UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI FIRENZE

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO

DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN MUTAMENTO SOCIALE E POLITICO

CICLO XXXIII

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CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS' PRACTICES AND REPRESENTATIONS IN ITALY

A DISCIPLINARY DISCOURSE

SETTORE SCIENTIFICO DISCIPLINARE: SPS/11 SPS/12

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ANNI 2018/2020

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CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS' PRACTICES AND REPRESENTATIONS IN ITALY

A DISCIPLINARY DISCOURSE

Notes for the external examiners

The thesis has not been submitted for language correction yet. I apologise for typos and grammatical inaccuracies.

I Introduction

In 1978, Hans Toch published a contribution evocatively entitled: "*Is a correctional officer, by any other name, a screw?*", reporting a lack of recognition of correctional officers' contributions in assuring inmate survival and mental health. With a blatant *j'accuse* towards the penitentiary administration, the author proposes rewarding those correctional officers who, through the use of discretion, enrich inmate welfare in order to avoid a regression to narrow, traditional definition of their jobs, and ultimately support those correctional officers who "fight the system to advance goals which we verbally endorse but often sabotage in practice" (Toch, 1978, p. 19).

Forty-three years have passed between Toch's research and the present work, and correctional officers, while internationally have gained their own niche of studies and different aspects of the profession are investigated in depth, in Italy are not the object of a well-developed literature yet. Understanding which the goals recalled by Toch are, what correctional officers' impressions, suggestions, and representations are about them, and how such goals are interiorized and reproduced within an Italian prison's walls, is undoubtedly a compelling exercise. Thus, from the words of the author is possible to grasp a glimpse of a shared reality of a unique world soaked in a self-sustained culture, in which different actors are able to influence the trajectory of that place through their everyday practices. Generally, we would be led to consider prisoners as the actors mainly involved in the process of resisting or, in certain ways, sustaining the viscosity of the so called prisonization effect. Nevertheless, in order to understand and provide a valuable insight on the modes of functioning of a prison, shifting the attention to correctional officers - the main engine moving all the prison's pistons, is crucial.

Moreover, the process of understanding the prison's functions and practices implies to also investigate the broad macro processes shaping complex systems of institutional power. Undoubtedly, prison studies have dedicated a large part of their attention to the disciplinary power of prison as a total institution able to mold individuals by imposing them a specific culture and, specifically, many authors have provided groundbreaking insights on the evolution of welfare policies towards a neoliberalist model with the expansion of social programs targeting the poor, linking this shift to the rise of prison's numbers. Thus, framing a new conceptualization of poverty governance as the process of

managing insecurity through the inclusion of nonintegrated fragments of population, requires to focus on the ways of reshaping how poor people think about and regulate themselves. Consistently, the aim of poverty governance to provide the technical tools to allow poor to adopt specific conducts and applying new mentalities to govern their own lives, is inherently linked with the general discussion on disciplinary models, in which the penitentiary system represents a privileged field of study and point of view. Nevertheless, the scientific debate has a well-rooted legacy that merged poverty governance studies and prison studies taking into consideration prisoners and their stories, but the literature focusing on correctional officers is instead, scarce. Hence, the present thesis aims to investigates a localized phenomenon, namely the level of adherence of correctional officers' representations and practices working in an Italian prison, to specific disciplinary models, linking it to the broad macro processes that have framed systems of institutional power and culture. In doing so, I concentrate on two variables pertaining to the correctional officers' constructs, gender and merit, exploring the level of discretional power linked to them. Using gender and merit as variables entails to examine in depth whether correctional officers' practices reproduce and reify specific representations of prisoners, developed from a shared culture pertaining to the prison system and to wider disciplinary models. Moreover, the presence of an unequal narrative of meritocracy based on different gendered expectations impacting prison's sanctioning and rewarding system has been inquired as well.

Consistently, the thesis premises' start from the following questions: "How correctional officers' representations and practices within an Italian prison impact their level of discipline? How the categories of gender and merit impact on them in a daily-base routine?" by conducting an ethnography in an Italian prison over the course of five months (May 2019 - November 2019). I spent a total of 70 hours in both female and male sections, gathering descriptive and relational data by observing correctional officers' behavior within the prison in different positions and locations. The main tool I used to collect data have been ethnographical notes, which I then analyzed with an open access web application for systematic text analysis based on the techniques of qualitative content analysis. The category system has been interpreted in the direction of the research questions, and the analytical chapters have been built on the basis of the three main categories emerged, *correctional officers' profession*, *relations* and *practices*.

This ethnographical study describes correctional officers' self-representations, illustrating the biographical background that justifies the choice of pursuing this professional path, focusing on the level of engagement with the institutional mandate and the coping strategies to survive an environment that often does not reflect the one imagined before entering the profession, which is rarely chosen for intrinsic motivations. The perception of a lack of authority and authoritativeness, together with shared hostility against the local prison's administrative management, leads to a widespread use of discretion, which is both a tool to reconfirm correctional officers' decisional power and a jeopardizing factor to in-group solidarity and working modalities. The thesis presents how correctional officers' biographical background, expectations and interiorized imagine of "the good officer" foster an in-group narrative that is continuously confuted and re-constructed by a unique social environment. Nevertheless, the process of becoming a correctional officer not only foresees the perception of *being* it, but also of *identifying with* the professional role. During the fieldwork, it was possible to observe how the representation of the self is always accompanied by the representation of the other, through a back-and-forth dialogue in which the juxtaposition of the two identities is pivotal. Indeed, if the definition of the self is affirmed through the differentiation from the other, it is crucial to dig through correctional officers' narrative, often gendered, on prisoners, and analyze its impact in affirming or disconfirming the prison culture and the disciplinary model. The officers-prisoners interactions build a net of relations that are often used to deploy patronizing authority, and to gain trust and provide a friendly and empathetic trait to their self-image. Then, the fieldwork highlights how the daily interactions in prison represent a complex system of institutional power and culture, in which the correctional officers' practices need to adapt day by day, discretionally deciding to strictly follow the rules or to strategically use the punishment-rewarding system to achieve what they believe to be the best outcome, applying a case-by-case judgment. The high level of leeway and discretion, the symbolic use of pen as a tool able to provoke negative impact on prisoners' paths, the continuous act of filling papers, all suggest an interesting parallelism between correctional officers and bureaucrats. Nevertheless, even if their functions fit with the conceptualization of bureaucratic power – shaping State proxemics and being the State's arm - they eventually dismiss and refuse to deploy such role without being recognizable as a true police force, despising the colleagues who chose to be *real bureaucrats* by abandoning the wards and hiding in the office. Indeed, a good correctional officer is the

one who stays in a *grey-zone of bureaucracy*, using the pen selectively, and discretion as a first resource. As the main narratives surrounding the imagine of the "good correctional officer" has been retraced during the fieldwork, the ones framing the imagine of the "good prisoner" has been observed as well: the meritorious prisoner is the one who behaves according with the standards shared and recognized within the prison culture, which depicts a different imaginary on the basis of gender, provenience, age, type of addiction, and type of crime. Hence, the representation of a deserving prisoner emerges from a complex intersection of variables, being reconfirmed amongst correctional officers' in-group narrative and reproduced through everyday practices, both of correctional officers and prisoners. Focusing on gender, from the fieldwork it has been possible to observe how the discretional use of correctional officers' power is deployed differently within the two sections, and general rules can be declined through different practices due to preconcepts on trustworthiness linked to gendered roles. The stereotypical narratives apply also to correctional officers and, interestingly, although they consider important to specify that the "stereotype from outside" does not really pertain to male and female correctional officers since the profession is not a predominantly male activity, they reproduce rooted double-standardized working modalities and expectations, such as different shifts and perception of professional role and competences.

The interpretation of correctional officers' standpoints and shared views offers a privilegied observational point on their representations and practices, which are informed and informs a disciplinary model with peculiar characteristics. The disciplinary strategies of the penitentiary culture produce a bond between the individual and the professional role, even if the single institution's management modalities do not correspond with the shared idea of what a correctional officers should be able to achieve. Hence, thorugh a strenous exercise of coming into terms with the disenchantement of an unpleasant environment that contradicts their expectations, thanks to the in-group production of narratives sustaining the high-value of their role, correctional officers strive to survive in a system in which they eventually belong and support, confirming its capacity of self-sustaining in spite of everything and discipline its workers. Eventually, the narrative of *disciplining* and *disciplined* individuals' is fed.

Chapter 1 is the first theoretical chapter of the thesis and illustrates the scientific debate on social control approaches. In this chapter, I lay the theoretical foundation of my work,

identifying *disciplining* as the key word unveiling the essence of social control mechanism. After having introduced the evolution of the conceptualization of deviant and pathological, to be intended as the main targets of the disciplining model, I focus on the theoretical stances investigating the subject of the discipline and on how the ideal individual to be disciplined has been historically described by scientific literature. Moreover, I draw from the literature on poverty governance to discuss the imposition of a neo-liberal paternalist cultural model, aimed to punish marginalized segment of population which does not comply with the rules of dominant class.

Chapter 2 proceeds in framing the theoretical premises of the thesis, turning the attention to one of the cornerstones of state's control practices: the use of discretion by those in charge of enforcing rules and implementing programs, through the moral category of deservingness. I also offer an analysis of the concepts of desert and merit, distinguishing between the two and underlining the interactional nature of desert, a main lens to judge individuals and, consequently, to discipline them. In the second part of the chapter, the gendered bias in the use of discretional power is examined in depth, retracing the prison discriminatory evaluation criteria and stigmatizing stereotypes. In so doing, a conceptual framework on prison as gendered organization that uses sex segregation as a disciplinary tool, is presented.

The methodology and research design, as well as a brief presentation of my ontological assumptions and epistemological positioning, are illustrated in Chapter 3. I used ethnography as research method, and the rationale and possible shortcoming of this choice are deeply explained in the chapter.

Chapter 4, 5, and 6 are the analytical chapters, which have been outlined in order to offer a wide perspective on correctional officers' level of discipline by observing their everyday practices. Indeed, while Chapter 4 analyzes the configuration of correctional officers' identity as professionals, and Chapter 5 investigates their relations with prisoners as resulting from correctional officers' representations, Chapter 6 centers the analysis on the correctional officers' practices and use of discretion based on such constructs. Consistently, the interpretation of correctional officers' level of discipline is the result of the observation of their practices, but also a reconstruction of how they see and describe their role, which are the motivations that push them to choose their professional path, as well as which are the main representations they have on prisoners.

Chapter 7 is the final part of the thesis and discusses the results introduced in the analytical chapters, proposing a categorization of correctional officers based on their level of discipline, which provides four types of correctional officers depending on their level of identification with their professional role and with the institution. Furthermore, correctional officers are also depicted as active agents who not only are disciplined, but discipline as well, and the diverse modalities of carrying on their professional role, according to the four types resulting from the research, are presented. Finally, the chapter discusses how the discretional use of practices of punishment and reward mirrors the diverse attitude of the disciplined correctional officers, critically assessing the gendered nature of their system of choices.

I GOVERNING SOCIAL PATHOLOGIES

(...) d'esse exame e do facto estatistico,
resultara para elle a convicção de que a verdadeira doutrina
não era aquella mas aopposta, e portanto que se devia admittir
como normal e exemplar odesequilibrio das faculdades e como hypotheses pathologicas
todos o casosem que aquelleequilibrio fosse ininterrupto

(Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, *O alienista*, 1882)

Machado de Assis' 1882 satiric novella, The Alienist, shows that the protagonist's blind faith in natural sciences' methods undeniably falls short when it comes to assess criteria aiming at preventing mental illness. The obsession for discovering a universal method to cure and prevent pathological mental disorders drives the main character, a psychiatric, to follow the scientific reasoning to its extreme consequences: how could a cartesian and rigorist mind find a solution when the assumptions can be randomly interpreted? Thus, the psychiatric believes that mental illness is a condition that produces anti-social behaviors, which are not aligned with the majority of the community. Nonetheless the doctor observes that from a mere quantitative point of view, balanced people are actually a minority which, in turn, makes them a social anomaly. Consequently, according to his theory, balanced people are those in need to be cured to create a society without outliers. To crown it all, the psychiatric discovers to be the most-balanced person of the village, indeed the one most in need of treatment: consistently, since he is the only one without mental illness and thus a social outsider, he is also the only one who should be locked in the psychiatric hospital, and it is exactly what he does. Seventeen months later the doctor expires and the whole village agrees that he had always been the only mad person since the very first moment.

Definitely, Durkheim would have appreciated the Brazilian author's ability of uncovering the debate on natural sciences' methods and paradigms to study social facts. In the novel, the psychiatric aims at identifying a general criterion to label the individual as balanced or mental ill, or, in other words, to scientifically demonstrate whether someone is normal or not. Durkheim formulates three rules to distinguish the normal from the pathological, the former of which is as follows: "a social fact is normal for a given social type, viewed at

a given phase of its development, when it occurs in the average of the society of that species, considered at the corresponding phase of its evolution" (1895, p.97). Such rule recognizes one simple criterion: in a given time and space, if social characteristics are in line with the majority of those accepted by the society, then it is possible to label them as "normal". Nevertheless, this is not enough: it could be useful to assess how the common sense and the social construction of normality and pathological, occur, and, most importantly, what is labelled as pathological.

As shown by the unfortunate events occurred to the main character of Machado de Assis's novella, observing a social fact applying a statistical method could be questioned, and the results deceptive. The main lessons learnt from the story is that what is called "mental illness" is not based on objective and unilateral criteria. The discussion on the objectivity of mental illness' reality has enforced a heated debate between two opposite poles: mental illness as organic malfunction, as the product of oppressive social structures, or a label to identify someone who does not adhere with social norms. Such polarization of positions in interpreting and understanding a social phenomenon is rooted in different ontological, epistemological and, finally, methodological approaches. The process of framing the concept of pathological has been studied amongst various branches of knowledge, and mental illness could easily serve as an exploratory field to briefly recap the evolution of social control theories by comparing different perspectives. The next paragraphs present the main debates on this topic.

1.1 Defining pathological: social control approaches

Durkheim states it clear: "If there is a fact whose pathological nature appears indisputable, it is crime. All criminologists agree on this score" (Durkheim, 1894, p.97). It might seem a sharp and dogmatic statement, but we need to acknowledge the dubitative nature of it: Durkheim says that crime's pathological nature *appears* indisputable, not that it *is* so. Indeed, what is it certainly indisputable is the provocative nature of Durkheim hypothesis: deviance and crime seem to be morbid and pathological, but in reality, they are incontrovertibly normal. In Machado de Assis novel, the psychiatric struggles to find evidence of mental illness, and, as it will be described in the next pages, the concepts of normality and pathological strictly depends on (perceiving) an alteration of social life and

its common sense and core values. In other words, it is deeply based on historical and social settings, and lays on specific moral assumptions.

Consistently, Durkheim's postulates on the normality of deviance and criminality derive from mere observation: crime is indeed observed "in all society of all types" (Durkheim, 1894, p.98). Thus, if crime exists in all societies and it only differs in form and in the actions which are labelled as criminal, and "it appears to be closely bound up with the conditions of all collective life" (ibidem), it is possible to name it as a normal fact, and, on the contrary, as a positive symptom of a healthy society: punishment is strictly influenced by what in a certain society is fundamental for sustaining collective life and its core believes, without which the social pact fails[1]. The main function of penalty is not to punish an objective crime or offence, but to recognize which are the offences that cannot be tolerated and that need to be punished, to *preserve social cohesion.* Indeed, crime has a positive function: through crime, and punishing it, society demonstrates to be strong enough to address the original social pact, protect its roots and preserve possible flaws. Of course, any society has its own actions regarded as criminal, and they can vary and change. Nevertheless, even if a specific criminal action could effectively cease, it would not lead crime to disappear, but to the reformulation of what society considers as such, and thus the emergence of new forms of criminality to be persecuted. Once again, criminality and deviance are normal, and, moreover, are fundamental to maintain social order and cohesion. Durkheim explains penalty as having a function of social control: not aiming at the prevention of criminality but at representing criminality and using such representation as a fundamental tool to guarantee social cohesion. Ultimately, penalty is a way to signal to society what it is permitted and what is not, punishment needs to be proportionated to crime committed, and penal sanction must reciprocate the seriousness of the crime and not the social danger of the criminal. In fact, Durkheim says that penalty is a tool of social control that operates on the whole society, not only on neutralizing the specific person's degree of social danger.

