

Prison Officers: how social and professional identity make places

Raphael T. Sabaini – Universidade de São Paulo – USP
rsabaini@gmail.com

Introduction

In recent years, has been increasing attention to the prison setting, both in the press and in academy. The formation of criminal gangs, who demonstrate great power, draws attention because of its impact in various sectors of society. Moreover, there is a whole sensational coverage often made by the press, about the numerous prison riots that occurred all over the country, revealing the preoccupation with the question of prison problem. Allied to this, we have a discussion about the effectiveness of prisons and its ongoing reforms.

From all these factors and their implications, concern about this issue led to arouse a research network and experiences which, at the same time, consolidates academically and echoing among the most diverse sectors of the brazilian society.

The prison institution also occupies a prominent place in the reports produced by organizations related to the issue of human rights. On the one hand, the media often point to the inmates as victims, such reports usually emphasize their victimization. This analysis can also be made in respect of prison officers who, despite being identified by many as victimizers, generally consider themselves victims of a prison system that is difficult for everyone. Fact is the knowledge of the everyday practices and social interactions of these prison officers are limited. Even less is known about the network of relationships that these actors settle out of prisons. In this case, around the small town of Itirapina.

It must, before anything, expose some data on the political-administrative division of Brazil and some other important data, which will make the difference when the analysis will deepen. The Brazilian territory is divided into political and administrative units covering the different levels of government: Federal, State and Municipal. The division is called Political Administrative Division. Officially Brazil constitutes a Federal Republic - Federative Republic of Brazil - composed of 26 states and one federal district, where is the capital of the Republic - Brasilia, the seat of government.

Each state is the largest unit within the hierarchy of political and administrative organization of the country. The States and the Federal District are the units of the Federation. These units are the higher rank within the political and administrative organization in Brazil, were created by laws enacted by the Congress and sanctioned by the President. Brazilian states are also grouped into five major political administrative regions: North, Northeast, Southeast, South and Midwest.

Each of the units of the Federation (states) is further subdivided into municipalities. Municipalities or districts are units of lower hierarchy within the political and administrative organization of Brazil, formed by the ordinary laws of the legislatures of each state and sanctioned by the Governor of each State. The location where it is headquartered City Hall, center of executive power, is a city.

The region with the largest number of inhabitants is the Southeast, and it is this region which is Brazil's largest city by number of inhabitants: the city of Sao Paulo, the State Capital with the same name. The estimated population for the State of Sao Paulo, according to the foundation SEADE, is of 41,674,409 inhabitants, data obtained in 2011 by SEADE.

The city of São Paulo, which is the state capital, has 11,324,102 inhabitants. Comparing with Itirapina, it has 15,819 inhabitants. That is, the difference of the capital (São Paulo) for the small town of Itirapina by number of inhabitants is too big. It is from this difference that the context of the Itirapina will show very differently from urban and prison contexts found previously in Brazil.

In view of this first presentation of the differences between a big city like São Paulo, and a small town like Itirapina, this proposal aims to investigate the mode of life of these prison officers, as it occurs within and outside the jail and try to get a vision of the institution and the town from the perspective of the prison officers. Moreover, this proposal turns to the daily lives of prison guards, for their social and professional practices, as well as the creation and consolidation of urban interaction of these agents that we believe are social agents in Itirapina, and how this prison and social officers make social places in the various locations of the town.

The case of Itirapina seems to demonstrate that prison officers interacts with the dynamics of the small town. Therefore, the profession which is seen in the big cities as an occupation that adds negative features, in Itirapina seems to become synonymous with social mobility, while establishing a differentiated status and quality of life interpreted by many city residents as admirable to local dwellers. Perhaps this

particular phenomenon goes unnoticed for most people who are immersed in the daily urban life of Itirapina, which has approximately 15 000 inhabitants and two prisons, where about 2,400 inmates.

The first hypothesis is that the dynamics of Itirapina seems most of the time, turn around the prison and its employees. The use of the word *agent* in this case ends up having a double meaning: the prison guards (in Portuguese: *Agentes Penitenciários*), public official, your responsibilities, rights and duties with are relationated to your profession. But we also have a social agent that "agency" most of kinds of relationships in the urban space. In this small town, be a prison officer (Agente Penitenciário) enjoy high status, is to hold a steady job, integrate a middle class that has more credit from local market.

