

Urban slaughters in the city and Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (2009-2020)

Chacinas urbanas na cidade e na Região Metropolitana de São Paulo (2009-2020)

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Abstract

This article analyzes the slaughters that occurred in São Paulo and its Metropolitan Region between 2009 and 2020. Using data extracted from news and interviews with journalists and public security agents, the article provides a socio-spatial analysis, highlighting features of the victimizations, perpetrators, and modus operandi of that form of extermination. Deaths resulting from slaughters reveal a polysemy of urban conflicts, predominantly linked to disputes over power, “political commodities” (Misse, 2014), and acts of revenge between criminal groups, or between public security agents and these groups. Peripheral populations are the main victims of slaughters, which occur in their places of residence and socialization and disclose power relations in these territories.

Keywords: slaughters; homicides; peripheries; institutional acts of revenge; genocide.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa as chacinas ocorridas em São Paulo e Região Metropolitana entre 2009 e 2020. Utilizando dados de notícias e entrevistas com jornalistas e agentes de segurança pública, o artigo proporciona uma análise socioespacial, destacando características das vitimizações, dos executores e do modus operandi dessa forma de extermínio. As mortes resultantes das chacinas revelam uma polissemia de conflitos urbanos, predominantemente ligados a disputas de poder, “mercadorias políticas” (Misse, 2014) e vinganças entre grupos criminais, ou entre agentes de segurança pública e esses grupos. As populações periféricas são as principais vítimas das chacinas, que ocorrem em seus locais de moradia e socialização, evidenciando relações de poder nesses territórios.

Palavras-chave: chacinas; homicídios; periferias; vinganças institucionais; genocídio.



Introduction

This article discusses the urban massacres (*chacinas*) that occurred and were committed in the city of São Paulo and in the cities that make up the São Paulo Metropolitan Region (SPMR) between 2009 and 2020, debating the São Paulo Death Squad and urban militarization as generators of the daily life of these massacres. The socio-spatial characteristics of these homicides are analyzed, as well as the possible *modus operandi* and motivations for the massacres that took place in the city of São Paulo and the SPMR between 2009 and 2020.

The data on the massacres were collected for a doctoral thesis research, which made it possible to build a database. Semi-structured interviews and memoirs were conducted with journalists who covered and still cover these massacres, with victims' relatives and friends of the Pavilion 9 Organized Supporters¹ (*Torcida Organizada Pavilhão Nove*) massacre, and with public agents. Socio-spatial analyses of the massacres in the city of São Paulo and in the cities that make up the SPMR were also carried out.

Urban massacres are a topic related to the debate over what has come to be referred to as "urban violence". In Brazil, the term *chacina* appears in dictionaries to mean the slaughter of pigs or cattle and is used to determine a series of conflicts (Sinhoretto and Marques, 2019; Telles, 2010; Vedovello, 2022) that victimize three people or more, in the same territory² or in nearby places, based on a certain motivation

and with the same perpetrators. There is no criminal classification for a *chacina*, which are technically treated as "multiple homicides".

Chacina is an emic category (Vedovello, 2022) used by various sectors of society and by activists to demonstrate the horror of this lethal violence. The choice of the term "chacina" or "multiple homicides" sometimes demonstrates a political dispute over the meaning of the killings. As an example of how terms are politically mobilized to dispute the meanings of lethal violent actions, De Lucca (2016, p. 26) explained that following the execution of six people in downtown São Paulo in 2004, activists denouncing the *chacina* debated the use of terms such as "chacina", "murder", "extermination", and "massacre". Ultimately, they agreed that "massacre" best captured the degree of violence involved in these murders.

Throughout this article, I explain that: 1) the *chacinas* in São Paulo, perpetrated by public security agents, stem from the actions of the Death Squad and are linked to urban militarization (Graham, 2016; Oliveira, 2013; Zaverucha, 2005), "political commodities" (Misse, 2014), disputes over illegal markets, and state vendettas that produce a policy of extermination; 2) the socio-spatial configuration of these massacres shows that they predominantly occur in peripheral areas with a higher demographic proportion of black populations; and 3) the similarities found in massacres between 2009 and 2020 indicate a characteristic *modus operandi* in the extralegal actions of public security agents.

São Paulo's Death Squad and massacres

The administration of “political commodities” and urban militarization are not the origins of multiple killings in the city of São Paulo and its Metropolitan Region. Reflecting on the historical context of multiple homicides, Fausto (2009) recounts a crime from 1938 in the Brás neighborhood, where three men and a woman were killed with pestle blows during Carnival, in the year of the World Cup.

These murders led major newspapers of the time to feature the crime in prominent headlines. The incident was also covered on the radio and even inspired the ten-string guitar song “The Crime of the Chinese Restaurant” (*O Crime do Restaurante Chinês*), performed by the Laureano Brothers. This episode exemplifies how, in the late 1930s, multiple homicides were regarded as tragedies that transcended the ordinary crimes and illegalities of daily life in the city.

Understanding the emergence of massacres as a frequent means of producing deaths in the city of São Paulo and the SPMR involves recognizing the existence and activities of the São Paulo Death Squad. This group's formation was tied not only to the political context of the Civil-Military Dictatorship but also to drug trafficking and a protective network that shielded criminal groups involved in narcotics.

It was also during the Civil-Military Dictatorship that the police underwent militarization. Dictator Castello Branco established the Brazilian military police through Decree-Law n. 317 of 1967, designating them

as auxiliary forces of the Army (Brasil, 1967). According to Article 2, their role was to maintain public order and internal security within the states, territories, and the Federal District, including the repression of disturbances and serious subversions, often preempting actions by the Military Forces. In 1969, Decree-Law n. 667 integrated the police into the National Security Doctrine (Brazil, 1969). This marked the abolition of state uniformed guards and the creation of military police units controlled by the Army, tasked exclusively with uniformed policing (Rocha, 2013).

