



BIOPOLITICS AND THE SCOURGE OF CRACKLAND: AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF *HOMO SACER* IN GIORGIO AGAMBEN

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study is to analyze the issue of Cracolândia, the users who form the flow of the environment and the state interventions that they have experienced, from the perspective of biopolitics in Foucault and homo sacer in Agamben.

Theoretical Framework: The research is based on the theoretical contributions of Michel Foucault, especially the concept of biopolitics as a form of management of life in society, and of Giorgio Agamben, with an emphasis on the figure of homo sacer, bare life and the state of exception as expressions of sovereign power over life and death. Contemporary authors who study public policies, social exclusion and urban security are also used.

Method: The methodology adopted for this research comprises qualitative research, with a focus on theoretical research, carried out through bibliographical research.

Results and Discussion: The results obtained revealed that the repressive policies historically adopted in Cracolândia are aligned with a logic of thanatopolitics, while programs such as “De Braços Abertos” and “Redenção” point to possibilities of positive biopolitics, centered on social inclusion and human dignity. The study reveals that strategies based solely on repression are ineffective, as they disregard the multiple factors that sustain the permanence of individuals in that territory of exclusion.

Research Implications: The research contributes to the academic and political debate by highlighting the need for intersectoral public policies, supported by a human rights perspective, that contemplate the social, psychological and economic complexity of the population of Cracolândia. It also points out the risks of normalizing the state of exception as a daily practice of government.

Originality/Value: The value of this research lies in the articulation between contemporary political philosophy and a concrete urban problem. By relating the concepts of biopolitics and homo sacer to the reality of Cracolândia, it offers an innovative critical reading of the strategies of control, exclusion and resistance in the city of São Paulo, contributing to the advancement of discussions on citizenship, vulnerability and public policies.

Keywords: Crackland, Biopolitics, *Homo Sacer*, Analysis.

BIOPOLÍTICA E O FLAGELO DA CRACOLÂNDIA: UMA ANÁLISE SOB A ÓTICA DO *HOMO SACER* EM GIORGIO AGAMBEN

RESUMO

Objetivo: O objetivo deste estudo é analisar a questão da Cracolândia, dos usuários que formam o fluxo do ambiente e das intervenções estatais que os mesmos vivenciaram, sob a ótica da biopolítica em Foucault e do *homo sacer* em Agamben.

Referencial Teórico: A pesquisa está fundamentada nos aportes teóricos de Michel Foucault, especialmente no conceito de biopolítica como forma de gestão da vida em sociedade, e de Giorgio Agamben, com ênfase na figura do homo sacer, na vida nua e no estado de exceção como expressões do poder soberano sobre a vida e a morte. São utilizados também autores contemporâneos que estudam políticas públicas, exclusão social e segurança urbana.

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Método: A metodologia adotada para esta pesquisa compreende em uma pesquisa de natureza qualitativa, com enfoque na pesquisa teórica, realizada por meio de pesquisa bibliográfica.

Resultados e Discussão: Os resultados obtidos revelaram que as políticas repressivas historicamente adotadas na Cracolândia se alinham a uma lógica de tanatopolítica, ao passo que programas como “De Braços Abertos” e “Redenção” apontam para possibilidades de biopolítica positiva, centrada na inclusão social e na dignidade humana. O estudo revela que estratégias baseadas apenas na repressão são ineficazes, pois desconsideram os múltiplos fatores que sustentam a permanência dos indivíduos naquele território de exclusão.

Implicações da Pesquisa: A pesquisa contribui para o debate acadêmico e político ao evidenciar a necessidade de políticas públicas intersetoriais, sustentadas por uma perspectiva de direitos humanos, que contemplem a complexidade social, psicológica e econômica da população da Cracolândia. Também aponta os riscos de normalização do estado de exceção como prática cotidiana de governo.

Originalidade/Valor: O valor desta pesquisa reside na articulação entre filosofia política contemporânea e uma problemática urbana concreta. Ao relacionar os conceitos de biopolítica e homo sacer à realidade da Cracolândia, oferece uma leitura crítica inovadora sobre as estratégias de controle, exclusão e resistência na cidade de São Paulo, contribuindo para o avanço das discussões sobre cidadania, vulnerabilidade e políticas públicas.

