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Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

## **Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth**

## **Observâncias: psicologia, políticas de segurança pública e juventudes encarceradas**

## **Observaciones: psicología, políticas públicas de seguridad y juventudes encarceladas**

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to discuss the production of an expertise between psychology and security, specially regarding ways of observing and intervening towards the young subject considered dangerous. Based on Michel Foucault's studies, this analysis focuses on the relation between those fields of knowledge questioning the observance strategies engendered by psychological practices within public security policies. In these terms, the article brings quotidian scenes based on ethnographical experiences from within a project entitled 'Imprisoned Youth Observatory' located inside the Central Prison of Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil) that make it possible to question the way psychological knowledge produces young people in conflict with the law. Through this analysis, it is possible not only to visualize how psychology privatizes a domain over the incarcerated young offender, but also how this science creates dead-end destinies to this youth who are considered a 'social problem'.

**Keywords:** Psychology; Prison; Youth; Public Security Policies

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Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

### Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é discutir a produção de uma *expertise* entre psicologia e segurança, principalmente no que tange formas de observar e intervir sobre o sujeito jovem considerado perigoso. Fazendo uso dos estudos de Michel Foucault, a analítica volta-se para a relação entre estes campos de saber, colocando em questão as estratégias de observância engendradas por práticas psicológicas no interior de políticas de segurança pública. Assim, o artigo traz cenas cotidianas baseadas em experiências etnográficas junto a um projeto intitulado 'Observatório de Juventudes' no Presídio Central de Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil) que possibilitam questionar o modo como o saber psicológico produz o jovem em situação de conflito com a lei. A partir dessa análise, não somente se visibiliza como a psicologia privatiza um domínio de saber sobre o jovem preso, como esta se torna uma ciência que encerra destinos para a juventude considerada 'problema social'.

**Palavras-chave:** Psicologia; Prisão; Juventude; Políticas de Segurança Pública

### Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es discutir la producción de una *expertise* entre psicología y seguridad, principalmente en lo que se refiere a las formas de observar e intervenir sobre el sujeto joven considerado peligroso. La analítica se vuelve a la relación entre estos campos de saber, poniendo en cuestión las estrategias de observancia engendradas en las políticas públicas de seguridad y la participación de las prácticas psicológicas en el interior de éstas, haciendo uso de los estudios de Michel Foucault. En estos términos, el artículo trae escenas cotidianas basadas en experiencias etnográficas en el Presidio Central de Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil) que posibilitan cuestionar el modo como el saber psicológico produce al joven en situación de conflicto con la ley. A partir de ese análisis, no sólo se visibiliza cómo la psicología privatiza un dominio de saber sobre el joven preso, como ésta se convierte en una ciencia que encierra destinos para la juventud considerada 'problema social'.

**Palabras-clave:** Psicología; Prisión; Juventud; Políticas Públicas de Seguridad

Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

### **The slipper and the tile, a prison's tale**

Central Prison of Porto Alegre, administrative yard. The walls of this section are filled with concrete and color – new pictures were hung, work of the prisoners. The new floor shows a combination of tiles and bricks. Twenty-three doors are located in a long and narrow corridor; the last door on the right is the one addressed as the Youth Observatory. The room is small and its walls are still waiting for the color of the graffiti that soon will be painted. A group composed of psychologists, law professionals, representatives of the youth prison service and members of the military police brigade<sup>4</sup> stand inside the Observatory. They are gathering to officialize the beginning of a new partnership and research activities inside this prison. As they stand there, a voice echoes through the corridor. It reaches every one of them as an alarm: “Passing through! Passing through!” – The loud howl is launched among bars, uniform and diligences.

Someone warns that at this exact moment, at the sound of such utterance, those who are in the corridor must place themselves with their backs against the nearest wall (making sure not to misunderstand by doors or bars): “Passing through! Passing through!”, it means a prisoner is about to cross the corridor of the administrative yard to enter one of those doors. As the detainee passes through, everything suddenly freezes. One is not supposed to look directly at him, neither talk to the passer-by, not even cross his way. Everyone must wait, against the nearest wall, until the prisoner is out of sight. There are so many negative orders, so

many ways of not looking, not moving, not talking, not acting, not passing to let him pass, that the only place the gaze is allowed to look is straight to the ground. By doing so, the eyes meet the prisoner's slippers clapping against the tile while he walks. His hands, chained in handcuffs on his back, interact with each other. Against the wall, the thought that crosses one's mind is: how the Observatory could produce any difference between the slipper and the tile?

