Intimacy and power: body searches and intimate visits in the prison system of São Paulo, Brazil

Intimité et pouvoir: les fouilles corporelles et des visites intimes dans le système pénitentiaire de São Paulo, Brésil

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Introduction

In this article, I present some of the structuring dimensions of the everyday functioning of the prison system in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. I focus on the visitation process for prisoners’ relatives in male prison units, with special attention to the injunctions and constraints that enable and regulate intimate heterosexual encounters inside these prison spaces. The general hypothesis underlying this exercise is that the controls and restrictions (formal and informal, legal and illegal) that enable heterosexual intercourse
within male prisons in São Paulo constitute privileged means to problematize the particular modes of operation of this prison system.

2 Although the visitation process in male prisons of São Paulo is quite complex, this article aims to analyze it by focusing on two specific situations or moments: body searches and intimate visits. These two situations illuminate the ways in which the operation of power in the prisons of São Paulo challenge and reconfigure the intimacy and sexuality between prisoners and their visiting relatives.

3 By analyzing these situations, I intend to contribute to the field of prison studies in three main areas: first, I reveal certain elements that offer a more nuanced characterization of the prisons of São Paulo and Brazil that has prevailed in the international literature; second, I aim to problematize current forms of mass incarceration by analyzing its peculiar dynamics in the global south; finally, I intend to widen the field of empirical and conceptual references in the analysis of the social experience of families of prison members, especially women who visit their partners who are behind bars.

4 The article synthesizes and reworks some findings from my doctoral research conducted between 2011 and 2014 (Godoi, 2015). During this period, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in municipalities in the western region of the state of São Paulo that house prisons. I followed the path of visitors leaving the city of São Paulo to visit their incarcerated relatives. I stayed with them in the same hotels, and managed to develop a close and trusting relationship with some family members of prisoners and ex-prisoners. I also conducted participant ethnographic observation inside some prisons in Greater São Paulo as a volunteer of the Catholic Church, carrying out religious activities as well as material and legal assistance. I have 46 registered prison visits in my fieldwork notebook, most of which were made in two prisons near the capital. Outside prisons, I attended and recorded 15 meetings between religious workers, ex-prisoners and family members of prisoners in three suburbs of the city.

5 The relevance of the prison system of São Paulo as a strategic focus of reflection stands out for its superlative dimensions and its exacerbated tensions and disputes. In 1986, the state of São Paulo housed a prison population of 24,091 prisoners – corresponding to an incarceration rate of 85.1/100,000 inhabitants (Salla, 2007, 74). In late 2012, according to the National Penitentiary Department (DEPEN, 2014), São Paulo already had a population of 195,695 prisoners and an incarceration rate of 474.4/100,000 inhabitants. In 1983, the state prison system had only 14 units (Salla, 2007, 77), while in 2012 the state system comprised 152 prisons (SAP, 2014). The penitentiary system in the state of São Paulo is by far the largest in Brazil and one of the most extensive in the world. In 2012, Brazilian prisons housed a population of 548,003 prisoners, and the national incarceration rate was 287.3/100,000 inhabitants (DEPEN, 2014). The state of São Paulo, therefore, concentrated about 35% of the prisoners in Brazil and had an incarceration rate 65.1% higher than the national rate. If it were a country, São Paulo would be among the ten countries that imprison the most people in the world, both in terms of absolute population and incarceration rate. The prison population of São Paulo is higher than that of any country in Western Europe. In relative terms, the incarceration rate in the state of São Paulo is more than two times higher than in the United Kingdom and Spain, and more than four times higher than in France (cf. ICPS, 2014).

6 In addition to the superlative dimensions, the prison system in São Paulo draws attention because it presents one of the most turbulent trajectories of expansion, marked by
numerous riots and killings. In 1992, at least 111 prisoners were killed by the police in the Casa de Detenção de São Paulo (Carandiru Prison), in what became known as the Carandiru Massacre (Caldeira, 2000, 175). In 1995, a riot in a penitentiary in the municipality of Tremembé lasted about 130 hours (Salla, 2007, 80), establishing itself as one of the longest in history. Between January and May 1997, 57 prison riots were registered across the state (Dias, 2011, 136). In February 2001, prison riots broke out simultaneously in 29 prison units, involving more than 28,000 prisoners (Salla, 2006, 276). In May 2006, riots occurred in 74 units simultaneously, while 43 public officers were killed outside the prison walls – mostly police officers and prison agents – and hundreds of attacks were carried out against banks, shops, public buildings, and buses. Between the 12 and the 20 of this same month, 493 homicides were registered in São Paulo, and, in at least 122 cases, there were signs of summary execution committed by the police (IHRC, Justiça Global, 2011). The link between prison riots and attacks and deaths on the streets is well known (Peralva, Telles, 2014). These were some of the episodes that marked the emergence and consolidation of the First Command of the Capital (Primeiro Comando da Capital, PCC), a collective of prisoners controlling over 90% of the state’s prisons (Dias, 2011, 42), giving São Paulo the distinction of housing one of the most turbulent prison systems in the world.

7 Before presenting the data I need to discuss the set of assumptions that guided my analysis. The approach of the heterosexual practices in male prisons is based on a certain conceptualization of power relations underlying the dynamics of the production of intimacy and the practice of sexuality. Foucault (1988) suggests that sexuality cannot be addressed as something restrained by power, but rather as an overall effect and the specific means of certain relations of power and knowledge. For this author, the sexuality dispositif is implanted and grows in the social world because it articulates a double strategic dimension: on the one hand, it allows power to operate over individual bodies, regulating and normalizing the use of pleasures; on the other, it allows power to operate at the collective level, in the life of the population as a whole, and in its various segments, regulating birth trends, mortality, morbidity, etc., as well as managing flows of people, goods, and information. Sexuality is produced, therefore, by crossing disciplinary and biopolitical techniques: the control of bodies and population management.

8 As Stoler (2001) highlights based on reflections of the colonial experience, there is no discontinuity between the analysis of issues inherent to the dynamics involved in the production of intimacy and in the exercise of state power. In terms of bodily intimacy, there is no additional arena for the manifestation of power and injustices, but rather a strategic space for the actualization of techniques of governance. The exercise of sexuality always presupposes a politics of intimacy, which defines categories of exclusion, forms of subjectivity, and sites of resistance. Intimacy is, therefore, a space loaded with political tensions of the utmost importance. The constant unease about the circumstances of prison visits shown by the employees and directors of French prisons (Ricordeau, 2012) corroborates this argument.

