Inside Out

Embodying Prison Boundaries

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Abstract

This article compares materials drawn from fieldwork in a Portuguese women's prison in different decades, before and after the rise of concentrated incarceration that tightly interlocked this institution and a handful of heavily penalized urban neighbourhoods. As these worlds behind and beyond bars became socially and morally continuous, former intra-prison boundaries collapsed, entailing changes that included corporeal and sensorial aspects of prison experience. Taken as a window onto these changes, the imprisoned body is therefore described not as a bounded object of disciplinary power or as a site of resistance but as constituted first and foremost by social and moral relations, in a way that renders bodily experiences of confinement highly contextual. A comparison between forms more and less shaped by a particular prison–urban relation suggests that these experiences vary according not only to prison-specific circumstances, but also to social-specific circumstances.

Keywords: body, confinement, embodiment, prison, prison–urban relations, senses, sensorial experience

In the last two decades, prison–society relations and the connection between intramural and extramural worlds have been addressed by a significant amount of ethnographic research and ground-level inquiries of the carceral world.[1] Firstly, from a perspective centred on institutional regimes, the relation of prisons with the world beyond walls has been approached focusing on the flow of communications, goods and services between them, and on the external influences that bear upon institutional enactments of coercive power. On-the-ground research has shown not only how current relocations of authority and normative orders to levels superseding individual institutions have impacted on the exercise of institutional power, but also how broader shifts in rationalities, governmentality and punishment policies have filtered down to the level of prison regimes. The institutional porosity in terms of modes of provision, regulation and scrutiny has long been acknowledged in the light of macro- or meso-level conditions which shape the concrete workings

of the institution.[2] While this kind of porosity already dismissed a view of the carceral world as autarchic, closed and self-sufficient, it has also revealed the complexity of contemporary forms of power, including the coexistence of contradictory practices and rationalities: inside and outside walls, post-disciplinary programmes can combine with modernist classifications and disciplines, alongside pre-modern controls involving body searches and physical coercion (Carlen and Tombs 2006).

Secondly, the permeability of prison boundaries has been recognized by a variety of approaches centred on the prisoner community. Echoing a classic debate interrogating the endogenous or exogenous basis of prison social life, these approaches have taken into account extramural contexts in terms of the pre-carceral configurations that continue to shape prisoners' moral world, cultural forms, social structures and identities behind bars (e.g. Crewe 2009; Trammell 2012). From this perspective, the prisoner community itself – besides institutional power – is no longer considered a self-contained system.

Finally, other approaches documenting ethnographically the specific, ground-level effects of the rise of incarceration rates and of its disproportionate concentration on ethnic-racial minorities and stigmatized urban communities have reinforced this view from yet another angle. Whether centred on the intramural life of prisoners or on the extramural life of their families, partners and communities, whether based on field research inside and/or outside walls, these approaches have in different ways shifted the ethnographic focus to the juncture of both social worlds and have shed light on their mutual effects.[3] My own research on the prison–neighbourhood nexus in Portugal is in line with this type of perspective. Elsewhere (Cunha [2002] 2018, 2008, 2013) I have shown, on the one hand, how the prison system became a reality woven into the fabric of poor urban neighbourhoods, where the lives of residents and families are pervaded by its inescapable presence, and, on the other hand, how carceral sociality ceased to be self-referential and became an extension of some urban neighbourhoods. Continuity, I should stress, is not synonymy. The fact that these realities became interlocked does not imply that they are the same, or that they constitute each other in the same way at every level in day-to-day life. Be that as it may, the new translocal quality of carceral social life led me to shift the focus from the prison to the interface between the inside and the outside. Even though this ethnographic inquiry was equally based on prison field research, its focus differed from the former 'prison-in-context' type of inquiry I had conducted in the same institution.

In sum, there is an ever-increasing recognition of different aspects of permeability of prison walls. It is, however, difficult to ascertain whether this acknowledgement mainly reflects changes in ethnographic lenses and broader theoretical shifts emphasizing flows rather than closure (Geschiere and Meyer 1998), or, on the contrary, whether closer attention to the interconnectedness between intramural and extramural worlds reflects, above all, actual shifts in empirical realities. Up to what point can this apparent tightened juncture reshape prison life and experiences of confinement – and the way prisoners and researchers make sense of these experiences?

