Religion's Multiple Locations in Prisons

Germany, Italy and Switzerland

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Religion's Multiple Locations in Prisons Germany, Italy and Switzerland¹

Introduction

In Prison, a tension is constantly at work between the disciplinary action of the institution and the individual or sometimes collective resistance against it. The lenses of religion provide a privileged perspective into imprisonment because the location of religion in prison is inhabited by this very tension. From a genealogical and legal point of view religion is both shaped by an institutionally organised chaplaincy and the guarantee of the individual religious freedom, from an individual point of view it is both an inner private experience and a link to an outside community, it can be a source for resistance against the institution as well as a force supporting its control.

Numerous qualitative social scientific studies of prisons are very insightful, but rarely do they pay any attention to religion (Le Caisne, 2000). Those which concentrate on religion often adopt only one specific perspective: criminological studies rather aim at finding out to what extent religion favours pro-social behaviour (for instance recently Dammer, 2002; Johnson, 2004; Akers, 2010). This discourse is mostly, as the theological or legal discourse, normatively oriented. Most sociological studies focus on the chaplaincy (Beckford, Gilliat, 1998), others on one religious group of inmates (Khoshrokhavar, 2004; Rhazzali, 2010). Religion in prison is embedded in a variety of discourses all ascribing religion particular roles and locations. Instead of adopting a normative or partial perspective, I tried to concentrate on the conditions of religious experience in the context of the prison as a total institution.

The argument of this article is that the total character of the prison experience determines to a large extent but not entirely the religious experience of inmates. While there is an extraordinary convergence about many aspects concerning the chaplaincy, other aspects of religiosity, such as prayers or one's relationship to transcendence reflect a huge variety of religious expressions. This text aims at offering a comparative look into the astonishing discursive similarity with regard to chaplaincy and the multiplicity of religious practices.

In the first doctoral, then postdoctoral and finally national research projects I have been conducting since 2001 in various prisons in Germany (primarily in the East), Italy (primarily in central Italy) and Switzerland I discovered strong similarities as far as this double-tracked location of religion is concerned. The situation in the prisons of these three European regions differs in denominational regard. In Eastern Germany about two thirds of the population is "non-belonging" (Schmidt, Wohlrab-Sahr, 2003), which is also the case inside prisons, contrary Western Germany where more than 70% of the population is affiliated to Christian Churches. A higher percentage of religious affiliations, mostly Christian Orthodox and Muslim, can be found among non-German inmates who are about 18% of the total prison population.¹ This rate stood at around 36,5% in 2007 in Italy (*ibid.*) where, as in Switzerland, the rates of Christian affiliations are around 80%. While in Italy this rate almost totally overlaps with Catholics, in Switzerland it comprises as many Protestants. Both Italy and Switzerland have witnessed the impressive rise of non-Christian inmates in the last decade (Schneuwly Purdie, Vuille, 2010). The social, national and cultural backgrounds of these

¹ My endless gratitude goes to the anonymous reviewers, the other contributors of this issue as well as to Claude Bovay and Pamela Klassen for their valuable comments on previous versions of this text.

inmates are wide: Catholics or Protestants are no longer the majority. This increased religious plurality in prison poses new challenges not only to chaplaincy, but more generally to the daily organisation of prison life and social scientific research.

The article will firstly present some methodological notes on the way the data was collected and the reflexivity underlying the various researches. In the second part, I shall present some analogical institutional developments with regard to prison chaplaincy in the three contexts. Thirdly, I shall discuss some of the narratives that have emerged from the empirical fieldwork around the question of the conditions of religious experience in prison.

The methodological challenge of researching in prisons

The difficulty of doing qualitative research—or fieldwork—in prisons is well-known by social scientists.² None of the conditions that are usually necessary to establish the required level of trust in the social relationship between researchers and researched is given: time, space and communication are restricted. How is it possible, under these conditions, to “break into” prison and implement a multi-situated perspective that shows more than mere single or isolated cases?³

The following sequence shall offer a short illustration of the multi-dimensional character of religion in prison. In a group discussion conducted in a male prison in Switzerland in September 2009, three security officers who had been employed there for several years argued about what they had noticed—or not—in terms of religious objects in the prison cells, a discussion provoked by the interviewer's question: Did you notice religious signs in the cells?⁴

O3: Rugs, prayer rugs.

O1: Icons.

O3: Icons. Is it also called icons for Muslims?

O1: I don't know if it is for Muslims, but I know that some have icons, stuff, pictures.

I: *With?*

O1: Ho, there's a little bit of everything. I don't talk about the other pictures (*laughs*).

I: *No, no, I talk about religious signs (laughs). Are there little altars, incense, candles?*

O3: No, we don't have that because I think that it is not authorised here.

O1: They do have the right to have incense. Yes, yes they have the right.

O2: No, little altars to pray, no, there is not really a little corner.

O1: Yes, yes, there is one or two guys who have stuff in that style, but it's rather...

O3: Little stuff put on a tablet, tiny things.

O2: Ha yes, well, some have Virgin Mary, with the little candle.

O1: There is one or two Buddhists.

O2: Yes, that's where you probably find incense with the Buddha.

O3: We do have some of them?

O1: Yes.

O3: Here?

