

# Ethnography

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## Closed circuits Kinship, neighborhood and incarceration in urban Portugal

■ Manuela Ivone P. da Cunha

*Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal*

**ABSTRACT** ■ The notion that prisons are a 'world apart', with their walls severing prisoners from their external relationships, and incarceration an interruption, 'time away' spent in a separate social universe, has provided an adequate framework for understanding the social realities of imprisonment in the past. But it has also created an analytical dead angle that prevents us from identifying the ramifying social effects of concentrated incarceration upon both the prison and heavily penalized lower-class neighborhoods. This article addresses these effects with data from an ethnographic revisit of a major women's prison in Portugal, where the recomposition of the inmate population that has accompanied the rapid inflation of the country's carceral population is especially pronounced and entails the activation of wide-ranging carceralized networks bringing kinship and neighborhood into the prison as well as the prison into the domestic world. The analysis focuses on the ways whereby these constellations have transformed the experience of confinement and the texture of correctional life, calling for a reconsideration of the theoretical status of the prison as a 'total institution' and for exploring anew the boundary that separates it (or not) from outside worlds.

**KEY WORDS** ■ prison, concentrated incarceration, drugs, family, neighborhood, women's imprisonment, Portugal

**326 Ethnography 9(3)**

Over the past two decades, the boundary between the carceral world and the outside world in many societies has tended to become more permeable as a result of organizational changes that have articulated the prison to other institutions, regulations that subordinate it to outside control, and a growing flow of goods, services and communications (e.g. Barak Glanz, 1981; Cunha, 2002; Stastny and Tyrnauer, 1982; Wacquant, 2001). Recognition of this kind of institutional opening has led several authors to question the adequacy of Goffman's model and to declare it outdated (see Farrington, 1992; Lemire, 1990; Walker, 1987). Yet a close examination of contemporary experiences of confinement reveals far deeper, less apparent porosities. The concurrent or consequent imprisonment of kin, friends and neighbors is an especially pertinent feature of concentrated incarceration such as I observed in a Portuguese women's custodial establishment, insofar as prison no longer represents a reality between brackets or an anonymous social hiatus. Such networks of precarceral ties create a continuity with the outside world before, during and after confinement, and transform the nature of prison sociality and daily life, which cease to be self-referential. Life inside and outside then become inextricably intertwined.

**A carceral revisit aborted**

A decade after a two-year research sojourn in the major women's penitentiary of Portugal, I returned to the same institution for a re-study of identity management and carceral sociality – or so I intended. But I had not anticipated the magnitude of the transformations that affected this universe in the meantime. Their scope and scale forced me to reconsider from top to bottom the focus of my research. During the 1990s, the rapid growth of the carceral population in Portugal was accompanied by a qualitative shift which made the daily life of inmates barely recognizable to my eyes. In this ten-year period, the country's correctional stock nearly doubled, jumping from 7965 to 14,236, to post the highest incarceration rate in the European Union with 145 inmates per 100,000 in 2000,<sup>1</sup> while the proportion of women among inmates rose from six to ten percent – also the highest figure for the European Union. However, behind these figures another, more discreet, transformation has been occurring: the confined populations are now often traversed by networks of kinship and neighborhood, that is, clusters of pre-prison ties which transport and reenact relational circles behind bars. The prison is thus no longer jumbling individual lives together randomly –or not as randomly as before. A new question thus imposed itself upon me: what are the implications of social clustering for carceral life and for the experience of confinement, which is presumed to entail a sociobiographical rupture and to set one apart from one's previous social

universe? Thus my return to the field would not be an ethnographic revisit (Burawoy, 2003), aimed at comparing, topic by topic, the present with the past according to a research script designed ten years earlier. It would have to open up an entirely different line of inquiry.

From January through December 1997, I conducted intensive fieldwork in the Estabelecimento Prisional de Tires (colloquially known as Tires). Located near Lisbon, Tires has been the main penitentiary for women in the country since its opening in 1954.<sup>2</sup> Its compound include, among other buildings, three prison blocks, mostly with individual cells occupied by two to three inmates. In January 1997, there were 820 inmates, between convicts and detainees.<sup>3</sup> Most convicts (69%) were serving sentences of more than five years (further sociographic data on them will be provided below). I conducted 70 in-depth interviews with women selected by combining a snowball progression that followed 'natural' networks and a systematic sampling that diversified inmates along lines of penal and social profile, as well as length and experience of confinement (Cunha, 1994, 2002). The richest and most productive data, however, were derived from participating in prison daily life, several times a week, in stretches from six to 48 hours, both in its routines and in its various social plots, episodes, quarrels, and by interacting with participants as these events unfolded in all unpredictability. The more I knew (and by making apparent to them that I knew what was going on), the more I was allowed to know without having to ask. In both periods of fieldwork, I had unrestricted access to all prison facilities, by daytime and nighttime, which enabled me to observe and take part in most prison activities, as well as to engage in individual and group conversations on a regular basis and varied circumstances.

How did the constellations of family, friends and neighbors multiply in the prison landscape? Two sets of causal factors lie behind this particular reorganization of the carceral population (Cunha, 2002, 2005). The first resides in the specific policies of penal repression aimed at retail drug trafficking during the past decade. Apart from having fostered procedural massification, whereby the courts tend to aggregate several individual drug cases into a single one regardless of their degree of connectedness (Maia Costa, 1998),<sup>4</sup> drug control fostered a proactive style of law enforcement that increased the potential for selectivity and bias. Police interventions were increasingly aimed at poor urban neighborhoods, which became routine targets of intensive surveillance and indiscriminate sweeps. As in other countries where the penal repression of drugs has reinforced similar trends in crime control (Dorn et al., 1992; Duprez and Kokoreff, 2000; Tonry, 1995), these stigmatized territories are now massive suppliers of inmates, and the geography of imprisonment has grown remarkably predictable. It is therefore not surprising that co-prisoners are often relatives and neighbors, imprisoned successively or simultaneously. This was

**328 Ethnography 9(3)**

not the case in Portugal until the 1990s, with the exception of the gypsies, a stigmatized minority which had already experienced a similar kind of collective targeting in rural areas (Cunha, 1994).