I intend to contribute to this debate by comparing materials drawn from field-work in the main Portuguese women's prison[4] in different decades, before and after the rise of concentrated incarceration that tightly interlocked this institution and a handful of heavily penalized urban neighbourhoods. I propose to do so by focusing on how the reorganization of intra-prison boundaries, entailed by the interconnectedness between intramural and extramural worlds, has impacted on some of the most subterranean dimensions of prison experience, such as corporeal and sensorial ones.

Fieldwork was conducted in periods of two years and one year respectively. In both inquiries it benefited from unrestricted access to all prison facilities. Besides in-depth interviews, this allowed for observation and participation in most prison activities and daily life, as well as for engaging in informal individual and group conversations with prisoners on a regular basis and under varied circumstances. In both periods, women were selected by combining, on the one hand, a serendipitous snowball progression that followed 'natural' networks and, on the other hand, a systematic theoretical sampling that diversified interlocutors along lines of penal and social profile, as well as length and experience of confinement.

The ethnographic inquiries mentioned here were conducted in two periods that, in retrospect, emerge as defining moments in a changing carceral landscape: the late 1980s and late 1990s (see Cunha 1994, [2002] 2018, 2008). These two decades revealed in their most pronounced form different patterns that can now be found combined or reproduced in other prison settings, albeit more mitigated in some respects. This is the case, for example, with another women's prison in a different metropolitan area, which was the object of a recent comparison with the one men-tioned here (Cunha and Granja 2014).[5] In this article, I focus therefore on these different configurations as they emerged clearly defined in those moments in the same prison setting.

Boundaries

The imprisoned body tends to have been conceptualized mainly as an object of penal power – in particular disciplinary power – or as a site of resistance. In Michel Foucault's (1977) influential view, prisons aimed to produce 'docile bodies', incul-cating norms into bodily practices through detailed monitoring, timetabling and training. How docile, malleable and 'disciplined' confined bodies really were in the 'disciplinary' prison is another question (Garland 1990), which Foucault (1980) himself considered an entirely different one.

Nevertheless, regardless of how the body and the senses are affected by insti-tutional power and by the ecological environment of the prison, corporeal and sensorial experiences behind bars do not cease to be mediated and constituted by social and moral relations. In the same way that we are not unitary subjects, but influence and are influenced by others (Blackman 2008), so the sentient body is not a singular, bounded entity containing the self, but a relational process. Bodies are connected to other bodies and are permeable to them (Mol 2002). Following this

line of reasoning, this article focuses on how sociality frames aspects of corporeality. More specifically, it focuses on how a changing sociality has framed a changing embodiment *in* the prison and *of* the prison.

In the time span of a decade between the two ethnographic inquiries mentioned above, the prison population underwent major sociological changes. For reasons detailed elsewhere (Cunha 2005, 2008), its sudden rise was accompanied by an unprecedented penal and social homogenization. The overwhelming majority were imprisoned for drug-related offences and were almost uniformly levelled at the bottom of the class structure. In the late 1990s, 76 per cent of the total population (823) of EPT were imprisoned for drug trafficking, compared to 37 per cent ten years earlier. Property offenders represented only 13 per cent. The majority of those convicted (69 per cent) served sentences of more than five years. Prisoners increasingly came from the segments of the working class most deprived of economic and educational capital: from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, the proportion of women who held jobs in the bottom tier of the service economy rose from 4 per cent to 33 per cent, and the proportion that had never attended school or gone beyond the fourth grade rose from 47 per cent to 59 per cent. Furthermore, this population was massively recruited from a few stigmatized urban neighbourhoods. An important proportion of prisoners had relatives and neighbours doing time in the same institution or in other prison facilities. According to a conservative estimate based on data registered in social-educational files, between one-half and two-thirds of the inmates in Tires had family members inside the same institution (sisters, cousins, aunts, nieces, mothers, grandmothers). This estimate does not include male partners and kin serving their own sentences in other facilities. The proximate cause of these new carceral social configurations lied in the specific penal policies of drug control developed in the late 1990s. Police interventions were aimed at destitute urban neighbourhoods, which became massive suppliers of prisons. As a result of this collective targeting, large clusters of prisoners already knew each other before imprisonment. These clusters were an effect not of extensive, highly structured criminal organizations operating in those urban communities, but rather of the severe repression exerted by both law enforcement and the courts on an open and easy accessible small-scale drug economy in which residents from the same neighbourhoods participated irregularly and independently (Cunha 2005).