During that period, the methods of population control, previously practiced by public forces since at least the beginning of the Republic, underwent significant changes. In the late 19th century, the primary targets of police action were enslaved individuals, foreigners, and the impoverished, with their daily and cultural activities becoming focal points of repression (Caldeira, 2000, p. 145). With the militarization of police forces, their role shifted to conducting conspicuous patrols in Brazilian cities, focusing on identifying “suspects” or “enemies of the state” in peripheral areas.

This militarization of security agents, together with the intense urbanization that had been taking place since the late 1950s and 1960s, was giving rise to another process in São Paulo: urban militarization. This militarization can be understood as the adoption of military models, doctrines and procedures in civilian activities, as in the case of public security, in which the Army's values surround society's values, even overriding social values, displacing the rhetoric of “war” and “combat” into everyday urban life (Zaverucha, 2005).

In São Paulo, this discourse of war manifests itself in campaigns against organized crime, the First Capital Command (PCC, or *Primeiro Comando da Capital*), drug trafficking, and areas like Cracolândia, among other justifications for employing military doctrine and tactics. Public spaces often resemble arenas of a thinly veiled civil war (Oliveira, 2013, p. 75), where urban transformations occur using repressive techniques and technologies associated with urban colonial warfare, effectively bringing a militaristic urbanism to these locations (Graham, 2016).

If urban militarization is established, in part, through the extensive presence of public security agents in territories to monitor behavior and enforce a desired social order, it is this constant presence and the authority wielded by security agents that facilitate negotiations over “political commodities”. These commodities operate on a delicate line between legality and illegality, representing services and the commodification of political and economic resources offered by public security agents and armed groups to manage certain illegal activities without facing prosecution (Misse, 2014). “Political commodities” are often associated with state agents who leverage their political resources to engage in “differential management of illegalities”.³

The Death Squad conducted executions targeting inmates at Tiradentes Prison and individuals deemed to be threats to groups associated with drug trafficking, whom the Squad shielded under its protection. Executions

also turned into massacres, and the bodies of the executed were left on the outskirts of São Paulo and the SPMR. Prisoners from Tiradentes Prison were taken out of prison to be executed on the peripheries of São Paulo.

The São Paulo Death Squad operated along four primary lines: 1) instilling fear by torturing those executed, referred to as “hams”; 2) influencing public opinion through markings on corpses, including the acronym “E.M.” denoting Death Squad actions, and the involvement of a public relations officer named White Lily (*Lírio Branco*), who notified newspapers of body locations; 3) systematically targeting prisoners at Tiradentes Prison, justifying executions under the belief that criminals (*bandidos*) were irredeemable and deserving only of death; 4) adopting a metric where ten individuals were to be executed for every policeman killed (Bicudo, 1988, p. 83). Although the São Paulo Death Squad ceased operations in the early 1970s, its legacy persisted through a culture of slaughter and revenge logic in the daily life of São Paulo’s cities, where ten “suspects” are often executed for every public security agent murdered.

Between the 1980s and 2020, the state of São Paulo experienced at least 828 massacres. The records on massacres show that they began to appear in newspaper reports in 1982, beginning in the city of Osasco, increasing exponentially over the years. The peak in the occurrence of massacres occurred in the late 1990s, with a decline observed after 2001.

The escalation of massacres corresponds to periods of both increasing and decreasing homicide rates, as described by Feltran (2012) as the “time of wars”. Following the Carandiru Massacre, power struggles emerged, and the PCC consolidated itself as a criminal organization that reshaped the “world of crime”⁴ and established the pacification⁵ of the peripheries (Biondi, 2018; Dias et al., 2015; Feltran, 2012). At the time, the urban massacres were linked to this dynamic and, as the PCC “pacified” the peripheries, especially after 2001, this form of homicide declined.

In an effort to stop the escalation of massacres, a Massacre Team was established in 1999 in the city of São Paulo. Comprising specialized police officers, this team operated under the linked to the Department of Homicide and Protection of the Person (DHPP, or *Departamento de Homicídios e Proteção à Pessoa*). Prior to its creation, investigations regarding multiple homicides were handled by various police teams from stations near the crime scenes.

Only in 2011, State Decree No. 57,537 established of the 3rd Police Station for the Repression of Multiple Homicides and Robberies (*3ª Delegacia de Polícia de Repressão a Homicídios Múltiplos e Latrocínios*) occur (São Paulo, 2011). Initially tasked with investigating both massacres and robberies, the station was reorganized in 2013 to cease investigating robberies and became the 3rd Police Station for the Repression of Multiple Homicides (*3ª Delegacia de Polícia de Repressão a Homicídios Múltiplos*).

Socio-spatial configurations of urban massacres

Between 2009 and 2020, there was at least⁶ 6,138 massacres in the city of São Paulo and the cities that make up the SPMR, resulting in 536 casualties.

The database on massacres comes from my own research, based on searches in the archives of the national newspapers *Folha de S.Paulo* and *Estadão*, as well as using the newspapers *Agora São Paulo*, *Terra*, *R7*, *G1*, *Brasil Atual*, *Ponte Jornalismo* and more regionalized newspapers, such as *O Taboense*, using the Portuguese keywords “chacina”, “chacinas” and “massacres”, month by month, for each year researched.⁷

Data on the number of massacres and their victims is often underreported due to the specific nature of these homicides and the way deaths are recorded in state documents that initiate police investigations. The use of newspapers as a resource for building a database for multiple homicide cases allows us to track the frequency of these events more accurately. Similarly, Martins (2015), in his research on lynchings – which also lack a specific criminal classification and are underreported – used newspapers to build his database.