9 Das (2007) draws attention to the strategic role that the female body tends to occupy in this set of power relations. From considerations about the tragic events that marked the Indian partition – from practices of gang rape and kidnapping of women to negotiations, programs, and policies aimed at restoring order – Das sheds light on a gender-related structuring dimension of state formations. According to the author, in this particular case, the female body figures as a territory disputed by men at war, whose possession or annihilation – but also protection and recovery – are instantiating modalities of a new
and sovereign nation. Something of that figuration can be perceived in the daily functioning of contemporary prisons – especially, but not only, in male prisons. There, too, the female body – taken almost exclusively in its reproductive and sexual dimensions – appears as a central element of bellicose relations among men.

I - Intimate Visits

In countries such as France (Ricordeau, Milhaud, 2012) and the USA (Comfort, 2008), the prison administration recognizes and grants to a minority of prisoners the right to have intimate encounters with their partners. This minority of prisoners is typically composed of individuals who are formally married, considered low-risk, have no disciplinary infractions, and have completed a considerable part of their sentence. Intimate encounters take place inside the prison, but in specific spaces, separated from the cells and other visitation places, in modules that replicate a domestic environment. At prescribed intervals of weeks or months, visitors and prisoners are allowed to stay in these spaces for long periods that can last for up to three days.

For a long time in Brazil, intimate visits remained informal, dependent on the decision of the unit directors, and largely restricted to male prisons. In 1999, the right to intimate visits was formally recognized, regulated, and extended to women prisoners through Resolution No. 1 of the National Council of Criminal and Penitentiary Policy (Conselho Nacional de Política Criminal e Penitenciária, CNPC) of the Ministry of Justice (Bassani, 2013, 16). In some female units, this resolution called for the creation of specific spaces for this type of visit (Padovani, 2010), but in male prisons it did not produce many changes to the practices that were already informally established.

In São Paulo, the dynamics of prison visitation are quite unique and offer a glimpse of the specific forms of the exercise and distribution of power within the prison. In 2013, there were 402,697 prisoners’ relatives registered for visitation in the prison system throughout the state, of which 269,070 were women and 53,284 were children under twelve years old of both sexes (DEPESP, 2014). From the trajectories of Denival and Diva, a couple with a long prison experience and two of the most important contributors to this research project, it is possible to extract some episodes and passages that express both the specificity of the dynamics of visitation in prisons in São Paulo and the heterogeneity of experiences that this particular dynamic generates, which varies according to the times and places where the visits occurred. The following reports were reconstituted from life history interviews and informal conversations during the field work in the hotel in a small provincial town where Denival, Diva and their three daughters also live.

January 1991. Diva, then 23, first entered the largest prison in Latin America to personally meet the one who would become the man of her life. Two years before she had sent a letter to a radio program that intermediated dating and relationships. In a nutshell, she presented herself in the sincerest way possible: an evangelical, funny, talkative and without prejudice. The feedback was resounding: in the following weeks, she received letters from hundreds and hundreds of men interested in corresponding with her. She responded to all of them, but effectively maintained a dialogue with only a few. Months later, she was only corresponding with Denival, the most interesting, caring and dedicated, precisely the one whose letters she had to hide from her policeman father. The sender’s address was: Hall 9, Carandiru Prison.

After two years of continuous correspondence, Diva and Denival were already close. It was she who took the initiative to ask to meet him in person, offering to visit him...
in prison. He welcomed the proposal with enthusiasm: his mother had died and neither his father nor anyone else visited him in prison. Even suffering from isolation, he did not dare to ask his new female friend to visit him because he knew the humiliations that were imposed on visitors who came weekly to the prison. The first meeting was held in the pavilion courtyard, on two stools arranged in the middle of the football field, under a strong summer sun. With the little money he earned stitching footballs, this was the only place that Denival managed to arrange from a cellmate who would not receive a visit that weekend. At that time, older or more powerful prisoners sold everything in the prison, from visiting places to vacancies in cells. After the first meeting, the visits became more constant, Diva helped Denival buy a “tent” improvised with blankets and sheets along the prison wall, a larger and more comfortable space, where they could take shelter from the sun and enjoy some intimacy. There they kissed and made love for the first time. As the turnover of prisoners was great, after a few months Denival “inherited” a place in the cell to receive conjugal visits. For that, he needed to bribe the officer regulating the courtyard access to the interior of the pavilion. In the morning, while the cell was occupied by another couple, Diva and Denival strolled hand in hand through the courtyard, talking and making plans; afterwards, they went to the cell, where they ate the food she brought and spent the rest of the afternoon together. In mid-1992, a lawyer paid by Diva was able to exonerate Denival of theft charges for lack of evidence. He was released shortly before the massacre that killed 111 prisoners in that same hall.

July 2004. For the first time, Diva and her two daughters, aged 7 and 2, travelled 645 kilometers from the capital to a small rural town in the state, whose existence she had not previously known, to the prison where Denival had just been transferred to fulfill the remainder of his third conviction. The trip was quite painful. Diva had to carry the children, their bags and the heavy “jumbo” of Denival from their home, located in a suburb of the east zone of São Paulo, up to Carandiru Metro Station where, on Friday nights, dozens and dozens of buses departed with visitors to the various prisons spread around the interior of the state. On Saturday morning, the three landed at the prison doors, already full of other visitors waiting to enter the unit. Diva left the bags in the car of another visitor. She entered the unit with the children, a change of clothes and her husband’s “jumbo”. Denival received the family with enthusiasm and led them into the cell which had been designated by his hall companions to receive, with full privacy, his first family visit. These were new times in the prison system of São Paulo; times in which the ethical principles of the PCC governed relations between the prisoners in order to avoid abuses, conflicts and deaths. Denival did not have to pay to receive his visits in a cell, or to buy a place to receive his visit, or to pay bribes to an employee to enjoy some intimacy. Although, as a newcomer, he still had to sleep on the floor in the most overcrowded cell of the pavilion, on the day of his first visit, he had a fully available neighboring cell just for him and his family while most of its 10 residents (without visits) spent the day in the patio while some received visits in other cells. Inside the cell, Denival joked with his daughters, lunched with the family and made up for lost time with his wife while the children slept. In the late afternoon, Diva took a shower and left the unit in a hurry: if she could find somewhere to stay she would be able to visit again on Sunday. The visitor who had looked after Diva’s bags also let her and her daughters stay in the small room she had rented nearby a few months earlier - since her husband had also been transferred there.

