

Me, my name, my territory: A clinical intervention with “street boys”

Eu, meu nome, meu território: Uma ação clínica com “meninos de rua”

Yo, mi nombre, mi territorio: Una acción clínica con “niños de la calle”

Moi, mon nom, mon territoire : Une action clinique avec des « gamins des rues »

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Abstract

Ruptures, violence, human rights violations, devastating losses, drug trafficking, sexual exploitation, offenses, and wandering. The complex reality of the social segregation experienced by thousands of children and adolescents who wander through streets, homes, and institutions is woven from these factors, laying bare a perverse context that strives to erase every trace of humanity from "street boys." This article arose from a community outreach initiative aimed at providing adolescents experiencing psychological and social vulnerability with a space for collectively exploring their proper names, their appropriation of self, and their territory through an operative group. Grounded in psychoanalytic theory, both the clinical intervention and the writing of this article sought to highlight the psychological functions of proper names and territory in the lives of these children and adolescents. These functions are understood as constitutive of psychological places and spaces of belonging and recognition for subjects of desire, despite the desubjectivation and stigma of exclusion carried by the label "street boys."

Keywords: psychoanalysis, street boys, proper name, territory, institution.

Resumo

Rupturas, violências, violação dos direitos humanos, perdas drásticas, tráfico de drogas, exploração sexual, delitos, errâncias. É na trama desses fatores que se desenha a complexa realidade de segregação social de milhares de crianças e adolescentes que vagueiam pelas ruas, pelas casas, pelas instituições, a escancarar o contexto perverso que se esforça por apagar todo e qualquer traço de humanidade dos "meninos de rua". Este artigo resulta de uma ação de extensão, que teve por objetivo propiciar, por meio de grupo operativo, um espaço de construção coletiva acerca do nome próprio, da apropriação do sujeito e do território para adolescentes em situação de vulnerabilidade psíquica e social. Ancorando-se no referencial teórico psicanalítico, a ação clínica, assim como a construção deste texto, visaram a pôr em relevo, na vida dessas crianças e adolescentes, as funções psíquicas do nome próprio e do território, entendendo-as como constitutivas de lugares psíquicos e de espaços de pertencimento e reconhecimento para sujeitos do desejo, a despeito da dessubjetivação e da marca de exclusão que a denominação "meninos de rua" carrega.

Palavras-chave: psicanálise, meninos de rua, nome próprio, território, instituição.

Resumen

Rupturas, violencias, violación de los derechos humanos, pérdidas drásticas, narcotráfico, explotación sexual, delitos, errancias. Es en la trama de estos factores donde se configura la compleja realidad de segregación social de miles de niños y adolescentes que deambulan por las calles, los hogares y las instituciones, evidenciando el contexto perverso que se esfuerza por borrar todo y cualquier rastro de humanidad de los denominados "niños de la calle". Este artículo resulta de una acción de extensión cuyo objetivo fue propiciar, por medio de un grupo operativo, un espacio de construcción colectiva en torno al nombre propio, la apropiación del sujeto y del territorio para adolescentes en situación de vulnerabilidad psíquica y social. Basándose en el marco teórico psicoanalítico, la acción clínica, así como la construcción de este texto, buscaron poner de relieve, en la vida de estos niños y adolescentes, las funciones psíquicas del nombre propio y del territorio, entendiéndolas como constitutivas de lugares psíquicos y de espacios de pertenencia y reconocimiento para sujetos del deseo, a pesar de la desubjetivación y de la marca de exclusión que conlleva la nominación "niños de la calle".

Palabras clave: psicoanálisis, niños de la calle, nombre propio, territorio, institución.

Résumé

Ruptures, violences, violation des droits humains, pertes drastiques, trafic de drogues, exploitation sexuelle, délits, errances. C’est dans la trame de ces facteurs que se dessine la complexe réalité de ségrégation sociale de milliers d’enfants et d’adolescents qui errent dans les rues, dans les maisons, dans les institutions, mettant à nu le contexte pervers qui s’efforce d’effacer le moindre signe d’humanité des « gamins des rues ». Cet article résulte d’un projet communautaire, qui avait pour objectif de permettre, par le biais d’un groupe opératoire, un espace de construction collective autour du nom propre, de l’appropriation du sujet et du territoire pour des adolescents en situation de vulnérabilité psychique et sociale. En s’appuyant sur le référentiel théorique psychanalytique, l’action clinique, ainsi que l’élaboration de ce texte, ont visé à mettre en relief, dans la vie de ces enfants et adolescents, les fonctions psychiques du nom propre et du territoire, en les comprenant comme constitutives de lieux psychiques et d’espaces d’appartenance et de reconnaissance pour des sujets du désir, en dépit de la désubjectivation et de la marque d’exclusion que la nomination « gamins des rues » véhicule.

Mots-clés : psychanalyse, enfants des rues, nom propre, territoire, institution.

Where we began

Recent and alarming data from Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (IPEA, 2023) reveal that “(...) the homeless population in Brazil grew by 38% between 2019 and 2022, when it reached 281,472 people.”¹ Data also indicate that, over the decade from 2012 to 2022, the number of people wandering the streets – often adopting them as their place of residence – rose dramatically by 211%.

Within this population, children and adolescents – pejoratively and violently labeled “street boys” – roam the streets in a kind of “forced choice” (Ferreira, 2001), either fleeing or responding to unbearable situations experienced within the private sphere of the home. Thus, by taking a subjective position, they adopt the street as a “stage” in the public arena upon which they enact their traumatic experiences. At times, they find in it a “forced” space for survival, thereby exposing a perverse social context shaped by social exclusion, segregation, and every form of violence. In the words of Barros (2015, p. 99):

It is a place “produced” and “determined” by the violence of an exclusionary and segregating society, marked by the effects of neoliberalism and the dictates of capitalist discourse, which lays bare, in the “street boy,” the violation of every kind of human right. Such a society is therefore governed by the logic of a social machinery that, by excluding him and stripping him of his position as a subject, includes him at the margins of what ensures its proper functioning.

