

**Imprisonment, social policies and intersecting inequalities:
(Re)producing positions of social exclusion within and beyond prison**

Abstract

Imprisonment brings together complex effects of a range of intersecting inequalities, which comprise issues of class, ethnicity and gender. Drawing on interviews with twenty male and twenty female prisoners in Portugal, our purpose is to assess, from the prisoners' point of view, how intersecting inequalities are translated into and shaped by the carceral scenario.

Results show that imprisonment co-produces a wide range of complex, and sometimes contradictory, implications within and outside the prison scene. On the one hand, it widens or enables the relationship with the Social State from within prison. On the other hand, imprisonment is inserted in a larger web of societal forces within and beyond prison and establishes itself as an additional mechanism by which inequalities are (re)produced and consolidated.

In the face of insufficient public services or social policies aimed to mitigate the social, familial and economic issues emerging during confinement situations, the vulnerabilities co-created by imprisonment are mainly responded to by kinship networks, and in particular by women. However, this caring work is mostly rendered invisible and under recognized.

Keywords: imprisonment, intersecting inequalities, families, social policies.

Introduction

Imprisonment brings together complex effects of a range of intersecting inequalities, which comprise issues of class, ethnicity, gender and other social positioning locations. A body of interdisciplinary literature has consistently reported that imprisonment affects mainly disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals from the poorest social classes (Carlen, 2007; Cunha, 2013; Wacquant, 2009; Western, 2007). Previous studies also indicate that ethnic minorities are overrepresented in the carceral context (Joseph, 2006; Tonry, 2011). Commentators also add that imprisoned women, although representing a small percentage of the total prison population, entail complex issues that must be analyzed through a gender-sensitive approach (Almeda, 2005; Chesney-Lind, 2002; Heidensohn, 1985).

Men and women sent to prison are generally subject to high degrees of economic and social exclusion that sometimes cumulatively combine the material and symbolic realities of poverty, low levels of educational capital, limited employment-related skills, lack of suitable housing, substance abuse (drugs and alcohol), criminal records, mental health problems, and, particularly among women, episodes of physical and/or sexual violence and single parenthood (Carlen, 2007; European Commission, 2005). Frequently, offenders also live in communities associated with contemporary urban poverty – which are highly target by law enforcement agencies – and have other family members involved with the criminal justice system or imprisoned (Cunha, 2008).

Therefore, an intersectional approach, that emphasizes the interplay of multiple social and economic disadvantages, is central to understand men and women experiences in relation to deviance, crime and imprisonment (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Coster & Heimer, 2006; Joseph, 2006). This conceptual framework, that simultaneously attends to issues of class, gender, ethnicity, and other forms of inequality, allow us to explore how the intersection of these factors of social positioning create compounded dimensions of disempowerment that impact and structure individuals' lives (Crenshaw, 1991). As Anderson and Collins (1995) note, it is crucial to recognize the diverse forms whereby several systems of social hierarchy intersect, creating combined and mutually

constitutive effects of inequality that represent more than the sum of its individual components.

In this article our purpose is to explore how interactions between multiple systems of inequalities are translated into and shaped by the carceral scenario. The foundation for our analysis is the specific social and symbolic context of prison and we take into account the prisoners' point of view. Our aim is twofold: firstly, to analyze how imprisonment relates with pre-existing economic, material and social vulnerabilities. Secondly, to examine how imprisonment co-produces a range of complex effects that directly affect imprisoned men and women and indirectly influence their families.

Results show that imprisonment co-produces a wide array of multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory, implications within and outside the prison scene. In the face of insufficient public services or social policies aimed to mitigate the social, familial and economic issues emerging during confinement situations, these vulnerabilities are mainly responded by kinship networks, and in particular by women. However, this caring work is usually rendered invisible and under recognized.

Along the next pages, we begin by shedding light on the way the relations between prison, family, and policies are usually equated. Then, we present the methods used in this study. The analysis discusses two main contradictory but complementary themes, namely: i) the ways whereby prison may present, to several individuals, a particular platform for entry and referral to multiple social services and ii) how imprisonment depletes human, social and economic resources, relating to complex intersections of systems of inequality, and establishing itself as an additional mechanism by which inequalities are (re)produced and consolidated. In the final remarks we discuss challenges for social inclusion that emerge from the reflexion developed along this paper.