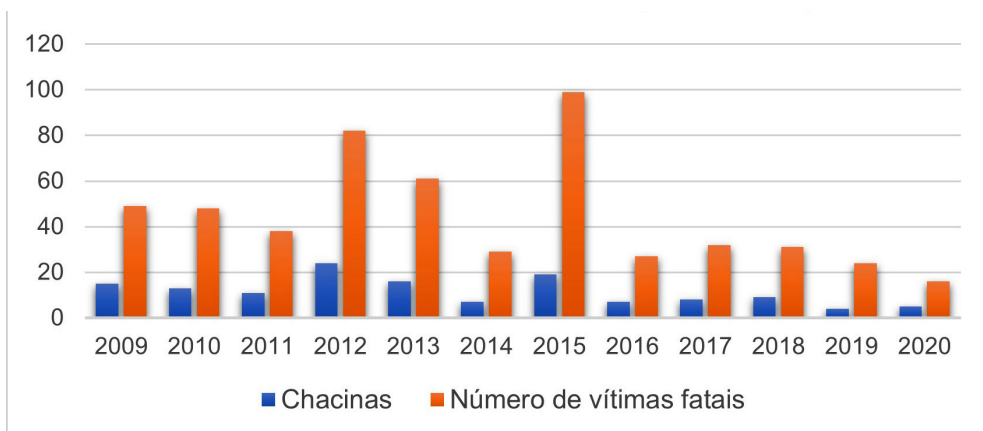
The data enabled a more detailed analysis, particularly regarding the locations of massacres between 2009 and 2020.

Table 1 – Number of urban massacres and casualties in the city of São Paulo and in the MRSP (2009-2020)

Year	Massacres	Number of casualties
2009	15	49
2010	13	48
2011	11	38
2012	24	82
2013	16	61
2014	7	29
2015	19	99
2016	7	27
2017	8	32
2018	9	31
2019	4	24
2020	5	16
Total	138	536

Source: Prepared by the author in 2021 based on data collected from press reports.

Graph 1 – Occurrence of urban massacres in São Paulo and the SPMR (2009-2020)



Source: Prepared by the author in 2021 based on data collected from press reports.

This allowed for the creation of georeferenced maps, facilitating discussions on how these killings impact the territories and residents of São Paulo. Additionally, it sheds light on the dynamics of death production within the city.

There is no consistent pattern in the annual distribution of multiple homicides. Notably, in some years, the occurrence of massacres surges amid urban conflicts and, while in others, it declines. These fluctuations in multiple homicides can reveal the specific disputes and conflicts taking place in a particular year, city, or neighborhood.

Table 1 indicates a decline in the number of massacres between 2009 and 2011. This reduction may be linked to a possible reorganization of “political commodities” (Misse, 2014) within the interactions between public security agents and the criminal world, following the hundreds of executions during the major crisis between the PCC and public security forces in São Paulo in 2006. Feltran (2012, p. 248) also highlights this phenomenon in his analysis of the decrease in homicides.

This period became known as the Crimes of May (*Crimes de Maio*),⁸ during which public security agents, responding to attacks against police officers and bases, executed approximately 505 civilians – according to data from the Report of the Center for Anthropology and Forensic Archeology at Federal University of São Paulo (Caaf/Unifesp) (Amadeo et al., 2019, p. 68). These rearrangements between security agents and the “criminal world” are fragile, evidenced by the surge in massacres in 2012, their decline in 2013, and another increase in 2015. These spikes in massacres are referred to as, respectively, the “crisis of 2012” (Dias et al.,

2015) or the “wave of violence of 2012” (Biondi, 2018), and the “year of the great massacres” for the events of 2015 (Vedovello, 2022).

Table 1 and Graph 1 allow us to understand the variations over time, shedding light on the dynamics of existing conflicts that resulted in multiple homicides. However, beyond these variations, the data enabled us to create a map of these massacres, making it possible to construct a socio-spatial analysis of these violent events. Map 1 details the location of massacres occurred in São Paulo and the SPMR between 2009 and 2020.

In 2009 and 2010, the massacres spread to cities in the western and southwestern regions of the SPMR. In 2010, newspapers reported on the so-called “Killers of the 18” (*Matadores do 18*), an extermination group organized by military police officers (MPs) belonging to the 18th Metropolitan Military Police Battalion (*18º Batalhão de Polícia Militar Metropolitana*), located in the Freguesia do Ó neighbourhood, in the northern part of the capital.

One of the factors contributing to the high number of massacres in certain areas, such as the northern zone of São Paulo, is the existence of a “battalion history”, as noted by a delegate from the 3rd São Paulo Multiple Homicide Police Station (*3ª Delegacia de Homicídios Múltiplos de São Paulo*) (ibid.). In these territories, massacres are often intertwined with power struggles and the distribution of “political commodities” among public security agents.

The “Killers of the 18” and another extermination group from the eastern zone of São Paulo were implicated in over 150 executions in the capital between 2003 and 2010. These executions were allegedly driven by revenge, abuse of authority, “cleansing”,

Map 1 – Location of the urban massacres in São Paulo and the SPMR between 2009 and 2020



Source: Vedovello (2022).

drug trafficking related charges and gambling charges, according to an investigation by the DHPP (Merlino, 2012).

Between 2010 and mid-2012, the decade-long decline in civilian homicide rates was disrupted by a surge in both civilian deaths and police killings. A crisis emerged, showing a destabilization of the peace agreements between the PCC and the police that had been in place in recent years. The result was a significant increase in civilian executions and massacres in 2012, along with targeted killings of public security agents (Dias et al., 2015).

In 2011, there were 11 massacres reported. The highest number occurred in the southern part of São Paulo, where three massacres took

place, followed by Guarulhos with two incidents. None of the recorded massacres during the year involved more than four victims. Reports from three locations – Santo André, the Campo Limpo neighborhood in southern São Paulo and Embu – suggested that public security agents may have been involved, as witnesses reported that the perpetrators identified themselves as during the incidents. In one such case at a bar in Campo Limpo, witnesses told the newspaper *Agora São Paulo* that the perpetrators had identified themselves as police officers and questioned if any of the people in the bar “had a police record”.

In 2012, amidst the crisis, the number of massacres more than doubled compared to the previous year, totaling 24 incidents with

82 fatalities, marking what was described as a “veiled war” between the PCC and public security agents (Vedovello, 2022). This conflict, characterized by Dias et al. (2015), involved, on the one hand, targeted killings of police officers by one faction and, on the other hand, retaliatory massacres occurring near these incidents.