After two or three visits, Diva decided to move with the children to that distant city. She left her job of many years in an appliance store in the center of the capital, drew her Wage Guarantee Fund and only managed to rent a house after several refusals from bigotry owners. She began producing “jumbos” on demand, selling food, drinks, clothes and bags in the waiting lines and renting out rooms in her home for visitors who came from far away. “Diva’s Pension” was born. It quickly expanded, and Diva ended up reactivating the largest and oldest hotel in the city where in addition to living, she received scores of visitors weekly to the local prison and other units in the area. Despite the workload, Diva visited her husband every
weekend in more or less the same conditions as her first visit, varying the degree of intimacy in the cell according to whether her daughters were with her or not. When Denival was released in 2010, the family did not return to the capital; in addition to working in the pension, he bought a taxi with which he took visitors to his ex-penitentiary and others in the area.

October 2015. Diva left her two older daughters to take care of the hotel and went with her third daughter, 5 years old, to visit her husband in the “CDP Caiuá”. Located 100 kilometers from their home, it was a unit that housed temporary prisoners from all over western São Paulo. Denival had been arrested again a few weeks earlier. She was very concerned since she had heard that her husband was not well. Upon entering the patio, she was stunned by the amount of visitors with their children or husbands on the patio, reminding her of the times at the Carandiru Prison. She understood that the situation was even worse as Denival did not welcome them at the entrance to the pavilion. A prisoner she knew led them to a cell where Denival was lying on a bed. He was very thin, helpless and depressed. Although there was no space to allocate all visits in the cells of the pavilion, the over thirty prisoners who lived in that cell, left them alone with respect for Denival’s long prison trajectory and his health conditions, the same reasons for which he had been spared, as a newcomer, from sleeping on the floor. With some effort, Denival explained to Diva that he could not eat prison food, that he had a lot of headaches, that he was not receiving any medical care and that since coming to the unit he had barely left his cell.

In the months Denival stayed there, Diva continued to visit him even though the hotel was losing money and customers with her prolonged absence. She did what she could to support him, mentally and materially. Every weekend, she took wool for him to produce handmade carpets, brought a lot of food so he would be well fed during the week and always carried one daughter or another to cheer him up. As he got better, the visits became less private as he did not want to impair the visits of his colleagues. The couple’s intimate moments began to take place behind a sheet hung on the bed for a short time while other couples also arranged the same method in the other beds of the cell.

To understand the dynamic of prison visits in São Paulo it is important to keep in mind that even in the newest male prisons, there is no specific place for family visitation, such as the “parloirs” of France (Ricordeau, 2012) or the visiting rooms of the USA (Comfort, 2008). Although all units have parlatórios – cubicles where visitors and prisoners can talk separated by grids and/or glass partitions – they tend to be used exclusively for meetings with lawyers. When the administration of the unit allocates family visits in these areas, it is usually a punitive measure. The visits, either family or intimate ones, invariably occur within the same confined space. State agencies limit themselves to establishing the moment and duration of visits, and to selecting which family members can enter the institution. Inside the pavilion, the prisoners, through various strategies, manage the distribution of bodies and spaces for the production of the intimacy necessary to perform sex.

The way in which the visit actually takes place tends to vary depending on the type and location of the units. The Provisional Detention Centers (Centros de Detenção Provisória, CDP) for remanded prisoners are the most overcrowded units of the system – in 2013, they housed a population 146.7% above capacity. These units are also concentrated in the metropolitan areas of the state (Godoi, 2013), from where 47.6% of the state prison population is recruited (DEPEN, 2014). Given their closer proximity to the prisoners’ place of origin, these units receive significantly more visitors and the scandalous overcrowding ensures that these visits take place in especially small spaces.

Under such circumstances, the dynamics of visitation evokes what prevailed in the now extinct Carandiru Prison in the 1980s and 1990s (cf. Varella, 2012). Family visits occur in the pavilion courtyard, while the cells are reserved for intimate visits. Prisoners that do
not receive visits cannot remain in the cell and are expected to avoid contact with other prisoners’ visitors in the courtyard – an arduous task carried out more by means of keeping a body posture indicative of strict respect than by means of spatial distance itself. Diva reports that in the Carandiru Prison, prisoners used to turn their back and face the wall as she walked the corridors of the pavilion. According to her, currently it does not occur like this; in the CDP, prisoners simply lower their heads. In the most crowded and visited prisons, the cells are usually shared by two or more couples. Prisoners can establish a rotation system, in which couples have some time for the exclusive use of the space; however, two or more couples may be allocated to the same cell at the same time. In these situations, as we saw, the cell is divided by sheets and blankets hanged on the grid or beds – a technique known as “quieto” (a word that means “silent” in Portuguese).

16 The penitentiaries are relatively less crowded: in 2013, they housed a population 81.5% higher than their capacity. Unlike CDPs, (male) penitentiaries were preferentially installed in the countryside of the state, in remote rural areas located away from the largest urban centers (Godoi, 2013). In the CDPs and other metropolitan units, visits take place once a week on Saturdays or Sundays for a period of about eight hours. In the most remote penitentiaries, however, family visits may also happen both on Saturdays and Sundays for about eight hours a day. As visitors cannot sleep in the units and because of the fact that they are often hundreds of kilometers from home, they stay in hotels and guesthouses in the area – such as Diva’s Pension. Due to the distance and the high costs involved in travelling, the number of visitors in these countryside penitentiaries is relatively low. For example, a distant penitentiary in the west of the state, which housed about 1,600 prisoners in mid-2013, was accustomed to receiving roughly one hundred visitors on weekends. Geographic distance reduces the volume and the frequency of visits, working as an effective intensification of the segregation imposed by these units.

17 As there is a small number of visitors in relation to more than a thousand prisoners, visits to countryside penitentiaries differ significantly from the dynamics in place in CDPs; at these units, the visit is primarily a private ritual. When family members enter the pavilion, the prisoners they are visiting greet them and accompany them to the cells where they spend practically the whole day. The cell may or may not be the one in which the prisoner resides. Prisoners who are not receiving visits and whose cells are being used for visits are expected to stay in the courtyard throughout the duration of the visit. Even visits by a prisoners’ relatives, including their parents, brothers, and sisters, occur in the private area of the cell and are most often combined in order to prevent the displacement of an excessive number of prisoners. Exceptionally, as needed and according to the prisoners’ leaders assessment, two intimate visits may occur in the same cell, privacy being preserved only by means of the “quieto”. The degree of privacy conceded to the prisoners is so high that one time, as I registered in my field notes in December 2013, the administration of a unit only discovered that a prisoner had strangled his wife to death inside the cell at the end of the day when they checked the registers for entrances and exits from the unit.