Both pre-prison relations transported to the prison and a common socio-spatial provenance from then on structured the prisoner community and created a continuity between prison and neighbourhood life. The course of intramural life became tightly bound to the flow of everyday life outside through the ramifying networks that connected prisoners both among themselves and to external intersecting circles of kin, friends and neighbours. These social circles impacted the experience of confinement and synchronized prison temporality with the rhythms of the outside world (cf. Cunha [2002] 2018, 2008).

The blurring of boundaries between the worlds behind and beyond bars produced yet another important effect. It also entailed the erosion of boundaries

among prisoners that had governed in-prison life a decade before. In the past, disparaging co-prisoners and establishing with them a social and symbolic distance was also a way of dispelling the stigma attached to imprisonment (Cunha 1994). The negotiation of stigma was expressed through the refusal to be levelled to an equal condition, in a distancing game by which any differences (e.g. between types of offence) were amplified by prisoners themselves as a means of setting oneself apart from the rest of the convict world. A prisoner could consider her offence as a result of exceptional circumstances, whereas she would essentialize that of her companions as being a matter of a criminal nature.

To be sure, a decade later these differentiating elements had become harder to mobilize in symbolic boundary building. The former variety of criminal categories gave way to the massive predominance of drug-related offences. But if the previous dynamic of mutual stigmatization managed to generate oppositions even within the same category of offenders (e.g. between dealers and user-dealers), now the prevailing tendency was to erase these and other differences. An almost all-inclusive category of collective self-identification had emerged: *we're all here for drugs*. Such a broad local category included not only drug-dealing itself, but all kinds of drug-related offences (e.g. property offences, larceny or fencing).[6]

But although 'drugs', or the drug economy, may appear in this designation as the common denominator, it does not by itself define this category's sphere of collective agency and identity. Firstly, this identity was also defined by a shared status at the bottom of the class structure and by a pre-prison stigma attached to ill-reputed neighbourhoods. Prison merely compounded the structural and symbolic marginalization that now collectively affected those populations (Cunha [2002] 2018, 2008; cf. also Jefferson 2016). Stigma had now ceased to be negotiable by intra-prison processes, rendering the previous game of mutual differentiation pointless, if not altogether futile. Prison was now already embodied in the daily life of the urban territories where most prisoners came from and had become an ordinary element of many biographies. Every other resident had an acquaintance or a relative who was or had been imprisoned. Prisoners were now therefore aware that when they were released they would not be subject to strong censure in their social universe. Concealing imprisonment was now a rare concern, unlike a decade ago when the remote possibility that outcoming prisoners would meet an ex-prisoner on the outside, who would expose their past, cast a shadow over their release. Thereon, as many prisoners came from the same neighbourhood, such concealment would not even be possible. Moreover, members of different families now travelled together to prison facilities to visit their incarcerated relatives and friends, making the most of the opportunity of a car ride offered by a neighbour.

Secondly, the perception of a shared destiny and identity was also now built on tangible pre-prison interpersonal ties, that is, kin, friendship and neighbourhood ties. Several previous categories of representation, such as offence categories, were now often already mixed within this circle of relationships in pre-carceral life: a non-user dealer with a non-dealer, drug-user husband, and a drug-user son who stole valuables from home to make some money.

Contagion

This conjunction was similar to, and coherent with, one other combined set of circumstances occurring in prison life. Confinement situations are prone to exacerbate fears of transmissible diseases, as they involve forced cohabitation, joint participation in daily activities and the common use of facilities and utensils. Yet a decade earlier the fear of contagion – especially by hepatitis B and HIV – was also exploited as a suitable means to reassert identity boundaries, to communicate non-identification and to underline distance between prisoners. Fears of contagion were thus dramatized and emphatically expressed. Ostensible demarcations displayed as hygienic, for example outward refusal to sit on chairs used by co-prisoners, were based on the idea of a diffuse threat. 'Evil', as one prisoner put it, 'can come from anywhere'. *Evil*, however, was not limited to microbial referents or simple pathogens. It had a deep moral resonance. Concerns about intentional contamination were not uncommon. For this reason, even prisoners who, in the civilian world, stood for the non-segregation of infected people now demanded separate prison units for several transmissible health conditions, from venereal diseases to AIDS. In the case of HIV, there was a general suspicion among prisoners, who looked for any remote sign that in their view could be interpreted to identify HIV-positive co-prisoners, for example an inmate who had obtained parole too easily or who was not subjected to thorough daily body searches (Cunha 1996: 81).