The triggering element of this “2012 crisis” was reportedly wiretaps that were transferred from the Civil Police to the Military Police, leading to at least three ROTA operations resulting in multiple deaths of individuals suspected of belonging to the PCC (Dias et al., 2015, pp. 168-169; Vedovello, 2022, pp. 119-120).

In 2013, there were a total of sixteen massacres reported across the SPMR and neighborhoods in São Paulo city. The SPMR witnessed nine massacres, occurring in Osasco, Carapicuíba, Cotia, Ferraz de Vasconcelos, Itapevi, Guarulhos (two incidents), and Diadema (two incidents), resulting in 7 injuries and 61 fatalities. In São Paulo city, seven massacres occurred: four in the South Zone, two in the North Zone, and one in the East Zone, mostly concentrated in the first half of the year. From January to July, eleven massacres occurred, with an additional five occurring from August onwards. Notably, one high-profile case involved a family of police officers from Rio de Janeiro, where the son of the policemen was identified as the perpetrator. This incident, known as the Pesseghini Family Massacre, garnered significant media attention.

In January 2013, a massacre in Campo Limpo, south of São Paulo, resulted in the death of seven people. As the gunmen approached the scene, they shouted: “Go, it's the police, nobody move!” (Caramante, 2016). Twenty

days after the massacre, the Public Security Secretariat requested the temporary arrest of six police officers from the 37th Military Police Battalion, located approximately three kilometers from the site of the incident. The officers were acquitted in 2014, with only one eventually standing trial for the deaths of the seven victims.

In 2014, the number of massacres significantly decreased, with two occurring in São Paulo – one in the east and another in the north – and five in other cities of the SPMR – two in Carapicuíba, one in Jandira, one in Mogi das Cruzes, and one in Guarulhos. Despite the reduced number of incidents compared to previous years, news reports linked public security agents to the executions in five of these cases. Specifically, incidents in Sapopemba (east zone of São Paulo) and Carapicuíba were reported as possibly motivated by revenge for the killing of police officers.

The possible involvement of police officers in massacres gained prominence in the public debate. Even the head of the Carapicuíba Homicide Police Station stated that police officers were involved. The line of investigation pointed to the possibility of the existence of extermination groups linked to public security agents in the execution of the massacres.

In 2014, another massacre garnered significant attention. Occurring in April at a square known as “7 Yougsters” (*7 Jovens*) in Brasilândia, the incident resulted in five people being shot, with three killed and two wounded. The square had earned its name from a previous massacre in 2007, which claimed the lives of seven people. Therefore, this event marked a recurrence of urban massacres at the location.

In 2015, the number of massacres in the state of São Paulo rose to 19, resulting in 99 fatalities. This year witnessed the notorious “biggest massacre in the state of São Paulo” (Silva, 2021): the Osasco and Barueri massacre. Reports on eight of these 19 massacres indicated that public security agents were among the suspects in the executions. Although the Osasco and Barueri massacre was the largest recorded in 2015, other massacres also had a high death toll. In Jardim São Luiz, in the south of São Paulo, ten people were murdered in March of 2015; in April, six were killed in Parelheiros and, a day later, eight were executed on the grounds of the Pavilion Nine Organized Supporters. Additionally, in the city of Mogi das Cruzes, three massacres occurred in 2015, continuing a series that began in 2013, which has claimed 26 lives over the years (Omura, 2019). A Military Police officer stood trial for executions in two of these massacres.

The number of massacres decreased in 2016, with seven incidents reported: one each in Guarulhos, Embu, Mogi das Cruzes, Itaquaquecetuba, and eastern São Paulo, and two in northern São Paulo, in the neighborhoods of Jaçanã and Parque Edu Chaves. Among these, the massacres in Guarulhos and Mogi das Cruzes included the possible participation of public security agents. One of them made the headlines because of the way it was carried out. The case became known as the “The Five from Mogi Massacre” (*Chacina dos 5 de Mogi*) or “The Five from the East Massacre” (*Chacina dos 5 da Leste*).

The *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper highlighted the case, which initially was reported as a disappearance. The young men had left by car to attend a party and vanished. Before their disappearance, however, one

of them sent an audio message to a friend reporting a police raid (*enquadro*).⁹ The bodies of the five young men were later found bearing signs of torture, revealing they had been executed by public security agents as an act of revenge for the suspected involvement of one of the young men in the death of a police officer.

The massacres in the Jaçanã neighborhood between 2016 and 2017 led to the area being called the “neighborhood of massacres”. In 2017, eight massacres were recorded in São Paulo and in the SPMR: three in the south, three in the north, one in Osasco, and one in Guarulhos, resulting in a total of 32 fatalities. Evidence suggests that public security agents were involved in the last two massacres of the year, which occurred in two northern neighborhoods of São Paulo (Pirituba and Tremembé).

The number of massacres in the northern zone of São Paulo increased between 2016 and 2018. While in 2015, the year of the major massacres, there was only one massacre in the northern zone, in the Jaçanã neighborhood. However, this number rose to two in 2016; three in 2017; and four in 2018 (one in Pirituba, two in Brasilândia and one in Jaçanã). Among these, only one involved public security agents as suspects.

Since 2019, the number of massacres has significantly declined, with four incidents recorded: one in Suzano, another in Jardim Peri Alto (north zone), one in Sapopemba (east zone), and one in Paraisópolis (south zone) during the event known as the “DZ7 Ball” (*Baile da DZ7*).

The massacre in Suzano was an attack to a state public school (*E.E. Raul Brasil*), where a student and a former student entered the

institution, killing eight people before taking their own lives. The media referred to this event as an attack, a *chacina* and a massacre.

In the Sapopemba and Paraisópolis massacres, public security agents are implicated as suspects in the killings. In Paraisópolis, the deaths were not directly caused by gunfire, but by indirect mechanical asphyxiation during an attempt to disperse a “favela funk party” (*baile funk*) by São Paulo's Military Police. The action was justified by the police officers as an attempt to chase two armed men who had entered streets where the party was happening on a motorcycle. However, subsequent media footage of the incident, which resulted in the massacre, showed police officers assaulting attendees while attempting to shut down the event. Azevedo et al. (2022), in their report on the Paraisópolis Massacre, categorize it as a police-initiated massacre linked to a broader pattern of “statization of deaths”, where mass killings occur during police operations, that is, in “un-hooded”¹⁰ actions.

