Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Papers

MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

Working Paper No. 202

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Halle/Saale 2020
ISSN 1615-4568

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The Promise of Paper: files, movement and "progress" in a Rio de Janeiro men's prison[1]

David Thompson[2]

Abstract

The prison system of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, functions through a series of documents that make the incarcerated available as objects of legal knowledge and intervention. This bureaucratic system, in turn, fulfils a federal legal mandate for a progressive model of imprisonment. In this paper, I consider the production and circulation of a set of legal documents within a single men's prison in Rio de Janeiro, one that I call Tobias Barreto. I offer a close examination of the files that proliferate within the prison, with an emphasis on one document – the criminological exam – that forms a nexus between penal courts, prison administrators, treatment workers, and incarcerated people. Through a rigid set of evaluations, these documents render the history and futures of the incarcerated person as evidence, a process that underpins any "progression" through a prison sentence. I argue that while documents relay an assurance of progress, this assurance is undercut by a generalised suspicion regarding incarcerated people's claims of having reformed. The analysis highlights both the tensions and the complicity between progressive governance and punitive violence.

[1] The research upon which this paper is based was supported by the Institute for International Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Social Science Research Council. I am also grateful for the dissertation writing-up fellowship I received from the Department 'Law & Anthropology' at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. I would like to thank Marie-Claire Foblets, Brian Donahoe, and Ana Chiritoiu at the Institute, as well as the two reviewers of this paper, Ursula Rao and Larissa Vetters, for their insightful feedback. Finally, thank you to James Holston, Everton Rangel, Kristin Sangren, Keramet Reiter, and Flavia Medeiros, who provided feedback on earlier iterations of this work.

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Introduction

The Paper Heart of Imprisonment

On my first visit to Tobias Barreto, a men's prison in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, I was given a tour of the facilities by the unit's deputy warden.[3] Leaving his office in the administrative building, we walked a few metres down the hall until arriving at our first stop: the classification sector. The walls of this room were lined with filing cabinets, while at the centre stood a table covered with more documents. In a corner sat two computer stations, both currently occupied by prison guards who turned to greet us with a smile. After the deputy warden explained that this room held all the files pertaining to the prison population within the unit, one of the two guards spoke up to confirm, stating that this was, in his opinion, the "heart of the prison".[4] Later, when I began to return regularly to Tobias Barreto, I came to understand the centrality of this small office and the weight of the guard's metaphor. The phrase pointed to the vitality of bureaucracy, but it also signalled the importance of circulation. This was a heart that pumped files throughout the prison, and indeed beyond, into the offices of lawyers, administrators, and penal courts.

The present paper examines the production and circulation of documents within Tobias Barreto and the various anxieties that are attached to them by the legal system, prison workers, and those incarcerated within the prison. I argue that files enact a model of "progressive" incarceration – a model that I explore below, one which sees imprisonment as a gradual "opening" back into society. This model, with a foundation in ideals of rehabilitation, or what is known in Rio as "resocialisation",[5] strains under the weight of severe overcrowding as well as both legal and extra-legal forms of punitive violence. However, it nevertheless persists as the frame through which those in prison are understood as objects of evaluation and intervention, and this frame emerges most clearly in the practice of documentation.

By connecting this paperwork to progressive incarceration, my aim is to produce a distinct form of engagement both with Rio de Janeiro's prisons and with incarceration more broadly, one that might clearly delineate the intersections between law, governance, and the experiences of confinement. I also push back against contemporary narratives within prison studies that frame both progressive models and rehabilitative goals as elements of an era of incarceration that has largely drawn to a close. While I do not put forward a claim here that Rio de Janeiro's prisons are (or are not) rehabilitative – an assertion which would assume and therefore bypass the more important question of what rehabilitation actually is – I nevertheless contend that both progression and resocialisation continue to serve as operating institutional principles of prison life.

This argument emerges from the broader context of my doctoral dissertation project on resocialisation in Rio de Janeiro.[6] In 2014, I began exploratory fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro and obtained authorisation to visit a series of prisons in the state, including Tobias Barreto. It was at this point that I first encountered the classification office as the "heart" of the prison unit. I returned in

[3] The name of the prison, as well as the names given to all participants who appear in this paper, are pseudonyms.

[4] All translations from Brazilian Portuguese in this paper – including conversations, interviews, reports and legislation – are mine.

[5] Resocialisation (*ressocialização*) is the most commonly used term in both Rio de Janeiro and Brazil generally to refer to the network of practices and narratives that centre on the transformation of the incarcerated person and their re-orientation towards life in society outside prison. The motto of Rio de Janeiro's prison system, for instance, is "Resocialise to Conquer the Future". However, in other regions of Brazil such as São Paulo the term "re-education" (*reeducação*) is more commonly used to refer to this network.

[6] While "penal execution" also encompasses a number of alternative penalties such as probation or community service, the vast majority of criminal sentences in Brazil (approximately 98%) involve imprisonment.

late 2016 as an intern for the Public Defenders' Office, working with the team of lawyers and paralegals who were assigned to clients within this prison. Together with the team, I would visit the prison at least once a week over the course of a year. As both the legal representatives of the incarcerated and the only agents of the judiciary with a physical presence in the prison system, public defenders depend upon paperwork, and upon this classification office, to carry out their work. However, in order to understand the production and circulation of files, I also turn to other actors, from guards to prison psychologists and social workers – and the incarcerated themselves, whose pasts and futures are transformed into evidence through a series of documents.

I begin this discussion by locating my analytical approach within recent literature on incarceration. I then offer an outline of the contemporary carceral landscape of Brazil, before situating it within a broader history of the development and consolidation of a model of imprisonment based on the idea of "progression". Next, I turn my attention to three files: the sentencing certificate, the transcript of disciplinary record, and the criminological exam. Giving particular attention to this last document, I consider how paperwork is embedded within both a progressive mandate and the realities of mass incarceration. I also offer an analysis of a specific conflict involving the wording and even punctuation used within these files, one which demonstrates an operative politics of suspicion that exists within Tobias Barreto. Finally, I suggest that progressive imprisonment feeds into the suspicion that saturates relationships between courts, prison workers, and incarcerated people, a suspicion which erodes the promise at the heart of the notion of progress.

As a methodological note, it is important to highlight that I have chosen here to follow files produced in courts and prisons, files which refer to and produce specific representations of those imprisoned in Tobias Barreto. This leads to an emphasis on agents and objects of the state, including lawyers and files, at the expense of the incarcerated themselves, who largely appear in this account as mediated through documents. Such an approach in part emerges from the conditions of my fieldwork and the necessity of ensuring the privacy of those imprisoned in Tobias Barreto. Because this paper focuses on the representations of these people in bureaucracy, it does not elaborate their individual voices and experiences, which find little room for expression in a standardised file. This is particularly true, as I shall argue, when documents crystallise a specific image of human development and rehabilitation marked by the social norms of whiteness, against which the incarcerated, the vast majority of whom are Black, are measured (Davis 2001). Nevertheless, by offering an account of the practices of documenting, I aim to both critique its limitations and highlight its roots within, rather than outside, progressive incarceration and the models of liberal governance from which it stems.

Progress and Paperwork as Objects of Anthropological Inquiry

In order to consider the relationship between documents and progress, it is first necessary to explain what both terms mean in the context of this study. For those incarcerated in Tobias Barreto and those who work in the prison, "progress", whether as a noun (*progresso*) or a verb (*progredir*), most immediately signifies movement through a prison sentence and towards release. As I will examine below in more detail, every criminal sentence is divided into distinct phases that correspond to a specific regime of punishment. These range from "closed" prisons, which would roughly correspond to a "maximum-security" designation in most Anglophone contexts, to "open" imprisonment, which for most means house arrest. During my fieldwork, Tobias Barreto was designated as a "semi-open" prison, something of an intermediary phase. From the perspective of incarcerated people, progress

was an event, a substantial transformation in the conditions of their punishment. Given the extensive overcrowding in the prison system, however, for prison workers this same movement was more of a strict, logistical control of flows that almost resembled a production line in its constant demand for movement.

This movement is tied to a broader model and ideal of imprisonment, one that also calls itself "progressive". In this second sense, the "progress" of progressive incarceration refers to an orientation of the penal system towards the subject engaging in crime (as opposed to the criminal act) and the rehabilitation and gradual reintegration of these individuals into the social body. It therefore operates on the basis of an analysis that assumes two entities – society and the individual – are in conflict, with the latter being an object of diagnosis and treatment in order to eliminate the conflict. This progressive penology therefore draws on liberal ideals of the perfectibility of the individual and of society as a whole. Contemporary Brazilian penal law is explicitly structured around this model of imprisonment, one element of which is distinguishing between different regimes of punishment.

