Youth Gangs in the Urban Context of Cabo Verde

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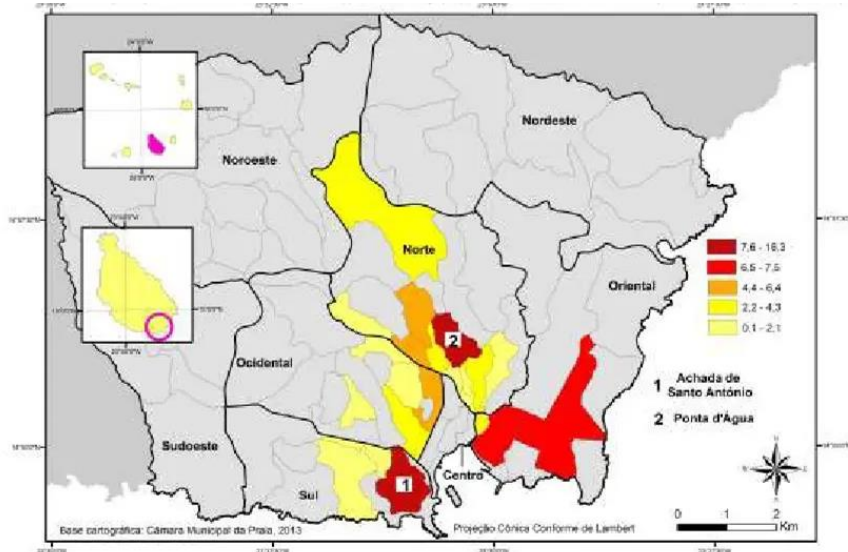
Youth Gangs in Urban Africa, Freetown, 6th June 2023
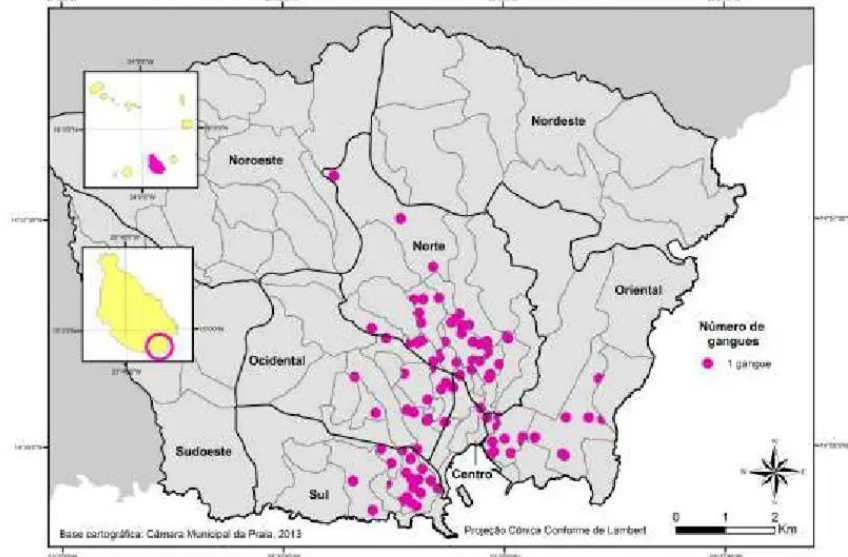
Context of the emergence of urban gangs

- Between 1990 and 2000 Cape Verde became an international hub for cocaine (Saviano, 2014) via highway 10 (Pérez, 2014) – Lusophone connection (Brown, 2013);

- In the early 1990s Praia became a retail hypermarket - crack cocaine;

- In the late 1990s there was an increase in deportations of young Cape Verdeans from the USA and the European Union;

- From the 2000s there has been an increase in homicides and a proliferation of juvenile gangs, mainly in the city of Praia (OHCHR, 2013).