Select this object of research led to precisely the curiosity around this apparent reversal of the figure of Itirapina prison officer, which in many other Brazilian cities and states is seen as a torturer, a corrupt person, a keeper of underemployment. We can draw a comparison with the work of Castro e Silva (2008), since the city of Rio de Janeiro, prison officers have the need to hide well their professional identity:

Em sociedade o Agente Penitenciário não tem o menor orgulho de revelar sua profissão. Quando por força das circunstâncias, é obrigado a fazê-lo, diz receber em troca olhares de desconfiança e acusação, como se ele fosse o responsável pelas mazelas do sistema penal (CASTRO E SILVA, 2008, p. 72).

The prison officers in Rio de Janeiro just wear their uniforms when they arrive in prison, changing their clothes in the locker room of the institution; but in Itirapina, they go to work in uniform. Because the small size of the town, many go to their work place on bikes, showing on the back of their uniforms the symbol of Sao Paulo State, along with writing: "Prison Officer."

Therefore, we may ask: what factors influenced this reversal of values, and how the phenomenon of the expansion of prisons to the interior of São Paulo State, together with the characteristics of a small town just creating conditions for the formation of a particular context? From this, how is this dynamic in a small city like Itirapina that has affected the daily lives of this dwellers by two prisons?

Thus it is of fundamental importance to further study of the debate about the penal institutions, both between what is raised by the media but also by academic analysis. Still, despite the publication of some works and research, little is

known of the daily life of many of the Brazilian penal institutions, and especially of them affected its employees. Studies of prison inmates tend to emphasize (RAMALHO 1983; COELHO, 2005; BIONDI, 2008), leaving the prison guards in the background.

Overview of the town and its characteristics

The dynamic that the two penal institutions creates in Itirapina represents an opportunity to study further their employees and social relationships, family and urban interactions, and how this process creates those specific social spaces affected by the prison.

Remember, the town has two institutions: the Penitentiary I (Penitentiary Dr. Antonio de Queiroz Filho) and Penitentiary II (Penitentiary João Batista de Arruda Sampaio) and that both are located in urban area: the first at the main entrance of the city and, the second, next to the small industrial district.

The Prison I have about 600 inmates assigned to a single pavillion and have approximately 150 employees, including directors, prison officers and administrative assistants. The Penitentiary II shelters currently about 1,800 inmates and a staff of about 200 employees. Both prisons are working with two types of scheme: the closed and semi-open. In a closed regime, the prisoner is fully recluse in a semi-open, the prisoner, who is serving or who is considered mild in the process of being set free, works during the day or on the sectors of the penitentiary and only returns the jail to sleep.

Based on these figures the Bureau of Jail Management and SEADE Foundation, we can conclude that the population of prisoners in two prisons in Itirapina corresponds to 16% of the number of inhabitants of the town. Because of the transfer of prisoners to those two prisons, their relatives ended up moving to the suburbs, increasing the number of residents in the poverty areas of Itirapina. In addition, prison officers and their family from other cities, also moved to the Itirapina because of employment opportunities won through public tenders.

The phenomenon initiated by the construction of two prisons in a relatively small town changed the life of the city, and at the same time, it became a source of pride, as the profession of prison officers was received as an opportunity for social mobility, because being an agent implies the possibility to belong to a middle-

class owner of property as their own house and car. In a city where there were few job opportunities, civil service positions from vacancies in the administrative staff of the prison appeared as well-paid jobs. Before this event at this Itirapina, perceive, through de Moraes (2005), this attempt at social climbing also present among the agents of the State Prison of Paraná:

Os Agentes Penitenciários têm sido tradicionalmente recrutados entre trabalhadores braçais – lavradores, pintores, pedreiros, motoristas, bem como entre trabalhadores urbanos não qualificados – com baixo nível de escolaridade (MORAES, 2005, p. 209).

Moreover, there is a justification based on the advantages accruing from the civil service to continue keeping a job from stereotypical pejorative characteristics: "The wages paid and the search for stability and [financial] security are a very common argument that even the old prison officers, choose the profession "(ibid., p. 210).

The relations of proximity and remoteness that seem to occur between the prison officers and the town of Itirapina resembles the design of "foreign" crafted by Simmel (1983). The place that makes it enable these new types of relationship is precisely the city. His sociability spaces provide the emergence of specific types of relationship and interaction. The city puts the strange and foreign in contact. The stranger turns out to increase the opportunities for sociability in certain contexts:

A unificação de proximidade e distância envolvida em toda relação humana organiza-se, no fenômeno do estrangeiro, de um modo que pode ser formulado da maneira mais sucinta dizendo-se que, nesta relação, a distância significa que ele, que está próximo, está distante; e a condição de estrangeiro significa que ele, que também está distante na verdade está próximo, pois ser um estrangeiro é naturalmente uma relação muito positiva: é uma forma específica de interação (SIMMEL, 1983, p. 182).

