

Tiago Lemões¹
Flávia Giribone
Marina Madruga
Rodrigo Gonçalves da Silva
Rosana Chagas
Sarah Emygdio
Karen Lessa
Piero Vicenzi
Alice Simoni

ANTHROPOLOGY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN A PANDEMIC TIME: COLLECTIVE ENGAGEMENTS AND THE PUBLIC DEBATE ABOUT VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN PELOTAS/RS

¹ Tiago Lemões is professor at the Post-graduation Program in Social Policy and Human Rights at the Catholic University of Pelotas (PPG-PSDH/UCPel). The second author, Flavia Giribone, is a PhD student at PPG-PSDH/UCPel. The other authors – Marina Madruga, Rodrigo Gonçalves da Silva, Rosana Chagas, Sarah Emygdio, Karen Lessa, Piero Vicenzi and Alice Simoni – are Master students at the PPG-PSDH/UCPel.

RESUMO

In this article we take a reflexive look at exploratory researches realized with homeless population, focusing the homeless population of Pelotas, during the pandemic times of the new coronavirus. The main point of this discussion is the insertion of the results of a research in a wider field, establishing a debate with different actors and collectivities, with the aim of consolidating an ethnographic engagement between the interlocution, the city and its public debate, so as to identify inconsistencies, contradictions and political games which raises care and repression, as well as defense and remotion, rights, citizenship and violence.

KEYWORDS: Ethnographic engagement. Human Rights. Homeless population.

It is not new that Anthropology has taken a look over the human rights, from an analysis of the meanings, narratives, practices and political conflicts. The dynamical and procedural aspect of the senses of justice (GEERTZ, 2006; KANT DE LIMA, 2010), of the emerging subjects produced by collectivities for the claim of human rights agenda, of the performances and discourses reporting violations and historical contexts of subalternization (LAMOUREUX, 2013), of the multiple interventions of the State on behalf of human rights or even the daily practices of care and repression (RUI, 2012; FASSIN, 2014) have been the subject of many researches explored by anthropologists who study the social, political and cultural productivity of human rights.

However, the reality of a diversity of fields and heuristic objects is also a data that much reveals about the quicksand ground on which rights are based, despite their universal pretensions – largely constructed by the Occident. As it is explained by the historian Lynn Hunt (2009), despite the self-evident character of natural rights in the XVIII century – especially after the proclamation of the first constitutional text of the United States and the Declaration of Human Rights, in France – the rights have only become significant, either in the past or the present, when they started being publicly thematized, when they acquired a political content demanding the active participation of certain groups for the production of mechanisms that allows the recognition of muted humanities (HUNT, 2009).

Inspired by these assertions, all of which placed the potency of human rights on the political battles and collective commotion side, our intention is to take a reflexive look over the homeless population of Pelotas, in the extreme south of Brazil. It is important, before anything, to specify our objectives, in a dialogue with what Didier Fassin (2011) understands by ethnographic engagement: a modality of interlocution with the city and the political debate in a way of turning visible political games what strangely articulate care and repression, defense and remotion, rights, citizenship and violence. The idea is to insert results of different fieldworks in a wider field, in a dialogue with different actors and collectivities directly or indirectly implied in our interests of research.

With some provocations to address the context of the academic production about gestors and public institutions, our team, the Group of Anthropology and Human Rights¹ (GANDH/UCPel) has followed interventions from the local power, questioning these practices and the discourse assistencialism, insisting on the need for these people to have their fundamental rights applied. Furthermore, we try to broaden the angles through which homeless people are seen as an homogeneous group (when, in fact, they have a background, a history, memories,

¹ The GANDH is a group for discussion and researches of the Post-Graduation Program in Social Policy and Human Rights of the Catholic University of Pelotas. At this moment, the group is composed by students from the fields of Law, Journalism and Social Sciences. Since 2019, it has been conducting researches, both Master and PhD degree, about subjects concerned by the human rights debate, such as family, public policies and genre in prison, social mobilizations and the claim for LGBTQIA+ community, trans in party politics, public security policies for vulnerable youth and homeless population.

experiences, genre, race and political potencies) whose the one and only solution would be the production of institutional confinement space in order to withdraw them from central public spaces.²

Thus, we aim to show the possibility of leading the discussion about violation and access to public policies beyond the sensationalist visibility formed by the media and governmental fundraising efforts to face climatic adversities. The present moment could not be more adequate for this debate.

The problematization of these themes has reached an incredible resonance due to the visibility of multiple process of vulnerabilization created by the current COVID-19 pandemic. International orientations of preventions are proclaimed unilaterally, without taking into account the unequal access to resources and care conditions – extremely evident than ever, in the eyes of an enormous audience.