The attention given within this paper to progress runs counter to an established narrative within studies of incarceration that suggests that progressive imprisonment has largely been abandoned as a model for penal practices. North American-based scholarship in particular suggests that rehabilitative processes and programming were dismantled beginning in the 1960s, a shift that was bolstered by an apparent consensus within criminology that with regards to rehabilitation, "nothing works" (Martinson 1974). Others have argued that the new forms of punitivism and mass incarceration that emerged in its place were then successfully exported to the rest of the world – including Brazil, which Loïc Wacquant (2008) sees as a second paradigmatic site of this new neoliberal penality. This narrative has been criticised on a number of fronts, such as its failure to account for the significant local and regional variance (Lynch 1998) and its dismissal of the interplay between penal policy and racial or demographic shifts in the prison population (McLennan 2015). However, these critics nevertheless follow the typification of contemporary forms of incarceration as post-progressive or "post-rehabilitative" (Lynch 1998: 91) in some crucial sense.

Implicit within these arguments is an either-or binary that frames progressive imprisonment and contemporary forms of mass incarceration and punitive violence as being mutually exclusive. Such reasoning does not hold within the context of Brazil, which, as I demonstrate below, has seen a clear expansion of both since the most recent transition to democracy in the 1980s. However, my main objection to this line of research is its reliance upon a functionalist tendency to reduce processes to outcomes at the expense of a proper understanding of what progressive incarceration actually *does*. I contend that the enduring impact of progressive imprisonment becomes increasingly clear when we suspend, at least temporarily, the question of its relative efficacy (that is, whether it "works"). Examining prisons through this lens does not necessarily require embracing or naively accepting the values or policies of prison administrators and legislators. Instead, it makes it possible to investigate what is made and unmade under the sign of progress. To put it differently, progress can and does "fail" constantly in many senses, some of which I document below. But this apparent failure does not mark the absence of progressive imprisonment but rather one of its effects.

By following these effects, I also engage with Brazil's contemporary penal state in a distinctly different way than other accounts both from within scholarship and in the national and international popular imagination. There is a well-established anthropological literature detailing the punitive cruelty of Brazil's penal system, ranging from everyday scenes of violence and suffering to more

spectacular displays of abject horror. This "spectrum of violence"[7] includes widespread prison overcrowding (Alves 2016); the ritualised assault of visitors through strip searches (Biondi 2016); the proliferation of infectious diseases from scabies to tuberculosis in a context of inadequate or non-existent health care (Santos 2019); and an entrenched culture of violence, from daily beatings to riots and periodic prison massacres across the country (Mallart 2014; Santos 2019; Alves 2016; Wacquant 2008; Bueno and Denyer Willis 2019). Far from representing any rehabilitative ideal, such prisons are more commonly recognised as *criminogenic*, since not only do they push incarcerated people towards crime, they also shore up the structures of criminal organisations. These groups, known in Brazil as factions (*facções*), arguably displace state authority as they come to govern, at least partially, the prison system (Darke 2018; Holston 2009; Wacquant 2008; Biondi 2016).

These critiques are not isolated to academia; indeed, many of those with whom I worked, whether prison workers or incarcerated people, articulated similar claims over the course of my fieldwork. What insights, then, can be gained by using the idea of progression to orient prison research in this context? As argued by another anthropologist, Rafael Godoi (2016: 8), the repetitive framing of incarceration in Brazil through similar tropes of violence and injustice produces

> "(…) a certain intellectual attitude (…) that, faced with the question 'What are prisons in Brazil?' provokes the response 'We know what they are about: precarity, arbitrariness, poor treatment, torture, the same as always!' This is still true. But the daily functioning of prison cannot be reduced to these processes. As central as these structuring forces are, other dynamics (which often produce other sufferings) are fundamental not just to the maintenance of prison routines but also to the expansion of incarceration."

Building from Godoi's line of argument, I claim that progress is one of the structuring forces of prison life and governance within Rio de Janeiro. In doing so, I suggest that progressive ideals neither resist nor mitigate the punitive violence that is characteristic of Brazil's prisons – but they do mould its contours.

Whether as an ideal, a process or an event, progress often appears elusive within Tobias Barreto. However, it is constantly referenced, enacted, and made material through a series of documents that flow through each prison and connect them with the penal courts. In approaching imprisonment through these bureaucratic processes, I follow the argument set forth by criminologist Sora Han (2015: 97–98) that punishment "is not only a system of signification whose purpose is to shape something outside of it (…). It also bears a certain materiality of writing through which social identification, political imagination, and both mundane and spectacular statecraft are performed. In short, punishment is paperwork". The materiality of prison is composed of paper as much as concrete or iron – although paper differs from these other substances by the facility of its movement. The fact that paper travels through an institution entirely organised around immobility gives documents a particular significance, both for workers and for incarcerated people. Furthermore, paperwork as a frame also draws us to the *work* of documents – the labour invested in them as well as the work that they accomplish. Like other anthropological studies of documents (Reed 2006; Riles 2006; Hull 2012), I approach files not just as extensions of the subject, but as conduits of various other forces and as actors in their own right.

[7] Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2003) use the concept of a spectrum of violence to understand the resonances between intimate or everyday forms of violence and broader structural inequalities.

Other anthropologists have examined the significance of documents within Brazil's prisons in recent years. For instance, Rafael Godoi (2017) turns to bureaucracy as a key technology of the state's maintenance of custodial prerogatives within São Paulo's prison system. Thus, he focuses on *control* as the central analytic for understanding the relationship between incarceration and bureaucracy. In her work in juvenile detention in the north-eastern state of Bahia, Kristen Drybread (2016) describes documents in terms of their *violence*, since the practices of documenting young people's supposed "delinquency" has tangible effects, limiting both their opportunities to define themselves and their scope of action. Both elements appear within this paper. However, my focus on progress allows for a consideration of the constructive as well as destructive effects of incarceration, and perhaps more importantly, on the interplay between them.

Incarceration and Contemporary Brazilian Democracy

The contemporary Brazilian project of democratisation is, as James Holston and Teresa Caldeira (1999) argue, a "disjunctive" one. By disjunction, the authors refer to the uneven and contradictory quality of democratic projects, which are "never cumulative, linear, or evenly distributed for all citizens, but [are] always a mix of progressive and regressive elements, unbalanced, and heterogeneous" (ibid.: 692). This is not unique to Brazil; rather, such slippages are a general feature of all democratic projects, which therefore always exist in some state of incompleteness (Holston 2008). The case of Brazil is nevertheless particularly demonstrative of this double movement in which the consolidation of democratic institutions has been accompanied by

> "the delegitimation of many institutions of law and justice, an escalation of both violent crime and police abuse, the criminalization of the poor, a significant increase in support for illegal measures of control, the pervasive obstruction of the principle of legality, and an unequal and uneven distribution of citizen rights." (Caldeira and Holston 1999: 692).

Many rights-based movements and campaigns have emerged and continue to operate within this context. This includes a broad network of actors pushing for penal reform, and a shift in both national and international concern from the figure of the political prisoner during the 1964–1985 military dictatorship to that of the "common prisoner" (*preso comum*). But such movements have difficulty finding traction within Brazilian society and politics because they are largely dismissed as providing "privileges for bandits" (Caldeira and Holston 1999; Caldeira 1991). This antipathy towards those labeled as criminal has also found its expression in increasingly punitive legal and policy reforms, a shift which helps to account for the staggering 730% growth in the nation's prison population between 1990 and 2019. While there is a dearth of reliable quantitative information regarding Brazilian prisons, the most recent federal report placed the entire prison population of the country at the end of 2019 at slightly over 750,000 (Infopen 2020).

