

# The Passage: “Social locations” and the field of prisons\*

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## Abstract

With an ethnographic description of my processes of entering three female prisons in São Paulo – as a researcher, volunteer and family visitor – I analyze how ethnographic research methods were intimately related to the territorialities and procedures of the examination of the subjects that crossed the checkpoints, the border posts of the penitentiary institutions. Based on a feminist and anthropological literature, I argue that to speak of the ethnographic passage through the corridors of the penitentiaries necessarily involves speaking of technologies of gender. They produce and create hierarchies of subjects with different locations in the geographies of power that edify prisons.

**Keywords:** Prison, Anthropology, Feminisms, Gender, Social Localizations.

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\* Received February 04 2019, accepted March 18 2019. Translated by Jeffrey Hoff.

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## Presentation

This article is the product of a long study conducted between 2010 and 2015. The results of the research, which focused on networks of affection and romantic relations lived at female prisons of the cities of São Paulo and Barcelona, have already been published (Padovani, 2018). This article, however, is a result not only of the research process, but of questionings provoked by exchanges with the *Anthropology of Confinement Network*, formed mostly by European anthropologists, which has promoted periodic meetings at congresses, as well as rich analytical exchanges through digital communications.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the questionings of my research methodology were provoked by these encounters and exchanges, which sparked questioning about how researchers are produced through intimate relations with people who are serving time, and involvement with networks of activism related to family members of imprisoned people (Ricordeau, 2012; Lago, in this issue). We also questioned how long-term ethnographic processes in the field of prisons involve the production of relations of intimacy and affection for the people serving time and their family members (Padovani, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> In 2014, during the meeting of the European Association of Social Anthropology, in Tallinn, Estonia, a panel was held entitled “Prison Ethnographies, research, intimacy and social changes”. As a result of this panel, coordinated by Ines Hasselberg and Carolina Sanchez Boe, the Anthropology of Confinement Network was formed. Ines and Carolina felt a need to produce the network because of the many registrations for the panel. During the panel, through a presentation of works by researchers active in various parts of the world, including in prisons in Brazil, it was possible to perceive similarities and differences in the studies produced in prison institutions, and to share methodological challenges specific to the field of institutions for incarceration. Since 2014 we have remained in contact. This dossier is the result of the exchanges that did not conclude in that year, to the contrary. In 2017, Carolina Sanchez Boe came to Brazil to participate in a workshop that I organized together with professor Anna Uziel of the Department of Social Psychology of UERJ. More information about the network is available at <https://www.easaonline.org/networks/confinementnet/> (last accessed on: 18 July, 2019).

Prisons, after all, change the lives of those who relate to them (Mallart, 2014).

In other moments, I have argued that to relate with prisons is also to produce a relation with processes of crossing frontiers (Padovani, 2017a). The penitentiary institution itself is configured in a frontier that is aligned with territories of cities that are only recognized by those who learn to have intimacy with the plots of the prison apparatuses.<sup>2</sup> The prison architecture is edified by countless *checkpoints* (Jeganathan, 2018), or control posts, which materialize the procedures by means of which the subjects who cross them are inspected and located; “framed”, to use Foucault’s (1978) grammar. The “entomologizations” of the subjects and the populations, about which Foucault spoke upon addressing biopower, however, do not reach the processes of resignification of “social localizations” to which transnational feminists call attention (Mohanty, 1984; Brah, 1996; Mahler; Pessar, 2001).

The category “social localization”, coined from the analytical formulations aimed at the regimes of transnational mobilities, refer to geopolitical, colonial and economic positions, that locate differently countries, continents, and geographic regions. They are materialized in asymmetric power relations that are lived by subjects in processes of movement. The geopolitical positions “locate” people and populations (Mahler; Pessar, 2001), and do so

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<sup>2</sup> In other moments I have described the cartographies of cities that relate with prisons. These cartographies are cafes, bars, neighborhoods, bus stops and other territories that shape emotional maps that relate prisons to the “world”, the “outside” of prisons that are present in the daily life of prisons through letters, family visits and meals. In my work in Barcelona, the prison cartography included, for example, a café just outside the prison where women would go when they left the penitentiary, either for a temporary leave or in “conditional liberty”. It also involved the *Sants* station from where the bus left with family members on prison visits. The prison cartographies of the city of São Paulo are the Carandiru station and the peripheral neighborhoods such as Sapopemba and Cidade Tiradentes. They are also, as Rafael Godoi (2015) shows, the hotels, food trailers and small shops where family members of people serving time in the interior of the state are lodged and purchase goods. About prison cartographies, I recommend Cunha (2002).

through categories of differentiation such as race, class and nationality, always intersectioned to gender markings

According to Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar (2001), it is through "geographies of power marked by gender" that body, family, territory and state are aligned, The notion of "social location" stems from transnational and intersectional feminist productions, developed through crossings of borders lived by the authors: feminist women from the "third world", "South Asians", "Africans", "blacks"; "Latin Americans" who travel around the globe and who are located in diverse ways in the process of their movements by people with whom they relate.

As taught by authors such as Chandra Mohanty (1984), Avtar Brah (1996) Angela and Onika Gilliam (1995), however, the crossing of borders need not be transnational to produce resignifications of "social localizations". For these authors, it is the differences, not the concept of equality, that should be considered to be central to the theoretical proposals and the feminist practices.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a feminist epistemological practice must consider that collaboration and intimacy do not involve a suppression of differences, but a recognition of the frontiers of class, race and gender.

