

CHAPTER 5

The Changing Scale of Imprisonment and the Transformation of Care: The Erosion of the “Welfare Society” by the “Penal State” in Contemporary Portugal

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Considered in its comparative potential, the concept of support is especially suited to analyze recent Portuguese historical processes that are changing the way the State, moral orders, and social ties intersect, thereby reconfiguring contemporary frameworks of protection, assistance, and solidarity. Bearing both on the personal and the impersonal, on informal networks and institutions, on entitlement and moral obligations, as well as on sentiments and emotions, it allows ground for examining not only the ambiguities at stake, but also the constituting relationship between these frameworks without losing track of their different local meanings, or without diluting the distinct connotations they respectively convey in local ideologies.

The different meanings of support as an ideal as well as its different connotations as a mode of action become apparent by examining the way intimate social structures of support have recently been impacted by the State, more precisely by the workings of an overbearing penal State in poor urban communities, which puts such structures under unprecedented pressure. Both prison institutions and the communities where the majority of prisoners are now recruited are a vantage point for a close grasping of such processes.

Portugal has consistently been depicted by social scientists as a “welfare society”—as opposed to a “welfare state” (see esp. Portugal 2006, Santos

1993, 1994). By this they mean two things. First, that the support encounters between citizens and the State are scarce insofar as support provided by the latter (public services, pensions, subsidies) is largely unavailable when compared to other—especially Northern—European countries. In this respect, in spite of all its expansion during the past three decades after the end of the dictatorship in 1974, the Portuguese State is weak not so much because it has been eroded by an all-pervading neoliberal trend—which has also been the case in recent years—but because its welfare mechanisms are still largely underdeveloped.

Second, the same authors sustain that support encounters within communities are, by contrast, abundant. The shortcomings of a weak social State and the shortage of public services are in some ways absorbed by the effectiveness of moral ties, that is, by networks of relatives and neighbors who provide not only economic support (not incidentally, the majority of the unemployed have declared that family is their main source of income and subsistence; Santos 1993: 47), but also several forms of care and assistance on a personal basis (assistance to the elderly, health care, and childcare, among other forms of help and catering to the needs of dependants). As some authors have observed in other contexts (e.g., Finch and Mason 1993; Feder and Kittai 2002; Bofill 2006; Pine and Haukanes 2005), women are central actors of these encounters, fueling and upholding community support networks (Cunha 2002). The expression “welfare-society” (Santos 1994) designates precisely these informal support encounters that contribute to mitigating the insufficiencies of an incipient social State. They have therefore been considered as a “pillow” that would soften the harshness of a life that would otherwise benefit from little (formal) protection in crucial aspects, especially among the poor.

Although such a view frames this kind of social support encounters as “traditional,” it resonates with recent connotations of the notion of “social capital” as a “resource” (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000) in a contemporary world increasingly dominated by the market and by a receding social State (for an overview of the ambiguous meanings of “social capital,” see Smart 2008). In this latter view, it becomes redefined as a “modern” resource in a “society of advanced insecurity” (Wacquant 2007). Notwithstanding these changing connotations, the notion of “welfare-society” has the merit of pointing to a less State-centric perspective on the organization of social security (see F. and K. v. Benda-Beckmann 1994; Caldwell 2004).

The strength of social networks and the salience of informal support encounters that shape the “welfare society”—or the social capital of the poor—in Portugal is also what led some authors (e.g., Merrien 1996; Paugam 1996a, 1996b) to consider the “poverty” observed in this and other Southern

European contexts as being specific and different from the “exclusion” emerging in late capitalist societies. “Exclusion” is considered in this perspective as a twofold process of disconnection both by relation to the labor market and to close social ties, namely family and community ties (see esp. Castel 1991). Regardless of citizen rights and the way the State deals with poverty, such authors characterize this kind of economic destitution not as a synonym to a state of “exclusion” but, on the contrary, as “integrated” poverty. In other words, although relatively destitute in monetary terms, most poor in those contexts are not outside the labor market (even though they occupy its margins and hold underpaid jobs), nor are they isolated from family and neighborhood networks¹. Several kinds of support flow from these networks, not only in the form of emotional and moral support, but also in the form of goods and services, assistance and care, practical and material help.

The aforementioned scholarly framing of such networks is not without evolutionary overtones, in that support encounters portrayed as expressions of “traditional solidarities” appear as an anachronism deemed to fade away in the face of the fragmenting pressures of the urban world. They are also expected to subside according to some preconfigured stages of progression from pre-industrial to post-industrial societies—despite the fact that the actual historical evolution, as Ben-Amos and Krausman (2008) have substantiated, shows precisely the opposite.