This sequence shows that although working in the same prison, the officers do not observe the same religious practices in prison. Some of the observations even surprise other officers who also are in close contact with inmates over years. Contrary to most researchers, they all enter prisons on a daily basis and have access to the whole prison complex. Nevertheless, they seem not to have coinciding views on the religious activities carried out. A similar disagreement came out with regard to the presence of the chaplain. In this case, the interviewer asked whether she had understood correctly that once every week at the same time the chaplain would just be in the corridors to meet inmates. One officer denied and thereby started a new sequence.

O1: No, it's on request. They fill out a form to meet the chaplain. And he then groups them on Thursday and then on Saturday.

O2: No, but on Thursday he does not come on request, usually. The rules say he comes on request but he comes on his own. Now, I don't know if that's because he wants to (...) pass by, but I know that on Thursday afternoon he comes.

O1: Aha, ok, I really thought he would always come on request.

O2: Well, the rules say they can ask at any time to meet the chaplain or the imam, and on request. But the chaplain I don't know why, he comes on week-ends when there are newcomers. By the way, he knows who has arrived this week, he goes and meets them at lunchtime in the arrival section.

O1: and on Saturday evening he is in the responsibility section, from 6 to 8.

O2: but he comes on his own, he does not come on request.

O1: well to responsibility section he comes on request.

O2: well, not where I am.

O1: he has a list of people who arrive.

O3: He comes on his own.

O2: Yes.

O3: Cool.

O2: On Saturday when he comes all the time, nobody has requested it and he meets the newcomers.

O1: Yes, yes, it's requests, in any case where I am, these are requests.

The argument goes on for a while and finally the two officers agree that they disagree. In their exchange we can notice that the official rules about chaplaincy do not necessarily determine the actual practices. In prison everyday life religious practices organise not only around the effective rules but as well around personalities, habits, spaces, local routines, etc. This way, all of the concerned actors have only a partial view on religion and the issue appears fuzzy and slippery. In order to grasp it, one needs to highlight it from different perspectives and find out how they relate to each other. In the context of prisons this means, however, having to confront innumerable obstacles.

In my experience, and this very fact already indicates the peculiarity of religion in prison, chaplains turned out to be valuable gatekeepers. In Germany and Switzerland the chaplains were the first persons who were contacted. They helped in obtaining the needed authorisations to enter the prisons where they worked which usually took only a few weeks. I met them several times, interviewed them inside and outside prison, visited with them their offices, the prison chapels and libraries. Thanks to their support I could participate to religious services, Bible reading groups, or other events, such as the exhibition of the drawings made by inmates and the award ceremony for the winner taking place in the rooms of the chaplaincy. In Italy, I followed the advice of local criminologists and sent my request for authorisation to the Ministry of Justice. One year passed before I received a positive answer. In the meantime I could volunteer as an English teacher over several months in a Tuscan prison thanks to the support of an Italian teacher. Between 2002 and 2007 I entered a total of eleven prisons⁵—in the States of Brandenburg, Berlin, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, in Tuscany and in Switzerland. I interviewed personally and individually thirty-three inmates, twenty chaplains and other providers of spiritual care and three prison wardens. Almost half of the inmates were Christians, five were Muslims, one identified as a Jewish-Christian, two were Buddhists, one Rosicrucian and the others had no religious affiliation. Two chaplains and two prison wardens were women while all other interviewees were men.⁶ From 2007 to 2010 I directed a research team in the context of a nationally founded research on "Religious Plurality in Swiss Prisons" (Becci, Bovay, Kuhn, 2007). The team made further interviews with other prison staff members. In all of these research projects I met primarily long-term prisoners (having at least a five-year sentence) who were, I assumed, well able to articulate a perspective on their prison experience. Only in one case in Switzerland, I dealt with a women's prison, all the other research sites were male prisons. To recruit inmates willing to be interviewed, I asked either chaplains or other staff members to publicise the research among inmates who then could manifest their interest in meeting me. It is well possible that I

met more individuals who had some connection to the chaplains, but for sure some interviewees had, on the contrary, no relation whatsoever with them. All interviews took place without surveillance and were recorded. I provoked a narrative with general questions about their daily life in prison and then asked for more details with regard to their religious practices. Most interviews with inmates lasted precisely one hour each while those with chaplains and wardens could also extend over more than two hours. The inmates had at all points the possibility to interrupt the recording if they preferred to tell something off record, which occurred only once. I have not retained the names of the interviewees and had no further knowledge of them when I met them. As I guaranteed anonymity in the following text all names have been changed. All files were transcribed and coded partly on the basis of my questionnaire, partly *in vivo*, following the grounded theory paradigm. When I found myself in the various prisons, either for the interviews, for visits or for teaching, I jotted down what I observed and took field-notes afterwards from my memory.⁷ A strategy in the—predominantly discourse—analysis was to triangulate the different perspectives according to the created code-categories. In prison, the perspectives are strongly compartmentalized and can therefore develop in quite opposing directions. This is the reason why, a triangulation makes particularly sense if the aim is to highlight the ambiguities and the disruptions in the prison world.