Given this exponential growth in incarceration, it is clear that the role of prisons within Brazil's landscape of a differentiated distribution of rights is particularly significant. On the one hand, they ostensibly form part of the "legal" apparatus of the state, holding supposed criminals to account through the law. In this sense, they perhaps best represent a Brazilian tendency to wield the law as a tool of subordination rather than equality, and indeed to reserve its full force for differentiating between citizens and establishing categories of internal enemies (Holston 2008). Yet prisons are also, somewhat paradoxically, extra-legal institutions, hosts to an array of violence ostensibly outside the

scope of state sovereignty. They are, furthermore, also integral to the production of the category of the criminal in the first place. Media coverage of police killings routinely identifies which victims had a *passagem* – a prior "passage" through the criminal justice system. Having a *passagem*, or simply associating with someone who has one, marks an individual's death under such circumstances as not just comprehensible but legitimate, irrespective of legality. While prison sentences are hardly the only means by which people become marked as both criminal and killable, they nevertheless draw upon and cement what Graham Denyer Willis (2015: 16) describes as the "victim-perpetrator 'complex'", a stark moral dichotomy that underlies both morality and mortality in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America.[8]

Nationwide, those most directly exposed to the amalgam of legal and extra-legal strategies that operate under a rhetoric of "law and order" are young Black men, particularly those living in urban peripheries. Statistics on victims of police violence, as well as sentencing rates and prison populations, underline the fact that the "security" apparatus poses an ongoing assault on Black Brazilians. Nationally, two-thirds of the prison population are identified by the state as Black (*negro*).[9] There is a particularly great disproportionality between Black and white incarceration rates in the south-east of Brazil, a region which includes Rio de Janeiro as well as the neighbouring states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais (Santos 2019). In Rio, for example, Black people make up 72% of those incarcerated, compared to 51% of the state's population overall (Infopen 2017). Those whose lives and deaths are quantified by incarceration statistics are also overwhelmingly male, or at least legally identified as such – 92% of the prison population in Rio de Janeiro is held within men's prisons, for instance (ibid.). These numbers, however, obscure the forms of violence experienced by transgender and *travesti* Brazilians, who are generally rendered invisible in these accounts. Likewise, cisgender Black women are drawn into the criminal justice system both as family members and visitors of incarcerated loved ones, and increasingly as targets of incarceration themselves (Moore 2020).

While the growth, violence, and systemic racism of incarceration are endemic all across the carceral landscape of Brazil, there is considerable variation at the regional and state levels. Both criminal and penal law (that is, the body of legislation that concerns the application of punishment and the administration of prisons) operate at a federal level. However, the administration of the criminal justice system, from policing to courts and incarceration itself, is managed by individual states.[10] As such, imprisonment in Brazil, as in the United States, might be better understood as a collection of related but distinct prison systems. This ranges, for instance, from São Paulo, where the prison population and incarceration rate[11] both far exceed that of any other state, to Bahia in the country's north-east, which has the lowest incarceration rate in the nation and has maintained a relatively stable prison population over the last decade (Infopen 2017).

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[8] For example, see Samet (2019) for an analysis of a parallel discourse within Caracas, Venezuela.

[9] Prisons, as with most government institutions, tend to use official categorisations based on colour (*cor*) that divide the population into *preto* (black) and *pardo* (brown), alongside *branco* (white), *indígena* (indigenous) and *amarelo* (Asian, literally "yellow"). Contemporary approaches to race within the social sciences do not align with these terms. Most scholarship combines *preto* and *pardo* within the category of *negro*, which most closely corresponds to the Anglophone racial category Black.

[10] The notable exceptions to this are the five federal prisons that largely function as "supermax" units; however, these units are reserved for individuals held under exceptional circumstances and collectively they house less than 1% of the national prison population.

[11] "Incarceration rate" generally refers to the number of those currently imprisoned per 100,000 people. It therefore does not include those serving sentences under conditions of parole or house arrest, or those who have not been apprehended but for whom an arrest warrant has been served.

When I resumed my fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, the number of people imprisoned in the state had reached 50,000. This population was distributed among forty-three jails, prisons, and penitentiaries, as well as a small number of medical facilities. The state of Rio de Janeiro has pursued a strategy of concentrating prisons within urban peripheries. Particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, units in the city centre and in remote areas of the state were decommissioned and demolished, while new prisons were built in the peripheries along the outer edges of the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, as well as within its satellite cities. It is important to note, however, that half of the state's prisons, and two-thirds of the prison population, are located within a single complex, located in Rio's West Zone, some thirty-five kilometres from the city centre. This complex, colloquially known as Bangu,[12] also houses Tobias Barreto.

The contemporary shape and size of the penal system in Rio de Janeiro directly reflects the security operations of the previous decade, and particularly the emergence of the Police Pacifying Units (*Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora* or UPPs). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a history of the UPPs,[13] it is important to note that this security strategy, in which police established a permanent presence in the city's *favelas*, greatly increased the scope of police activity and magnified *favela* residents' vulnerability to the criminal justice system. The first UPP was established in late 2008; but the mega-events of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games provided political justification and intensification of this process and increased funding for policing in Rio from both federal and state governments. One of the results was an accelerated rise in rates of arrest and imprisonment; in the four years between 2013 and 2016, the prison population of Rio grew by over 40%.

Thus, in the midst of an unprecedented project of urban renewal and the declared "transformation" of Rio de Janeiro, criminal justice functioned as a form of displacement and a tool for the assertion of state sovereignty over urban territories. The influx in the prison population was not met with any substantial increase in resources for prisons, which exacerbated a series of ongoing issues within the system, including over-crowding, violence, and disease. Yet these aspects of incarceration also stood alongside a clear legal mandate for a "progressive" prison system, one deeply rooted within national history, and particularly ideas of race, development, and humane treatment. In order to understand the confluence of these forces during the timeframe of the study, it is therefore necessary to consider how "progress" emerged as an ideal of punishment in the first place.

The Progress of Progress

Brazil's Penal Project, 1830–1957

The concept of progression within a penal sentence – that is, of a path through incarceration structured by the gradual acquisition of benefits and movement towards lower-security regimes – is occasionally referred to within criminology as the "British" model. Arguably, this model has two distinct, yet contemporaneous, origins. The first is Pentonville Prison, opened in England in 1842, which was the first to break down the time of imprisonment into different regimes (Ignatieff 1978). Here, those recently imprisoned were first held in solitary confinement, before later moving to a second phase of the sentence in which they lived and worked in a communal fashion. Around the same time, the British captain Alexander Maconochie implemented what he termed as the "mark

[12] The formal name, Gericinó Penitentiary Complex, is virtually never used, even by prison workers and administrators.
[13] For a more detailed account of the UPPs, see Amar and Carvalho (2016), Ferreira da Silva (2014), and Penglase (2014).

system" in the penal colony of Norfolk Island, off the coast of Australia. This system established five stages of a sentence, beginning with strict imprisonment, moving through intermediate stages that allowed greater movement, and culminating with a "ticket of leave on parole", which constituted a conditional pardon (Petersilia 2003). Beyond this specific change, Maconochie also envisioned a system of confinement that was not determined by specific lengths of imprisonment but rather used indeterminate sentences in which the only criteria for progression and release depended upon an evaluation of the character of the imprisoned person.

Although these two shifts, and the distinctions they create, may appear relatively insignificant compared to the brute fact of imprisonment itself, they nevertheless represent a significant break in how incarceration was both understood and administered. Before the emergence of these models, the criminal sentence was understood as a single block of time. Indeed, time was treated as a fungible quantity, which Melossi and Pavarini (1981) argue reflected the new organisation of time as a commodity within capitalism. These elements of progression broke down this view of time. One month in prison was no longer the same as any other. Instead, time seemed to bend towards the moment of release in this gradual movement through different "stages" of a sentence; but this movement also began to depend upon analysis of the imprisoned person.

While these models of progression began to develop within Europe and many of its colonies, they were still distant from Brazil, which had only recently embarked on its own project of prison construction as a tool to "modernise" the Empire. The House of Correction (*Casa de Correção*), the first penitentiary built in Latin America, was proposed by the Society for the Defence of Liberty and National Independence of Rio de Janeiro[14] soon after the establishment of the first criminal code in 1830. The society's goal was to consolidate various houses of detention across the city (which variously held the indebted, the homeless, and enslaved Africans as well as their descendants) within this new penitentiary model. In a city with a large Black majority at the time, the House of Correction was also promoted as a solution to the "insolence" of the enslaved and "free Africans" (*Africanos livres*)[15] and their "disrespect" for the police, and to prevent uprisings that, it was feared, could result from public gatherings on the city streets (Araújo 2009: 19).[16] As implied in the name, the House of Correction was to be a site of moral reform. But at this time, such reformative ideals were not enacted in the form of incorporating "progressive" elements into criminal sentences.

