Porosity of Prisional Institutions: Effects on Bodies and Tactics of Adaptation

Alex Medeiros Kornalewski, Francisco Ramos de Farias
University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

This paper discusses the characteristics of a prison institution in the perspective of closure, or in the various applications that transform in that Goffman conceptualizes as "total institutions." In complement, the discipline, analyzed in the light of Foucault, is at the heart of promoting this closure. The metodological procedure is the comparative study with these two authors cited in complement with the newspapers that discuss the current fragility of prisons. It is verified that persons promotes numerous tactics to adapt, in order to make bearable the experience within the prisons. Thus, the work points to the emergence of a tactic in which it is possible the reversion or appropriations of the prisional space, causing therefore the porosity of prisional institutions.

Keywords: total institution, discipline, adaptation tactics

Introduction

When discussing about prisons, some points are seen with constancy in the academic field, among which the understanding that this typology of institution has the function of correcting the deviations, in the attempt to recover the persons in custody in prisons. However, it has been observed only the use of discipline for the control of bodies, such as Foucault (2011) described in his book entitled *Discipline and Punish*.

The problem of these institutions is also due to the fact that in addition to disciplinary employment, other harmful aspects are seen in prisons, such as the question of the mortification of the self, the process of desculturation, the tactics of adaptation, and the closure characteristic itself, according to Goffman's perspective (2015).

In short, the work reflects on the following issues. First, discipline and its specifications are discussed in the light of Michel Foucault, in addition to Goffman and the concept of total institution. Next, we enter into the adaptive tactics employed by the persons, with a view to making the experience, in the case of prisons, more bearable. Thus, we can into the proposal to analyze the current porosity of prison institutions, since the persons enters a new sphere of adaptation, in which he not only seeks to adapt, but rather to adapt the institution itself to its needs, at the same time, in which this practice demonstrates how fragile the prison walls are.

Total Institutions: The Discipline and the Control of Bodies

Before discussing some characteristics of prison institutions, and therefore, their closure effects on

---

Alex Medeiros Kornalewski, graduation degree in Library Science, master and doctorate student in Social Memory, Postgraduate Program in Social Memory, University of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

Francisco Ramos de Farias, Ph.D., professor, Postgraduate Program in Social Memory, University of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

bodies—which is then subjugated by society outside the walls, the administrative team, or themselves—it is important to emphasize what is meant by total institution. Goffman (2015, p. 11) defined a total institution as a place of residence and work where a large number of individuals with a similar situation, separated from the larger society for a considerable period of time, led a closed and formally managed life.

Therefore, it can ba said that the total institutions are constructed for the purpose of closing or seclusion of a certain group of persons. However, some questions are presented: What are the criterial used to categorize the persons as "abnormal" (Foucault, 2010) and able to be excluded from society and allocated in spaces built solely to shelter them? How does this closing process take place? And what are the effects of these total institutions on the persons?

The criterion of abnormality is justifiable, when the person performs a certain act or has a certain condition that sets it apart from the majority. For example, the person presenting a diagnostic of mental disorders may be allocated in a custodial and psychiatric treatment institution if he presents a particular risk to society or to himself; the undisciplined child is sent by parents to schools classified as educandarios, who for their high discipline and full-time education have long been regarded as a correctional institution for their children; the prisoners, because they violating certain norms (criminal, tax, family, and others) are placed in prison institutions, in which discipline and incarceration is seen as a model of correction and discipline for the person.

Thus, three aspects are clear in the applied way to deal with the so-called "abnormal." Firstly, frame the person in a condition that makes him different from the others. Secondly, spaces are created to allocate the "abnormal." Finally, the numerous disciplinary tools available or coming from each type of total institution are applied. It is worth emphasizing that space is one of the three dimensions (space, time, and vigilance) that is part of the disciplinary processes, because it allows the minucious control of the operations of the body, which carry out the constant subjection of its forces and impose on them a relation of docility-utility (Foucault, 2011, p. 133).