### **An observatory at Central Prison of Porto Alegre**

In June 2013 the first author of this paper received an invitation to participate in the construction and implementation of the ‘Imprisoned Youth Observatory’ at the largest pre-trial detention establishment of the south of Brazil, the Central Prison of Porto Alegre, located at the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The creation of an Observatory directed to young people deprived of freedom at this prison, more specifically, originated from the fact that every month, for the last couple of years, around 300 young people, aged between 18 and 29, enter this prison facility: approximately 70% of the local imprisoned population in Rio Grande do Sul in 2013. In addition, the growing concern over violence and mortality rate amongst young people in public discourses, strategic planning and the political agenda of the state government mobilizes the emergence of such Observatory. According to data from the Department of Operational Strategy of the Superintendence Penitentiary Services (Susepe), only in the first semester of 2012, 949 people were murdered in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, out of those 50% were young people aged between 15 and 29. Amongst the victims, 75% had a police

<sup>4</sup> Different from other Brazilian states, in Rio Grande do Sul the police have a militarized branch entitled Military Police Brigade.

Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

record and at least 37% had passed through the prison system. Finally, as the last premise for the implementation of the Observatory, it is the fact that at every two days a young person between that age dies in Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul, 2013).

The national picture presents a similar reality: since the early 1980s prison system databases have registered a dramatic increase in young offenders incarcerated. Dialoguing morbidly with this scenario, the last Violence Map (Waiselfisz, 2014)<sup>5</sup> registered a growth of 314% in mortality rates within youth population from 1980 to 2010. This same document still highlights that scales referring to homicides by guns among young people also grew in an even larger proportion, with an increase of 591,5%. So many numbers, percentages, statistic rates... what do they convey? Not only they solidify an articulation between youth and criminality, as they feed (or are fed by) a concern that has become stronger in the Brazilian contemporary society: the production of a “dangerous” youth.

Such data are not alone, they are not islands that emerge without any historical conditionalities: strategies of a militarized police, crisis in the prison system, war against drug traffic, the sensation of social insecurity, a media fuss regarding the increase of violence, the reduction of the age of criminal responsibility for juveniles, amongst other movements all create this feeling of fear towards youth. The construction of a society embraced by a moral panic

that has as its key protagonist the dangerous young subject (Scisleski & Guareschi, 2011; Scisleski, Reis, Weigert, Hadler & Guareschi, 2012).

Despite the fact that the social construction of criminal youth has been regarded as a security matter since Colonial (1500 - 1822) and Empire (1822 - 1889) periods in Brazil, our youth as a social concern “only appears in the public sphere when the journalistic stories took it out of oblivion to show us a delinquent or an offender or a criminal” (Waiselfisz, 2014, p. 5). This sets a scene that throws the Brazilian society directly towards the incarceration of young offenders or the so-called “dangerous youth”. The young subject appears to be at the end of a double-edged knife<sup>6</sup>: either as the perpetrator of the social evil who should be imprisoned, or as the victim of a violent death and as such in need of protection. Young people and criminality thus are tied as the iconography of Brazilian violence.

Characterized in punitive, segregating and racist rationality, strategies of contention and social control of this dangerous youth have started to rise. At the same time, interventions have proliferated aiming at this public. A group of experts have begun to show interest in this population. A fertile field of concern about this ‘lost youth’ (Cerqueira & Moura, 2013) in which a whole market of interests is produced – such as law professionals and economic science experts who surround this juvenile public with a domain that focuses on observing and controlling this subject, each within their own interests. Within

<sup>5</sup> Document that provides diagnosis of violence against youngsters in Brazil, offering subsidies for the construction of public policies for this population. Since 1998, it has been produced by sociologist Julio Jacobo Waiselfisz in a partnership with UNESCO and the Ayrton Senna Institute. Currently, it has been a federal research which is being carried out by the National Council of Youth (Waiselfisz, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> In the Portuguese language, the popular saying known as “a double-edged sword” has a peculiar difference, known as: “a double-edged knife”. It is said of a situation that presents two contrasting points of view, but that are undeniable linked between themselves.

Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

this reality, psychological practices are drawn to ‘understand’ this dangerous individual, scan his story (as if there were only one version), his crimes, his failures (as if there were many), and his truths (as if there were only one side).