This transformation of the inmate population is also shaped by the specificity of the Portuguese drug economy. Retail trafficking in urban Portugal, which is the more exposed and risky side of the trade, has developed along kinship and neighborhood ties, and it has relied on traditional webs of solidarity operating in the dispossessed districts of the city (Chaves, 1999; Santos, 1993). Such is the case with *fiado*, one of the robust cultural forms of mutual assistance and interest-free informal loans that facilitate the circulation of both legal and illegal goods.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that the drug economy is usually organized in the form of extensive networks of the kind we now find in prisons. On the contrary: it revolves around small, variable circles of associates (kin or neighbors) that have flexible structures and work autonomously. But small-scale drug trafficking brought to impoverished urban areas a booming structure of illegal opportunities in which all of the residents could participate, regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity. These retail markets are very weakly stratified along these lines; the very fluidity of their 'free-lance' profile, as opposed to a 'business' structure prevalent in the US (see Johnson et al., 1992), makes existing ideological barriers to entry more permeable and ineffective.<sup>6</sup>

The drug economy thus stands out today as the main agency organizing the collective peregrination between deprived urban communities and the prison, due to the combination of the specificity of its inscription in the social structure of poor Portuguese neighborhoods and the penal policy of active and massive repression it has triggered. Imprisoned networks of kin and neighbors are a central feature of this circulation. The prominence they gain in women's institutions stems partly from the startling homogeneity of the female imprisoned population. In the 1990s, women inmates were increasingly drawn from the segments of the working class most deprived of economic and educational capital: from 1987 to 1997 the proportion of women who hold jobs in the bottom tier of the service economy rose from four percent to 33 percent, and the proportion who had never gone to school or gone beyond fourth grade rose from 47 percent to 59 percent. This population also presented a more homogenous penal profile. Whereas the male carceral population is also fairly homogeneous (with property and drug-related offenses accounting for 80% of convictions), its distribution is much more balanced than that of its female counterpart: 46 percent of confined men were for property offenses and 34 percent for drug-related offenses, while the proportion of women is 16 percent and 69 percent respectively (Ministério da Justiça, 1997). In Tires, 76 percent of women in 1997 were charged or convicted of drug trafficking, compared to 37 percent ten years earlier, with property offenders representing no more than 13

percent in 1997. The present centrality of drug offenses in women's convictions also accounts for the faster rise in Portugal's female incarceration rates relative to men: these are the crimes with the highest conviction rates and among the harshest sentences.

Women thus occupy a conspicuous position in the processes that systematically link prisons to a small number of neighborhoods, that is, the genesis of carceral clusters of kin, friends, and neighbors. In Tires, aunts, cousins, sisters, sisters-in-law, mothers, grand-mothers and mothers-in-law now find themselves in prison together, in a circle of kin that often counts more than a dozen people, sometimes encompassing four generations (as when a great-grandson is born in the prison to an inmate whose daughter and granddaughter are also confined there). I do not include here the male kin serving their own sentences in other facilities. These circles of relatives, in turn, intertwine with circles of neighbors to form wide-ranging networks of inmates who knew each other prior to imprisonment. It should also be noted that, because these in-prison relatives are real kin from pre-prison life, the family configurations that the Tires inmates develop are quite different from the 'make-believe families' that have been a central topic of the literature on women's prisons for decades (together with the prison romantic dyads) (Giallombardo, 1966; Kosofski and Ellis, 1958; or Selling, 1931 [AQ: not in refs list, please supply] to Foster, 1975; Mitchell, 1975; or Propper, 1981). Tires's family circles are not tied to any specific of women's prison. The two sets of processes that route these families, as well as their neighbors, to this custodial facility, namely, the drug economy as an open structure of illegal opportunities and the sociospatial targeting of penal repression, are also at play in the rising incarceration of men in Portugal, although their effects are more concentrated, and therefore more salient, in women's facilities.

### Searching for family, friends and neighbors

If a decade ago the presence of such pre-prison networks could be detected, it was limited strictly to the circle of gypsy prisoners (see Cunha, 1994), a group of five dozen inmates stemming from a stigmatized minority which was then especially targeted by law enforcement. Today, this presence permeates the entire institution. Between one-half and two-thirds of the inmates in Tires had family members inside (a conservative estimate based on data registered in social-educational files), and many more had neighbors or acquaintances. The prisoners originating from the two main metropolitan areas of the country (78%), those of Lisbon and Porto, came from the same neighborhoods (89% and 86%, respectively), and similar patterns of concentration obtain within the remaining urban provenances.

**330 Ethnography 9(3)**

Combing through the criminological and sociological literature on prisons and imprisonment, both before and after the present wave of mass incarceration, this phenomenon appears to be unparalleled. Is this because such networks did not exist in other prison contexts or is it that the analytic focus of prison studies rendered them invisible? Pre-prison ties, and incarceration as a biographical element in the lives of relatives and acquaintances, are mentioned here and there but only sporadically, en passant, and in the interstices of other concerns. For example, in a study combining fieldwork inside and outside the prison, Fleisher (1995: 124–5) registers the presence of intramural neighborhood relationships under the terms ‘road dog’ and ‘homeboy’ when he addresses the composition of ‘gangs’ or ‘sets’.<sup>7</sup> Later on, it is again solely via the words of Fleisher informants that we are made aware of the co-presence of kin behind bars. This occurs when a new arrival tells him exultantly that he no longer feels scared because he just met a cousin and a couple of neighborhood acquaintances (Fleisher, 1995). References to ‘homeboys’ or ‘homeys’ keep surfacing throughout the text, but without Fleisher paying notice.

‘Homeboys’ are also briefly mentioned by Irwin (1980: 58–9) in his description of prison networks and cliques. Leo Carroll (1974: 100–01) refers to ‘street partners’ (a category including ‘one’s actual biological relations’) and, more recently, Juanita Díaz-Cotto (1996: 297–8) mentions ‘homegirls’. Other authors subsume such ties within a general profile of the prison population, as does Stewart (1994: 13), when he reports at the outset of his study that ‘the vast majority [of the inmate population] reported having an immediate family member or close friend in prison’. This is described as a ‘startling fact’, but Stewart does not examine its implications inside or outside the prison. The fact described resonates with statistical data concerning a 1996 profile of jail inmates in the US, according to which ‘nearly half of the inmates reported that a family member had ever been incarcerated’ (Harlow, 1998). It is also consistent with quantitative data on detainees’s incarcerated relatives reported by Wacquant (2004).