True, a variety of recent challenges faced by community networks of support have come into focus in other contexts (e.g., Yuen-Tsang 1997). However, while acknowledging the longtime existence of informal support encounters in Portugal, as well as their ongoing importance, I intend to ethnographically document a state of affairs where their present erosion is not an outcome of diffuse general societal processes, but instead a specific by-product of the workings of the State. More precisely, this erosion is a by-product of a growing penal State.² That is why an anthropological approach sensitive both to the multilayered character of social security and support, as well as to the construed and shifting nature of the often essentialized divisions between private/public, formal/informal, State/non-State (see in this respect Thelen and Read 2007) cannot nevertheless underestimate the constituting power of the State. In this particular case, it cannot neglect the way it impacts on the very reconfiguration of the social fabric of support provisioning. It is under this light, within the triangle prison–community–State, that I will focus on the transformation of support encounters among the poor in Portugal.

Current phenomena of massive incarceration are changing both the face of prison institutions and the poverty-stricken urban territories where imprisoned populations now come from (for several effects other than those

analyzed here, see, e.g., Patillo et al. 2004; Comfort 2002, 2008). During the 1990s, the exponential growth of incarcerated populations in Portuguese prisons was accompanied by a qualitative shift that transformed almost beyond recognition carceral daily life in the major women’s penitentiary where I returned in 1997 for a year-long fieldwork, a decade after a sojourn of two years in the same institution.³ Behind these figures another, more discreet transformation occurred. These populations were now often articulated in networks of kinship and neighborhood, that is, in clusters of pre-prison ties that reenact, behind bars, former community encounters and relational circles. Prisons were thus no longer combining individual lives randomly, or not as randomly as before. I will not address here the implications of such clusters for carceral life in general and for the experience of punitive confinement, nor the continuity they create between inside and outside prison walls.

I briefly mention two sets of reasons for this particular reorganization, which led these two worlds to mutually constitute each other through such networks.⁴ The first one lies with the specific patterns of repression that retail drug trafficking came to induce in the penal system and in law enforcement. Apart from having fostered procedural massification,⁵ drug control favored a proactive style of law enforcement that increased the potential for selectivity and bias. Police interventions were aimed more than ever at poor urban neighborhoods, which became collective targets of surveillance and of routine indiscriminate sweeps. As in other countries where the fight against drugs has reinforced similar trends in crime control (e.g., Dorn et al. 1992; Tonry 1995; Duprez and Kokoreff 2000), these stigmatized territories are now massive suppliers of prisoners, and the geography of imprisonment has begun to be extraordinarily predictable. It is therefore not surprising that co-prisoners are often relatives and neighbors, whether imprisoned successively or simultaneously.

This transformation in prison populations is also shaped by the specificity of the Portuguese drug economy itself. Retail trafficking, which is the more exposed and risky scale of this activity, develops in Portugal along kinship and neighborhood ties, and has benefited from the way traditional solidarities operate in underprivileged residential areas. Such is the case with *fiado*, one of the robust cultural forms of mutual assistance and interest-free informal loans that bear the circulation of both legal and illegal products. Support encounters can thus fuel the illegal drug economy also. One can borrow from a neighbor a few grams of heroin for resale in the same way one borrows a cup of salt or three eggs in another occasion. This does not mean that the drug economy is usually organized in the form of the extensive networks we now find in prisons. Rather, it is the opposite. It evolves around small, variable circles of associates (whether kin or neighbors) that have flexible structures

and work autonomously. We are far from the stereotypical *mafia* familism. What happened is that small-scale drug trafficking brought to impoverished urban settings a booming structure of illegal opportunities in which all could participate. These retail markets are very little stratified whether by age, gender, or ethnicity,⁶ and the very fluidity of their “free-lance” profile, as opposed to a “business” structure (see Johnson, Hamid and Sanabria 1992), causes whichever existing ideological barriers to entry to be more permeable and inefficient.

Imprisoned networks of kin and neighbors are a central feature of this massive circulation between deprived urban communities and the prison. I will approach some of the implications of imprisonment on relatedness and on the organization of support encounters within the community, and, conversely, the way these relationships have changed the experience of confinement. My research was based in the *Estabelecimento Prisional de Tires* (henceforth Tires), the major Portuguese women’s penitentiary where I returned in 1997 for one more year of fieldwork, a decade after a two-year-long research sojourn. In both periods of fieldwork I had unrestricted access to all prison facilities, by daytime or nighttime, which enabled me to observe and take part in most prison activities, as well as to engage in individual and group conversations on a regular basis and under varied circumstances. I also conducted 70 in-depth interviews with women selected by combining a snowball progression that followed “natural” networks and a systematic sampling that diversified inmates along lines of penal and social profile, as well as the length and experience of confinement (Cunha 1994, 2002). The richest and most fertile data, however, were derived from participating in prison daily life, several times a week from 6- to 48-hour stretches, both in its routines and in its plots and episodes, and by interacting with their participants as these events unfolded. The more I knew about what was going on (and also by making this apparent to my inmate collaborators), the more I was allowed to know without having to ask.