Inspired by the methodology proposed by these authors and provoked by the object of this dossier about intimacy and collaboration in prison ethnographic production, I turn to one of the fundamentals of anthropology, the fundament according to which the ethnographic field must be understood as a "contact zone". In this contact zone, difference is the base of the postulate of the analysis (Pratt, 1999). I thus suggest a methodological

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<sup>3</sup> More than turn to the dialog with social theories, Chandra Mohanty proposes confronting the feminist practices of her contemporaries. Chandra Mohanty writes with facility, nearly always as if she was presenting us an argument, to express her extreme concern for the **effects** of her writing. The effects that she seeks are those of transnational political solidarity, not that of "*sisterhood*", but of political solidarity across borders - national borders, as well as those of class and race. Her writings are thus concerned with crossing academic borders and supporting practices of feminist solidarity. See: Mohanty (1984) and Alcoff (2016).

analysis of ethnographic practice in prisons considering the different forms by which I was located in the field. My proposition is based, as it could only be, from my own crossing of the frontiers of prison buildings. These borders are materialized in checkpoints – the penitentiary gates.

I argue that the different ways by which I – my body and my relations documented in papers and official stamps of approval – cross the control posts of the prison borders reveal symmetries and hierarchies that edify penitentiary institutions and allow different recognitions in the zone of contact. In other words, I argue that a critical analysis of the methodological processes of ethnographic research conducted in prisons allows analyzing the functioning of prisons.

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For the many years<sup>4</sup> I have conducted fieldwork in female prisons across São Paulo state, my visits to the institutions took place through three various relational statuses. The ethnographic process described in this article began at the Female Penitentiary of the Capital, the only prison unit I accessed carrying documents that proved I had all the legal authorizations needed to conduct “academic research”. All the documents were validated by signatures of the administrative staff of the prison unit, and by the directors of the state prison system. Parallel to my research, I also entered the Female Penitentiary of the Capital and other correctional institutions, as a volunteer with the Incarceration Pastoral. This is a civilian organization that in addition to providing religious services, acts as a social and humanitarian movement in the prison system (Godoi, 2015). During the time of my research, some of the interlocutors who had been imprisoned in the Female

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<sup>4</sup> The first time that I entered a female penitentiary was in 2003 for a Scientific Initiation project study about labor workshops in the now disactivated Female Penitentiary of Tatuapé. Until today I visit the Female Penitentiary of the Capital on the *list of Family visitors*. More details about my passage through prisons can be seen at Padovani (2018).

Penitentiary of the Capital were transferred to other prisons. Due to these transfers, my name was placed on the *list of family visitors* for two of these women.<sup>5</sup> That is, the methodological analysis of the ethnography addressed in this article was conducted from at least three different relational statuses established with prisons: that of a researcher, a volunteer with the Incarceration Pastoral and a *family member*.

This text is divided into three subsections. In the first I present my entrance into prison by means of the relational status established by the “academy”, with documents from the university. Next, I present the entrance and documental location of my insertion in the field as a carrier of identification from the Incarceration Pastoral. Finally, I describe the entrances through family visits. The article concludes with some final considerations about the resignifications of the “social localizations” that are attributed to me to the degree that I come to be understood according to distinct relational, institutional, and territorial attributes.

### **The paths that lead to prison: through many entrances and many bodies**

I took the train at Santo André,<sup>6</sup> the city where I live, relatively frequently, and would switch to the city of São Paulo’s

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<sup>5</sup> *Visitors list* is the name of the list of names of family members and friends who can visit prisoners.

<sup>6</sup> Santo André is one of the cities of “Greater São Paulo”, that is, the metropolitan region of the city of São Paulo, which is the largest municipality in Brazil with a population of about 11,000,000. The metropolitan region of São Paulo has a population of over 20,000,000 inhabitants. The city of São Paulo is the capital of the state by the same name, the state of São Paulo is also the most populated state of Brazil, representing 22% of the country’s total population. The data presented in this article refer either to the state of São Paulo, or to the city of São Paulo. All the laws, regulations and documents refer to the state penitentiary administration. The prison units described here are situated, however, in the city of São Paulo. Santo André is one of the cities of the so-called ABC Paulista region. It had an important role in the history of union movements and housing rights struggles. It is a periphery, or one of the many suburbs of São Paulo (Martins, 1992; Moraes, 2003).

Metro line to the Carandiru station. It was the likely stop to get off. For someone heading to any state prison institution in São Paulo, the neighborhood in the northern zone of the state capital, Carandiru, is emblematic. It is the scenery of the “Carandiru Massacre” – as the police raid made during a prison rebellion in 1992 came to be known, and whose aftermath was the death of at least 111 inmates. Located just outside the subway stop it was, until recently, the largest male prison in Latin America. It has been the subject of films, books and songs.<sup>7</sup> Until today, more than ten years after its deactivation and the implosion of its pavilions in 2002, the site is the departure point of many of the buses that leave the city of São Paulo to take family members on visiting days to the male penitentiaries in the interior of the state. Lines with dozens of women and children carrying bags, boxes and sacks with food, clothes and money, could be seen by those who like I, emerged from the subway station at Carandiru and walked towards the Female Penitentiary of the Capital, or the Female Penitentiary of Santana through the large park built over the