If deviance and criminality are not social pathologies but can even have a positive function in society, what makes the difference is how society reacts to and interacts with actions

[1] "*Crime is normal because it is completely impossible for any society entirely free of it to exist. Crime, as we have shown elsewhere, consists of an action which offends certain collective feelings which are especially strong and clear-cut (...) It is not of course punishment that causes crime, but it is through punishment that crime, in its external aspects, is revealed to us*" (ivi, p.61)

that are believed, perceived, and treated as dangerous for social order. Indeed, once social order is or might be disrupted, society will try to prevent disruption through social control measures. Edward A. Ross (1901) introduced the term "social control" as a core concept of social theory, revisiting Spencer's own use in *Principles of Sociology* (1879, pp. 3-35): social homogeneity and social order may be guaranteed through specific democratic tools. Ross's view of these two concepts strongly relayed on legislation and repression and represented one of the two poles mentioned above: if there is deviance, then social control will be enacted to maintain social order. The subtext is clear: deviance is an objective social fact and pouring from specific and given actions; society *has* to react and implement social control measures. Interestingly, such definition of deviance and criminality strongly differs from the one offered in the previous pages and departs from completely different ontological assumptions.

To understand the difference between the two approaches, it might be useful to start from the opening quote of this paragraph. Indeed, Durkheim statement on the criminologists' beliefs system about the pathological nature of crime draws from the sociological positivism and positive school of criminology, which studied the social pathology by applying a specific discipline: statistics. Quetelet (1835) and Guerry (1833), influent representatives of such school of thought, associated biological and social normality with the frequency of a characteristic in a population. Quetelet outlined a project of social physics through which inferring relations between social factors and criminology. Some years later, the Italian Positivist School framed the analysis of criminality through a bio-anthropological approach. Cesare Lombroso and Enrico Ferri indeed investigated the etiology of crime postulating that it is possible to anatomically identify the so-called "born criminal" by observing specific physical traits[2]. Once again, criminality is investigated by searching for those characteristics that differ from what is socially considered to be normal. It is defined by difference: if not normal, it must be pathological. Accordingly, crime, criminals and criminality are pathological, and it is possible to retrace the causes of such "disease" applying scientific methods of investigation. It must be treated as a disease: criminal anthropologists denied that criminals chose to commit crimes by free will,

[2] The theoretical framework of Cesare Lombroso was based on a causal fallacy: the criminal atavism theorization was a product of inferring a correlation that does not exist. Specifically, even if A and B occur together, it does not mean that one causes the other. It is in fact possible that some criminal behavior is perpetrated by individuals with the same physiognomic features, but we cannot predict criminal behaviors from anthropometric studies.

consequently they should not be hold responsible for their actions, and purpose of punishment was not to expiate guilt, but to protect society (Gibson, 1982); here, the Durkheimian positive function of penalty was not considered. Notwithstanding, if it is true that embracing a perspective that considers *any* meaningful human action *always* being the result of individual propensities interacting with environmental instigation (Walsh and Beaver, 2009, p.79) has been at the core of biosocial criminology's approach, it also represents one of the main neglected and overlooked theory by critical social criminologists. On this concern, recently it has been discussed that believing of inviting "the demon biology to the ball is to invite racism and eugenics" (ibidem), is, at least, "proudly ignorant" (Van den Berghe, 1990, p. 177). Such trenchant statement derives from some sort of frustration towards colleagues keen to dismiss any biological origins of criminal behaviors, who misunderstand the main assumptions: biosocial criminologists do not believe that, given the relevant biological factors, the fluctuations in crime rates would have a biological foundation. In fact, it strictly depends from the environmental factors, which remain crucial in determining the individual threshold for engaging in criminal behavior (ivi). The relevance of environmental factors has been recognized and postulated by Lombroso himself. Mary Gibson's re-reading of Cesare Lombroso clearly describes how, although the father of the positivist school of criminology owes is reputation to the description of the "born criminal", only the 35-40% of crimes were considered having organic causes, while most of the other prisoners were categorized as "occasional criminals" and acted against the law due to purely environmental factors such as education, economic conditions, civil status, resembling the rest of the "normal" population (Gibson, 1982)[3].

The role of biology in causing both illness and deviant behavior is present, although partially dismissed, also in Parsons and Merton's approach:

> Illness is a state of disturbance in the 'normal' functioning of the total human individual, including both the states of the organism as a biological system and of his personal and social adjustments. It is thus partly biological and partly socially defined. Participation in the social system is always potentially relevant to the state of illness, to its etiology and to the conditions of successful therapy, as well as other things (Parsons, 1951a, p.431).

[3] Gibson also suggests that Lombroso should be credited with introducing the subject of female criminality as a legitimate field of study, since it was, until the birth of feminist criminology, one of the very few criminological texts explaining women's crime.

> For whatever the role of biological impulses, there still remains the further question of why it is that the frequency of deviant behavior varies within different social structures and how it happens that the deviations have different shapes and patterns in different social structures… Our perspective is sociological. We look at variations in the rates of deviant behavior, not at its incidence (Merton, 1968, pp. 185–186).

Parsons is recognized as the precursor of considering mental illness as a type of deviant behavior and analyzing the asymmetrical relation between the sick role (the patient) and the professional role (psychotherapist) through the identification of a power relation and the social control function of medical knowledge. By adopting a "structural-functionalist" framework (Parsons, 1951), Merton, Parsons's disciple, developed the concept of *anomie*. Originally coined by Durkheim (1894) to refer to a condition of relative normlessness in a society or group, Merton establishes a relation between it and the emergence of deviance. Specifically, when society establishes agreed-upon *goals* but fails to provide for agreed-upon *means* for achieving those goals, crime and other forms of deviance would raise (Inderbitzin et al., 2016). Merton identifies in cultural and social structures the two fundamental properties of the social system that need to be considered in studying the deviant behavior variations, to be intended as the "prescribed goals of action and the normatively approved means for realizing these goals" (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2009, p.211).

The tradition described above studied the functional mechanisms of the production of criminality. On the other hand, a generation of sociologists applied a labelling perspective on deviant behavior. The core assumption of labelling theory assumes that individuals labeled as deviants tend to react to the stigma attached to the label (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1967), and the deviant behaviors often represent "means of defense, attack, or adaptation" (Lemert, 1967, p.17). The theory recognizes the influence of previous social and psychological conditions but sees the labeling process as a triggering factor to the reinforcement and stabilization of the deviant pattern. In opposition to Parsons, who theorizes the idea that social control is a response to deviance, Lemert defines social control as a process producing deviance.

> This is a large turn away from older sociology which tended to rest heavily upon the idea that deviance leads to social control. I have come to believe that the reverse idea, i.e., social

> control leads to deviance, is equally tenable and the potentially richer premise for studying deviance in modern society (Lemert, 1967, p. V)

Labelling theorists reject the natural causes of deviance and crime and, following the theorization of Mead (1925, 1934), believes that the self is a social construct: the way we see ourselves and act strictly depends on how other people act towards us. On this note, a multitude of studies concerning the cognitive labeling process from the individual level has been greatly influenced by Goffman conceptualization on the notion of stigma. Unquestionably, Goffman's description of the stigmatizing process has represented the cornerstone for the literature related to the topic. For the author, stigma is a response to a negatively-viewed attribute, and the mental illness diagnosis is meant as the product of an interaction between the subject who is going to be labelled as ill and a public that see those symptoms: "What psychiatrists see as mental illness, the lay public usually first sees offensive behavior—behavior worthy of scorn, hostility and other negative social sanctions" (Goffman, 1963, p. 137). In other words, Goffman believes that mental illness is a social construct based on othering processes[4]. Moreover, mental illness heavily rests on the interiorization and acceptance of such role (*to be a person who has a diagnosis*) by the mentally ill patients themselves and by those considered to be responsible for them and their behavior, leading to a *spoiled identity*. Thus, the face-to-face encounter becomes pivotal in investigating the public reaction to mental illness symptoms. Goffman criticizes the tendency to classify mental illness as a type of deviancy[5], since there are many deviancies that are not instances of mental pathology (Abrams, 2014). Thomas Szasz, an American contemporary psychiatric, in the 1950s wrote *The Myth of Mental Illness*, an essay and a book published in 1960-1961, in which proposed to view mental illnesses as behaviors that disturb or disorient others or the self, as well as to reject the narratives of patients as helpless and passive agents, victims of pathobiological events outside their control:

> Everything I read, observed and learnt supported my adolescent impression that the behaviours we call mental illnesses and to which we attach the legions of derogatory labels in our lexicon of lunacy are not medical diseases. They are the products of the medicalisation

[4] Goffman sheds light on the paths of mental patients by applying the concept of careers contingencies, upon which the institutionalization of those labelled as mentally ill, who "(…) suffer not from mental illness, but from contingencies"(Goffman, 1961, p.135), is determined.

[5] The much discussed legacy of Parsons in medical sociology represents an interesting starting point in the debate on illness as a social deviance and the sick role (Parsons, 1951).

> of disturbing or disturbed behaviours - that is, the observer's construction and definition of the behaviour of the persons he observes as medically disabled individuals needing medical treatment. This cultural transformation is driven mainly by the modern therapeutic ideology that has replaced the old theological world view and the political and professional interests it sets in motion (Szasz, 2011, p. 181).

Melossi (2002) stresses the relevance of personal interaction in the construction of such "deviance", stating that one of the methods through which we define who is a deviant person is by interacting with him/her: "it is evident that the first diagnosis of mental illness is made by the community where the person lives" (Melossi, 2002, p. 203)[6]. As an example on point, Lemert (1962) published a groundbreaking article on a specific mental mania, paranoia, coining the term "paranoid pseudocommunity" to define the paranoid hallucination of mentally ill, postulating that such pseudocommunity is not only a product of an unbalanced mind. Indeed, retracing the evolution of the paranoid syndrome, Lemert identifies paranoid persons as "those whose inadequate social learning leads them in situations of unusual stress to incompetent social reactions" (Lemert, 1962, p.2) which can lead to heightened aggression or irritability. The reaction of social environment is crucial. Indeed, community could either normalize this kind of behavior or take position against it. Thus, the creation of a paranoid community, generally treated as a whole product of the "mentally ill", at the beginning could be based also on true reactions of people at the deviant behavior of the paranoid. Goffman proposes to use a new terminology introducing the concept of "situational improperty": the symptoms are manifest when the social order is disrupted[7]. Once again, the social interaction has a central role: who is socially defined as paranoid starts taking on the traits that will justify the diagnosis.

Although functionalism and labelling theory "may well represent incommensurable universes of discourse such that no synthesis is feasible" (Wright and Randall, 1978, p. 218), in the 70s some attempts to find a theoretical convergence have been made (Gibbs and Erickson, 1975; Wright and Randall, 1978). Notwithstanding, Wright and Randall dismiss

[6] Melossi draws from Smith's work (1978) an empirical example of such process: reading the biography of a girl labelled as mentally ill, Smith observes how the label derives not from the girl's actions, but from her interaction with friends, acquaintances, experts (Melossi, 2002).

[7] "*Psychosis is something that can manifest itself to anyone in the patient's work place, in his neighborhood, in his household, and must be seen, initially at least, as an infraction of the social order that obtains in these places. The other side of the study of symptoms is the study of public order, the study of behavior in public and semipublic places*" (Goffman, 1967, p. 140).

Gibbs and Erickson's tentative[8], defining it as an "overly simplistic suggestion" (Wright and Randall, 1978, p. 230), and propose to consider the process of "translation" suggested by Kuhn to overcome the incommunicability between the two approaches. Indeed, Wright and Randall "show that much of the confusion characteristic of the labelling *vs.* functionalist debate arises out of the fact that what is "deviance" to one may or may not be "deviance" to another" (Ibidem, p.229-230). In other words, they are two different scientific groups with a specific language community, and, if it is not shared and explained, "many of the explanations and problem-statements endorsed by the member of one scientific group will be opaque to the other" (Kuhn, 1970, pp.202-203).

Moreover, some specific aspects of labelling theory have been critically assessed. In *The New Criminology*, Ian Taylor, Paul Walton and Jock Young (1973) criticize the limitations of labelling theory, which depicts deviant individual as passive actors not considering the importance of structures as powers and institutions. Taylor and his colleagues do give high credit to labelling approach in theoretically advancing social deviance studies by demystifying "cruder structural approaches which lost sight of the importance of social control as an independent variable in the creation of deviancy" (Taylor, I., et al., 1973, pp. 145-146) and distinguishing between physical and social actions – indeed, deviance and criminality are not inherent property of the act, but labels deriving from social constructs. Nevertheless, labelling theory has often considered the social meaning of the actions as variable/arbitrary and Taylor, Walton and Young see in it a major weakness. In fact, they suggest that actors endow their actions with meaning and are aware of such social meanings, which pre-exist the possible labels. In other words, an action is not only deviant when society labels it once it is perpetrated, but it is deviant prior to the intervention of society and the "deviant/criminal" does already know and choose to engage in it. They critically ask: "Where is the criminal who engages in the robbing of banks and who is unaware that he is engaged in the social act of stealing?" (Taylor, I., et al., 1973, p. 146). The point raised in *The New Criminology* offers an interesting starting point to discuss labelling theory. Indeed, Taylor and colleagues have the merit to re-attributing an active role to the "deviant" person shifting the focus away from the view of the deviant as a passive subject to that of "a decision-maker who often actively violates the moral and legal codes of

[8] *"The issue can be resolved quickly by two admonitions: (i) Normativists (functionalists) cease presuming that data on deviance can be interpreted independently of reactions to deviance; and (2) Reactivists (labelists), cease presuming that reactions to deviance have nothing to do with prior behavior." (Gibbs and Erickson, 1975, p. 39.)*

society" (Taylor, I., et al., 1973, p. 147). Thus, they underline the need to investigate how structures of power and institutions shape deviancy and criminality.

> Our contention is that much deviancy must be viewed as a struggle, or reaction, against such 'normalized repression', a breaking-through, as it were, of accepted, taken-for-granted, power-invested commonsense rules. The outcome—the everyday conception of what is right, the common-sense world in which both normals and deviants live, is then fully seen as having been shaped by entrenched positions of power and interest (Taylor, I., et al., 1973, p. 169)

Consistently, it is possible to state that critical criminologists, to whom *The New Criminology* represent a milestone, do not totally reject labelling theory, they just claim that is underdeveloped and narrow sighted. What is important for them is to recognize the relevance of structured inequalities in forcing actors to achieve their interest through deviant means. An interesting and significant point advanced by Taylor et al. is the incontrovertibly need to assess the relation between deviancy, moral bind, and repression. Hence, following Gouldner's statement on power and normalized repression[9], the authors define deviancy as "a break from the moral bind involved in ongoing 'normalized' repression" (Taylor, I., et al., 1973, p. 169). Consistently, labelling theorization has two main fragilities: first, it does not deal with the governing framework of power and interest which form smaller processes and transaction towards criminalities and deviants; secondly, it does not investigate the inner motivation of the deviant act (either being a neutralization of the moral code as a justification or an ideological opposition to it).