Located near Lisbon, Tires’s compound include, among other buildings, three prison blocks, mostly with individual cells occupied by two or three inmates. It held at the time a population of 820 inmates, between convicts and detainees. Aunts, cousins, sisters, sisters-in-law, mothers, grandmothers, and mothers-in-law now find themselves doing time together, in a circle of kin that often amount to more than a dozen people, sometimes encompassing four generations (when a great-grandson is born in prison to a prisoner whose daughter and granddaughter are also imprisoned). Between one-half and two-thirds of the inmates in Tires had family members inside (a conservative estimate based on data registered in social-educational files). I do not include here the male kin serving their own sentences in other facilities.

These circles of relatives in turn intertwine with circles of neighbors, therefore forming wide networks of prisoners who knew each other prior to imprisonment. It is hardly surprising that most inmates had neighbors or acquaintances in prison. Seventy-eight percent of the imprisoned population came from the two main metropolitan areas of the country, Lisbon and Porto. More noticeable is the fact that the overwhelming majority of these came from the same neighborhoods: 89 percent from Lisbon and 86 percent from Porto. But similar patterns of concentration in the same residential areas obtain within the remaining urban provenances, other than Lisbon and Porto. One neighborhood can have over one-third of their residents imprisoned at a given time (Chaves 1999).

It should be added, however, that this socio-spatial pattern is but one of the features of the startling homogeneity that the imprisoned population now presents. In the 1990s, most prisoners were increasingly drawn from the segments of the working class most deprived of economic and educational capital: from 1987 to 1997, the proportion of women who held jobs in the bottom tier of the service economy rose from 4 percent to 33 percent, and the proportion who had never gone to school or gone beyond fourth grade rose from 47 percent to 59 percent. This population also presented a more homogenous penal profile: 76 percent of women in 1997 were charged or convicted of drug trafficking, compared to 37 percent ten years earlier, and property offenders represent no more than 13 percent. Most of those convicted (69 percent) were serving sentences of more than 5 years.

As for the handful of urban neighborhoods that are now massive suppliers of this and other carceral institutions, the prison is already inscribed in their horizon and their daily life. It has become an ordinary element of many biographies, a banal destiny. Every other resident has an acquaintance or a relative who is or has been imprisoned. As Miguel Chaves pointed out for the Portuguese ill-reputed case of Casal Ventoso neighborhood, one of the Tires “suppliers” of prisoners,

Getting locked up and being locked up are experiences that many inhabitants have been through and they are not far removed from the horizon of expectations of many others. [H]undreds of people [approximately 800 out of 3,000 residents] in the neighbourhood were imprisoned.

(1999: 122)

Chaves analyzes in detail the way in which police repression has become instrumental in creating a strong sense of community (see the *going on the run* category, a collective practice designed to escape and ridicule actions undertaken by the police). But in addition, this ethnography also provides data suggesting that the prison itself (that is, not only the increased focusing of

police attention on the neighborhood) is part and parcel of these dynamics by shaping in specific ways the reproduction of neighborhood relationships and by creating new encounters within the community:

[After the adolescent was arrested], another person arrived and commented: *Marcia went white. She's alright now, her mother came to pick her up.* Everyone seemed to know why Marcia went white. [W]hen her mother was imprisoned, the captured adolescent had stayed in her house for a few months and *they were like brother and sister.*

(Ibid. 253)

This particular case shows how support encounters mediated by policing and imprisonment within a same generation of neighbors specifically generate other kinds of encounters and new forms of relatedness in the next generation. By extending its effects over time, the penal system thus takes part in constituting neighborhood sociality in the long run.

I will come back to this later on. If the neighborhood has therefore absorbed the prison, it might also be said that the prison has absorbed the neighborhood.⁷ Occasionally, imprisonment brings together such a wide range of relatives, friends, and neighbors that Tires ends up absorbing a prisoner's immediate circle almost entirely. Consequently, a whole support network, which plays on the outside a crucial role at several stages of the incarceration trajectory, is also amputated. Prisoners affected by the erosion of such external support are deprived of the small extras that make prison life easier: parcels, foodstuffs, envelopes and stamps, telephone cards, and "pin money" for cigarettes and coffee. These supplies may be totally absent from the start, or be discontinued, or made less frequent during the prison term for one of two reasons. Either the outside providers are themselves imprisoned, or it becomes too difficult for them to cater to the needs of all those close to them after they have been transferred from Tires and dispersed through other prisons. It is less expensive to send the goods to just one person, who then distributes them among others within the same prison.