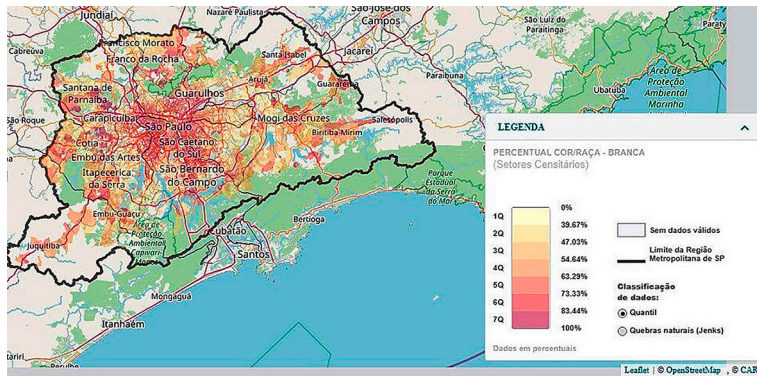
In 2020, the press reported five massacres: two in the east (Vila Jacuí and Sapopemba), two in the south (Capão Redondo and Chácara Santo Antônio) and one in Embu. The massacres in Capão Redondo and Chácara Santo Antônio occurred between late January and early February of 2020. According to press accounts, there were suspicions of involvement by civil police officers in the Chácara Santo Antônio incident. Following a pause from March to mid-June, during which no killings were reported, two massacres occurred in June. From July to mid-September, no further massacres were recorded. The final massacre of 2020 occurred on September 16 in the Sapopemba neighborhood.

Between 2009 and 2020, the SPMR cities with the highest number of massacres included Guarulhos, Osasco, Taboão da Serra, Embu, Carapicuíba, Mauá, Santo André, and Diadema. In the city of São Paulo, massacres occurred across all zones: one in the west, one in the center, with the north and south zones recording the highest number of multiple homicides in the period, totaling 24 each. The east zone accounted for around 13 massacres. The neighborhoods in São Paulo's zones with the highest incidents of multiple killings included Brasilândia, Jaçanã, Campo Limpo, Jardim São Luiz, Parelheiros, Sapopemba and Itaim Paulista.

Although socio-spatial analysis highlights cities with high population density like Guarulhos, massacres do not directly correlate to the demographic density of the areas where they occur most frequently. According to data from the São Paulo City Hall (2022), during the period from 2009 and 2020, among the mentioned cities, only Guarulhos had more than 1 million inhabitants; the others ranged between 200,000 and 600,000 inhabitants. On the other hand, neighborhoods in São Paulo with the highest number of massacres ranged between 150,000 and 300,000 inhabitants (*ibid.*).

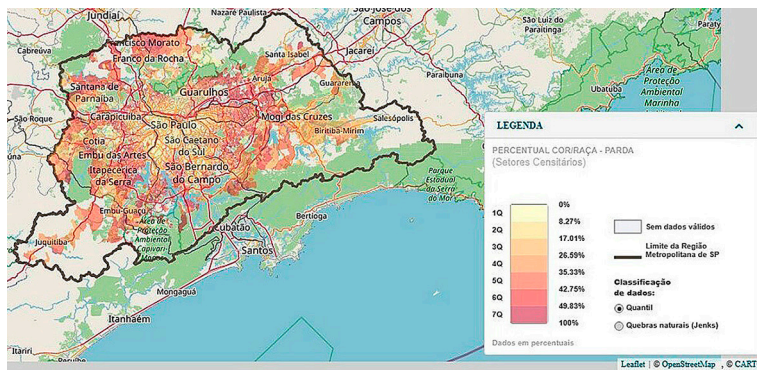
If demographic density is not a preponderant element for a territory to experience massacres, the racial and ethnic composition of the resident population proved to be important in socio-spatial analysis of the places where massacres occurred during this period. Data from the Center for Metropolitan Studies (CEM, or *Centro de Estudos da Metrópole*) revealed that areas with the highest incidence of massacres were also those with the largest black and brown populations (Vedovello, 2022, pp. 139-140).

Map 2 – Percentage of white population in São Paulo and in the SPMR – 2010



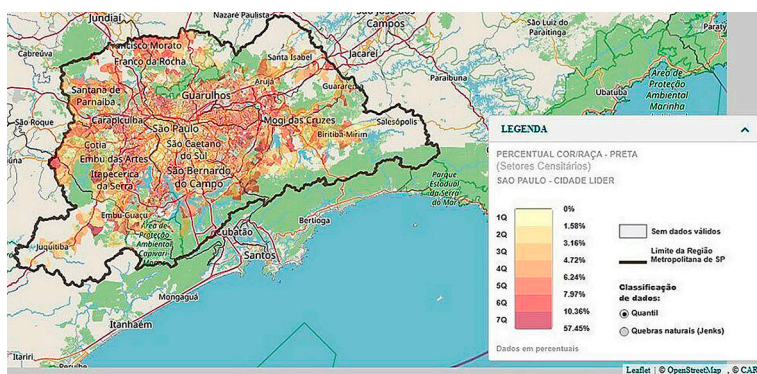
Source: CEM (2021).

Map 3 – Percentage of brown populations in São Paulo and in the SPMR – 2010



Source: CEM (2021).

Map 4 – Percentage of black population in São Paulo and in the SPMR – 2010



Source: CEM (2021).

The areas where most of the massacres occurred predominantly have brown and black populations¹¹ (Maps 3 and 4), such as the south of São Paulo; Taboão da Serra; Embu; Carapicuíba; Osasco, the north and east of São Paulo; Guarulhos; Mauá; Santo André; and Diadema. In contrast, the central region of São Paulo has the highest concentration of white people, and within the SPMR, the cities of São Bernardo do Campo and São Caetano do Sul also have high concentrations of white residents (Map 2). According to data from the Police Ombudsman's Office (2020), 56.2% of the 599 reported deaths resulting from police intervention were of black individuals (ibid.). Although police lethality and massacres are analyzed differently, this data shows the importance of considering race and color in investigating victimization.