Prison, family and policies: (dis)connections

At present, the purposes of Portuguese Correctional Services are focused on assuring legal interests and society' protection and promoting offenders reintegration into society (Law 115/2009). Within the framework of reintegration, in European and North American contexts, there is an increasingly disseminated trend in official

discourses and imprisonment-related literature that depicts family support during and after imprisonment – in coordination with social security and health, education and employment services – as a key enabler of offenders successful re-entry and recidivism prevention (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Naser & Vigne, 2006; Santos *et al.*, 2003, pp. 67-76; Touraut, 2012, pp. 179-180). Therefore, families are being increasingly called to the penal realm to develop diverse forms of caring work (emotionally and materially support their imprisoned relatives) and to play an active role in prisoners transition back into society (Aungles, 1993, 1994).

In Portugal there are two institutional measures that clearly illustrate this growing connection between the prison and the family sphere: one is the principle of allocating prisoners in institutions located near their social environment in order to prevent the disruption of social ties (Law 51/2011); another institutional disposition is the fact that for the purpose of conceding imprisonment flexibility measures (such as home leaves and parole) one of the main factors taken into account by the prison's head office is the prisoners' social and family environment (Law 115/2009).

Nevertheless, despite the emphasis put by Portuguese legislation on the relevance of sustaining family bonds and promoting social reintegration of prisoners, there are discrepancies between what is formally established and the practices put in action. Firstly, because of the typology of the correctional facilities available: a prisoner convicted to a long sentence might have to serve the prison sentence in a facility located far from his/her family residence. Secondly, because logistics and practical dispositions that characterize most Portuguese prisons – including severe problems of overcrowding – undermine the possibility to locate all prisoners near their social environment. Thirdly, because prison management in Portugal, as also evidenced in other countries, tends to subordinate the upholding of social ties to a *modus operandi* which places a primary emphasis on discipline, control and surveillance of offenders (Craig, 2004). This implies that although there's a wide range of control mechanisms designed to monitoring prisoners, there are scarce instruments oriented to promote prisoners' close connections to the family environment and an overall shortage of social policies oriented to address family issues during imprisonment.

The overlooking of the maintenance of family ties during imprisonment is clearly illustrated in the ways prisons tend to manage contacts between prisoners and their relatives. As pointed by Loïc Wacquant (2002: 376), regarding the North

American context, and Ann Farrell (1998), in relation to the Australian environment, family contacts tend to be defined as a privilege of prisoners, rather than a right of the family as a whole. This same trend is observed in Portugal. That is, ‘privileges’, defined as access to more and improved opportunities for family interaction – longer visits in rooms with fewer people, access to home leaves –, may be extended if the prisoners show good behaviour, or conversely, restricted and forbidden if they do not comply with rules and regulations. Furthermore, policies endorsing family interactions – such as visiting, phone calls, mail, birthday celebrations, and home leaves – are extensively monitored and controlled (Comfort, 2002). And, finally, the conditions for visiting available in most Portuguese prisons (located in locations remote from urban centres, with limited public transport networks available and with an overall shortage rooms adapted for children) tend to not reflect the needs of families. Therefore, as in other countries, visiting in prison in Portugal is characterized by multiple difficulties and may entail onerous costs (Christian, 2005).

Therefore, the control-oriented models governing penal facilities (Craig, 2004) mainly disregard the sustaining of prisoners family connections and ignore the potential impact of imprisonment upon families and communities (Cunha, 2008; Pattillo, Weiman, & Western, 2004). Although there’s a growing importance assigned to the support provided by families both during imprisonment and reintegration, most prison practices in Portugal do not reflect this approach. Kinship networks are increasingly called to the prison context to provide several kinds of assistance to their imprisonment relatives but face scarce adequate resources (Touraut, 2012).

The increased reliance on families to ensure imprisoned relatives well-being and warrant a successful re-entry is fully in line with incipient or receding welfare regimes in Southern European countries such as Portugal, which end up relegating to the family – and particularly women – the responsibility for caring (Portugal, 1999; Santos, 1993). As in other areas of social life, it is generally the *welfare society* – in other words, family and community resources and networks to perform care work– that ensures relatives support, thus mitigating the gaps of a weak welfare state (Santos, 1993).

Yet, as noticed by Manuela Cunha (2013), in the Portuguese context, these *welfare society* mechanisms are extensively eroded by the concentrated action of the criminal justice system, especially among most deprived communities. Since the 1990s, deprived urban territories in the two main Portuguese metropolitan areas (Lisbon and

Oporto) were systematically associated with drug dealing and consumption and drew an intense attention from law enforcement agencies. The centralized action of the criminal justice system in these urban peripheries has led to a systematic confinement of relatives, friends and neighbours (see Cunha 2008). This spatial centralisation of imprisonment tends to extensively erode support networks based on kinship and friendship, since it depletes human, social and economic resources, and increasingly overburdens those who may remain available to provide assistance.