Such extras are all the more precious now that unemployment has also reached the prison. Work is not always available for everyone and there might be a long wait before being given a position. As the current prison population is poorer than before, the demand for prison jobs has rocketed and the problem for the inmates now is not how to refuse work but how to obtain it. Consequently, along with the old prison underground economy based on contraband and illegal dealing (of drugs, medication, and goods such as jewelry), a new, informal work-based economy has developed. It is structured in much the same way as its informal counterpart on the outside, where many of the prisoners made a living beforehand (as domestic servants, day-cleaners,

or street sellers mostly). Prison re-inscribes their pre-carceral positions within a hierarchical axis, which now subordinates them to a minority of better-off prisoners. They wash or iron “a few bits of clothing here and there,” as one prisoner with several relatives imprisoned put it. Both she and her daughter benefited from these “odd jobs,” for which they would receive 50 cents or 1 euro,⁸ and/or would do several types of cleaning for a new kind of “bosses.” In this, prison encounters have changed too.

A structural continuity between life inside and outside prison is thus evident here. Anne-Marie Marchetti (1997, 2002) has identified some of the processes whereby poverty is reproduced—indeed, intensified—within the carceral context. Prison has always been a poor institution (in part, because it tends to be directed toward poor people) as well as a pauperizing one, but not in a uniform way. The encounter between the prison and the poor has specific aspects: the poor enter prison more readily, suffer harsher prison terms, and leave prison with greater difficulty. Poverty is understood by Marchetti *lato sensu*, as an absence of several kinds of capital: economic, educational, social, and physical. According to Marchetti, the overall lack of capitals makes an inmate who is poor the “ideal-typical” prisoner, the “perfect object” of the total institution (Goffman 1999 [1961]):

[H]e is, on the one hand, stripped completely of his former identity [. . .]. On the other hand, he is deprived of all objects that can be bought inside prison. These may be superfluous but are, nevertheless, signs of individuality and self-worth. Nothing comes between the rigorous order of prison discipline and his person.

(1997: 193)

The poverty of the women in Tires is not very different from that of French prisoners. Yet it diverges in one important respect. A whole filter of imprisoned relatives, friends, and neighbors is interposed between the penitentiary order and the self, which continues to uphold their former identity. Moreover, the extent and corresponding implications of these family networks for prison life do more than make these inmates into “imperfect objects” of the total institution. They suggest rethinking the very notion of prison as a “total institution,” which I tried to do elsewhere (see Cunha 2002, 2008). This question is, however, equally interwoven with the issue of pauperization, but not in the way suggested by Marchetti, when she states:

The inmate who is already disadvantaged before prison, becomes even more so in the first few months of the prison sentence if his social or family ties were already loose and thus no longer “benefits” from family support.

(1997: 198)

In the case of Tires, as indicated above, life in prison does not become materially more difficult because family, friends, and neighbors were already distanced on the outside, but because they are also on the inside. This changes substantially the nature of the encounter with prison.

Second, imprisonment may itself lead to pauperization for other, non-carceral, reasons. Both Augusta—a 56-year-old day-cleaner with a husband and a brother-in-law in prison—and one of her three daughters, while imprisoned in Tires, saw their shacks demolished by the city council. Unlike other people in the neighborhood, they were not included in the city's relocation plan designed to transfer residents in shanty towns to apartments in other areas. Also in Augusta's absence, her son had gradually emptied the shack to finance his drug habit. Therefore, Augusta's imprisonment put her in a doubly vulnerable position on the outside. Because it exposed her connections to trafficking and heightened the stigma, imprisonment undermined the very possibility of support encounters with non-penal domains of the state, which would be all the more necessary in her case, such as access to public housing.⁹ Furthermore, prison deepened Augusta's vulnerability because it became more difficult for her, *in absentia*, to keep her belongings safe from kin who were drug users and were themselves equally poor. This kind of pauperization events is a frequent theme in prison conversations.

The extensive absences that imprisonment implies for those on the outside, in terms of both length of time and the number of those absent, lead to a second set of consequences. Several prisoners alluded to an intention to go back to trafficking from the moment they found out that their now unsupported adolescent or pre-adolescent children, in the absence of both parents and close relatives, were becoming involved in the same business. As one of them put it, "I don't want my son to replace his parents dealing. When I get out, I'll have to go back to dealing to get him out of it."