A decade later this was no longer the case. This was all the more significant since the prevalence of the transmissible health problems most feared by prisoners had increased substantially. The proportion of HIV-positive prisoners, for instance, rose by around 20 per cent, while ten years before the seroprevalence in this prison was almost the same as in the civilian population. Similarly, while self-mutilation barely existed in the past, it had now become a daily occurrence. Given the growing tendency of co-prisoners to resort to self-harm practices such as making incisions on legs and arms in situations of stress and vulnerability,[7] one could expect a corresponding rise in health-related claims for segregation like those that emanated from the prisoner community a decade before. But instead of being exacerbated in a context that could potentiate them, the dreaded spectres of contagion subsided. The precautions taken – when they were taken – were now strictly sanitary and lost all moral content. During my second period of fieldwork, I never heard a word or observed a behaviour that might be interpreted as a distancing strategy. Instead, the former avoidance had been replaced by a concern with an inverted meaning: great care was taken not to threaten – with a cold, a mycosis, for instance – the frail immune system of a colleague with AIDS or simply an HIV-positive prisoner. Once again, prisoners were not unfamiliar with this reality before their imprisonment: many had a son, a brother, a neighbour with HIV or AIDS (Cunha [2002] 2018).

Nevertheless, a small segment of prisoners of higher social standing, not included in the major category of collective identity mentioned above,[8] now reproduced at a residual scale the same notions, practices and perceptions that widely pervaded prison sociality in the past. This small group of prisoners vocally

claimed, for example, to prefer using a toilet bucket, generally viewed in the past as a degrading prison item, rather than the community restrooms.[9] They did so not because they considered those restrooms to be usually unclean, but because they were afraid they might not be thoroughly disinfected. Likewise, despite not questioning the proper cleaning of common prison tableware, they used their own personal tableware in order 'to protect themselves', claiming to be 'disgusted at the thought of using the same as everybody's'. The reasons for using personal utensils did not merely lie in the fear of physical contagion. They pertained to a wider demarcation. Rather than take part in the everyday collective commensality of the prisoner community, these prisoners preferred to take their food in tupperware containers from the refectory and eat their meals inside their cell, or wait until there wasn't 'such a big mixture of people' to eat in the refectory after everybody else.

Sounds and smells

These were also the same prisoners who claimed to feel profoundly disturbed by prison noise: the sounds of doors, bolts and bars, but above all the voices. Not, however, just any voices, but specifically the distressing reverberation caused by prison acoustics of voices perceived to be characteristic of 'underclass' people. As one of my interlocutors put it, 'these people are loud. It's in their blood. They can't keep their voices down'. Above all, these prisoners felt beset by smells. Again, not any smells. My own nose felt disturbed by a variety of prison smells, from the penetrating odour of disinfectant generously shed on all premises, to the leftovers in lunchboxes and the manure from the prison farm. This was an olfactory discomfort I shared with most prisoners, who also mentioned them, even though comparing my sensorial experience to the prisoners' has obvious limits. For one thing, unlike the prisoners I could always escape the carceral aggression of the senses by abandoning the site, a fact that can impact differently our respective threshold of tolerance to that shared discomfort. The small minority of better-off prisoners, however, complained mainly not about the odour of prison *things*, but about the odour of prison *others*, that is, of co-prisoners: 'It's this smell of people, of sweat, of drug addicts throwing up… It's a smell that gets into us'.

Olfaction brings categories and their limits into question. Smells detach themselves from bodies and they cross boundaries. As David Howes (1991) and Alfred Gell (1977) have long since shown, they are therefore particularly suited to express ideas of contagion and action at a distance.[10] It should not be surprising that in the eighteenth century prisons became laboratories for the experimentation of ventilation, deodoration and other sanitary techniques that would afterwards become generalized in the common home. The hygienist rationale was then professedly bound with moral concerns and with the aim of preventing criminogenic contagion (Corbin 1986). The residual group of middle-class prisoners were concerned, as the majority of prisoners were a decade earlier, with another type of contagion, and particularly another kind of levelling: that which dissolves boundaries between bodies, persons and categories of people. These few prisoners aimed to secure

distance, impermeability, difference. Odours, on the contrary, homogenize, bring together, synchronize (Howes 1991; Simmel 1997: 237).