For these reasons, what we present here is the result of some collective strategies of research, developed in order to optimize our engagements through some technical bulletins³ on official websites of the Catholic University of Pelotas, in social networks and local media with an objective of publicization of qualitative and quantitative data from a research realized by the *Centro de Referência Especializado para População de Rua (Centro-Pop)*⁴, during November 2019, to identify and comprehend violence experienced suffered by the users of this institution.

Because of the collaboration of all the researches, the workers and users of *Centro-Pop*, a survey concerning age, schooling, birth, race, genre and violence was done from some questionnaires applied to 55 homeless men and women. In order to ensure qualitative data, we kept, individually, fieldnotes to register information that could not be apprehended by closed questionnaires, what allowed us to apprehend the dynamic of the determinants of race, genre and the perceptions that indicate the ordinary violence or even unacknowledgement about in what could consist the violence.

Our first concerns about this object was provoked by the challenging reality of having access to official data in the city. Despite all our efforts to have access to information through the public administration, the only sources are newspa-

² The historical and assertive “alternative” for the confinement dialogues with the context of European immigration discussed by Fassin (2014), where the edification of a “field structure” correspond to a response based on the creation of exception small territories, justified by an emergency situation that makes the gathering of all these people an acceptable solution.

³ The technical bulletins are simple and objectives publications about the data of concluded or ongoing researches. This modality of publication has been used by the *Grupo Interdisciplinar de Trabalho e Estudos Criminais-Penitenciários (GITEP/UCPel)*, coordinated by professor Luiz Antônio Bogo Chies, group to which GANDH is associated. This tool turns possible to disclose some information about regional or local themes, aiming to problematize some research subjects in a simpler language, accessible to everyone, in order to facilitate the dialogue between university, community, public and private institutions. We would like to use this opportunity to thank two researches in particular: Luiz Antônio Bogo Chies and Samuel Rivero, both from GITEP. We are extremely grateful for all the support given to our researches and the access to a broader public.

⁴ It is a day service inaugurated in 2009 by the Brazilian government, dedicated to the development of solidarity relations, respect and conviviality of women and men who live on the streets.

pers whose information, far from a certain panorama, expresses uncertainties as well as institutional disputes for official numbers. It is the case of an article published by *Diário Popular (DP)*, in May 2018, that indicates a changing in the number of homeless people in Pelotas, between 2015 and 2018. According to DP, there is an increase of 150 to 432 people living on the street, data provided by *Centro-Pop*.

In the same article, the responsible for the social assistance of the city contested this number, affirming that this increase is due to the passage of “Uruguayan nomads” that pass by the city to reach the coastal regions of the state. He also affirms that “this number is larger than 400 people is an accumulation of registers since 2006 and does not represent the current reality. Although there are homeless people in the city, the current number of attendances is between 120 and 140 people a month” (PERAÇA, 2018). Immediately, we can identify a field of disputes for the numbers, expressed by disagreement among the local public institutions, what reinforces the need for the application of efficient measures to comprehend this phenomenon, as it has been developed by other Brazilian municipalities.⁵

Identifying the disputes towards the official numbers, we understand that it is fundamental to bring it up, through the publication a technical bulletin – in consideration with the provocative effects that this measure could cause. In our document, we give a space to some elements such as race, genre, schooling and access to labor market. We have reached the following results: of the 55 people interviews, 86,4% are men. Women represent a percentage of 13,6%. This data confirms what the academic literature had already said about this issue: the homeless situation is an experience mostly masculine (ESCOREL, 1999; FRANGELLA, 2010). Nonetheless, recent studies have demonstrated that de dramatic dimension of homeless women, for whom the masculine presence, in the context of the street, is the paradoxes manifestation of protection and violence (FERNANDES, 2019).

About the racial percentage, we identified that 36,4% are caucasian, 38,6% are black, 20,5% brown, 4,5% indigenous. Concerning age, 68,2% of the users are aged between 30 and 49 years old. The research also shows that 75% have not finished middle-school, followed by 11,4% with a middle-school degree. Undoubtedly, the fact of being out of the labor market is, in part, due to the inexistence and ineffectiveness of housing, income, health and education policies. Still, we can also infer that the racial profile of these people has a strict relation with the situation of vulnerabilization where they are placed, considering that the structural racism supports and goes through social relations in Brazilian society, besides determining which groups have access to rights, goods, political and economic services, and which groups will be placed as the focus of many violent practices (ALMEIDA, 2018).

In order to hatch this relation between structural racism and procedures of vulnerabilization, we have elaborated a third bulletin, presenting the data

⁵ See, for example, the experience of qualitative and quantitative research in Porto Alegre (cf. PIMENTA, 2019)

about experiences and violences. Even though our initial pretention was not to publish data about the context after the pandemic of COVID-19, the absence of a local plan for the care of homeless people, having passed a month of social distancing determined by a state decree (55.154/20), have pushed us to put on stage one more discussion with a potential to show the complexity of life on the streets, from a perspective concerning other vectors of vulnerabilization, such as the daily violence.