This latter process involves what might be called the "career circle of drug trafficking," organized around the terms prison-trafficking-consuming. Retail trafficking rarely generates a large amount of capital, in part because trafficking careers are discontinued early on by incarceration. Moreover, a large proportion of such capital is spent on helping imprisoned kin (packages, money, travel expenses to prison institutions, which are seldom located far away) and on the clinical treatment of addicted sons and daughters. One prisoner, a day-cleaner and street vendor mother of five in her sixties, with a three-month career in dealing, put her drug user son into a clinic on the proceeds of trafficking. After her confinement, he went back to drugs so she, who now had no money, was considering turning him in for trafficking and larceny so that he could recover in prison. Another prisoner, who also had two drug-using children who were now "getting cleaned up," assured me that

If my son hadn't been put in prison, he would have died. It's like my mother used to say: “Let your son be put in prison, if not, you'll be weeping at his funeral.” And it's just like that, right. And he was so skinny, he never ate anything.

Arguing that their conviction was based on insufficient evidence, other prisoners wonder whether they had been sent to prison “as a cure” for their drug problem. This notion that prison is a way of dealing with drug abuse tallies with the social contrast between two systems for drug control in Portugal: on the one hand, the criminal system, which is geared toward users from lower socioeconomic strata, and, on the other, the public health system, which absorbs users from a wider variety of social strata (Valentim 1997: 89–90).

The prison has therefore been appropriated for a function that, in the case of the socially better-off, is normally fulfilled by other institutions. It takes on support roles that usually pertain to other areas of the State—to the “social State,” rather than the “penal State.” In this respect, it becomes a “peculiar social service” (Comfort 2008), or a “social agency of first resort” (Currie 1998). But there are further consequences from the fact that the prison now physically integrates whole sections of the neighborhoods where prisoners come from, thereby undermining support encounters that usually pertained to the community. I will not detail them here, but it also needs to be mentioned that as the end of the prison term approaches, the thinning of the ranks of those outside affects the prisoners from another angle. One of the criteria for granting parole is the existence of external support, namely family support. As whole lines of kin are brought inside the prison, there are few relatives and loved ones remaining on the outside who could fulfill this requirement for the social worker's assessment, which contributes to the final decision. For this reason, staff and prisoners commented on several occasions that “sometimes it's better to be on your own” (i.e., without family members in prison).

Another vacuum left by these processes of collective imprisonment concerns the care of children on the outside. A decade ago, only exceptionally were they sent to children's homes when one or both of their parents were incarcerated. They would typically be taken care of by relatives, friends, or neighbors, therefore delving into the usual support encounters that take place within the community. These mechanisms of the “welfare-society” have not faded and continue to operate. However, the overload that now affects them causes the bureaucratic institutions of the state and institutional care to be called on much more often to replace them.

This is a combined effect of two factors: (i) the increased length of the prison sentences being served, which raises the amount of time children have

to be looked after by others on the outside, and (ii) the imprisonment of many of those available to provide this temporary care. A grandmother can thus find herself looking after several grandchildren, either simultaneously or consecutively, when sons and daughters-in-law are imprisoned. An aunt can find herself with several nephews, nieces, and godchildren as well as her own children, or a neighbor with one, two, and sometimes three children of neighborhood friends. These are some among several possible arrangements.

As a result, children enter an unpredictable and unstable circuit. As well as being separated and distributed among family and neighbors, brothers and sisters will move successively from uncles to grandparents, godparents and neighbors—and eventually into institutions when other children arrive or when expense becomes unbearable. Indeed, many of them end up growing up in orphanages and several types of state institutions. Recent modes of collective imprisonment therefore induce a short-circuiting of the mechanisms of the “welfare-society”—precisely those that in Portugal have traditionally helped to stop the slippage from poverty into total exclusion. In this case, the encounters with the welfare-state are therefore themselves mediated by the penal system and they are an outcome of its extension.

The mechanisms of the welfare-society will, to an infinitesimal degree it is true, be recovered and reshaped in the movement from the inside to the outside of the prison. When they *go on* (temporary) *leave*, many prisoners collect from institutions children belonging to other imprisoned relatives, friends, and neighbors. Taking them out is one of the many tasks and pieces of business that have piled up on the outside that they have to deal with, and they look after them in their homes during these temporary leaves. Other mothers respond in kind during their own periods of leave, which means that the same child can benefit from several outings through the offices of more than one person. The logics of community support encounters can thus be reactivated from within prison walls.