As mentioned above, prison sociality ten years before could for the most part be described as a multiplying dynamic of boundary setting, which a decade later would become almost imperceptible and reduced to a small group of prisoners. With the notable exception of this group, most prisoners ceased to be governed by the fear of contamination by pathogens and to subsume it in a broader anxiety about the inherent impurity of co-prisoners – an essentialized impurity that would spread to things and resist any ordinary washing. Likewise, disturbing sounds and smells ceased to denote different social meanings and were no longer sorted according to their potential for disrupting symbolic and intersubjective boundaries. The discomfort they caused was not experienced as different from other unwelcome smells. They were not endowed with distinct meanings or rendered especially intolerable by their identification with particular people. Rather, they were perceived as emanating, like all others, from the general physical and human environment of the prison. Thus, although in both periods prisoners were exposed to the same soundscapes and smellscapes, they did not experience them or talk about them in the same way. The meaning of bodily experience was mediated by social relationships (Classen 1998; Howes 2003; Wacquant 2015).

This is all the more true when we consider the importance of the body as a locus of personhood and a scene of identity processes. As prisoners' identity in the past – and residually in the present – was structured by mutual opposition, there was a close connection between the body, subjectivity and the individuated sense of the self.[11] To be sure, institutional power exacerbated this juxtaposition. As is often the case in prison settings, it was not a coincidence that the individual sense of self was destabilized by the way the levelling machinery of the institution affects the body, from the uniform prison clothes to the uniform institutional food. Or, inversely, that the institution was also resisted by these very same routes, by ingesting food brought by visitors, by renouncing prison nourishment (cf. also Cerbini 2012; Cunha 2018; Smoyer and Lopes, 2017; Ugelvik 2011) and by an overinvestment in bodily appearance (in relation to pre-carceral life) or a closer focus on the body (Cunha 1996). As Drew Leder (1990: 90–91) once put it, a body usually silent and absent in everyday life reimposes itself upon consciousness in anomalous situations.

The acute awareness of corporeality was not merely associated with a sense of alienation produced by the institutional decisive grip over the body. For example, the treatment of a health problem was dependent not only on the initiative of the prisoner and the availability of a doctor, but also on the intermediation of prison officers and a bureaucratic extra-medical process whose outcome was, from prisoners' point of view, uncertain. The heightened awareness of corporeality also ran parallel to the concern about the suppression of barriers between individuals. Preserving the subject depended on preserving an impermeable body. In the period of the first field research, it was not only physical density *per se* that aroused prisoners' perceptions of crowding and invasion of individual space. Proxemics also depends on contextual social definitions. Permanent visual exposure to others was experienced

then as particularly intrusive. Several prisoners suffered from metabolic problems (constipation, kidney stones) as a result of inhibitions in cell cohabitation.

A decade later, however, cellmates were often closely related. Kin, friends, neighbours are not perceived to threaten personal intimacy and bodily integrity as dramatically as strangers. In any case, this aspect ceased to be a topic in local talk. A few counter-examples still occurred, usually with the few prisoners from socio-spatial backgrounds other than the majority's, such as when one of them avoided undressing in front of others before entering the shower. Rather than being attributed to shyness or embarrassment, this behaviour tended then to be considered strange and lofty, indicating that the colleague considered herself superior or different from the others.

Refusing offerings and support from co-prisoners, whether food items or any kind of assistance, was also considered odd and distancing behaviour. It elicited the same kind of reproaches, especially if the person came from the same urban neighbourhoods as most prisoners. This was the case with Mina, a Cape Verdean woman doing time for drug trafficking. Precisely because she was seen as an equal, her conduct was more conspicuous and was considered even more offensive. The tensions she alludes to below are all the more revealing as her only fault was to ask nothing from anyone. A newcomer at the time, she had not yet realized that within the collective *drugs*-category identified with the *neighbourhood crowd*, the gift is generally neither agonistic nor charitable, but rather enacted as simple sharing. The Maussian undertones in her narrative are inescapable:

> They're always accusing me of being weird, because I do not ask anyone for anything, even if I don't have what I need. 'Oh she doesn't ask, she's weird'; 'Oh, she thinks we're less than her'. You can't imagine what it is. I'm getting on my nerves because of this. I don't mean to cause offence, but I don't want to owe favours. Who gives, stays above the others and I do not want to be under them.