Pastoral and spiritual care: the double religious outreach into the secular world

Prison chaplaincies are based simultaneously on a notion of pastoral and of spiritual care. “Pastoral care” is a concept used by the Christian churches as institutions to describe one realm of their action for salvation. It refers to the activity through which they reach out to the secular world and in particular to its suffering and less privileged part to provide moral and spiritual guidance. Pastoral care is thereby a moral action aiming at keeping the individual integrated in a particular social context. For established religions,⁸ “pastoral care” is hence in line with the joint aim of State and church while the expression of “spiritual care” refers primarily to the individual's needs in the spiritual realm and not to the institution. “Spiritual care” is rather an ethical action addressing the individual's values and worldviews.⁹ Max Weber stresses that spiritual care refers to the religious care of individuals (*die religiöse Pflege der Individuen*), or the offer of individual religious consolation when someone is in need emotionally or externally, materially (*Spendung von individuellem religiösem Trost in innerer oder äusserer Not*, Weber, 1964: 365). This support is based on an inter-individual relation, while pastoral care puts the individual in relation to a community. In an analogical way one could draw this distinction close to Ferdinand Tönnies' concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, the former favouring pastoral, the latter spiritual care. In all three countries I found the same tendency to pass from pastoral to spiritual care: the political contexts and the resistances to the change were, however, quite different we shall see.

Within West German Protestantism, the passage started in the sixties. As Isolde Karle writes until then “the Protestant doctrine of chaplaincy was mainly led by notions such as annunciation, confession or remission”.¹⁰ After the rupture with this doctrine the new motive of chaplaincy became “chaplaincy as a conversation”. In the GDR the change was much more abrupt and strongly steered from above: the atheistically oriented Socialist government step by step centralised prison chaplaincy service and employed only few chaplains it considered party-loyal. They had the task to provide mainly a very individual spiritual care. Today, after unification, prison chaplaincy in the East adapted to a large extent to the Western model which is based on the idea that both State and church aim at transmitting to prisoners “the fundamental values of the care for peace and the strive to maintain human dignity and to achieve justice and peace for the people” (Eick-Wildgans, 1993: 65). Eick-Wildgans concludes in her book on the legal aspects of the collaboration of church and State in Germany that the churches are considered the moral guarantee of the well-functioning of prisons. Today, the presence of one Protestant and one Catholic chaplain and of one church or chapel is assured in every prison of the country.¹¹ Prison chaplains have the obligation to be there a certain amount of hours a day and are the only permanent employees as far as

religious matters are concerned. They have their own office in the prison building, have access to basically all units and are protected by the right to keep their conversation with inmates secret. The State directly or indirectly contributes to their salary, but does not put them under the authority of the director. According to Eick-Wildgans, the chaplain is "the colleague of the other prison employees" and therefore his function is "not limited to giving advice but also includes active participation in decisions taken by the administration" (*ibid.*: 182). He is the only religious actor forming part of the committee deciding about the treatment of individual prisoners. The official list of the tasks to be accomplished by chaplains in Eastern Germany has become overwhelming: to celebrate religious services and sacraments, to make individual and group meetings, meet confidentially the inmates who wish it, provide spiritual care and material support also for the convicts' family and for all the prison staff, to collaborate to the planning of the sentence programme and to reintegration after release, to organise leisure activities, to give their opinion about acts of grace and for an early release. Most of their working hours, however, as all East German chaplains I interviewed confirm, are dedicated to individual spiritual care. A part from prison chaplaincy the right to religious freedom is legally respected for every inmate and the requests are globally fulfilled if they are not considered as endangering security in the institution.¹²

In Italy as in Germany, despite the denominational difference, the State sees the Church as an indispensable partner for accomplishing its task of rehabilitation. The elaboration of the Italian Constitution after World War II introduced new principles in the penitentiary realm which are still valid nowadays. Article 27 formulates the new pillars of the prison-system: prisoners should not receive any treatment that is considered contrary to human dignity and they should be re-educated. Inmates are no longer obliged to intimately adhere to the Catholic doctrine while the obstacles to religious conversion have been removed. In 1963, the State unilaterally instituted a chaplains' inspector, dependent on the Ministry of Justice, with the duties to control the chaplaincy. Only in 1975, with the important reform of the penal law; the obligation to attend religious services was abolished and religious freedom was recognised. Article 1 of the new law states that the treatment of prisoners has to be absolutely impartial; no one should be discriminated against for his/her religious beliefs. A further achievement was the change from considering religious practice as a criterion for judging whether a prisoner was behaving "well" to its definition as a human right. Article 26 of the new law states that in every prison one or more chapels are constructed and that every prison has at least one priest. Nothing similar was guaranteed to non-Catholic religious communities whose imprisoned members were allowed to request spiritual assistance from one representative of their community. One major reform hit the prison law in 1986 under the heading of the *legge Gozzini*, its name stemming from the independent left-wing senator who had promoted it.¹³ This meant a certain softening of prison life conditions. Inmates were encouraged through the promise of early release measures to collaborate with juridical authorities. It favoured in particular convicts who decided to cut their ties to terrorist organisations or who were incarcerated for having participated to criminal organisations. The whole prison staff was transformed into an observation staff, chaplains and nuns included. Carmine,¹⁴ a South-Italian Catholic inmate in his forties, sentenced for organised criminality, experienced the change personally as he told me when I interviewed him in a Tuscan prison in May 2004:

I have experienced the eighties in prison. It was a harsh time but we were lucky to have the Gozzini law which was a great law. We had a total social re-integration with that law. It was a good law, a law that made the State win. Prisons were quiet, everybody has changed, and there weren't any revolts. Consider that for 100 inmates on a day-permit, 95 would come back among the life-sentenced. There was a total change in prisons. You had to participate actively to your own re-habilitation, with concrete actions. There were several teams, all were teams, doctors, the chaplain, all were observing teams. Even when I was working in prison, for instance at the prison shop, the shop agent would observe me and comment on my behaviour because I was every day with him. At the time, prisons were exploding: there were revolts. I have experienced those years personally and I have seen a great change.