Adão (2017) had already noted that peripheral spaces, predominantly inhabited by black people, are more affected by lethal violence, and this trend extends to massacres as well. Concerning the fact that massacres predominantly affect peripheral territories with higher concentrations of black residents, a former police ombudsman stated: "What is common is that massacres always occur in the periphery; that's the fact" (Vedovello, 2022, p. 141).

The socio-spatial distribution of massacres reveals that they occurred in greater numbers in territories considered to be peripheral. These peripheries are often taken as an analytical and accusatory category that predefines these territories as subaltern, where workers and criminals coexist, leading to stereotyping and subjugation (Feltran, 2010).

The subjection and stereotypes produced in these territories facilitate lethal actions against those who live in and move through them.

While peripheries are more affected by massacres, they are not solely defined by deaths and executions. Massacres do not occur in all peripheral areas and, in addition to these deaths, these territories are characterized by a multitude of experiences among their peripheral residents (D'Andrea, 2013).

The data indicate that 14 cities did not report any massacres between 2009 and 2020. These cities are Pirapora de Bom Jesus, Cajamar, Caieiras, Franco da Rocha, Francisco Morato, Mairiporã, Santa Izabel, São Lourenço da Serra, Jquitiba, Rio Grande da Serra, Guararema, Salesópolis, Biritiba-Mirim and Vargem Grande Paulista. This information reveals that during this 11-year period, around 64% of the cities in the SPMR experienced massacres.

Most of the massacres occurred in public places where people frequently pass through, such as streets, avenues, alleys and lanes. However, one fact called our attention: in at least 24 massacres, the victims were inside or in front of bars; in eight cases, they were in front of other local businesses such as restaurants, bakeries, and pizzerias, or socializing inside halls, organized supporters' courts, and soccer pitches. Additionally, three massacres took place at a favela funk party, and two occurred in public squares.

Thus, among the spatial characteristics of multiple homicides, these incidents not only occurred in spaces of urban circulation but also in places of social gathering in the peripheries,

such as bars or other nighttime social venues. These locations were often targeted in armed attacks involving more than three victims.

Executioners, victimizations and *modus operandi*

The data on the massacres reveals more similarities than disparities when examining the actions of the perpetrators, the victimization, and the sequence of execution acts.

In the analysis of the massacres, it was found that in 70.28% of the cases, there was no description of the likely motives for the executions. Only in 31 cases were possible causes described, with five cases involving multiple motivations. Notably, revenge or actions attributed to police officers were associated with 16 cases; in 12 cases, disputes related to drug trafficking were identified as significant factors. Additionally, personal conflicts or vendettas were mentioned in five cases, while references to criminal factions or activities linked to organized crime were found in three cases.

Massacres and executions associated with institutional revenge (Hirata and Grillo, 2019) are not new in São Paulo. For instance, the São Paulo Death Squad operated illicitly from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, employing a *modus operandi* where for every public security agent killed, ten individuals deemed “criminals” were targeted for execution (Bicudo, 1976, pp. 76-77).

In 93 of the reported massacres, there were no indications of suspects mentioned in the press reports, which means that in 67.3% of the cases, the perpetrators were unidentified.

In 34 cases, current or former military police officers, metropolitan civil guards, or civil police officers appeared as suspects, totaling 24.6%. This suggests that in approximately a quarter of the massacres, primary elements already brought the actions of public security agents to the center of the executions.

In the case of massacres carried out by off-duty public security agents, the data from São Paulo and the SPMR closely align with findings by Silva (2021) regarding Brazil as a whole. According to the author's analysis, in 23.8% of the massacres studied, there was suspicion of police involvement in the executions in 23.8% of the massacres studied. Silva (2021) further notes that in São Paulo, between 2015 and 2019, police participation in massacres was identified in 43.5% of cases. In five of these cases, the suspect was a relative or acquaintance of the victims, while in another six cases, there were clues to the suspects, such as a name or a sketch.

As they were carried out off-duty, i.e., during times when security agents had already finished their working hours, the massacres were portrayed as a form of producing summary executions, considering them as

[...] any homicide committed by state security forces (police, military, prison guards, municipal guards) or similar (extermination groups, vigilantes), without the victim having had the opportunity to exercise the right of defense in a regular legal process, or, although responding to a legal process, the victim is executed before their trial or with some procedural defect; or, even, although responding to a legal process, the victim is executed without having been assigned a legal capital punishment. (Lima Júnior et al., 2001, p. 16, translated by the author)

Actions conducted during work hours, known as Police Operations, planned in São Paulo and the SPMR, which result in the deaths of more than three people, are typically not labeled as “chacinas” by the press or justice officials. São Paulo's public security institutions classify these deaths under the category of “deaths resulting from police intervention”.

The so-called Castelinho Operation serves as an example of an action conducted during working hours by public security agents, resulting in more than three victims, where there is a debate over whether it constitutes a legal operation or a massacre. This event, carried out by the São Paulo Military Police in March 2002, involved intercepting cars with members of the PCC at the José Ermírio de Moraes highway toll station, known as *Castelinho*, resulting in the deaths of 12 individuals associated with the group. No police officers were injured during the operation. In the dispute over the meaning of the deaths, social movements like the Mothers of May (*Mães de Maio*) denounced the operation as a massacre, while the justice system deemed it a lawful operation and acquitted the involved police officers.¹²

Labeling actions with high lethality as 'Operations' can confer a sense of legitimacy upon these incidents compared to multiple executions. To highlight the illegitimacy of such operations resulting in high death tolls in specific territories, Hirata et al. (2022) introduced the term “police massacres” (*chacinas policiais*) for incidents labeled as Operations with significant casualties in Rio de

Janeiro. Azevedo et al. (2022) similarly applied the term “police massacre” to analyze the Paraisópolis Massacre.