In 1890, after the abolition of slavery and the end of the Empire, a new criminal code was introduced. The code represented a clear attempt to substitute policing for slavery as the institution for exercising control over the nation's Black population. In particular, it directly criminalised Afro-Brazilian cultural practices, including the martial art *capoeira*, and the "practice of spiritism, magic, and sorcery" in reference to religious practices such as Candomblé and Umbanda.[17] These practices were classified within the code together with "idleness" (that is, the crime of unemployment), which was now punishable by up to fifteen days of imprisonment. However, the code, which drew heavily on examples from the United States and Europe, also demonstrated the first steps towards a progressive system. Article 50 stated that "those condemned to prison for a period exceeding six years and who have completed half the sentence, demonstrating good behaviour, may be transferred

[14] *Sociedade Defensora da Liberdade e Independência Nacional*.
[15] *Africanos livres* was a legal term describing formerly enslaved Black people in Brazil who were nevertheless subject to particular legal controls, including the possibility of forced labour, and therefore occupied an ambiguous position between enslavement and full citizenship.
[16] For more detail on the relationship between slavery, labor and the House of Correction, see Jean (2017).
[17] BRASIL. Decreto nº. 847, de 11 de outubro de 1890 (Código Penal dos Estados Unidos do Brazil). Article 157.

to an agricultural penitentiary to complete the remainder of their punishment".[18] Agricultural penitentiaries of the time were located on the outskirts of major urban centres and were generally characterised by less restrictive security measures.

Over the next several decades, this first decree was followed by a series of laws that shifted the nature of criminal sentences. For example, Brazil introduced parole for the first time in 1924, with the explicit objective being to "stimulate the convicted to live honestly in liberty, reintegrating gradually into the society of free men, maintained by the fear of returning to prison".[19] Here, too, eligibility for parole was pegged to an assessment indicating good behaviour – but the 1924 decree also aimed to define and formalise the concept through documentation by requiring a report, produced by the prison warden, that attested to:

> "1. The particular circumstances leading to the penal infraction that may be of importance for the appreciation of the nature of the inmate.
> 2. The character of the parolee, revealed through their history, as well as criminal practice, oriented by both the psychic and anthropological nature of the inmate (tendency to crime, brutal instincts, influence of their surroundings, customs, level of emotion, etc.)
> 3. The behaviour of the convicted in prison, their docility or rebellion in the face of discipline, aptitude for work, and relations with companions and workers of the establishment.
> 4. The affective relations of the convicted (family, friends, etc.);
> 5. The economic, professional, and intellectual situation of the inmate.
> 6. Plans for after parole, particularly future vocation."[20]

As I will demonstrate in the following sections, these criteria for parole have remained remarkably stable since 1924: first, by defining behaviour through interactions with prison authorities (i.e., as well-behaved or rebellious); and second, by tying parole to the question of the incarcerated person's plans for release. In practice, however, this law deepened the racial divide in incarceration. For instance, the records of release demonstrate that white men were disproportionately classified as well-behaved and therefore eligible for parole, while incarcerated Black men were far more likely to spend the entirety of their sentence– or in some cases even longer – in prison (Sepúlveda dos Santos 2006).

Where it was initially the warden who held responsibility for assessing an incarcerated person's eligibility for parole, in the mid-twentieth century other forms of expert knowledge entered into this decision. The first of these was psychiatry, which Rio de Janeiro physician Heitor Carrilho was instrumental in establishing as a necessary tool starting in the 1940s with which to understand the "personality" of the criminal. This view saw the criminal as an individual positioned in conflict with another entity – society – that was largely understood along Durkheimian lines as a moral-institutional order (Carrilho 1948; Teixeira Dias 2011).[21] Thus, the psychiatrist's report came to supplement and partially supplant that of the warden as a legal document and a tool for determining a person's progression through the prison system. This shift was consolidated in 1957 with the first comprehensive federal law governing the administration of prisons across the country. For the first

[18] Ibid., Article 50.
[19] BRASIL. Decreto nº. 16.665, de 6 de maio de 1924. Article 6.
[20] Ibid., Article 4.
[21] Previous legislation and debate in Brazil referred to *civilisation* rather than society as the entity under threat by crime and towards which the incarcerated person should be re-oriented.

time, legislation mandated the presence of "psychotechnicians" as members of a prison's administration who were responsible for generating the evaluations of those held under custody.

The Law of Penal Execution (LEP)

The function of prisons shifted during the years of Brazil's military dictatorship, particularly as activists and other voices of political dissent were imprisoned across the country. Yet the legislation governing prison administration remained largely unchanged. It was during the transition to democracy that arguably the most important piece of legislation governing prison life was introduced – the Law of Penal Execution, also known as the LEP (*Lei de Execução Penal*), which is still in force, albeit with some alterations, today. In the midst of this new democratic project and the consolidation of progressive governance within other institutions, the LEP developed previously-introduced elements of progressive imprisonment and consolidated them as a central aspect of incarceration. In its first article, the LEP defines two objectives of carrying out penal sentences: "the implementation of the terms of the sentence or criminal decision, and the provision of conditions for the harmonious social integration of the convicted or the interned".[22] The first of these objectives, implementation, is technical – prisons shall carry out a sentence. The second is reformative, aiming for a reconciliation between the two units of individual and society that are assumed as being in conflict. The LEP thereby brought treatment to the forefront of prison administration – at least in the letter of the law.

Together with this ideal, the LEP also introduced the gradations that characterise imprisonment across Brazil today. That is, it established the parameters for different kinds of imprisonment, from "closed" to "semi-open" and finally "open" prison regimes. The names themselves demonstrate an image of incarceration as a progressive "opening", as the incarcerated person progresses along their path towards eventual release. For instance, under the LEP those in a semi-open prison such as Tobias Barreto are legally guaranteed the opportunity to work and study outside prison and to move more freely through the unit. However, progress through this system is not automatic. Instead, the LEP prescribes a series of evaluations to be conducted by correctional officers, "psychotecnicians", and penal judges that collectively determine eligibility both to move between different categories of prisons and ultimately to be released on parole.

The history of legal reform is not the history of prison as it is experienced either by incarcerated people or by administrators. Guarantees written into legislation regarding education, treatment, and work were, and still are, largely unavailable in the vast majority of prison units in Rio de Janeiro and in Brazil as a whole. Furthermore, the LEP offered no set penalties for officials or administrators who did not conform to its requirements. However, the history outlined above demonstrates three important points: First, it highlights the gradual development of progression as a model for understanding and coordinating punishment in Brazil. Second, it demonstrates the insertion of experts, first psychologists and then "psychotechnicians", as juridical actors who serve this model of progress by making the incarcerated person an object of knowledge and a form of evidence. Finally, it shows the growing centrality of reports and other documents as the medium through which this evaluation occurs. As we will examine in the following section, there is a clear disjuncture between the image of imprisonment presented in the LEP and the reality of Tobias Barreto. But files nevertheless act as a conduit between the juridical ideal of progress and everyday prison life, albeit in unexpected ways.

[22] BRASIL. Lei nº. 7.210, de 11 de julho de 1984 (Lei de Execução Penal). Article 1.

Paper, Progress, and Penal Law

Documenting Punishment: the Sentencing Certificate

Tobias Barreto sits inside the massive penal complex of Bangu, sandwiched between two other prisons on the road that leads in from the main gates. As an intern for the Public Defenders' Office, I would arrive at the complex early in the morning as a passenger in the car of either Lívia or Ángela, the two defenders assigned to the unit. On most days, their work was not here but in their offices in the city centre, where they would file petitions, meet with family members of clients, and track the progress of cases. But both of them would spend at least one day each week in prison speaking with their clients. This rhythm of work was the standard practice for most public defenders working in Rio de Janeiro's prisons. It was based at least partly on the argument that their presence might prevent violence against or gross violations of the rights of their clients. It constituted the only physical point of contact that most incarcerated people had with the judiciary after their criminal trial and sentencing. This contact also marks Rio de Janeiro as distinct from most other states within Brazil, in which incarcerated people have virtually no opportunities to physically meet with their state-appointed legal representatives (Godoi 2017).

In the car, alongside myself and often an intern or paralegal, Lívia and Ángela would bring a suitcase stacked with papers they had printed the previous evening. While they had a designated office within Tobias Barreto's administration building, the first stop was always at the classification office, where they would distribute a large stack of files to the correctional officers on duty. We would then walk down the hall into the office and arrange the plastic tables stacked in the corner into a row in order to meet with the line of clients that generally had already started forming by the time of our arrival. Before letting them in, however, Lívia or Ángela would take another stack out of the suitcase and hand them to their assistant, an incarcerated man who organised the line of clients and intervened in any potential conflicts.