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<sup>7</sup> The film “Carandiru”, 2003, was directed by Hector Babenco and includes stories from the book “Estação Carandiru” (Carandiru Station), written by Dráuzio Varella, a former doctor in the medical care unit inside the largest prison in South America, situated in Carandiru, a region close to downtown São Paulo. After the “Carandiru Massacre”, several books were released including some written by inmates who experienced the horror of that day. One of the most significant was written by André DuRap and Bruni Zeni, “Sobrevivente André du Rap (Do Massacre do Carandiru)”, [Survivor Andre du Rap]. In addition, the “Carandiru Massacre” inspired song lyrics such as, “Diário de um detento”, or “The diary of a prisoner”, by the Rap group “Racionais”, and part of the song “Haiti” by Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, in which they wrote: “*Cento e onze presos indefesos, mas presos, são quase todos pretos. Ou quase pretos, ou quase brancos quase pretos de tão pobres. E pobres são como podres e todos sabem como se tratam os pretos*” [One hundred and eleven defenseless prisoners, but prisoners are nearly all black. Or nearly black, or nearly whites, nearly black they are so poor. And the poor are like the rotten, everyone knows how they treat the blacks]. The “Carandiru Massacre” was one of the many mass killings whose victims were poor populations in large Brazilian cities. On the subject, see Godoi (2017) and Padovani (2017b).

remains of the prison. This, in many senses, is the affective address that permeates stories and narratives about prisons in São Paulo.

For Karina Biondi (2009), the deactivation of the House of Detention involved important changes in the state prison system after the “Massacre do Carandiru”: a sharp increase in the inmate population – which from 1992 to 2002 rose from 52,000 prisoners to 110,000 – the transfer of male prisons to the central regions of cities in the interior of the state or to the peripheries of the Greater São Paulo metropolitan region, and finally, or as a result, the articulation of a collective of prisoners, the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* [The First Command of the Capital], also known as the *party, fifteen, the command* or the *family*.<sup>8</sup>

Biondi argues that the move of the penitentiaries from the central regions to the interior of the state sought to hide, simultaneously, the growth of the prison population and the PCC. The new prisons, built in cities far from the capital, were larger than those in the city of São Paulo, so that they could meet the growing demand for spaces in the penitentiary system and camouflage the sad scene witnessed by subway passengers on Line One of the Metro in the largest city in the country. The drama of the overpopulated prisons, however, remained exposed at the Carandiru subway stop. The construction of the new penitentiaries was slower than the process of imprisonment and the deficit in prison space become chronic. This made it unviable to close the

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<sup>8</sup> The PCC, or The First Command of the Capital, is a collective, created in the 1990s, with the goal of improving the lives of the prisoners in the prisons of São Paulo. The history of the collective is quite controversial. It may have been created in the Carandiru Detention Center, but it may have been created in another prison from a football team formed by prisoners. In May 2006, on behalf of the *party*, police stations and offices were attacked. The event gained tremendous attention in the media and in the city of São Paulo, during which universities and other institutions (public and private) were closed. The PCC and the process of transference of the male prisons to the interior of the state are recurring themes in the narratives of the female interlocutors of this research due to the impact they have on their decisions and the way they organize or manage their lives. The work of Karina Biondi is the result of a complex analysis about the PCC.



House of Detention. The projects for penitentiary administration and for public safety simultaneously covered up and exacerbated the unsustainability of the São Paulo state prison system.

The pavilions at Carandiru were, however, imploded in 2002, one year after simultaneous rebellions at 29 prison units. The so-called “mega-rebellion”, organized by the PCC, promoted this collective of inmates and prevented state agents, such as the governor of São Paulo, to continue to claim its existence was “nonsense”, “fiction” or to call it “an unimportant group of inmates” in the interviews with the press (Biondi, 2009). To the contrary, as a way to contain and recognize the strong presence of the collective in state penitentiaries, the deactivation of the House of Detention of Carandiru, at the time considered the nerve center of the revolts, was conducted with urgency.

It is strange to walk along the paths in the park built on the former grounds of what was considered the largest prison in Latin America, without finding the voices of those who were assassinated in one of the largest massacres in the history of the state of São Paulo. The impression is that earth was thrown like sawdust over the still moist blood on the asphalt to hide the smell and color of burning flesh. The park allows the subway passengers to see, through the closed train windows, a more peaceful landscape. It allows the traffic to flow. I walk through the park, but some employees of the Female Penitentiaries of the Capital and of Santana, which were relocated to facilities on the grounds of the imploded House of Detention, do not have the courage to walk through the Parque da Juventude: they call it “a haunted park”. Perhaps there are ghosts of the trauma that haunts those who did not die along with the others (Cho, 2008). I walked through the haunted Parque da Juventude in the direction of the Female Penitentiary of the Capital, where “the widows of Carandiru” served their time and remained alive.<sup>9</sup> At 9:30 in the morning I reached the gates of the Female Penitentiary of the Capital.

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<sup>9</sup> The expression “widows of Carandiru” is not a reference to an organized civil movement of victims of police violence in the House of Detention as is, for

### Searching the body of the research(er)

The first door was opened by a long-time, and well-known employee of the prison, which allowed me to ring the bell at the second gate, which gave access to the area of the prison entrance. I touched it, and the “magic eye”, or the peephole of the iron gate opened. Paula, the chief duty guard that week saw me and let me in. I greeted the security guards and gave them my documents; Brazilian ID card, university ID and the authorization to conduct research, which was properly signed by the state secretary of penitentiary administration of São Paulo and the magistrate judge of the Court of Barra Funda. The papers, already crumpled from constantly being removed from my knapsack and being filed at the registrations of entrance to the Penitentiary were, once again, left at the counter and then placed in a book with a black cover and lined sheets on which the employees wrote my name just below the column with the date. “Natália, right?”, they asked, without waiting for my answer while they checked the time to be written next to my name that would still await the register of another time: that of my departure.