Within this collective category, distancing behaviour like Mina's is sharply spurned and viewed as illegitimate. Her companions mocked her self-exclusion and quickly re-absorbed her into a community of equals through the gift. Months later, Mina would praise with enthusiasm the sharing practices and mutual support among her companions, a solidarity she eventually accepted and embraced unreservedly. And contrary to what she had anticipated, the gift did not render her inferior. It only re-aligned her with her companions.

In sum, whereas ostensive detachment was the norm in the past, it now became deviance. While most prisoners were unsettled before by signs of homogenization, now they were disturbed by signs of distinction. If a decade earlier they tried to preserve difference, today they aimed to preserve sameness. Moreover, in the previous decade boundary setting was mostly inter-individual. The purpose was to resist being levelled with co-prisoners by a stigmatizing convict status. Ten years later, however, the residual attempts at social demarcation included a strong class and socio-spatial dimension. Prisoners from the small middle-class group do not merely distance themselves from the majority of co-prisoners as such. They distance

themselves from the 'drug neighbourhoods crowd'. This pre-prison divide is indeed deep enough to override any intra-prison hierarchy or differentiation.

Inscriptions

This engrained social divide was also inscribed on the body surface. Unlike what has been reported for other carceral institutions (cf. Demello 1993), tattoos did not signify distinctions or communicate boundaries between categories of people, such as between gangs, ethnicities and neighbourhoods. To be sure, the neighbourhood is an important referent of identity and belonging, which can be codified by a specific tattoo. A prisoner described the pair of dots she wore on her face in those terms, by assuring me they were the signature of her neighbourhood ('It's because I'm from Musgueira'). However, other prisoners, from other neighbourhoods, carry the exact same signal and describe it otherwise, as a trendy decorative mark, or because 'lots of people wear it'. A symbolic gadget or not – or, like most symbols, plurivocal – it can be a badge of identity that communicates belonging for some, but it does not communicate boundaries. Being widely borrowed and shared by many, it has no effectiveness as a distinctive mark.

The same is true of other icons that could express prisoner status. Among them are a five-dot mark between the index finger and the thumb (signifying, according to some prisoners, being surrounded by prison bars or cell walls), or 'the clover', a stylized three-dot triangle. The clover connotes the hope for a quick end to the prison sentence, but also the fact that the prison career of the wearer is already long. It therefore inscribes on the body a story to be read by oneself and by others. However, this story does not confer a particular prison status, for example by promoting the veterans and marking them out from the novices. As for the five-point mark, it is not understood as a prison initiation mark. Several prisoners already wore it before entering the institution, inspired, as they say, by the tattoos of relatives, friends and neighbours who had faced imprisonment before them. Moreover, this symbol is used by a wide variety of people in the civilian world and is not limited to carceral connotations. It can be simply associated with loneliness, in the same way that the clover can connote happiness. Nevertheless, in the context of the neighbourhoods penetrated by this institution, both marks are in fact situated in the orbit of the prison, narrowing the scope of these marks and binding their meaning to it.

But if tattoos did not inscribe boundaries and differences, they did inscribe social distance. They rendered the social gap between the underprivileged majority and the better-off minority of the imprisoned population clearly visible. Convict bodies were decorated with a variety of iconographic motifs. But the same motif could reveal different things. On the one side, a discrete fine-lined coloured rose on the shoulder; on the other, an imperfect bold-lined monochromatic rose in wide format on an exposed area (an arm or a leg). This difference stemmed less from aesthetic preferences than technical and socio-economic constraints. As Margo Demello (1993) pointed out, contrary to professional tattoos, self-inflicted ones are

more primitive and exposed. They are also more painful. Consequently, they some-times remained unfinished, as incomplete names and images. The social divide also intersected with different gender notions and practices. A middle-class prisoner, who considered the bodies of co-inmates not only to be too visibly marked, but also exceedingly contrary to her notions of femininity, commented: 'It's SO exposed and looks SO bad in a woman… Then, with that on their arms, plus the scars from the [self]cuttings; and the 'hood crowd complains they can't find a job?'