18 In the countryside penitentiaries, the cell is, therefore, the preeminent place for visits – both intimate and familiar. However, it is important to emphasize that despite the privacy, either granted or arranged by prisoners, visits do not take place in absolute isolation. Contact between prisoners who are receiving visits and the ones who are not is relatively common. For example, portions of the food individuals receive from their
visiting families might be distributed to other prisoners. Less frequent is contact between
visitors, which may occur when parents and children share the same cell, or when, in
order to have private moments, a wife leaves her child on the patio or in another cell with
a close friend – as Diva used to do at the CDP Caiuá. Contact between visitors and
prisoners who are not being visited is rarer and usually only occurs only with the express
mediation – or permission – of the prisoner being visited.

From these considerations, it is clear that, in general, within the male prisons of São
Paulo, the dynamics of visitation and, in particular, the organization of intimate visits,
are the responsibility of the prisoners. They are the ones who distribute the bodies and
spaces to generate the privacy that facilitate the exercise of sexuality; moreover, they are
also responsible for maintaining a family atmosphere in the prison, managing the
differentiation between the intimate and the public, and regulating the suitability of the
encounters between visitors and prisoners – either the ones who are being visited or
those who are not. While the prisoners watch over the “normality” of the visitation days,
prison agents do not interfere with what happens on patios and in cells; they exert their
control prerogatives over the prison space before visitors enter the pavilion.

**II - Body Searches**

In France (Ricordeau, 2012) and the USA (Comfort, 2008), as I have already pointed out,
family visits and intimate visits are never mixed. For family visits, there is a prescription
for the appropriate positioning of bodies, acceptable movements, and even the number of
hugs and kisses allowed – these and other aspects of visitation are monitored
continuously by employees located at strategic points in the visiting room. During
intimate visits, surveillance is less continuous and, therefore, the selection criteria for the
couples that are able to exercise this right are more stringent. In either case, there is a
series of procedures to follow before the visit. Visitors must be formally authorized to
visit imprisoned relatives; they must be properly dressed, according to the standards
established by the institution; they must pass through metal detectors; and their personal
belongings must be checked by a correctional employee. As Comfort (2008) emphasizes,
these procedures are followed with anguish and suffering by women visiting their
imprisoned partners, either due to the frequent change of institutional criteria or
because of the usual harshness from the employees.

In the male prisons of São Paulo, the distinction between family and intimate visits is
operationalized by the prisoners themselves, so that every woman’s visit is potentially an
intimate visit. The visitation area is the confinement space, where surveillance by
employees is exercised in a relaxed and distant way. However, such an arrangement does
not mean that prisoners and visitors are free to do whatever they want, or that the prison
agents are absolved of any responsibility. On the one hand, one must consider that the
management of bodies and spaces operated by the prisoners can be more attentive and
rigorous than that of an agent: disrespecting codes of conduct and collective agreements
in force in the pavilion may have very serious consequences, including death. This
responsibility for normality and morality taken on by prisoners on visiting days can be
called the shared management of prison routines and space. On the other hand, any
impression of liberality from the prison administration with regard to the dynamics of
visitation dissipates when we examine the content of the procedures preceding the entry
of visitors in the pavilions.
As in the northern countries aforementioned – and with similar effects of anguish and suffering – visitors must comply, before entering any prison in São Paulo, with bureaucratic requirements, keep an adequate appearance, and undergo a body search.

To receive visitors and jumbos, the prisoner must select his “list of visits”, informing the directors the full name, the nature of the bond and the ID number of the people who visit. After the name is included in the “list” and released by the administration to receive a card, the visitor must provide copies of their personal documents, proof of residence, certificate of criminal records, marriage certificate or a notarized stable union statement, and 3x4 photos. Children must be formally registered with the name of the father. Although there is a computerized and centralized control system of visitors, this registration must be redone every time a prisoner is transferred. With regard to clothing, the visitor cannot wear a bra, skirt, dress or shoes with a metal frame. Blouses cannot be entirely white, low-cut, sleeveless nor too tight or short for the criteria of the agent that scrutinizes visitors. Generally, visitors wear yoga pants and slippers. Notwithstanding these general guidelines, the criteria that the unit’s administration imposes on clothing vary greatly over time and according to the staff on duty on a particular day. For example, a pair of jeans that was allowed a few weeks ago suddenly ceases to be; a blouse that was not too short for employees in last week’s inspection is now unacceptable; one agent does not let the visitor enter wearing sandals while another allows them. Such issues are discussed widely among visitors while waiting in line. It is not uncommon, from these discussions, for visitors to find themselves forced to change clothes at the time, lending or buying from someone or even returning home or to the hotel, in order to prevent a possible delay during the inspection process. The variability of the rules for clothing and strictness in inspections foster a whole market of sale and rental of clothing at the doors of São Paulo’s prisons.

Besides the necessity to be correctly dressed, the visitors also arrive in the queue carrying their personal bags and heavy bags of jumbo. Much waiting time in the queue is consumed by discussions and the rearrangements necessary for the inspection process of the jumbos that are even more complex than those motivated by clothing. The organization of the jumbos are a true collective effort with the more experienced visitors helping not only the newcomers – in the system as a whole or in the particular unit – but also those who visit infrequently who bring items that experienced visitors know will be barred either for what they consist of or the way they are packaged. Through these discussions and rearrangements, we may grasp the central elements in the composition of a jumbo – fast food, sweets, snacks, drinks, toiletries and clothes – and the multiple criteria and specifications that the prison administration requires of each item to be allowed in.

In the unit whose queue I closely observed, ready to eat foods like rice, beans, pasta, meat, vegetables, salads, pies and cakes had to be distributed in up to four plastic containers, yet always subject to various restrictions. For example, dishes like lasagna, gnocchi and stuffed cakes were vetoed, as well as certain ingredients – such as beets and corn. The sweets and the savories had to be put in a determined number of transparent plastic bags. The drinks were limited to two soda bottles (two liters, sealed, unlabeled and not frozen) and a determined number of small soluble juice packets. Reddish beverages with grape and raspberry flavors were not allowed. The various toiletries were also subject to specific rules: soaps had to be white and wrapped in plastic bags, removed from their original packaging; deodorants could not contain alcohol or be sprays or aerosols;
bottles of shampoos and conditioners had to be transparent. The clothes and shoes that the visitors took to the prisoners were also subjected to restrictions of quantity and models.

26 In entering the prison, after the verification of visitors’ cards and inspection of the jumbo, the visitor has to pass through security gates equipped with a metal detector and sit on a stool that also serves as a metal detector. As if this were not enough, not only in the state of São Paulo, but also in much of Brazil, a specific procedure raises to the level of paroxysm the humiliation and violence imposed on the prisoners’ family members: the body search.