Palavras-chave: Cracolândia, Biopolítica, *Homo Sacer*, Análise.

BIOPOLÍTICA Y EL FLACTO DE CRACKLAND: UN ANÁLISIS DESDE LA PERSPECTIVA DEL *HOMO SACER* EN GIORGIO AGAMBEN

RESUMEN

Objetivo: El objetivo de este estudio es analizar la cuestión de Cracolândia, los usuarios que forman el flujo del entorno y las intervenciones estatales que ellos vivieron, desde la perspectiva de la biopolítica en Foucault y del homo sacer en Agamben.

Marco Teórico: La investigación se basa en los aportes teóricos de Michel Foucault, especialmente el concepto de biopolítica como forma de gestión de la vida en sociedad, y de Giorgio Agamben, con énfasis en la figura del homo sacer, la nuda vida y el estado de excepción como expresiones del poder soberano sobre la vida y la muerte. También se utilizan autores contemporáneos que estudian políticas públicas, exclusión social y seguridad urbana.

Método: La metodología adoptada para esta investigación comprende la investigación cualitativa, con foco en la investigación teórica, realizada a través de la investigación bibliográfica.

Resultados y Discusión: Los resultados obtenidos revelaron que las políticas represivas históricamente adoptadas en Cracolândia están alineadas con una lógica de tanatopolítica, mientras que programas como “De Braços Abertos” y “Redenção” apuntan posibilidades de biopolítica positiva, centrada en la inclusión social y la dignidad humana. El estudio revela que las estrategias basadas únicamente en la represión son ineficaces, pues desconocen los múltiples factores que sustentan la permanencia de los individuos en ese territorio de exclusión.

Implicaciones de la investigación: La investigación contribuye al debate académico y político al destacar la necesidad de políticas públicas intersectoriales, apoyadas en una perspectiva de derechos humanos, que contemplem la complejidad social, psicológica y económica de la población de Cracolândia. También señala los riesgos de normalizar el estado de excepción como una práctica gubernamental cotidiana.

Originalidad/Valor: El valor de esta investigación radica en la articulación entre la filosofía política contemporánea y un problema urbano concreto. Al relacionar los conceptos de biopolítica y homo sacer con la realidad de Cracolândia, ofrece una lectura crítica innovadora de las estrategias de control, exclusión y resistencia en la ciudad de São Paulo, contribuyendo al avance de las discusiones sobre ciudadanía, vulnerabilidad y políticas públicas.

Palabras clave: Cracklandia, Biopolítica, *Homo Sacerdote*, Análisis.



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1 INTRODUCTION

In the center of the city of São Paulo, in the vicinity of the Luz Station, there is an area with intense drug consumption and commercialization and where hundreds of people congregate every day. This region was popularly known as Cracolândia. Since the first crack seizure occurred in the capital of São Paulo in 1990 (BBC News Brasil, 2023), the situation has worsened, since the use of narcotics has increased exponentially. The negative consequences of this situation for the municipality activated and justified the implementation of biopolitics; this means that Cracolândia and its users became the object of control by the Public Power. Over just over three decades, numerous actions have intervened in the region in attempts to solve the problem. None of them, however, was fully effective.

Michel Foucault developed the theory of biopolitics in the 1970s, arguing that, from the end of the eighteenth century, the state power began to manage and manage the life of the population, which thus became his main focus of attention. Giorgio Agamben resumed these studies in the 1990s. The Italian philosopher promoted a redefinition of the politicization of life based on the concepts of *homo sacer* and bare life. The *homo sacer* is a figure of Ancient Roman law, one who could be sacrificed without any punishment. Thus, the *homo sacer* possesses the so-called "bare life", which is life devoid of rights and value.

Given the above, this article has as main objective to analyze the issue of Cracolândia, the users who form the flow of the environment and state interventions that they experienced, from the perspective of biopolitics in Foucault and *homo sacer* in Agamben. The work is divided into three parts: understanding biopolitics in Foucault; analyzing the resumption of the theme through the concepts of *homo sacer* and bare life in Agamben and finally, discussing the challenges and policies implemented in Cracolândia. The methodology used in this work is the theoretical research, carried out through bibliographical research that involves the investigated theme. The subject is relevant, since Cracolândia is an illness that has generated immense social and economic losses for São Paulo. This work does not propose to exhaust the theme, nor to bring miraculous solutions to the problem; it only seeks to promote a discussion about the strategies that could be practicable and fruitful in coping with this context of profound crisis and social invisibility.