For example, some points inherent in the space of a prison institution can be presented. Besides the control of the bodies, it also exercises its discipline through its closed architecture, which limits to the maximum the communication of prisoners with society outside the walls, doors closed, high walls, barbed wire, moats, water, forests, and swamps (Goffman, 2015, p. 16). In addition to the categorization of the person, the place where they are allocated exercises the discipline, too. And therefore, the closing of the bodies, which imposes on the prisoner an unacceptable state of difference, at the same time, in that distances him from society.

In addition to the organization and architecture of space, the time is also seen as a crucial factor in the development of discipline in prisons. The prisoners are subject to time, which controls their acts, gestures, and the objects they use, and promove the processes of temporal regularization (Foucault, 2011, p. 144). In this temporal regularization, the bodies follow a routine in common only for those who are within the total institution: time to wake up, time of the review made by the administrative team, and time of the count of the prisoners, which in turn have the time of the coffee, sun bathing, visit, and count again on the return to the cells.

The third disciplinary dimension in which have to dedicate a few words is about vigilance. At this point, Foucault (2011, p. 164) was emphatic in saying that, "The success of disciplinary power is undoubtedly due to the use of simple instruments: hierarchical gaze, normalizing sanction, and its combination in a specific procedure—the exam."

This eye, which enlightens all, is employed thanks to two conditions existing in prisons: Firstly, all activities are carried out within the walls. Secondly, the activities are carried out by a group of prisoners, observed by a administrative team, all of whom carry out their functions in the same way and together

(Goffman, 2015). A priori, the space, and the time, were not made to exercise control only of one or two persons, but of a group, in the case of prisoners who, in turn, are observed by a group of professionals of the prisional institution.

However, surveillance is not only done with the hierarchical eye. It is also necessary to establish so-called standardization sanctions. They are not interested in the atonement or repression of the prisoner, but rather to normalize them, since disciplinary institutions, are intended to compare, differentiate, hierarchize, homogenize, and exclude (Foucault, 2011, p. 176), removing the "previous support" from the prisoner so that they can live according to the house rules (Goffman, 2015, p. 50).

As for surveillance, we refer to the instrument of hierarchical gaze and normalizing sanctions. Now, let us at the third instrument: the exam. According to Foucault (2011, p. 177), the examination exercised the subjection of those perceived as objects and the objectification of those who submit. Thus, the prisoner becomes an object that can be analyzed, with the purpose of keeping them under the control of a permanent knowledge, at the same time, that each subject is seen as a "case," with views to the control and development of methods of domination.

The exam expands the visibility of the prisoner in a singular way, once all his/her actions are described, a documentary body of each subject is formed, not only with the purpose of exercising control, but also of overcoming any possibility of resistance, since each "case" serves to update the disciplinary methods employed by the prison institution, in addition to arrange for the desculturation of the person and the mutilation of herself/himself, regarding the abilities of the person to face some aspects of the life extra walls (Goffman, 2015).

It is credible to say that prisons are qualified as a total institution, not only because of their closure of a certain group of persons over a period of time (Goffman, 2015), but rather because of disciplinary procedures—space, time, and surveillance—used in favor of a construction, legitimation, and possible improvement of the closing techniques of the groups. However, some tactics are constantly employed by prisoners to adapt or even transgress the prison system.

The Act of Unleash the Moorings: Tactics of Adaptation of the Group in the Prison Institutions

It can be said that the prison institutions are organic institutions, since they undergo constant modifications in favor of a single objective: the closure of the person, the mutilation of herself/himself, and the unculturation, in that concerns the ambient outside of the "walls" for then insert it into a "prison culture." However, the total institutions are challenged today by the persons who inhabit it, in search of the loosening of the walls and the possibility of an opening.

Therefore, four tactics of adaptation of the internees must be presented (Goffman, 2015), namely, "removal from the situation" (in which the prisoner ignores everything that surrounds her/him, except for what affects her/his body); "tactic of intransigence" (in which the prisoner attempts to challenge the total institution); "colonization" (in which the prisoner adapts with the little that is given her/him from the outside the institution), and the "conversion" (in which the subject accepts, a priori, and the role of prisoner).