27 The body search procedure precedes any family member’s visit to the prison. Men and women are searched separately by prison agents of the corresponding sex. Children not only witness their mothers being subjected to the body search, but also undergo similar procedures. According to reports of several women who visit their sons or partners in prisons, visitors are restricted to a cubicle, alone or in small groups, under the close surveillance of at least two security guards, where they must undress completely, hand all their clothes over piece by piece, and undergo a body search. They must stand naked facing the wall. Then they must release, shake, and lift their hair, show the soles of their feet, and squat. The movement causes the opening of the vagina and anus, and agents check for evidence of objects introduced. When there is suspicion, the visitor is asked to repeat the motions, squat lower, exert force, clear any discharge, or open body cavities with their hands. If suspicion remains, they can call other agents to check. Ultimately, when prison officials remain suspicious they may give up checking the visitor, who is simply refused entry, and inform their superiors. If the visitor under suspicion insists on entering, they are escorted to a hospital, where they must undergo x-ray examinations. In the following passages, I reconstitute episodes of body searches that were reported to me and that I registered in my fieldwork notebook.

August 2011. In a pastoral visit, I talked to Paulo. Angrily, he told me that the weekend before, his 65-year old mother had suffered incredible humiliation while entering the unit to visit him. He said she suffers from a herniated disc, feels a lot of pain and therefore has markedly impaired mobility. At inspection time, the prison guard made his elderly, naked and suffering mother, crouch 15 times to make sure she had not hidden anything in her vagina or anus. He said that after the effort, his mother could barely walk and spent half the visit lying on the bed inside his cell.

December 2011. In front of the prison, I was with Diva at her stand where she sells food, drinks, clothing and bags during the queues of prison visitors. An acquaintance came out of the prison toward us. Nervous and talking loudly, she said she had already gone through the inspection, had removed her clothes, squatted on the mirror and that she was about to enter the prison when the female prison agent asked her to lift her hair again. When she saw that she wore hair implants, the agent told her that she would not be allowed in with “false” hair. So she asked Diva to look after her hair. With a knife and the help of two colleagues, she removed the implants, put the hair in a bag, handed it to Diva and returned to the prison.

April 2012. At a meeting with ex-prisoners and family members of prisoners at a church on the outskirts of São Paulo, I talked about the ongoing campaign against the practice of “vexatious inspection” in prisons. Irma, a young woman, 22 years old, whose husband was confined at a CDP in the capital, recounted with tears in her eyes her worst inspection experience. She said that once she entered a unit with her mother-in-law and 6-month old daughter in her lap. She did the usual entry procedures, took off her clothes, squatted, etc., while her mother-in-law held her daughter. The prison guard then asked her to take off the child’s clothes and
diaper and open her vagina with her hands. Since this incident, she has avoided
taking the girl on visits, but does not want to deprive the father of contact with his
daughter.

May 2012. In front of the prison, I conversed with Berenice, 35, a guest and friend
of Diva, as she waited to enter the unit. She told me that in another prison in which
her husband was held, the inspection procedure was much worse than what
prevailed at this prison. She said that there, women had to climb up to a very high
step and hold onto an iron bar nailed to the wall in order to make the broadest
possible squat. She added that there was an agent who ordered women to rattle
their hips and make several contractions while the agent looked very closely from
above.

September 2012. At Diva’s Pension around 3 p.m., I was talking to Denival when he
received a call to pick up a guest who had been prevented from entering the prison.
He asked me to go along. When he drove in another direction from the prison, he
explained that she was not at the prison, but at the City Hospital, where she had
been escorted to do X-rays. In the car, Claudia, twenty years old, told him what had
happened. She was menstruating and after the squat, the prison guard told her that
since she could not see anything she could only visit her husband in the
“parlatório”. She protested, arguing that she had sat on the “stool”, that she had
not hidden anything and that she had the right to enter. The agent then called the
director and other correctional officers who told her that she could only enter if
she did X-ray exams at the hospital. Before leaving the unit escorted by prison
guards, they made her sign a statement that it was an examination made under her
own “free will”. The trip to the hospital and exams took so long that she no longer
returned to the prison since the visiting time had already expired. She then decided
to call Denival.

January 2013. In a pastoral visit, I talked to Reginaldo, a short and very thin young
man who had just arrived at the prison. I asked him if he had a family and if he was
already receiving visits. He said he had a girlfriend who had visited the CDP, but he
did not know if she would visit him at the penitentiary. He said that before being
transferred, during her last visit, the female prison agent had inspected her looking
for drugs in her “private parts” with a flashlight. The agent asked her to open up
more and even touched her with the flashlight insinuating that she knew she was
hiding drugs and that she would be arrested on the spot. The girl spent the whole
visit crying. Reginaldo said that he had no more news of his girlfriend. He asked for
my help to contact her.

December 2014. Saturday night after dinner at Diva’s Pension, I chatted with Selma
on the sidewalk. She asked me about my research, what I was doing there. I
explained my interest in prisons and the experience of imprisoned family members.
She said it was a lot of humiliation and suffering. She said that once she passed
through an inspection with two elderly ladies. When one of them took off her
clothes, the prison agent screamed and blocked her nose, saying that she stunk and
had to take a shower and that if she showed up again in those conditions she was
not going to enter and would receive a “gancho”.

November 2015. At home on a Monday night, I talked to Diva on Facebook. She was
angry, asking for my help to denounce to “the human rights staff” a humiliation
she had suffered the day before when she was barred from visiting Denival at the
CDP. She recounted that at inspection time she entered the room with her youngest
daughter and three more women and that when the agent saw her she already told
Diva that she would not be allowed in that Sunday. While she was squatting, the
agent asked her to open her vagina with her hand; Diva obeyed, but when she did it,
the agent said that she was stuffing something up inside and for this she would not
be allowed to visit her husband that day. Diva asked to speak to the director, asked
them to call the police, arguing that she wanted to do an x-Ray exam while the
agent expelled her and her daughter from the unit with screams and insults.
From the perspective of the managers and operators of the prison system, this practice, known as an “intimate search”, is justified as a necessary security procedure, mainly to prevent the entry of drugs and mobile phones, which are seen as major disturbances to prison order. This search modality is regarded as a technical element, a system that, although inconvenient, is available to impede the introduction of these objects in a context marked by the lack of personnel, appropriate spaces for visitation, low budgets, and more advanced technologies. For prisoners and their relatives, the body search is above all an excessive and arbitrary humiliation. For certain sectors of civil society, the most appropriate name for this practice is “vexatious search” and is considered to be an illegal, unjustifiable violence. From a more analytical point of view, the body search can be considered a type of “status degradation ceremony” that marks one’s passage from the free world to the prison, signaling the necessary and absolute subjection of the visitors’ bodies to the prison administration's intentions. The cubicle in which the body search is performed constitutes a liminal territory by definition, a space between the inside and the outside, in which visitors are not entirely inside – since they have not yet entered and do not yet know if they will be admitted – and yet are no longer outside – because they are not free from the demands of the prison administration. It is, therefore, a place of transition and a mandatory passage, where the status of the prisoner’s relatives in relation to the state is suspended and undetermined. On the one hand, visitors are free people who in principle enter the prison voluntarily; on the other hand, if they want to see their loved ones they must totally subject themselves to the rules, controls, and procedures of state agents, no matter how vexatious they are. Half free, half imprisoned: in that cubicle, by their own choice, but naked and crouched before the scrutiny of prison guards. To enter the prison freely, family members are required to undergo these procedures; however, many visitors cannot stand the challenge presented by the body search, which thus functions as a filter, a discouraging element to visitation that reinforces the segregation of prisoners from the outside world.