Marked by the symbolic deprivation of a place of recognition, adolescents’ life trajectories bear the scars of a social mutilation that tends toward the annihilation of desire. We refer to adolescents who, within the culture and segregating social bonds in which they live, are assigned the position of “street boy.” As Medeiros et al. (2022) emphasize, this position is structured through a hegemonic narrative grounded in power relations that disavow any expression of singularity.

These adolescents move through public spaces in search of new “anchoring points,” as Barros (2015) suggests in her doctoral dissertation. They set out wandering in search of a possible place to which they can address themselves – a place of recognition and welcome – despite the hostility and violence of and on the streets. Guided by this perspective and responding to a request from a psychosocial care institution, we embarked on a journey that culminated in the writing of this article, as explained below.

Tracing a shared practice

In April 2023, given psychoanalysis’s ethical and political commitment and with a view to the principles of expanded clinical practice, students enrolled in a clinical psychology practicum expressed the desire to propose a community outreach initiative inspired by this approach. The initiative was to be conducted at a psychosocial care institution for children and adolescents experiencing homelessness in the Recife metropolitan area, state of Pernambuco, which had identified the importance of providing a clinical intervention within the service. Through its outcomes, the initiative that inspired this article was linked to the clinical supervisor’s research project, “Wanderings: A Psychoanalytic Study of the Subject’s Place in Subjective and Migratory Displacements.” The project aims to analyze what is singular in each subject’s wandering amid subjective and migratory displacements, understanding it as a response to the psychological place or places assigned to and occupied by that subject within family and social settings.

¹ For the purposes of this article, all direct quotations from the original sources have been translated into English.

From the perspective of expanded clinical practice, Rosa (2004, p. 331) emphasizes the importance of psychoanalytic practice beyond the consulting room, understood as “an approach, through psychoanalytic ethics and concepts, to issues involving a psychoanalytic practice that addresses the subject entangled in social and political phenomena (...).” In this sense, we understand adolescents experiencing homelessness as subjects affected by contexts of exclusion and violence, which leave marks on both their bodies and their subjectivities.

The clinical intervention emerged from a training program delivered to professionals at a nongovernmental organization (NGO), titled “Untying and Ret tying Knots: Institutional Reception and Care for Adolescents Experiencing Homelessness,” as well as from observations of the institutional setting and participation in several workshops with the young people served by the institution – or service users, as the institution refers to them. Through our contact with the adolescents, we found it pertinent to discuss the aspects that “caught our eyes and ears” during this practice. Moreover, following several meetings with the institution’s professionals, we were “seized” by their accounts of their experiences amid institutional impasses—moments in which proper names and territory emerged as dimensions permeating the lives of the adolescents concerned.

Emphasizing writing as a fundamental component in developing clinical know-how, this article brings together the theoretical and clinical reverberations of an experience that addressed distinct demands rooted in a shared desire: to enable words to circulate among the adolescents, to listen to what they had to say, and to recognize them as subjects of desire and citizens with rights and responsibilities whose human rights must be guaranteed. For those of us at the university psychology clinic, the wager was on the subject of the unconscious – a wager sustained by and through the ethics of psychoanalysis.

Thus, at the meeting point and intersection of the adolescents’, trainees’, researcher’s, and institution’s demands, the focus of our intervention took shape. We sought to work with the adolescents served by the institution on two aspects that we regarded as foundational to their subjective reality: their proper names and territory.

Drawing on these premises and envisioning a group intervention grounded in psychoanalytic theory, we based our initiative on Pichon-Rivière’s (2005) proposal of the operative group, aiming to provide adolescents experiencing psychological and social vulnerability with a space for collectively exploring their proper names, their appropriation of self, and their territory. As Pichon-Rivière (2005) proposes, the operative group is oriented toward completing tasks while simultaneously functioning as a potential space for learning, analyzing interactions, and fostering participants’ subjective transformation. Because it seeks to foster the subjective transformation of each participant in their singularity while also engaging with the collective through the group’s dynamics and functioning, we considered the operative group both pertinent and valuable to the initiative we intended to develop: offering a space for collectively exploring proper names, the appropriation of self, and territory.

The meetings took place at the institution itself and were facilitated by trainees from the university psychology clinic and the NGO psychologist. We believe that the bond established among them opened a space – though not without some resistance – for engagement with the proposed activities. Enabling words to circulate among adolescents is already a challenge in itself; however, given the social circumstances of those served, whose lives were marked by social and discursive helplessness, this challenge proved even more demanding. We therefore used playful resources and proposed tasks that guided the meetings, supported by film excerpts, drawings, modeling clay, music, paper, pencils, and clippings. These materials opened possibilities for subjective expression, based on the wager that each subject could express themselves, interact, respond to prompts, and act in their own name.

This article therefore offers scholarly contributions that may inspire the development of clinical and institutional dispositifs capable of supporting intervention proposals in contexts of social vulnerability. To this end, we draw on the propositions of Rinaldi and Bursztyn (2008), who conceive of the clinical dispositif as a “set of mechanisms guided by a particular field of knowledge, entailing specific positions within that field and organized toward a particular purpose in the clinical setting” (p. 39). Broadly speaking, we address the foundations that provided our theoretical and clinical anchoring, drawing particularly on Lacanian premises. While observing the ethical safeguards required by a clinical intervention, we constructed a narrative based on what seized us in the act of listening and set us to work. Accordingly, the article is structured in three parts: i) we begin by highlighting the psychological function of the proper name; ii) we then discuss the notion of territory; and, finally, iii) we offer several considerations regarding the place of psychoanalysis in work with adolescents experiencing psychological and social vulnerability.