The 'neighbourhood crowd' – by which she meant the majority of prisoners – defined a prison category of agency and identity without parallel in the past. It was built through kin and neighbourhood ties, as well as through class and shared pre-prison social stigma. In a sense it was a 'community', expressed both in collective practices and local narratives. Acts of sharing and mutual support were widespread, including attending to newcomers under a drug abstinence syndrome, washing them, treating them and feeding them. Wide manifestations of organized solidarity were not uncommon, such as contributions on behalf of destitute companions on the verge of leaving prison, and petitions signed by 90 per cent of prisoners pro-testing against unfair or excessive punitive detainment of co-prisoners. A decade before, I witnessed only two initiatives on a similar scale, but with an opposite meaning. One of them demanded the disclosure of results for transmissible disease tests, and the isolation of infected co-prisoners.

Changes in the meaning of practices run parallel to changes in the meaning of perceptions. In the first decade co-prisoners were not even referred to as compan-ions, and the notion of carceral friendship was explicitly denied. Although there were actual close and supportive friendship relationships, their existence was dis-cursively veiled. When asked 'Do you have friends [in prison]?', prisoners almost invariably said they did not, while the same interlocutors recited without hesitation the names of a few co-prisoners when I re-phrased the question as 'How many friends do you have'?[12] A prisoner once told me that 'here there are no friends, only good comrades. Friends, it's only outside'. This prisoner was not alluding to any specific relationships inside and outside prison walls, but expressing the oppo-sition outside/inside which organized prisoners' perceptions of their social world. It is not unlikely that in the civilian world these same 'good comrades' would be described as 'friends'. This terminological distinction actually seemed to express less different degrees of personal closeness and affect, but rather the fact that 'real' relationships were only conceivable in the 'real' world, understood as the world outside prison walls.

A decade later, designations like 'friends' were current. Not only because 'friends' from the outside were now actually also inside prison, but because there was conti-nuity, rather than opposition, between intramural and extramural social and moral worlds. Moreover, an unprecedented rhetoric of community emerged, reiterated in expressions like 'we're all together in the same boat'. Evidently, this does not mean the absence of tensions and interpersonal conflicts in daily life, which could be as frequent and vivid as a decade before. But their nature changed, and was deeply connected with the pre-prison character of most prison relationships. Contrary to

what went on in the past, co-prisoners were disparaged mainly as flawed friends, family members, neighbours – not so much 'othered' as convicts. The community was now spontaneously asserted, rather than experienced by prisoners as a threat and as imposed by the workings of the total institution (Goffman 1961). In this changing context, bodily boundaries ceased to be patrolled.

'Nerves' and 'attacks'

Just as previously prisoners asserted their individuality with and through the body, now it was also with and through the body that the community was expressed. 'Attacks', that is, episodes of prostration or paralysis attributed by prisoners to 'nerves', can be understood in this light. These episodes, in which a prisoner fainted or fell inert, complaining of 'not feeling [her] legs' or of 'losing strength', tended in the previous decade to occur after arguments with co-prisoners or with prison personnel.[13] They were witnessed and commented on with relative indifference. Guards and other prison personnel dismissed them as 'hysterical', and co-prisoners disdained them as mere attempts 'to draw attention'.

A decade later, although these phenomena continued to communicate personal distress, from time to time they also gained an expressive para-collective dimension. There were simultaneous 'attacks', an attunement of bodies expressing, and performing, an attunement of emotions. On one occasion, for instance, there was a general outcry when word got around that a 34-year-old prisoner, mother of two, had re-entered prison with an unusually harsh twenty-year prison sentence for drug trafficking, with little chance of applying for parole. Some prisoners beat their chests with their hands, others cried, several fell or fainted. In the community of meaning, agency and feeling thus expressed, it is irrelevant to try to separate feelings of solidarity towards others from the perception that a colleague's misfortune today could easily turn into one's own fate tomorrow.

Concluding remarks

Grounded in actual social worlds and intersubjective processes, embodiment and sensorial dispositions are culturally different in different places. They also change within places. Prisons, nevertheless, are particular places within places. For all their own historicity and no matter how porous their governance may have become, the fundamental coerciveness that defines institutions of penal confinement justifiably shapes descriptions of the imprisoned body mostly as an object of institutional power and as a site of resistance. The form and content of both power and resistance have been richly documented in their variety by prison field research.

But regardless of how the body and the senses are affected by institutional power and engage with the ecological environment of the prison, corporeal and sensorial experiences behind bars are also mediated and constituted by social and moral relations, in such a way that renders bodily experiences of confinement highly contextual.

