶.

The urban space was considered as naturally more attractive for the populations, which would be at the origin of an intense migration from the countryside to the city. The development of transport had favored this migratory movement, fed by a set of factors ranging from the highest wages practiced in the city to the best economic conditions that existed here. Bento Carqueja individualized other factors, which he called "moral, political and social order", that favored urbanism. Hospitals, philanthropic institutions, places of

¹³ Basílio Augusto Soares da Costa Freire, *Estudos de Antropologia Patológica. Os degenerados*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1886, pp. 262-272.

¹⁴ Alberto António de Moraes Carvalho, *Relatório do Governador Civil do Distrito administrativo de Lisboa*, Alberto António de Moraes Carvalho, referido ao ano de 1859, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1860, p. 3.

¹⁵ António de Azevedo Castelo Branco, *Estudos Penitenciários e Criminais*, Lisboa, Tipografia Casa Portuguesa, 1888, p. 97.

¹⁶ Bento Carqueja, *O Povo Português. Aspectos sociais e económicos*, Porto, Livraria Chardron de Lello e Irmão, Editore, 1916.

leisure, places of education, places of culture, public offices and military barracks were in the cities. However, as he warned, what happened was that the benefits of urban life were generally emphasized, without showing the problems and difficulties faced by its inhabitants. These difficulties would pass through miserable housing, greater inequality in the distribution of wealth, more mortality and lower birth rate, very harsh working conditions, greater exposure to the risks of lack of work and economic crises, greater gaps between the different social classes that inhabited the city, and more poverty. Thus, Bento Carqueja refused to define the city as a space more favorable to the practice of crime. What he considered important to point out was not the greater or lesser total number of crimes committed in the city in relation to rural areas, but the different types of crimes that in each of these areas were preferentially manifested: in Lisbon, small crime predominated, while in rural areas the most serious and violent crimes would have a greater incidence¹⁷.

However, the metamorphosis that took place in the middle of the nineteenth century made the city emerge as an insecure space, an image that the dictatorial regime established in Portugal in 1926 sought to give strength, making it endure throughout the twentieth century.

Conclusion

The dangers that urban life would pose in individual and social terms were permanently emphasized. There are several factors that between 1850 and 1910 sustained the perception of urban spaces as crime scenes, some of which maintain relevance and explanatory capacity. Cities began to agglomerate vast and heterogeneous communities, a factor that was considered as potentiating the emergence of conflicts. In Lisbon, the structures of internal self-regulation of conflicts were more diluted due to the large size and heterogeneity of the population living there. The action of informal mechanisms of social control, such as the family, the neighbourhood, or the Church, would be smaller here. The fears that urban life raised and the will to discipline a population that was not socially inserted and that lived in a painful situation, to which a high degree of danger was attributed, arousing feelings of intolerance, were also considered factors that contributed to the high incidence of crime in Lisbon and to its affirmation as an insecure space.

However, the understanding of the higher incidence of crime in Lisbon should not only be sought on the side of crime practice, but also on the side of crime prevention and repression. The central importance that the city of Lisbon had in the political, economic and social dynamics of the time made it the privileged centre for the implementation of the observance of law and order by the public authorities. It was in Lisbon that the power of the State first sought to affirm the action of entities dedicated to the prevention and repression of crime: the police and the courts had initially here a more effective action than in other areas of the country, leading to an increase in the number of crimes of which the authorities were aware. The special concern that existed in the repression of crime in Lisbon contributed to the city's emergence in criminal justice statistics with a large number of crimes.

Between 1850 and 1880, Portugal experienced a period of intense urbanisation and the social and cultural representation of the city, in particular of Lisbon and its inhabitants, underwent a profound transformation. From 1880 onwards, Lisbon was definitively considered to be the privileged and most propitious space for the practice of crime and its inhabitants as those who contributed most to crime reaching such a dimension, in order to become an important and unavoidable social problem.

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¹⁷ Bento Carqueja, *O Povo Português. Aspectos sociais e económicos*, Porto, Livraria Chardron de Lello e Irmão, Editore, 1916, pp. 262-263.

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