Creating “aliases”: on rejecting and appropriating the proper name

We know little about the names of these young people who insist on cleaning our car windows. The difficulty in naming them may reveal our resistance to granting them a place, one that would lead us to question the perpetuation of a system that cannot do without those it excludes. If they have names, they will have at least some history, and this binds them to the city’s collective flow and weaves them into the knots that constitute it. (Souza & Goldmeier, 2008, p. 999)

The proper name is a distinctive mark that assigns a place to the person who has just entered the world, situates them within a lineage, and specifies their rootedness and birth as a subject at the origin of nomination, as an insignia bestowed

by the Other. The term "proper" implies that the name belongs to something or someone and serves to distinguish and identify them in their singularity. In the sociolinguistic context, the proper name situates a subject as part of a familial and historical lineage, recognizing them as a social being: "It is through this legally validated name that we can be socially designated, even against our will" (Mariani, 2014, p. 133).

In the psychoanalytic context, the proper name, beyond its function as a social designation, is constitutive insofar as it arises from the Other's choice and forms part of the subject's prehistory, with the subject being named by the person who gives them a name. "There is an other who names, and this is never a matter of indifference to the person being named. This reference, which lies outside the linguistic field, contributes signifying elements that can be taken together with the proper name (...)" suggest Gerber and Zanotti (2020, p. 70). Thus, at birth, signifiers are bestowed upon the infant, inserting them into the order of language. The proper name is a symbolic mark inscribed by the Other, presupposing a subject who will bear that name and summoning them to become the name they carry. In other words, the subject identifies with and experiences their own name as a representation and a place within the Other's desire.

Pommier (2013) emphasizes the proper name as an absolute gift, the "first symbolic instance of subjectivation" (p. 167), because the act of naming the subject locates an entity that had previously remained unlocated. Like an anchor, the name thus positions the subject at a particular point in space. It is an act of speech through which a father situates his child within the symbolic order, inscribing the gift of love through the recognition of filiation.

Taking on the name means that the subject recognizes that these qualities have been given to them, which does not mean that they make them their own: "Okay! I take this name (...), but I will make of it whatever I want." This act of taking on the name signifies the absolute nature of the subject's singularity. Even if subjects accept the place assigned to them, they must first reject it before taking it up again (...). They must steal their life, even if it has been given to them. To exist, subjects reject the determinations that objectify them: they are thus divided between themselves and the part of themselves desired by the Other. (Pommier, 2013, p. 126)

In this sense, by taking up the proper name to speak about and name themselves, subjects become divided between what they assert about the "I," an imaginary construction, and the signifiers they carry as part of the Other within themselves. Once inscribed upon the now-named subject, the proper name gives rise to a narrative that the subject constructs for themselves on the basis of their name (Gerber & Zanotti, 2020).

According to Lacan (1964–1965/2006), the proper name functions as a primary mark that differentiates the subject and connects them to the person who named them. It is a suture, a stitching point aimed at the impossible task of filling a structural gap within the subject – an impossible-to-fill lack that drives desire. Thus, Lacan states (1964–1965/2006, p. 74): "It is not as an individual that I am called Jacques Lacan, but as something that can be lacking, whereby what does this name move toward? Covering another lack."

It is essential to understand the proper name as the subject's distinctive mark by drawing on the concept of the unary trait (Lacan, 1961–1962/2003), since no trait is identical to another, and each carries multiple meanings. Lacan thus addresses the dimension of the letter to situate the proper name as something belonging to this dimension – something that circumscribes the subject's rootedness and binds together the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary registers.

Drawing on the Lacanian proposition that contrasts the naming function of the Name-of-the-Father with naming-to, Lebrun (2010) makes a major contribution to our understanding of the forms of nomination surrounding the lives of adolescents experiencing social vulnerability. The author emphasizes that, in modernity, the signifier Name-of-the-Father – in its naming function, which is responsible for barring the primal desire so that subjects can constitute themselves through their own signifiers – is replaced by the function of "naming-to." This function acts upon subjects as a form of labeling, making it nearly impossible for them to move beyond the position assigned by the "to," insofar as it often operates as an injunction that confines them.

According to Pommier (2013), therefore, when the proper name is not used – when, for example, a child is addressed through insults – the child may be cast into the depersonalization of autoerotic jouissance, submerging their subjectivity. In this case, rather than ensuring the subject's distinctiveness and situating them within a line of filiation, the act of naming confronts the child with a real nomination that imprisons them. Thus, in the absence of a gift that conveys the transmission of the proper name, subjects seem to lack the appropriation of a name capable of functioning as a distinctive mark. In this sense, the name does not operate as an anchor and therefore fails to situate the subject at a particular point in space. This offers a possible interpretation of the restless wandering that, according to Barros (2015), characterizes adolescents experiencing homelessness.

The notions of "naming-to" and real nomination provide important support for problematizing the devastating subjective effects experienced by adolescents who are pejoratively and violently labeled "street boys" while living on the streets. This label readily adheres to others, summoning them to act as "delinquents," "criminals," "petty thieves," or "glue sniffers." They bear the labeling imposed by a society that relegates them to a "non-place," or to the position of social refuse, within a homogeneity characterized by the rejection and absence of singularity: "In the disintegration of the proper Name, it is

therefore the drive-related value that is released, emptying rather than shattering the symbolic body. It empties this symbolic body that makes a living body plausible – in short, the pact between Name and Body” (Douville, 2011, p. 39).