I passed through the search, which that day consisted only in opening notebooks, pens, checking the audio recorder, placing my bag in the closet and asking me to pass through the metal detector. As a researcher, I would not have to remove my clothes and conduct a body cavity search over the mirror on the floor of the dressing room – a classic search process to which family members of men and women inmates are subjected. At least on that day, I was a researcher, an anthropologist. On other days, however, I

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example, the collective the “Mães de Maio”. “The Widows of Carandiru” refers to the way that some of my interlocutors produce narratives about their trajectories. It is important to point out that even though it does not refer to an organized civil political group, the expression “widows of Carandiru” aggregates meanings of collective recognition intersected by the experience of imprisonment and death of husbands and boyfriends during the massacre at the Carandiru prison in or as a result of it. The expression makes the bodies of these women, whether they are inmates or not, permanent presences of the dead bodies of their companions.

would be a volunteer of the Incarceration Pastoral, or a “pastoral agent”. On others still, I would be a family member, friend, suspect, or one more naked body squatting over a mirror.

On that morning, at the end of the bureaucratic and mild inspection, I gathered my belongings, passed through the metal detector, **which was turned off**, and continued to the administrative pavilions. I entered the department of rehabilitation to notify the social workers, psychologists and pedagogues in the sector that I had arrived. For the directors of that institution and the staff of the state penitentiary administration, these professionals were responsible for my presence in the unit, and therefore, I had to report to them when I arrived and left the prison. After this procedure, there was still one more gate to cross, the last one before accessing the yard outside the residential pavilions of the Female Penitentiary of the Capital.

Now I presented myself to another checkpoint. I no longer had any documents at hand, only a notebook, pens and the recorder, all previously inspected. I said hello to Joaquina, the security guard on duty at the gate that separated the administration and the residential pavilions of the penitentiary. A long-time employee, Joaquina was one of those who said that she never walked on the dirt paths of the haunted park at Carandiru. As usual, she asked about our common acquaintances, volunteers from the Incarceration Pastoral, my family, and commented on the releases and confinements of the week. “Maria left. Did you know? I was concerned, she has no family in São Paulo. She was sleeping in the street. I even took her a blanket at the gas station where she sleeps at night. Now, this week a few Chinese women arrived. They could not speak any language at all. Do you know anyone who speaks their language? Ah, you don’t know who left and is already back!...”. The passage through that checkpoint, for registration of names and IDs of those who enter and leave the prison did not depend on carrying papers and IDs, but on repertoires of knowledge about the prison itself. Joaquina’s inspection was slower and more sophisticated in any case. After all, the success in the process imposed by Joaquina was expressed

by the opening of the gate and by the sound of her voice wishing you a good job while she handed you a flyer of St. Expeditus, who in Brazil is considered the patron saint of lost causes. Joaquina, however, still had to complete the institutional routines. Like the security guards at the entrance gate, she noted my name and the time of entrance and departure in a record book with the black cover.

With the flyer for Saint Expeditus in hand, I went to the school. That was the space that I occupied when I entered the penitentiary with documents that said I was a researcher/anthropologist.

### **Reviewing the networks of humanitarian and religious service**

I walked down the broad corridor that linked the penitentiary entrance to the gate where searches were conducted in the building designed by architect Francisco de Paula Ramos de Azevedo in 1911. Along the route that connects the two gates, the marks of history can be seen on the building that until today is known by employees of the penitentiary system, and by those who serve or served time there, or visit or visited its cells and pavilions as the state penitentiary. The lack of specification of gender in the former name of the institution reveals that it was a male penitentiary, one of the most important in São Paulo state. Accompanying the process of interiorization of the male prison institutions, the then State Penitentiary gave way, in 2005, to the Female Penitentiary of Santana, which became the largest female penitentiary in Latin America with approximately two thousand five hundred people distributed in six halls of the three residential pavilions.

My visits to the Female Penitentiary of Santana, unlike my passage to the Female Penitentiary of the Capital, were always permeated by the fact that there I was a representative of the Incarceration Pastoral, registered and with an identification document issued by the Secretariat of the Penitentiary Administration that identified me as a "pastoral agent". The

identification card for the “pastoral agent”, as well as my body and the materials that I carried on my weekly visits to that prison unit, were, therefore, polysemic.<sup>10</sup>

My turn had arrived to submit to inspection my documents and anything else with which I intended to take into the prison. On the left side of the counter I left my knapsack that was placed along with countless others on the ground of the inspection room. On the right side I placed my notebook, a pen, my ID from the Incarceration Pastoral and my Brazilian driver’s license. All of this was checked by the security guards and my notebook and pen passed through the x-ray machine. While the objects were examined, I passed through the next post, a location where I would get the notebook, which had very few notes: just names and pavilions, and the pen. In possession of my belongings, I passed through the next room in which I would be the one examined.

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<sup>10</sup> Unlike missionaries from various Evangelical churches and from the small group of Kardec Spiritists, the “pastoral agents” do not present themselves at the prison entrance gate in uniform. To be a “pastoral agent”, it is necessary to take a course which includes readings and debates from Biblical passages and information about Brazil’s Penal Code. The course content and schedule indicate the requirement for action of these “pastoral agents” who need not be Catholic. The agents, who go on religious visits in the female penitentiaries of Santana and of the Capital each Saturday, include nuns, religious women, missionaries, women who live in neighborhoods of the periphery who enter the pastoral due to a past experience of imprisonment of sons, daughters or friends; lawyers (retired or active); human rights activists; law students; volunteers without any direct apparent relationship to the prisons or with the Catholic religion; graduate students and researchers, like me, who work in prisons; and others. None of these “identities” created by means of the first impressions or statuses of action, however, define the people who want to make weekly visits to female or male prisons, hospital centers and custodial prisons. The attempt to separate the course in two days, one religious and another legal, and to specify individuals as “pastoral agents”, is nothing more than an attempt to reveal lines of a complex mesh of relations established between religion, politics, militancy, research, voluntary work, friendship, interlocution and biography. None of these elements is stronger or weaker in the action of the Incarceration Pastoral as a “social entity”. The tension between the threads and which of them stands out is given by the interpersonal relations among the agents and between agents and prisoners. For more data about the Incarceration Pastoral see Godoi (2015).