Therefore, it is in this context of the increasing rates of violence within young people (the consolidation of a dangerous youth as a social concern) and the imminent necessity for intervening with this public that the Youth Observatory has been created. The grounds where the Observatory was consolidated is the Central Prison of Porto Alegre, the largest pretrial prison of the state of Rio Grande do Sul<sup>7</sup>. What does it intend to observe? Young offenders who are detained there. The Observatory’s main goal is to understand the path of criminality and to act towards young offenders in order to produce “statistic indicators about the process of criminalization of youth” (Rio Grande do Sul, 2013, p. 2). The group of observers are psychologists, lawyers, students from the respective areas and representatives of the Military Police Brigade.

Having the Observatory as the focus of this paper, this article draws on the disciplines of psychology and prison studies, and their relation with imprisoned young people. It discusses the experiences of imprisoned young offenders and how penal treatment is held by psychologists inside the prison. To this analysis, this paper is organized into three sections. In the first one, we contextualize public policies of security towards youth and their articulations with the production of a determined juvenile category. Afterwards we

present the Observatory itself, its networks, junctures and actions foreseen, problematizing its operationalization and denaturalizing regimes of truth put forward in its practices. Finally, in the last section we discuss the creation of a psychology sector in the Observatory to question mainly the way this field of science produces answers towards a youth considered a ‘social problem’.

### **Public security policies and youth: economic reasons for the creation of an observatory**

For the past decade police repression forces and actions of government organizations towards the increase of criminality have been growing in a vertiginous way. An acute feeling of imminent fear makes the notion of ‘security’ to be the number one priority in politicians’ speeches and promises, and within political agenda. At the core of these discussions, we find the young offender as the main protagonist. Social concern within the Brazilian society grows widely into the debate regarding public policies in the direction of the dangerous young subject. Given these conditions, interventions aimed at the Brazilian youth have focused on two emphases: public security actions and human rights discourses which are, in effect, polar opposites.

These last couple of years inside government agenda for Brazilian youth, we have witnessed the emergency of a series of measures<sup>8</sup> that predominantly

<sup>7</sup> The Central Prison of Porto Alegre is known as a pretrial prison since it is responsible “for receiving inmates who are awaiting trial during a period that can last weeks, months or years” (Bassani, 2016, p. 46).

<sup>8</sup> As stated by the Youth National Secretary online page, the main programs of the Brazilian Federal Government towards young people are as following: Youth Alive Plan, Youth Station, Participatory and the Productive Inclusion Program (Brasil, 2013a). All of those present a singular aspect: the concern of preventing the young subject to fall into criminality’s path.

Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

concentrate its actions on creating more vacancies in prison establishments as well as developing oppressive actions towards groups known as ‘in situation of vulnerability’. It is important to acknowledge that the notion of ‘vulnerability’ is vague, imprecise and flexible. Usually, public policies in Brazil are targeted on those groups considered to be vulnerable, however, for someone to ‘be in a situation of vulnerability’, this person may be dealing with problems that depend on a wide range of aspects – social, psychological, environmental and/or biological matters. Public security actions, as well as other public policies (assistance, health, inclusive education) aimed at juvenile public, have as a primary justification for their actions the ‘degree’ of vulnerability in which the young subject and their families are found. In the Statute of Youth, implemented in 2013 by the Brazilian government, the discourse of a vulnerable youth is the key element that maintains a youth public policy in force (Brasil, 2013a).

Considering the overcrowding conditions of the Brazilian penal state, it is understood that neoliberal punitive rationality relates directly to the creation of youth policies and therefore, the criminalization of poverty (Reishoffer & Bicalho, 2013; Wacquant, 2001). In this context, the construction of vulnerability becomes the objectification device of the young subject that legitimizes punishment over his future actions and defines the young person either as a criminal or a victim. The curve of vulnerability thus becomes the object used to sharpen the double-edged knife. Ultimately, the degree of vulnerability will brand the young person either with the sign of crime or death. However, if vulnerability becomes the object that sharpens this

knife... who could be the sharpeners or the blacksmiths?

Answering this question is a first analytical process to understand the context in which the Youth Observatory emerges. To put forward this analysis, our discussion is grounded on Michel Foucault’s studies, aiming at the deconstruction of what becomes truth and its relationship with knowledge. This means that when we look at history as has been laid out, it becomes imperative to question the conditions of possibilities for certain articulations to exist – youth and criminality, for instance. Under a Foucauldian gaze, we attempt to problematize not the young subject himself, but the politics of truth that support and legitimate a lost, vulnerable, criminal youth. And in order to analyze this matter, we start by understanding the connection between public policies and youth.