During the clinical intervention that inspired this article, we observed a certain apprehension and/or resistance among the adolescents when it came to sharing their proper names. They more commonly used nicknames or insults to address one another, as well as to introduce and name themselves. Lage (1992) invites us to consider whether this preference for the “thing-name” denounces an imaginary position occupied by an “objectified” or “thingified” subject: “The new name crystallizes the imaginary dimension of a new identity and grants it unity within exclusion, thereby alleviating the anxieties arising from the narcissistic disruption brought about by this new life” (Lage, 1992, p. 2).

By superseding and concealing the proper name, this “thing-name” seems to open the way for an unrestrained pursuit of *jouissance*: “a name without baptism, imposed by *jouissance* and not given a priori (...) that points to the truth of a subject’s modes of satisfaction” (Gerber & Zanotti, 2020, p. 82). We are thus led to consider the subject who creates a name for themselves. From this perspective, in the case of adolescents experiencing homelessness, altering the name affords the freedom of *jouissance* in the face of the streets’ excesses. Ferreira (2001) discusses this alteration as a means of belonging to the collective, because on the streets one must “make a name” for oneself. By freeing subjects from what assuming their proper name entails, this allows them to remain open to the possibilities of *jouissance*.

This prompts us to consider the place that nicknames, which those served by the institution called “aliases,” create for these adolescents. In our work with them, we were able to observe the constructions and meanings that their names and aliases held for each of them, both subjectively and socially. On the one hand, we observed the nomination assigned by the social bond, which excludes them from the status of subjects and confines them to the degraded and dispossessed position of the “street boy” – a mark of exclusion that prevents any signifying slippage. Conversely, the singular invention of a name and the sharing of aliases among peers can, at times, indicate an attempt to create a different place, to construct a place of one’s own – one intended to be privileged within the territory and in relationships among peers.

We highlight the words of one adolescent who spoke of wanting to create a new history for his name and for himself, different from the history of his biological father, from whom he inherited the same proper name. According to Teixeira et al. (2021, p. 424), the unconscious transmission of an affective inheritance has played a foundational role in the psyche across generations since the earliest times. Beginning with the recognition of what he inherited from his father, this adolescent stated that his proper name was the only thing passed down to him and that he wished to oppose this inheritance. He emphasized that he wanted to be a different father to his son, a better father than his own had been to him.

Giving his name a new destination, another adolescent stated that he had created his own letter – an artistic, singular invention that prompts us to consider both Lacan’s (1961–1962/2003) notion of the unary trait and the dimension of the letter as the subject’s rootedness. In this case, he appeared to create his own letter as an attempt at anchoring himself.

In some cases, the altered name – particularly one through which adolescents demean themselves and/or are demeaned by others – appears to expose a paternal deficiency marked by a “thing-name” that reveals the ineffectiveness of the Name-of-the-Father. This occurs, for example, when adolescents “embody” the injunctions and constraints imposed by the real nomination “street boy.” From this perspective, we understand the label “street boy” as denying adolescents a position as subjects of desire and locating them within the imaginary dimension of an “objectified” or even “thingified” name, as previously noted. By imaginarily suturing the subject’s lack, this “improper” name also renders the subject “improper” and impersonal, like the street itself, which “belongs to no one” (Ferreira, 2001). By belonging to no one, the street exposes adolescents to boundless *jouissance* and to the possibility of unrestricted enjoyment in its deadliest dimension.

Through the wandering movement that characterizes these adolescents’ displacement across the streets, there appears to be a search for anchoring points – an attempt to construct territories as possible psychological ways out that protect them from the annihilation of being and expose the fragility of the family and other social institutions.

On the streets, the fascination with the ideal of *jouissance* outside the law, the illusory promise of freedom, anonymity, and “making” a name become intertwined with an existence shaped by violence. The same street that “welcomes” and makes promises also violates their status as subjects and creates space for a traumatic excess that overwhelms them, leaving them alone and exposed to drive-related chaos and unhealthy living conditions.

Rosa (1999) discusses the *jouissance* of the “street boy,” this “knowing what to do with” the context of the streets:

The discourse concerning the street boy, while highlighting deprivation and the need for care and attention, places him in a position stripped of phallic value. At the slightest difficulty, the discourse shifts from deprivation to dangerousness: he becomes someone who lives according to the ideal of being able to enjoy outside the law, who does not submit; someone who poses a threat through his *jouissance* and must be restrained. It must be emphasized that, in its first aspect – the child who lives according to the ideal of being able to enjoy outside the law – the discourse concerning the street boy intensifies contemporary discourse about children in general.

We thus consider, for example, the nickname routinely given to an adolescent on a particular street corner, which quickly becomes attached to the subject who will carry it, like the sobriquets that emerge on the streets in moments of

vulnerability or inattention. These nicknames become part of their identities within a specific territory and help define their actions, as if the physical space itself validated these labels and reinforced the sense of belonging to a separate world. In this case, those labeled "street boys" alter their names in favor of an "alias" that reflects their condition on the streets – an indelible mark of an existence at the margins of society. This casts them into the supposed freedom of anonymity and into a sometimes relentless search for a place of belonging and recognition.