To a third security guard I turned in my ID from the Incarceration Pastoral who filed it in a book with a black cover where my name was noted below the date and next to the time of my entrance. I removed my earrings and rings, placed them on my notebook with a green cover on the second counter, next to the metal detector. I passed through it, and it did not issue any sound, after all, after so many comings and goings through prisons I learned that to not have any problems at the entrance, it's necessary to wear slacks or shorts (below the knee) without buttons or a metal zipper, and that are not beige or yellow – the colors of the pants used along with white shirts, that compose the uniform that identifies people serving time in the state of São Paulo.

With no problems in the search, I gathered my things on the counter and continued down a narrow corridor until the third gate, where I would give in my driver's license to the security guard responsible for filing all the documents from visitors. One more gate was opened and, finally, I reached the large courtyard of the former state penitentiary. In that penitentiary, as a “pastoral agent”, unlike what occurred as a researcher, I did not need to present myself to the social workers and psychologists in the rehabilitation sector. Carrying my relationship with the Incarceration Pastoral, I continued my walk down the halls, corridors and conviviality cells of the Female Prison of Santana. However, I would have to pass through many more gates.

The building of the state penitentiary was built with three parallel pavilions cut by a broad central corridor that divided them into six halls. The trajectory down the corridor therefore included passages through the access gates to each of the pavilions of incarceration. Since on that Saturday I would be going to the third residential building, I would have to pass through the gates for entering and leaving the health clinic, and the entrances and exits to the first and second pavilions to finally reach the third. In each one of these passages, I would have to inform my destiny to the security guards in the booths formed by the bars that interrupt the passage of visitors. I reached the first gate for the first pavilion and

presented myself to the security guard who opened and closed it right away. The situation was repeated at each of the entrances to the pavilions: two security guards, one standing, and ready to open and close the gates, the other, seated behind a table, was responsible for a book with a black cover full of sheets on which entrances and exits are recorded, as well as dates and times of the frenetic movement of employees, visitors, and inmates coming and going to work, school or medical, psychological or other visits.

After they asked where I was going, they opened the second gate so that I could continue to the hall of the next pavilion and conduct the same procedure, to then continue the walk that would be interrupted, again, by crushed cigarette packs in a window of an even numbered hall to another odd numbered hall of pavilion two. Finally, nearly two hours after having first presented my ID as a volunteer from the Incarceration Pastoral to the employee at the first gate of that penitentiary, I heard the security guard seated behind the table on which sat the black covered registration book for pavilion three ask: “even or odd hall”? “Even hall”, I responded, pointing to the barred gates on the left. “Name?”; “Natália Corazza Padovani”. He wrote it down, below the date, next to the time. And let me in.

### **From coughing over the mirror to the economies of technology: inspecting familiar nudity**

For the first time, I was entering a Brazilian prison<sup>11</sup> on the line of family visitors. Marta Tellez had been transferred from the Female Penitentiary of the Capital to the Transitory Sentence Center in Butantã. Just over forty years of age and serving her third sentence in different countries, Marta, Spanish, was concluding her sentence in Brazil. I had returned from a trip to Madrid during which I met her sister and brother-in-law. Marta

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<sup>11</sup> Much of my fieldwork with Brazilians incarcerated in Barcelona, from October 2011 to March 2012, were conducted by means of family visits. In São Paulo, since 2013 I have conducted family visits to a friend who is serving time. I will describe the search that I was submitted to in this article.

wanted to know about her family, her home. I wanted to know about Marta. We agreed through letters that she would put me on her list of family visitors, only in this way could I visit her in Butantã, given that my registrations, either as a researcher, or as a “pastoral agent”, limited my entrance to the Female Penitentiaries of the Capital and Santana. Thus, one month after Marta was transferred, I could finally visit her, with my Brazilian ID card in hand (the original and a copy), proof of residence and of any criminal record. Armed with these papers and with two clear Tupperware containers filled with the salads and fresh fruit that Marta had asked me for, I went to the prison at Butantã. There, I found the main gates open, but even so I would have to pass through the checkpoint to present my documents, and then be searched.

It was Sunday, the day of family visits in most of the São Paulo prisons, and the day had begun hot. The line, however, was not long. Different from those at male penitentiaries, or even at the Female Penitentiary of Santana, where family members often begin to camp at the entrance on Thursday to get a good place on line, and thus, have more time to visit with daughters, wives, husbands, mothers, or fathers. But Butantã was a “center of progression” from which inmates could leave on holidays, like Christmas, for example, and the visitors arrived little by little.

Just in front of me on line, an older woman carried in her hand a bag with containers of pasta, fried chicken, fruits, meatballs and in her other hand, a boy of approximately two years old. We reached the first checkpoint where I gave in the papers needed to get me on the list of Marta’s visitors. The security guard who took the documents said that I could enter that day, but that, on future visits, I would have to wait for confirmation of authorization of my entrance from the directors of the unit who would, in case my visits were permitted, produce an ID with which I would present myself on Sundays, at that same checkpoint – an ID that the woman in front of me and the man behind me already had.