2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 BIOPOLITICS BY MICHEL FOUCAULT

The analysis of the politicization of life and the concepts of *homo sacer* and bare life in Giorgio Agamben must, in advance, pass through the study of biopolitics in Michel Foucault. The French philosopher was the source that inspired the Italian to formulate his theories about the theme. Therefore, learning this, necessarily goes through that. Begalli and Silveira (2019, p. 3) begin this journey by telling that

In Ancient Greece, life could be defined and understood in two forms: *zoë* and *bios*. The first was a natural, purely biological form of life, referring to all living beings. However, with the politicization of life, some human beings were deprived of rights and citizenship. The second was the way of life of the person holding rights, which made her a citizen with political participation within the polis.

In the Greek city-states, the so-called polis, slaves were an example of *zoe*, that is, they had a biological existence, but they were devoid of any right or political participation. According to Arendt (2001, p. 103), "the ancients reasoned otherwise: they thought it necessary to have slaves by virtue of the servile nature of all occupations that provide what is necessary for the maintenance of life." In that society, honor and dignity were linked to participation in the public sphere and work was considered a condition that made man inferior. Also according to Arendt (2001, p. 211), "men who needed to work and had restricted their coexistence in the polis, because of the ordinary needs of life, would be inferior to others".

In the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, in the West, a great transformation occurred: man ceased to be seen as an individualized being and became part of a social body, and this entity became the object of government action. The government began to manage life in a collectivized way" (Begalli & Silveira, 2019, p. 04). Government actions were intended, from then on, to control life. Thus, the human body and the life of the population, considered as a collective entity, began to be monitored and managed by the state power, which began to have them as the center of its exercise. Examples are the control of mortality rates, birth rates, morbidity rates, statistics and public health policies.

Foucault (1994) commented that even wars no longer have the greater purpose of strengthening sovereignty, since they began to be fought in the name of the survival of a people, and because of this need to survive, many peoples have massacred each other. One population



is condemned to death to ensure the life of the other. Wars broke out as forms of life management, which became, in this way, the object of politics, but within a mass feature. Thus biopolitics was born. Life went into the calculations of the government, which went on to direct its mechanisms of power to manage it.

For Foucault (1994), sovereign power began to make the administration of bodies and the calculating management of life, that is, "we should speak of 'biopolitics' to designate what makes life and its mechanisms enter the domain of explicit calculations of power, and makes power-knowledge an agent of transformation of human life" (Foucault, 1994, p. 157). One of the central elements of biopolitics is the population, since it has become the main object of government actions. Foucault (2005) recalls that until the emergence of biopolitics, Law was essentially concerned with two concepts: the individual and society. Rousseau's theory of the social contract was taken into account, in which the individual gave up a portion of his freedom in favor of peace and order, which was essential for the existence of a civilized society. In this sense, biopolitics was not only concerned with an individual or with some individuals, but with the human species in a broad way, as this became regulated by the State. For Foucault (2005), the population could be considered as a multiple body, and biopolitics began to deal with this body as a problem at the same time biological, scientific and political.

There have been many developments in biopolitics. One of them was the management of the population and life through sexuality, often in order to achieve a purification of blood and race, that is, a true eugenics of the human species (theme already mentioned in chapter II of this work). Foucault (2005) cites the Nazi regime that, in the name of this eugenics, committed a great genocide in search of this propagated superior blood. For this blood, Hitler's policy took charge of the largest massacre in history. This would be racism in its modern form. Foucault (1994) also says that the first eugenicists put the domain of sexuality as primordial for the improvement of the race.

Sexuality has thus come to be regulated and nationalized in countless ways: sterilization of people with the control of birth rates, government programs to combat sexually transmitted diseases, assisted reproductive techniques, and even the prohibition of interracial marriages, as happened in societies that preached segregation between blacks and whites. Sexuality was involved "in broad biological processes that no longer concern the body of the individual, but this element, this multiple unit constituted by the population" (Foucault, 2005, p. 306). Thus, sexuality no longer concerns the private life of a person, it becomes important for an entire population, its survival and continuity.