As the numbers of incarcerated young people increased in Rio Grande do Sul, concomitantly so did research and publications in a national level. As it was announced measures and new ways of dealing with this dangerous youth, a separation between the ‘dangerous ones’ and the ‘ones in danger’ was produced. The first group became identified as the one who cost the most for the Brazilian government:

Youth and Risk: social losses and gains at the top of the young population [...] this is the value of the lost youth in Brazil: Mortality of the young people costs R\$79 billion per year to our country – According to IPEA study, this value represents 1,5% of the national PIB, and within such data rest more than 1,9 million of young victims of violent death (Brasil, 2014)<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Information published by the Secretary of Strategic Subjects of the Presidency Republic of

Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

It is convenient to remind that historically we have on the first penal code towards young offenders, known as the Mello Matos Code implemented in 1927, the correlation between youth and criminality. With the second one, a reformulation of the previous during the Military Regime and known as the Minors Code of 1979, such laws only depicted the connection between poverty, racism and violence. Abide by both, poverty situation became an indicative of familiar disruption and the children born in poor economic environments should be restrained into closed institutions due to their 'inherent nature to cause social disorder'. These children were known as 'minors'. Towards this 'minor', preventive actions ought to be taken. Towards these children seen as a social problem, a series of repressive practices were elaborated. Raniere and Maraschin (2011, p. 100) point out that in the history of Brazil such actions are directly connected to a correctional utopia, through which policies for youth came "so that the young offender could be reprogrammed in his illegal and undisciplined tendencies": it is the promotion of a domestication of the transgressor.

However, despite this rationality, it is indubitable that achievements also happened to the (infant)juvenile public. With the Federal Constitution of 1988, there were undeniable changes in the paradigm associated to this young public, in which the Doctrine of Irregular Situation, which prevailed until the decay of the Dictatorship, was substituted by human rights discourses. Under this bias, the National Policy of Youth was put into practice carrying

different approaches in the direction of the once called 'minor'. A certain movement of the federal government seeking to get past the view of them as being a social problem, to the acknowledgement of young offenders as subjects of rights (Brasil, 2013b). It was the human rights ideals that were taking place in the post-militarized Brazil. The repressive apparatus was slowly transformed into prophylactic ideas, and a whole system of actions were conjugated over the subject virtualities. In other words, security forces stopped aiming at convicted criminals, but started acting in favor of the suspicious young subject, those 'about to' commit any crime. The correctional utopia is still present, however, disguised in concern with those who are potentially suspects, translated by a well-known message frequently said: "it is better preventing than correcting".

This shift is based on the ideal of a democracy consolidated at the mercy of market logic, in which the discourse of human rights and the political economy are grounded in neoliberal intelligibility (Teles, 2013). Nevertheless, this does not mean that punitive reasoning and diverse forms of violence associated with slavery and military heritage have disappeared. To the contrary, precisely during the period when more public policies for Brazilian youth have been created, unprecedented levels of homicide and youth incarceration started to elevate. The punishing inheritance and repressive ideals regarding 'the minor' still mark public policies for youth, since this young offender (or even the one who never committed a crime) is seen as the inner enemy of Brazilian society: "all those who the 'order keepers' consider to be 'suspects' and who must, therefore, be watched and, if necessary, eliminated" (Coimbra, 2000, p. 16). Having in mind this rationality, one can

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Brazil (Brasil, 2014). Available at: <<http://www.sae.gov.br/site/?p=17148>>.

Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

only assume that prison rates regarding young people would also escalate.

When observing the prison population map of 2016, we can catch a glimpse of the vertiginous increase of prison population which only in Rio Grande do Sul is of 36,398 prisoners, for a total of 21,486 vacancies spread through 99 prison establishments. In comparison, if in 1990 this state counted 89 prisoners to every 100,000 inhabitants, today it counts approximately 286. Out of these, 61% of the men and 89% of the women are imprisoned for drug traffic. Furthermore, it does not seem necessary to reinforce that prison population in Brazil and in Rio Grande do Sul is constituted, mostly, by youth population aged between 18 and 29, and that 36% of them are black and residents of poor and peripheral neighborhoods of the cities (Rio Grande do Sul, 2016; Brasil, 2012).