We passed through a split doorway in which only the bottom half had been closed. In the following room there was a conveyor



belt with an x-ray and metal detector. We turned in our bags and containers to the guard responsible for inspections that day. She opened them and examined all the food. Then it was our turn. The same guard sent us, one by one, to the changing space behind the counter and the x-ray machine; men to one side, women to the other. At that point, as we already knew we would have to do, we removed all our clothes. The older woman, who continued to hold the boy, also removed his clothes and diaper. Naked, we gave our clothes to the guard who would check them. Meanwhile, individually, each one entered one of the small closed concrete booths with curtains.

On the floor of the booth was a little mirror without a frame and with oxidation stains. The security guard who had taken my clothes opened the curtain and entered. She asked me to face in front and raise my arms, and then turn around. Finally, she asked me to squat over the mirror and open my legs as wide as possible, even the sides of my buttocks. “Now cough!”; I coughed; “again”; I coughed. She twisted her head as if looking for something even deeper inside me and asked me to begin the entire process again. I repeated, squatted and coughed three more times over the mirror while I held my legs and my body totally open. She was finally satisfied. She said that I could get dressed as she gave me my clothes. I got dressed. When I left the booth to look for the salads and fruit promised to Marta, the guard to whom I had given the documents at the first counter came up to me: “I think I know you”; “maybe”, I responded; “have you already visited here before?”; “no, it’s my first time”; “but you already visited other units. Aren’t you from the Incarceration Pastoral?”; “Yes, I am”; “Look, today you can go in, but later you will have to decide. Either its *family*, or *pastoral*. Not both!”, I agreed and thanked her. I headed to the yard where Marta was waiting for me.

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Vexatious is how the social movements call the “intimate searches” or body cavity searches, given to visitors of people who

are incarcerated in prisons throughout Brazil.<sup>12</sup> Since April 2016, the vexatious searches *of women* are prohibited in all Brazilian prisons (emphasis mine). Law n. 13.271/2016 calls for a fine of R\$20 thousand reals in case of non-compliance, with the funds to be allocated to agencies for protection of women’s rights. In São Paulo, on 12 August 2014, Law n. 15.552 was approved that prohibits the vexatious searches of visitors in prison establishments. The practice of searching was substituted by a scanner,<sup>13</sup> a machine composed of a conveyor belt and an x-ray detection system. However, the vexatious searches continued to be applied to visitors to São Paulo state prisons until 2017.

Since 2016 I have visited Wendy, a South African from Johannesburg, who I met during my master’s research, in 2008. Wendy, who is serving her third sentence in the Female Penitentiary of the Capital, added my name to the list of her family visitors at the prison. This allowed me to visit her twice a month, and to have contact with her family in South Africa by WhatsApp and Facebook. In December 2017, I was one of the women who, dressed in leggings and a tee-shirt, always pink, red or green,<sup>14</sup> stood on line at the entrance for family visits to the Female Penitentiary of the Capital. We all spoke and smoked while watching children climbing the bars of the prison gates, Fathers, mothers, children and husbands: Brazilian men and women, as well as Bolivians, Angolans and people of other nationalities,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See page <http://www.fimdarevistavexatoria.org.br/> – last accessed on: 19 July. 2019.

<sup>13</sup> “Scanner corporal humaniza revista íntima e estimula visitas a internos”. Conselho Nacional de Justiça – 9 July 2017 [<http://cni.jus.br/noticias/cni/87129-scanner-corporal-humaniza-revista-intima-e-estimula-visitas-a-presos-2>] – last accessed on: 19 July. 2019.

<sup>14</sup> The prison units indicate what colors are permitted or prohibited in visitors’ clothing. They must use clothes without zippers or metal buttons. As Rafael Godoi (2015) described, the visiting lines at prisons are mostly composed of women dressed in leggings.

<sup>15</sup> The Penitenciária Feminina da Capital [Female Penitentiary of the Capital] is a prison unit occupied mostly by “foreigners” who are serving sentences in Brazil. Most of the people imprisoned there are accused of involvement with the drug

were on line. Everyone was carrying bags with food that was getting cold, melting ice cream and soda getting warm in the December sun. It was the visit for the New Year's party, and we would still pass through the vexatious search. Only in January 2018 was the vexatious search definitively terminated at that prison. "The Female Penitentiary of the Capital was the last prison to receive a *scanner*", they told us while we waited on line to once again take off our clothes, and cough over the mirror.

I can't say if the Female Penitentiary of the Capital was truly the last to receive a scanner, but in fact in January 2018 the vexatious search was no longer applied at that prison. The scanner would impose other search technologies on the *familiar nudity*.

That day the line was much shorter. It was the second week of January and a significant number of people who visited in December were not at the prison gate that Sunday. Even so, the wait took more than two hours. The scanner had just arrived and the security staff at the prison was beginning to learn to work with the contraption. I and a few companions and acquaintances on line, almost always the same people, complained about the delay. I had arrived at 9 am and was only able to enter to be searched after the staff lunch, at 1 pm.