The management of the population was also very important for capitalism. The Industrial Revolution, which began in England in the mid-eighteenth century, caused a large number of people to leave their lives in the countryside and start working in the machine-powered workshops. The exhausting working hours, low wages, disrespect for the condition of women, placing children in the industry and unhealthy working conditions, among other degrading factors that boosted the economy of the time, could only exist from the so-called docilization of bodies, so that they became productive and fit for what was required of them. The so-called "docile bodies" were essential to the capitalist system.

It was also at the end of the 18th century that the French Revolution (1789-1889) began. France, ruled by an absolutist state regime, faced, at the time, a serious political, social and economic crisis. The merchants paid heavy taxes and practically maintained the luxury of the Court of Versailles, but, like the workers and peasants, they did not have the right to participate in the course of the country's politics. Added to this was the poverty and misery in which a large part of the French people lived. All these reasons culminated in a strong tension against the nobility and the clergy, until the moment the revolt became irreversible and the Old Regime finally witnessed its final overthrow. Without going into the merits of the legacy that the French Revolution left to the world, this work sticks to the question of the bourgeois class and its purposes. Traders ardently desired to get rid of taxes and have the freedom to practice their market activities without any state interference. Thus, the Liberal State was inaugurated, which began to focus on the market and its rules. The market then became such a powerful force that it began to drive the behavior of the state itself. It often even seems to be above him. Foucault (2008, p. 49) says that the market economy "constitutes the general indexer under which one should put the rule that will define all government actions. It is necessary to govern because of the market."

However, biopolitics, through its numerous mechanisms, has brought a consequence that is perhaps the most serious of all: from the moment the State came to have power over life, it also began to seize death and "the right to death will tend from the outset, to move, or at least to rely on the demands of a power that manages life, and to order itself to what they claim" (Foucault, 1994, p. 139). After all, how many wars erupted and decimated entire populations? How many states have been on battlefields dueling with each other on the grounds of protecting their populations? While one dies, the other survives. He kills himself for a living. Life and death are controlled, which, paradoxically, start to live side by side.

Michel Foucault died early in June 1984. As already mentioned, his theories about biopolitics were re-examined in the 1990s by Agamben, under new features. However, if, for



Foucault, biopolitics was born in the passage from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, for Agamben (2002), this intimate relationship between power and life, and the placing of life as the center of power, has been present since the earliest times of humanity, as will be seen in the following topic.

2.2 THE *HOMO SACER* BY GIORGIO AGAMBEN

For Agamben (2004, p. 78), "Western politics since its beginnings has been related to life and the exclusion of life." Thus, since antiquity there would already be an administration of life by the government. As protagonists of Agamben's studies on the politicization of life, there are the figures of *homo sacer* and bare life. The first is an Ancient Roman Law figure "who possesses an unsanctionable death that anyone can commit in relation to him" (Agamben, 2002, p. 84). That is, it is a person who can be killed without there being a punishment for such an act. The *homo sacer* therefore possesses

[...] a bare life, which is life itself devoid of rights. In this way, the paradox of inclusion-exclusion arises, since *homo sacer* is excluded from the legal system, before the absence of rights that permeate its existence, but is also included in it, since this same system that denies it rights, has the domain over its life and death and, thus, allows it to be sacrificed without later sanction (Begalli & Silveira, 2019, p. 04).

By politicizing life, sovereign power has the power to exclude and include. It excludes because it does not confer rights on him, but it includes because it has the power to decide about his life and death. Agamben (2002) points out that the axis of contemporary politics is life and this ends up generating a great contradiction: while it can be preserved, it can also be sacrificed, depending on the value that is given to it. As long as this paradox remains, according to the author, Nazism and fascism will always be current.