I will return to the first stack of files at a later point in this paper. The second stack contained around two hundred pages of printed paper, carefully organised alphabetically by the first name of the roughly forty clients scheduled to appear in the office that day. These were the sentencing certificates (*atestados de pena*) which the assistant would hand to clients as they waited in line. Each certificate begins with a series of identifiers: name of the incarcerated person, names of both parents, their Brazilian identification numbers, and the protocol number assigned to them once they enter the prison system. The second section lists the current conviction(s) by name and the article of the criminal code in which they appear. It also includes a history of all movements through the prison system, from date of arrest and internment to the date of the conviction, as well as any transfers or former "progressions" through the prison system.

However, the main object of interest, both for incarcerated people and public defenders, was the final section of the certificate: the calculation (*cálculo*). When a judge passes a criminal sentence, the length of imprisonment falls within a range defined by the criminal code. This initial term is then modified based on any aggravating or attenuating circumstances, such as pre-meditation or the use or threat of violence. The product of this legal-mathematical operation is a single number: the length of time of the sentence. But this number then forms the basis of a second operation, the calculation, in which the entire sentence is divided into segments after which specific benefits, including eligibility for progression, become available. Aside from the length of the sentence, this calculation

depends on two factors: whether the person sentenced is identified as a recidivist;[23] and whether the crime is categorised as "heinous".[24] In the case of a first-offence non-heinous crime, for instance, one would be eligible to apply for a transfer from a "closed" to "semi-open" prison after serving one-sixth of a sentence, and for parole after one-third. Those convicted of a heinous crime, on the other hand, must serve at least three-fifths of a sentence to become eligible for parole. These fractions are established at the moment of sentencing and cannot be modified except to correct for human error.

When clients received their sentencing certificate from the assistant, most flipped immediately through the first few pages to find this section of the form. Since Tobias Barreto was a semi-open prison, those held here were generally waiting for their upcoming eligibility for parole (or, in some cases, house arrest). Reaching the dates for progression was, in itself, not enough. Instead, these dates represented what public defenders referred to as the "objective" criteria for release. Here objectivity refers to the established juridical fact of the sentence, rather than the "subjective" evaluation of the incarcerated person, which I will examine below. Calculation produced a schedule for possible release, one that was generally much shorter than the entire length of the sentence. Along that path, it also offered various concrete points that would relax confinement, some of which those in Tobias Barreto had already passed. This calculation therefore constituted a mathematical process of liberation that, in partitioning the future, produced an image of opening, one tabulated and marked on the sentencing certificate. This date was often only months away.

Public defenders have no legal obligation to bring this document into prison. These files were generated automatically by the penal court; they attested to information that was already established; and on their own they initiated no particular action. All information present in the sentencing certificate was also available in the electronic database that Lívia and Ángela brought with them on their laptops, which also included much more detail regarding each case. But this weekly practice of printing hundreds of pages each night in preparation for the following day's prison visit was an established routine among all public defenders in Rio de Janeiro. It represented an attempt to mitigate tensions between incarcerated people and the judiciary. To appreciate the significance of this document, we must first turn to the terms of the meeting between defenders and their clients.

Lívia and Ángela each had approximately 900 clients in Tobias Barreto. Their caseload was a direct consequence of the exponential growth of Rio de Janeiro's prison population in 2013–2016. Lawyers who had worked in the prison system for many years, such as Lívia, constantly lamented the loss of their previous work routine. While prisons were overcrowded even then and public defenders burdened with hundreds of clients, Lívia felt that she still had the opportunity to develop closer relations to them and keep track not just of the formalities of the case but of the people themselves. By 2017, however, public defenders had developed a different kind of workflow: an almost industrialised production line for handling criminal sentences. During my fieldwork, the two defenders organised their labour with the goal of attending to their clients at least once every four months. This required that each of them seeing between forty and fifty incarcerated people on each of their visits to Tobias Barreto. Even with the assistance of paralegals and interns, this meant that

[23] Recidivism (*reincidência*) in Brazil is defined as a crime committed within five years of the end of a previous criminal sentence.

[24] "Heinous" crime (*crime hediondo*) is a category established in the Brazilian constitution of 1989. The main effect of this classification is that a person sentenced for a heinous crime must spend a longer portion of their sentence in a specific regime before becoming eligible for progression. A series of legislative reforms from 1990 have brought new crimes under this category.

most incarcerated people had around five minutes, three times a year, with which to speak with their legal representatives.

From the perspective of public defenders, each meeting with a client was one moment in a long day's work; for the clients themselves, this was the only opportunity they would have for months to speak to an agent of the judiciary. Incarcerated people were often extremely nervous as they waited in line for their scheduled meeting with the public defender. Most clients showed their anxiety on their faces and in their bodies, sitting nervously in their seats or moving restlessly as they waited. Both Lívia and Ángela recognised this anxiety, although they interpreted it as a consequence of the inflated image many clients had of the power of public defenders within the judiciary. But the anxiety of the prisoners was also based on a well-founded mistrust of a system that produced errors and delays at every point in the process, a process to which they only had access during this brief time. Applications for progression must be initiated by a lawyer. While the defence team adopted various measures to deal with the logistics of the flow of cases, deadlines were often missed, causing people to languish for months in prison until their case was found. Often criminal courts failed to send documents relating to a conviction over to the penal system, without which nothing could be done in terms of progression. Case files regularly contained significant errors in calculating the dates of eligibility for progression and parole which took weeks or months to correct.

The main risk, however, was that a case would simply sit still (*parado*) on a desk or a desktop somewhere in the juridical network. Those files, stagnating within the network that determined release, meant the stagnation of the person inside prison. A case must move (*andar*) in order to get anything done. And since the public defence team constituted the only point of access to the judiciary, those five minutes represented the only feasible window for finding the case file, for checking whether it was still or moving, and, if possible, for jolting it back into circulation. Lívia and Ángela had developed an array of strategies to minimise tension and to assure their clients that their cases were, indeed, moving – that they had not been lost in the system. Ángela deliberately cultivated a style of presentation and speech meant to exude professional authority, which allowed her to manage her time while conveying a kind of technocratic assurance wrapped in a language that was understandable but forceful. She would work quickly through the details of each client, noting important upcoming dates and highlighting what the defence team had already done. Lívia, by contrast, gave a little more time to each person. She would generally ask each client if they understood the terms she was using and would rotate her laptop to give them a better view of the file she was working with, pointing with a pen to any instances of applications or petitions that had been filed. As a result, her working day was consistently longer than Ángela's.

The distribution of sentencing certificates was part of this strategy of managing tension. As a physical object that the incarcerated person could keep, it seemed to offer an assurance that went beyond the reassuring words of the public defender. "Paper is the one thing that calms a prisoner", Lívia told me one morning as she drove me and a paralegal from the city centre to Tobias Barreto for the day's work. "Prisoners just like to go to their cell after seeing us to read their papers and see what's happening. It's the kind of information we should be giving". The entire public defence team believed that many were unable to read or understand the details on these documents.[25] But the very fact of having paper, of being given a file by the judiciary, was a sign that the case was moving, that they were not forgotten within the bureaucracy. As a prop during their meetings, both public

[25] Based on my fieldwork I would suggest that this assertion underestimates the collective legal literacy of the prison population.

defenders and paralegals would draw their clients' attention to the calculation, assuring them of the "objective" fact of their impending release. The piece of paper itself therefore served as both a promise and a sedative by focusing clients' attention on this future point.

Documenting the Subject: the Transcript of Disciplinary Record

As I have mentioned, the length of a sentence and its division into different segments are established juridical facts known as "objective" criteria for progression and parole. However, this alone is not enough to secure progress. Penal judges also require "subjective" evidence in the form of another series of documents that collectively constitute an evaluation of the character of the incarcerated person. Despite several legislative reforms, there is little difference between the evidentiary demands of contemporary penal courts of Rio de Janeiro and those laid out by the 1924 legislation described in the previous section. Both centre on concepts of character, behaviour, social relations and plans for the future, none of which are explicitly defined. Rio de Janeiro's prisons produce this evidence through forms that collectively constitute a "file self" of each incarcerated person (Chatterji 1998). The aforementioned first stack of papers that Lívia and Ángela would submit to the classification office each morning contained a series of requests for these documents; the office would hand those documents to defenders in yet another stack as they left in the afternoon.