In terms of victimization, 58% of the reported massacres involved three fatal victims, while 25% had four victims. From 2009 to 2020, there were eight massacres with five victims, another eight with six fatalities, two with seven victims, two with eight, one with nine, and one with 10 victims. Including the Osasco and Barueri massacre, the total number of fatalities reached 19.

Of the 536 fatal victims of the massacres occurring between 2009 and 2020, 419 were male, comprising 78.17% of the fatalities; 37 were female, making up 6.90% of the total victims. Gender identification was not available for 79 victims in the reports, and one of the 536 victims was a transgender woman.

The age group most affected by massacres between 18 and 24 years old, with a total of 110 people executed, followed by 52 victims aged 25 to 29. Between 2009 and 2020, the biggest victims of massacres were people among 18 and 29 years old, accounting for a total of 162 people. It is worth noting that in the 13-17 age group, 51 teenagers died during this period as victims of massacres. Thus, when the age of the victims is considered, we conclude that most of them are young people. Other age groups include six victims aged 0 to 12 years old, 80 victims aged 30 to 40, 27 victims aged 41 to 50, ten victims aged 51 to 60, and two victims over 61 years old.

Among all the elements analyzed, it was found that information on color and race did not appear in news reports about massacres.

Silva (2021) also identifies the challenge of obtaining this data in the Brazilian context. Therefore, what can be perceived is a gap in this type of information.

However, the sociodemographic composition of areas with the highest number of massacres reveals that these incidents predominantly occur in regions with higher concentrations of black and brown populations.

The data on the victims of massacres in São Paulo, along with the socio-spatial configuration of these multiple homicides, summarized in Chart 1, indicate a preference for peripheral and racialized territories. Most victims are young men residing in the city outskirts. These aspects of the victimization align with the assertions of social movements and activists, who characterize these acts of death and extermination as forms of genocide targeting black youth.

While the term “genocide” has been employed to condemn police violence since the founding of the Unified Black Movement (MNU, or *Movimento Negro Unificado*) in 1978. However, it gained stronger emphasis in 2007, at the 1st Meeting of Black Youth and the National Youth Conference, where was used to denounce lethal violence targeting the black and peripheral population, especially police violence (Ramos, 2014 e 2021).

In discussions surrounding genocide and police violence, movements representing victims' families, such as the Mothers of May Movement, view massacres as a manifestation of the genocide targeting black youth. To delimit this pattern of violence, the movement coined the term “Democracy of Massacres”, exposing the frequent occurrences of massacres in the period following the democratic transition (*Mães de Maio*, 2012, p. 299).

Chart 1 – Predominant characteristics of massacres in São Paulo and in the SPMR (2009-2020)

Characteristics	Predominance
Age group	Mostly young people
Gender	Mostly men
Location	Sidewalks, streets, alleys and bars in peripheral, favelas and neighborhoods notably populated by the poor and black working-class community
Territory	Spaces of urban mobility and sociability, contested or not for internal power dynamics
Period	Most often, at night
Executioners	Evidence of off-duty public security agents' involvement, in most cases
Elucidation	Little clarity regarding the perpetrators' identities

Source: Prepared by the author in 2021 based on data collected from press reports.

Regarding the possible *modus operandi* of the massacres, firearms were used in almost all cases, with a few instances involving knives, sticks, and other instruments that served as weapons during the executions.

In 48 cases, perpetrators arrived in cars and fired shots either from inside the vehicles or immediately upon exiting. Of these, seven incidents involved cars escorted by motorcycles, 18 cases involved perpetrators that arrived at the scenes on motorcycles; and witnesses of only four instances reported perpetrators arriving on foot.

Most perpetrators are unidentified, often arriving wearing hoods, ninja caps, hats, or helmets to avoid recognition. In cases involving public security agents, descriptions typically mention the presence of boots, the presence of police vehicles preceding the executions, and perpetrators identifying themselves as police officers.

The scenes of the massacres depict the arrival of cars, motorcycles, or vehicles escorted by motorcycles with perpetrators wearing hoods, ninja caps, and boots, often shouting "it's the police", asking if "anyone has a criminal record" or if "they sell drugs there". This questioning or insinuation that individuals in the vicinity of the massacre are suspects, drug dealers, or criminals highlights a mobilization of criminal subjugation (Misse, 2010) to facilitate the execution of these massacres.

"Criminal subjection" extends beyond mere stigma, consisting a process that constitute subjectivities, identities, and

subcultures within individuals. This process encompasses three dimensions: 1) the criminal trajectory, referring to the path taken by individuals in crime; 2) experiences with "criminals" and/or prison life; and 3) the belief that those who have engaged in criminal activities are destined to return to them. This process of criminal subjection is also a form of subjectivation, shaping a self, and thus entails both acceptance and subjugation (*ibid.*).

Thus, alongside criminalizing attitudes towards individuals residing in peripheral areas, questions posed during massacres such as "having a criminal record" or "selling drugs" suggest that "criminal subjection" (*ibid.*) is a process that exacerbates massacres as a means of conflict resolution.

After questioning or proclaiming, "it's the police", perpetrators proceed to shoot indiscriminately or capture and execute individuals in their vicinity, often targeting groups of young men on sidewalks in peripheral neighborhoods or near nighttime social venues. Following the executions, they typically collect any discarded bullet casings and ammunition cases that are left in the area after the execution.

The elements highlighted constitute a significant portion of the scenes of massacres carried out by off-duty public security agents between 2009 and 2020 in São Paulo city and other cities of the SPMR. These incidents, which accounted for approximately a quarter of the reported massacres during this period, were prominently featured in news reports.

Chart 2 – Frequent aspects of massacres in São Paulo and in the SPMR (2009-2020)

Chain of action	<i>Modus operandi</i>
Arrival scene	In cars, or in one or two motorcycles, or in cars escorted by motorcycles
Aesthetic components	Hoods, ninja caps and boots
Imposition of presence	When they shout “it’s the police”
Posture of power and operation of criminal subjection	When they ask if someone “has a criminal record”, “sells drugs”, etc.
Decree of action	If there is a surrender
Final execution of the act	Followed by indiscriminate firing of shots, with or without prior decree of action, and collection of capsules or other incriminating evidence

Source: Prepared by the author in 2021 based on data collected from press reports.