In northern countries, this search modality is common and exclusively imposed on prisoners; their bodies – not their relatives’ – are thoroughly searched before and after the visits in order to prevent them from transporting anything considered inappropriate to and from the visiting room or intimate visit modules (Ricordeau, 2012). In São Paulo, the imposition of the body search to the family members of the prisoner not only approximates their experiences, but also makes them, even momentarily, undifferentiated – just as the allocation of visitors inside confined cell spaces does. In 2014, after a long campaign, institutions and social movements in defense of human rights were able to pressure authorities to pass laws in several states and even at the federal level that deliberately prohibit the practice of body searches for prisoners’ relatives. However, it remains a practice despite such laws, with the administrative justification of a lack of technical and budgetary resources to promote alternative procedures, although we know that all units in São Paulo are equipped with various models of metal detectors. The institutional justification of body searches as a security measure proves to be even more fragile when data on drug and cell phones seizures in state prisons are taken into account. According to the Secretariat of Penitentiary Administration (Secretaria de Administração Penitenciária, SAP), among the 17,664 drug and mobile phones seizures made in 2012, only 793 – or 4.5% – resulted from searching visitors’ bodies and belongings, while 13,813 – 78.2% – resulted from searching prisoners, cells, and other facilities within the prison (DEPESP, 2014). Yet these data do not suggest

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that the “intimate search” is an ineffective procedure, just that its efficiency is not that proclaimed by the state authorities.

At this point, the analogy with war rape, as discussed by Das (2007), may be illuminating. Not because the subjective anxieties and sufferings experienced by women on visit days in the prisons in São Paulo and in the Indian partition are somehow equivalent, but because, in both cases, the woman’s body figures as a disputed territory, a privileged locus for expressions of power and, more precisely, achievement of victory.

The body search reveals how the territorial boundary between the inside and outside of prison is not only made of walls and railings, but is also produced by the continuous and daily practices that objectify the bodies of family members of prisoners. Moreover, not only does the cubicle becomes a liminal territory between the inside and outside of the prison; the visitor’s own body constitutes territory where this separation is inscribed. Body searches that occur in São Paulo’s prisons recall the collective rapes in the Indian partition because they convert bodies – especially those of women – into privileged territories for the inscription and manifestation of dominance.

The body search space-time therefore appears as an occasion for the affirmation and exercise of the administrative autonomy and punitive sovereignty of the prison (Foucault, 1975, 250). Although the body searches of prisoners’ mothers, wives, and daughters are performed by other women, the procedure is performed in a coercive fashion by agents who claim authority and effectively exercise it by breaking the law and suspending constituted rights. By conceptualizing the body search as a type of war rape, I emphasize that this systematic exercise of power over the bodies of visitors operates both as an assertion of punitive sovereignty of the prison and, accordingly, constitutes an indirect attack against the prison population. The intimate search signals and refreshes the continued victory of some over others; it marks, practically and symbolically, the ineluctable prerogatives of the prison administration over a territory that, in principle, is someone else’s: the body of the enemy’s wife. If, on visiting days, prisoners in São Paulo can manage with relative autonomy the distribution of bodies and spaces inside the pavilion in order to produce the intimacy necessary for engaging in sex, it is because the power of the prison administration has already been expressed. Its prerogatives are already guaranteed by the selection, screening, and subjection of the visitors’ bodies.

Conclusion

In this article, I aimed to discuss one aspect of the everyday operation of the prison system of São Paulo, taking as a starting point the practices and procedures involved in enabling heterosexual intimate encounters inside male prisons. If the information in this article reveals some idiosyncratic aspects of the prisons of São Paulo, it mainly shows how questions about the exercise of sexuality, especially in punitive institutions, invariably demonstrate the fundamental power relations that constitute them.

In this conclusion, I intend to contribute to the debate on reconfigurations of criminal systems in the contemporary world – in particular to the sociology of prisons – on at least three interrelated levels of analysis. In addressing the implied constraints and injunctions in the realization of conjugal visits and body searches in prisons in São Paulo, I provide elements for reflection on (1) how Brazilian prisons, especially the prisons of São Paulo, appear in the international debate; (2) the theoretical and analytical implications of the
social dynamics underlying incarceration in the global South to the very understanding of the phenomenon of contemporary mass incarceration; and (3) the possible meanings of prisoners’ family members experiences in the current context.

In the international literature on the Brazilian prison system, particularly on São Paulo (Holston, 2008; Darke, 2013; King, Valensia, 2014), what I described here as shared management emerges as the central theme. Commonly, the broad autonomy of prisoners in the organization of the daily prison routine figures as a direct effect of overcrowding and shortage of staff. The symbiotic relationships between staff and prisoners (King, Valensia, 2014), the delegation of some responsibilities, and this kind of prisoner self-governance (Darke, 2013, 275) are issues that emerge as a necessary counterpart of a precarious and poorly structured system. Under such circumstances, the continuous surveillance of prisoners by prison agents, a hallmark of modern prisons (Foucault, 1975), would be impossible – a situation that gives rise to this rare state of affairs.

The idea that the pronounced influence of prisoners and their forms of organization in the establishment and maintenance of prison routines derives from the inability, failure, and, ultimately, absence of the prison authority, does not sound atypical for Brazilians experts (Adorno, Salla, 2007; Dias, 2011). Such considerations are not misplaced: indeed, the influence of informal structures of organization of the prisoners of São Paulo is very strong compared to other contexts – especially to northern prisons; the disproportion between the number of prisoners and agents is alarming, and overcrowding is scandalous. All these factors, as well as the visitation dynamics in penitentiaries and CDPs described herein, support this already consolidated approach to the prison reality of São Paulo. However, as I have tried to show in this paper, such an approach can only be partial, as it neglects the ways in which the prison administration makes itself effectively present and active within particular dynamics.