The chaplains regained through this change in the overall prison system the controlling and observing functions they had lost. Parallel to these developments, in 1976, the Vatican and the Italian government started to revise the Lateran pacts.¹⁵ Two major changes affected prison chaplaincy: the status of the chaplain passed from aggregated personnel to personnel in charge of spiritual care and the notion of pastoral care itself was replaced by that of spiritual care.¹⁶ This change indicates a tendency towards individualisation in the approach to religion similar to the one orienting chaplaincy in Eastern Germany. It denotes here a passage from a top-down principle, a hierarchical relationship between a religious organisation and a passive, receptive individual, towards a bottom-up model, a dialogic relationship in which the individual is autonomously asking for assistance. Spiritual care is now considered as an inmates' right protected by the State, and not as an obligation imposed upon prisoners by the joint action of State and church. Prison chaplains exhort each other not to miss this change in atmosphere and to concentrate on the spiritual aspects of their role: "We need to stop being the chaplain who 'does everything' (...) We need to have, clearly in front of us, the preeminent task of evangelisation".¹⁷ Only a couple of years earlier, the idea of pastoral care was dominant: "the true mission of the chaplain consists in the work of rehabilitation and of moral reconstruction of the persons the Lord has brought to his care" (Pelle, 1986: 87). Pastoral care was implicitly and explicitly dominant in the second half of the last century but we observe a move towards a more individually oriented spiritual care. This move is also meeting a great deal of resistance, as the way Don Mario, a chaplain in Tuscany I interviewed in March 2004, interprets his task of teaching the Catholic doctrine indicates:

C- I teach catechism... 20-25 inmates come regularly, about 45 are registered...

I- *With no denominational distinction?*

C- Since I am a Catholic, I teach catechism to prepare for baptism, confirmation, and prayers. And obviously I explain catechism, that is, they ask questions. But this does not mean: "today we discuss—what do you think of God...", improvisations of things nobody knows... On the contrary, I make school, the debate-group does not exist with me. Considering the circumstances the debate-group doesn't make any sense according to me.

Don Mario rejected the new orientation of chaplaincy since prisoners lacked what he considered basic religious knowledge. As in Germany, in all Italian prisons we find today the permanent presence of at least one Catholic chaplain, who has the obligation to be there at least three hours a day. Chaplains have been excluded from most of the formal disciplinary functions, but they are the only religious actors forming part of the committee establishing the rules of the prison treatment. Their main tasks are to celebrate religious services and teach the Catholic doctrine, to meet privately the inmates who wish it, to provide them with social and material care. They have access to practically all places in prison, cells included, and are allowed to distribute the Catholic magazine to inmates. They are paid by the State, enjoying all social insurance, but as employees they are also subject to State control.¹⁸ Through this apparatus, the Catholic faith is an integral part of daily life in Italian prisons which is not really the case in Eastern Germany. Since 2000 various adjustments have been made in order to guarantee equality to non-Catholics: some concern diet, that is, the prison administration has to guarantee appropriate food to those inmates who want to follow religious dietary prescriptions.¹⁹ Representatives of other religions are allowed to visit inmates on request so that the ordinarily employed chaplains remain the main protagonists of prison chaplaincy.

In Switzerland, the legal frame is variegated since according to its constitution of 1848 the relations between the churches and the State are ruled at a cantonal level. Some cantons have very general regulations concerning prison chaplaincy using religion-neutral forms—such as "providers of spiritual care" for instance—while others meticulously detail their regulations clearly referring to Catholicism or Protestantism (Vuille, Kuhn, 2010). In the different prisons the position of chaplains can vary: they can be a highly integrated service or a rather independent actor within the institution. Cantonal differences exist also as for the amount of time to which the chaplain is hired and for its institutional position: sometimes the chaplain's position depends on and is financed by the respective churches, sometimes it is

more directly linked to the prison authority. Despite all these differences, however, there is, in Switzerland a large bi-denominational consensus (Becci, Bovay 2007) which determines a gap between the recognition of the two established religious traditions (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism) and all the other religious communities. As a consequence there is in every prison in Switzerland a chaplaincy held by Catholic and Protestant representatives, and there are chapels or churches of these two denominations whatever the religious composition of the detained population is. In the last decades, the prison institution has also specialized strongly its different services so that doctors, social assistants, psychologists, psychiatrists, tutors, etc. have increasingly been employed. This professionalization is a national phenomenon and has pushed also chaplains to redefine their role and functions in prison. For the last twenty years they have given priority to interreligious competences and interdisciplinary profiles, a change that is clearly thematised by chaplains themselves, as the following quotes of a Catholic and a Protestant elderly chaplains illustrate: ²⁰

[The chaplain] used to care for all social questions, for family, he would call or write letters to the lawyer (...) he would even give French lessons if necessary. Progressively *[the State]* took over all these tasks by developing first the social service, then the medical service, the whole psychological realm, the possibility to take alphabetisation or French or Computer or Maths classes. So all these things have been slowly taken over by the State. So it is true that the role of the chaplain has changed a lot and that it had to evolve towards a definition of its specificity.

The place of the pastor in prison—that was something (...) He was the warden's proxy. The director and the pastor were the same (...) When I started, the old chaplaincy system was still in place. People would bend down. And then this passage to a chaplain who becomes one of many actors. (2) There were very few social workers when I started, very few of all those activity realms even in jail, of animation activities. This has developed a lot. At the time chaplains were a little bit social workers, a little bit psychologists, a bit of all. He would not ask himself all the questions he is asking himself now.