> What is necessary is that, having rejected the assertion that deviancy 'is not a property of the act', we should be able to move towards a structural sociology on the one hand (a sociology competent to deal with power and interests) and a sociology of motivation on the other (a sociology that can account for the way in which individuals give meaning to their acts) (Taylor, I., et al., 1973, p. 171)

Hence, critical criminology proposes to develop a theory of deviancy that considers motivation and reaction as a structural part of social relationship: doing so, it would be

[9]"The powerful are both ready and able to institutionalize compliance with the moral code at levels congenial to themselves. Power is amongst other things this ability to enforce one's moral claims. The powerful can thus conventionalize their moral defaults. As their moral failures become customary and expected, this itself becomes another justification for giving the subordinate group less than it might theoretically claim under the group's common values. It becomes, in short, normalized repression". (Gouldner, 1972, p. 297)

possible to overcome the vagueness of the creation of deviancy[10]. Slightly differently phrased, in most case of deviance, missing a "detailed social history of the constraints, aspirations and meanings which inform and activate the actors" (Taylor, I., et al., 1973, p. 170) would lead to no explanation of the causes of such deviancy. What critical criminologist believe, is that the study of deviance needs a sociology able to combine structure, process, and culture in a continuous dialectic (Taylor, I., et al., 1973, p. 171).

In conclusion, Hacking (2004) offers an interesting insight on this issue. The author describes Goffman's methods "bottom-up", since he researched on individuals and their interactions, in order to capture how people is understood by others and how understands itself. In doing so, the author compares the Goffman's work to Michel Foucault's approach: the French philosopher's research is "top-down", focused on the system of thoughts and dissociated from the human being. Nevertheless, the two authors are not opposite, but complementary; while the former could provide an understanding of how the forms of the discourse become part of the lives of ordinary people, the latter offers an interpretation of how institutions came into being (cfr. Hacking, 2004). Similarly, Parker and Aggleton (2003) underline the relevance of the two bodies of work to understand the pivotal role of stigma and stigmatization in constituting social order. Having already discussed Goffman contribution, it is fundamental to recall Foucault's emphasis on how deviance is embedded to established regimes of knowledge and power. Indeed, to the author different disciplines offer specific claims of truth, which create knowledge systems. The relationship between knowledge and power exercises forms of control over individual and social bodies. Such forms of social control are performed to the production of conforming subjects and docile bodies (Foucault, 1976; 1977), in other words, through the naturalization and the interiorization of an identity compliant with the maintenance of social order.

Whether or not is possible to find a synthesis between diverse and divergent systems of thought, goes far beyond the objective of the work hereby presented. Nonetheless, investigating complex social phenomena such as disciplinary practices within a prison

[10] As a way of example, the authors explain that by considering the institution of private property in a stratified and inequitable society and the subsequent division between owners and non-owners, the explicability of thieves and social/justice institutions' activities become more blatant. Similarly, industrial espionage is highly condemned due to the high value attributed to technological innovation in a "sharply competitive industrial society", as well as student militancy increase results from the gap between the expansion of higher educational system and provision of rewarding jobs. (Taylor, I., et al., 1973, p. 170)

(micro-analysis) as strategies of social control (macro-analysis) would necessarily require taking into consideration multiple theoretical approaches. Opening the paragraph with Machado de Assis' satiric novella, although it partially reveals the positioning of this thesis, has the intention of underline how observing the social world from only one point of view is difficult (and shortsighted). In fact, even if it does not result in any sort of self-induced suicide as the one occurred to the protagonist of the novel, it could lead to a conundrum. Ironically, instead, the real core objective in diagnosing mental illness has been showed: identify the individuals who creates a disequilibrium in social order. Having or not mental unbalances is insignificant, it is only important to cure those who do not adhere with the segment of the population that matters, being them sick, different, or poor, as we are going to see in the next paragraphs. Phrased differently, preserving social order through forms of social control become the main concern. The present work starts from these premises.

1.2 Disciplining and disciplined individuals

In the previous paragraph, I have identified a first definition of social control: maintaining social order via democratic tools. Of course, *disciplining* and *rationalizing* might be considered the key words to unveil the essence of social control mechanism. To answer to the pending questions of who are the subjects who need to be disciplined, it might be useful to follow Melossi (2002) explanation of the relevance of the anthropological type increasingly becoming an active subject of political power (European adult male, owner) during Enlightment and how rationalization and democratization processes have been deeply rooted in it. Such moral type, indeed, has been exported and imposed on those segments of population that did not adhere, either internal (youth, women, proletarians, marginalized population) and external (uncivilized, "savages") (Melossi, 2002, pp. 20-21). Thus, the author explains how Hobbesian contractarianism developed through conceptualizations of the State that paved the path to the crystallization of a new version of social contract theory and deeply influenced the emergence of modern penitentiary system. First, the conceptualization of individuals as rational autonomous agents who subscribe the social contract based on moral equality, strongly differs from Hobbes' *homo homini lupus* based on mutual self-interest pursued bargaining with others. Moreover, this version of social contract theory entails a bidirectional relation between individuals and

the State: the same State whose *raison d'etre* lays in the political power[11] that men agreed to cede in the hands of the society on the base of a social contract, would shape the men who have the right to participate in the contract itself. The individuals meritorious to participate in the collective life and social contract are rational according to specific criteria set on values as work, asceticism, and own property. Indeed, the only subject of political power are adult men – men who have private property. Specifically, owning material goods and making them prosper, is essential to participate at the collective life: for the age of Enlightenment the subject of rights must be a rational being, and such rationality is perceived as lacking to women, children, and no-white individuals, who in turn cannot take part in the social contract and must be excluded from society. Interestingly, Melossi critiques the concept of social exclusion: the aim of controlling and disciplining is not excluding deviants from society but trying to include them by imposing a very specific social and cultural model – which imply also resorting to institutions aimed at conveying such disciplinary model. Undoubtedly, the penitentiary system is one of them; retracing the history of imprisonment, Melossi (2002) describes how, starting from the XVI Century, prison became an essential tool to mold individuals into perfect citizens.

1.2.1 Discipline and subordinate inclusion

In the 1977's version of Michel Foucault's *Surveiller et punir*, the translator's note explicates the lack of an adequate English equivalent of the verb 'surveiller'. *Surveillance, inspect, supervise, observe*, are terms close to the French philosopher's original connotation, but are all or too technical, or too neutral. At the end, Foucault himself suggests *Discipline and Punish*. As clearly emerges in analyzing the Foucauldian theory, discipline is a strategy through which power organizes individuals' life to perform the most efficiently possible. Agents must be distributed in role and functions. Space, time, and the body itself must be carefully managed to achieve productive results - every detail count: indeed, discipline is a "political anatomy of detail" (Foucault, 1977, p.138).

[11] Locke identifies three distinct powers: paternal, political and despotical. While the latter is the absolute and arbitrary power targeting captives and slaves, the former is the power that fathers have over their children and wives. Political power instead is "that power which every man having in the state of Nature has given up into the hands of the society". Consequently, if slaves, criminals, children, and women are those susceptible to paternal/despotical power, and must be excluded from the social contract.

Rye (2014) underlines the main differences between the Foucault's conceptualization and the characterization of discipline that derives from bureaucratic power in Weberian terms (Weber, 1948, 1978). Specifically, the first is clearly productive and individualizing: it constructs individuals as useful agents, "empowered to act within a scheme" (Rye, 2014) and subjected to highly detailed level of control, such as devices and techniques that regulate their activities. The second is totalizing and is rooted in the phenomenon of societal 'rationalisation': with the modernization, all aspects of life have been overtaken by rational calculation and reasoning is reserved for limited calculation of means rather than critical reasoning about ends. Weber defines 'discipline', then, as: "the probability that by virtue of habituation a command will receive prompt and automatic obedience in stereotyped forms on the part of a given group of persons" (Weber 1978, p.53). Moreover, such general process of societal rationalization affecting all the institutions in society is not present in Foucalt's theory, which instead identifies specific rationalities (Foucault, 1994, p.329): although all the rational responses to particular issues may create a network of power relations, they are not designed by a totalizing force but represent the intersection of micro-powers. Nonetheless, despite a divergent conception of social rationality, O'Neill (1986) argues that Foucault's studies of the disciplinary society could complement Weber's analysis of the modern bureaucratic state and economy. Indeed, the French philosopher's studies of the prison, hospital and school grounds the legal-rational process in techniques for the administration of corporeal, attitudinal and behavioral discipline (Foucault, 1976; 1977).

A recent advancement on the theorization of disciplinary power has been made by Melossi (Melossi and Pavarini, 1977; Melossi, 2018). In the attempt to critically assessing the misinterpretation of his thesis in *The Prison and The Factory* (Melossi & Pavarini, 1977), the author explains that his aim was investigating the inter-relationship between the development of capitalist accumulation and forms of punishment and discipline, focusing on the pivotal role of the proposed reconceptualization of the notion of discipline itself. Thus, by applying a Marxist reading to prison history materials, Melossi e Pavarini originally linked the "invention" of the prison to what Marx calls "primitive" or "original" accumulation. Presumably, the main cause of misreading Melossi and Pavarini thesis originated in interpreting it as a confirmation of Rusche and Kirchheimer work in *Punishment and Social Structure* (1939), rather than a development of it: *The Prison and The Factory* does not claim that prison emerged as a sort of "school (…) (a "professional

training school" perhaps?) for an apprentice working class—confusing our thesis, I surmise, with penological visions on rehabilitation/resocialisation/ re-education (as Italians call it) by means of work" (Melossi, 2018, p.2). Thus, the author explicates what he does not imply with the term discipline: indeed, it does not mean to teach some abilities to potential workers – in fact, we are not talking about training people to enter the labor market. With *discipline* and *disciplining* the authors introduce the notion of "subordinate inclusion", which is, pragmatically, teaching obedience and shaping the correct citizen who will not disrupt the social order[12]. We have saw that what makes undesired people "outsiders" may change. What remain constant is the capitalistic economic regime, which cyclically absorbs its marginal strata aiming at subordinating them through different form of inclusion, and one of that is the prison system.

> If capitalist society—whether characterized by private or by public capital—is essentially marked by class struggle, the idea of subordination seems to constitute its original and dominant principle, even vis-à-vis the very goal of production (Melossi, 2018, p. 16).

1.2.2 From poverty governance to disciplinary practices in prison

O'Neill, in describing the disciplinary society as theorized in Weber and Foucault, briefly retraces the historical separation between differently meritorious type of poverty: indeed, the author highlights how "Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century legislation was faced with the task of separating 'the impotent poor' from the anomalous 'able bodied poor'"(O'Neill, 1986, p.50). While the impotent have the authorization to beg, the able bodied the only thing could beg for was pardon through forced labor, likely in the workhouses. The segregative measures both regulate the supply of free labour and set the model for the

[12] One of the clearer historical example provided by Melossi are the anti-institutional and anti-authoritarian struggles of the 1970s, when the strength of working class and the questioning of Fordist factory reached a peak. In this period, the imprisonment rates were at their minimum. Thus, Melossi hypothesizes a connection between class struggles and behavior of imprisonment rates. Since, from the point of view of capital, the priority is "the restoration of command discipline" (Melossi, 2018, p.15), by repressing such struggles and consequently weakening working class ability to react, the incarceration rate would drastically increase. *"The problem therefore, from the perspective of capital, was the restoration of command discipline (…) First, the repression of the political vanguard, then the processes of criminalization in the double meaning of the term, as helping to construct a criminal underworld and as the construction and diffusion of mass imprisonment. The nexus of discipline to the teaching of obedience to the goal of subordinate inclusion (whether there be a rhetoric of "rehabilitation" at work or not) seems therefore to be the perennial (programmatic) raison d'être of the prison"* (Melossi, 2018, p. 15).

discipline of former peasant and artisans who have been released into vagabondage and criminality due to the decline of feudalism and the confiscation of monastic property (Ivi).

Although theorizations on the relation between poverty and prison system has ancient roots, the contemporary approaches use the same lens. Indeed, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1971) landmark study, *Regulating the Poor*, represents a milestone in poverty governance and prison study, further advanced by Wacquant's *Punishing the Poor* (2009). In analyzing the contemporary American prison system, Wacquant theorizes that the shift in poverty governance from 1960s liberal social policies to a more punitive approach is embedded on a racialization approach and on a sort of demerit of people not playing according to the rules of white and wealthy class. Thus, social assistance cannot be guaranteed, and those segments of the population need to be punished. Recalling from Melossi the concept of subordinate inclusion described above, it is easy to glimpse a red thread between the interpretation of penitentiary as an institution aiming at including people by imposing a social and cultural model, and Wacquant's description of a neoliberal-paternalist regime of poverty governance, which punishes the behavior of marginalized people who do not comply with the rules of dominant class. Indeed, the list of studies depicting the relation between market regulation practices and mass incarceration rates, as well as on poverty governance as a form of social control, is far from being short. At the same time, Soss et al. (2011) propose a groundbreaking development of Wacquant's theory. Since it is essential to frame the theoretical assumptions of my work, I briefly summarize the main points.

Firstly, Soss and colleagues question Wacquant's functional drift: indeed, although the author is well aware of the slippery path towards an overdeterminated functional approach, he describes the development of the penal state and racialization processes as needed, without providing an analysis on political agents. Conversely, Soss et al. are very specific in retracing political changes in America that could explain the disciplinary turn of poverty governance. The wide resonance of a historical and geographical explanation of such changes and the need of clarify the role of the actors in creating *new mentalities of rules* are compelling. On this note, Caputo (2019) furthers the analysis providing an insight on the significant changes in welfare approach and policies, and their effects in modifying the main paradigm of liberalism that tended to exclude individual without private property. Indeed, we have discussed on how liberalism valorized private property as the

main criterion to allow individuals to take part in society: non-proprietary individuals were regarded as immoral. On the contrary, welfare state recognizes its role, or, to better say, its own duty, in protecting and integrating individuals belonging to the poorer classes – even those who violated the law. Undoubtedly, in the first decades after the War the affirmation of welfare has favored a decrease of the population held in most of the prisons of western continental Europe. In the 70s and 80s, however, things started to fail: the social spending dramatically increased to cope with uncontrolled unemployment originated from the oil shocks of the early 1970s, and led to strong critics of welfare (Caputo, 2019). Nevertheless, initially the shift from protecting proprietary individuals to extending an universal protection to non-owners was aimed at containing unemployment and social conflicts, as well as providing cheap labor through wage support programs (Cloward and Piven, 1971). Caputo says it clear: in the model of welfaristic social inclusion, the state bears the responsibility to socialize risks and mitigate social insecurity in exchange of commitment to work. The repressive criminal policies towards poverty of the liberal era have been rejected: the welfare state grounds the social order on a new anthropological type of individual who is still rational and bearer of subjective rights, but at the same time consumer of goods and services (Caputo, 2019). Moreover, the prison is now an interesting tool for controlling immigrant workforce through the labor market, in order to ensure the availability of labor supply (De Giorgi, 2002; Sbraccia, 2004; Mosconi,2005). Accordingly, social institutions normatively induce individuals at internalizing the new rules of welfare state, which are based on exchange between work and social protection.