In these studies, pre-prison networks of acquaintance can be inferred by the reader only from the words of the prisoners or they are presented as brief, inconsequential sociographical data, or merely alluded to when dealing with other issues. They are not recognized as such or accorded any analytical relevance and do not, therefore, constitute objects of inquiry in themselves. With the exception of Stewart (1994), they may have gone unnoticed by virtue of their insignificance in prison, even though quantitative insignificance is not a straightforward criterion for theoretical irrelevance. Cross-referencing this literature with contemporary studies of the same stigmatized urban neighborhoods that supply the brunt of inmates allows us to question such an assumption. Sommers et al. (1996), for instance, draw a profile of the population they study in two New York

neighborhoods and indicate that 60 percent of these women had a family member in prison. In a similar characterization, Maher (1997) notes that 40 percent of people in a Brooklyn neighborhood she studied had brothers and sisters caught up in the penal justice system, and one-fourth reported family members imprisoned at one moment or another. Wacquant (2001: 114–15) reports that ‘in the late 1980s, three of every four inmates serving sentences in the entire state of New York came from seven black and Latino neighborhoods of New York City [...]’. These are only a few examples of a wider trend described by Patillo et al. (2004: 4–5), whereby ‘prison and jail inmates tend to be disproportionately drawn from a small number of largely poor and minority communities’. This suggests that facts scattered throughout ethnographic studies of gangs in the American inner city represent more than just coincidences, as when Bourgois reports about one of his key informants: ‘He spent a year and a half in prison, where by coincidence he served time [...] with his uncle’ (1989: 332).

Examining French prison studies, I encountered no trace of such family and neighborhood relationships. They might, therefore, be insignificant. However, from the perspective of urban studies, Duprez and Kokoreff (2000) describe the growing repression exercised in marginalized neighborhoods and the territorial concentration of police action which contributes, as in Portugal, to producing large numbers of co-defendants enmeshed in networks of interpersonal acquaintance, since a significant number of these arrestees wind up behind bars, whether to await trial or after conviction. To come to Portugal, in his study of the stigmatized neighborhood of Casal Ventoso in Lisbon, Miguel Chaves (1999: 122) reports:

‘The joint’ [jail/prison] and ‘being locked up’ are experiences that many inhabitants have been through and they are not far removed from the horizon of expectations of many others. [H]undreds of people [circa 800 out of 3000 residents] in the neighborhood have been imprisoned.<sup>8</sup>

I pointed out earlier two sets of factors behind the relative invisibility of pre-prison networks in studies of the prison. First, it is possible that such networks are not extensive enough to have made them worthy of attention, despite growing indications to the contrary in the literature on non-carceral contexts. It may also be that they are still too recent, given the fact that the penal targeting from which they result has been organized to a great extent around drug control. Additionally, such carceral networks may be less prevalent in national contexts other than Portugal due to a differing operation of neighborhood and family networks in the drug economy. A second explanation for that invisibility can be advanced, especially considering that mass repression of drug offenses dates from the early 1980s. It is that the conventional research focus prevents the analysis of exchanges between prisons and neighborhoods as it sets them apart as separate categories. A

**332 Ethnography 9(3)**

prominent exception to this approach is Wacquant (1999, 2001, 2002), who inscribes them both in the dynamics of the regulation of post-Fordist poverty and the neoliberal transformation of the state over the past two decades, thereby providing an analytic framework wherein prison and lower-class districts interlock and where the presence of family, neighbors, and friends in prison can be expected and situated. Yet these precarceral networks have been absent from prison studies. Although prison has for a long time now been located within the wider contexts that shape it as an institution, and however much it was understood to be derived from the cultural baggage that the prisoners bring with them (Irwin and Cressey, 1962; Wellford, 1967), carceral studies have tended not to question the seemingly self-evident nature of its boundaries as defining a closed site of social interaction which succeeds to, and effectively replaces, the pre-prison relational universe. In this sense prison walls would materialize a sharp biographical cut and delineate a social world temporarily autonomous and cut off from the outside, according to the model of the total institution (Goffman, 1999 [1961]; Sykes, 1958). Therefore, it is possible that intraprisson networks of external previous acquaintance were accordingly not recognized as such and emerged in diluted form within a web of relationships that were by definition, 'prison relationships'.

**The prison absorbed by the neighborhood**

In the prison of Tires nowadays, the extension of family and neighborhood ties into the facility has woven a web of 'prison relationships' of another nature, different from the one implied in the model mentioned above. In most cases, a new prisoner arrives together with equally imprisoned family, friends and neighbors, or meets them again inside the institution. Initiation to prison life is therefore undertaken with them or by them. This helps dispel the sense of apprehension inherent to an unfamiliar institution and enables them, at least partly, to maintain the former personal and social identity in a world that otherwise tends to suspend it or corrode it. In any case, prisoners today, unlike those of the past, would probably not relate to the prisoners interviewed by Léonore Le Caisne in a French prison, who thus nicely evokes a 'typical' experience of confinement in a total institution:

This loss of a feeling of coherence and continuity leads the prisoners to question the existence of their person as a whole, as well as their 'truth'. They postulate the existence of a unified 'self', although nobody, in prison at least, is able to recognize it. 'They will never know who I am here', most of them claim. What do they consider their self to be? Where is it to be found? In prison? On the outside? (Le Caisne, 2000: 87)

Upon being put under lock, most Tires prisoners are no longer completely removed from their social world as important sections of this world are dislocated and transported along with them. In this sense, prison ceased to represent a social hiatus. These pre-established networks of kin, neighbors and acquaintances render prison continuous with rather than separate from the outside world. This continuity operates at several levels simultaneously. First, the symbolic boundary that the prison used to represent is now seriously eroded. The stigma which was formerly associated with imprisonment is instituted well before detention, by the very belonging to ill-reputed neighborhoods. It indicates a structural, rather than circumstantial, marginalization. In turn, the prison is already a reality embodied in the daily life of those same urban territories, where it has become an ordinary element of many biographies, a banal destiny. Every other resident has an acquaintance or a relative who is or has been imprisoned (e.g. Chaves, 1999). Prisoners are therefore aware that when they are released they will not be subject to strong censure by their social universe (see also Matos, 2006). Concealing imprisonment is now a rare concern, unlike a decade ago where the remote possibility that outcoming inmates would meet an ex-prisoner on the outside, who would expose their past, cast a shadow over their release. Nowadays, as many prisoners come from the same neighborhood, such concealment would not even be possible.