We can assign this feature of "foreign" to the prison officer just because he transit over from the city's ambience and environment of the prison as part of two specific environments (intramural and extramural places), but interconnected. While he is in prison and is seen as "outsiders" by the inmates, while in social life of the city is seen as belonging to the "inside" the prison by townspeople who are not prison officers.

The city presents itself again, as a space of confrontation of social diversity. And that this confrontation can be both negative and positive, i.e. the same

way that brings new contexts and identities, while others may also be disappear. However, these processes do not cease to be an integral part of practice of socialization found mainly in urban areas.

Besides, what could be a professional environment like any other, becomes, in the special case of prison officers, a day-to-day marked by several aggravating factors, such as violence, mistrust, the constant surveillance of other and of itself. Beyond the physical boundaries, and architectural space, there are limits to how relational and are appropriated and reinterpreted within this particular universe. This transformation occurred within the prisons is described by Biondi:

As organizações prisionais são um precioso exemplo de como são implantadas regras e leis próprias em um micro território inserido na Sociedade mais ampla, acionando suas auto-regulações como resultado de situações e ambientes específicos. (BIONDI, 2006, p. 321).

Foucault (1986), in his analysis of violence in prisons, examines the methods adopted in punitive crackdown on crime, noting that the birth of the prison is intrinsic to the very functioning of society. It turned out to constitute the entire legal apparatus, securing, distributing, sorting, taking of individuals the maximum time and maximum force, training their bodies, coding their continuous behavior, maintaining them, so in constant vigilance, constituting about they a know that one accumulates and concentrates. By applying this constant vigilance, there is a "fabrication" of individuals, as Foucault (1986, p. 143): "Discipline makes individuals, it is the specific technique of a power that takes individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise."

This state of constant surveillance creates docile bodies, and this not only occurs in the prisons, because this phenomenon is spreading through many different spaces of sociability of Itirapina's society. The interactions occurring within the prison institution radiate beyond the walls, reaching all kinds of townspeople and their modes of social relationship. The case of Itirapina seems to demonstrate this in a way even more striking: not only the inmates and staff members seem to suffer from this docilization, but also their family and friends. We can not fail to notice that other city residents are also affected, whether directly or indirectly.

From this constant state of surveillance that docile these bodies, we are interested in investigating how these prison officers also live constant transit between the inside of the Institution in a tense environment, often marked by violence and

mistrust, which is their workplace, and outside the penitentiary, where they coexist with family and friends in places where the practice of these "surveillance" actually extends beyond the prison walls:

Dizia-me um funcionário do Sistema, com quem conversei, da insegurança que experimentava. Imaginava uma multidão de olhos que se distribuía para frente e para trás no tempo, marcando seu rosto sem que nada pudesse fazer para burlar essa vigilância. Isto comportava tanto os egressos e seus visitantes, quanto o que para ele era um caso extremo: as crianças que visitavam os presos e a impossibilidade de reconhecê-las, uma vez que, com o passar do tempo, se tornavam homens. "Alguns deles criminosos, assim como o pai, o tio, o avô" – assinalava. O que fazer neste caso? Dizia que vivia em um estado de tensão contínua, de permanente observação dos locais aonde ia e das pessoas com quem encontrava. Paranóia infinita diante da linha genealógica do crime (BARBOSA, 2007, p. 147).

The state of surveillance and discipline are characteristics included in the routine of prison officers, because it ends up creating a new behavior from a more cautious way of life, which extends to their family and friends. With this, we can say that prison is not a "totality", as stated Goffman (1999) to deal with this Institution as something closed in itself (a "Total Institution"). The two prisons, therefore, reach more from people connected to it, as officers and inmates, so also maintaining relations with them, whether directly or indirectly. These other people, such as relatives and friends of those prison officers and prisoners also end up being influenced by codes and practices present in the prison system. We can therefore assume, as from this complex and fluid network of social relations, the daily lives of two prisons in Itirapina affects a large number of people in the town.

Manuela Ivone Cunha (2002) discusses how the "inside" and "outside" of the prison are interconnected and communicate like a pendulum between two angles, and from this move as it creates new kinds of relationships. The prison officers, this stranger, in the words of Simmel, who moves from outside and from inside the prison, raises some concern about the consequences of these new types of relationships established, brought by this context, as pointed out by Castro and Silva (2008):

Quais as conseqüências para os Agentes Penitenciários de serem socializados nos valores que vigoravam intramuros e passarem a utilizar tais normas? Tendo a acreditar que, se for verdade que as unidades prisionais operariam com uma lógica singular cujos padrões seriam fornecidos pelos próprios condenados, ela seria duplamente

prejudicial à sociedade, pois, além de não ressocializar o interno, ainda socializaria o guarda no “mundo do crime” (CASTRO E SILVA, 2008, p. 88).