On the one hand chaplains' role is requested to be more specific, on the other it is meant to loose some of its specifically denominational character. Christian faith is considered today by chaplains as some sort of common language allowing a dialogue and bridging gaps between inmates, staff and the outside world. As in Germany, individual spiritual care is today the most important activity of chaplains. The confidential character of the chaplains' work is, as in the other two countries, guaranteed.

The experience of religion in the total institution prison

If the legal definitions of the chaplains' roles resemble each other that much, one can expect that inmates do have similar experiences in and perceptions of chaplaincy. The mentioned differences along the distinction between pastoral and spiritual care should also be observed. The aim of the next section shall hence be to find whether the inmates' perception of and relation to the chaplains reflect this situation. One of my questions to inmates was how they found out when arriving in prison that there is a chaplain. The answers were all similar, no matter if it was in Germany, Italy, or in Switzerland. Everybody in prison knows the chaplain and knows how to establish a contact with him or her. Sources of information are other inmates, posters and advertisements, the inmate newspaper if it exists, and finally the other employees, social assistants, educators, etc. As Carmine told me, when a new inmate arrives:

C- He asks other inmates, we talk to each other, and there is also the tutor, the social assistant

I- *Do they also say that there is a priest?*

C- Yes, yes, there are a lot—it's well organised here.

An inmate recognises immediately the chaplain even if he has never met him before also on the basis of bodily attributes: the chaplain has no uniform, carries no weapons but a lot of keys, and can be met in almost all units of the prison. For an Italian ex-inmate who was over fifty when I interviewed him in 2003, the chaplain “can move more easily than others, can also talk more than others”. In his long experience in Italian prisons he had learned, he would tell me, how important it was for a newcomer to talk to other inmates: that's where he learns the useful information to get hold of his situation.

When you arrive, you are put in isolation, and there, you don't know anything. Then, when the isolation time is over, they put you into a unit, a section and you have the impression your life has changed because there are people around you can ask, because the first thing you do is to ask 400 questions, as soon as you can. How does it work? How does it not work? When do we eat? Who is he? Who is the other guy? What do I need to do to ... 1,000 questions and all the answers come from your co-, co-inmates who are the best experts and non-experts of what they tell you. In prison you find so many inmates, they will tell you how the juridical system works, what you need to do when you go to trial... there is a whole culture of spreading information that is almost specialized information, true information that has the merit to calm the anxiety of the person who asks the questions because in general the answers of one inmate to another are more calming than those of a lawyer.

Information about the chaplaincy is diffused by inmates themselves and belongs to a set of knowledge necessary to prison life. The East German inmates were also very clear in answering this question. Mike started as a minor to rob banks and to be imprisoned and when I interviewed him, he was almost thirty and again in prison for a bank hold-up. He had therefore a sound experience of prison life and although he was not a believer nor had he any religious practice, he knew everything about the prison chaplaincy:

There is one in every prison, you simply know it as an inmate that there is a pastor and that you can go and see him if you want to talk or so. It's also written in the house plan... and there is in every unit, there are panels with information about religious services or so.

Indeed, some told me they had read about chaplaincy in the inmates' paper. A further but younger and less educated East German inmate told me that when he was imprisoned he met an inmate who told him that:

one can go to the church also in here... And I thought he was certainly kidding me and then I met the pastor and simply asked him—can we really go to church here? and he answered yes.

In Switzerland, many inmates mentioned the visibility of chaplains. Théodore,²¹ slightly over 40 when interviewed, was at the end of his fifth detention. He recognises chaplains because they come to the cells: "There aren't many persons who come to the cells, so you simply ask who this man is." Quentin,²² a further Swiss inmate of the same age, considered himself as an agnostic. He often met up with the chaplains and sometimes participated to the religious services. When he was asked how he learned about the presence of a chaplain in prison he answered:

Necessarily, when you see a civil in prison "Is he a director, a cop?" And, "no, no, he's the chaplain." That's how you learn it.

Bruno, a young, Catholic and Swiss inmate related how he first met the chaplain:

Well they come and see you as you arrive. Both the catholic and the protestant chaplain, independently they come and welcome you here. They tell us that if we need them we can write them and they come and see us. So I wrote him, he came and we had a conversation.

A further question referred to what the chaplain meant to inmates, and to how the relation to him could be qualified. In general, the feelings interviewed inmates expressed for chaplains were positive. None of them, no matter what his own religious involvement was, would like to renounce to the prison chaplains. A chaplain is usually considered "a teacher", "a good friend", "a person you can trust", all terms that one can interpret in the sense of spiritual care, as the outcome of individual support. In my Italian fieldwork, there was a large consensus among inmates that for them the chaplain is "one who really helps", and this makes him "a wonderful person", "a very good person". One Italian inmate even said he was like "a father" to him. A Palestinian and Muslim inmate noticed that the chaplain comes to see everybody at least twice a year, when there are Christian festivities "and brings along gifts. He is a nice person." A South-Italian inmate of almost 50 years underlined in particular the chaplain's impartiality, his commitment to the whole prison population as a:

"friend to everyone, as someone who stands close to all of us, also for minor things. For instance, the other day, I asked him to buy some socks... My family is poor, I don't have anybody else to help me. That was an important gesture, the socks. The chaplain talks openly, I can feel that he talks with his heart, and transmits it. I like listening to him".