In the discourse of those served by the institution, we observed how the proposed themes – the proper name and territory – frequently intersected, with each evoking the other through nuances that slipped metonymically. As manifestations of the unconscious, these nuances revealed the important connection between "proper name" and "territory," which emerged as though there were an urgent need to speak about these themes. Through a kind of transitive interplay, the adolescents thus confirmed the hypothesis underpinning our proposal for a clinical intervention centered on these two themes: the supposition that there was indeed a demand concerning them. The name they bear, the name they sometimes reject or conceal, the name they appropriate, and the other names they create for themselves—as signifiers that name the subject in their search for belonging to a place—guide them through life and through the construction of what becomes a territory for each of them. Thus, when signing something they had produced, the adolescents repeatedly accompanied their proper name or its initial with an acronym they had created to refer to the place where they lived. This occurred almost as a kind of continuum, as though they were inventing "place-surnames" for themselves.

As our writing moves from the proper name to territory, following the rhythm that the adolescents imparted to this text, we understand nicknames – their "aliases" – as marks that these adolescents inscribe upon themselves. They carry what we understand to be the psychological effects of three forms of nomination: the name given to them at birth, the thing-names imposed upon them by life, and the names they created, chose, and assumed for themselves.

In his propositions concerning the proper name, Pommier (2013) emphasizes that, to appropriate the name assigned to an infant at birth, subjects must first reject it. Among adolescents experiencing homelessness, we observed that, in some cases, this rejection is enacted through their departure into a life of wandering, as a refusal of the place assigned to them. Thus, by rejecting both their proper name and their place of origin, adolescents encounter the label "street boy" in public spaces. They may embody it by occupying the position of social refuse, or reject it by taking the street as a stage for their enactments and singular ways out. In this context, inventing an "alias" and choosing a new name for themselves as a means of recognition among peers may, depending on the psychological function it fulfills, propel them toward constructing new territories within the same physical space of the street.

We return here to one of the activities conducted at the institution, in which we invited participants to express themselves freely regarding their proper names and different forms of nomination. This activity touched on questions concerning the origins and intersecting influences that shape proper names. On that occasion, an adolescent who introduced himself by his nickname produced a drawing containing his proper name, which occupied much of the page; his signature; sporting items, such as balls and a surfboard; a loaf of bread; a flute; hair clippers, referring to his desire to become a barber; a drawing of himself; and a gun. He did not include his "alias" in the work and explained that all the images constituted his proper name because they represented the complexity of his existence in the world—a collection of isolated scenes, some of which he wished to experience and others he wished to forget. Because he was not recognized by the proper name with which he signed his work, the "alias," although absent from the drawing, appeared to provide an alternative means of stitching together these experiences and his way of presenting himself and acting on the streets.

For these adolescents, who are often invisible in the eyes of society, having a name, assuming it, and appropriating it runs counter to the anonymity imposed by a context of social segregation. This context places them within a kind of undifferentiated mass labeled "street boys," aiming to erase them as subjects. We therefore understand this as the setting in which children and adolescents occupy and take over the streets as a space for survival – a stage for daily struggles marked by encounters and missed encounters in their search for a place of belonging and the construction of a territory of their own.

My territory, my place

"My place. It is surrounded by struggle and sweat. Hope for a better world. And beer with which to celebrate" (Arlindo Cruz). We used this song to introduce the theme of territory during the meetings with the adolescents served by the institution. The song resonated with them, certainly because it was familiar, but also, we assume, because of what was at stake in its lyrics. The task was to think, speak, and produce material about territory.

When subjects speak about the place where they live, defining the territory to which they belong, they generally recount – with emotional investment – the customs, traditions, everyday life, and memories of "their place," to which they almost always wish to return and where they recall meaningful childhood experiences. What does territory mean to adolescents experiencing homelessness? What kind of territory is at issue?

The geographer Milton Santos (2003) introduces the concept of territory from a transcendent perspective: not merely as a physical space defined by borders, but as a place where human actions become intertwined, consolidated, and expressed amid powers, strengths, weaknesses, passions, transformations, and (re)constructions.

Territory is the land together with its population; that is, it is an identity, the fact and feeling of belonging to that which belongs to us. Territory is the foundation of work, residence, material and spiritual exchanges, and life, all of which it influences. When we speak of territory, therefore, we must immediately understand that we are speaking of territory as used and inhabited by a population (Santos, 2003, p. 47).

Beyond physical space, we conceive of territory in terms of how it is used and, especially, its subjective effects as a psychological space in its Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary dimensions. It is constructed and occupied by wandering adolescents who often find in the streets a way to exist. We emphasize that territory is inhabited, occupied, constructed, and forged through a desire and a history by a subject who bears an assigned proper name – a trait inscribed in the psyche that, as we have seen, constitutes a highly sensitive issue in the lives of adolescents experiencing homelessness.

Territory – and the subjective construction made of it – is therefore permeated by lived experiences and shaped by economic, historical, cultural, and political issues, insofar as it is situated within the geography of the *polis*. At a more intimate level, the construction of what becomes territory for a subject reaches back to a singular history and to how that subject inhabits and moves through spaces. Based on their place in the Other's desire, subjects delineate a place of their own amid the physical boundaries demarcating the territory and the psychological borders situating them within it. In demarcating possible borders for space, Segers (2009, p. 226) suggests that:

(...) the question of the threshold is essential to the question of place because, to situate oneself in space, one must rely on lines and the intersections between them. The threshold evokes the archaic crossing between what lies outside and inside, that which may be concealed. It is a kind of precarious and shifting security perimeter. Certain intersections of lines create the perspective of an angle and open up the possibility of a territory.

Territory thus becomes a space in which human relationships are constituted at the intersection of lines establishing limits and boundaries between inside and outside, self and other, inclusion and exclusion, thereby circumscribing geographical, imaginary, and psychological spaces of belonging. We believe that it is at this intersection between inside and outside, through forms of address between self and other, that territory assumes a singular psychological function for each subject. Within this psychological space of belonging, the dimension of territory may reverberate in the invention of nicknames and aliases that distinguish “street boys” from one another.