With this research, we intend to examine, therefore, new types of relationships and interactions that may be emerging in Itirapina from the Sao Paulo expansion prison policy of prisons into the country. This new context emerged from this recent prison policy is still little explored, as these new types of sociability begin to emerge and consolidate itself only nowadays.

The House of Detention, also known as Carandiru, was located in the capital city of São Paulo. This prison has come to shelter over 8000 inmates. In mid 1990, the House of Detention was gradually deactivated. At the same time, the prison policy held by the state government of Sao Paulo was building new prisons throughout the State, including the penitentiary II in Itirapina. These new units have a smaller number of prisoners (about 2000), compared to the number of inmates in Carandiru.

One should realize, therefore, that the construction of these prisons in small towns with small number of dwellers occurred at the same time with the deactivation of the House of Detention and the transfer of their prisoners, which are scattered throughout the state. This process erupted a new phenomenon in the state of Sao Paulo, the expansion and internalization of Prisons throughout the state, changing the social dynamics of small towns, which are now transformed due to the presence of Prisons in its urban space.

Itirapina had the construction of its two prisons at different times: Penitentiary I was built during the period of military dictatorship, more precisely in 1978, whereas the Penitentiary II was built in 1998, precisely in the decade in which it is the massive expansion prisons to the interior of São Paulo. In the late 1970s, the model prison (whether architectural, legal, political or law-criminal) was based on a context in which the authoritarian regime was reflected inside the prisons, marked by much violence and repression. Even during the military dictatorship, is created to FUNAP, which originated through the Law No. 1238 of December 22, 1976, with its Statute approved by Decree No. 10235 of 30 August 1977. Already in the 1980s, the period between the end of military dictatorship and democratization period, the prevailing model of prison policy was used just as a means of FUNAP in trying to retrieve the prisoner as one of the terms of the status of the Foundation:

Contribuir para a recuperação social do preso e para a melhoria de sua condição de vida, através da elevação do nível de sanidade física e moral, do adestramento profissional e do oferecimento de oportunidade de trabalho remunerado.

Already during the 1990s, the census of the prison itself FUNAP, the State of Sao Paulo had one of the largest prison populations in the Brazil, also has a lack of prison vacancies. As the federal and state governments had as political representatives of the PSDB, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Mário Covas, respectively, both spheres of power are supported to create a project to expand enrollment in the penitentiary system, which included the deactivation of the Casa de Detenção de Sao Paulo and the internalization of prisons throughout inside the state. We realized that if, during the military period, there was a time of repression, then, during the democratization period, there was a time of expansion of prisons to new cities inside the State of São Paulo. During this expansion process, 21 new prisons were built, among them the Itirapina's Penitentiary II (Penitentiary João Batista de Arruda Sampaio). We can see the difference of contexts in which each Penitentiary was implemented and how the social dynamics of Itirapina ended up, somehow, the result of this policy of internalization and expansion of the prisons in São Paulo.

Therefore, it is of fundamental importance to investigate the daily lives of prison officers, social relationships and the influences that this process is created. Realizing that the transfer of prisoners, of a large prison, located in Brazil's largest city (Sao Paulo, Brazil), for small cities in the interior led to the dynamics, relationships and social interactions changed completely, especially in the municipalities affected by policy of expansion of prisons across the state.

Bibliography

BARBOSA, Antônio Rafael. Um levantamento introdutório das práticas de violência física dentro das cadeias cariocas. **In: Marques, Ana Claudia (org.). Conflitos, política e relações pessoais.** Campinas: Pontes Editores, 2007.

BIONDI, Karina. Tecendo as tramas do significado: As facções prisionais enquanto organizações fundantes de padrões sociais. **In: Grossi, M. P., Heilborn, M. L., Machado, L. Z. Antropologia e Direitos Humanos 4.** Florianópolis: Nova Letra, 2006.

_____. "Junto e Misturado em Prol do Comando": Reflexões acerca da imanência e transcendência no PCC. **In: 32º Encontro Anual da ANPOCS, 2008, Caxambu.** Anais do 32º Encontro Anual da ANPOCS, 2008. v. I.

BONELLI, Maria da Glória et alli. **Profissões jurídicas identidades e imagem pública.** São Carlos: Edufscar, 2006.

CASTRO E SILVA, Anderson Moraes de. **Nos braços da lei: o uso da violência negociada no interior das prisões.** Rio de Janeiro: e+a, 2008.

