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Posted by ALGARVERESIDENT on March 31, 2005

Amadora's no-go zone

 news: Amadora's no-go zone

BAIRRO de Santa Filomena in Amadora, the scene of the recent killings of two policemen, is one of the most dilapidated and run-down areas in Lisbon's suburbs. It's also an increasingly lawless enclave where the police are outnumbered and outmanoeuvred.

The area is so infamous for its violence that postmen have refused to deliver mail in the vicinity for two years. Authorities provided a solution to this problem by installing a battery of post boxes on a nearby access road. Many of these boxes are broken into, especially those belonging to elderly people, in the expectation of accessing pension money and benefits. "On most days there are attacks round here. Nobody is safe, either in the street or in their houses," explained a resident of the nearby Avenida General Humberto Delgado, the site of the Chopp Bar, near to where the policemen were slain.

On the edge of this artery that adjoins the Casal de Santa Filomena, all the commercial premises – vegetable stalls, cafés or clothes shops – have barricades and grills. One café owner said he has lost count of the occasions that he has had to escort people to his house wearing only their underpants. Groups of teenagers, sometimes numbering up to 50, rob a shop or café and steal everything, including their victims' clothing, in a practice known as 'steaming' in Britain.

The police find it difficult to patrol the areas effectively. There are 21 roads and many tiny alleyways, only two of which can be negotiated by vehicles. "The youngsters know the area with their eyes closed and, once inside, it's virtually impossible to catch them," said a policeman.

Criminality in Santa Filomena starts at an early age. Thieves begin by shoplifting and then move on to drug dealing. A policeman, who requested anonymity, described the progression of the typical criminal: "He starts at the age of seven or eight by robbing supermarkets. Then he progresses to mobile phones. Later, at the age of 12 or 13, he moves on to cars and commercial premises. Then, at the age of 18, he switches to drugs."

The drug scene is the most deadly of all because it leads to murders – contract killings and the settling of scores between dealers. Lives are extinguished quickly and prematurely, leading to the area's increasingly notorious reputation as one of the most dangerous in Portugal.

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