I entered with the fish stew that Wendy said she was craving. The dish that I had made the day before was cold in the clear plastic Tupperware. The *Itubaína* soda, Wendy's favorite, and which I had left in the freezer the night before, was warm. The security guard opened the bottle and it fizzed out on the inspection table. She smelled it to check if the drink was not doctored, and let

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trade. My master's and doctoral research were conducted at this prison, but the central focus was not on the transnational mobilities of the people incarcerated there. Since my post-doctoral study in 2016, and in my current research project begun in 2018, I have specifically analyzed the juxtaposition between migratory mobilities and prison trajectories (Projects: FAPESP 2016/08142-7: "*É pior ser imigrante irregular que criminoso internacional*": *Gênero nas tramas dos deslocamentos transnacionais através das prisões*. FAPESP 2018/02551-8: *Bipolar de Documentos: Gênero e 'localizações sociais' nos deslocamentos transnacionais através das prisões*).

it go. But as soon as she opened the Tupperware with the fish stew, she found an item that had become prohibited the week before my visit: green pitless olives. Tired, the employee asked me if I wanted to remove the olives or if I preferred not to enter with the dish. Exhausted, but hungry, I asked to remove the olives, a task that the guard did with a bread knife with a red handle, and not without complaining. "Then you complain about the long lines! You have to check to know what food is prohibited in the pavilion".<sup>16</sup> Silent, I waited patiently for the olives to be removed. Only after the food was checked did I go to the next step of the search.

In the room with the scanner there were three guards operating the machine and two receiving the family members who arrived to pass through the procedure. In front of me were two women and two children, all from the same family. The younger woman's belly revealed she was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. The older woman cared for the two children who were between four to six. They got on the scanner's conveyor belt, one after the other, raising their elbows to the height of their ears and spreading their legs slightly. The security guards responsible for the area of the *scanner* praised the children. "How smart! They already know the procedure", they said. After them, the pregnant woman and her older sister stepped up somewhat boldly on the device's conveyor belt. Watching the scene, I could not help but feel upset to see a pregnant woman submitted to an x-ray, and I was still somewhat disturbed about "how smart" the children were who knew the right position to be scanned by that machinery. The

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<sup>16</sup> To say that a "food is being punished in the pavilion" is to say that the food was prohibited as punishment for the entire pavilion, or even the entire prison. This occurs, according to the prison administration, because the specific item was involved in some type of transgression, something was found inside a sack of pitted olives, for example. The enormous seasonality with which foods enter and are removed from "punishment" makes the life of family visitors difficult, but also for the prison staff. The guards, in turn, regularly blame the family members and prisoners for not being aware of the arbitrary and seasonal "punishments" of the prisoners and their network of affects.

family, in turn, continued contently inside the area of the pavilions. The children played with each other, while the women walked, alleviated, to finally go see their daughter and older sister who was serving time.

It was my turn to be searched.

I warned that I was menstruating, to which the agent responded by requesting that we go to the cubicle where the vexatious searches were conducted. There I was given a “sanitary pad from the prison”, since I could not enter the pavilions using a pad from the “outside” in which, also according to the prison administration, I could be hiding something. In the cubicle, she watched me during the entire exchange of sanitary pads. Finally, she sent me to the body scanner. Without as much abandon as the children, I raised my elbows to my ears. I slightly spread my legs and the track began to move forward. Finally, my body passed through the scanner.

I got my bag with the cold fish stew and the warm *Itubaína* soda. As usual, I still had to place my right arm in a small cardboard box illuminated with ultraviolet light. This was a small dark chamber in which the security guard painted a mark on my arm with ink visible only inside the box. At the end of the visit, I would once again place my arm in the box so that the staff could confirm that the person who leaves the prison is the same as the one who entered.

I finally crossed the entrance gate to the pavilions of the Female Penitentiary of the Capital. “Have a good visit!”, one of the guards said to me. At the entrance to the pavilion where Wendy was incarcerated,<sup>17</sup> I gave my identification to the guard at the gate that separated the yard outside the prison from the living blocks. She took my “family visiting card” and gave me a number printed on a piece of paper. When leaving I would have to return the document that attested that I was a “visitor” of Wendy. Now I visited Wendy. She was clinging to the bars of the pavilion gate, anxiously awaiting my entrance. That is where my visit began.

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<sup>17</sup> While writing this article, in June 2019, Wendy was still in prison.

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On that same day, at the end of the visit, when leaving the Female Penitentiary of the Capital, I met Paula, the same security guard who, as chief of the unit, usually received me when I entered the unit carrying my academic credentials. We said hello and she asked how I was, if I had finished my study. I said yes, but that I continued to work with prison research. To which she replied: “did you come to visit your sister today?”, I confirmed. She took my documents at the gate and said goodbye. I passed through the door through which so many times I had entered holding many different documents and forms from various inspections. Now, however, Paula had no more doubts. I, a white, Brazilian, a researcher from a public university in São Paulo and a former volunteer of the Incarceration Pastoral had become the sister of a black South African woman, Wendy. The grammar of the prison visit is a family grammar.

Sister of the passage<sup>18</sup> that I am, I observed visiting day.

### Some final considerations

As I described above, search procedures in the visits made to prison units when carrying identification from the pastoral or the university carried gradations of intensity about what would be searched. As a researcher, my documents were recorded on the pages of a black book, my belongings removed from my knapsack and quickly examined while my body passed through a metal detector that was turned off. To pass through the gates of the prisons carrying the card from the Incarceration Pastoral,

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<sup>18</sup> “Sister of the passage” is the expression used to refer to a friend on whom one can count during “the tough journey of the sentence”. The bonds between sisters of the journey are relationships of mutual help intertwined by exchanges of affection, care, food and money. They are bonds nourished by the maintenance of life in the broad sense. They are bonds created through the exchange of substances that produce daily life. Food, money, secrets and affections are like the *relatedness* of which Carsten (2004) speaks. They are substances that produce family.

meanwhile, meant to have notebooks read, objects X-rayed, and the body submit to the metal detector turned on and fully functioning. Clothes, the size of earrings and rings were also inspected and sometimes seized.