Secondly, Soss et al. confute Wacquant's interpretation of the advancement of neoliberalism: instead of being caused by the retreatment of welfare state, or, in other words, the roll-back of the social functions of the State[13], Soss et al. argue that neoliberalism has rather *embraced* the activist state, transforming it. In fact, neoliberalist reforms have seen an expansion of social – and, of course, penal – programs targeting the poor. What *paternalist* neoliberalism entails is an active role of institutions in telling poor what to do and a constant monitoring of behavior, through a system of incentives and penalties for no-compliance. This is particularly apparent with poverty governance

[13] The evolution of neoliberalism has been described as a series of discrete phases: 'proto-neoliberalism' associated with the pre-1980s attack on Keynesianism; 'roll-back neoliberalism' of the 1980s and early 1990s focused on deregulation and structural adjustment; and 'roll-out neoliberalism' from the 1990s onwards concerned with state-building (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

measures such as means-tested benefits, deeply conditional on good behavior. On this regard, it is central to understand the key rationale of it: poverty governance main aim is not to end poverty, but to manage insecurity, including nonintegrated fragments of population through their own contribution: "neoliberal paternalism can be seen as an overt and ambitious effort to reshape the ways that poor people think about and regulate themselves" (Soss et al., 2011, p.). Indeed, poverty governance goal is to provide the technical tools to allow poor to adopt specific conduct, and, eventually, govern themselves (Cruikshank 1999) – not just force them to adopt desired behaviors. Hence, even if the expansionist welfare policies have led to an unprecedented decline of incarcerations during the first 30 years after the war, the idea of a causality relation between poverty and crime still endured. Indeed, the poor is no longer object of moral reprobation but it is still considered a danger to society due to its deviant potential, and dangerous poor classes' typical behaviors are still punished. Caputo (2019) validate such analysis by depicting the Italian case: the Criminal Code currently in force maintains an authoritarian and classist feature centered on the defense of property. Thus, the criminal approach to deviance does not change. Instead, punitive practices are re-articulated merging humanitarianism, social pedagogism and criminological corrective techniques (Caputo, 2019). Consistently, welfare practices and punitive prison do not disappear entirely but are supported with a system of articulated restraints: institutions create social control programs such as rehabilitation projects for young deviants, or segregative structures like the asylum. Moreover, penal welfare programs do not only have corrective and including purposes, such as prison, but encompass also public utility works and alternative measures to detention. That is a crucial point: even though the criminal welfare softened punitive practices, prison is not brought into question and remains central to the sanctioning system and, while imprisonment is presented as an extrema ratio, we begin to experiment a system of measures alternatives to detention that tend to accentuate the pedagogical nature of the criminal execution (Caputo, 2019).

Third, and it is strictly linked with the importance of the agency of those in management position, Soss and colleagues further Wacquant's analysis by investigating both *what* and *how* governing authorities operate. Changes in poverty management such as policy devolution, privatization process, and performance systems, have developed through new mechanisms of social control that not only affected poor, but also lower-level governing authorities. Thus, the authoritative direction of paternalism increasingly constructs moral

appeals and incentives to promote a specific personal change, and it deeply influences recipients and executors. The new penal rationality has been strengthened: the process of humanization of the prison did not involve a contraction of the criminal system as a whole. Indeed, it takes over the task of manage the rejects or failures of welfare policies, segregating them in corrective and normalizing institutions that provides to society re-educated individuals or, alternatively, neutralize them to ensure the defense of society. The Welfare state, therefore, tends to portraits a new penalty: describes the old criminal practices in prison as inhuman and afflictive, while presenting the new not only as more human, but above all as inclusive (Caputo, 2019).

To conclude, I do agree and adopt also Soss et al. urge to not consider punishment as "the disciplinary alpha and omega of neoliberal paternalism" (Soss et al., 2011, p.8). Indeed, and I am going to show it throughout this work, penitentiary policies are only a segment of a disciplinary system that is strongly rooted on incentives, reward and new form of pedagogy that inform both governing and governed subjects.

II PERVASIVE SOCIAL CONTROL: HOW MERIT AND GENDER SHAPES AUTHORITIES' PERCEPTION

"One of the operating principles of authorities is that the possibility of error is simply not taken into account.
This principle is justified by the excellence of the entire organization
and is also necessary if matters are to be discharged with the utmost rapidity"

"Didn't you mention a control agency?"

"You're very severe," said the chairman, "but multiply your severity by a thousand and it will still be as nothing compared with the severity that the authorities show toward themselves.
Only a total stranger could ask such a question. Are there control agencies? There are only control agencies.
Of course they aren't meant to find errors, in the vulgar sense of that term, since no errors occur, and even if an error does occur, as in your case, who can finally say that it is an error."
[Franz Kafka, The Castle]

In the acknowledgement section of 30th anniversary edition of "*Street-level bureaucracy – dilemmas of the individual in public services*", Lipsky explains how his interest in the common work characteristics of street-level bureaucrats prompted in 1969 while writing a review of a book on the police (Lipsky, 2010). To the author, street-level bureaucracies are agencies (i.e. schools, police and welfare departments, lower courts, legal services offices) "whose workers interact with and have wide discretion over the dispensation of benefits or the allocation of public sanctions" (Ibidem, p.xi). Another significant characteristic is that the public's interactions with street-level bureaucracies represent a direct experience of the government they have constructed and interiorized. Lipsky claims that the exercise of discretion was a crucial dimension of public workers who regularly interact with citizens, and it is used to overcome the lack of time and information to properly respond to the single case according to highly standards. In so doing, the workers develop routines of practices and stereotyped perceptions of the "clients".

According to Lipsky own words:

> Perhaps the most highly refined example of street-level bureaucratic discretion comes from the field of corrections. Prison guards conventionally file injurious reports on inmates whom they judge to be guilty of "silent insolence". Clearly what does or does not constitute a dirty look is a matter of some subjectivity (Ibidem, pp.12-13)

Following Lipsky's foundational theory, Dubois argues that these everyday interactions highly effect the implementation of state policy, and, as a result, the definition "of what the state actually is" (Dubois, 2014). After having explained what should be intended with the term discretion (namely, the leeway of the officials in the enforcement of rules or implementation of programs), Dubois elaborates the discretion's functions as a pattern of Foucauldian concept of governmentality, focusing on the state's control practices. Indeed, although perceptions that shape formal rules at the top of the state apparatus do not necessarily equal those of street-level bureaucrats, they are highly intertwined: if the latter "see like a state" (Scott, 1998; Dubois, 2014) by imposing schematic visions, the former "also see through the eyes of its individual agents (…) who, facing this complexity, use their own perceptions to master it and to enforce state categories" (Dubois, 2014, p. 39). Focusing on a field where control procedures of street-level bureaucracy are particularly evident, namely the provision of welfare measures, the author stresses how the shifting towards a financial version of welfare produced a searching for limitation of expanses, which are cut through a reduction of benefit recipients. Indeed, stringent checks are carried out and control policies implemented. While during classic welfare it was used to avoid error in payments, Dubois states that in the last three decades "checks are designed to verify compliance with behavioral criteria and are part of the policy instruments used to 'activate' the non-working poor" (Ibidem, p.40). A moral category emerges: that of deservingness.

2.1 Deservingness and merit. New disciplinary categories

As already showed, the concepts of merit, desert and deservingness have been usually investigated referring to social welfare policies and attitudes towards poverty (Lipsky, 1980; 2010; Appelbaum, 2002; Bendix Jensen, 2004; Van Oorshot, 2006; Soss et al., 2011; Dubois, 2009; 2014; 2015).

Nevertheless, the concepts of merit and desert are semantically ambiguous. In fact, they can refer to two distinct things: something that has been accomplished, or some innate quality of the individual. Brigati glimpses a thin but substantial difference in English language between desert and merit, applying the former to the actions and the latter to the moral evaluation of intrinsic features (Brigati, 2012). Such distinction is not idle: it implies intention (*I deserve a reward because I have voluntarily act in a meritorious way*) or not (*I deserve to be recognized as a talented/good/intelligent person*), and it can refer to the past *(the action that has to be rewarded*) or to the future (*the qualities that can be spent to achieve something with a positive social impact*).

Desert always results from an interactional framework: if something is deserving, it means that it needs to be recognized, thus engaging a plurality of actors. I use the verb *recognized* because a desert does not necessarily imply a reward: it can also be only praised; of course, this practice still has an enormous symbolic impact. Brigati provides a fundamental analysis on the concept of desert, proposing four important postulates: i) desert does not (only) depend on a contract or agreement; ii) there are forms of recognition of desert that precede institutions; iii) those forms are embedded within modalities of control and exchanges; iv) desert is always a product of interaction (in other words, there is not merit without an observer) (Brigati, 2012, p. 189).

Simpson et al., (2020) critic the attitude of sociology of work and organization studies towards the conceptualization of deservingness and merit, which commonly are used interchangeably, saying that deservingness is treated as an alternative meaning (Sommerland, 2014; Simpson et.al, 2020). In fact, they rather agree with Pojman and McCleod (1998) distinction between the two terms, where merit comprises talent, skills and ability, and deservingness comprises effort, commitment and goodwill. Moreover, Simpson et al. appreciate the authors' efforts to highlight the fact that deservingness relies on performances and attitudes evaluation. Nevertheless, they still remark the hyper inclination to disregard the negative effects of using deservingness in evaluating merit-based systems, since such approaches perpetuate work-based inequalities:

> This is to fail to fully understand not only the distinction between them but also the nature of their interrelationship. Thus, as we seek to show, while merit is generally thought to be founded on a stable set of attributes possessed by the individual, its contingent and

> subjective character is in fact rooted in the performative dynamics of deservingness, with implications for work-based reward (Simpson et al., 2020, p.185).

Brigati briefly mentions an aspect of desert particularly interesting: each institution which dispenses rewards establishes *ipso facto* its *own* forms of desert and it is not possible to find an institution keen to reward services/performances against (nor even neutral towards) its objectives (Brigati, 2012). Such statement entails a further insight on the terms *deservingness* and *entitlement*: if it is true that institutions operate by rewarding and punishing according to their forms of merit, it is also true that they could not disregard those who are entitled. Feather recognizes that the two terms are often considered interchangeable (Feather, 2003), as criteria to comparing group differences (Major, 1994) as well as linked by a conceptual hierarchy in which entitlement is the umbrella to indicate "equity, deserving, rights, fairness, and the justice of procedures, distribution, and retributive acts" (Lerner, 1987, p. 107). Nevertheless, the author proposes a clear distinction between the two terms (Feather, 2003). On one hand, deservingness should be related "to outcomes that are earned or achieved as products of a person's actions" (Ibidem, p. 369) that could be both observed or inferred. The distinctive characteristic of deservingness is the perceived responsibility of the person being evaluated by the outcomes of his own actions. On the other hand, the term entitlement relates to both actions and outcomes, referring "to judgements that relate more to an agreed-upon body of law, social norms, and formal and informal rules (…) embodying legal or quasi-legal social norms and principles that concern groups and categories of people" (Ibidem, p.368). Feather underlines also that while individuals can be judged to deserve both positive and negative outcomes, entitlement generally has a positive connotation: a person is not entitled to negative treatment or punishment. Indeed, although the law could prescribe a negative treatment to offenders, we would consider them as deserving the punishment, given their actions and responsibility (ivi).

As far as the logics of responsibilization are concerned, the notion is often linked to logics of recipients' behavior aligning to specific institutional requirement to demonstrate their deservingness of welfare benefits. White (2000) justifies the notion of responsibility as a response to the principle of reciprocity: citizens are obliged to contribute to the value of social product of collective goods' provision that they received, to avoid free-riding and inter-groups dependence. It can be done proportionally (value to value) or according to

one's abilities (doing one's bit). Notwithstanding the relevance of such interpretation of the concept in distributive and egalitarian economic justice, within the concept of responsibility there is also a hidden aspect of social control measures towards a segment of the population that cannot be integrated:

> Bifurcating the lowest strata into "deserving" and "undeserving" categories of poor. In essence, more than ever private agents will play roles of social control with respect to public rights and claims of citizenship (…) With its emphasis on bootstrap mobility and individual responsibility in a social structure of immense inequality, faith-based social service obscures the broader structures of racial and economic domination, depoliticizes social inequality, and replaces confrontation with accommodation. Sectarian organizations are perfectly suited to exert pressure on the lower classes (Weiss, 2001, p.43)

Setting out from the semantical distinction between desert and merit previously illustrated, it is important to understand that while the observer evaluates talents subjectively, the actions are always judged through the biographical history of the person, which contributes to build and reinforce the idea of desert (Brigati, 2012). Nevertheless, Rossi warns against interpretations of responsibility that neglect any recipient's agency, whom in reality "perform a variety of strategic actions in order to shape their possibilities of receiving services and that these actions can diverge from expected logics of responsibilization" (Rossi, 2017, p. 614). As I have briefly exposed in paragraph 1.2.2, the disciplinary turn of policy government and the emergence of a paternalist neoliberalism implied a constant monitoring of behaviors through a system of incentives (Soss et al., 2011; Caputo, 2019). Deservingness critics demonstrate that "the poor and non-poor violate conventional morality at similar rates; what differentiates them is vulnerability, not behavior" (Zatz, 2011, p. 560). Zatz quotes from Katz (1989) a relevant excerpt, in which poverty is defined as a matter of personal responsibility and can be alleviated only through a personal metamorphosis which seeps into acquisition of skills, commitment to the work ethic, or the practice of chastity (Katz, 1989). In other words, in order to access welfare benefits, poor have to demonstrate to deserve them and not be guilty of misconducts that might produce the conditions that caused their neediness. Moral judgement and high discretion are the key ingredients of anti-poverty programs: Zatz (2011) states that dismantling the gap between need and deservingness is fundamental to disclose the implicit moral content of need assessment, which is strictly connected with behavioral conditions. On these lines Van Oorshot (2006) proposes the basic criteria to assess a

group's deservingness. Such criteria are the following: i) 'control over neediness': people who are seen as being personally responsible for their neediness are seen as less deserving; ii) 'level of need': people with greater need are seen as more deserving; iii) 'identity': needy people who are closer to 'us' are seen as more deserving; iv) 'attitude': more deserving are those needy people who are likeable, grateful, compliant and conforming to our standards; v) 'reciprocity': more deserving are those needy people who have contributed to our group before (who have 'earned' our support), or who may be expected to be able to contribute in future (van Oorshot, 2006, p.26).

2.1.1 Deserving of punishment: disciplining offenders

As we have saw in the previous chapter, Caputo (2019) links the analysis of changes in welfare policies with the emergence of a new perception of individuals, and in particular, of offenders. Indeed, the population begins to take on the characteristics of a fluid entity no longer described according to the traditional categories, such as classes or strata social; but evaluated according to market criteria, such as individual merit and the ability to innovate or adjustment. Individuals are no longer protected from cradle to grave by that welfare - social leviathan; they are co-responsible for their achievements and failures. Drawing from Nozick (2008), Caputo underlines how it is not out of coincidence that the concept of individual responsibility makes its reappearance in the theory of criminal law, criticizing the re-educational and preventive theories of punishment that were at the basis of the correctionalist and welfarist model. The offender ceases to be considered a social misfit or a sick person, to go back to being a rational individual responsible for his own actions (Caputo, 2019), and for this very reason, judicable as a *deserving/undeserving* individual. We have also stated that Soss et al. (2011) identify the manageability of needy people as the main goal of social programs addressing poverty, rather than the radical elimination of it. Thus, according to the authors, the poverty governance does not aim to end poverty but wants to secure the cooperation and contributions of weakly integrated populations. Moreover, we have seen that Soss and colleagues propose an advancement of Wacquant theory (2009): they do agree on the central role acquired by incarceration and punishment in poverty governance which use "surveillance and penalty systems to keep aid recipients moving along their designated paths" (Soss et al., 2011, p.2), but they doubt that the punitive policies tools represent the only instruments. New incentives system, modes of pedagogy, and reformative experience of market relations play a significant part

as well: “the disciplinary turn in poverty governance, in our analysis, entails the expansion of sovereign powers but, more fundamentally, is a project of governmentality focused on fostering particular forms of self-mastery and promoting a particular kind of wellness in targeted populations” (Ibidem, p.8). Above all, Soss et al. explain the main purpose of such new modes of governance, which endorse “new mentalities of rules” to alter governing practices by “reconstructing the ways that authorities understand themselves, their missions, and the problems and populations they act on (…) The ultimate purpose of these changes is to transform the poor themselves—to make them into the kinds of subjects who voluntarily embrace particular kinds of choices and behaviors” (Ibidem, p.9).