This scenario is generated by a field of interests grounded by a whole economy around investments in life (and death) and in incarceration of a dangerous youth. To better understand how a market logic emerges tied to the increase of incarcerated youth, it becomes necessary to look at certain social conditions that operate here. In historical terms, it is worthy to remember that in the first years of the democratic government, the country was sunk in an economic crisis due to external debts obtained during the militarized years. Such crisis context combined with the demographic growing of young people called the attention of official organs and international cooperation agencies towards Brazilian 'lost youth'. Seeking to invest in this group and produce the young person as the 'agent for the economic development' in 1995 the National Policy of Youth is created by Brazilian government receiving funds

from the United Nations International Youth Committee (UN) through the World Program of Action to the Youth (PMAJ). A time in which the Interamerican Bank of Development (BID) begins to finance several capacitation working programs for the juvenile public not only in Brazil, but also in other Latin American countries. Concomitantly to the idea of youth being considered a force for the economic development, inside Brazilian political agenda also emerged actions based on social prevention focusing on young people 'in situation of vulnerability'.

At the turn of the century, during the 2000s, a plan of new state interventions and federal projects directed to the young public stepped in. The Youth Parliamentary Commission was launched with a new understanding about youth: no longer considered as a 'lost' generation of criminal-to-be young offenders who must be controlled, but a juvenile public in which the government has a lot of interest in investing. Human rights projects were emerging that aimed at 'rescuing the citizenship' of those considered to be vulnerable. And, for such government actions to be effective it needed certain knowledges to understand, formulate strategies, diagnose, debate, follow, intervene with young subjects. Thus, the Youth Observatory becomes a necessary investment in a time where youth is considered a theme of high priority. The young subject becomes a target of government within a system of politics and legal schemes.

In order to be governed, the young subject now starts to be part of a jurisdiction and of a regime of law. Infinite laws are created to protect their citizen status, but also to condemn them: they must be protected of themselves, a prevention that acts upon



Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

the young person's virtualities to stop them of becoming criminals or, in case of those whose lives are already interlaced with criminality, a segregate protection. In this way, the idea of citizenship connects directly to the foucauldian notion of biopolitics:

The "right" to life, to one's body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs, and beyond all the oppressions or "alienations," the "right" to rediscover what one is and all that one can be, this "right"—which the classical juridical system was utterly incapable of comprehending—was the political response to all these new procedures of power (Foucault, 1988, p. 136).

Therefore, a field of interests emerges: as an indicator of this policy with citizenship based on human rights discourses, the same moves that guarantee to young people certain social rights also abide them to a domain a lot deeper than security with peaceful policies: a domain in which life is judicialized. Fassin (2010) calls this process the production of inequalities by humanitarian public policies that legitimize different weights and measures to life. This author highlights the vital contract established between human *versus* citizen. Between both of them a relational space emerges in which a complex network of power, knowledges and public policies create strategies and interventions that inhabit and determine which lives start to appear in government agenda. Among actions of protection and observatories created to understand juvenile violence, "the difference between those who are protected in their pacified spaces and those who remain under the bombs" (Fassin, 2010, p. 247-8) begins to materialize in the incarceration or even termination of certain groups.

These humanitarian hierarchies and different life values attributed to different human categories alert to games in which an expertise is promoted about this 'lost youth': interests are mobilized (from international organization to local policies) and types of knowledge are triggered (psychologists, social assistants, lawyers, police officers are convoked to look at this youth). A social and economic process that has the Youth Observatory in its middle: looking at slippers and tiles, handcuffs and young offender in this field of public security policies, youth and prison.

### **Or maybe I already was...**

The graffiti wall witnesses an interview that takes place at that room. On one side of the table a young man sits leaning his left side against the wall. His hands are handcuffed behind his body and his legs are crossed at the ankles. On the other side of the table, the inquiry: the questions now unveil over the young offender's criminal history.

– So, tell us how you have been arrested. – Period. It was not a question, it was a command. Even if it were carried through a sweet tone, since the psychologist's voice was soft as if it were somehow speaking to a child who is about to be approved, it was still an order.

– I was caught robbing. The first time I 'fell' was at the age of 18. I was in the army the first time. – The answer is honest and casual.

– So you've snatched defeat out from the jaws of victory, then? – Now the psychologist's voice had changed, the words would come out loudly and in good sound. The look of the young man meets the look of the psychologist:

Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

– Each person makes their own choice. – He calmly states.

– But tell me how this happened? You were fine, in the army, working and then, out of the blue you became a thief? – Asked the psychologist.