The case of the girl Omayra Sanchez (Marques & Biondi, 2016) is cited as an example. In November 1985, the Nevado del Ruiz volcano, located in Colombia, erupted causing the destruction of the town of Armero. Among the victims was Omayra, a 13-year-old girl who was trapped by the rubble of her home. When the people responsible for the rescue located her, they found that to remove her from the site, it would be necessary to amputate her legs. However, there was no surgical equipment necessary for this procedure, nor any resource able to remove it. The teenager agonized for about sixty hours, until she died. The Colombian government remained indifferent to the situation and did not send any help to Omayra, "deciding" in a way



that that life did not deserve to be lived. Therefore, Agamben (2002, p. 119) understands that "if in every modern state, there is a line that marks the point at which the decision on life becomes a decision on death, biopolitics can thus become so much politics [...]".

The *homo sacer* and the bare life can lead to a context that is also nuclear in Agamben's studies: the state of exception. The state of exception is an abnormal situation which directly precludes the rule of law. This is a condition in which fundamental rights and guarantees can be suspended, and therefore the state of exception constitutes a kind of suspension of legality. Agamben (2002, p. 24), on the subject, argues that "the standard applies to suspension by disapplying, withdrawing from it. The state of exception is therefore not the chaos that precedes the order, but the situation that results from its suspension."

If it is the sovereign state that holds the power to create the law, that same state can suppress it. Nowadays, exceptions are becoming the rule, because "the declaration of the state of exception is progressively replaced by an unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of security as a normal technique of government" (Agamben, 2004, p. 27). Thus, this leads us to a dangerous situation in which the State can define which lives, through exception, will be excluded from the protection of the legal system, after all "how is it possible for the legal system to have a gap precisely on a crucial issue? And what is the meaning of this gap?" (Agamben, 2004, p. 39).

Agamben (2004) recalls that, as soon as Hitler came to power in Germany, he promulgated the "Decree for the protection of the people and the state", which suspended individual freedoms and rights. The decree was in effect for 12 years and for all that time Germany lived in a state of exception. The concentration camps leave no doubt about this. To these camps were taken all the people who, within that social and historical moment, were regarded as the *homo sacer*. Barers of the so-called naked life, they could *be subjected to slave labor, to degrading conditions of life and even to death without any punishment*. This state withdrew its fundamental rights and guarantees from this population, excluding them from its current legal system. But although banned by this state, paradoxically it was this same sovereignty that had the power to decide on his life and death. About who would live and die. It turns out that the existence of figures that align themselves with the concept of the *homo sacer* of Roman Law, is not restricted to history books. The *homo sacer* is present in the contemporary world. He's alive and right next to us at various junctures. And this is the case of the so-called Cracolândia, the theme of the following topic.



2.3 CRACOLANDIA

The São Paulo district of Campos Elísios was born at the end of the 19th century to house the mansions of wealthy families, especially those of the major coffee producers. In 1961, the Rodoviária da Luz was inaugurated, a fact that marked a turning point in the region: hundreds of people began to disembark every day at the terminal and this movement attracted numerous traders who filled the region with their shops, hotels and restaurants, offering work to the population and making the neighborhood increasingly agitated. In 1982, with the inauguration of the Tietê Bus Station, the Light Terminal was deactivated and this unleashed an emptying of the local commerce. This abandonment has made people living on the streets and vulnerable to start living in the area, which before the nickname of Cracolândia, was also called Boca do Lixo. There, prostitution, crime and drug use have become part of daily life (BBC News Brasil, 2023).

From the beginning of the 1990s, crack consumption spread in an uncommon way, stimulated by the low price and the potency of its effects. Cracolândia became a social scourge with very serious consequences not only for the regions of Luz, Santa Efigênia, Campos Elíseos and surroundings, but for the municipality as a whole. The degradation of the area where it is located caused a strong real estate devaluation, in addition to frightening companies, new residents and other investments. In addition, the large concentration of people using open-air narcotics means that the Public Power has more expenses in the areas of security, cleaning, health and social assistance, among other sectors.

This framework of scourge allows us to understand the reasons why Cracolândia has been, for more than 30 years, the object of state policies aimed at solving the problem. Not without reason, the lives of drug users have become the focus of research (to map profile and behavior), investments, police operations and social programs. This is a way of managing the life of the population, biopolitics. But analyzing the measures implemented in this period, what is noticed is that since "the beginning of public policies for Cracolândia, one can observe the use of state violence in operations such as "zero tolerance", obeying a logic of social cleansing that aimed to exclude those considered undesirable" (Alves & Pereira, 2023). In January 2025, the City Hall of São Paulo erected a wall about 40 meters long and 2.5 meters high to surround the site and confine users (G1, 2025).