Within the last quote two concepts are subsumed, both of which crucial for the thesis’s aim: self-perception of the authorities and the rehabilitative approach to subjects who need to act properly with societal rules. Sykes (1958) in his study of a maximum security prison, clearly describes the prison’s objective as the imposition of a massive body of rules, which are a behavioral blueprint for inmates. The author refers to this kind of imposition as a social order that “represents means, a method of achieving certain goals” (Sykes, 1958, p. 13). Of course, to Sykes prison is a machine which translates the dictates of society into action, but the set of rules and routines of prison officers is still a choice among alternatives, and, as underlined by the author, “we must examine the basis of this choice as well as the objectives themselves” (ibidem, p.14).

Hence, to borrow from Soss, which are “the ways (prison) authorities understand themselves” (Soss et al., 2011,p.9)? And, consequently, which are the main societal dictates that they translate into action? Indeed, the moral prescription that led correctional officers’ practices in establishing prisoners’ merit and deservingness could also be investigate through Dubois’s analysis on state’s control practices over authorities’ perceptions. Authorities, or in this case correctional officers, see like the state, but also reinforce state’s categories by applying and reproducing their own perceptions. (Dubois, 2014).

Indeed, if we concentrate our analysis on the punitive system and on correctional officers perceptions, which represent the research focus as we clarified in the introductive chapter of this work, it is of particular interest referring to Sykes’ explanation of prison approach to the reward-punishment system: according to Sykes, prison officers cannot count on a sense of duty to motivate prisoners to obey – and, of course, the use of violence is not

allowed. Indeed, although the legitimacy of control[14] is recognized and accepted, it is rare to find a sense of duty based on an internalized morality. Thus, "the custodians must fall back on a system of reward and punishment" (ibidem, p.50), to be intended as the only instruments that correctional officers *perceive* to have, not as a deterministic *extrema ratio*.

Here, I would like to investigate how such perceptions are constructed – and reify – on specific laws. According to the Italian penitentiary regulation, the compliance to rules of conduct might be interpreted as acquiring sense of responsibility that deserves to be rewarded. According to the art. 37 O.P., in fact, "the rewards represent the recognition of the sense of responsibility shown in personal conduct and in activities organized in institutions". The law, therefore, is not satisfied by a "passive compliance with the rules of conduct", but requires "behaviors deserving of a positive appreciation because motivated by a sense of responsibility, demonstrated in the community life of the institute". Moreover, to guarantee the impartial exercise of administrative power, art. 76, paragraph I, also identifies the conducts' typologies deserving positive consideration.

Coherently, the relevance of neoliberal paternalism approach as assessed by Soss et al. (2011) is at hand: the punitive system is a hyper efficient engine to discipline the authoritative system – in this specific case correctional officers – to, eventually, disciplining the poor and lead (both of) them to "voluntarily embrace particular kinds of choices and behaviors" (Soss et al., 2011, p.9)

2.1.2 The ubiquitous features of merit's rhetoric. A gendered insight

In the previous pages, I discussed Simpson et al. warning on the risks of confusing deservingness and merit in the evaluation of an organization applying merit-based systems. Indeed, following the conceptual distinction between the two terms (with the former as an objective criterion of attributes and skills, and the latter as positive acts and behaviors), they develop a *performative understanding* of deservingness in order to

[14] Weber claims that a social order is legitimate "only if action is approximately or on the average oriented to certain determinate 'maxims' or rules" (Weber 1978 [1924], p. 31). Johnson et al. (2006) starting from the Weberian theory, offer a sociological review of the definition of the term legitimation. Firstly, whereas individuals presume that some rules and beliefs are shared and accepted by others, they will behave accordingly even if they are not aligned and privately in disagreement. Indeed, until the social order is supported and validated by most individuals, it will be perceived as valid and objective. Consequently, legitimation "*occurs through a collective construction of social reality in which the elements of a social order are seen as consonant with norms, values, and beliefs that individuals presume are widely shared, whether or not they personally share them*" (Johnson, 2006, p. 53).

underline its relationship with the concept of merit. In doing so, the gendered nature of the performances is showed, the evaluation of which upholds merit like performatively constituted as deserved through masculine displays (Simpson, 2020. p. 193). Differently phrased, the achievements that are commonly evaluated as deserving and that are merged with the objective criteria of merit-based assessments, generally rely on pre-existed gender norms. As explained by the authors, "this is to foreground not only how deservingness is predicated upon behaviours and performances that are given value in context (e.g., based on effort, commitment, achievement), but also (…) how a gendered, deserving meritorious subject is constituted through performative, embodied displays" (Ibidem, p. 192).

The authors rely on Butler's (1990, 1993) concept of performativity, which theorizes that "*a (gendered, professional) subject is constituted performatively through the repetition of acts and behaviors that cite pre-existing norms within a contextually specific regulatory scheme*" (Simpson, 2020, p.190). In paragraph 1.2.1 I briefly discussed Rye's comparison between Foucault and Weber's conceptualizations of disciplinary power (Rye, 2014). The author also reports the significance of Butlerian performativity, quoting her famous definition of gender as a fiction without "ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' (Butler 1990, 136) and, through a comparison with Goffman's *expressive equipment*, to be intended as the tool used to present the self and adhere to society expectations (i.e. physical attributes like sex, gender, age, racial characteristics, but also facial expressions and bodily gestures, rank, clothing, posture, etc.) subverts it "into tools for disciplining the body" (Rye, 2014, p. 158) and convey political messages through appearance and conducts.

West and Zimmermann (1987) criticized Goffman's contribution in defining gender. Indeed, the authors dismiss the conceptualization of gender as set of traits, or a variable, or a role, and define it as the product of social doing, which is continually produced through interaction. In criticizing Goffman (albeit recognizing the high value of his thesis) the authors underline how gender is not something that can be voluntarily displayed at own pleasure, it is not optional. Doing gender is "an ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 130). Moreover, doing gender produces a social order reflecting "natural differences", de facto legitimating hierarchical arrangements:

> Doing gender furnishes the interactional scaffolding of social structure, along with a built-in mechanism of social control (…) An understanding of how gender is produced in social situations will afford clarification of the interactional scaffolding of social structure, and the social control processes that sustain it (Ibidem, p. 147).

In the next paragraphs I present how merit and deservingness are intertwined with gender in disciplinary mechanisms within a peculiar organization: the prison.

2.2 A gendered organization: deserving punishment and reward

Since Acker (1990) coined the term 'gendered organization', which "means that gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life" (Acker, 1990, p. 567), a gender paradigm for the study of the organizations and bureaucracy has been widely applied. Carrabine and Longhurst claim that gender identities are constituted in material practices and stress the significance of taking into consideration the relation between the managers and the managed to demonstrate that organisations are routinely gendered (Carrabine and Longhurst, 1998). Nevertheless, the concept of gender remains blurry. Generally, sociologists meant gender as a role enactment or a "display" focusing on behavioral aspects rather than on biological differences, or as a situated interactional process. In discussing why choosing to refer to gender rather than sexuality, Witz and Savage explain that the main reason of 'gendering' sociological discourse has been to demonstrate how social practices reproduce male dominance and male power, which are not premised on biological imperatives (Witz and Savage, 1991, p. 54). Along these lines, Acker (1992) explains that although the binary categories male and female are seen as natural, "thus prior to social intervention in the form of gender", the assignment of individuals to such categories is an evaluative social process usually made by supposing biological difference. In other words, gender differences are socially understood through sex categorization, which de facto "derives its meaning from gender: sex collapses into gender" (Acker, p. 566). The author does not consider body and sexuality as unimportant, but that they are experienced "through social practices and processes; they are constituted through gender and, at the same time, help constitute gender" (cf. ibidem, pp. 565-566). Similarly, I adopt

Bartky's definition of femininity (and, consequently, of masculinity): "we are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine. Femininity is an artifice" (Bartky, 1988, p. 95).

2.2.1 Binary sexual segregation: inmates' discipline

Of course, prisons constitute a special typology of gendered organization[15]. Prison regimes have been recently studied as domains in which gender is "enforced" by means of sex segregation of the inmates – namely, the partition between males and females prisoners (Pemberton, 2013). Specifically, Pemberton asks why sex segregation is imposed in some organisations and not others, declining it as a representation of a biological fact and depicting it as an exercise of power that reinforces binary sex and gender categories. Drawing from Connell (1987), Pemberton uses the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is constructed in opposition to both femininity and subordinated masculinities and is produced by the state in institutions such as military, police, and prisons (Pemberton, 2013, pp. 167-168). Moreover, since 'penal governance' is understood as "a form of productive power that has the intention of producing individuals who meet certain normative expectations" (Hannah-Moffat, 2001, p.7) and such gendered organisations are central to the reproduction and reconstitution of wider gender relations in society, Carrabine and Longhurst's analysis of Sim's argument (1995) on the role of embedded discourses on masculinity and femininity to sustain and reproduce order within the prison represents a focal point (Carrabine and Longhurst, 1998, p. 165). On this regard, critical criminology studies penal institution as a structure operating through gender – thus, creating "appropriately gendered human behavior and socialized (docile) subjects" (Butler, 1990; Bosworth & Kaufman, 2012, p.). Particularly, it assumes that the power to punish have a bidirectional relation with gender (which is not fixed and can be reinterpreted), depending from it and producing it (Ivi).

[15] Interestingly, the time-honoured definition of Goffman's refers to prisons as total institutions - not total organisations. While the former are defined as systems of formalized rules determining how structures develop and behave, the latter are to be understood as institutionalized, stable and recognized models of behavior. Perry (2007), recognizing that often the two terms tend to be intended as equivalent, proposes an assessment of the term total institutions. In fact, Perry retraces the critique of Goffman's use of the term, according with the category "total organization" has been proposed as more appropriate. Against this, Perry explains that Goffman's employment of the term "institution" aims at considering both the organizational (spheres of activity in which there are subjectivities and objectives) and the institutional natures (formalized rules that involve the allocation of identities as well as the distribution of duties and the provision of rewards) (Perry, 2007, p. 1).

Gender, power and deservingness have a long legacy in criminology studies, which hosted a long debate on gender as a correlate of crime and delinquency. Indeed, studies on female and male detention demonstrated that the reproduction of gendered stereotypes (Sim, 1995; Girschick, 2011) creates highly discriminatory expectations and evaluation criteria for female offenders, which tend to reproduce patriarchal model towards women who disrupt social order. Initially, feminist studies started to investigate whether the introduction of women in work organizations usually dominated by men presence would increment female prison population as well (Simon, 1975; Adler, 1975). Empirical research demonstrated that it is not the case: patriarchal domination not only hides criminal behaviors against women but creates a parallel social control system relegating – when possible – female deviance within domestic environment, or, in any case, outside the penal system. Penal policies for the social and work reintegration of women are of particular interest since they include specific requirements and prescriptions that are influenced by the perception of the role of women in the patriarchal society. The punitive system thus applies a differentiated treatment to the deviant woman, claiming exceptional nature of her behavior compared to the male offender: the transgression of moral codes and cultural stereotypes involves the tendency of sanctioning them with the only aim of correcting an individual who is perceived unable to comply with social rules (Faccioli, 1990; Carponi Schittar, 1996; Ceraudo & Giugliano, 2008; Ronconi & Zuffa, 2014, 2019). On this regard, some authors investigated whether equal treatment in prison between men and women is fair treatment (Chesney-Lind & Pollock-Byrne, 1995; Chesney-Lind & Bloom, 1997).

Marginalization, infantilization, incapacitation of offenders are both conceptual and practical issues investigated by an academic niche, even if remain understudied and struggle to achieve a wide appeal when referred to women in prison. In her groundbreaking writing on women in prison, Carlen (1983) argued that female prisoners were routinely infantilised, denied agency and required to follow outmoded and unrealistic forms of feminine behaviour. Carlen landmark study discussed the modalities used by prison to operate through gender roles and has been followed by a rise of interest in sociologists engaging directly with gender theory, "exploring in some detail the self-constitutive relationship between imprisonment and gender. According to the latter body of work, prison regimes do not simply reflect and reward gendered notions of appropriate feminine behaviour; rather, the prison solidifies and propagates particular (binary) constructions of gender throughout society" (Bosworth & Kaufman, 2012, p. 189). Then,

the need of studying female detention is clear: in a hyper masculinized organization, female prisoners are not considered, both theoretically and practically. Nevertheless, when it comes to investigate the role of gender within prison, it always refers to female sections, rarely to male prisoners. Bosworth and Kaufmann (2012) shed light on this underdeveloped field of research, retracing the cause of such scarce attention to the paradoxical nature of masculinity for male prisoners: it is recognized that high value of masculinity, which brings power and control, but it is always held in check by the authority of prison staff. Thus, although a specific form of gender is encouraged in men's prisons, male prisoners are entirely dependent on the institution (Bosworth & Kaufmann, 2012). Such dependency is in contrast with axioms of masculinity and significantly impacts the relationship among prisoners and between them and prison officers (Crewe, 2006; 2011).

Before proceeding with delineating the body of literature on gender and correctional officers, it is necessary to introduce and concisely illustrate another pivotal theme: condition of transgender inmates. Undoubtedly, the spatial-ideological arrangement of prisons as described in the previous paragraphs cannot (and, eventually, do not) assimilate the phenomenon of transgender inmates, who often struggle to have a dedicated area[16]. Thus, such unforeseen phenomenon has to come to terms with a new carceral topography that jeopardizes its normative binary division (Dias Veira, Ciuffoletti, 2014). Transgenders in prison are hyper-marginalized and unrecognized individuals, but also a space (a body?) of resistance: prison authorities informally deny the presence of transgender inmates transferring the responsibility of managing them only through security practices. The main goal of prison bureaucracy is indeed maintaining the internal order, not implementing inclusive practices of the *tertium genus*. The law, the normative binary logic, is reconfirmed not paying attention to a body that can be recognized only as an exception. Nevertheless, it produces a paradox: the penitentiary system is able to find space even to those who do not comply with its logic, opening interstices from which unexpected subjectivities risk peeping out (Peroni & Vianello, 2018).

[16] In Italy, trans inmates are generally located within a ward in the male section. The Florence's prison is the only one with a trans ward within the female section.

2.2.2 Binary sexual segregation: correctional officers' discretional discipline

During the 70s, the US introduced female officers into male prisons, thus sparking a debate on the advantages and disadvantages of having women officers working in a front-line capacity with male prison inmates (Kissel and Katsampes, 1980; Potter, 1980; Peterson, 1982; Jurik and Halemba, 1984; Crouch, 1985; Jurik 1985, 1988; Wright and Saylor, 1991; Walters, 1992). The thriving of academic literature on this change in prisons management widened the variety of studies on women entering traditionally masculine or male-specific occupations. Maculan (2014), in providing a review of the international literature, underlines how one of the most investigated topics is related to the organizational culture, to be intended as system of meaning within a specific organization that are routinely reproduces by social actors (Maculan, 2014; Bruni; 2003; Bifulco, 2008). On this aspect, the research conducted by Sarzotti (1999) on the organizational culture of the penitentiary, which describes both the re-educational function and the policing function as characterized by gendered features – one characterized by interest and care, the other by authority and supervision, is of particular interest. Methodologically, Maculan underlines how the qualitative approach has been preferred, through interviews to the guards (cfr. Jacobs & Retsky 1975; Jacobs & Grear 1977; Lombardo 1981; Kauffman 1988), participatory observation to investigate correctional officers' practices (Crawley 2011; Liebling et al. 2011), as well as under-cover research as hired correctional officers (Marquart 1986; Fleisher 1989; Herberts 1998). Considering literature on gender impact on prison work, most of researchers investigate female correctional officers working in male facilities. Rarely male working in female prisons are taken into consideration. Generally, research's results underline how female correctional officers' work tends to be hindered by male colleagues, rather than male prisoners (Jurik 1985; Hunter 1986; Zimmer 1989; McMahon 1999). Nevertheless, recently a higher degree of acceptance of female guards seems leading toward an inclusive perception from male correctional officers (Carlson et al.; Crawley, 2011). Studies that have analyzed differences in working modalities based on correctional officers' gender are of particular interest (Jurik & Halemba, 1984; Zupan, 1986; Zimmer, 1987; Pollock, 1995; Jenne & Kersting, 1998). Interestingly, while Zimmer and Pollock found gender-biased divergences in carrying on the same duties, the other body of studies report a greater similarity. Maculan (2014) retrieves the cause in the methodology used: indeed,

the former engaged in qualitative research instruments as in-depth interviews, the latter predominantly utilized self-report questionnaires.