Map of street gangs 2013

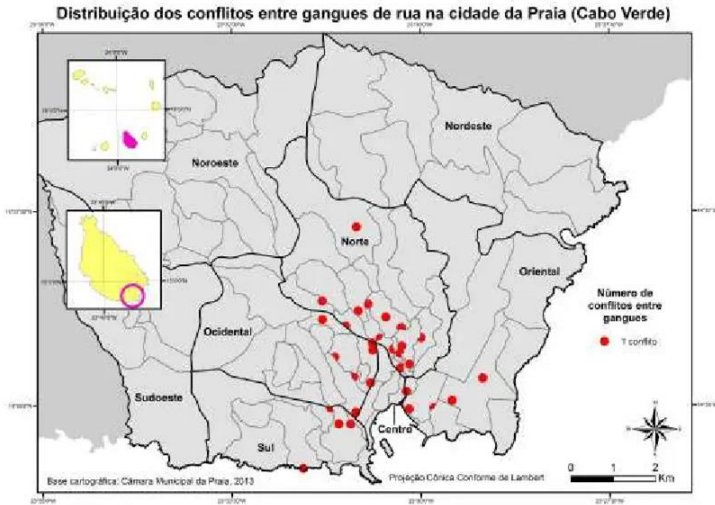Distribuição das gangues de rua na cidade da Praia (Cabo Verde)

Praia

- 94 street gangs – 4 gangs formed by children under 15 and 7 by women;

- In 2011 there were 104 street gangs;

Mindelo

- 13 street gangs;

Distribuição dos conflitos entre gangues de rua na cidade da Praia (Cabo Verde)

Thugs lutam pelo controlo da venda de drogas

Map of armed confrontations between street gangs in Praia 2010-2012

- 30 open armed confrontations of street gangs;

- Homicides in Cape Verde (2006-2012) - 281, average 40.1% per year;

- Praia (2006-2012) – 144, average 20.6 per year. In 2011, 28 deaths out of 33 (total 53) are directly or indirectly linked to armed gang confrontations.

Deviant and protestatory urban youth aesthetics

- "Dread" aesthetics inspired by Bob Marley's Rastafarian aesthetic of the 1970s and early 1980s;

- Early 1990s the aesthetics influenced by hip-hop. At first the "yo" and then the "boss" – If both were distinguished by parties and feminine conquests, the confrontations between groups in festive environments, almost always with recourse to white weapons (knives and baseball sticks), become more frequent with this second;

- "Thugs" from Tupac thug life (from the mid-2000s) – it was with the thug aesthetic that confrontations between groups became deadly.

Background and characteristics of the the "thugs" groups

- "Netinhus di Vovó" (Grandma's little grandchildren) – End of the 1980s;

- "Piratinhas" (Little pirates). Street children groups – 1990s and early 2000s;

- The armed opposition between rival groups and the border demarcation between friendly and hostile neighbourhoods are the central features of the "thugs" violence and therefore the major innovation compared to previous groups (Cardoso, 2012);

- Most "thugs" are inserted in the logics of neighbourhood protection and a minority is involved in the sense of the drug market and/or political parties at election time;

- 3 generations: "thug" ideology (late 1990s to second half of 2000s); Zé Pequeno generation (after 2010); hybrid gangs (after 2014)

Typology of Praia criminality groups

1. "Kasubodistas" groups (Cash or Body groups): drug addicts – robberies in the streets or organised property theft groups;

2. "Thugs" groups. Now transformed into hybrid and cross-community gangs;

3. "Outlaw" Groups – they call themselves revolutionary groups;

4. Drugs and another trafficking groups

5. "Gangster" – white collar crime groups.

Institutional and community responses

In 2005 the zero-tolerance policy was implemented – creation of the anti-crime brigade (anti-gang brigade) in 2007. In 2008 the Military Police returned to patrol the streets, in 2012 "Ninja" in Mindelo and in 2012 the National Guard – the 200% increase in the prison population: mass incarceration (Cabo Verde has the highest incarceration rate in West Africa and the second highest on the continent).

Between 2010 and 2012 a policy of neighbourhood pacification was implemented – the use of a kind of intelligent power combining intense police repression in problematic neighbourhoods with the financing of community social projects promoted by some groups, many of them co-opted by state institutions.

Institutional and community responses

- In 2013 there emerged in Praia new forms of youth protagonism and and political affirmation and contestation that have been gradually replacing gangs as spaces of social insertion and identity cohesion – street organizations like "Korenti Ativizta" and many others (use the cabralista revolutionary aesthetic – unity, struggle and reafricanisation of spirits and minds).

- **Collaborative policy of community security:** The National Programme for Internal Security and of Citizenship implemented in 2017 provides for the inclusion of civil society organisations in the fight urban crime and in the process of building a culture of peace. We intend to create in a collaborative way a Local Safety Network with community associations and street organisations that support the elaboration of the local diagnosis of the situation and the construction of intervention strategies.

Thank you