Second, members of different families travel together to prison facilities (Tires or otherwise) to visit their incarcerated relatives and friends, making the most of the opportunity of a car ride offered by a neighbor. In fact, as the biographical narratives of inmates recurrently indicate, as occasional commentaries by prison guards on visiting days, prisoner and visitor are almost interchangeable statuses, given the frequent shift from one condition to another in different moments of one's life trajectory. These shifting subject positions complexify the prison circuit. A conversation between two women from different neighborhoods of a northern town,<sup>9</sup> who had relatives in common, was interrupted when one of them went to greet a prisoner from Lisbon warmly. They had first met in a southern prison hospital (the Hospital Prisional de Caxias), where one was visiting her mother and the other a sister. Then, they met again not as visitors but as detainees awaiting trial in Custóias prison, in the north of the country. And, finally, they met again as prisoners in Tires.

More than its banality, it is the recent 'normalcy' of the prison that surfaces in the way prisoners insisted on being photographed full face, striking a pose and putting on a smile, when I tried to leave their faces out of the frame. As during the first fieldwork, I was mostly photographing the premises and avoided taking pictures of inmates. One woman asked me for a picture and said that she had photographs of herself in 'all the prisons' (where she had been either a prisoner or a visitor), apart from Tires.

### 334 **Ethnography** 9(3)

A fellow prisoner heard her request and added, without referring to the different statuses of the photographed:

Ah, you've got photos of the prison? I've got loads myself, from other prisons. I've got one I really like, with my brother in Coimbra. But I haven't got any from Tires yet . . .

It was also the 'normalcy' of prison that members of staff liked to invoke when commenting on the atmosphere during prison visits, especially the ease of the children, which 'grow up in the middle of police raids, have lots of kin imprisoned, and [ . . . ] are used to visiting prisons', as one Tires social worker put it. But this wasn't the case with the younger son of Palmira, a gypsy woman who lived on the outskirts of Lisbon and was now serving a seven year sentence in Tires. For him, prison was not yet 'normal' in this sense. The normalization process would be carried out during visiting periods in prison itself, by the mother he visited, with the help of a prison guard. Palmira described it as follows:

My son was eight years old when he saw his first [police] raid. It made a deep impression on him. He just screamed and screamed . . . Not long ago he wrote me a letter with a little note to the warden. 'When is my mum coming out on leave?' He had seen a film on television where the prisoners had their ankles chained together. He thought this had happened to his mum too and just wouldn't stop crying during the prison visit. So a guard took him to the cell to show him that it wasn't like that. I told him we couldn't leave here, but apart from that it's just like life on the outside. 'Prison's just like life on the outside, son'.

The normalization of prison and incarceration can thus start very early on, both inside and outside the institution. In any case, for the adults imprisonment is an ever present reality and is already embodied within pre-prison daily life.

#### **The neighborhood absorbed by the prison 1: thinning outside support**

If the neighborhood has absorbed the prison, it might also be said that the prison has absorbed the neighborhood. Occasionally, imprisonment brings together such a wide range of relatives, friends and neighbors that Tires ends up absorbing a prisoner's immediate circle almost entirely. Consequently, a whole support network, which plays on the outside a crucial role at several stages of the incarceration trajectory, is also amputated. Prisoners affected by the erosion of such external support are deprived of the small extras that make prison life easier: parcels, foodstuffs, envelopes and

stamps, telephone cards and 'pin money' for cigarettes and coffee (see also Comfort, 2002, 2008). These supplies may be totally absent from the start or be discontinued or made less frequent during the prison term for one of two reasons. Either the outside providers are themselves imprisoned, or it becomes too difficult for them to cater to the needs of all those close to them after they have been transferred from Tires and dispersed through other prisons. It is less expensive to send the goods to just one person who then distributes them among others within the same prison.

Such extras are all the more precious now that unemployment has also reached the prison. A decade ago, the supply of prison jobs in Tires was greater than the demand for them. Although work was not compulsory, there was strong pressure on inmates to accept the jobs proposed to them, or they would lose privileges and recommendations for parole. Refusal had to be justified by reasons of *force majeure* such as sickness or school classes. Nowadays, work is not always available for everyone and there might be a long wait before being given a position. As the current prison population is poorer than before, the demand for prison jobs has rocketed and the problem for the inmates now is not how to refuse work but how to obtain it. Consequently, along with the old prison underground economy based on contraband and illegal dealing (of drugs, medication, and goods such as jewelry), a new, informal work-based economy has developed. It is structured in much the same way as its informal counterpart on the outside, where many of the prisoners made a living beforehand (as domestic servants, day-cleaners or street sellers mostly). Prison reinscribes their precarceral positions within a hierarchical axis which now subordinates them to a minority of better-off prisoners. They wash or iron 'a few bits of clothing here and there', as one prisoner with several relatives imprisoned put it. Both she and her daughter benefited from these 'odd jobs', for which they would receive 50 cents or one euro,<sup>10</sup> and/or would do several types of cleaning for a new kind of 'bosses'. One of the latter clearly saw herself in this position:

I have a maid, a gypsy girl, who takes care of all my domestic chores: she tidies up, washes, does the laundry, that sort of thing. She's a very reliable kid. I couldn't do without her now.

One of these 'maids' told me that a prisoner for whom she 'took care of things' appreciated her work so much that she'd already told her she wanted to employ her in her own home when she was released. A structural continuity between life inside and outside prison is thus evident here. Anne-Marie Marchetti (1997, 2002) has identified some of the processes whereby poverty is reproduced – indeed, intensified – within the carceral context. Prison has always been a poor institution (in part, because it tends to be directed towards poor people) as well as a pauperizing one, but not in a

**336 Ethnography 9(3)**

uniform way. The poor enter prison more readily, suffer harsher prison terms and leave prison with greater difficulty. Poverty is understood by Marchetti *lato sensu*, as an absence of several kinds of capital: economic, educational, social, and physical. According to Marchetti, the overall lack of capitals makes an inmate who is poor the 'ideal-typical' prisoner, the 'perfect object' of the total institution:

[H]e is, on the one hand, stripped completely of his former identity [. . .]. On the other hand, he is deprived of all objects that can be bought inside prison. These may be superfluous but are, nevertheless, signs of individuality and self-worth. Nothing comes between the rigorous order of prison discipline and his person. (1997: 193)

The poverty of the women in Tires is not very different from that of French prisoners. Yet it diverges in one important respect. A whole filter of imprisoned relatives, friends and neighbors is interposed between the penitentiary order and the self which continues to uphold their former identity. Moreover, the extent and corresponding implications of these family networks for prison life do more than make these inmates into 'imperfect objects' of the total institution. They suggest rethinking the very notion of prison as a 'total institution', which I will attempt to do at a later stage. This question is equally interwoven with the issue of pauperization, but not in the way suggested by Marchetti when she writes:

The inmate who is already disadvantaged before prison, becomes even more so in the first few months of the prison sentence if his social or family ties were already loose and thus no longer 'benefits' from family support. (1997: 198)

In the case of Tires, as indicated above, life in prison does not become materially more difficult because family, friends and neighbors were already distanced on the outside, but because they are also on the inside.