The data is alarming. It shows that 80% of homeless people have already suffered some kind of violence. Of these, 84% have suffered physical violence, 73% verbal violence and 11% sexual violence. Regarding sexual violence, there is a notorious genre cut. Although the number of sexual violence cases related by the people interviewed is low, when compared to other kinds of violence, this percentage is evident in what concerns women. Of the total number of 55 women interviewed, 07 were women. Only one declared not to have suffered any kind of violence. Of the 06 women who have been victims, 03 declared to have suffered sexual violence while they were in a homeless situation. This is: the social differentiation complexifies the theme and challenge state interventions to adopt intersectional actions.

Albeit the percentage of aggression committed by other people in homeless situation is representative (39%), the state agents of the public security are the main aggressors, being responsible for 48% of the physical and verbal violence. Among the victims, 70% have never denounced the violence practices to state competent authorities. In this context, the silence appears paradoxically as the most effective protection action against new aggressions. We have concluded, among all the possible conclusions that the homeless situation has a double effect of vulnerabilization, given that it exposes the people to violence at the same time that prevents the access to justice through some internal mechanisms of protection.

During the last week of April, one measure of the local government has been highlighted by the regional media: the city opened the doors of a local public school to house homeless people. "While the pandemic of COVID-19 is active, the homeless people of Pelotas are going to have an option of place where to be"⁶. What are the implication and consequences of an action like this? What rests implicit when the government choses to offer "places where to be" temporarily, especially at a moment when the city government loosens the confinement measure? Moreover, what is the degree of articulation between the assistance, health, and care practices with people who are housed in a place where we can find agglomeration? This new house space is articulated as a locus for the guarantee of other rights, as the register in housing, income and access to justice policies? Without an answer, as professionals engaged in the public debate, it is up to us

⁶ Correo do Povo. *Colégio Pelotense abre as portas para moradores em situação de rua durante pandemia*. Pelotas, 22 de abril de 2020.

to make questions, according to the orientation of João Biehl (2011), to show the complexity of policies as well as to bare the omitted details and the divergences that reveal failed institutions, in the path to repeat old practices under new discursive techniques.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

ALMEIDA, Silvio Luiz de. **O que é racismo estrutural?** Belo Horizonte (MG): Letramento, 2018.

BIEHL, João. Antropologia no campo da saúde global. **Horizontes Antropológicos**, ano 17, n. 35, 2011, p.227-256.

SCOREL, Sarah. **Vidas ao léu. Trajetórias de exclusão social**. Rio de Janeiro: Fiocruz, 1999.

FASSIN, Didier. Compaixão e repressão: A economia moral das políticas de imigração na França. **Ponto Urbe**, São Paulo v.15, 2014.

_____. **La force de l'ordre. Une anthropologie de la police des quartiers**. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2011.

FRANGELLA, Simone. **Corpos Urbanos Errantes: uma etnografia da corporalidade de moradores de rua em São Paulo**. São Paulo: Anablume, Fapesp, 2009.

FERNANDES, Talita. 2019. **Rua, substantivo feminino**: mulheres em movimento e o direito ao corpo na cidade. Dissertação de mestrado (Programa de Pós-Graduação em Geografia). Porto Alegre: Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

GEERTZ, Clifford. **O Saber Local: novos ensaios em antropologia interpretativa**. 8. ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2006.

HUNT, Lynn. **A invenção dos direitos humanos: uma história**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2009.

KANT DE LIMA, Roberto. Sensibilidades jurídicas, saber e poder: bases culturais de alguns aspectos do direito brasileiro em uma perspectiva comparada, **Anuário Antropológico**, II | 2010, 25-51.

LAMOUREUX, Diane. Le droit d'avoir des droits - Que faisons-nous politiquement lorsque nous revendiquons des droits? In: SAILLANT, F.; TRUCHON, K. (Orgs). **Droits et cultures en mouvements**. Quebec: Presses de L'Université Laval, 2013, p. 41-57.

PERAÇA, Vinícius. "População de rua cresce 188% em três anos em Pelotas". **Diário Popular**, 03 de maio de 2018.

PIMENTA, Melissa. População em situação de rua em Porto Alegre: processos de estigmatização e invisibilidade social. **Civitas**, Porto Alegre, v. 19, n. 1, p. 82-104, jan.-abr. 2019.

RUI, Taniele. Vigiar e Cuidar: notas sobre a atuação estatal na cracolândia. **Revista Brasileira de Segurança Pública**, São Paulo v. 6, n. 2, 336-351 Ago/Set 2012.