The room was now a composition of looks, from the graffiti on the walls, from the interns that followed the psychologist interviewer, from the young man who was smiling. A smile that enlarged on his lips without showing his teeth; almost inconspicuous, if it were not for a subtle impatience and perhaps a certain amount of tolerance:

– Or maybe I already was a thief and, out of the blue, I decided to go to the army. –The prisoner answers.

Something in the room broke, a deaf stomp followed by a shattering noise: the psychological science dismantled, surprised. There are laughs in the room that now is filled with humor other than inquiry.

### **Psychological practices, observance strategies**

The Youth Observatory was originated from a partnership between public and particular institutions: the Superintendence of Penitentiary Services of Rio Grande do Sul (Susepe) and the Southern Methodist University Center of Porto Alegre (IPA). Regarding Susepe's public the young offender is among its priorities. In order to invest in this population this organ created in 2011, the Youth Coordination, which had<sup>10</sup> as main objectives the prisoner's reeducation, reintegration and resocialization projects, as well as to

manage industrial and rural penal villages, professionalization school and other cultural and social projects that could represent a means of reducing recidivism (Rio Grande do Sul, 2011). Under this view, the Youth Coordination developed the Youth Observatory with the intention of working with imprisoned youth (aged between 18 and 29) and, possibly intervene with the high rates of recidivism within this public.

For the Youth Observatory to start functioning two main fields of knowledge were necessary: Psychology and Law. Therefore, IPA University Center entered this project as a partner of Susepe's Youth Coordination, providing human resources for both departments. However, for the Youth Observatory to take place, another organization was also indispensable: the police. Rio Grande do Sul is the only Brazilian State to have prison houses run by a police task force. The Military Police Brigade assumed control of the Central Prison of Porto Alegre after a rebellion in 1994, where the present director was shot and paralyzed, five people died and 49 prisoners escaped. As a way of containing the riots, the state government deployed a police task force to take over the prison for six months; however, it still remains and has been renewed every semester for the past 20 years.

Known as "the gateway" of Rio Grande do Sul's prison system, Central Prison of Porto Alegre holds a record of overcrowding, inhumane and degrading conditions. In 2008, the Prison Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry considered the PCPA one of the worst prisons in the country, which became best-known not only as the largest pre-trial detention house of southern Brazil, but as having structural subhuman conditions post-redemocratization as well. Currently, the PCPA has more

<sup>10</sup> In 2015 the Youth Coordination was closed by the political agenda of Rio Grande do Sul's new governor, José Ivo Sartori (2015 - current).

Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

than 4,670 prisoners, 200% more than its official capacity. It is divided into nine housing pavilions each holding a different gang or subset of prisoners. The prison is run by 295 officers from the Military Police Brigade. Trying to improve the image of this prison facility, the board director of the Central Prison developed partnerships for the past decade in order to provide a better quality of life for their residents. In this context, when a project like the Observatory was presented, it found the demand and situational conditionality for its consolidation. This way, the Military Police Brigade has become the third partner in the construction of the Observatory.

Together the Military Police Brigade, IPA Law and Psychology departments, and the staff of the Youth Coordinator started developing a series of steps to establish the way the Observatory was going to be implemented. These steps were: A) Arising of data through interview process referring to the criminality path of the imprisoned young offenders aged between 18 and 29 in order to build a statistical source and a profile database regarding this population; B) Presentation and publication of the material arouse, tensioning local public policies aiming to produce debates and discussions about incarcerated youth; and finally C) Developing working spaces within public policies for youth, having in mind the difficult prospectus of leaving prison, seeking a reduction in recidivism.

The main demand for psychological practices inside the Youth Observatory was to execute activities that perpetrated 're' speeches – re-socialization, reinsertion, reeducation – to produce knowledge about incarcerated youth and arise data about this population to act directly in youth criminal prevention.

There are known factors, like social abandoning, poverty and the connection with the use or trade of drugs, however the way through which this path is established, considering territorial, ethnic aspects and the exclusion of social institutions, is still unknown. (Rio Grande do Sul, 2011, p. 6).