However, I have to stress that this is far from balancing the overall effect of contemporary phenomena of massive incarceration on the organization of traditional support encounters. Clearly, informal (community) support encounters are not necessarily preferable to or endowed with more virtues than formal (State) ones. Even if the boundaries are not clear-cut and intersections are possible (Read and Thelen 2007), the impersonal contract or notions of entitlement can produce more equitable and universalistic outcomes than intimate support predicated on unilateral acts of goodwill. Whether concerning models that praise the reduction of formal regulations by embedding economic relations in family and community relationships, or by anchoring social protection on family duties and forms of reciprocity—see also the way ideas of “intergenerational solidarity,” “[participation] of civil

society,” and “network” are being promoted by governments and national and international agencies (e.g., Harriss 2001)—some authors have contributed with ethnographic evidence showing the tensions and ambivalences that surround the moral field of obligations and affective relations (Narotzy 2006a, 2006b; Bofill 2006). Others have also pointed out the ambiguities that would go with a general displacement of regulations from the legal field to the moral field: this can be detrimental to the most vulnerable and can compound inequality, domination, and exploitation (Santos 1994: 48–49; Lister 1997; Feder and Kittai 2002; see also Portes 1998, for related “negative” aspects of social capital in general).

Notwithstanding, the social fabric of informal support encounters to which I have been alluding to is also still crucial where other regulations and protections fail, or are out of reach. The multiplying encounters of the poor with the penal State, together with the scarcity or untimely character of these encounters with the State nonpenal domains, put new kinds of pressure on horizontal, mutuality-type support encounters, which are discontinued or become less viable. Gradually, these systems give way to vertical, top-down, State-sponsored-only systems of support, but paradoxically in areas where they would not have been necessary, nor sought for in the first place—and indeed would have been rejected by local ideologies.

This is why it is necessary to focus not only on the organization of intimate social structures of support and support practices, but also on the meanings, sentiments, and values involved in the idea of support in local perceptions. As signified by the Portuguese terms *apoio/apoiar*, the semantic field of the local notion of support is centered on the idea of assistance, protection, and aid as results or objective actions, whether stemming from persons or institutions. As such, it includes the notion of care (*cuidado*), but it is not synonymous nor co-terminus with it. *Cuidado* evokes feelings of concern, worry, and attentiveness, and implies personal closeness rooted in some ongoing relationship. This meets cultural expectations that cut across a variety of social settings along lines of class, region, and ethnicity, according to which support provided by persons is not of the same kind as the one identified with institutions. Only support provided by persons is considered to be genuinely “caring,” as institutions would by definition be impersonal and have a contract-oriented, one-time event approach to human relationships.

Especially when it comes to children or, to a lesser degree, the elderly, support emanating from the State—State actors or State institutions—is hardly conceptualized as “care” in this view; however, “caring” might be the concrete processes and interactions through which it takes place.¹⁰

Such wide cultural definitions intersect with more specific moral models of mutual obligation and responsibility attached to close social ties, especially family ties. In the case at hand, they are deeply entangled with notions of

respect, less as a sense of personal pride and dignity (see Bourgois 1995 for a similar structural context) than as an ideal of family conduct, of what should regulate relationships between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, as well as appropriate levels of intimacy, support, and responsibility.

Complaining about a case of failed reciprocity regarding some of her sons, a 56-year-old prisoner, retailer of produce in the street market and mother of six—who at the time shared her cell with her 25-year-old daughter and had her husband and another son doing time in a male prison facility—expressed this close connection between support and respect as follows:

I brought up my children honorably. I always gave them bread, never abandoned them, I never put them in an institution. I was always a good mother and I never had a man to help me. Respect was what I gave them. They all respected me (. . .) [In the meantime, her daughter arrives in the cell]. Come on Rosa, say hello. Sorry, nowadays they just want to fool around, but they respect me. Just because I'm in prison, does that mean they shouldn't respect me? The other [prisoners] tease her: "So, Rosa, what's this? Now your mother's here, best watch out. Best give her some respect (. . .). My son who was in prison in Braga, I brought him his laundry all nice and clean. I gave him money for coffee and took him a few things. You can't imagine what I went through to do that and now he won't even send me a letter. [Another son] ran away from [a juvenile institution] and is selling drugs. For what? So he can ride a motorbike, buy food and drink and then he doesn't even send a letter to his mother? They don't even go and visit their father, who's in prison so near them? People must think, oh, they're selling drugs to help their mother. A motorbike, for Christ's sake? They could help their 28-year-old sister, who's having a baby and has two children already. Or they could say, I want to help my parents in prison because they were good parents. Everyone knows the type of mother I was. . . . Before coming here, Rosa was in [another prison] for a month. They only went to see her once with a bag of fruit. She sent it up to me, some bananas that were all rotten (. . .). I don't want to be responsible for them anymore. . . ."