These recurring elements, observed in many of the 138 massacres analyzed, enabled us to establish a *modus operandi* for these executions. Chart 2 outlines a sequence of actions during these massacres that were consistent across incidents studied over the 11-year period.

The elements detailed in Chart 2 depict scenes of massacres in São Paulo and in the SPMR, recurring over a span of nine years. These scenes illustrate what was called as “hooded” massacres, where actions were executed to conceal the identities of perpetrators, while other symbolic elements suggest an action linked to a perspective of institutional revenge. The analyzed massacres from this period demonstrate how these events were planned as it was some sort of a “game”, in which the perpetrators hid their faces, while leaving institutional markers such as boots or

the declaration “it’s the police”, concealing their individual identities while highlighting the institution to which they belonged.

Final remarks

The elements discussed in this article underscore how the massacres in São Paulo and in the São Paulo Metropolitan Region (SPMR) from 2009 to 2020 trace their historical roots in the activities of the São Paulo Death Squad. This demonstrates a method of producing urban extermination through the adaptation of the actions of public security agents within the broader dynamics of urban militarization, largely characterized by the subordination of public security to military logics.

The actions leading to massacres are intertwined with a diversity of conflicts within territories. When these incidents involve executions led by public security agents, they are connected to “political commodities”, criminalization, and “criminal subjection”, displaying consistent elements in their *modus operandi*.

The socio-spatial characteristics of multiple homicides indicate that certain neighborhoods, areas within the city of São Paulo, or specific cities in the RMSP experienced a higher number of massacres compared to other territories. This lethal violence predominantly occurred in peripheral territories with a predominance of black population.

The massacres predominantly occurred in public places, spaces of urban circulation, and sociability, primarily affecting young people. In this context, they manifest as a form of extermination associated with the “genocide of black youth”.

Most of the analyzed elements refer to what are commonly known as “hooded” massacres – executed to conceal the identity of perpetrators – accompanied by symbolic actions like wearing combat boots or declaring “it’s the police”, emphasizing the institutional identity of the perpetrators.

However, it has been noted that deviations from this pattern have occurred through incidents resulting in multiple deaths carried out in an “unhooded” manner, such as the Paraisópolis Massacre in 2019, analyzed by Azevedo et al. (2022), and the Operations Escudo and Verão, conducted between mid-2023 and early 2024 in Baixada Santista. These incidents, characterized by high lethality, were perpetrated by public security agents during official working hours to legitimize them as state actions.

The “unhooded” massacres, referred to as Operations, may indicate possible ongoing changes regarding these forms of execution in the urban context of São Paulo.

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Notes

- (1) In this article, I focus on the massacres between 2009 and 2020 due to the detailed database available for analysis. I do not delve into earlier massacres in São Paulo and the RMSP between 1980 and 2008, nor do I discuss the Pavilion Nine Organized Supporters (Torcida Organizada Pavilhão Nove) massacre. These topics are explored in depth in my doctoral thesis titled "Who bleeds in the corpse factory? The massacres in São Paulo and SPMR and the Pavilion Nine Organized Supporters massacre" (Quem sangra na fábrica de cadáveres? As chacinas em São Paulo e RMSP e a Chacina da Torcida Organizada Pavilhão Nove) (Vedovello, 2022).
- (2) Territory is defined here as a delimited space shaped through human labor. Socially constructed, it emerges from power dynamics among diverse subjects and groups involved in its creation. (Raffestin, 1993, pp. 143-145).
- (3) The "differential management of illegalities" refers to the interpretation and manipulation of laws and jurisprudence, where certain illegal actions are either deemed criminal or overlooked based on the discretion of the agent involved (Foucault, 2002).
- (4) The term 'world of crime' refers to a network of social relationships characterized by illicit activities, whether they are or not legally defined as crimes, and often involving the use of violence. It encompasses not only criminal activities but also the social relationships and identities shaped by norms and regulations specific to criminal behavior (Feltran, 2008; Ramalho, 1979).
- (5) "Pacification", whether in prisons or in peripheral areas, refers to methods aimed at regulating the PCC's use of violence as a means of conflict resolution (Biondi, 2018; Dias, 2011).
- (6) The use of the term "at least" is due to the under-reporting of these massacres.
- (7) The news items were stored in a search engine using Excel, which had columns for capturing the following information: date; time of occurrence; street; neighborhood; area of the capital/municipality of the SPMR; number of fatal victims; number of non-fatal victims; weapon/caliber; suspects; police report/investigation number; outcome; names of the victims; gender; color/race; age; criminal record; probable motive; description of the massacre; newspaper of reference; newspaper link. This data allowed for a more detailed analysis, and the data on the locations of the massacres between 2009 and 2020 allowed for the construction of georeferenced maps using QGIS software. We also used data on homicides and police killings obtained from the São Paulo State's Public Safety Secretariat website, as well as data obtained from the Brazilian Public Safety Yearbooks published by the Brazilian Forum on Public Safety. Other important sources of data were from the National Penitentiary Department.
- (8) For more details and analysis on the Crimes of May, see: Almeida (2021), Justiça Global (2011) and Figueiredo et al. (2018).
- (9) The term *enquadro* is popularly used in Brazil as a synonym for police raids that may be followed by personal searches.
- (10) Bearing in mind that massacres, when carried out by public security agents during non-working hours, have the characteristic of the perpetrators wearing hoods. The perspective of "un-hooding" is linked to actions with a high level of lethality, carried out during police operations in which the agents do not cover their faces, because the actions have the possibility of state approval.

- (11) According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), both black and brown individuals are categorized within the black population. However, the CEM maps distinguish between black and brown groups, which is why this article reflects that separation.
- (12) In 2024, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), part of the Organization of American States (OAS), condemned the Brazilian state for the executions carried out by the São Paulo Military Police.

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