One of these documents is the transcript of disciplinary record (*transcrição de ficha disciplinar*, or TFD). Unlike the sentencing certificate, which originates in the judiciary, this file is generated within Rio's prison system. The legal representatives of the incarcerated (public defenders, in around 90% of cases) are responsible for bringing them out of prison and into the courts. This document begins, like the sentencing certificate, with the name of the incarcerated person, the names of parents, and the same government and prison identification numbers. Its main purpose, however, is to measure and explain a person's behaviour while in the prison system. Like the 1924 legislation, behaviour is defined and evaluated exclusively through the relationship between the imprisoned person and prison workers. However, the TFD measures behaviour as a regimented scale, one which classifies all those in prison within one of five groups – bad; neutral; good; excellent; and optimal. The only way to climb this behavioural ladder is to do nothing. For every six months that pass without incident during the sentence, the incarcerated person climbs one rung higher on the scale. While in prison, there is no concrete benefit for a rating higher than "good". However, when the transcript passes through the hands of the judiciary as part of an application for progression, the rating becomes an important element in the prosecutor's opinion and the judge's final decision.[26]The only movement that an incarcerated person can actively initiate along this scale is downward. Prison officials follow state and federal law in dividing "infractions" into three grades – minor, moderately serious, and serious. In practice, virtually all infractions are listed as serious. "You cough loudly during the count", Ángela once told me, "and they'll write you up for a serious infraction". This wasn't an exaggeration but a reference to a specific case she had seen that day. Initially, these write-ups were part of the individualised plan of treatment and required a small tribunal with the participation of the prison's social worker and psychologist. With the growth of the prison system, however, prison guards now decide on almost all cases and send pre-filled forms for treatment staff to sign.

[26] All applications for parole or progression in Rio de Janeiro are initiated by the legal representative of the incarcerated person; they are then sent to the public prosecutors' office (*Ministério Público*) which produces its own opinion; and finally, to one of the state's five penal judges, who issues a decision.

The infractions and the TFD that lists them are significant because in all other areas prison guards and officials have no capacity to influence decisions on progression or release. Their role is generally limited to custody, security, and treatment – it is the penal judge that decides on questions of progress and parole. However, the infractions represent a mode of direct control over progression. A "serious" infraction automatically demotes a person's behavioural classification to "bad", the lowest on the scale. Eligibility for a whole series of rights, including progression, but also education at prison schools or work, depends on behaviour rated as "good" or better – two rungs higher. Because of this, an infraction can make someone ineligible for progression for a year. This included one case of a man who had recently transferred to Tobias Barreto and was marked as absent in his former prison, since the records were not updated quickly enough. Despite appealing, he was assigned a serious infraction and listed as having "bad" behaviour, cutting him off from any further benefits.

Aside from this direct demotion, an infraction is also permanently recorded on the TFD. This document is generated within prison, but public defenders also carry it to their office to scan and upload so that all other juridical actors can access it. What the TFD actually represents, however, is murky. When a physical fight with a guard, a loud cough, an attempted escape, or a logistical error by prison officials are all translated into serious infractions, behaviour cannot index a positive relationship with institutional authority. Instead, it becomes a tool that can be used at any point by those in the prison administration to impede progression. But the translation of behaviour into the form of the TFD renders it a quality of the incarcerated. As it moves into the hands of public prosecutors and judges it is interpreted as evidence of in/capacity for good behaviour upon release.

The Criminological Exam

Life History as Evidence

In contrast to the transcript of disciplinary record, the criminological exam makes the question of future behaviour explicit. The reports that make up the exam are produced by one from each of the "technicians" – psychiatrist, psychologist, and social worker – that collectively build a "psycho-social profile" of the incarcerated person. According to the Law of Penal Execution, this exam was to be used "in the procurement of revealing data regarding the personality" of the convicted.[27] One of the main proponents of the exam during the formulation of this legislation was Álvaro Mayrink da Costa, a magistrate who had previously worked as both a criminal lawyer and a prison warden in Rio de Janeiro. In his doctoral dissertation, da Costa (1972: 26) argued that the exam would allow for the proper individualisation of punishment that might treat criminal anti-sociality. Through the exam, the penal judge might

> "take responsibility, within the judicial functioning, for the investigation of the biological constitution of the delinquent, their psychological reality, and their social conditioning (...) which will allow for the application of appropriate measures concerning their personality, thereby recovering the principle of the legality and the dignity of the human being."

Dividing criminal law into the "scientific" study of criminality and the "legal" study of the crime, da Costa concluded that only the former form of knowledge would result in any kind of prevention of

[27] Law Nº 7,210 (11 July 1984), Article 9.

criminal behaviour and recidivism. Part diagnosis, part prognosis, the exam was meant to provide a forecast of one's future "evolution within the social grouping" (ibid.: 233).

According to the Brazilian Supreme Court's interpretation of the LEP, the criminological exam is not a mandatory procedure for progression or parole, and in most states it has fallen out of routine use. Rio de Janeiro, by contrast, maintained the criminological exam as standard practice, particularly in the case of applications for parole and house arrest. Almost all incarcerated people applying for these measures during my fieldwork were required to undergo this series of interviews. Rather than waiting for a penal judge to request the document, public defenders would generally initiate a request for the exam themselves – often weeks before their client became eligible. However, Tobias Barreto, like virtually all prisons in Rio de Janeiro, had a significant backlog of pending interviews. The state prison administration had not hired any new technicians on a permanent basis since 1999. Consequently, in 2017 the entire state relied on fifty-seven psychologists, seventy social workers, and fifteen psychiatrists. Today these numbers are even smaller, as many of these prison staff have retired or found work outside prison.

The nature of the exam reflects both the huge level of demand and the small number of qualified professionals to undertake it. Psychiatrists often used the exam as a diagnostic tool and attempted to identify any "psychiatric disturbances" that might require a treatment programme, whether in or out of prison. But with even fewer psychiatrists employed at the prisons than members of other professions, they had a far greater burden of cases to work through. Tobias Barreto, for instance, had no dedicated prison psychiatrist. On my first day working as an intern, one appeared late in the morning – he had three hundred pending exams to work through that day. To get through that workload, he would have needed to conduct one exam per minute. With the personal details of each interviewee prefilled on each form, his exam was reduced to ticking one of two boxes: one confirmed that the person had demonstrated an "ability to live within society", the other testified that they had symptoms of some "psychiatric trouble" that might be an impediment to this conviviality. The exam was thus reduced to a tick and a signature.

The interviews by psychologists and social workers were generally longer; most interviewers reported to me that each exam lasted for twenty to thirty minutes, on average, and the few interviews that I witnessed conformed to this timeframe. While the psychologists and social workers approached the report with different professional backgrounds, they both generally followed a life-history approach, building a biography that might explain both the crime and any subsequent move away from it. This biography did not stop in the present but instead led to the future, asking about plans after release. *How was your childhood? Is this your first stint in prison? Then what happened? What was your motive? Have you been going to school in here? What about when you get out? And where will you live?*

In his examination of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Alan Feldman (2004) points to the institutional pressures that shape the production of biographical narratives. In the case of his fieldwork, witnesses who testified to the commission were forced by the form itself to make their experiences of apartheid legible to state-based forms of authentication as "juridical and emotive currency" (2004: 167). As Feldman highlights, biographies do not simply tell a history; they privilege certain kinds of knowing, certain kinds of justice, and pull some objects into focus while discarding others. The criminological exam, like these testimonies, demands the constant reproduction of certain narratives in order to reproduce itself. Unlike witnesses in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, here it is a biography from the position of an ostensible perpetrator, rather than a victim or witness.

Yet it is equally as rigid in following a line of questioning that funnels the lives of the imprisoned into narrative of a dysfunctional childhood, insertion into a criminal life, imprisonment, and finally an internal transformation after the point of arrest that leads the interviewee to a commitment to a reformed, "resocialised" future.

Coding Race in the Exam

It is important to note that in most cases the interviewer aims to produce a report that would be favourable to the incarcerated person. While there are exceptions, generally those who work in those professions aligned with "treatment" understand themselves as allies of the incarcerated and as working in opposition to the custodial imperatives of the institution. Indeed, in most cases these workers do not identify their own labour with that of the prison itself.[28] Their explicit aim in the criminological exam is often to provide a sympathetic portrait of their clients in order to "humanise" them by producing a life history that might allay any suspicion of danger, at least within the constraints of time and form of the exam. But this defence often reproduces standard tropes of "unstable" family life and childhood neglect, along with repentance and an aptitude for future work, as the only possible counter-narrative.