Thinking about territory from this perspective evokes Winnicott's proposition concerning the environment. To support a child's healthy emotional development, the environment must ensure stability and continuity and adapt to the child's needs in a good-enough manner, fostering the potential space of being throughout the maturational process. When the environment invades rather than welcomes, and violates and destabilizes rather than providing safety and stability, the boundaries between spaces and between self and other become blurred, and subjects are denied the protection and belonging they need.

For adolescents living in a territory where they feel violated, excluded, and threatened, reproducing violence ultimately becomes a defense. Expressions such as “To survive there, you have to be a criminal” are common, as are seemingly resigned remarks such as “I have nothing to say about that place... it's nothing but death!” In this instance, laughter and a mocking tone appear to provide the only available means of expressing the hostile environment in which they live.

In the lives of the adolescents served by the institution, community life is often governed by the tyrannical laws of drug trafficking, which establish rigid physical boundaries as a means of ensuring “protection” from threats posed by rival communities. The institution faces the challenge of enabling adolescents from rival communities to coexist within the same space. This involves the continuous work of providing a different environment—one intended to remain protected from external tensions and dangers, although it cannot remain entirely untouched by them. Rather than the familiar, the street represents the unknown, non-territory, impersonality, and anonymity – a place where people live in the total absence of safety and love, as Douville (2008) emphasizes: “The street then becomes not a space between two places, but a pure ‘in-between’ that connects nothing, the most radical point of place itself (...)” (p. 46).

Segers (2009) proposes that, when confronted with territories marked by the dissolution of social bonds, wandering subjects risk losing the traits and signifiers of their origins. At the same time, we understand that the effects of certain marks accompany subjects throughout their entire trajectories, whether as the reproduction of the same or as repetition that enables signifying slippages and the construction of new subjective positions.

From the perspective of listening to the subject of the unconscious, intertwined with the social bond and situated within a challenging place, we asked how it might be possible to listen to adolescents experiencing social and psychological vulnerability and to speak about and from their territories. More specifically, we questioned how we could provide an

effective space for listening and facilitate the circulation of words, creating dialogue and reflection about their experiences in the spaces through which they move and the territories constructed within them.

During our initial contact, we noticed the urgency with which the adolescents spoke about the places where they lived and spent their time. It was along this path – considering both physical space and, beyond it, psychological space – that we recognized the relevance of addressing the notion of territory in the clinical intervention, including how the adolescents used this space and its subjective effects on their lives.

Accordingly, Arlindo Cruz's "My Place" proved an important resource for enabling words to circulate as we explored the theme of "my territory." The song's resonances prompted the adolescents to identify similarities between the "place" portrayed in the composition and the place – the community – from which they came. Despite every form of violence and vulnerability, this territory was also a place of belonging whose marks the adolescents carried wherever they went: *"My place / Is surrounded by struggle and sweat / Hope for a better world / And beer with which to celebrate."*

During the meetings with those served by the institution, when words did not seem to be available as a possible symbolic resource, drawings, paintings, and LEGO constructions spoke of how they were situated within their territories. The meaning that the place held for these adolescents thus took shape through representations of everyday life: the symbol of the major avenue; a precise drawing resembling a floor plan of the community or even the institution; living on the other side of the overpass, among bridges and ghettos; and the gun as a symbol of defense, power, and death, but also of territorial protection.

"Who can I rely on in my territory?" We continued the activity by asking the adolescents to keep balloons in the air, using their hands to prevent both their own balloons and those of their peers from falling to the floor. How can one remain steady and maintain balance in such hostile environments? Who can they rely on in the places where they live so that these places can function not merely as geographical spaces but as territories – i.e., as networks of affection, protection, and belonging? Within that territory, there was also a "safe harbor" where friendships were formed, such as that of two adolescent girls who could rely on and support each other during difficult times. Football could not be left out. In one boy's representation, it was "a place to call his own."

The greatest challenge of this experience was breaking through silence and resistance. It also involved bearing the silence of those whose eyes seemed to cry out their existence. It was in this context that an adolescent girl made a drawing and discreetly placed it in a drawer. A few minutes later, one of the trainees approached her and asked whether the drawing in the drawer belonged to her. When she said that it did, the trainee asked whether she could show it. The adolescent promptly removed it from the drawer, surprising the trainee with a sheet of paper covered in a textured background. She explained that she had created it by rubbing the pencil across the paper while it rested on the countertop, capturing the grain of the wood. She said it was ugly and crumpled the paper into a ball, which she held between her hands. On whom could this adolescent, who crumpled her territory, rely? By crumpling it, might she also be crumpling herself? What did she crumple in that work – so striking in its delicacy – in an impulsive gesture, while nevertheless stopping herself from throwing it away? Surprised by a compliment, she very gently unfolded the ball of crumpled paper, almost as though it were blossoming. She smoothed the sheet on the table and offered it for inclusion alongside the group's other drawings. Something was constructed by welcoming this silence, particularly through the invitation extended to the adolescent. We understand that, when conflicts arising from social interactions are not recognized, tensions fall upon individuals, making their concerns less socially intelligible. After all, what questions is a "street boy" allowed to formulate?

From this meeting, we also highlight a child's drawing of a house bearing a number and, beside it, an uncolored, divided heart. When encouraged to speak, the child mentioned their grandmother, who welcomed them into her home, where they slept, and spoke about their experiences on the street, where they spent their days. As the narrative unfolded, the child returned to the drawing and began filling in the heart. From the emptiness of an organ representing affection emerged a heart colored red.