COELHO, Edmundo Campos. **A oficina do diabo e outros estudos sobre a criminalidade.** Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2005.

CUNHA, Manuela Ivone Pereira da. **Entre o bairro e a prisão: tráfico e trajectos.** Portugal: Fim de século, 2002.

DUMONT, Louis. **Homo Hierarchicus: o sistema de castas e suas implicações.** São Paulo: Edusp, 1997.

FOUCAULT, Michel. **Vigiar e punir: nascimento da prisão.** Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 1986.

GÓES, Eda Maria. **Transição Política e Cotidiano Penitenciário.** São Paulo: História, 2004, p. 219-238.

GOFFMAN, Erving. **Manicômios, prisões e conventos.** São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1999.

GOLDMAN, Márcio. **Alteridade e Experiência: Antropologia e Teoria Etnográfica.** Etnográfica, Vol. X/1, 2006, p. 161-173

HANNERZ, U. "Thinking about cultures and cities"; "Cities as windows on the world" **In: Deben, L.; Heinemeijer, W.; Van der Vaart, D. (eds.) Understanding Amsterdam: essays on economic vitality, city life and urban form.** Apeldoorn-Antwerpen, Het Spinhuis, 2007, p. 61-196.

KUPER, Adam. O Retorno do Nativo. **In: Horizontes Antropológicos ano 8, n. 17.** Porto Alegre, 2002, p.213-237.

LEIRNER, Piero de Camargo. **Meia volta volver.** Rio de Janeiro: Ed. FGD, 1997.

_____. **Hierarquia e individualismo.** Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar Editor, 2003.

LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. **As Estruturas Elementares do Parentesco.** Petrópolis: Vozes, 1982.

_____. **“Introdução à obra de Marcel Mauss”**, In: MAUSS, M., Sociologia e Antropologia. São Paulo: EDUSP/EPU, 1974.

MAUSS, Marcel. **Ensaio sobre a Dádiva.** In: MAUSS, M. Sociologia e Antropologia. São Paulo: EDUSP/EPU, 1974.

MORAES, Pedro Rodolfo Bodê de. **Punição, encarceramento e construção de identidade profissional entre Agentes Penitenciários.** São Paulo: IBCCRIM, 2005.

RAMALHO, José Ricardo. **Mundo do Crime: A ordem pelo avesso.** Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal, 1983.

SABAINI, Raphael. **Hierarquia, Status e Troca: os Agentes Penitenciários de Itirapina.** Monografia de conclusão de curso. São Carlos: UFSCar, 2009.

SILVESTRE, Giane. **Prisões, Sociedade e Punição: As Penitenciárias e suas Relações com o Município de Itirapina.** 2007, 93f. Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso (Bacharel em Sociologia)
Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências, Universidade Estadual Paulista, Marília, SP.

SIMMEL, G. “As grandes cidades e a vida do espírito”. *Mana* vol. 11, n. 02, Rio de Janeiro, Museu Nacional, out/2005, p. 577-591.

_____. “O Estrangeiro”. In: Moraes, E. (org.). *Sociologia: Simmel.* São Paulo, Ed. Ática, 1983 [1908], p. 182-188.

TURNER, Victor W. **O Processo Ritual.** Petrópolis: Vozes, 1974.

References transmitted by electronic media:

Fundação "Prof. Dr. Manoel Pedro Pimentel" de Amparo ao Preso:

<<http://www.funap.sp.gov.br/>>

Fundação SEADE:

<<http://www.seade.gov.br/>>

SABAINI, Raphael. Artigo em página eletrônica: [Agentes Penitenciários de Itirapina, SP: identidade e hierarquia](#). **Ponto Urbe**: revista Digital do Núcleo de Pesquisa Urbana (NAU) da USP. São Paulo, ano 3, dezembro de 2009. Disponível em:

<[http://pontourbe.net/index.php?](http://pontourbe.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45:agentes-penitenciarios-de-itirapina-sp-identidade-e-hierarquia&catid=7:graduacao-em-campo&Itemid=12)

[option=com_content&view=article&id=45:agentes-penitenciarios-de-itirapina-sp-identidade-e-hierarquia&catid=7:graduacao-em-campo&Itemid=12](http://pontourbe.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45:agentes-penitenciarios-de-itirapina-sp-identidade-e-hierarquia&catid=7:graduacao-em-campo&Itemid=12)>. Acesso em: 20 de agosto de 2010.

Secretaria da Administração Penitenciária do Estado de São Paulo:

<<http://www.sap.sp.gov.br/>>