Britton applied the Acker's theory of gendered organizations to frame an analysis on correctional officers working in women and men prisons. Specifically, the author argues that although the organizational practices are the same in both the environments, prisons might be properly defined as "masculinized" organizations since they tend to benefit male correctional officers and reproduce gender inequalities (Britton, 1997). Liebling (2000) provides a compelling analysis of the impact of the policing literature to the work of prison officers, stressing on a specific topic: the influence of discretion on the police deviation from the rule of law (Rainer, 1997; Liebling, 2000), thus, on informal/formal modes of social control. Of course, Liebling considers the structural differences between police and correctional officers' work, such as the constant contact between guards and prisoners – the relational aspect is crucial and connected on deeper levels. Previous research within prisons of England and Wales (Liebling, 1999) found a link between the quality of staff-prisoners relationship and the use of formal rather than informal sanctions (Liebling, 1999, 2000). Indeed, the high use formal modes of control (punishment) resulted in weak staff-prisoners relations; the use of verbal skills and communication achieved a higher level of compliance and promoted closer relations. Another relevant finding of Liebling qualitative research is the main motivation that pushes correctional officers to underenforce the law showing authority rather then enforcing the rules: the smooth flow of the prison should continue without interruption (Sykes, 1958; Liebling, 2000). Is the correctional officers' behavior against prison rules? No (or, at least, mostly not): "the translation of rules into action is an interpretative exercise, where the particular situation cannot be appropriately addressed by the general rule (…) By dealing with the relationship, the officer achieves compliance and the maintenance of order. He deals with the prisoner in a legitimate manner – but not a rule-bound manner" (Liebling, 2000, pp. 344-345).

Of course, there is quite a different result in non-compliance with the rule to avoid bureaucracy red tape and narrow minded decisions unable to adapt to contexts and individuals, and non-compliance with the rules on the basis on unfair, unequal and, sometimes, totally unreasonable judgement of the person due to her/his specific traits. Liebling uses the following/unfollowing the rules of prison on a spectrum that start from the neutral compliance to the rules to the positive no-compliance of them: from, in other words, choosing to put a prisoner on a report or not thanks to their empathy and ability

to read the specific situation – interpreting the prisoner's behavior and motivations. Thus, rules are important to prisoners as well: rules are resources that should be used wisely, not something that has to be strictly enforced (Liebling, 2000). Nevertheless, and we will see it in the next chapters, the unstable and discretional use of rules is a gigantic issue for prisoners as well: they need to know how to cope with the prison environment, and the regime of rules can also be a lifeline. Prisoners need definite and certain assurance, and rules can also prevent discriminatory acts or rights violations. Liebling says it clear: "the discretionary use of very high levels of power without recourse to a set of principles to guide its use leaves a wide legitimacy deficit of a fairly precise kind" (Liebling, 2000, p. 349). Staff can distribute power: untroublesome category of prisoners deserve civil and professional treatment (what they are entitled to, plus effort, consideration, time), uncompliant prisoners only the professional (what they are entitled to) (ivi).

Considering gender as a variable in deploying a certain degree of discretion, Liebling mentions it as a impacting factor in identifying the role model officer: the officer who "got it right" is the one able to accept and use discretion wisely. Namely, they are female correctional officers:

> This was by no mean a special preserve of female officers. Role model staff were described as having known and consistently applied but justifiable boundaries; something which was referred to as 'moral courage' or 'moral fibre'; sensitivity to the effects of their own power; and a sensitivity to individuals and contexts (precisely the virtue that a 'feminine' mode of evaluation is said to embody) (ibidem, p. 346).

The narrative and rhetoric use of "feminine" characteristics to label women correctional officers is of high interest. The acknowledgement of a female difference within prison reproduces model of behaviors based on gender specificities socially constructed, and at the same time it is product of them. Liebling (2000) repeatedly stresses the relevance of analyzing how correctional officers practices are mediated by gender as a category of analysis – whether feminine-masculine attitude towards and approach to the use of power – encouraging researchers to further investigations on this topic. Consistently, exploring how personal background and external inputs influence the correctional officers' practices on the workplace, discussing the Italian correctional officers' perceptions and attitudes comparing male and female experiences in establishing relations on the basis of merit in such gendered organization, aiming at discovering spaces of resistance for formal and

informal practices that do not support the penitentiary model of rewarding, represent the main aim of the research hereby presented.

III Methodology and Research design

Ernest Hyde

My mind was a mirror:
It saw what it saw, it knew what it knew.
In youth my mind was just a mirror
In a rapidly flying car,
Which catches and loses bits of the landscape.
Then in time
Great scratches were made on the mirror,
Letting the outside world come in,
And letting my inner self look out.
For this is the birth of the soul in sorrow,
A birth with gains and losses.
The mind sees the world as a thing apart,
And the soul makes the world at one with itself.
A mirror scratched reflects no image –
And this is the silence of wisdom.

(Edgar Lee Masters, Spoon River Anthology, Mc Millan Company, New York, 1916)

The elaboration of the main questions of this thesis – how correctional officers' practices and representations are shaped/shape the daily government of an Italian prison on the basis of merit and gender – has its roots in the interdisciplinary theoretical premises discussed in depth in the previous pages. Before illustrating the rationale above the methodology chosen to conduct this research, it is important to briefly present the debate and the evolution that led to the main methodological paradigms in social science. Indeed, epistemology and ontology are the unavoidable premises to the philosophical explanation of the methodological asset:

> Every research tool or procedure is inextricably embedded in commitments to particular versions of the world and ways of knowing that world made by researchers using them. To use a questionnaire, an attitude scale of behavior, take the role of a participant observer, select a random sample (…) is to be involved in conceptions of the world which allow these instruments to be used for the purposes conceived. No technique or method of investigation (…) is self validating: its effectiveness, its very

status as a research instrument (…) is dependent, ultimately, on philosophical justification "(Hughes, 1980, p.13)

Moreover, ontology and epistemology unveil my positioning as a researcher and my motivation to engage in social research. They are "a skin, not a sweater" (Marsh and Furlong, 2002, pp. 17-41).

In order to understand what it means to interrogate about how the social world is constituted, and how one can access it as a researcher, the Spoon River Anthology's quote at the beginning of the chapter offers an interesting figurative transposition. Edgar Lee Masters's says: "*My mind was a mirror: it saw what it saw, it knew what it knew*". An initial approach to the poet inner expression of his younger self might lead to perceive a lack of introspection, or interpretation of the world. He cut back to observe what the world showed to him, and his mind experienced through the sense of sight that it and the world are two separate beings. But then the soul absorbs the external world through the scratches got in adulthood. Thus, eventually: "*the mind sees the world as a thing apart, and the soul makes the world at one with itself*". We know that the main task of poetry exegesis is offering a critical interpretation of authors' metaphorical expressions and figures of speech, but Edgar Lee Masters' poem fits perfectly as a metaphor itself and an example of epistemology *and* ontology: the knowability of social world and its reality status.

3.1 The knowability of the world: the importance of an epistemological statement

Social research has been oriented by two general frames of reference: positivism and interpretivism, two opposite visions of social reality and how it should be understood. The former applies the conceptual framework, the techniques and the procedures of the natural sciences to the studies of social phenomena. The ontology of positivism sees social reality as external to human beings and knowable in its true essence due to two main epistemological assumptions: *dualism* (the subject who studies and the object studied are independent) and *objectivity* (the subject who studies does not influence the object studied and viceversa). In other words, "inquiry takes place as through a one way mirror" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.110): the mind of *Spoon River Anthology* poet was able to know the world just staring at and seeing it – *absorbing it as it is*. Methodologically, positivism is inductive, which means that moves from particular to the general, deriving general laws

from the empirical observation of regularities within the reality (the part of reality) under investigation. As presented in the theoretical framework of this research, Durkheim could be considered the father of positivist sociology: by considering social facts as things, not subject to human will or intervention, with a deterministic structure that can be discovered through scientific research, to Durkheim social world can be methodologically studied as natural world:

> Since the law of causality has been verified in the other domains of nature and has progressively extended its authority from the physical and chemical world to the biological world, and from the latter to the psychological world, one may justifiably grant that it is likewise true for the social world. Today it is possible to add that the research undertaken on the basis of this postulate tends to confirm this (Durkheim, 1895, p. 159).

Nevertheless, as in the Nineteenth Century the methodological evolution of sociology as a discipline had been strongly influenced by the paradigm of natural sciences, during the Twentieth Century the development and progression of groundbreaking theories in this field introduced new revolutionary assumptions. Indeed, while 1930s Neopositivism postulated that the meaning of a statement derives from its empirical verifiability through the language of variables, in the 1960s Postpositivism, a disruptive approach to study social phenomena, emerged. In fact, the advancements in physics on quantum mechanics, general theory of relativity and Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty – to name a few – represented the cornerstones for a new conception of nature and its law (Corbetta, 2003). Deterministic laws started to be substituted by probabilistic laws and the concept of falsification was introduced to validate a theoretical hypothesis: data cannot confirm a theory, only non-confute it. If the data do not contradict the hypothesis, is it possible to consider it as valid; positive proof is just impossible, since the same dataset could resonate with other theoretical hypothesis. Most importantly, Postpositivism frames the empirical observation as theory laden: the recording of reality depends on the researcher frame of mind, social and cultural influences. Getting back to the *Spoon River Anthology*, the poet lets the outside world come in, and his inner self look out. He cannot absorb reality, he has to accept that, although reality exists independently from his cognitive process, the understanding of it is conditioned by the social context and the theoretical framework (namely, the lens you use to look at it, or the *scratches* on the mirrored-frame mind of the poet). Consistently, Postpositivism assumes that empirical observations are theory-laden, which means that theoretical concepts and data cannot be separated. That said, the

postpositivist orientation does not dismiss the empirical approach, and the methodological procedures: collecting data modalities, measurement and statistical analysis still remain the main tools utilized. Summarizing, the ontological assumptions of Postpositivism still consider reality to be external to human being, but it is only partially knowable due to its own laws, which are probabilistic, and to the human knowledge that is not perfect (Ibidem). Dualism between object studied and scholar is dismissed: there is an inevitable interference between the both and deductive procedures are at the core of the cognitive process, through falsifications. Nevertheless, the main aim remains the formulation of general laws, although probabilistic and admitting qualitative methods. Methodologically, the detachment between scholar and object studied is achieved by applying statistical analysis and experiments, which will be reproduced by the scientific community to critically asses the hypothesis and formulate new ones.

The path followed by Positivism, Neopositivism and Postpositivism could be compared to the evolution of the Weberian version of interpretative sociology and its subsequent development of lines of thought as symbolic interactionism, phenomenological sociology, and ethnomethodology (Ibidem). Nevertheless, unlike the advancements of positive approach, the interpretativist developments share all the core assumptions: ontologically, the world is formed on the meanings attributed by individuals, and, due to the great variation between individuals and cultures and societies, a universal social reality does not exist. Epistemologically, scholars and objects of study cannot be separated and the main aim of research is finding meaning able to explain individual behavior, rather than general laws. We will examine the methodological approach in the next paragraph.

In order to understand the core difference between Positivism and Interpretivism, it is useful to introduce the main divergences between their epistemological approach: since, ontologically, for Positivism the nature exists independently from the researcher, it is possible to gain knowledge by *explaining* the law of natural world. In Interpretivism instead, researcher and social world cannot be detached. The observer and what is observed are co-dependent (the human soul is scratched by its own experience and let the world come in, it is not possible to just reflect it as a one-way mirror). Thus, the process of achieving a new knowledge cannot be reached by explaining the social world, but making attempts to understand (Verstehen) it: "We explain nature, but we understand psychic life" (Dilthey, 1883). The milestone of sociological approach and interpretative methods lies his roots in Weber's distinction between knowledge and judgement: while

the latter must be avoided in social and historical sciences, value judgement would inevitably influence the former in selecting the object of study, guiding the scholar in choosing the field of research. Consistently, freedom from values guarantees objectivity of social science, which is the first condition to formulate postulates of general nature, but the knowledge of social phenomena will always be led by the interpretation of human behaviors. The second condition is methodological: researchers need to use *Verstehen*, which is the rational understanding of the motivations underlying behaviors. Aiming at understanding human behavior objectively through the subjective point of view and inner motivations might seem contradictory. To explain it Weber introduces the concept of *ideal types*, which are abstractions of social actions recurring in human behavior that are empirically observable. In other words, ideal types are mental constructs that scholars use to direct the process of gaining knowledge, functioning as theoretical model that support the interpretation of it. The German sociologist does not believe in the possibility to retrace the *factors that determine* social actions or human behaviors, but the *conditions that make them possible*. Weber's ideal types not only represent a groundbreaking model in social sciences, but are *de facto* a significant attempt to cope with the main criticism against Interpretivism: the over relevance of subjectivity. Moreover, beyond recognizing the possibility of achieving cognitive generalizations, he did not totally dismiss the relation between causality and *Verstehen*. Nevertheless, from the 1960s the subjectivity character of Interpretivism has been emphasized, and consequently strongly criticized: if knowledge cannot be objective, a scientific method cannot be pursued and the science itself is jeopardized. Moreover, the main risk of interpretative approach has been retrieved in a hyperbolic relativistic vision. Feyerabend known definition of relativism, "everything goes", well summarizes such critique: if every claim of knowledge has the same dignity, can be substituted by every other claim of knowledge (Corbetta, 2003). Richard Rorty (1985), besides this view (all belief are equally good), states that relativism can also refer to the impossibility of retrieving only one meaning for truth (there are as many meanings as there are procedures for justification), and that searching for truth is nothing else than describing the procedures employed to justify claims of knowledge[17], by a particular social group, in a specific time and space, concerning a particular area of inquiry. Interpretivists

[17] The philosophical assumption of positive research is Foundationalism, which claims that all knowledge has a secure foundation and that it is possible to reach the "truth" by following the right procedures. Interpretivism contrasts this assumption.

disagree with the first definition: relativism does not mean that all belief are interchangeable, instead, it expresses the core contingency of knowledge, which is always time and space situated. There are not permanent or time and place free criteria for assess a generalizable and objective knowledge.

The not-objective nature of knowledge and its essence as the product of shared and time-and-space located beliefs are at the core of Foucauldian post-modernist approach: the sense making process is strictly linked with the social context where it occurs. The social process of meaning-making, called by Foucault (1980) "Battle for Truth", produces knowledge by rejecting, accepting, reaffirming, and reinventing truth claims, which are always the product and the producer of power relations. Indeed, to Foucault the acceptance of knowledge as true by a community always generates power and will inevitably influence the sense-making processes of that community. Predictably, also postmodernism cultural relativism has been criticized: if all discourses are social constructs based on collective agreement, discriminatory and repressive discourse have the same validity of emancipatory ones. Foucault answers to this critique arguing that the recognition itself of gender, race, and social class as social constructs would arise awareness and lay the foundation for societal change (Foucault, 1980).