The partiality of this approach is mainly due to a problem of the construction of the object of study. Taking the prison as a separate social universe is an established habit in the field of prison studies (Cunha, 2004), and it is because studies focus on the observation and analysis of the internal prison dynamics exclusively that, in São Paulo, the practical assemblages of shared management stand out. When the same attention is devoted to what happens in other places and with other agents, not at all unrelated to the prison nor restricted to the pavilion, the picture that emerges is far more complex – as I tried to show by discussing what happens with the prisoners’ family members on visiting days. Through this procedure, I shed some light on the “war expedients” that are a necessary counterpart, if not a condition of possibility of the arrangement of shared management. The war dimension of the social relations that are carried out, among other means, through the prison, does not emerge from analytical abstractions, but from the lexicon widely used in São Paulo by prisoners, visitors, their families and friends, and also by prison officials and other state agents, to describe empirical situations and living conditions (Hirata, 2009). It is no coincidence that women who accompany their husbands in the course of long sentences, visiting them weekly, despite all the humiliations and difficulties, are recognized as “warriors”.

The inextricable confluence of war expedients and shared management, which, in São Paulo, articulate and, at the same time, oppose prison agents and the preferred clientele of criminal justice institutions, is much clearer to researchers who are attentive to dynamics present outside the prison, but not totally alien to it (Peralva, Telles, 2014). It is known that the PCC, during the 2000s, extended its field of activity far beyond the prison,
especially within poor suburbs in the periphery of major urban centers. This expansion process led to a drastic reduction in homicide rates, by means of the development – promoted and conducted by PCC members – of new forms of conflict mediation in the field of popular “illegalisms” and sociability (Feltran, 2009; Telles, 2014). But one cannot forget that this reduction in the overall rate of homicides was accompanied by a sharp increase of police lethality and the significant expansion of the activities of death squads, almost always composed of police officers and former police officers (Feltran, 2015). Deaths of police officers, summary executions of suspects, indiscriminate killings, and the setting of buses on fire are part of the daily life of the suburbs of São Paulo. These events can cause or follow the destabilization of the game of relations between “state agents” and the “world of crime”, but, in general, they do not mean the breakup of the “liaisons dangereuses” (Misse, 2006) that unite them all in protection and extortion networks, ensuring the expanded circulation of drugs and other illicit goods (Hirata, 2010). In São Paulo, war and shared management are inextricable arrangements in the world of urban illegalisms, as in prison.

In the prison world, the body search constitutes a particularly illuminating expedient of war for two main reasons. First, because it is a procedure that is publicly recognized by prison authorities, despite their outrageous illegality – unlike other more discreet practices, such as torture, which is consistently applied inside prisons, but denied by authorities (Pastoral Carcerária, 2010). Second, because the body search, through the objectification of the visitors’ bodies, reveals this necessarily extended character of the war, that is, the inescapable implication of other actors, far beyond agents and prisoners arranged in a given unit. The successive and circumstantial changes in the correlations of forces within this expanded and continuous war that unfolds inside and outside the walls, define, among other things, the ways in which tasks and daily responsibilities can be distributed inside the prison in shared management arrangements.

In the incipient international literature on São Paulo prisons, the idea that dominates is that the prison system is in practice controlled by the prisoners. It is to qualify this perception that I insist here on the dimensions involved in the warlike game of relations between prisoners, family members and prison agents. In the prisons of São Paulo, perhaps more than anywhere else, “il faut entendre le grondement de la bataille” (Foucault, 1975, 315).

In addition to questioning the image of São Paulo prisons in the international debate, the analysis developed here also raises questions about the very figuration of contemporary mass incarceration. Birkbeck (2011) was one of the first scholars of prisons to question the differences that exist between current incarceration regimes of northern countries and the global south. Confronting current prison dynamics in North America and Latin America, this author questions the supposed uniformity of contemporary deposit-prisons. If in both contexts prison functions as mere confinement devices, which neglects the reforming practices that Foucault (1975, 251) called “supplément disciplinaire”, one should not overlook the differences between punitive institutions and concepts of penal intervention that materialize in the north and south of the globe. Birkbeck (2011, 308) describes these differences in terms of degree and quality. On the one hand, he recognizes that in the north there is more continuous and intrusive control of the prison population, their distribution in space, their activities and external relations, while in the south this control is looser, more sporadic and superficial. This makes it appear that the inside of the prison seems to belong more to the prisoners than to the prison authorities. The
dynamics of visitation in prisons in São Paulo analyzed here confirms this perception. On the other hand, in qualitative terms, Birkbeck distinguishes the “imprisonment” of the north from what he designates as the “internment” of the south. According to the author, in the northern countries, even if the recovery of inmates is no longer on the horizon of the authorities, penal intervention is not reduced to mere imprisonment, but also involves a whole social engineering project for the distribution and control of bodies inside the prison. In the south, the system of “internment” constitutes, above all, of a “spatial policy of confinement” (Birkbeck, 2011, 320) centered on the administration of a perimeter and in the containment inside of a population group whose internal organization and activities hardly preoccupy the authorities. The dynamics of the body search of relatives in prisons in São Paulo illustrates this (paradoxical) centrality of the prison perimeter.