Neither public defenders nor technicians spoke explicitly about race when discussing the criminological exam. I also never read any criminological exams that mentioned the interviewee's race or discussed racism within the report. Yet these reports nevertheless constantly relied on a kind of narrative shorthand in which "de-structured" families or dysfunctional communities seemed sufficient explanation for criminal behaviour. This image of family breakdown, as anthropologist Mariza Corrêa (1981) has noted, is an entrenched aspect of Brazilian social and intellectual thought that clearly places non-white kinship structures outside the realm of the normal. The fact that such tropes repeated themselves over countless reports with little variation and without any apparent need for further explanation reflects what anthropologist João Costa Vargas (2008) has identified as a dialectic of "hyper-consciousness/negation" of race within Brazil. Vargas understands this dialectic as the particular condition under which many Brazilians are keenly aware of both race and racism as structuring forces in social life even as they outwardly deny its importance, a practice sustained by the myth of "racial democracy" (*democracia racial*).[29] Nevertheless, a number of euphemisms around both whiteness and Blackness allow Brazilians to incorporate racial logic into discourse without necessarily naming it as such. While the racial democracy myth may have been challenged in recent years, it nevertheless provided these euphemisms with which technicians could signal race in reports.

This language of the reports has already been analysed by a former prison psychologist, Cristina Rauter (2003), through the lens of class. After leaving Rio's prison system and entering academia, Rauter conducted an analysis of 120 reports produced through criminological exams. Here she argued that the format of the exam rests upon a kind of deterministic logic in which a troubled childhood and the impacts of a defective "subculture" that originates in "problematic" territories, particularly the *favelas* and north-eastern Brazil, provides sufficient explanation for a criminal

[28] This distinction between custody and treatment as or technicians' basis for their conception of their role within the prison system strongly correlates to a similar phenomenon observed among mental health workers in a supermax prison in the US state of Washington, as described by anthropologist Lorna Rhodes (2004).

[29] Elsewhere, Vargas (2010: 445) defines racial democracy as a "myth [that] suggests that all Brazilians, independent of their racial background, are equals and live without racially motivated conflict (…). [B]y emphasizing harmony and racelessness, inequalities that were, at base, derived not only from class, but also from race and gender, among others, were silenced and replaced with a sense of national pride and moral superiority".

"trajectory". As the exam produces this narration, it also reproduces a vision of justice as an "apolitical regulator of social order" (2003: 102), de-politicising the role both of the judge and of the interviewer and their "domination and control over poor populations".

While Rauter foregrounds class within this discourse, I would contend that this language functions primarily as a cipher for race. The notion of family dysfunction as both a symptom and cause of broader social breakdown has been prevalent within Brazilian social and political discourse for decades. As Denise Ferreira da Silva (2014) highlights, politicians in Rio de Janeiro invoke "disaggregated" families as a sociological explanation for violence within predominantly Black communities and as a justification for police intervention within them. The criminological exam operates with this same sociology when it extrapolates from the response to a single question – *who raised you as a child?* – to produce a moral landscape of order and crime underpinned by racialised conventional wisdom. Reports always note when an incarcerated person was raised by a single mother or other family member as opposed to their biological father. This is not to say that all imprisoned Black men were raised only by their mothers, nor that all white men in prison grew up in a nuclear family unit.[30] But when technicians portray the childhood and upbringing of interviewees *exclusively* in terms of who raised them, they nevertheless produce reports that conjure an image of Black familial dysfunction as an explanation for crime. This euphemistic language also dictates what cannot be said in the exam: most obviously, the fact that the criminalisation of Black men in particular is often what produces the figure of the absent father in the first place.

As Ferreira da Silva's argument suggests, both race and family are tightly bound to questions of geography. The territories of the *favela* and the North-east that Rauter identifies in the reports, and which I also observed in my fieldwork, are heavily marked in Brazil as Black spaces. Regardless of the actual race of the interviewee, when their upbringing, family, or community are located within these territories they are positioned in opposition to the norms of another set of territories, one largely occupied by white and middle-class Brazilians. Furthermore, the redemptive arc that interviewers often strive to provide within the exam often takes the shape of a struggle to "overcome" these markers of Blackness – by moving out of the *favela*, for instance, or by a newfound commitment on the part of the incarcerated person to reconstructing a nuclear family with themselves at the helm as father and provider. Given the time pressures placed on technicians to undertake each exam, these tropes arguably become more important as a shorthand to communicate a complex set of social relationships through a series of figures whose meaning and import is assumed as already known to the report's audience: public defenders, prosecutors, and penal judges.

The Problem with "Try"

These time pressures leave little room for the kind of individualised biographical information envisioned as necessary for progressive incarceration. Interviewers simply do not have time to explore in detail the specifics of either the past or the future. Alongside this racial shorthand, another result is a more or less formulaic construction of a life history that repeats itself without major variations across most reports. This expectation creates a specific demand for both interviewers and the imprisoned to speak and write the exam in certain ways. When noting an upcoming criminological exam, defenders would generally remind their clients to always speak positively about

[30] As Corrêa (1981) notes, the "traditional" Brazilian family defined by the nuclear unit was never feasible for the vast majority of Brazilians, including white elites, for whom the ubiquitous presence of the Black nanny or *babá* as the primary child-rearer represented a constant threat to their self-image.

their hopes for the future, and suggest specific talking points – above all, prospects for employment. Occasionally, however, prison workers can be surprised by unintended reactions to their formulaic representations. Marina, a psychologist from another prison, stated in an interview that during a meeting in the mid-2000s she learned that public prosecutors and judges took issue with the use of the word "*ansioso*", meaning anxious or eager. To be *ansioso* for something, including release, apparently began to signify a lack of dedication, or a certain passivity. Following the meeting, Marina and other psychologists thereby began removing *ansioso* from any of their reports when undertaking exams for regime progression.

Similarly, when noting an upcoming criminological exam, Lívia would often tell her clients never to use the word "try" (*tentar*). This was because one of the two psychologists stationed at Tobias Barreto would consistently pick up on that language and draw attention to it within her report. An example of this can be seen in the following exam,[31] which begins with the name of the interviewee and his parents, and then continues:

> Name of the Solicitation: Progression
> Age: 26
> Education: Secondary (incomplete)
>
> Familiar/Affective Aspects: Was raised by mother and father. Has five siblings. Stable family relationships. Receives visits from his mother and sister.
>
> Perception and Motivation for the Crime: Convicted under articles 57 and 123. First offence. He has already served two years and eight months. The inmate reports that he committed those crimes as a result of his getting involved with "bad company" (sic).[32] He denies the use of drugs.
>
> Carceral Comportment: Good. The inmate says that he spends his free time playing football. He does not work or study in prison.
>
> Perspective for the Future: He aims to "try" to change his life (sic). He will return to the house of his mother. The inmate has still not thought of what he will do when he leaves prison.

Here I want to call attention to the report's alternation between direct quotations and indirect reported speech. As Bakhtin (Bakhtin/Voloshinov 2004) has argued, any act of reported speech, in which one references the speech of another, sits on a spectrum between verbatim quotation and a looser or *pictorial* description of what was said. Anthropologist Matthew Hull (2012) develops this argument in the context of bureaucracy to demonstrate that manipulating the level of direct or indirect reported speech alters the author's relationship with the speech being cited in order to position it as more or less connected with the author's own intent. Using a direct quotation separates the voice of the person who spoke it from that of the author who later recounts it. A more indirect style, by contrast, produces a greater mixture between the two voices.

What is notable in the above report is that the psychologist has clearly alternated between these two poles of reported speech both to maintain the technocratic authority of herself as an interviewer

[31] I have created this report as a composite of various reports I had access to over my research in order to preserve the anonymity of interviewees. As I have mentioned, there is generally very little variation between reports in terms of structure and content, although many reports are slightly longer than this example.
[32] Please note that this use of "(sic)" appears within the report itself.

and to incriminate the interviewee. Where the psychologist paraphrases the interviewee, the words more closely resemble her own professional judgment. It even becomes unclear to what extent some phrases represent the interviewee's responses or the psychologist's interpretation of them. By contrast, she switches to direct quotation in order to raise suspicion, to seal off the interviewee's words from her own authority. The two uses of "(sic)" further reinforce this distance; in both places where the term appears, it reinforces that the word or phrase is a direct quotation. Through this symbol, the interviewer casts doubt on responses that would otherwise speak in the interviewee's favour by refusing to invest her own professional authority in their truth value. In the above report, the interviewee reduces his responsibility for the crime, and announces that he will attempt to find work. But the "(sic)" condemns him, because the report deliberately traps these words inside the voice of a convicted criminal. No such quarantine is needed for "The inmate has still not thought of what he will do when he leaves prison" because, as a statement that may do harm to the imprisoned, its truth value is never under question – even though it contradicts the interviewee's clear interest in finding employment.

