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Medicalization of Crime: The Florianopolis Penitentiary as a Space for Knowledge and Power (1933-1945)

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Objectives: There are two central objectives of this article. One is to analyze how fears that affected urban centers after the 19th century have repercussions on Florianópolis; and the other is to understand the strategies created by their control, specifically in penitentiary centers.

Methodology: Descriptive analysis with revision of documents from the Pedra Grande Penitentiary.

Results: The authors conducted an analysis of the set up and reorganization of the penitentiary model of Florianópolis at the beginning of the last century, utilizing the theories of Foucault and Illich, and they show that this model was created under the point of view of the medical-hygienist thinking. They describe the creation of diverse centers and institutions for the control of individuals considered undesirable by society, like “crazy people, abandoned children, prostitutes and beggars”, etc. The control is encouraged by the bourgeois class, which has ideals of “progress and civilization”. Their members look at the impoverished classes as dangerous, and as carriers of diseases and addictions. The authors found in the sources studied a very strong preoccupation with crime associated with heredity, perversion and hygiene, all marked by a medical-legal vocabulary. The positivist penal codes, based on the new sciences of criminology and criminal anthropology, were the precepts utilized in the majority of the prisons in the country in order to reform the penitentiary systems. Among the first measures adopted, the authors demonstrated the categorization and separation of the “crazy” people from the general prison population, as well as separating individuals by their types of crimes that they are accused of and their punishments. The declared purpose was to have a better understanding of the determining factors of crime, converting the prisoner into an object of a positivist science that accumulated information in the form of a scientific study supported by the observation of the daily life in the prison in order to control them better.

Conclusions: The authors assert that the creation of the Pedra Grande Penitentiary originated from two areas. The first source of support were the problems that affected the large urban centers during this time period, including the problem of mass urban migration and the fear of contamination and epidemics. The second source was the social acceptance of control institutions of this type. The authors found in the writings of Araujo, who orchestrated the penitentiary reform, eugenics discourse which attributes the origin of crime to the individual, to his physicality and specific race. These documents express a medical practice that functions with a judgmental discourse, which the authors call the *medicalization of crime*.