Second, imprisonment may itself lead to pauperization for other, non-carceral, reasons. Both Augusta – a 56-year-old day-cleaner with a husband and a brother-in-law in prison – and one of her three daughters, while imprisoned in Tires, saw their shacks demolished by the city council. Unlike other people in the neighborhood, they were not included in the city's relocation plan designed to transfer residents in shanty towns to apartments in other areas. Also in Augusta's absence, her son had gradually emptied the shack to finance his drug habit. Therefore, Augusta's imprisonment put her in a doubly vulnerable position on the outside, both because it exposed her connections to trafficking and heightened the stigma, and because it became more difficult for her, *in absaentia*, to keep her belongings safe from kin who were drug users and were themselves equally poor. This latter type of pauperization is a frequent theme in prison conversations.

On two occasions I came across Palmira and Lavinia talking over the common misfortunes that had beset them during their imprisonment. Palmira was pondering who, out of the various possible candidates, all of whom were extended kin, had robbed her house. Lavinia was attempting to comfort Palmira by reminding her that it was her own son who had taken everything from her shack, which was *'even worse'*. A new affinity thus united them, adding to other bonds from outside the prison: they had been colleagues in street vending and Palmira's daughter-in-law had married Lavinia's nephew.

Two of Maria's five children are drug users. One of them sold the contents from her house, which had been furnished in part through a second, more financially advantageous, marriage. On top of this, her stepson forged his father's signature on a checkbook and took everything out of the account.

As for Mina, she came back from her prison leave in a state of shock after finding an empty house. Her brother and sister-in-law, both drug users, had asked Mina if they could stay in her house while Mina and her husband were in prison. They had sold almost all its contents, from furniture to the cooker and the fridge. Mina had to cook in a neighbor's house and put the children to bed on a mattress she had collected from her mother-in-law so that she could spend her leave with them.

The extensive absences that imprisonment implies for those on the outside, both in terms of length of time and the number of those absent, lead to a second set of consequences. Several prisoners alluded to an intention to go back to trafficking from the moment they found out that their now unsupported adolescent or pre-adolescent children, in the absence of both parents and close relatives, were becoming involved in the same business. As one of them put it, 'I don't want my son to replace his parents dealing. When I get out, I'll have to go back to dealing to get him out of it.'

This latter process involves what might be called the 'career circle of drug trafficking', organized around the terms prison-trafficking-consuming. Retail trafficking rarely generates a large amount of capital, in part because trafficking careers are discontinued early on by incarceration. Moreover, a large proportion of such capital is spent on helping imprisoned kin (packages, money, travel expenses to prison institutions which are seldom located far away) and on the clinical treatment of addicted sons and daughters. Zulmira, a day-cleaner and street vendor mother of five in her 60s, with a three-month career in dealing, put her drug user son into a clinic on the proceeds of trafficking. After her confinement, he went back to drugs so Zulmira, who now had no money, was considering turning him in for trafficking and larceny so that he could recover in prison. Rosário, who also had two drug using children who were now 'getting cleaned up', assured me that:

**338 Ethnography 9(3)**

If my son hadn't been put in prison, he would have died. It's like my mother used to say: 'Let your son be put in prison, if not, you'll be weeping at his funeral'. And it's just like that, right. And he was so skinny, he never ate anything.

Arguing that their conviction was based on insufficient evidence, other prisoners wonder whether they had been sent to prison 'as a cure': 'They had nothing on me ... So the only reason they put me here is 'cause they think I'm an addict and they want to get me straight. They sent me here for the cure', said Corina, a 40-year-old cook. This notion that prison is a way of dealing with drug abuse tallies with the social contrast identified by Artur Valentim between two systems for drug control in Portugal. On the one hand, the criminal system, which is geared towards users from lower socio-economic strata, and, on the other, the medical system, which absorbs users from a wider variety of social strata:

[The] data on the social disqualification of the drug using population caught in the snares of the legal system are not confirmed by the medical system ... This social contrast between the police-judicial system and the medical system for drug control inevitably leads us to question the social processes which lead to the former being directed towards the lower classes and the second being appropriated by a more socially diverse group. (Valentim, 1997: 89-90)

Just as prison has been appropriated for a function that, in the case of the socially better off, is normally fulfilled by other institutions, it has also come to incorporate other non-correctional roles. At the beginning of the prison term, the vacuum left in the neighborhood by the simultaneous imprisonment of relatives, friends and neighbors can have repercussions upon the trial. As 'they leave no one on the outside' to testify on their behalf, as one guard put it, detainees on remand have begun to enlist Tires staff to do this for them. Just as they ask a doctor to testify that they are drug abusers in order to get lighter sentences, they also put forward guards and professional staff as character witnesses to testify to their good behavior. For this reason, some staff members worried about taking on such a role, a role that might conflict with the amount of distance and authority necessary to perform afterwards as guards before the same inmates.

We see here how the prison not only physically integrates whole sections of the neighborhoods where prisoners come from, but also how it takes on roles which, by definition, pertain to the outside world. Adding to this new ambiguity, the inside/outside boundary is transposed onto the inside of the prison and is rearticulated within it when many of the visitors who arrive during visiting hours do not come from outside the prison anymore. These are prisoners who visit family and neighbors also in Tires, but who are

servicing their own sentences in other blocks and have no other occasion on which to be with them. Although each block always puts together family members and friends, the webs of interpersonal relations are too complex to be dealt with entirely through logistical distribution. Visiting days, therefore, combine visitors from outside and inside the prison.