Facing this wide range of conflicting forces, that, on the one hand, appeal for family assistance and, on the other hand, undermine kin efforts and erode their networks, how is family support enacted within prison context?

Methodology

This article is part of research conducted in Portugal. Its main purpose is to explore, from the female and male prisoners' perspective, the familial and social impacts of imprisonment. A qualitative study was undertaken to explore, in depth, how the reconfiguration of social roles and responsibilities upon imprisonment is enacted and how this reframing is shaped by gender, ethnicity and class. Our analysis derives from data gathered from forty interviews conducted by the first author, in two Portuguese prisons, under the scientific supervision of the other authors. Interviews with twenty imprisoned women were conducted between April and September 2011 and the ones with male prisoners were carried out between January and February 2012. The participants' verbal consent to conduct and record the interviews was obtained after they were informed about the study's aim and that their anonymity was guaranteed. The interviews lasted, on average, 83 minutes and the tapes were transcribed verbatim. The names used in the section that presents our analysis are fictitious, to ensure the respondents' anonymity.

A purposive sample was used, which means that new data were added to the analysis when of theoretical interest (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Participants were selected according to the information that respondents could provide about the phenomenon under study. All participants are Portuguese, convicted, had been

imprisoned for more than six months and had at least one child. Ten respondents (five women and five men) are Roma/Gypsies¹.

The interviews focused on the prisoners' life stories, and their family relationships, both before and during imprisonment. Data were systematically categorised and synthesised by main themes. Based on a comprehensive and interpretative analysis of prisoners' narratives, three main themes emerged from the preliminary analysis, namely: i) how prison may represent a particular platform for entry and referral to social services; ii) the forms whereby intersecting inequalities are translated and shaped in the carceral scenario; iii) the social responses to the familial and economic issues associated with imprisonment.

The majority of the interviewees came from precarious economic, social and cultural backgrounds, reflecting trends shown in other national and international studies on prisoners (Carlen, 2007; Wacquant, 2009). Most respondents were aged between 26 - 33 and 34 - 41 years. Men and women had low levels of education. Nine male prisoners weren't gone beyond four years of schooling. Among women (20 in 40) the most common level of education was six years of schooling. Regarding household composition, women had on average 2.85 children and men 2.5 children. Before prison fourteen women and eleven men were living with all of their children.

Regarding the legal and criminal characterization, recidivism is more recurrent among male prisoners: thirteen men and five women had previously served prison sentences. Crimes against property were committed by eleven men and eight women, and crimes related to drug trafficking were perpetrated by five men and seven women. Among female prisoners there are five cases of crimes against people. Men have two convictions for the same reason. Regarding the length of sentences, 21 respondents (twelve women and nine men) were serving sentences ranging from three to six years.

Prison as a particular platform for entry and referral to social services

Prior to imprisonment, most male and female prisoners faced a broad constellation of social problems. However, few men and women had resorted to social

¹ Roma, a widely dispersed ethnic minority, is the designation adopted by Roma activists and some members of the Roma community. However, the majority of members of this community in Portugal use the ethnonym "Gypsy" (*cigano/a*) to identify themselves. Gypsies are a highly stigmatized, segregated and discriminated ethnic minority in Portuguese society (Casa-Nova, 2009).

services or law enforcement agencies to address those issues. Within this framework, imprisonment emerges as the factor that compulsorily withdraws individuals from the pressures that characterized their lives. For example, eight interviewed women reported intimate violence in their conjugal relationships prior to imprisonment. The incidence of domestic violence is particularly high among Gypsy women: three of five Gypsy women interviewed described histories of uninterrupted abuse perpetrated by their conjugal partners². In these particular cases, women's imposed absence from households, caused by imprisonment, tends to discontinue violence. Joaquina – a Gypsy woman who for 10 years has been the victim of abuse by her husband – reports how, while in prison, she experiences a period of “protection”, and has received for the first time professional counselling.

Imprisonment has opened my eyes. [My husband says that before entering to prison] I was not like this and it's true! When I entered here it was like I was blind, he was always beating me and I didn't react. Now I say bad things to him too. (...) The psychologist here helps me a lot (...) I used to love him, now I hate my husband, I really hate him. (...) For me it was better to be imprisoned. If I wasn't arrested maybe at this point I was already dead. He was sick, I swear.
Joaquina (aged 37, robbery, 14 years).

As illustrated by Joaquina's narrative, away from their abusers and exposed to expert counselling discourses, prisoners may address violence differently. Joaquina reported how she gained acknowledge of being a victim of violence. This 'violence awareness' has empowered her for dealing with abuse in new ways, including the way it is perceived in retrospect or projected in the future.