Respect is thus a broad category that includes the way family members treat each other in a supportive way. Failing to fulfill obligations of family support gives rise to depreciative comments denouncing disrespectful behavior, like the one of a prisoner convicted for trafficking who had been shocked by the fact that one of the witnesses in a collective trial did not help her own mother to go free. Greeting an elderly woman who was passing by, she now commented on a similar situation:

Her daughters were real cows to her. They didn't own it up to themselves. Can you believe it? The woman is 63-years-old and they don't admit it for their mother? They don't have any respect for her. No respect at all. It's not because

someone is in jail that they lose respect. She’s also got her grandson here, poor thing. The grandmother is the only one of them worth anything because the mother is a bitch to that child. The grandmother comes between them, which is just as well.

Clearly, *respect* has a hierarchical ingredient that is destabilized by imprisonment, in that daughters, mothers, and grandmothers are reduced to a common condition—that of a prisoner. Tirades such as *You’re as much a prisoner as I am, it’s the guards who tell me what to do!* were not uncommon in daughters exasperated by the control over their behavior by older relatives. The equalizing effect of being imprisoned, by leveling out distinctions, can dim that authority, and this may be one of the reasons for the constant reiteration of *respect* in prison talk. However, this does not mean that it does not effectively organize sociality and daily life. The guards understand it only too well and sometimes use the language of respect as a valuable tool in their work:

The mothers do a lot of controlling and that makes the work of the guards much easier. There’s a prisoner here who is completely unbearable when her mother is not around. When her mother comes, she shows respect and behaves herself. She calms down straightaway. I myself have a word with other kin when I see things getting out of hand. Family members have their disagreements, but they are very united. If there’s a problem with a prisoner, they immediately support her even if she’s not in the right. But sometimes they have a go at her.

In the face of the particular circumstances of penal confinement, moral obligations, notions of responsibility, dependency, and emotional closeness, which are infused in local ideals of supportive relationships, may emerge vividly in some of their implications and in the effects they produce in the prison scene. Prison rhythms and careers may now be modified by family ties. Much sought after periods of prison leave are sometimes turned down by prisoners who choose instead to wait and go on leave with kin. In other cases, they prefer the Prison Board’s assessment of them to be delayed for similar reasons. Parole, which is even more coveted and is difficult to have granted in Tires, is also subject to the same considerations. A prisoner ended up turning down this privilege because on the same day that it had been granted, she also found out that her imprisoned mother had a tumor. The fact that her sister was also in Tires did not sway her from her decision. On the contrary, and as she confided, it reinforced it for this way they would all support each other.

However, the same closeness and intimacy that has come to define new meanings, values, and emotions in prison—such as an ideal of support embedded in notions of shared sentiment, duty, respect, and mutual

obligation defining family and neighborhood relationships in local ideologies—also entail an increased potential for tension and conflict. This leads to new forms of dissension replacing the prison boundaries, which held sway in the past, such as the ones surrounding the injunction *not to grass* (not to inform about someone). It is not uncommon among siblings, brothers, and sisters-in-law or cousins (that is, within a wide circle of kin) for one of them to take responsibility for a drug offense so that the others are released (when on remand) or not charged. Apart from the real responsibility for the offense, several factors may influence a possible conviction. Often, the ones who sacrifice themselves are those who are in a more advantageous position with regard to a shortened or suspended prison sentence, whether because they are drug users, young, or first-time offenders without criminal records. Some of such negotiations take place daily in prison. It is therefore vital that an inmate maintains her silence throughout the various stages of the trial process. This does not always happen, especially if she does not see herself being given sufficient support in terms of visits, cards, and parcels. “They’ve dropped” me or “They’re dropping me” are statements that simultaneously convey a complaint and a threat. They are introduced deliberately into conversation in order to reach those they are aimed at through the complex networks of acquaintance that connect the prison with the outside world. Nevertheless, *not to grass* is nowadays more effective an imperative than a decade before (Cunha 1994: 129—139). Among other reasons, it has become more persuasive because it protects not mere co-prisoners, but relatives, friends, and neighbors. Also, it is now a pre-prison value, cultivated in the context of family and neighborhood support networks. In other words, although it operates within prison, it is not part of a cross-cultural “prison code” (as the one first identified by Sykes and Messinger 1961), nor part of a “criminal code” (as Irwin and Cressey 1962 have maintained in crime-prison studies). In the case at hand, the symbolic effectiveness of this imperative lies rather in its connection with the notion of *children of the neighborhood* (Chaves 1999: 273—279), for it is less used in the protection of outsiders. Protecting a *child of the neighborhood*, which implies *not grassing* on them, is a widespread obligation that ranks high in the hierarchy of values. In this sense, even residents who do not take part in drug trafficking and vehemently protest against it would not inform on a local dealer. The execration attached to grassing stems therefore from community support and solidarity codes, rather than from “deviant codes”—as some criminological literature would put it.