The inclusive profile of the chaplain's job concerning in particular material support was stressed most of all in Italy and was almost absent in Switzerland. For Nouri, an Iranian man about forty years old imprisoned in Tuscany the chaplain is "a saint". I observed that only in Italy inmates used religious vocabulary to talk about their relationship to the chaplain:

"I always say it in the letters I write to my family, he is a good person. If I can't buy socks or underwear for instance, you can ask him. I am a little ashamed to ask this to a priest but he is a good person. He does his best to help everybody, if your feet hurt, he will find new shoes".

As mentioned, the chaplain is considered as part of the prison staff juridically, but has particular privileges compared to the other staff. The meaning of these privileges can differ according to the context: while in Italy the privileges also imply a greater freedom in bringing along items inmates need for instance, in the other cases the privileges rather relate to spatial or relational issues. Both in Germany and Switzerland inmates strongly appreciated the chaplain's higher level of "education" which allowed more intense discussions. Théodore appreciates in particular that they can have "good discussions about our way of being, frank discussions, not hidden ones".

For Bruno, a young Swiss inmate,²³ it was most obvious that the chaplain was very different from the rest of the prison staff because:

he doesn't care to know for what crime we are now in prison, actually he is more interested in the person than in the rest.

The relation to the chaplain is felt as free of any disciplinary aim and inmates highly appreciate this and trust him more than others as the following quote of the conversation I had with Fritz, a forty years old German catholic inmate, testifies:

F- In the discussion with the chaplain you talk about your own problems, he listens, nobody is obliged to do anything. It's spontaneous. I prefer to talk to him rather than to the psychologist.

I- Why?

F- Because I realise that he simply listens to me. He does not put pressure on me, he does not ask any questions, nor does he try to find out things I don't want to talk about.

The chaplain's neutrality was an established fact for inmates. To my question on what side—staff or inmates—the chaplain stands, the answers were straightforward but differed most between Italy and Germany. In Italy, the dominant idea was that the chaplain was on good terms with everybody, staff and inmates. Carmine's point of view is here representative:

The chaplain is on the side of the Lord, he is on anybody's side... And we are all God's children. The chaplain loves the direction as much as he loves us.

A more nuanced perspective is held by East German inmates for whom a critical distance to the prison authority is needed to trust a chaplain. To use an elder Eastern German inmate's words, whose point of view was widely shared:

Chaplaincy is independent, has nothing to do with the prison, they don't judge me, don't pigeonhole me or whatever. They are simply there, when you feel miserable, and help. They're neutral, don't value and analyse everything.

What makes the relation to chaplains valuable also for not believers is, as Quentin argued, that:

Firstly, they are not proselytising... And secondly, they have a culture, an education, a perception of life that is totally different from what you usually have in the context of prisons... And finally it's a part of society, a slice of humanity, a slice that makes you feel good. And it's interesting, we can talk about a number of issues I like. It's existing in the other's eyes... and yes, that does you good.

In a nutshell, the perceptions of the chaplains and of chaplaincy indicate firstly, in the three cases, that there is a visible impact of institutional regulations. The way this impact is reflected in the socially constructed understandings and meanings of religion, however, varies. In Italy an understanding in terms of pastoral care is still very present while in Switzerland and Eastern Germany the meaning of spiritual care prevails. Let us hence have a closer look at the religious discourses and practices of some of the religiously most involved inmates which was the case for more than half of the interviewees. They clearly

stated that their level of religious practice had increased in prison compared to outside and indicated a wide range of reasons therefore. Interestingly, most of them were affiliated to an established religion. Stefan, for instance, as most East Germans, was not affiliated to any religion when he entered prison. He was about thirty when I met him, and converted to Catholicism in prison. It was clearly his contact to the Catholic chaplain that brought him on this path.

S- Actually, I don't have any religion, I am not baptised and was not raised religiously but I think I have found Christian faith in here.

I- Do you think you would have made the same experience outside of prison?

S- I don't think so... I also consider continuing my life in the direction of the church, maybe priest. This is one of my life-dreams now. I don't feel like working for whatever enterprise outside, I would like to continue in this direction. Prison chaplaincy or something like this. Whatever.

I- Well, then you will have to decide in which denomination, Catholic or Protestant.

S- Then, I think it will be Catholic simply because of the name, catholic means all-encompassing, and that's what I want.

Stefan grew up under Socialism and after its collapse he kept being sceptical of the capitalist model. In the Catholic Church he found a new harbour standing outside of the capitalist circuits.

In Italy, I interviewed also Wu, a young Chinese ²⁴ about forty years old—now converted to Catholicism. When Wu was imprisoned he did not understand one word of Italian. He started to participate in the religious services offered by the Catholic chaplain basically by chance. Out of curiosity, he just followed the prison officers when they opened his cell door. This person was in particular fascinated by the emotions the participation to religious services would rise in him:

I- When you say "I liked it when I came to the service." What did you like most?

W- During the service they were singing, I like singing. I don't know, I liked it. First I was alone, was always alone in church. I like it. I don't know why. There were Italians in the church, I was the only Chinese. First I didn't understand anything, after one year I started to understand something. I didn't speak at all. I learned here at school I learned to sing at the services.

I- Didn't you have any contact with others?

W- No, I just went. I like it. Then I got to know the Church, Christian religions.

In his apprenticeship he was well supported by the activities of the chaplaincy.

I- Did you have to learn many things to convert? Catholic religion, who is Jesus, the churches?

W- At catechism they teach you the Bible a bit. I think they tell you the most important things.