From the perspective of the interweaving of subjects and their territories, we emphasize the intensity with which territory emerged as a powerful space for identification and belonging. To be from somewhere is to feel part of something. As we have seen, signing one's name alongside the acronyms representing one's community is a way of constituting and naming oneself as belonging to that space. Although silenced by a social pact that denies these adolescents the status of subjects with rights and subjects of desire, during those meetings we witnessed the safeguarding of a space for dignified existence, removed – even if only momentarily – from the perverse effects of exclusion and social mutilation.

The group collectively engaged in constructing a narrative about the territories in their lives. References to violence and poverty within their territories predominated, particularly references to shootings and deaths resulting from rivalries between different "domains." Despite this discourse of violence, we also encountered references to affection and creation, such as that of the adolescent mentioned above, who stated, "I created a different letter!" Her narrative was accompanied by a written sentence beside the letter she had invented: "Life is beautiful, but only for those who know how to live it."

In her writing, we observed the influence of graffiti art, a form of visual expression prominent in urban spaces and communities, particularly on large surfaces such as walls and public and private buildings. Graffiti is a means of communication; more than that, it is an expression of resistance, denunciation, existence, and art.

Within the urban landscape, walls – although many of them are privately owned – are appropriated as public territory through the mark/art of graffiti and/or tagging. In many cases, this symbol (graffiti) appropriates walls and turns them into territories through the expression of its “voices,” which reveal society’s contradictions and the ideas of these “marginal” groups, i.e., groups and/or individuals who may hold other ideas, other ways of seeing and thinking about the world, “rationalities” other than those of modernity, and “projects” other than that of progress. It may also serve as a means of contesting, controlling, and appropriating territories in relation to the various groups formed within cities (...). (Mondardo & Goettert, 2008, p. 299)

Through the creation of graffiti, the tagging of public monuments, and writing on their own skin, adolescents seem to be attempting to inscribe something. They appear to appeal for a gaze that can become a possible addressee, like the trainee who invited the adolescent to show the drawing hidden in the drawer. According to Douville (2008), some adolescents produce such marks not merely out of a desire to mark a territory, but to give substance to a trait that can serve as a point of support for the psyche – a set of borders capable of containing bodily excitation.

As a possible point of support for the psyche, the final meeting addressed the territory shared by everyone: the institution as a welcoming space, a possible place of address, a space that establishes limits and rules, prevents and prohibits violence, and creates possibilities for the search for new territories – a place that itself becomes territory. What did this territory represent to them? The answers varied and included references to food, friends, music workshops, football, opportunities for growth, and the possibility of changing their lives.

Along this path, we observed the diversity of themes they chose to address when speaking, in their singular ways, about their shared territory. Each work reflected engagement and affection and, for some, pride in presenting their feelings to the staff and their peers, as well as the fulfillment of introducing themselves by their proper names. Despite the variety of ways in which the same place was represented, every drawing and every color bore the mark and feeling of belonging – the desire to be part of a place: the institution, a place to call “my territory.”

The institution-as-territory and psychoanalytic listening to a subject who has a name

What can an institution committed to welcoming people experiencing homelessness do in the face of a social bond that violently relegates the “destitute” and “dispossessed” to a state of social and discursive helplessness? What can psychoanalysis do in the face of the adversity and violations experienced by adolescents living on the streets, who sometimes find in institutions a point of support for the psyche, as Douville (2008) suggests?

We turn to Eliseo Diego’s (1946) story “Del Tapiz,” which allows us to evoke and draw inspiration for psychoanalytic practice within institutions serving adolescents experiencing social vulnerability. In a house perched on the edge of a precipice lived a grandfather who had long devoted himself to making a tapestry. It covered part of a canvas wall in his living room, protecting his four grandchildren.

One morning, while the grandfather was away, the four boys, with tremendous effort, tore away part of the tapestry to see what lay behind it, suspecting that there might be a door. Instead, however, they encountered the Unspeakable, described as the darkness of a hole. When the old man returned, he was horrified and rushed to retrieve his tools in an attempt to cover the tear in a new way. The boys shouted, believing it to be a game, and ran toward the tapestry, destroying it. Now, whatever lies behind it sucks them in so powerfully that they cannot free themselves from the fabric. They struggle in terror, tearing the tapestry’s fibers even further, and the suction of That grows with delirious intensity. The grandfather cannot help the children because they would all be lost. His hope is to fill the gaps with figures. He tries to create them with his hands, but grows tired... the figures are merely his shadows. (Diego, 1946, p. 38)

By analogy with the circumstances of adolescents experiencing social vulnerability, the institution’s function also appears to involve stitching together the holes left by the many forms of harm that the social fabric inflicts upon young people. We recall that, during one of our meetings with the institution’s professionals before beginning the clinical intervention with those served, the theme of “patching the holes” arose within the group. Like the old man in the story attempting to devise ways to mend the holes in the tapestry, the institution’s staff spoke of the exhausting and often frustrating task of filling the system’s perpetually open gaps.

The question persists: what can psychoanalysis do in the face of this stark reality, this hole in the fabric that pulls “street boys” into bare life? In dialogue with concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Mario Pujó, Rosa (1999) outlines aspects of a twofold violence – in addition to the social helplessness already experienced – that permeates the modes through which adolescents living on the streets are subjectivated and desubjectivated. In her interpretation, the logic of the dominant capitalist and neoliberal discourse instills a loss of the values that organize social bonds. Combined with the impossibility of equipping themselves to confront this loss, it casts these individuals into discursive helplessness, leaving them at risk of a traumatic encounter with what lies beyond meaning: the Unspeakable behind the fabric. The label “street boys” entails an utterance with no engaged subject and establishes no bond with their condition as desiring subjects. They

are "street boys" because they lack the protective screen of family discourse and must therefore rely on their own discourse to survive in the space of the street (Rosa, 1999).