Finally, as the end of the prison term approaches, the thinning of the ranks of those outside affects the prisoners from another angle. One of the criteria for granting parole is the existence of external support, namely family support. As whole lines of kin are brought inside the prison, there are few relatives and loved ones remaining on the outside who could fulfill this requirement for the social worker's assessment which contributes to the final decision. For this reason, staff and prisoners commented on several occasions that 'sometimes it's better to be on your own' (i.e. without family members in prison).

Another vacuum left by these processes of collective imprisonment concerns the care of children on the outside. A decade ago, only exceptionally were they sent to children's homes when their mother was incarcerated. They would typically be taken care of by family, friends or neighbors. These mechanisms of the 'welfare society'<sup>11</sup> have not faded and continue to operate. However, the overload that now affects them causes the bureaucratic institutions of the state to be called on much more often to replace them. This is a combined effect of: i) the increased length of the prison sentences being served, which raises the amount of time children have to be looked after by others on the outside, and ii) the imprisonment of many of those available to provide this temporary care. A grandmother can thus find herself looking after several grandchildren, either simultaneously or consecutively, when sons and daughters-in-law are imprisoned. An aunt can find herself with several nephews, nieces and godchildren as well as her own children, or a neighbor with one, two and sometimes three children of neighborhood friends. As a result, children enter an unpredictable and unstable circuit. As well as being separated and distributed among family and neighbors, brothers and sisters will move successively from uncles to grandparents, godparents and neighbors – and eventually into institutions when other children arrive or when expense becomes unbearable. Indeed, many of them end up growing up in orphanages. Recent modes of collective imprisonment induce therefore a short-circuiting of the mechanisms of the 'welfare society' – precisely those which in Portugal have traditionally helped to stop the slippage from poverty into total exclusion.

### The neighborhood absorbed by the prison 2: outside categories slip behind bars

The prison's absorption of a whole range of relatives, friends and neighbors produced other changes, such as in the notions underpinning everyday sociality. They are inseparable from the transformation of the nature of carceral networks, which are no longer a disparate set of individuals who come together for the first time in prison and form their relationships from there *ab initio*, but a series of already formed relationships which are transposed into the carceral context before. Sociability on the inside continues to be oriented by criteria which are prior to and external to the social fabric of the prison. Domestic categories of honor are brought in from the outside near intact and continue to operate inside the prison. Such is the case with the notion of *respect*. Not 'respect' as characterized, for example, by Bourgois (1995) [AQ: not in refs list, please supply] in his ethnography of drug selling in the lower-class *barrio* of East Harlem, which operates largely as category of masculinity, a sense of personal dignity constructed by inner-city men in response to their structural domination. Neither is it a carceral category, in the manner of those which assign a prisoner his or her rank in the status hierarchy of the prison. Rather, it is a notion embedded in representations of family conduct and kinship seniority, of what should guide relationships between parents, grandparents and children, as well as preserve family privacy and solidarity. On this point, Zulmira told me:

I brought up my children honorably. I always gave them bread, never abandoned them, never put them in an institution. I was always a good mother and I never had a man to help me. Respect was what I gave them. They all respected me. I laid down the law ... and they obeyed me, otherwise ...

In the meantime her adult daughter, who is also in this prison, arrives in the cell.<sup>12</sup> I introduce myself and her mother immediately tells her: 'Come on, Rosa, say hello.' Then she comments to me in the presence of her daughter:

Sorry, nowadays they just want to fool around, but they respect me. Just because I'm in prison, does that mean they shouldn't respect me? [Meant as a rhetorical question to me.] Now she's being punished (by the administration) because she took a chair from the refectory. The others teased her: 'So, Rosa, how come? Now your mother's here, best watch out. Best give her some respect.'

The disparagement of other prisoners is no longer based on symbolic struggles using internal weapons and made up of prison material (e.g. homoerotic affairs, the crimes committed). It is now based on exogenous criteria, such as *respect* and the way children and parents treat each other.

This triggers to the depreciative comments like Alda's, a prisoner convicted of trafficking. On another occasion, Alda had been shocked by the fact that one of the witnesses in a collective trial which included her sister-in-law did not help her own mother to go free. She now commented on a similar situation:

Hello, grandma! [she greets an elderly woman who passes, without stopping. She is not really Alda's grandmother, but a prisoner Alda met in Custóias prison. Then she says to me:] Her daughters were real bitches to her. They didn't own up to it themselves. Can you believe it? The woman is 63 years old and they don't admit to it for their mother? They don't have any respect for her. No respect at all. It's not because someone is in jail that they should lose respect.

Criticisms of shamelessness circulate when disputes that should be resolved privately are made public. Such criticisms are particularly virulent when they come from the minority of prisoners who do not have family members with them and pertain to other social universes:

It really did my head in seeing people from the same family cleaning their dirty laundry in front of everyone ... That privacy of family things, sometimes it's like it doesn't exist. The daughters don't respect their mothers. The mothers try their best to control their daughters' relationships here, but sometimes they don't have the authority.

In reality, it is not so. The vivid notion that family tensions and conflicts are private matters was one of the reasons for my initial difficulties in getting close to the prisoners. Unlike the past, this private sphere is no longer located in the outside world. It now permeates prison life and, as a result, is subject to public scrutiny within a collective setting where privacy is inevitably minimal. However, if family quarrels are played out, sometimes ferociously, in front of neighbors, great care is taken to ensure they remain inscrutable to strangers. Given the intricate precarceral networks of acquaintance which come together in prison, any question which involves internal – 'prison' – relationships risks touching inadvertently on private sore points and is therefore subject to increased sensitivity. In other words, putting one's nose into prison business now means putting one's nose into private business, as one necessarily invokes the other. Silence, therefore, is *de rigueur*.

Without doubt, the hierarchical axis of *respect* is destabilized by imprisonment, which reduces daughters, mothers and grandmothers to a common condition. More than once, I heard tirades along the lines of 'You're as much a prisoner as I am', or 'Now, we're both prisoners, it's the guards who tell me what to do'. Such tirades were spoken, more or less sharply, by daughters exasperated by the control over their movements,

**342 Ethnography 9(3)**

behavior and relationships exercised by their older relatives or by attempts to impose decisions on them relating to the criminal case. The equalizing effect of imprisonment, by leveling out these distinctions, can indeed cancel out this authority, and maybe this is why the notion of *respect* needs to be constantly reasserted in prison talk. Notwithstanding, it does partake of the organization of sociability and daily life, as the guards understood only too well. They, too, sometimes use the language of *respect* as an auxiliary tool for control which makes their work easier, by 'having a word' with prisoners' mothers or other members of the family when they 'see things getting out of hand'.