Imprisonment also provides men and women the opportunity to invest in their education and labour training. Most interviewed prisoners were involved in some or several activities in the context of school and labour programs that are implemented in prison. As João shows, these programs may provide opportunities to which individuals didn't had access prior to imprisonment, owing to the accumulated pressures that characterized their lives.

I'm here finishing the 9th grade of school, which I had not finished before due to my drug addiction. (...) In addition to study I work, and I love working. I deal with

² Regarding gender issues among Gypsy communities in Portugal see Casa-Nova, 2009.

documents, laws, numbers, and know that there are people in here who rely on my work. That makes me gain so much self-esteem!. João (aged 38, qualified theft, 3 years and 6 months).

João also outlines another stabilizing force enacted by prison: drug addiction recovery. Eleven interviewed prisoners (5 women and 6 men) are drug addicts. Among these men and women, their recovery during imprisonment is one of the most prominent features of their narratives. However, substance abuse recovery does not necessarily result from specific resources available in prisons. Few Portuguese prisons offer a systematic rehabilitation programme. In most cases, drug addiction is managed through substitute treatment programs, but not specifically addressed during imprisonment. Recovery usually results from the physical separation of the external environment and the greater difficulty in accessing drugs while in prison.

Among the two prisons in which the first author of this paper conducted the fieldwork (one male and other female prison) only the male institution offered the opportunity to join one substance abuse recovery programme. Yet, this programme only targeted a small sample of the total prison population (nearly 1,5 %). Bruno was one of the prisoners involved in this *Free Drug Unit* programme. He highlights the positive changes it triggered in his life:

The good thing of imprisonment was that I quitted drug abuse (...)Despite the sadness of being here, from the time I went to the Free Drug Unit and didn't touched in any kind of drugs anymore my relationship with my wife became much stronger. (...) Imprisonment improved my relationship with my family as well. My mom told me "I'm much happier now, although you are arrested; now I see you are fine, I know where you are. When you were outside I was always waiting for a call from the police or from a hospital saying you were dead". Bruno (aged 38, qualified theft, 4 years and 6 months).

As Bruno shows, in specific cases, rather than damaging relationships, imprisonment can, in the short term, have more complex effects. Away from the pressures and problems outside and by interrupting destructive cycles of substance abuse, confinement situations may foster the reconstruction of deeply frayed family relationships (Comfort, 2002; Granja, Cunha, & Machado, 2013). As also evidenced by

Christian & Kennedy (2011: 391), by providing structure to lives who had become so out of control, imprisonment may also cause relief to family members. Prison controlled environment tends to decrease, even to the a limited extent, the anxiety and stress that relatives usually fell when offenders are on the streets.

Gracinda, whose husband is also imprisoned, also outlines how imprisonment acted as a stabilizing force in her life. Despite not having participated in any drug rehabilitation program (not available in this women's prison), Gracinda reports how imprisonment enabled her to overcome prior circumstances and prevent a fate that would probably lead to death:

I know that nobody likes to be imprisoned. But due to the situation I had, the shame I caused to my family, it was very good I was arrested. It was bad, of course, but at the same time it was a great miracle and I thank God for that. This was the only way to me and my husband got rid of a certain death. If we were not imprisonment we were already dead. We were homeless and my husband was going to die, he was facing tuberculosis... now he is healed. Gracinda (aged 43, qualified theft, 2 years and 7 months).

This narrative highlights how imprisonment can interrupt destructive cycles and, up to a certain point and with the necessary resources, be seen by prisoners as an opportunity to inflect trajectories. Prison effects are therefore complex. However, it is doubtful that these stabilizing forces remain effective after release or that these penal responses (Almeda, 2005: 185) are more efficient than others promoted by non penal institutions within community context, specifically directed to those purposes (Carlen, 2007). It may just be the first step.

Time in prison may also enhance prisoner's referral to social services and social welfare financial support. Availability of economic resources for men and women while in prison is scarce. Their funds are dependent on the access they might have to payment for working time in school and labour programs, and to payment for work related to other activities in which prisoners take part. Therefore, prisoner's ability to provide for families, and in particular children, is highly limited. For that reason, some prisoners – especially those with higher educational levels – attempt to trigger the required bureaucratic mechanisms to obtain certain social benefits. Usually, since this is a lengthy process that requires some specific knowledge of laws and rights, few prisoners

carry out the process. Paulo reports the difficulties he faced to receive State sponsored economic support for his daughters:

I managed to get a State economic support for my daughters. I never had State benefits. I will now use it to assure my daughters well being. It was difficult, I had to wait a long time, many months, many bureaucratic contradictions have emerged, I had to prove many things, but I accomplish it. I did. It's not a high amount, but it helps. Paulo (aged 43, qualified theft and fraud, 7 years).