The Observatory's proposal presented in this quotation is to develop a history of how young men end up in prison. In this sense, psychological practices joined with Law domain produce a universal category: the 'imprisoned young individual'. As a matter of curiosity, by being named as Observatory of Imprisoned Youth, this project marks the existence of only one imprisoned youth. In this setting, the Observatory only sees what is already seen: a young person who is conceived *a priori*: an abandoned, poor and drug addicted subject. Thus, Psychology plays the role of a regulation mechanism over unfortunate souls. Intending to provoke this nosological discourse within psychological practices towards imprisoned youth, it is necessary to problematize how regimes of truth are produced inside the Observatory. Considering psychological intervention is usually required specially in the first phase of this project (the interview), the following analysis will present how this interview process is made in order to problematize how it becomes an observance strategy over young men considered unmistakably dangerous depending on his answers about his own life.

The interview (conducted by a psychology from Susepe and interns of IPA's department of Psychology) consists of a two-sheet protocol with around 40 questions. The questions for this interview are divided into subjects – Health, Assistance, Education/Work

Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

and Justice and, after a writing part, the answers are calculated by a professional specialized in quantitative research, becoming numbers, statistics. This questionnaire takes place at the Youth Observatory room, located at the administrative wing of Central Prison. During the triage screening process, all of those aged between 18 and 29 are invited by a police officer to direct themselves to the Observatory to be questioned. The triage is the process of interviewing all prisoners on arrival regardless of age, or whether they are first timer or returning to the prison in order to gather personal data, gather information about their legal case as well as their basic needs (eg. health, assistance, clothing). This happens each week day, except Thursdays, and is usually conducted by technical prison staff: psychologists, public attorneys and social assistants. When people arrive at the weekend, they have to wait in a cell located below the administrative wing of the prison until the next triage period starts. This 'waiting cell' is called 'Brete'<sup>11</sup> or 'Cattle Chute' and despite being created to 'safely secured' ten prisoners, the 'Brete' usually holds around 60 prisoners, especially at weekends. After that, each prisoner is called individually and sent to a room where the triage will take place. There are about 20 rooms located on the third floor of the prison and the Youth Observatory is one of them. After going through the general screening, the sergeant in charge of

calling and watching each one of them, selects the young men aged between 18 and 29 to send them to the Observatory.

While analyzing the questionnaire, we divided it into two blocks. The first one assembles a concern regarding individual matters, in which there are questions with some interest in knowing the young men's 'personal' choices such as: "How old were you when you were first arrested?", "Do you have a spouse? Did you meet her in prison?", "Do you intend to study and/or work?". A second block of questions refers to another type of concern, something we call the govern of truth directed to the imprisoned young subject. This block is made of questions that involve relational aspects creating a sphere of dangerousness or an inherited criminal status, such as: "Do you have any relative who has any mental disorder?", "Have you run away from home?", "Have you ever been sheltered?".

When problematizing such inquiring structures, it is possible to observe the production of two paths to a same story, or a dead-end destiny for the young offender: the blame (criminalization) upon the subject's own choices or the social pathology that incriminates him. The answers are already put *a priori*, without any possibility of differentiation. When the first block of questions is launched, it approximates of what Rose (2000) points out as administration and identification practices of factors of risk. Such questions convoke to what the author identifies as a new eugenic rationality that provokes the identification of the 'abnormal ones', or the ones considered as criminals through a scanning process of the subject's life (the blame is only due to his own choices). The second block of questions is directed to the ties of the criminality to bind them into the

<sup>11</sup> Brete: 1. Bird trap; 2. Deceit, deception; 3. Corridor closed on both sides, through which the cattle passes in order to take a medicinal bath or to be killed; 4. Building made of strong planks or trunks, forming a tall and narrow corridor, its width suits an animal and its extension is built to fit four or five animals to shearing, castration, cure or dial (Michaelis, 2014). After dialoguing with prison staff, it was known that the third use of this word is the one used in this analogy.

Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

criminalization of young men based on stereotyped views of youth that are deeply scarred as young offenders accordingly to the environment from which he is from. Between his own 'wrong' choices and a society that produced him this way or a family that badly raised him, these two inquiring blocks create the image of Brazilian's inner enemy: there is no singularity or multiplicity, but a same story – the reduction of the young subject's experiences and, concomitantly, a fake universalism that disregards social and historical processes, networks of economic and politic interests.

The 'Brete', therefore, is not Central Prison's waiting room, but the practices that have been happening during the Observatory's interviewing process. Practices grounded on preventive discourses, but that indeed are ranking lives and proposing interventions of control and labeling young men taken as dangerous (Fassin, 2010). It's a paradox in which psychological practices live on: the desire to intervene without reducing or universalizing incarcerated youth. At this point, one might ask: could it exist other possibilities of listening to stories than the already crystalized and interpreted ones? Apparently, it is one of these young men who breaks this *modus operandi* that the kinds of knowledge that observe – psychology, law and police – tend to perpetuate: when he answers with humor towards a dead-end question made by the psychologist... "Or maybe I already was..."