According to the authors, the tactic of removal from the situation consists in ignoring all the questions inherent in the total institution in which the subject inhabits, the administrative team, and the other prisoners, that is, an attempt to pass unharmed, invisible to everything and everyone who are inside the prison walls. The

greatest motivation is to avoid, for example, all the damaging circumstances that arise in that environment for their physical, mental, or moral integrity.

As for the tactic of intransigence, we have a person that challenges the prison institution, the undisciplined person who tries at all costs to break with the closure provoked by the various nuances of power exercised within the prison ambient, which power is branched, capillary, and is found on all extremities (Foucault, 1979, p. 182). In contrast, the institution usually responds to intransigence with a greater disciplinary investment, with a view to docilization of the prisoner, who starts to play the role that is required of her/him (Machado, 1979, p. 18).

The colonization tactic is when the subject neither ignores nor challenges the total institution: It adapts to it. In colonization, the prisoner is overwhelmed, overcome by the force exerted on her/his body daily, uninterrupted. The disposition of the body in space, in the movement of time, and in the vigil of various eyes (of the other prisoners, cleaners, factions, administrative team, and others), implies on a "iron blanket" that covers and causes suffering to the person, of which allows a simple object-photo, writing material, cigarette, and the like—to become a great protection and support.

On the other hand, in the case of the conversion tactic, the person exercises the role that discipline imposes on her/him, that is, she/he accepts the way the prison institution and the administrative team treat her/him, as if this group provided her/him with an indisputable truth, which the prisoner must accept. The tactics mentioned are common, but few internees seem to follow them for a long time (Goffman, 2015, p. 62).

However, adaptive tactics mencioned from Goffman restrict herself/himself only to those already mentioned: removal from the situation, intransigence, colonization, and conversion. The fact is that a singular tactic has become increasingly visible, not only to the administrative team, inmates, family members, and researchers, but to society as a whole. We dedicate a few notes to follow about the tactic named as "reversion or appropriation."

Porosity of Total Institutions: When the Individual Breaks the Walls of Prison

This new tactic is named in this way by observing acts, practically commonplace, in which the person to appropriate tools and flaws existing in the procedures of prisons for their own benefit, which in many cases allows a reversal of the proposal original that a total institution presents: Instead of the person being in a closed environment, what happens is an opening of the institution, allowing that, in this case, the prisoners impose the "rules of the house," instead of following them.

For example, in the central prison of the State of Mato Grosso, a tunnel was found for the escape 100 prisoners, and the police intercepted 120 mobile phones and 500 packs of drugs (Francisco, 2014). At the Agroindustrial São João penitentiary, in Itamaracá Island, Grande Recife in Pernambuco, and at the Regional Prison of Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, located a coin-hunting machine, commerce, and numerous prisoners circulating freely with cell phones (Inmates use cell phone in prison that can receive Pedro Corrêa, 2014). In the central prison of Porto Alegre, 65 mobile phones were located, as well as the interception by investigative journalists of a conversation that registers the use of cellular devices to extort people from outside the prison institution, often reaching relatives of the prisoners themselves (Inmates use cell phones in RS to threaten relatives of detainees, 2009).

Thus, the tactic of reversion or appropriation becomes more evident, since the examples demonstrate the porosity of the total institutions, because their first closing function is put in checked, once the person is able to

revert the culture employed within the prisons, for their own will, communicating with society outside the "walls," making parties, posting their amusements on the Internet and others (Gama, 2015).

The porosity of the prison institution is not a recent but recurring drama, because the conversion and appropriation by prisoners does not just happen only an individual scope, given the different factions that inhabit both outside and inside the prison walls. Moreover, we know that the discipline, which allows the construction and legitimation of the inherent closure of the total institutions, also suffers numerous corrosions with this tactic.

In the first place, space is transgressed by technologies, allowing the person to have contact with the world outside the walls, to the point of provoking actions outside the prisons, without having to leave her/his cell, patio, and othes spaces in the prisional instituition.