Underlying this style is the assumption that someone in prison is inherently untrustworthy and performs specific attitudes and dispositions in order to secure release. That is, their presentation of themselves is read as an instrumental strategy for leaving prison. The psychologist positions reported speech in a certain light in order to read against it, to leave space for a counter-reading that runs contrary to the content of the speech conveyed to her. In Tobias Barreto, one of these counter-readings is made possible by the word *"tentar*" or "try". To put it directly, there is a world of difference between *trying to change your life* on the one hand, and *"trying" to change your life (sic)* on the other. The second form casts doubt either on the incarcerated person's capacity to succeed or on the sincerity of the statement itself. As I have mentioned, this resulted in Lívia training her clients to never try, but only do. In doing so, she pushed them to *already have* a future rather than to attempt to make one. They should claim that they already have a job lined up before they leave, a place to stay, a family to find support.

Trying to find work is in itself a fairly clear description of what people leaving prison actually do, particularly in a context of widespread unemployment and an economic recession. That reality must be suspended at the moment of the exam which, by extracting a biography, necessitates a very particular narrative of what progression and resocialisation should look like. Yet by forcing this suspension of reality, both Lívia and the psychologist reinforced the notion of the exam as a performance that must follow strict conventions. They thus reproduced this suspicion and the impulse to expose the underlying criminal intentions of the speech act. The imprisoned seem to always lose in this game of bad faith, since they can only be read as sincere when they act against their own interests – that is, when they incriminate themselves. An interviewee who says they will return to a life of crime is always understood as sincere; one who says they have changed their life is always subject to doubt. This suspicion operates throughout the justice system; confession is constantly demanded before, during, and after the moment of conviction. Yet that very confession is never entirely believable because of the assumption that the sole aim of the incarcerated person is to leave prison, and that any statement that person makes is motivated by a desire to achieve this end.

Those who carried out the exam were aware of the conflicts it created in terms of their own professional practice and their standing within the prison administration's hierarchy. In early 2010, Rio de Janeiro's Regional Board of Psychology (*Conselho Regional de Psicologia*) published a decree stating (1) that the aims of the criminological exam contradicted professional ethics; (2) that

the exam itself was not only unconstitutional but in fact was effectively abolished by legislation introduced in 2003; (3) that psychology did not provide the expertise to judge any individual's risk of recidivism or capacity for resocialisation; and (4), therefore, that psychologists should refuse to conduct the criminological exam within the prison system. As a response, Rio de Janeiro's prison administration issued its own decree, stating that those psychologists who refuse to conduct the exam would be arrested themselves.

While this second decree successfully forced psychologists to resume conducting the exam, it did not shift the opinion regarding its use. As a result, during my fieldwork many psychologists and social workers finished all reports with the same statement: "This report was produced from a twenty-minute interview. I have no means of evaluating this inmate's risk to society or the probability of their recidivism". The statement served three functions. First, it offered a direct protest against the obligation to undertake the exam. Second, it produced a ritualised critique of the exam *within the document itself*, one that would circulate through the penal courts. Finally, it lessened the liability of the interviewer. In cases where someone released on parole or house arrest committed a high-profile crime after release, journalists would often interrogate the judge who granted parole to request a justification for why the person was released.[33] Judges would then refer to the criminological exam and to the supposed expertise of the technicians as the basis for their decisions, effectively shifting the responsibility to them. In these cases, the function of the criminological exam is to produce a chain of reported speech acts – from the imprisoned person to the "technician", to the judge, and finally to the journalist. At each point when reported speech is produced, there is a shift in responsibility for this piece of evidence that was ostensibly proven faulty by the subsequent criminal act. The only actor within this chain who is unable to perform this shift is the incarcerated person. In the context of the interview, they cannot quote or paraphrase anyone else. Instead, they must only speak for themselves, since there is no other object being produced as evidence.

Conclusion

Paper as a Promise

During my fieldwork, I conducted a series of short interviews with people who had arrived for their first visit to the parole office, generally within ten days of release. One of the common threads in their narratives was the experience of documents being lost during their arrest and imprisonment. In many cases, police literally tore up their documents – particularly their government-issued ID cards, but also occasionally voter registration cards – at the moment of arrest. This ritualised destruction, which has been happening at least since Brazil's most recent dictatorship, signified the end of citizenship, a kind of death of legal personhood upon entry into the criminal justice system. More commonly, police would apprehend documents at the moment of arrest and they would simply become "lost". In rare cases, some who entered the prison system had no documents to begin with.

Whatever the form of de-documentation, the path that leads to imprisonment in Rio de Janeiro is often accompanied by a loss of juridical and civic identity far beyond the one legally prescribed by the sentence. The files that circulate through prisons and courts – the TFD, sentencing certificate, and criminological exam – often offer the most concrete evidence of a person's existence. Lívia and Ángela's suitcases carried proof of this existence, both to the incarcerated themselves and to the

[33] For an analogous process in the United States, see Williams (2017).

judges who controlled their progress through the system. The suitcase arrived in Tobias Barreto in the morning full of the "objective" facts laid out in the sentencing certificate, waiting to be distributed among clients. It left with the "subjective" evidence about the incarcerated person which might allow the defenders to set the gears of a progressive penal machine in motion. To have a file lost, or to have it sit still, was not simply a logistical issue. It represented a seizure of juridical personhood, as the subject represented on paper ceased to exist in any meaningful way as both an object of the law and a subject of rights.

Within this context, paper functions as a promise on three levels. First, it represents the concrete assurance that the incarcerated person is still recognised, even if minimally, as a juridical person. In an institution where people routinely become "lost" to their families, to the administration, or to their legal representatives, this recognition is critical. Second, documents constitute a material manifestation of the promise of progress – that is, they make the pathway from incarceration to release tangible. For those in Tobias Barreto, this pathway is most clearly visible in the impending eligibility for parole. Finally, the movement of files both anticipates and produces a movement of people. For anyone to move forward within this progressive system, paper must first pave the way.

Files, Futures, and the Unforeseeable

But even as files relay this promise, they also act as channels for suspicion. Both prison workers and imprisoned people know from experience how progress can disintegrate at any point within the bureaucratic circuitry of incarceration. Despite the tabulation of dates in the sentencing certificate that offered a glimpse of a path out of prison, Lívia and Ángela could not answer the constant question coming from their clients: when will a decision be made, when will I get out, when will my criminological exams be scheduled? The only response they had to offer was a vague gesture at *soon*, which generally signified a few months, or more, or less. One of the reasons that defenders resisted giving any timeframe for a decision was because they were concerned that any prognosis might be treated as an assurance against which they would be judged should it not come to pass. The vague promises of soon were a way of safeguarding the unforeseeability of the incarcerated person's future. It was a productive buffer for prison workers who sat between the expectations of the judiciary and the frustrations of the imprisoned.

Likewise, on the criminological exam, we can return momentarily to the phrase written on so many reports: "This report was produced from a twenty-minute interview. I have no means of evaluating this inmate's risk to society or the probability of their recidivism". As one psychologist explained to me in reference to this phrase, "We aren't clairvoyant, we have no crystal ball that will say if someone is going to commit a crime again or not". The phrase mitigates the demand for a prognosis by speaking directly against it: the interviewer cannot do what is asked of her. Yet when an interviewee even hints at this unforeseeability, this becomes an incriminating mark in the report: to "try" to find work, rather than to have work already, calls into question the will of the incarcerated even as it signals it. Thus, even as prison workers use documents to communicate unforeseeability, the incarcerated are nevertheless burdened with a demand for demonstrating certainty through the same medium.

Progressive incarceration therefore generates promise and suspicion, both of which shape the experience of imprisonment and the encounter between prison workers and the incarcerated. Documents hold these two forces together as they simultaneously point towards release and obscure it. Through these files, we can see Tobias Barreto as progressive: a prison structured around and

oriented towards a gradual reintegration of the incarcerated with the social body. The strategies of violence and incapacitation that emerge alongside and within this form of progress do not necessarily equate to a failure of this penal vision but rather draw our attention to its perversities. Those within Rio de Janeiro's prison system live in this landscape of hope, disappointment, and anxiety, even as they are asked to produce evidence of a future outside it.

Parole is eventually authorised for most. Denials by judges are not uncommon, yet the majority of those who apply are released on the first or second attempt. Yet so much of this promise of release takes place as a deferral. The dates for progression pass by, and it may take weeks or months for anything to happen. Waiting lists for the criminological exam become longer, files sit on desks, judges decide that a person does not yet exhibit the criteria necessary for parole. It is this "not yet" that characterises so much of the experience of prison. While the assurance of progress is always present, it is never entirely localisable. This suspension between the possibilities of the future and the violence of the present is the work of paper, a work that shapes imprisonment as much as any concrete wall.

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