However, even before this construction, Cracolândia was already, in a way, separated from the rest of the city through a type of imaginary line that delimited the space, segregating it and controlling the bodies belonging to it. This population, stigmatized, began to live in a



kind of limbo, marked by uncertainty, invisibility and the absence of guardianship and state rules. Oblivious to the social and legal order, this environment certainly ended up creating its own rules and its mechanisms of power. It has become a true state of exception and the people who inhabit it are the *homo sacer* itself: they are excluded from the State that neglects them, but they can be killed without any punishment, because that same State allows this to occur when determining that life has no legal value.

Hiding Cracolândia through concrete blocks or using violent actions against users to make them disappear (either through death or geographic displacement of them) does not solve the problem, but only masks it and probably for a short time. Any measure that intends only to extirpate the human flow from the place, without any concern with the rehabilitation and resocialization of the users will be innocuous, since it will only cause them to disperse or migrate to other places, where the consumption and commercialization of toxic substances will continue to happen, albeit in a decentralized way.

If the Public Power chooses to combat this problem only through the use of force, leading to the massacre of the local population, what is seen is the biopolitics replaced by thanatopolitics, that is, by exercising control over the bodies that are concentrated in Cracolândia, the State "decides" that those lives should be reaped, as if they were the *homo sacer*, bearer of the unworthy life. Public security has an essential role to curb drug trafficking, but this organism cannot be used as an instrument of social cleansing, because even if the urban scene is apparently free of those individuals considered undesirable, they will continue to exist, only camouflaged elsewhere. And the State will continue to be aggravated by this burden. Thus, this method only serves the purpose of a cleaner and more harmonious urban landscape in the eyes of those who transit there.

What one aims to say with this is that police actions are ineffective when carried out in isolation. And the past doesn't let us lie. In January 2012, Operation Pain and Suffering banned the gathering of people in the streets of Cracolândia; they could only move continuously, but were prevented from remaining in place, being reprimanded with tear gas bombs and batons (Agência Brasil, 2024). In 2017, a large operation that brought together about 900 civil and military police officers briefly dismantled Cracolândia; more than 50 people were arrested (G1, 2017), but as had occurred in 2012, the flow of users only diverted to other places in the center of the São Paulo capital. As time went by, they returned to the place where they used to settle.

The same can be concluded with regard to hospitalizations (whether voluntary or involuntary): they tend to fail if promoted as solitary measures. Drug addiction is a serious illness and the person living with it must have the corresponding treatment. Often this is through



hospitalizations in rehabilitation clinics. But what happens to the dependent when the period of restriction on the streets ends? Where is he going to live? How will you generate income for your livelihood? Do you have work? Are there links with the family? If these elements are disregarded, the propensity is that the person returns to the alleys and addiction after time in outpatient regimen, since they will not have the support or resources to keep away from them. And any hospitalization should have as its purpose the recovery and resocialization of the patient, one cannot contemplate treatments with a segregationist and exclusionary vision. This, once again, would correspond only to a kind of "urban eugenics."

What is clear is that Cracolândia is not only a matter of public safety nor a matter that belongs solely to the health field. This is a profoundly social demand, which opens up inequality, since the population inserted in this space is extremely vulnerable. We can see that each user who "survives and crawls daily through the dirty and dark alleys of Cracolândia in search of another stone is a sample that carries the traces of a micro and macro-social context that did not work" (Lovadini, 2023).

The data from the *Survey of the Profile of Drug Users in the Cracolândia Region*, carried out by the Alcohol and Drug Research Unit (UNIAD, 2019) of the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP) showed that more than half of users (65.3%) live and sleep every day on the streets of Cracolândia itself and do not have any income or benefits (53.9%). Users who have already been tested for infectious diseases, such as syphilis, HIV, hepatitis (B and C), and tuberculosis, are high. Regarding mental health, it was detected that more than half of the participants have a history of psychotic episodes (58%) and more than one third (38%) have already attempted suicide. Boiteux (2015) points out that the majority of crack addicts are men in the age group of 30 years, black or brown, single, with low level of education and also consumers of cigarettes and alcohol. For the author, this user is "one who only becomes visible when it bothers others on public roads, or when television shows images of people in situations of social repugnance" (Boiteux, 2015, p. 153).