Haraway (1988) offers an important opportunity to overcome such impasse, denying the relativism stance of the interpretive approach: knowledge claims can be grounded by shifting the question from the epistemological level to an ethical one. Haraway doctrine of objectivity is situated, and researchers' aim is to show the radical contingency of human constructions. Thus, the author says, the real alternative to a totalizing single vision is not relativism, which, in this way, would be just the opposite sides of a polarized positioning. The alternative to totalizing versions of claims to scientific authority is "partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584). Consistently, while the ideology of objectivity promises vision from everywhere, relativism pledges vision from nowhere, since "relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be every-where equally" (ibidem). What partial and contingent perspectives guarantee is the possibility of sustained, rational, and, yes, objective inquiry.

This research is based on the ontological assumption that social world is constituted by the meanings that social actors reproduce and reify through interaction and interpretation, and through which "any body of knowledge comes to be socially

established as 'reality'" (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 15). Epistemologically, I see that my role as a researcher cannot be separated from my object of study: they influence each other. Social research can be seen as a re-construction of the construction of the actors under scrutiny (Mayring, 2002, pp. 9-39). The process of reconstructing and interpreting the actors under study does not affect the validity of the research. Bourdieu explains that the difference is not between a science that effects a construction and one that does not it, but only between acknowledging it or not, and discovering the nature of the acts of construction and the effect they produce (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 608). In the next paragraph I will present my positioning as a researcher and how I master it while approaching the fieldwork and collecting data.

3.2 The one that look at the mirror: Reflexivity and validity

The quality of a research process is primarily demonstrated through his rigor: transparency and clarity in describing each step that has conducted to the main findings, a fair representation of data, reliability, comparability with other research in the same field. One rigorousness' criterion that heated the discussion between social scientists is that of reflexivity. Reflexivity concerns the need for the researcher to reflect on his or her role(s) and on the general nature of the relationship between the researcher and the studied. Reflexive scholars reflect on the need to explicit their social and subjective bias in conducting research.

Undoubtedly, approaching the field as a white woman in her early thirties with an academic background and past (and present) experience on prison system within no profit associations and local institutions, had a repercussion on the interactions with the persons under study (correctional officers) and influenced the way we approached each other and behaved in the setting I researched on. I say "in the way we approached each other" and not "in the way they approached me" because my biography was not only something that affected my "units of analysis" in perceiving me and adapting their practices and discourses during my presence. Indeed, my understanding of the research focus and process has been inevitably shaped by my underlying theoretical assumption. As Miller points out, "researchers' backgrounds, interests, skills, and biases necessarily play unique roles in the framing of studies and in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data" (Miller, 2008,

p. 754). Consistently, I aim to identify the subjective and normative choices that guided my research. This point creates a number of methodological issues that I will briefly present in this paragraph.

Indeed, the act of qualifying my knowledge claims cannot be considered sufficient in only stating my self-awareness on the effects that such claims produce. On this respect, Bourdieu (1992) criticized the limits of reflexivity pointing out the need of a detailed methodology to uncover the individual structures that shape researchers' approaches, rather than only acknowledge them. The French sociologist proposed to objectify the objectifying subject: in other words, scholars should grasp their own subject position. The groundbreaking critic made by Bourdieu on the challenges of reflexivity has undoubtedly represented a fundamental attempt to overcome some possible shortcoming of reflexive approach. Nevertheless, an intriguing counter-argument has been made by Knafo: "essentially reflexive scholars assume they can be objective about the very thing they have the least reasons to be objective about: themselves" (Knafo, 2016, p.2). In order to control reflexivity bias, the author proposes to rather conceive them in phenomenological terms: researchers should focus on subjectivity in general instead of casting the problem on the subject per se, which would interrogate reflexivity on personal biases and not as a general concern with the nature of subjectivity. At first glance, Knafo seems to contrast Haraway's recall to partial and contingent perspectives (see paragraph 2.1): indeed, the author does not believe that the control of bias should be shaped to one's specific circumstances or supposed location, since being aware of the specificity of the context is not sufficient. In fact, it risks to remain a mere ethical statement, not a methodological one: "we know that there are plenty of scholars aware of the problem who continue to reproduce it" (Ibidem). Knafo offers us a key to try to solve this conundrum: the contextualization is a core tool to overcome post-positivist accusation of relativism and to acknowledge the impact of the researching subject, but it should be achieved within a comparative framing.

> (…) To refract the significance of a work in political theory through a contextualisation which is intended to mark out what is distinctive about this work from its broader literary context. The challenge is to build the conceptual bridges which allow us to connect these localised developments to the broad macro processes we usually study. It can only be tackled by changing our perspective, notably through a comparative framing which is devised, not simply to look at agency, but to make it stand out (Knafo, 2016, p.20)

How Haraway and Knafo's rereading of Bourdieu can be summarized together?

The positions of the two authors, in reality, is not so distant. Indeed, I assume with Haraway (2003) that understanding a social fact and interpreting it without a location is unlikely to succeed and, since knowledge is always situated, the positionality of the researcher deeply influences the meaning of the information collected. The field work is experienced through the researcher's world, and theory and data continuously conversate. Such conversation does not imply a reductionist approach to the interpretation of social world. Indeed, acknowledging that researcher's world and the world that is studied are merged together, as well as time and space located, can build the conceptual bridges that Knafo sees as necessary to link the localized phenomena to broad and macro processes. In fact, the back-and-forth dialogue between theory and empirical data escapes "imposing prefabricated, theoretical models on the rich complexity of everyday life" (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2008, p. 19). The anti-reductionistic spirit of interpretivist approach relays exactly in the ability of refining the theoretical assumptions without using social practices to illustrate theory, or, viceversa, bending theory to fit specific social practices. Consistently, such situated methodological process will enable the researcher to reflect on global processes by studying their local forms, thereby acknowledging their complexity, ambiguity and transformation (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2008).

3.3 The unmirrored field: doing research in prison

During my very first visit to an Italian prison in 2013 I was fully rooted in specific preconceptions and expectations that filtered my view of the context and its actors. I was a twenty-four years old master student in Sociology, working for a no-profit organization as an external researcher. In the opening quote of this chapter, Edgar Lee Masters says: "in youth my mind was just a mirror in a rapidly flying car, which catches and loses bits of the landscape". Nevertheless, the intrinsic peculiarity of the landscape I faced for the first time was *unmirrored*: my mind could not *see what is see*, *knew what it knew*. I saw and experienced a world that was completely othered from what I was used, and everything caused a feeling of astonishment. I needed to process what a saw, I could not just absorb it. Thus, during these first experiences I approached the prison context with some theoretical, and, indeed, political beliefs, that made me see things through special lens

which shaped the outlines of every interaction I had. Entering the field has been easy: we had the endorsement of the Guarantor of the prisoners rights, and the prison direction enabled each step of the research. Moreover, in the 80s the senior researcher had a previous experience as inmate in the same prison we were researching. Consequently, interviewing women prisoners and let them speak for themselves was undoubtedly facilitated. Since then, I participated to another research in a female section of two Italian prisons, this time personally carrying on in-depth interviews with women inmates, and in a Judicial Psychiatric Hospital.

Indeed, in the years precedent to the PhD and the current research, prisons and total institutions not only represented a field, a context, a thematic stream to be investigated theoretically and empirically. They were (and, in a different way, still are) also another typology of field: a *battle-field* for political instances and law proposals to change something that I felt, as an academic and an individual, saturated of violations of civil, social and human rights. Thus, during the elaboration of the draft project of the PhD, even before thinking about my entering strategy to the field, I started to interrogate the core reason I was willing to engage in such research. How my previous experience would affect the way I see and interpret the prison system was a question at hand.

In the previous paragraph we discussed on the importance of reflexivity and its development. Stepping outside of the research in which I was engaged in, and reflecting back upon it, has been definitely an important step to prepare myself at approaching prison organizations differently. Hammersley (2016) reflects on the methodological implication of the notion of inside/outside while researching prisons' system, and on the difficulty to find a more "inside" of the inner of an institution that cuts out the outside world. An inside made up of outsiders who, once crossed the sharped boundaries of the prison, become the only true insiders of a self-reproducing world. What type of outsider was I? Was it possible to become an insider?

Such questions have been deeply investigated in academic literature on ethnographic research (Jackson, 1987; Atkinson et al, 2001; Hodkinson, 2005; Earle, 2014). Notwithstanding, my main problem was related to identify a different perspective to study something I previously experienced in the field: I simply could not approach female prisoners in the same penitentiary institution I already knew. Thus, after some preliminary

doubts, I become convinced that I should shift from the most studied natives, the prisoners, to those who generally are perceived as the hindering factors of studying prison inmates: correctional officers. Indeed, I had only few encounters with prison guards in my previous research, and I did have a very marginal knowledge of their profession and daily practices. It might help me controlling some of the bias, but the real turning point would be choosing the most proper methodological approach and research design. Spontaneously, answering to Wacquant's call to enter penitentiary institutions and remedy to the eclipse of prison ethnography (Wacquant, 2002) seemed to be the better choice. Nevertheless, I found extremely useful a warning against the claims for the "intrinsic superiority of ethnography" (Hammersley, 2016):

> We must certainly abandon the ethnographic imperative and its claims for the intrinsic superiority of ethnography. There is no hierarchy of methods: different approaches tend to have varying advantages and disadvantages; none is superior on all counts. Indeed, there is usually interdependence, as with the way in which ethnography must depend upon other sorts of data for information about the contexts of the settings it investigates. At the same time, there are strong arguments in favour of ethnography as a method, in studying imprisonment and many other topics (Hammersley, 2016, p. 35).

In the next paragraphs, I will present the motivations that pushed me to choose ethnography as a methodology and the main implications on the methods used, as well as how I cope with the issue faced in undergoing such kind of research.

3.4 Ethnography as methodology and its methods

In paragraph 2.1 I explained my ontological and epistemological assumptions: social world is constituted by shared and situated meanings created by continuous interactions between social actors, who reify and reproduce them. Such realities can be studied scientifically; nevertheless, researchers cannot be detached by their object of study and they are bidirectionally influenced. Methodology, which refers to how a researcher uses methods and sets out how methods are used and data are collected, operationally transposed my doubts concerning inside/outside distinction within the fieldwork. How already reported in the theoretical chapters, each prison is a peculiar microcosm impossible to be captured from only a particular angle, and being either an outsider or an insider would not make a difference: it is just not possible to tell the whole story. What it is possible is to choose the better approach to answer the questions the researcher aims to

investigate, acknowledging her limits and being aware of the interpretive bias. In a hall of mirrors, I chose my own perspective and made it clear. In the next pages I am going to justify this choice.

In paragraph 2.1 I also commented the interpretive approach's definition of the aim of human science, which is to interpretively understand *(Verstehen*) the meaning an action has for an individual. Ethnography is a research method used to *understand* the experiences of individuals, taking into account the contexts in which they live and are embedded. The emphasis on understanding actors and context is meant to distinguish ethnographical methods from mere recording and transcribing of events: through *thick* description (Geertz, 1973), intentions and motivations of studied subjects, as well as the cultural context in which their everyday practices occur, are interpreted by the researcher. In other words, ethnography allows to apply an emic perspective: depending on the role of the individuals in the community, the realities perceived are multiple. Consequently, it is necessary to understand insiders' point of view to eventually grasp their shared views on cultural knowledge, that strictly depend from their standpoint.

The main objective of the research hereby presented is to understand how a prison works through the practices of correctional officers, if they act applying preconceptions on gender roles reproducing specific forms of social control through gendered practices, and how merit informs them. Thus, given these questions, I could have opted for different methods: desk research, longitudinal analysis of academic literature, in-depth interviews and focus groups, just to name a few. But how could I have the possibility to actually *see* the practices that correctional officers and stakeholders would have described to me in single encounters? How the Spoon River's *great scratches* could be made on my mirror, "*letting the outside world come in, and letting my inner self look out*"?

Hammersley and Atkinson (1997) state that carrying out an ethnography "involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on these issues that are the focus of the research" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997, p. 1). That seemed the proper tool to overcome my initial doubts: my prior assumptions created by past experience on female prisoners would have been challenged thanks to a shift of my point of view, and the regular

interaction[18] with correctional officers would provide a direct (even if partial) observation of what "really goes on" inside an impenetrable institution. Moreover, I needed to overcome my preconceptions on the role of correctional officers, and seeing their practices, rather than hearing them told by a mediate perspective, would offer the possibility to interpret them on a different light. It is important to underline that, although to me it has been the better option for my research's aim, it was not the only one. In addition, there were multiple problems I needed to cope with: my role, my influence on the practices I researched on, the tools used for interpreting my interpretation, and, most of all, the need to balance my governing role in formulating insiders views – namely, the power of the researcher's role as *bricoleur* (Denzin, 1994). Thus, I empathize with the description of Moolman of her use of ethnography within the field: methodology becomes a process, a vehicle "through which research subjects are 'constituted' both through fieldwork and through the final text", referring to inside and outside prison (Moolman, 2015, p. 199). Such reference to the outside of the prison justifies the relevance in the theoretical framework to the concept of new paternalism and poverty governance: to understand social phenomena it is necessary to "locate them in some 'outside' – in a broader context that explains how they came into existence, why they take the form they do, what consequences they have and so on" (Hammersley, 2016, p. 27). Undoubtedly, there is not an available theory that can tell us the real nature of the outside context, being able to explain the studied phenomena. Nevertheless, given the questions of my research, and thanks to the continuous back-and-forth dialogue during the research process, I was able to illustrate my understanding of the wider context as well as of how I interpreted the local and situated phenomena I studied.

3.5 Research design

At the end of May 2018 I was in the prison of my home town, Florence, waiting for the female prisoner I was going to interview for a research project I was working on as a consultant. It was my first year of PhD, and I was struggling to frame my research

[18] My field research took place over the course of five months (May 2019 - November 2019), spending a total of 70 hours within the prison, and 8 hours in informal events. For major details see paragraph 3.6.

questions. I was keen to proceed in the same field I already worked in, prison studies, but I also felt the urge to change perspective. I can admit that I felt lost.

While waiting for the prisoner, I started some exchanges with the correctional officer in charge of the ward they allowed me to access for the interviews. The field's notes I rapidly wrote on a piece of paper would be the input for the development of the research questions:

> "I wait a long time for the girls. I take this opportunity to talk with her (*the correctional officer, nda*). She speaks of the fact that the perception from the outside is distorted, she claims that she is not understood in her role: '*they come from outside, we are considered to be of low culture and treated only as those who close (prison's doors, nda), they come here thinking to be the world's saviors*'. She is relieved to work in the women section. She would not tolerate a role without the possibility of having social relations: '*my role is already mainly about supervision and control*' - just opening and closing would not be bearable. I ask about the difference from the males (male colleagues) '*They lack sensitivity*'. *I ask if female correctional officers can work there: 'No, it's forbidden. Luckily, otherwise ..*'" (Journal entry, 25 May 2018(a))

From this conversation I derived the first sensitive concept (Blumer, 1969) of my research: prison as a *gendered organization*.