Prison rhythms and trajectories are now also modified by family and friendship ties. Much sought-after periods of prison leave can be turned down by prisoners who choose instead to wait and coordinate it with the leave of inmate kin. Parole, which is even more coveted and which is especially difficult to obtain in Tires, is subjected to the same considerations, as when an inmate ends up turning down this privilege because she had learned on the same day that her imprisoned mother had a tumor. The fact that her sister was also in Tires didn't sway her from her decision to stay behind bars to tend to her incarcerated mother. It reinforced that decision, for this way they'd all be together. In another case, the staff managed to have a young inmate transferred to another prison where the Parole Board was supposedly more lenient and where her parole would be 'practically guaranteed'. She turned down their offer, fully conscious of its consequences, because she did not want to be separated from her mother and friends in Tires. Such strategic transfers can also be refused for opposite reasons. Thus Alda refused a highly prized transfer to another prison because she preferred to 'have her periods of leave and parole cut than have to meet a neighbor and sister-in-law there that [she couldn't] stand'.

Yet the coalescence of a vast web of family and neighborhood relationships inside the prison has also changed the experience of carceral life itself. It is not only that solidarity, tensions and conflicts now build on a different basis, but also that the outside world participates extensively and permanently in such a construction. This can be seen in a recurring type of conflict, such as that which occurred when two prisoners who are former neighbors were placed at their own request in the same cell. In the neighborhood, the sister of one of them then began to live with the husband of the other and ended up giving birth to his child. Living together became so problematic for the two prisoners that they had to be transferred to separate cells.

Cases like this, in which family members outside begin relationships with the partners of friends and neighbors, punctuate daily life in prison and provide inexhaustible topics of conversation.

The clamor is even greater when, as in the case above, the husband's new

partner is herself arrested and ends up in prison. The guards have learned to accommodate such prisoners by assigning them not only to separate cells but to different prison blocks. As both have relatives in the same prison and the respective families know each other on the outside, one can again glimpse here the tact needed to approach any matter relating to intra-prison relations and especially the initially highly intriguing question of the constant transfer between cells and blocks. Much more frequent in prison daily life than ten years before, these transfers are now mainly motivated by the attempt to avoid such potentially disruptive conflicts. Many prison tensions are therefore located from the outset in the private sphere and originate outside the prison. Occasionally, they are interwoven with tensions relating to the trial process and mutually reinforce each other. In any case, prison is an echo chamber for plots that emerge elsewhere, both before and beyond it.

Rosário (a gypsy convicted of drug trafficking) is in P(block)2 with her sister-in-law. Her mother-in-law is in P3 and her sister in P1. One of her sons is in another prison, while the younger children remain with her mother. She keeps her voice down and looks around to check that her sister-in-law has not come into the inmate's bar. Relations with her husband's family have been going from bad to worse. They began to deteriorate after Rosário, already imprisoned, found out that her husband had left her for someone else. He later died, as it turned out, at the hands of the other woman's partner. Yet Rosário's anger was fueled further and generalized when her own sister became involved in a collective trial which, she claimed, was directed principally at her husband's family and which had included her mother-in-law. Thus, according to Rosário, her sister had ended up in Tires with them and risks being convicted 'because of [her] mother-in-law'. Rosário herself had already been convicted in another trial.

The following is an extract from one of my first conversations with Rosário, when I still thought that the fact that I had met a relative of hers in another block would be a good calling card:

- Manuela: ... I've just been talking to someone with the same surname as you, Ludovina Faria. She's not a relative of yours by any chance?
- Rosário: No, she's nothing to me. My man was her son, but as he's dead now I don't want anything to do with her.
- M: Ah, so she was your mother-in-law ...
- R: She was, but she isn't now.
- M: I see. So you don't see much of each other in here. I mean, she's also in another block ...
- R: Right. I don't want anything to do with her, because the first time I went to prison, my man was on the outside with the kids and

**344 Ethnography 9(3)**

he abandoned the children to run away with his mistress. It was that gypsie's man that killed mine ... He was still young, only 33 years old. It's a year ago now.

M: But your mother-in-law must also have been very upset ...

[silence]

M: And she also had nothing to do with ...

R: No [misunderstanding]. And she's from another trial, not mine. Everyone was busted. My sister too. She came to prison because of the Farias raid. I'm very shocked by my sister being arrested. Now, at the trial, she has to say whose [drugs] they were ...

M: Then maybe you get on better with your sister-in-law, who's also in here.

R: Yes ...

M: At least your sister-in-law's on your side ...

R: Yes ... She's not on my side at all. She's on her own side. Alright, so my man could leave me while I was on the outside. But to abandon me and my children while I was in prison, no. I'm no more her friend than anyone else's. I don't hold a grudge against her, after all, she's still my sister-in-law. She has her case. I had mine.

**Conclusion: a hyper-total institution?**

Prison life in Tires has become, as it were, an extension of the neighborhoods from which the prison recruits the vast majority of its customers. It is so not only in the conflicts that permeate it and in the new notions underpinning carceral sociality, but also because its course is tightly bound to the flow of everyday life outside through the ramifying networks of personal ties that connect prisoners both among them and to external overlapping circles of kin, friends and neighbors. Any event internal to the prison thus has immediate consequences on the outside, and vice versa.

Life behind and beyond bars continually affect each other. It is not that physical separation from the outside world does not loosen family bonds and labor relations, for clearly it does. But this loosening corresponds less neatly than before to the prison boundary between inside and outside. When the partners for whom men have abandoned their wives are themselves confined in Tires and receive visits from the other women's husbands, the prisoners' ways of dealing with such separation are not radically different from the ways they would deal with it on the outside. Inmates cannot escape tangling right there and then the plots involving their partners and rivals. They face the gossip from neighbors and seek the comfort of

longstanding friends, who are also imprisoned. The job instability and intermittent unemployment that already affected the majority of inmates before incarceration, both of which are more severe today than they were a decade ago, make the carceral disruption of labor trajectories one break among others.