Prisoners' narratives emphasize how imprisonment may paradoxically present to several individuals a particular platform for entry and referral to multiple social services. In this sense, by addressing problems that people who live in the margins of society commonly face, prison may sometimes function, however inadequately, as an substitute of a social agency for poor populations (Cunha, 2013; Wacquant, 2009). However, its effects tend to be limited upon the time spent in prison (Comfort, 2002). There are scarce or nonexistent bridges with the outside environment to establish continuity of these programmes (Carlen, 2007). In this sense, although optimistic, most prisoners are fearful about their future when they leave prison.

Furthermore, men and women descriptions of imprisonment as a site of protection, personal investment and substance abuse recovery co-exist with statements that clearly recognize that prison *also* has a disruptive effect on their lives, deepening positions of social exclusion.

Imprisonment (re)producing positions of social exclusion

As previously described, imprisonment may foster restorative forces, widening or enabling the relationship with the Social State from within prison. However, these positive implications are embedded in ambiguities, tensions and coexist with disruptive effects. In this section we explore how custodial sentences may as well relate to increase disadvantaged backgrounds, processes of social exclusion and gender inequalities

Imprisonment and intersecting inequalities

Before being imprisoned, interviewed prisoners generally remained involved – as recipients and donors – in systems of assistance and support within informal groups. These settings are predominantly constituted by intergenerational kinship networks and mainly mobilized by women (Pimentel, 2011; Portugal, 1999). Kin support generally involves material offers such as food, clothing and objects; occasional or systematic child and elderly care; economic support; and assistance to domestic work (Vasconcelos, 2002: 512). As shown by Madalena, these arrangements are usually destabilized and discontinued upon prisoner's conviction:

I used to go to my mother's house every day, no matter what time of day it was. (...) My mother needs me for everything. She is disabled (...) she wears diapers, she needs me to dress her, feed her, get her up, take her to the bathroom, everything. (...) Now a neighbour is taking care of her (...) The Santa Casa da Misericórdia [a charity institution] also goes there but if you don't take her off the wheelchair, she doesn't eat. She is closed at home, alone, during the night. The neighbour walks away and locks the door! What if something happens?
Madalena (aged 36, drug trafficking, 4 years and 6 months).

The disruption of such supports and exchanges tends to leave those dependent relatives most deprived of economic and social resources in vulnerable positions and dependent of sporadic help. Among prisoners, these reconfigurations generally promote feelings of powerlessness, magnified when relatives face difficult situations on the outside and convicted offenders cannot directly assist them. Although men tend to have a more peripheral role than women in these care settings, as Fernando and Sandra show, both men and women talk extensively about the permanent anxiety arising from the problems their families face:

My life is a mess because my dad really needs me, he is sick and he cannot work. I used to sell his things in the fairs and gave him the money... Now I'm not there and he cannot work. I want to help and I can't. Fernando (aged 36, possession of prohibited weapon, 2 years and 2 months).

I attempted suicide because in my head I was responsible for my family's misfortunes. The troubles that my mother started to have after I was imprisoned: starving, not having this, not having that... I blamed myself for that. (...) My mother told me she had got so behind with the rent that received letter saying that if she didn't pay at least one or two instalments by a certain date, she would be evicted. Sandra (aged 25, theft, sentenced to 7 years).

It is common among imprisoned men and women the assertion that “outside problems” tend to add additional tension to the difficulties of experiencing prison and compose a major source of concern. Moreover, as Sandra outlines, prisoners generally perceive their families’ problems as a direct result of their own imprisonment and tend to blame themselves for the situations relatives are going through.

However, social exclusion, elderly neglect, poor housing and other challenging situations that prisoners’ families face do not necessarily emerge as direct outcomes of imprisonment. These complex scenarios tend to be co-produced by several intersecting inequalities comprising issues of class, gender and ethnicity, among which imprisonment is established as an additional location of inequality.

Alberto clearly shows how intersecting systems of inequalities – including imprisonment – are interwoven in certain social contexts, generating particular patterns of disempowerment. Alberto is a Gypsy who, besides several labour, social and economic difficulties, had been living in precarious household arrangements before his arrest. Months before Alberto’s conviction his family faced a home eviction process that Alberto attempted to circumvent, resorting to the justice system. However, Alberto’s imprisonment added further emotional, economic and social pressure to an already vulnerable family life condition and eventually led to his wife eviction:

A few days after I came arrested they cutted my Social Integration Income [welfare support] and my wife was evicted (...) Now she sleeps in a van parked in front of the Social Security Office building. Sometimes our children [adult children] take her out of there and she goes to my daughter's house. She just goes there to do her hygiene and to eat something. Alberto (aged 52, drug trafficking, 7 years and 6 months).