Secondly, time becomes asynchronous, since just as there is a control of the activities carried in prison institutions, we also have an absence of time control, because the prisoner manages to move between the internal society and external society when it suits you, through smartphones, tablets, computer, and others technologies that enter prison space.

Thirdly, vigilance begins to collapse, as visibility becomes fragile in the state sphere, in the administrative teams, and among the prisoners themselves, enabling the annulment of descriptive practices, as well as breaking the prisoner's logic as a "case," since all are in the same possibilities of provoking an opening, or at least propitiate the porosity of the total institutions. In short, the arrests, made to keep the person who committed a crime closed and disciplined, according to the logic of maintenance of the social order, actually demonstrate that there is a multiplicity of precipices (Robert, 2011).

Conclusion

The work allows us to look at some key issues with regard to applicability and questioning on the issue of discipline, the functioning of total institutions, specifically prisons and adaptive tactics. Therefore, the record of a tactic in wich by prisoners demonstrate the existence of a reversion, or appropriation of the prison institution, breaking with the basic logic that imprisonment keeps prisoners away, in terms of communication, action power, and social interaction from society.

Therefore, it is crucial that we apply our efforts to understand the emergence of these tactics that corroborate the breakdown of a model long discussed as inefficient. Unfortunately, used by the prisoners themselves inserted in this prison culture, and therefore, dictate the rules of the house, as if they were exempt from the disciplinary and mortifying proposals that this institution promotes.

The technology is an important factor for a being seen, since these are tools that allow an opening of prisons, allowing a transition of the person between an internal society and a external society. Finally, it is the important refletion about the political implications that allow the operation of an intensely questionable system, as if there were no scientific evidence to prove the need for a review in the prison model as regards structure and its effects on the bodies of prisoners.

References

Foucault, M. (2010). *Os anormais* (The abnormal). São Paulo: WMF Martins Fontes.

Foucault, M. (1979). Soberania e disciplina (Sovereignty and discipline). In M. Foucault (Ed.), *Microfísica do poder* (pp. 179-192). Rio de Janeiro: Graal.

Francisco, A. (2014). *Fotos em celulares apreendidos mostram "vida boa" de presos da penitenciária central* (Photos on mobile phones seized show good life of inmates of the central penitentiary). Mato Grosso: RepórterMT. Retrived September 20, 2016, from http://www.reportermt.com.br/policia/fotos-em-celulares-apreendidos-mostram-vida-boa-de-presos-da-penitenciaria-central/39265

Gama, A. (2015). *Presos em cadeia de RR fazem festas, usam piscina e postam tudo na Internet* (Inmates in RR chain do parties, use pool and post everything on the Internet). Alagoas: Uol. Retrived September 20, 2016, from http://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2015/09/03/presos-em-cadeia-de-rr-fazem-festas-usam-piscina-e-postam-tudo-na-internet.htm#fotoNav=1

Goffman, E. (2015). *Manico mios, prisões e conventos* (Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and ohters inmats). São Paulo: Perspectiva.

Inmates use cell phones in RS to threaten relatives of detainees. (2009). Rio Grande do Sul: G1. Retrived September 20, 2016, from http://g1.globo.com/Noticias/Brasil/0,,MUL1266645-5598,00-PRESOS+USAM+CELULARES+NO+RS+PARA+AMEACAR+PARENTES+DE+DETENTOS.html

Inmates use cell phone in prison that can receive Pedro Corrêa. (2014). Pernambuco: G1. Retrived September 20, 2016, from http://g1.globo.com/pernambuco/noticia/2014/01/detentos-usam-celular-em-presidio-de-pe-que-pode-receber-pedro-correa.html

Machado, R. (1979). Introdução: Por uma genealogia do poder (Introduction: By a genealogy of power). In: M. Foucault (Ed.), *Microfísica do poder*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal.

Robert, P. (2011). *Sociologia do crime* (Sociology of crime). Petrópolis, R.J.: Vozes.