Immersed in these forms of violence and often entirely unsupported, the defenses these adolescents manage to erect sometimes place them in conditions of loneliness, muteness, and apathy, while also leading them to reproduce the violence they have endured. Listening to these subjects necessarily encompasses the social, economic, and discursive forces by which contemporary society is structured. This structure produces their Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic segregation. When confronted with the deadly position assigned to them within the social fabric, they sometimes ultimately identify with the position of refuse (Rosa, 2018).

In the operative groups, some adolescents' expressions appeared to allude to this position of refuse and to the insignia of exclusion. This emerged through a singular silence – the silence of those who seem unable to speak, who appear detached, or who repeatedly insist, "I can't do this" or "My handwriting is ugly," or even through the gesture of crumpling the paper. Conversely, as previously emphasized, letters and names were drawn in the style of tagging and graffiti, as singular inventions.

At the institution, adolescents drew on paper. On the streets, where do they leave their marks? On public spaces, predominantly walls that demarcate boundaries. In addressing segregation through the logic of gated communities, Dunker (2015) highlights the erection of walls as "(...) a way of life in which precariousness, risk, and indeterminacy would supposedly have been abolished" (p. 47). In his analysis, this modern phenomenon emerged as an attempt by economically privileged social groups to protect themselves from changes driven by neoliberal logic. Another protective screen is the community formed within these walls, with its own rules and modes of relating anchored in family discourse.

It is both curious and ironic that, for certain social groups, the longed-for protection embedded in concrete – which was intended to provide safety from risk – now assumes another function for populations facing social helplessness: it becomes a surface on which to draw lines and take risks. According to Mariani and Medeiros (2015, p. 135), tagging and graffiti are "(...) utterances that expose the boundary of art, the risk to life, the transgressive gesture, the cry. And writing as well: the 'verticalizing agent of letters' in a city that functions as a 'giant handwriting notebook.'"

The lines and marks made by adolescents on walls demarcating the boundaries of exclusion – separating those inside from those outside – give form to what remains unsaid and to what society refuses to see. Beneath the physical walls, they expose the illusory protection that has been established, inscribing through their creations a possible way out for themselves. In Douville's words (2002, p. 77):

(...) young people produce bonds and marks, perhaps to preserve the imaginary and the dream, to make the Real remnants of a Real and Symbolic exercise of wealth and power speak through imaginary means, an exercise from which they have been excluded by contemporary economic cruelties. There, the writing of tags and graffiti proliferates.

In line with Douville's perspective, the group was conceived precisely to open up a new territory in which adolescents could attempt to break with the social pact that silences them and precipitates them into violent and destructive action. Enabling words to circulate and making room for marks on paper, signatures, and the enunciation of proper names emerged as resources and points of support for the psyche, indicating the possibility of new bonds.

Once again, what can psychoanalysis do in the face of the stark conditions in which these adolescents live? How can resistance be possible in this context? As Rosa (2018) suggests, psychoanalytic listening is transgressive in relation to the foundations of social organization and entails breaking with the bond that prevents the subject of desire from being heard. We draw on Sousa (2014), who proposes that transgression, which is essential to art and the creative act, seeks to dismantle boundaries and pushes us toward spaces we avoid seeing. By interrupting the flow of established logics, transgression reveals the reverse sides of "truths" and activates the formless as a force capable of changing positions, opening other spaces for signifiers that convey different geographies of the world. In line with these authors, Broide (2019) explains that territorial listening occurs through dispositifs – tools that make it possible to see and speak in the face of urgency and of what remains unspoken and unable to circulate.

We maintain that this constitutes an ethical and political stance that cuts through what confines "street boys" to the position of refuse within the social pact, reinserting them into their own histories as subjects who bear proper names. They must be offered a space that operates as a symbolic point of reference, supporting the psychological work inherent in adolescence.

At the conclusion of this work – both the clinical intervention and the writing of this article – the institution that welcomed us and invested in our proposal already approaches the adolescents it serves with attentive regard. There, they are not "street boys" but are recognized and addressed by their names. The institution demonstrates both commitment and boldness in opening cracks in the thick, opaque wall – both symbolic and Real – that the contemporary world has erected against people experiencing homelessness. From this position, fulfilling the function of a psychological space that becomes a territory for some, the institution serves as an anchoring point, a stopping place in these adolescents' wanderings. Like the house in the story of the old man and his grandchildren, the institution stands in an in-between place at the edge of the precipice, between the solidity of social discourse and the fragility of the abyss in which these adolescents so often find themselves.

The bond established between the institution – its staff and its physical space – and those it serves provides material for the active listening involved in analytic work. According to Broide (2006, p. 19), this work is informed by the sensations that traverse the analyst's body during the transference and countertransference process and confronts the necessary challenge, as the author tells us, of "(...) gradually transforming these shards, fragments, and signs into words; that is, transforming what is fragmented and mute into the Symbolic and, therefore, into word-representations and transformative actions (...)."

Like the old man confronting the hole in his home, the institution can provide resources for constructing a tapestry – woven by many hands, like the clinical intervention described here and the text that arose from it – in the face of the void with which these adolescents come into traumatic and violent contact. It is precisely here that the institution places its wager: in becoming a place that opens gaps through which the subject can emerge despite the starkness of what has been instituted. As Sousa (2014) proposed, this means interrupting the flow of established logics and conveying different geographies of the world. A place, as one adolescent said, "to call my own." A safe territory in which speaking one's proper name becomes a pathway toward assuming a subjective position and creating new forms of nomination.

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