Alberto's contact with the criminal justice system, interwoven with pre-existing inequalities, lead to an exacerbation of institutional discrimination that members of ethnic minorities commonly face, to a decline of welfare benefits and to the loss of housing conditions (see in this respect Cunha 2002). In these particular settings, prison generally emerges as a mechanism that generates additional pressure on already deeply vulnerable lives and whereby logics of inequality are (re)produced and consolidated (Marchetti, 2002)(Marchetti, 2002)(Marchetti, 2002). That is, imprisonment does not tend to act as an isolated force that by itself triggers a whole range of hardships (Wacquant, 2002: 388). It is generally deeply embedded in structured gender, ethnicity and class inequalities which are not disconnected from each other, but interactive in its implications.

Social responses: care, gender, and *welfare society*

Upon imprisonment, in the face of insufficient public services or social policies aimed to reduce the social and economic impacts associated with custodial sentences, informal support networks generally emerge as key pillars, providing several kinds of assistance, especially among the poorest (Cunha, 2008). One of the areas in which *welfare society* mechanisms (Santos, 1993) are most prominent is child care placements upon parent's arrest.

Prior to imprisonment, most women bore extensive responsibilities of childcare. Fathers usually played a more peripheral role in education and child support (European Commission, 2005: 36). Generally, when sent to prison, most mothers cannot entrust their children to the care of their absent fathers (this is a scenario only reported by two interviewed women) and children usually cannot stay in the same living arrangements as before (Granja, Cunha, Machado, 2013). As shown by Sofia, upon women's imprisonment the most common scenario (reported by eight of the fourteen women who were the main carers of their offspring prior to imprisonment³) are children being take care by female relatives, especially maternal grandmothers:

My mother is guardian of my youngest daughter. But my mother is 72 years old.

(...) My father is in a nursing home, my mother wanted to be with my father but

³ Six of the women interviewed were not, the main carers of their children before imprisonment. Most mothers had not provided continuous care for their children since these were infants, and so had not maintained regular contact with them (Granja, Cunha & Machado, 2013).

she can't. Instead of resting my mother has to take care of my daughter. She could have some piece now and she hasn't. (...) Moreover she's now facing money problems; she only has her pension and an allowance for taking care of my daughter which are 109€. She struggles a lot. Sofia (47 years homicide, convicted for 9 years).

Though keeping the children inserted in family networks, these child care placements may invert the logics of care by reversing elderly relatives, who previously received care, into children's carers. In addition to restrict the lives of the elderly – who have to adapt to an unexpected lifestyle at this stage in their life. This child care arrangement also create a greater vulnerability to unforeseen events, such as illness, which promote concerns for imprisoned mothers due to the likelihood of elderly people falling ill, thus restricting or preventing them from caring for children. Moreover, these configurations also entail the adjustment to a meagre family budget, fostering economic vulnerability.

Unlike imprisoned mothers, fathers commonly rely on children's other parent to ensure child care: sixteen male prisoners have their children being take care by mothers. As illustrated by Samuel, in this child care configurations, imprisoned fathers generally outline how their absence from children's life and impossibility to economically contribute to the household tends to add further economic and emotional pressure to the main carer.

My children are growing, always needing my help, and my wife is alone out there. (...) Most times she hides the difficulties she faces from me. But I know she always has a problem and often multiple problems: the rent, the water, the light, the kids in school, the food, the cloth... Income is tight. (...) When I came arrested, we had some money, that money helped us while I was here. But now, towards the end, things start to become scarcer. Samuel (aged 24, drug trafficking, 2 years and 6 months).

Although acting as an as additional pauperizing force, imprisonment doesn't affect all prisoners in a uniform way (Cunha, 2008; Marchetti, 2002: 421). When better-off prisoners are confronted with the suspension of a substantial portion of income they are usually able to mobilize the savings made over the years to face emerging

difficulties. Nevertheless, as prisoners show, the considerable length of prison sentences tends to deplete the available economic resources, due to the combination of two main factors: i) resources reduction owing to the suspension of prisoner's income; ii) expenditure increase stemming from the maintenance of contact with imprisoned relatives. In this sense, prison may enhance the impoverishment of families, even for networks that before imprisonment had not often faced economic difficulties (Marchetti, 2002).