Differently, what attracted Nouri to Catholicism was some idea of modernity. He had experienced the Islamic revolution of Khomeini and thereby he associated Islam with repression, social conflicts, Arab domination and religious intolerance. For him Christianity was a commitment to peace, to dialogue and to freedom. It was a feeling of sympathy. In these two cases, the inmates have entered into contact with Christianity through chaplaincy and as persons imprisoned and isolated in a foreign context. In their religious conversion social and political questions are closely intermingled with their personal experience of imprisonment.

Religious *bricolage* (Levi-Strauss, 1974), that is, the action of tinkering or botching religious practices and beliefs out of pre-existing images and of personal experience, occurs all-over in prison. A quotation from an interview made with Luis, a mid-aged Saxon inmate in a Brandenburg prison in August 2003 indicates well the fuzzy boundaries of religious notions in prison. He grew up in the GDR and had been repeatedly imprisoned since he was a young adult. While in prison as the wall came down he met a committed Catholic chaplain and started to be interested in religion. Without having converted he told me he now prays often. As I asked him what kind of prayers he would make he answered the following:

It varies a lot. Actually I botch together my prayers on my own. I don't pray regularly but I do pray for instance when I am in situations—when I want to be on my own, when I think I can

console myself. There are different things, it can also be linked to our prison daily life, which can become a heavy burden at some point, be it the noise or whatever. Then, I always think I can find peace with my prayers or I also like to have conversations in my mind. Some say he is talking to God, I don't know if it is God, but in any case I have my conceptions in that frame and try to ask questions and find answers, and if not, that's fine, too, but I can speak it out.

For Luis the simple fact of accepting the idea that his "conversations" could also be considered as "prayers" reveals a spiritual attitude (Karstein, Schmidt-Lux, Wohlrab-Sahr, 2009). As Luis', most inmates' narratives of praying contain the reference to the experienced loneliness, distress, consolation and time. Still, they vary as much as prayers vary outside of prison in terms of aim, content and form.

Conclusion

Despite the numerous differences in historical, institutional, political and denominational regard, in the prisons of the three studied cases there seem to be at least three commonalities in the institutional location of religion: firstly, the established chaplaincy is considered as contributing to the process of rehabilitation and integration, thanks to, secondly, the fact that it has lost its openly disciplinary functions. Moreover, in all three cases inmates increasingly belong to other religions than that of the chaplains. An important difference can however be observed in the definition of the chaplains' main activity. While in Italy material support is still considered an important complement to their moral help, in Germany religious care in prison is still composed of both pastoral and spiritual care but the latter is clearly privileged. As for the Swiss case, spiritual care is the dominant self-definition of the prison chaplains' work. This tendency does however not mean that no tensions are at work resisting and re-orienting it, tensions that can best be identified through the analysis of the different discourses. Contrary to what a Tönniesian approach suggests, spiritual care has not totally replaced pastoral care. Today, the daily work of prison chaplains contains both pastoral care and spiritual care, and depending on a variety of factors such as the type of relationship they establish or the requests coming from inmates they stress rather one aspect or the other. As a correlate some inmates relate having mainly received a community-oriented moral guidance or rather an inwardly turned ethical stance from the chaplains. Pastoral care is more frequent where a certain overlap exists between integration into a religious community and integration into the secular community. Both ideas of pastoral and spiritual care aim at putting religion at the service of social rehabilitation. This aim orients inmates' religious experience, but does not completely determine it.

The prison community, to use the title of Donald Clemmer's (1940) classical sociological study, is the outcome of what the imprisoned create, that is a cultural life of their own, which is not straightforwardly given by the disciplinary setting of the institution but can actually stand in opposition to it. Nevertheless, commonalities develop among inmates as the result of what Clemmer (1958: 297) calls "symbiosis, by which is meant a living together so that a benefit exists which is mutual for the parties involved". A certain perception of religion certainly comes from the common experience of the prison chaplaincy. The institutional approach to prisons can however also carry a bias, that of overestimating the uniformity of the prisoners' community and of attaching more importance to the structural setting than to the experience of prisoners themselves. Religious experience can well follow other aims than rehabilitation and those aims still need to be discovered.

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Abstract

The author compares the regulations for prison chaplaincy and analyses the multiple religious discourse and practices in three European countries—Germany, Italy and Switzerland. The situation in these countries differs in many regards but, also displays a number of interesting similarities. She first points to some of the methodological difficulties qualitative social inquiries entail in prison to argue about the importance of triangulating the perspectives onto religion. The distinction between pastoral and spiritual care is used as a framework to nuance the similarities and differences. Secondly, she briefly presents the ways in which current legal regulations have emerged in the three cases and finally discusses some of the empirical data she has collected about inmates' representations of chaplains in their everyday interactions. She proposes a closer look at the religious practices and discourses about religious beliefs of some of the religiously most involved inmates. The results emerging from a comparative perspective indicate the necessity of completing institutional approaches with discourse analyses from below.

Key words: prison chaplaincy, spiritual care, Italy, Germany, Switzerland.