The ethnographic inquiries developed in the same prison institution in separate decades have shown how a changing sociality intersected with a changing embodiment *in* the prison and *of* the prison. This involved the scope and meaning of bodily inscriptions and of individual and para-collective expressions of distress, different notions of contagion and different sensory experiences of sounds and smells, including variations in terms of which sensory experiences were singled out and felt to be significant. Moreover, these inquiries have shown how in both periods specific bodily boundaries were closely connected with specific social and moral boundaries. Conducted in two defining moments, before and after the rise of concentrated incarceration that tightly interlocked this institution and a handful of heavily penalized urban neighbourhoods, the two inquiries enabled a productive comparison between contrasting configurations. Captured in their most pronounced form, these configurations acquired a particular analytical relevance, in addition to their descriptive relevance. The interconnectedness between intramural and extramural worlds was in fact a major shift in empirical realities, one that indirectly impacted, and was apparent in, the innermost, bodily aspects of intra-prison life. As the worlds behind and beyond bars became socially and morally continuous, former intra-prison boundaries collapsed, bringing forth an unprecedented sense of community – a community of meaning, agency and feeling – and entailing changes in corporeal and sensorial experiences.

The social and symbolic permeability of the boundary between inside and outside worlds also rendered permeable intramural boundaries. As new categories, identifications and subjectivities emerged, corporeal barriers, identity boundaries and separation gave way to aspects of relationality and connectedness. In both periods body and meaning were intimately intertwined, and the sensorial order was consistent with the moral order. Embodiment was therefore also a sensitive register of change.

A comparison between the opposite configurations that emerged in these two periods suggests that bodily experiences of confinement and the ways of sensing prison vary not only according to prison-specific circumstances, but also to social-specific circumstances. In other words, they are shaped not only by the 'carceral' character of the prison context, but also by the 'contextual' character of the social and moral relations taking place in prison, variably structured by a changing connection to extramural social worlds.

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Notes

1. In the first part of this section I briefly recover some of the main points I developed in a review on the ethnography of penal confinement, organized precisely around these lines of discussion (Cunha 2014). Even though the review does not include all the relevant authors, it provides a systematic overview of the different perspectives pertaining to these approaches, within and across scales and analytic frames.

2. In different forms and degrees, institutional regimes have been penetrated by the post-disciplinary stress on risk management, on individual responsibility and on individuals' volitionist capacity of choice as moral agents. The increasing bureaucratization and formalization of institutional procedures, communication and decision-making has also combined with managerialism as a new mode of governance. Moreover, these regimes are no longer entirely constituted at the local level of confinement settings, but follow centralized guidelines and are submitted to outside scrutiny and oversight by upper echelons of both prison and non-prison authorities. This tighter frame has reshaped the action of prison personnel – and, indirectly, prisoners' social configurations (e.g. Bosworth 2007; Crewe 2009; Cunha 2014; Liebling and Arnold 2004).

3. See Cunha (2014) for a development of this point.

4. Estabelecimento Prisional de Tires (Tires or EPT hereafter). Created in 1954 on the outskirts of Lisbon, it continues to be the major female penal institution in the country.

5. Estabelecimento Prisional de Santa Cruz do Bispo. Inaugurated in 2005 near the northern city of Porto, it was intended for a similar kind of penal population to *Tires*.

6. By my calculations based on prisoners' penal files, offences in the orbit of the retail urban drug economy would amount to 88 per cent.

7. Physical self-injuring has been described as both an expression of pain and a way to relieve emotional pain (Liebling and Ludlow 2016).

8. This group of prisoners amounted to a proportion of little more than 10 per cent of this prison's population.

9. These items have been entirely eradicated from Portuguese prisons since the beginning of the present century.

10. Cf. Cunha and Durand (1999) for a developed example of this point.

11. This connection should evidently not be taken as a given. Its form and content vary, as different cultural notions of person make apparent: more or less individuated and bounded by the body, more or less structurally enmeshed in social relations (e.g. Csordas 1994; Strathern and Stewart 2011; Turner 1994, 1995).

12. Cf. Uhl (1991) for a similar example of veiled friendship in other contexts.

13. Similar 'nerves' and 'attacks' were described as cultural and subjective performances embodying a fragmentation of the 'self' (Low 1994), but also as forms of protest and resistance by socially vulnerable beings (Lock 1993; Ong 1988).

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