In sum, upon parent's imprisonment – mothers and fathers - children are usually cared for by kinship networks, in particularly by other women. However, patterns of placement differ across families, and kin keeping may not be an option available to all prisoners (Enos, 2001, pp. 43–74). Family assistance is commonly insufficient and limited, especially among underprivileged informal support networks (Cunha, 2013).

According to the literature, the institutionalization of children is more common upon mothers rather than fathers imprisonment (Schafer & Dellinger, 2000). Nevertheless, in the present study, both men and women had their children placed in foster care following their arrest (2 women and 3 men). These situations usually emerged from the intersection of multiple systems of inequality, that fostered the erosion of support networks and carers overload. António shows how his imprisonment exacerbated a wide constellation of marital, social and economic problems which had a negative impact on his family, and especially on his wife's mental health. This conjugation of problems eventually led to his son institutionalization.

Prison has destroyed my life. I had a stable life. When I was imprisoned a year later we lost the house, she [wife] was not able to pay the rent. Meanwhile, we were also going through some troubles in our relationship and she was hospitalized at Magalhães Lemos [Psychiatry and mental health hospital] because she had a breakdown. Then, they [Minors protection commission] took my son. He went to the house of the lady who takes care of under protected children. António (aged 28, theft and minor trafficking, 3 years and 6 months).

When relatives are not able to continuously assume child care this can lead children to enter into a instable circuit, in which minors are placed among kin, neighbours or institutions (Cunha, 2013).

In addition to ensure most child care arrangements, informal support networks generally also provide prisoners emotional, material and economic support. However, this dual caring work – that both provides support to dependent relatives on the outside and to prisoners – is not equitable distributed among family members. According to prevailing expectations in the social relations of gender, caring work is mainly assured by women, both upon male and female imprisonment. Men generally play a secondary role in the delivery of care, since this is a task traditionally delegated to the women of the family, reproducing and consolidating gender inequalities in the family realm. Male prisoners usually report constant support from their female partners and mothers. Imprisoned women generally indicate their mothers and sisters as the main caregivers. Raquel shows how her mother holds the burdens of a wide range of economic and caring responsibilities, by trying to assure several relatives well being:

When I came arrested it was very difficult, financially. My mother still has five minor children. She is now also taking care of my 3 year old son and on top of that my father cannot work, so they only have her income. She brings my child to visits, and she also visits the father of my child, who is also imprisoned. But she's not able to visit me or my partner every week. Life out there is complicated. She only comes whenever she has [financial] possibilities. Raquel (aged 20, theft, 7 years).

Despite its demanding character, the work fulfilled by women supporting their imprisoned relatives and other family members is largely under-recognized. On the one hand because the tasks women enact in the reproductive sphere are not necessarily associated with paid work, being socially devalued (Pimentel, 2011). On the other hand, due to the emphasis traditionally assigned to the emotional aspects of care, coupled with the notions of 'naturalness' and 'effortless' of the women's caring work, that commonly masks its material and economic implications, rendering it as invisible (Aungles, 1993, 1994).

Since caring work is usually presented in political and public discourse as seemingly unproblematic and inexpensive, carceral institutions also tend to ignore its demanding and onerous costs. However, by doing so, prisons end up contributing to expand the problems families face. As shown by Tiago, in Portuguese prisons, although there's a wide range of control mechanisms designed to monitoring interactions

between offenders and their families, there is an overall shortage of facilities and logistical instruments (transport, waiting rooms, and suitable rooms for children) oriented to turn contacts more accessible.

My wife comes [to prison] by train, then she has to take two different buses to get here, with my daughter on her lap, with a bag of my clean clothes, it's bad, it's very bad. Then she gets here, she has to wait a couple of hours, and we have a 45 minutes visit! It's unacceptable. Tiago (aged 27, qualified theft, 3 years and 6 months).

Prisons located at long distances from urban neighbourhoods where families live, several relatives imprisoned in different and often far away prisons, and other problems arising in the attempt to maintaining contact with prisoners, make visiting logistically and economically challenging (Christian, 2005). In this sense, although family contact is an important mechanism to cope with imprisonment and to the upholding of social ties, as Antónia reports, underprivileged prisoners commonly choose to decrease visits frequency and other forms of maintaining contact to spare the amount of resources spent.

Now I have don't have visits. I don't want they [family] coming here because it's a long travel. Before I had visits once a month. I never had more than that because it's a very expensive trip and it is too far. Antónia (aged 42, attempted murder, 25 years).