Résumé

L'auteure compare les réglementations du religieux en prison en Allemagne, en Italie et en Suisse et analyse les perceptions autour de l'aumônerie de prison et les multiples discours et pratiques présents. L'analyse démontre une série de différences mais aussi des similarités surprenantes. L'auteure indique d'abord quelques difficultés méthodologiques, que toute recherche qualitative en prison implique, pour insister sur la nécessité de trianguler les perspectives sur le religieux qu'on y trouve. Puis, elle présente rapidement la manière dont les différentes réglementations juridiques ont émergé dans ces pays. Elle utilise la distinction entre assistance pastorale et assistance spirituelle pour différencier les cas. Ensuite, elle discute le matériel empirique qu'elle a rassemblé au sujet des représentations que les détenus se font des aumôniers dans leurs interactions quotidiennes. Cette perspective comparée montre la nécessité de compléter les approches institutionnelles avec des analyses des discours ordinaires.

Mots-clés : aumônerie de prison, assistance spirituelle, Italie, Allemagne, Suisse.

Resumen

Las regulaciones de lo religioso en la cárcel en Alemania, en Italia y en Suiza dan cuenta de una serie de diferencias pero también de similitudes sorprendentes. El artículo indica en principio algunas dificultades metodológicas, que toda investigación cualitativa en el ámbito carcelario implica, para insistir en la necesidad de triangular las perspectivas sobre lo religioso que aparece. El artículo presenta luego la manera en que las diferentes regulaciones jurídicas han surgido en estos países, especialmente a través de la distinción entre asistencia pastoral y asistencia espiritual. El estudio de las representaciones que los detenidos se hacen de los capellanes en sus interacciones cotidianas muestra la necesidad de completar las perspectivas institucionales con análisis de los discursos ordinarios.

Palabras clave: capellanía de prisión asistencia espiritual, Italia, Alemania, Suiza.

1. The countrywide rate stood at 26% in 2007 (Aebi, Delgrande, 2009: 46).
2. See for instance Wacquant, 2002; WalDRAM, 2009; Trulson *et alii*, 2004.
3. Moreover, it is unfortunately almost impossible for doctoral students who need to keep up with academic deadlines to fully follow the ten pertinent tips given by Trulson, Marquart and Mullings (2004).
4. The interviews in Switzerland have been made by Claude Bovay, Delphine Gex-Collet, Brigitte Knobel, Mallory Schneuwly Purdie and Irene Becci, in 2008 and 2009.

5. Two were in Switzerland, two in Italy, all the others in Germany. In six of them I entered only once. In the largest prison more than 1 000 persons are imprisoned, while the smallest kept only about 100 inmates.
6. More than half of chaplains in the three countries are men.
7. An important problem I can only mention in this text is the emotional impact of such a research context. At each prison visit one hears horrific stories, observes unbearable distress and often needs several days to recover emotionally afterwards. Inmates often understandably "use" the contact with a neutral person to download a huge emotional tension. Taking ordered notes or developing creative thoughts under these conditions is a particularly difficult enterprise. Once outside prison, however, I felt writing was a liberating action. I followed Emerson's (1995) and Hammersley's (1995) proposals for ethnographic field-note taking and tried as well as I could to develop a visual memory.
8. For the notion of "established" I refer to José Casanova (1994).
9. For the distinction between moral (as proposed by Emile Durkheim's social scientific approach) and ethical actions (in line with Max Weber's theory) please refer to Turina, 2010.
10. Karle, 1995: 198. This and the following quotes that are originally in German, French or Italian are my translation.
11. Ideally one full-time chaplain should be employed for 250 inmates. See Eick-Wildgans, 1993: 179.
12. Cf. art. 4 of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, art. 140 and art. 141 of the Weimar Constitution, § 53, § 54 and 78 of the Penal Law.
13. Mario Gozzini was simultaneously a convinced Catholic and communist who had studied and taught history of religions. For inmates, the word "Gozzini" has become synonymous of "benefici che permettono ai detenuti che hanno mantenuto una regolare condotta in carcere di usufruire delle misure alternative al carcere e dei permessi premio per mantenere le relazioni familiari e i rapporti di lavoro", cf. "Terre di mezzo", 2001: 66.
14. Carmine participated regularly to the religious services and said he was leading a pious life in prison.
15. Significant modifications concerned marriage, public schools and the change in the tax system "to fund not only the Catholic Church (...) but also other churches recognized by the government" (Homer, 2004: 208).
16. This change strengthened the chaplain's position juridically, but it kept it under the surveillance of the Ministry through the inspector. Their nomination was no longer dependent on a double agreement of church and State, but the church had the authority to designate someone who then had to be named by the State authority. Cf. Drigani, 1988.
17. Quoted in Damoli, 1988: 45.
18. A chaplain's wage is very low in Italy. A full-time chaplain of a Florentine prison told me that he earned only slightly more than 500 Euros a month.
19. Cf. Parlato, 1996; Introvigne, 2001.
20. Interviews made in February and June 2009.
21. Théodore received a mixed religious socialisation from his Protestant mother and Buddhist father but affirms that he does not believe in any God today, rather in the energy around him. Institutional religion is not his cup of tea but meditation which helps him feeling alive, mastering his thoughts and watching positively into the future. He takes his imprisonment as an opportunity to give a break to his activities. His regular meetings with chaplains occur in the halls or the yards of the prison. They never talk about religion together but about life and morality. He does not attend religious services in prison.
22. He received a religious socialisation that he found discouraging both at school and at home. In prison he starts reading a lot and now considers that there is something as a "big architect" of the world and for him the ten commandments are valuable moral rules about how to live well in society.
23. He received a conventional catholic education but is not practicing.
24. When I asked him whether he had received a religious education he answered: "A little, only my father a little bit Buddhist. But he had no religious beliefs. I: Don't you know a lot about Buddhism? Wu: Me, a little, I don't know anything about Buddhism."