**Observed youth, observer psychology: provoking a different gaze**

Psychological practices have had direct impacts on the objectification of the young offender.

Psychology professionals inside the criminal justice system produce complex inquisitorial techniques that are being used as tools for 'discovering' hidden traits in a young person's history. Moreover, the discourse of vulnerability has been strengthening and legitimizing psychological practices in its relationship with the legal system. Therefore, to question how psychology produces knowledge and interventions on imprisoned youth enables the problematization of its own practices and how it becomes an important tool between public security and human rights.

The young man's answer on the last scene presented "Or maybe I already was..." disquiet the psychologist posture. It caused awkwardness to the interviewer who, waiting for shame, sadness, or even irony, finds something rather than the expected. Humor. Stengers (2002) calls it quality of laughter, a distinction between irony and humor.

But above all it is the quality of the laughter that interests me. I do not want a mocking laughter, or a laughter of derision, an irony that always and without risk recognizes the same thing beyond the differences. I would like to make possible the laughter of humor, which comprehends and appreciates without waiting for salvation, and can refuse without letting itself terrorize. I would like to make possible a laughter that does not exist at the expense of scientists, but one that could, ideally, be shared with them (Stengers, 2002, p. 57).

After problematizing the psychological practices developed at the Youth Observatory, it becomes indispensable to ask ourselves: how is it possible to disrupt with a Psychology that insists on 'finding' the imprisoned

Hadler, Oriana Holsbach; Guareschi, Neuza Maria de Fátima; Scisleski, Andrea Cristina Coelho.  
Observances: psychology, public security policies and incarcerated youth

young offenders' path to criminality? If this science keeps on the tracks of origins and whys, the traditional way of psychologizing the subject will only encounter a naturalized young person, a criminal essence. While asking if there were a determined moment in this young person's life where 'at that very spot' or when he did this or that (or when they did this or that to him)', Psychology will find just one truth: the very point of this subject's criminalization. As Scisleski and Guareschi (2011, p. 222) emphasize "it seems like the meaning of this question is to bring to light the ranked relationships that are previously established", it means, one looks at what they want to see, to an already destiny final story taken for granted. When demarcating the existence of a 'criminalization process', the spaces that open are for specific sedimented answers made by a determined expertise that puts itself in a place that talks in the name or on behalf of these young people.

In his essay entitled 'The Psychology from 1850 to 1950', Foucault (2002) tensions the story of this science and its relationship with the justice system: to know who did what and why; hereafter the West starts to elaborate complex techniques of inquiring that start to be used by Psychology as a tool of 'discovery' of the dangerous subject. However, we question: what truth was searched? Would it not be a "knowing" trap this desire for 'the' truth? Apparently, a trap in which psychological practices still fall into, perpetuating an expertise over the young subject. Regardless the offense committed, the life that goes walking in slippers and tiles does not interest, because it is already decided.

At this point, Foucault (2006) keeps provoking us to break with such practices, pointing out the necessity of

pushing the thoughts to open the story of things: taking the event according to the multiple processes that constitute it, adopting a critic attitude towards our own practices, understanding them also as something produced by effects and govern of truths. Through this gaze, the Observatory is convoked less for the imprisoned youth, rather than for the ways through which we were historically created. A critic attitude, like Foucault (2012) used to call, that comes to displace Psychology in an exercise of questioning the production of knowledge and the way it is constructed, which means, of thinking the way this science became what it is.

That said, we finalize stating that once the young man answers "Or maybe I already was a thief and, out of the blue, I decided to go to the army", one is not supposed to suggest that society has not offered him enough subsidy turning him into a criminal, neither should individualize and reduce his story analyzing that he would be presenting himself resistant or, still, avoiding to take responsibilities. It is imperative to refuse the transcription 'this is that' and bet the observance of the humor as "the possibility of a new perplexity shared, which effectively establishes equality among those which it can reunite" (Stengers, 2002, p. 85).

In these terms, this paper hopes to contribute with the invention of new intervening proposals in the encounter of psychology, youth and public security policies, by problematizing the production of techniques of truth, as well as questioning the procedures and discourses that create a single story of incarcerated youth. A continuous request to recognize multiple ways of existing.

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