Yet, despite these separations, just as the presence of family, friends and neighbors instills a sense of the diachronic into prison life by superimposing the unfolding daily vicissitudes of precarceral relationships onto the minute regularity of institutional rhythms, it also *synchronizes prison temporality with the rhythms of the outside world*. Internal and external progression, which used to appear so discrepant in the eyes of inmates, have now converged and even merged. As it no longer represents *a time apart*, imprisonment is no longer perceived as a suspension of one's personal trajectory. Contrary to what I observed a decade before, events that take place during imprisonment are chronologically aligned along prior events and are not disposed differently within the autobiography (Cunha, 2004). In the same way, 'external' relationships are not interrupted by incarceration and 'internal' relationships do not cease upon release. They undergo developments behind bars which prolong the past and project into the future. Moreover, these ties are not excised from the autobiography, as they were a decade ago in an attempt to conjure away carceral stigma; nor are they now excisable for that matter.

Discussing the notion of 'lost time' at the heart of the experience of confinement in total institutions, Goffman (1999 [1961]) argued that it should be accounted for less by the harshness of living conditions in custody than by the social gap imposed by entering the institution and the impossibility of acquiring advantages transferable to the outside. Clearly, a prison term is in many respects a time 'taken from one's life' (Goffman, 1999 [1961]: 66) and studies have consistently shown that there is typically little, such as skills or education, that constitutes as an investment for the future. But with the swamping of prison boundaries, all that takes place inside the carceral social universe is now transferable to the outside, precisely because incarceration no longer effects a social hiatus. When Goffman typified total institutions, he singled out a fundamental distinctive characteristic: the barriers which separate different spheres of life in the outside world, corresponding to discrete domains of relationships and identity, collapse within total institutions, where those spheres become subject to common management. In light of this criterion, it would seem that Tires has become a *hyper-total institution*. On the surface, the prison not only combines in single space living, work and leisure; it also incorporates the neighborhood materially and symbolically, in the form of large sections of kin and neighbors. Moreover, prisoners impute to the carceral institution and its staff roles inherent to the outside world (such as witness at trial, which logically

**346 Ethnography 9(3)**

precedes the carceral role, or treating drug addiction as the purpose of confinement). It even includes new trajectories, such as visits in closed circuit, from one part of the prison to another. However, paradoxically, because it incorporates the outside world, the prison has also come to subvert an essential feature of total institutions, namely, the break between the inside and the outside. In Goffman's model, this break underlies all the other traits of total institutions and it is central to assembling them into a coherent theoretical framework. Life spheres recreated within total institutions do not replace or cancel out those left behind, which remain references *in absentia* for the inmates.

Indeed, in Goffman's formulation, it is precisely this tension between inside and outside which helps to explain the distinctive social organization and cultural life of total institutions. This framework no longer characterizes contemporary prison life in facilities such as Tires's. Networks of precarceral ties create a continuity with the outside world, altering the texture of carceral sociality and the experience of confinement. Wherever confined networks of previous relations subsist and flood the space of confinement, the walls no longer anchor the frame of local social relations. The old congruence between the physical limits of the institution, and social and symbolic boundaries can no longer be taken for granted. To understand inmates' perceptions, interactions and experiences, it becomes necessary to shift the focus from the 'prison in context' to the interface between inside and outside, so to capture the webs of relations and meanings which flow across and remake both worlds. Only by setting the neighborhood and the prison in analytical continuity can we take into account the emerging translocality of carceral social life.

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**Notes**

- 1 Portugal has led the European Union throughout the 1990s with an incarceration rate ranging between 128 and 145 per 100,000 inhabitants (Ministério da Justiça, 1987–2000).
- 2 There are 54 carceral institutions in Portugal, four of which are exclusively female. But women are also confined in the women's sections of several

larger mixed-sex prisons. Tires receives the more important contingent of convicts from around the country.

- 3 The distinction between detainee and convict is but one of the criterion for distributing inmates within the Portuguese carceral system. Although there are no convicts serving long sentences in the closest Portuguese equivalent to *jails* (holding detainees or mostly those sentenced to serve up to a year), people awaiting trial can be confined in prisons, especially when they are accused of serious crimes.
- 4 'Drug trafficking networks' reported by the courts often have little sociological consistency and are a mere artificial outcome of the way individual cases are aggregated for bureaucratic reasons by the criminal justice system.
- 5 Under the *fiado*, one can borrow from a neighbor small quantities of heroin or hashish for resale in the same way that one would borrow groceries or money on other occasions. Many women started dealing as free-lancers in this fashion (Cunha, 2005).
- 6 Retail drug trafficking networks are clearly more inclusive in Portugal than in the United States or in France (see Duprez and Kokoreff, 2000; Maher, 1997). A more detailed analysis of the Portuguese retail drug economy is in Cunha (2005, 2007).
- 7 In this case 'homeboy' and 'road dog' do not connote mere racial solidarity or gang membership but indicate, more precisely, pre-existing relationships from outside neighborhoods.
- 8 Chaves analyzes in detail how the increased targeting of the neighborhood by the police has contributed to the creation of a strong sense of community. But the 'joint' itself is part and parcel of these dynamics, as suggested by a brief fieldwork note in the same study: 'Another person arrived and commented: "Marcia went white" [pale]. "She's alright now, her mother came to pick her up." Everyone seemed to know why Marcia went white. [W]hen her mother was imprisoned, the captured adolescent had stayed in her house for a few months and "they were like brother and sister"' (Chaves, 1999: 253).
- 9 Cerco and Lagarteiro, two of the most stigmatized neighborhoods of Porto city.
- 10 Prisoners are allowed to access weekly a small amount of their prison wage or personal fund.
- 11 This expression designates the informal support networks that contribute to mitigating the insufficiencies of a weak welfare state, especially among the poor (Santos, 1994). They may provide economic support, but their importance lies especially in providing several forms of care and assistance. Women are the central actors of these networks (Cunha, 2002).
- 12 When they are not working, attending classes, waiting to be counted, or closed in their cells by the end of the day, inmates can circulate within their block on several occasion during the day, especially before and after meals.

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**350 Ethnography 9(3)**

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■ **MANUELA IVONE P. DA CUNHA** is ... [AQ: please provide a short biography and address details]. [email: micunha@ics.uminho.pt]

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