But the family and neighborhood ties that connect prisoners and define several constellations of community encounters behind bars give rise to complex situations of ambivalence between the values attached to support and those attached to *not grassing*. When several close relatives are involved in

new and trial-some circumstances, such values eventually come into tension. A prisoner whose daughter and mother-in-law had just finished serving their sentences and left Tires was divided between the pride she felt that her daughter had not *grassed* on those who were really in possession of the drugs and a strong resentment of her sister, who did not own up to the crime and was therefore responsible for the girl being imprisoned:

My daughter was caught with [a few grams of heroin] which weren't hers, they were my sister's. My sister arrived, saw the police, and saw they were waiting for her. So she gave them to the kid, so the kid could bring them to her later, but the kid got caught. The kid is tough, she didn't grass. She never said whose they were. But to go down for my sister . . . I understand that she didn't know the kid would be caught. But I'm pissed off with her, I don't know, she could have said they were hers when she saw what happened. Maybe she thought the kid would get off . . . I don't know, she could have said. I think she should have said they were hers.

Values involved in the notion of support can thus reveal themselves as conflicting imperatives and generate contradictory emotions. As such, they are constantly subject to contextual re-evaluation and casuistical reinterpretations. If this is generally so in most social arenas of daily life, where values and ideas are indivisible from situated interaction and are negotiated in practice, in prison the stakes are usually higher and draw scenarios of great indeterminacy. Given the magnitude of the consequences of each decision (freedom and a sense of a viable future being one of them), the new tensions and clashes that punctuate prison routine become hardly surprising. On the contrary, they are bound up with that indeterminacy.

As it is, the dynamics of support that unfolds within community encounters behind bars renders more salient—even if more shifting and unstable—the contours of the moral order that pervades informal structures of support outside prison walls. It is this moral order that has to be taken into account if we want to fully understand the meanings and consequences of contemporary engagements of the State with these communities. As pointed out above, support encounters between the State and citizens as actual welfare are affected in several ways by the extension of the penal system—as reflected on selective intensive police targeting and imprisonment. In some aspects, support encounters with the State are undermined by this extension (see Augusta's case); in others, they are transferred into the prison itself, but in a peculiar way (the prison becomes a “social agency of first resort” for drug problems, for example); in other aspects still, certain (unsought for) support encounters with the State are themselves a consequence of imprisonment (the children that end up in State institutions, defined in local ideologies as “uncaring,”

upon the imprisonment of many relatives). This is so because imprisonment has now undermined support encounters within communities by overloading them and thinning the ranks where they occur—which in turn impacts on the availability of informal support behind bars also. But additionally, the prison now increasingly mediates support encounters within communities, among neighbors and kin, insofar as imprisonment itself generates new encounters and forms of relatedness over time (children of imprisoned neighbors “raised like brothers and sisters”), thereby reconfiguring neighborhood sociality.

Notes

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1. See Bruto da Costa (1998); Capucha (1998); and Dubar (1996) for compared statistical data supporting this view.
2. For a combined analysis of the way the State is expanding in the penal sphere while it recedes in the social and economic spheres, see Wacquant (1999, 2004).
3. In this interval, the country’s population behind bars rose from 7,965 to 14,236, registering the highest carceral rate per 100,000 inhabitants in the European Union. Portugal steadily led the EU throughout the 1990s with a carceral rate between 128 and 145 per 100,000 inhabitants (Estatísticas da Justiça, Ministério da Justiça, 1987, 1997, 1987–2000).
4. Examined in more detail in Cunha (2002 2005).
5. Reported “drug trafficking wide networks” often have little sociological consistency and are a mere artificial outcome of the way individual cases are dealt with and juxtaposed by the criminal justice system (see Maia Costa 1998).
6. They are clearly more inclusive when compared to same-scale US contemporary markets (see Maher 1997).
7. “The neighbourhood” stands here for each of the handful of neighborhoods where the majority of prisoners come from (see *supra*).
8. Prisoners are allowed to access weekly a small amount of their prison wage or personal fund.
9. However, this was not an outcome determined by law. Unlike other countries, such as the United States, where punitive confinement entails an array of civil penalties (see Mele and Miller 2005), in Portugal it does not formally result in disenfranchisement of political rights nor restrictions on public welfare, housing, and educational benefits.
10. This seems to pertain more to ideas of “personalized trust” than to conservative gender discourses presenting home as the most authentic locus for care provision (see Thelen 2008 for the latter perception in other contexts). With the exception of elite groups, women in Portugal—and more so among the poor—have always massively resorted to work and wage labor as a survival strategy, without this being considered as a transgression of a gender cultural script (Cole 1991; Ferreira

1993; Pujadas 1994). Also, the idea of “personalized trust” builds alongside a popular perception of the State and institutions as abstract, faceless, undifferentiated entities.

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