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Anthropological Engagements with the Prison: gender perspectives

In recent years, a good number of collections on prison ethnographies has been published (Bandyopadhyay *et alii*, 2013; Drake; Earle, 2013; Jewkes, 2013; Martin *et alii*, 2014; Ugelvik, 2014; Drake *et alii*, 2015; Godoi; Mallart, 2017; Frois 2017). These are drawn from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds – criminology, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and so on - providing great insight to the challenges and opportunities of ethnography as “research practice” (Peirano, 2014) in prisons. This dossier takes its outset in the recent collections on prison ethnographies, but it also proposes to densify the analysis development in this field by calling attention to the centrality of gender in fieldwork in and of prisons.

Whereas seventeen years ago Loïc Wacquant (2002) wondered what had happened to ethnographies and anthropological studies of prison in the age of mass incarceration, today there is a plethora of anthropological studies of prison and experiences of imprisonment. Yet, even though anthropologists are increasingly engaged in prison research little is ever written on the particular epistemological, ethical and methodological questions of anthropological engagements with the prison (Rhodes, 2013). This dossier seeks to address this important gap in the literature by looking beyond ethnography as research practice, towards reflecting on the particular challenges and opportunities of conducting anthropological studies in and of prison establishments.

Conducting research in prison demands not just the collaboration of the research participants themselves, but also of agents that bring together a whole “institutional network” (Gregori, 2000) in which take part the prison system dispositive, as well as religious groups, NGOs and organized civil society groups that act in this field. The kind of access that the researcher is granted in prison influences the engagement she/he will have with people within and the collaborations that are possible, necessary or even

inevitable to the research process - what impact do these bear in the production of knowledge (*Gaborit, in this volume*)? What happens when the different actors (prisoners, staff, policymakers, civil society) work together or against one another to bring about sociopolitical change? In what ways do emotions and senses affect how daily-life in prison is perceived and experienced (*see Frois; Osuna e Pedroso de Lima, in this volume*)? How to make sense of the emotional connections and collaborations established in such contexts? Prisons thus present particular challenges towards anthropological knowledge. But they also may present particular opportunities to advance anthropological enquiry, as is explored in the articles of this special issue.

Prisons are not just spaces of confinement, they are spaces where legitimacy, punishment, justice, deprivation and resistance take expression in daily life - where such concepts are lived, experienced and contested, not just by prisoners themselves but also by others involved in their life as officers, staff (Nascimento, 2019) and family members (*see Lago, in this volume*). In fact, an argument that runs through all the articles published in this special issue is that prisons are neither “closed” nor “total institutions” (Goffman, 1961). Scrutinising the “ethnographic effect” (Strathern, 1999) in prison field, means to analyse the porosities of prisons and how the ethnographer take part on that.

The contributions on this special issue, therefore, pay particular attention to matters of positionality, or “social location” (Mahler; Pessar, 2001; *Padovani, in this volume*), to access and personal engagement (*see Bertrami, Uziel; Hernández, in this volume*) and, more specifically, explores the dynamics of intimacy, collaboration (*see Lago, in this volume*), as well as how emotions impact the fieldwork in prison research (*see Ballesteros Pena, in this volume*). These dynamics are inescapably produced through power and affection relationships entangled by many attributes that localize the researcher as a “foreign” (*see Ordoñez-Vargas, in this volume*); as a member of prison staff or someone who also works as volunteer in a human rights organization. To be localized as a “foreign”, as part of the “prison staff” or “part of an NGO”, for

instance, creates social expectations that are shuffled by and in the trajectories and gender, sexuality, race and class attributes embodied by the researchers themselves, as the article of Ceu Cavalcanti and Vanessa Sander, published in this Special Issue, demonstrate.

This special issue grew out of the Anthropology of Confinement network, under the European Association of Social Anthropology, founded by Ueli Hostettler, Ines Hasselberg and Carolina Sanchez Boe in 2014, and out of the workshop on Prison Sexuality and Reproductive Rights organized by Anna Uziel and Natalia Corazza Padovani¹ at the Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) in 2018. Setting the gaze in a number of geographical contexts - Brazil, Myanmar, Portugal and Spain– the contributors offer empirical insights and conceptual considerations to the important issues outlined above and provide critical discussions on the advancement of anthropological knowledge and the prison encounter, which gain greatly from collaborations across countries, languages and continents.

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¹ The 1^o International Workshop “Prisons, sexualities, gender and rights: challenges and propositions of contemporary researches”, occurred in Rio de Janeiro during April, 2018. It was organized by Anna Paula Uziel; Luisa Bertrami D’Angelo; Jimena de Garay Hémandez; Bárbara Rocha da Silva; Vanessa Pereira de Lima and all members of the GEPSID – Subjectivities, Institutions and folds research group of State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). The event was also organized in collaboration with Natália Corazza Padovani from Gender Studies Centre of State Campinas University (Pagu/UNICAMP). The workshop was founded by Brazilian Council for Scientific and Technological Development – CNPq and by the French Consul in Brazil.

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