The UNIAD survey (2019) also showed that there would be four main factors that would lead users to leave Cracolândia: work (44%), family support (32.8%), residence (20%) and treatment against addiction (18.8%). Many users mentioned that in the past they had already managed to spend a period away from drugs or at least reduce consumption. According to them, this happened due to factors such as the support of family or friends (23.6%), the achievement of a paid activity (23.1%) and the reception in Therapeutic Communities (22.6%). The data support the understanding that Cracolândia is not only a zone of buying and selling drugs, but also an area marked by social exclusion.



Given this situation and in contrast to the logic of militarized repression, in 2014 the City of São Paulo implemented the *Open Arms Program* (DBA), which offered users of Cracolândia housing in hotels, job opportunities and income generation, food, as well as a tent that was open as a physical space for support. Two years after the start of activities, 88% of beneficiaries said they had drastically reduced drug use. The survey also pointed out that 84.66% were in health treatment, 84.17% had acquired identification documents (because they did not have them, which certainly made it difficult to attend public services) and that 72.75% were working. Another important fact is that 52.52% of the beneficiaries had recovered contact with the family, an important condition for the social reintegration of the chemical dependent (City of São Paulo, 2016).

In a research carried out on the DBA, it was possible to perceive the positive impact that the program had on citizenship, self-esteem and quality of life of crack users, since such a policy was able to meet the need for work, housing and food (Silva; Pereira; Alves, 2023). However, the program has faced difficulties, especially the fact that it has to live with the conflicts in the region, still dominated by criminal factions linked to drug trafficking (Alves; Pereira & Peres, 2020). The closure of activities took place in 2017.

In 2019, it was the turn of the *Redemption* program, carried out by the Municipal Policy on Alcohol and Other Drugs, to start its activities, with the purpose of promoting health care, social reintegration and professional training for drug addicts. After four years, there were about three hundred beneficiaries of the program who had been inserted in the labor market, with specific vacancies for people at social risk due to the use of crack and other drugs and who were also in treatment in the equipment of the Psychosocial Care Network (RAPS) (City of São Paulo, 2023).

Both the DBA and the *Redemption* were biopolitics implemented in the form of affirmative action, which are governmental initiatives that act on behalf of groups that are in a situation of social fragility. They are usually elaborated and executed in the field of fundamental social rights, such as work, education and health. This core of rights, provided for in Article 6 of the Federal Constitution of 1988, if effective, has the power to correct the discrepancies that cause inequalities. And any context of inequality causes damage to the State. If, for example, there is a population with difficulty in entering the labor market, the result of this imbalance will be the increase in poverty and fatally the expansion of government spending, which will be overloaded at various levels. Therefore, the life of the population is also managed seeking to achieve inclusion; it is not a mere altruism, but a calculation that shows that any scenario of exclusion burdens the Public Power. And this time, processes are needed for their elimination.



Therefore, any intervention that ignores the multiplicity of factors that involve the complexity of Cracolândia will tend to fail. The measures should aim at the integral reception of individuals, considering their humanity, their uniqueness, their experiences. After all, what led these people to be there? In the search for these answers and with the conviction that they can contribute to a better understanding of the theme, Rui (2014) presents us with the story of Oseas and Shirley, residents of Cracolândia: he guarantees that he does not use crack cocaine uncontrollably, but that since he left jail, he has nowhere to go, nor with whom to count. She says that she doesn't smoke, but that she is in the place because there are friends with whom she talks and has fun. The question of identification calls attention: it is as if Cracolândia had been constituted as a social microsystem; the people belonging to this environment, repudiated by society and the State, found there a space of acceptance and mutual recognition.