The decrease of family support may have adverse consequences in prisoner's experiences of imprisonment. Firstly, because the moral support provided by kinship networks declines. Secondly, because the goods that families provide to prisoners – such as food, tobacco, television, clothes and magazines – play a central supporting role in prison and prisoners who don't have access to those assets tend to do time more harshly. Thirdly, and most important, since family support plays such a critical role in parole deliberations and in other flexibility measures (home leaves) prisoners with scarce kin support – translated into visits, phone calls and letters – have less possibilities for benefiting from those measures, even with good behaviour.

Accordingly, besides providing material and economic resources, within prison, families are themselves an important resource. Yet, besides being conditional on

relationship status (Christian & Kennedy, 2011), family support is also highly dependent on the access and availability of social and economic resources.

Final remarks: challenges of inclusion

This study explored, from prisoners' point of view, how intersecting inequalities and their combined effects take specific shapes during imprisonment within and beyond prison walls. Research findings indicate that the implications of custodial sentences are not homogeneous within class, gender and ethnicity categories. Custodial sentences consequences vary in scope and intensity across different social situations, locations of inequality, and life trajectories. Some of these differences could be observed in the following aspects:

- Men and women who, prior to imprisonment, faced domestic violence or drug addiction more frequently assess prison experience as a protective and stabilizing force in their lives;
- Poorest prisoners usually suffer harsher prison terms and have less family contact while in prison. Better-off prisoners, though also facing an erosion of resources, are usually more able to manoeuvring emerging difficulties, at least during the initial period of imprisonment;
- Imprisonment comprises gendered specific implications. It is more likely that women's absence from households, rather than men's, destabilizes the child and elderly care configurations that previously existed;
- For ethnic minorities, imprisonment further aggravates and consolidates positions of social exclusion, as it contributes to declining social benefits and perpetuates marginality and discrimination.

Despite the interdependence and intersection of inequalities in the penal field, most studies have used a one-dimensional approach by analyzing imprisonment as a factor that triggers a whole range of "collateral consequences". However, this study emphasizes the importance of using an intersectional analysis when studying imprisonment implications, in order to understand the full diversity of prisoners' trajectories and to shed light on the nuances produced by gender, class, ethnicity and other locations of inequality.

Data suggest that imprisonment may emerge as an additional factor that generates further pressure in the lives of people who live at the bottom of the social scale, (re)producing, exacerbating and compounding intersecting inequalities. Nevertheless, it is also clear that the influence of the prison is more complex, in that it is not entirely distortive and disruptive. Results show how prison can paradoxically present, to several individuals, a particular platform for entry and referral to multiple social services, such as drug abuse treatment, domestic violence counselling, education, labour training and access to social benefits. In this sense, although inadequately, secondarily, and under a limited period of time, prison sometimes functions as an substitute of a social agency for poor populations (Comfort, 2002; Cunha, 2013; Wacquant, 2009).

In Portugal, in the face of insufficient public services or social policies aimed to mitigate the social, familial and economic issues emerging during confinement situations, the vulnerabilities co-created by imprisonment are mainly responded to by kinship networks, and in particular by women, reproducing gender inequalities in the family realm. It is mainly female caring work that, on the one hand, provides prisoners emotional and material support and, on the other hand, assures the care of those dependent relatives left unprotected on the outside.

However, the overall shortage of policies oriented to offenders' families and the invisibility of the emotional, social and economic problems that kinship networks commonly face, tends to undermine families ability to continuously assure social protection. When families are unable to assume child and/or elderly care and provide support to prisoners, imprisoned men and women lose a major asset.

The implications of this study for policy and practice are necessarily restricted due to the limited generalizability of research findings. In broad terms this study highlights the need to explore critically how to attribute rights and responsibilities to families within the framework of imprisonment without further risking pressuring specific groups of people. Coupled with it there is also the need to discuss the invisibility of the work carried out by families, and particularly women, in the penal field. As other studies have also shown, even with minimal support, women on the outside bear most of the social, economic and emotional costs related to imprisonment (Aungles, 1993, 1994; Comfort, 2002). As far as the prison context is concerned, there

is scope to create institutional mechanisms that facilitate prisoners' involvement with families.

By continuing to ignore how imprisonment establishes itself as an additional mechanism by which inequalities are (re)produced and consolidated, affecting both prisoners and their families, we also obscure how confinement situations further weaken the mechanisms of *welfare society* (Cunha, 2013). Consequently, these unaddressed issues may end up undermining families' ability to accommodate prisoners after their release from prison, counteracting official discourses in which families are designated as the social units most likely to assure a successful reintegration.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Foundation for Science and Technology (Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science) for supporting this research, through the project PhD fellowship SFRH/BD/73214/2010. We would also like to thank the DGSPRS [General Board for Prison Services and Rehabilitation] for the permission to conduct this study and the prisoners interviewed for the generous sharing of their experiences.

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