Meanwhile, with my name on the *list of family visitors*, the search encompassed other examination techniques. Food and body were carefully inspected, handled, melted and discharacterized by hours on the visiting line or in the search process. The containers were opened, and the food stirred. If in the vexatious searches pants pockets and clothes were squeezed and turned inside out, with everything also X-rayed and, finally the bodies were undressed, opened-up and inspected following a ritual of movements: the opening and closing of arms, breasts, legs, vaginas, rectums and penises. In the search with the scanner, it is no longer a cough or a bodily secretion that are placed on the mirror before the palpating eyes of the guards, but the expertise in knowing how to be searched, to position oneself correctly on the conveyor belt of the contraption that X-rays a woman's pregnant belly. As demonstrated by Jeganathan (2018), the very technology of the checkpoints is developed and applied selectively to certain populations and corporalities.

Processes of examination and crossings of the borders of prisons and their checkpoints, speak of the passage of the researcher/volunteer/friend/family member/sister in the process of production of her relationship with the prison: a process of ethnographic and anthropological production. To enter the multiple gates to a field implies being located through its own marks of intelligibility. And, as much as it may seem to be, no mark excludes the other. To be a friend, "sister of the passage" and volunteer of the Incarceration Pastoral does not mean not being an anthropologist. The deeper the passage, however, the more the anthropologist is subsumed. In the relationship, a significant portion of the perplexity is juxtaposed by what is *familiar* to the field of prisons.

Categorizations that previously located me socially as an "academic" are resignified when my crossings are made viable by

relationships that locate me as an agent of a humanitarian and religious institution, as is the case of the Incarceration Pastoral. Other resignifications are produced when crossing prison frontiers under a relationship of intimacy documented by a family tie that locates those registered on the *list of family visitors*.

All of these categorizations, however, are necessarily permeated by "geographies of power marked by gender". The social localization of the anthropologist in relation to the prison is a social location of territoriality and intimacy among institutional apparatuses of the state and of knowledge. These apparatuses are marked by different forms of masculinity. It is not by chance, as I demonstrated in another moment (Padovani, 2015), that to be located in a prison as an anthropologist means to be named a "type of Indiana Jones". This denomination is linked to the whiteness that edifies the knowledges recognized as particular to a university institution. This white masculinity, however, does not apply to the functioning of the metal detectors in their scanning process, it does apply to the perceptive questions of Joázinha.

In contrast, the humanitarian agent and the family visit, are located according to territorialities and corporalities that intersect gender, race and class at the prison gates. Attributes of femininity are materialized at the prison checkpoint by the notion of care. The policing aimed at clothing, earrings and makeup that can [or cannot] dress the body of the volunteer from the Incarceration Pastoral reveal the policing that inspects its suitability to a certain notion of white Western "humanitarianism" of good civilized women who penetrate the wild territory to "save" the colonial women (Spivak, 2010; Abu-Lughod, 2012). The search during my crossings of prison borders when carrying identification from the Incarceration Pastoral was the fine inspection aimed at a docile, benevolent yet nevertheless, disturbing femininity - a femininity produced in relation to the other, to the "women inmates" and their families.

It is the care for the food, the children and the penetration of the apparatuses of the state of the body cavities to be searched and X-rayed, that produce, in turn, the femininity of the visiting



line. A line that, if not composed exclusively of women, is still categorized as feminine. Processes of penetration have always been related to the feminization of subjects submitted to technologies of examination, search and violation (McClintock, 2010). But the dynamic of the line of the family visit also reveals possible twists in gender relations and practices of penetration in the relationship between family members and prisons.

Finally, it is by means of the subservient passage, of the resilient patience (Guterres, 2014) of one who waits under the sun for visiting time, of one who quietly accepts the removal of “punished” food from inside the pots of food and of who is submitted to be completely x-rayed, that smart children skip inside prisons. Family visiting day thus produces the effect of a subversive penetration at the state institution. It is an invasion of the state territory which takes place at its margins (Das; Poole, 2004),<sup>19</sup> through the semantic and affectionate territories that connect neighborhoods and prisons and that in the process of this connection, remake them and unmake them.

To speak of the anthropological passage through the corridors of the penitentiary pavilions is more forceful when the methodological analysis uses tools coined at the heart of feminist theories. The places of enunciation through which pass the productions of knowledge, after all, stem from categorizations of differences that are produced by asymmetries and hierarchies of power that are inescapably produced by gender relations and its intersections. The relationship established between university and

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<sup>19</sup> By “margins”, Das and Poole do not understand regions or populations about which the state acts only in a weakened form. The concept is linked to an idea of the centralized and rationally ordered state. A notion tied to the image of loss of its strength in peripheral zones, that, because they are distant, are more difficult to serve with state policies. A perception linked to the terms of “vulnerability” and “victimization” that has supported the characterization of neighborhoods placed in relation to prisons in part of the literature about the issue. To the contrary, the margins of which Veena Das and Deborah Poole speak involve territorial spaces and practices in which laws and processes of the state are colonized by other forms of regulation articulated by subjects in their agencies and their relations (Das; Poole, 2004:24).

penitentiary at the crossing of the prison checkpoint is an effect of the geographies of power marked by gender that locate both institutions according to distinct attributes of masculinity.

The gender relations that permeate the anthropological passage through the prison also allow examining how asymmetries of power are subtly twisted in the daily practices of this journey by the grammar of care and family bonds. Joaquina articulates this grammar in her refined process as a *checkpoint* of the knowledge of the anthropologist about the field to which she requires penetrating. This is a grammar that resignifies the social location of the anthropologist in the process of the visit to her sister. It is a grammar that locates the expertise of the search of the children who colonize the prison with their skipping.

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