In May 2025, Cracolândia's main route of concentration of users was surprisingly emptied. The drug addicts, however, spread to several points of the city center; new streams were found in streets of the neighborhoods of Luz, Sé, Campos Elíseos, Liberdade, Santa Cecília and Bom Retiro. Under the March 25 Viaduct, two agglomerations of about 50 people were seen using crack and other drugs in broad daylight (O GLOBO, 2025). Again, it's as if a makeup had concealed a wound, but it hadn't healed it. This is because a good makeup can favor only the appearance, since it hides the injury, but does not reach the heart of it, so it does not cure it. If people left (or were removed) the place where they usually stayed, but continue on the streets, their vulnerability has not been extinguished and the State will continue to bear its implications in the most varied layers. The only change, in this case, seems to be the one that occurs in the urban landscape, which becomes (apparently) free of those considered inconveniences.

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this work is qualitative, focusing on theoretical research, carried out through bibliographic research. This approach aims to understand and problematize, from the theoretical framework of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, the forms of action of the State in the face of the problem of Cracolândia, in São Paulo.



4 RESULTSS AND DISCUSSÕES

The analysis developed throughout this work shows that Cracolândia constitutes a paradigmatic space for the exercise of biopolitics and the production of subjects such as homo sacer, as theorized by Giorgio Agamben. The data and examples extracted from empirical research, such as the surveys of UNIAD (2019) and the "Open Arms" and "Redemption" programs, demonstrate how the State acts selectively on the lives of certain individuals - sometimes administering, sometimes discarding these lives - based on essentially political and economic criteria.

It turns out that historically adopted repressive approaches — such as "zero tolerance" operations, the use of police force and the recent physical isolation of the area with walls — align with the logic of thanatopolitics, in which the state not only manages life, but authorizes its symbolic or concrete annihilation. The criminalization of the user, its territorial segregation and the invisibility of its human condition represent a clear manifestation of power over bare life, devoid of legal and social value.

On the other hand, social inclusion programs, such as De Braços Abertos, showed significant results: reduction of drug use (88%), increased adherence to health treatment (84%), reintegration into the labor market (more than 70%) and rapprochement with family members (52%). These data suggest that public policies focused on humanization, reintegration and recognition of human dignity are significantly more effective than merely punitive strategies. In this sense, such actions can be understood as positive forms of inclusive biopolitics, when seeking to manage life with a view to its preservation and strengthening.

The discussions also point to the need for intersectoral coordination between public safety, health, social assistance and housing and employment policies. The disarticulation of these fronts reduces the chances of social reintegration and perpetuates the cycle of exclusion. In addition, data reveal that the factors considered determinants by the users themselves to abandon drug use are directly related to the guarantee of basic rights, such as work, housing and family ties.

Finally, the persistence of Cracolândia as a "space of exception" demonstrates that, in addition to a matter of health or safety, it is a deeply political phenomenon, which reveals the gears of a state that either protects or eliminates, according to the value it attaches to life. The presence of contemporary homo sacer in the streets of downtown São Paulo requires a break with urban eugenics policies and the engagement in strategies that effectively promote citizenship and human dignity.



5 CONCLUSION

This article aimed to discuss Cracolândia and its impacts in the city of São Paulo, from the perspective of biopolitics in Michel Foucault and *homo sacer* in Giorgio Agamben. What the experiences of more than 30 years of government interference in Cracolândia show us is that initiatives with a purely repressive logic have not been successful; these actions have managed, at most, to disguise the problem for a short period of time.

Drug trafficking is a gear driven by two interdependent ends, trade and consumption. Reducing the sale of narcotics is an indispensable measure, since dependents will not be able to use the drug if it is not available for purchase. But this does not change the deprivation condition in which these people live. They will certainly continue to pass through viaducts and alleyways, exposed to numerous risks and living with hunger, cold, diseases, etc. That is why the work of security agencies must take place in conjunction with activities, in particular public health and social assistance.

Thus, we start from the understanding that any initiative that seeks a permanent solution must encompass the entire context of vulnerability of the population living or attending Cracolândia. It is not just a question of chemical dependency or of criminality: we are talking about establishing strategies that make possible the self-sufficiency of these people, because it is their concrete reintegration into society that is going to result in ample benefits for the State. Thus, planning should involve appropriate therapies, income generation, housing, and reattachment to family members. The fruitful results of social programs that have already been undertaken in the region, based on the assumptions of humanization and user embracement, support the argument that these seem to be the possible paths to the end of Cracolândia.

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