As I emphasized, the data presented here confirm to a large extent the suggestions of Birkbeck. However, it seems to me appropriate to raise two caveats to this analytical framework. First – as I already warned about the nature of São Paulo’s prisons that prevail in the international literature – we must keep in mind that the degree of autonomy that prisoners enjoy inside the prison does not signify the “permissiveness” of penal authorities. Such an understanding can only be maintained if the analysis focuses on the internal organization of the prison. The thorough and violent nature of body searches of visitors in the prisons of São Paulo indicates that the strategic control that is exerted on the institutional perimeter is far from loose, sporadic and superficial, and is rather quite systematic, expansive and intrusive. Systematic because it controls each passage between the inside and outside of the prison; expansive because it reaches beyond the inmates to their family members; and literally intrusive because it objectifies bodies in their most intimate recesses. Second, while I recognize the importance of differentiating penal intervention systems in the north and global south, it seems necessary to go a step further, questioning the very terms through which the phenomenon of mass incarceration in contemporary society has been thought. In the international debate on major transformations in penal systems in recent years, as well as the prevailing general narrative of the historical course of the politics of crime and penitentiaries in the United States and Western Europe (Garland, 2001), the hegemonic figuration of mass incarceration and “deposit-prisons” also seems to stick to the experiences of punitive systems that are located in the same geopolitical axis. However, among the ten countries that most imprison people in the world – in absolute and relative terms – only the United States conforms to the dismantling of the welfare state and the concomitant building of a penal state – as formulated by Wacquant (2001) – in addition to having a number of maximum security institutions where the prisoner seems to be effectively buried alive. The other countries, located in the global south, feature a diverse range of organizational, legal, political and social structures and historical paths that have led to an exacerbated punitivism. An approach to the working mechanisms of the largest state prison system in Brazil, as well as valid and interesting in itself, must aim to minimally move the geopolitical axis that has been central to the analysis of mass incarceration. A better understanding of the great transformation in punitive systems in recent years should be problematized in other ways that address the specific issues of these disparate realities, not only to demarcate the heterogeneity of incarceration experiences, but to expand and redefine the very field of references in which the issue of mass incarceration can be framed and analyzed.
Finally, the analysis developed here also suggests shifts in the senses and meanings that can be attributed to the experience of imprisoned family members. In general lines, the experience of prisoners’ relatives and female partners is understood in terms of the “collateral consequences of mass imprisonment” (Mauer; Chesney-Lind, 2002). A distinctive field of study has been structured around this issue, within which the work of Comfort (2003, 2008) occupies a central position, not only for the pioneering approach or the quality of the empirical data presented, but mainly by its conceptual developments. To look into the experience of women visiting family members in a California prison, the author shows how, during the visitation, the family is continuously exposed to some of the structural “pains of imprisonment” noted by Sykes (1971) and, as a result, how their identities are largely reconfigured to suit the institutional context (Goffman, 1974). According to these findings, visitors are subjected to a particular type of “prisonization” (Clemmer, 1958), which the author terms “secondary prisonization”. This is a “weakened, but still compelling version” (Comfort, 2003, 101) of the reworking of identity that derives from the surveillance, injunctions and regulations of the prison context itself. The effects of visitation in prisons in São Paulo as well as the practice of body searches can be analyzed in the same way. However, one should not overlook the fact that, in São Paulo, the visits take place in the prisoners’ own cells and the courtyards inhabited by the prisoners, and that the visitor’s body search is as violent as that imposed on inmates. In São Paulo, the experience of the family is not only close to that of the prisoners; it becomes undifferentiated in the course of the visitation. Thus, more than a “secondary prisonization” – which, as Comfort (2008) shows is a result of the constraints of the prison as a whole, but specifically affects the family – we can identify a type of expanded prisonization because it deliberately requires the family, albeit temporarily, to undergo exactly the same constraints that are imposed on prisoners.

Accordingly, to frame the experiences of these families as mere side effects of mass incarceration does not seem sufficient. The idea of “collateral” – as well as “secondary” – puts this type of experience within the prison system on a smaller, derivative plane, suggesting that the operation of mass imprisonment follows its own mechanics, which only inadvertently drags mothers, wives, and children of prisoners into repressive conditions. The deliberate indistinction in the treatment of prisoners and families, the strategic nature that the maintenance of the prison perimeter assumes (Birkbeck, 2011), as well as the importance of the bodies of visitors in the daily production of this frontier seem to be central to the understanding of the dynamics of contemporary mass incarceration.

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NOTES

1. Fictitious names.
2. I interviewed these two separately in 2012, but in each interview the other was present and also participated.
3. For a study of the daily social dynamics that obtain in Carandiru Prison, see Varela 2012.
4. A “jumbo” is a sack with food, clothes, articles of personal hygiene, cigarettes and medicines that families bring to the prisoners on visiting days. The composition of the jumbo will be discussed later in this article.
5. I systematized the data on overcrowding by type of unit based on the incarcerated population of each establishment reported by the Secretariat of Penitentiary Administration (Secretaria de Administração Penitenciária, SAP) in September 2013.
6. The same dynamic obtained in the CDP of Caiuá, unit that housed temporary prisoners from western São Paulo state.
7. For other ethnographical descriptions of visits, see Godoi 2014.
8. An administrative punishment of visitors which prohibits them from entering a unit for a period of up to six months.
9. Garfinkel (1956, 420) defines “status degradation ceremony” as “[a]ny communicative work between persons, whereby the public identity of an actor is transformed into something looked on as lower in the local scheme of social types”.
10. In 2012, there were 8.3 prisoners for each prison agent (DEPEN, 2014).
11. While in Brazil, as in most of the rest of the world, the incarcerated population is recruited among the poorest in society, I do not aim here to reaffirm the obvious class character of punitive institutions (Foucault, 1975, 277). The victory that the state impresses on the body of visitors should not be confused with the victory of the rich over the poor, of one class over another, but of a “society” against those that are labeled as dangerous enemies and undesirable subjects (Foucault, 2005).
12. In May 2014, the ten countries who most imprisoned people in the world were in descending order and in absolute numbers: United States, China, Russia, Brazil, India, Thailand, Mexico, Iran, South Africa and Indonesia. In relative terms, the list includes the following countries in descending order: Seychelles, United States, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Anguilla, Virgin Island, Barbados, Cuba, Belize, Rwanda and Russia (ICPS, 2014).
13. In general terms, the same could be said about other hegemonic sociologies of the punitive turn. For a systematic presentation and a critical analysis of these approaches, see Carrier (2010).

ABSTRACTS

In this article, I discuss some injunctions and constraints that enable and regulate heterosexual intimate encounters inside male prisons in São Paulo, Brazil. From considerations about the body searches of prisoners’ relatives and intimate visits inside these prisons, I intend to contribute to the field of prison studies in three main areas. First, I reveal certain elements that improve the characterization of the prisons of São Paulo and Brazil that has prevailed in the international literature; second, I aim to problematize current forms of the phenomenon of mass incarceration based on the dynamics and prison conditions specific to the context of the global south; finally, I intend to widen the field of empirical and conceptual references in the analysis of the social experience of families of prison members, especially women who visit their partners who are behind bars.

Dans cet article, je discute des injonctions et des contraintes qui permettent et régulent les rencontres intimes hétérosexuelles à l'intérieur des prisons pour hommes à São Paulo, Brésil. À partir de considérations sur la fouille corporelle des parents de prisonniers et des visites intimes à l'intérieur de ces prisons, je me propose d'explorer trois dimensions. Tout d'abord, je révèle certains éléments qui améliorent la caractérisation des prisons de São Paulo et du Brésil qui ont prévalu dans la littérature internationale ; deuxièmement, je problématise les formes actuelles du phénomène de l'incarcération de masse basée sur la dynamique et les conditions de détention spécifiques au contexte de l'hémisphère sud ; enfin, j'élargis le champ des références empiriques et conceptuelles dans l'analyse de l'expérience sociale des parents de prisonniers, en particulier les femmes qui visitent leurs partenaires incarcérés.

INDEX

Keywords: prison, São Paulo, visit, body search

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