Thus, I started a review of the international literature on the role of correctional officers, then focusing on the Italian system. During my previous experience in researching the penitentiary I did not problematized the differentiation between inmates and correctional officers based on sex segregation, interpreting it as a necessity to guarantee privacy and security. Nevertheless, through the review I discovered that from the 80s, following the introduction of female officers into male prisons in the US during the 70s, a debate sparked on the advantages and disadvantages of having women officers working in a front-line capacity with male prison inmates (Kissel and Katsampes, 1980; Potter, 1980; Peterson, 1982; Jurik and Halemba, 1984; Crouch, 1985; Jurik 1985, 1988; Wright and Saylor, 1991; Walters, 1992). The thriving of academic literature on this change in prisons management widened the variety of studies on women entering traditionally masculine or male-specific occupations. Maculan (2014) provides a review of the international literature, which in comparison with the Italian is rich and well developed[19]. Moreover, although many other

[19] Considering literature on gender impact on prison work, most of researchers investigate female correctional officers working in male facilities. Rarely male working in female prisons are taken into consideration.

countries followed the American path and started to employ women officers in men prisons[20], Italy still represents an exception. Indeed, even though the Italian law 395/1990 recognizes gender equality for prison personnel, correctional officers must be of the same sex of prisoners.

I was aware that the context played a relevant role: Italian prisons are deeply different from the American one, structurally and organizationally, and prison population, as well as prison guards, significantly differ. Notwithstanding, using gender as an entry concept to understand working practices and interactions still seemed compelling.

Although I have said that I had not the chance to focus on the gendered trait of prison, I do have centered my previous research on female prisoners. Hence, gender, as a variable to study the female difference within prison, is something that I was familiar with. In the theoretical chapter I exposed how gendered stereotypes creates highly discriminatory expectations and evaluation criteria for female offenders, reproducing patriarchal model towards women who disrupt social order (Sim, 1995; Girschick, 2011). Moreover, the punitive system is keen to construct a peculiar representation of deviant woman: the transgression of moral codes and cultural stereotypes involves the tendency of sanctioning them with the only aim of correcting an individual who is perceived unable to comply with the social rules pertaining to her gender, thus blaming her to have betrayed the very essence of femininity (Faccioli, 1990; Carponi Schittar, 1996; Ceraudo & Giugliano, 2008; Ronconi & Zuffa, 2014, 2019). My background indeed helped me in elaborating the main aim of the thesis, using gender as a variable to examine in depth how these divergences in treating male and female prisoners would depend on different perceptions and social constructs of correctional officers. Furthermore, I would also investigate how the sanctioning and rewarding system would have been influenced by an unequal narrative of meritocracy based on different gendered expectations.

Once I framed the research questions, I had to face the biggest challenge of conducting research on/in prison: the access to the fieldwork. Indeed, negotiating access to conduct ethnographic research in prison is proved to be time-consuming (Goffman, 1961; Waquant,

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Generally, research's results underline how female correctional officers' work tends to be hindered by male colleagues, rather than male prisoners (cfr. Jurik 1985; Hunter 1986; Zimmer 1989; McMahon 1999). Nevertheless, recently a higher degree of acceptance of female guards seem leading toward an inclusive perception from male correctional officers (Carlson et al.; Crawley, 2011).

[20] In 1982, England and Galles allowed correctional officers to work in prisons with inmates of opposite sexes.

2002; Sbraccia and Vianello, 2016) and, most of all, strictly linked to the relational capital of the researcher. Such first obstacle played a crucial role in selecting the case study: the choice of the Florentine prison may seem the most favorable and perhaps obvious, given my previous research experience in Tuscan prisons which allowed me to establish a vast network of relationships with gatekeepers and stakeholders. Nevertheless, the process that led to the final decision was not without doubts. First of all, Sollicciano is known, as confirmed to me by exchanges with multiple stakeholders, as a prison that is in a constant emergency situation and which could therefore invalidate the results of the research. However, subsequent comparisons and discussions on the objectives of the project and the method I intended to use, have clarified the thorniest aspects (overcrowding, difficult management of the judicial section, structural deficiencies) leading to a review of the initial perception of non-feasibility. Furthermore, this initial dubitative judgment implied that there was a single specific object that could be sought and observed and, depending on the prison, it could be visible or not. On the contrary, I diffusely explained why I do believe that each situation speaks for itself and it is important to understand also the macro phenomena. Moreover, it corresponds to the normal configuration of the penitentiary world: in fact, we speak of a "penitentiary archipelago", where each prison lives on its own regulatory equilibrium and relations, in which each institution has specific characteristics, although it is possible to glimpse a culture intrinsic to the penitentiary (Vianello, 2018).

Therefore, I chose the Sollicciano prison of Florence, and in the months of October and November 2018 I began to report and collect information from the main actors who deal with prison in Tuscany. The process of approaching the field was rather long and full of interactions. In November 2018 I participated in the preparatory meeting of the national conference "Prison and Justice, starting from the Constitution" at the Council of the Tuscany Region, an occasion in which thematic workshops were created. Having been appointed coordinator of the laboratory on Women and Prison, in the following months I led a series of meetings with institutional professionals and experts in view of the conference scheduled for 8 and 9 February 2019.

This was of great help to me: first of all, I was able to deepen some structural problems of the Florence prison, such as the project to move the female section to a structure adjacent to the main body of the penitentiary, detached and removed from the male section. In

addition, I had direct contact with the Regional Superintendent of the Penitentiary Administration of Tuscany and Umbria, who was very interested in the project and assured me of his support.

The entering strategy was not immediately clear: it could be officially, by submitting the research and asking for formal authorization, or through other channels, such as by carrying out voluntary teaching activities in both sections. After a discussion with my supervisors, the first option was chosen. The subsequent steps saw a phase of presentation of the project by the Regional Guarantor of Prisoners Rights, to whom I work with, to the Director and the Commander of the prison, then contacted directly by me. Specifically, after an initial telephone conversation with the Director, I prepared and emailed a document presenting the project. I chose to highlight the aspects concerning the importance of researching on correctional officers' wellbeing, as well as the interest of understanding how prison work through the direct experience of its staff. I do also refer to the difference between female and male correctional officers[21]. After about two weeks, I recontacted the Director and he gave me an appointment for the second week of April 2019. During the meeting, my entry into prison was negotiated: I would start the fieldwork from May 2019 until April 2020, with methods and times to be agreed at a later time.

The Director preferred to postpone the discussion concerning the access to the sections. Vianello (2018) explains how, in the majority of cases, prison administrations tend to allow access to those areas of the prison assigned to rehabilitation projects - places where you work, study, play recreational activities; it is therefore evident that the high criticality of the sections tends to be hidden, and any foreign subject removed. However, the Director understood the purpose of the research and we made an agreement: I would be eventually granted access to all areas of the prison.

Such result seemed nothing but a stroke of luck: I knew that most of the time, it is a "game of chance, not of skill" (Buchanan et al., 1988, p. 56), and "as with most things in life, 'who you know' often serves one better than *what* you know in attempting to gain access to

[21] "*The general objective of the project is the analysis of the agents' experiences in the different sections of the penitentiary, to interpret and tell their experience and understand if, how and to what extent management of the female and male sections present significant differences, also concerning the aspects relationships and interaction with all the actors of the penitentiary*". It is an excerpt of the presentation letter I send to the prison Director on 27 March 2019. During the fieldwork, I justified my presence with correctional officers highlighting only some aspects of the research, focusing on their well being and burn-out syndrome related effects..

research in prison (Sloan and Wright, 2015, p. 148). Thus, in my case having the endorsement of the Guarantor of prisoners' rights was game-changing: it was in the interest of the Director to make the process smooth. In addition to who I knew, also "what I have *done*" (ibidem) was equally of use: the Director knew me and how I worked. Moreover, he would gain an added value also from the research subject I was proposing: the relation between the prison administration and correctional officers is not always easy, and thus, make the prison personnel feel taken into account and acknowledging their role was undoubtedly functional for the governing strategy of the prison. Buchanan properly highlights the importance of instilling trust, since the depends on the goodwill of organizational "gatekeepers" (Buchanan et al., 1988, p. 56). In the following chapters I will further analyze such aspect.

3.6 Data collection and analysis

My field research took place over the course of five months (May 2019 - November 2019). I expected a longer duration of my fieldwork, which has been suspended in November 2019 and was planned to continue between February and April 2020, but, due to the global pandemic of Covid-19, it took another course.

I spent a total of 70 hours within the prison, and 8 hours in informal events (two dinners) and an official celebration of correctional officers corps. I visited the female section thirteen times and the male section six. Although they agreed to provide me with the complete access to every part of the prison, eventually I was not allowed to visit the cells area due to security reasons. Nevertheless, I visited all the significant facilities: library and educational, healthcare, kitchen and dining, chief of the ward offices, registry office. I had not hourly limits, nor daily. Essentially, I could access every area every time/day I wanted to. During my staying I was accompanied by the Chief Inspector of the female section, who became my reference person within the prison and, in actual fact, my real gatekeeper. In fact, she introduced me to her colleaguems and ensured that correctional officers welcomed me during their shifts. Undoubtedly, she initially represented also a hindering factor, since she partially filtered my interactions with the personnel she selected. Notwithstanding, I was able to cope with such bias thanks to the freedom I had to access prison facilities without forewarning: I met different people in different time, moreover

the Chief Inspector was not always present, and I moved in different facilities by myself. My relations and interactions with correctional officers will be the core of the 5 chapter, in which they will be deepen in detail in all their aspects. Here, it would suffice to say that I was able to build a strong trust relation and it really helped me during my research.

My field work consisted in conducting observational research to gather both descriptive and relational data observing correctional officers' behavior within the prison in different positions and locations. The main tool I used to collect data were ethnographical notes, which represented the empirical basis of the observational method. Drawing from Cigliuti (2014), to construct my ethnographical notes I used the distinction between *mental notes*, *jotted notes*, and *full fieldnotes* (Lofland and Lofland, 2006).

The former are mental annotations of what is observed. Consistently, they are "recorded" simultaneously with observation and, therefore, take shape in the field in terms of memorization. Interestingly, Cigliuti furthers the definition made by Lofland and Lofland: while the two authors state that taking mental notes means "to evoke your journalistic sense of what constitutes a descriptive report" (Lofland and Lofland 2006, p. 109), Cigliuti believes that in this form of notes the content cannot only be descriptive: in "memorizing" the course of observation, the researcher, involved in a personal experience, will make even the most emotional memories, as well as reflections concerning methodological issues that arise during the observation itself. Moreover, the descriptive nature of the notes cannot be, as well as does not aim to be, descriptive in objective terms. In fact, it is always worth remembering that even if the researcher takes precise mental notes on who and how many people were in the situation she was attending, "the physical character of the place, who said what to whom, who moved about in what way, and a general characterization of an order of events" (ibidem), such memories would be always filtered through the researcher personal experience. Indeed, she would focus on certain aspects and would neglect others; *trying* to be objective and descriptive as much is possible is a completely different thing from *pretending* to be it.

That has been a lesson I learnt right after starting the fieldwork. The first day I spent four hours within the female section, and I felt overwhelmed: I felt the urge to write all the details I saw and every sentences I heard on my field notebook (namely, I was taking *jotted*

notes[22]), and, once at home, I tried to recall every single event I experienced. While reporting every interaction and sensation, I immediately realized that I was writing just what I saw, and what I mentally and spontaneously classified as important. It was not what happened, but what I experienced and felt as significant in that precise moment. The effort I was making in reporting everything I saw was definitely correct, but there was not a right way to do it. I needed to be conscious of the fact that approaching the field completely detaching from it in order to achieve a more "objective" sight, would not produce anything valuable. I had to find a balance. Hammersley solves this kind of deadlock reminding that "all ethnographies are necessarily perspectival, since they seek to answer particular sets of questions" (Hammersley, 2016, p. 26). Notwithstanding, the author, recalling the "wise words" of Thomas Reid, warns to not fall from one extreme to another – namely, embracing some sort of radical constructionism to avoid empiricism. Indeed, "let us remember how common the folly is, of going from one fault to the opposite extreme" (Reid, 1785, p.250): as well as the ethnographer does not represent the character of an independently existing phenomena, she neither creates the phenomena that she investigates.

Consistently, I could never really belong to the inside, and my questions led the way I approached the field – they were questions arose from the outside; at the same time the insider knowledge is the product of situated and local resources. Then, it is not automatically valid:

> My underlying point is that we need to be very careful about the inside/outside distinction. It is misleading if interpreted in an abstract or fixed way. It should be obvious that there is no inside or outside per se. All perspectives and locations are situated, and the implication of this is that all reflexivity is itself from some particular angle: there is no view from nowhere that tells 'the whole story', whether conceived as outside or inside. This is not a matter of relativism – of a hall of mirrors, with each view necessarily being treated as justified in its own terms – or of a form of standpoint epistemology. It is true that there is no single view that can serve all functions, but there are better and worse approaches for answering particular questions. Perspectivism in this moderated form is the unavoidable reality. (Hammersley, 2016, p. 26)

[22] "Jotted notes consist of all the little phrases, quotes, key words, and the like that you put down during the observation and at inconspicuous moments. They have the function of jogging your memory at the time of writing fieldnotes. Many fieldworkers carry small, pocket-sized tablets or notebooks precisely for the purpose of jotting down notes" (Lofland and Lofland, 2006, p. 109).

My outside/inside self-perception changed during the fieldwork, and the data collection has been influenced by it. On this concern, the notebook had a great symbolic and concrete value on the way I immerged in the context: I was recognizable because of it. Entering with nothing but a pen and a little notebook let me be identified as "the girl from the university who cares about correctional officers wellbeing and who is guided by the Chief Inspector of the female section". Moreover, I tried to use it in front of correctional officers as a tool to write down all the descriptive information they gave to me (numbers and dates). It shaped my identity within the context and helped me to gain trust: for them, I was serious and precise in taking notes of all the significant aspects they were keen to tell me and, in a certain way, ensure them that I was free from preconceptions and stigmatized views. I seemed sincerely interested in gain knowledge from their own point of view.

It has been true for the first period of my fieldwork. Then, the notebook became cumbersome: I gradually became aware of the fact that it represented a shield, and people I interact with felt both intrigued and threatened by it. Thus, I firstly changed my original notebook with a smaller one, pocket-sized; eventually, I decided to do not carry anything with me and resort to only mental notes.

> "I continue to take notes in my notebook, the usual one I have been carrying with me since I first entered, but as soon as I have finished writing the Inspector approaches over my shoulder: "What are you writing?"; immediately embarrassed, I joke a little and say that I just take notes that in reality he could not read. He insists, I show him a random page and hastily point to a word or two that I had pinned down in a fairly illegible handwriting, before closing it and changing the subject [*For the first time I perceive the notebook not as something that substantiates and qualifies my presence inside the prison, but as an object that attracts unwanted attention. If, as public officials, they forced me to hand it over and have it read, they could. I had never thought about it and now I'm a little scared of the possibility*] (Fieldnotes, 11 July 2019)

> "Meanwhile, the agent I met at the top of the stairs arrives, he is a boy from Campania who has been working here for about 6 years. He is curious, he wants to know how the "interview" is going and what I write in the notebook [*it is on this occasion that I decide not to take the notebook with me anymore. From a tool that qualifies my presence inside, it has become an object of distraction, mistrust and curiosity. I will leave it in the locker and retrace the entrance once I return home, noting the most relevant things*]" (Fieldnotes, 14 July 2019).

Therefore, the process of note-making resulted in memorizing mental notes in the field, which would be eventually transformed into a corpus of notes: the empirical basis of the observational activity, my full fieldnotes.

3.6.1 Data analysis

At the end of the fieldwork I had 45 pages of notes. I used QCAmap, an open access web application for systematic text analysis in scientific projects based on the techniques of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014), to code, label and analyze my data. After having uploaded the fieldnotes in the software, I started the categories formation process by applying an inductive approach. Such an approach requires an explorative/descriptive research question, which in my case is "which are correctional officers' perceptions and practices within an Italian prison? How the categories of gender and merit impact on them in a daily-base routine?". Then, after having defined the selection criterion (correctional officers' perceptions, punish/reward practices within male and female sections) and the level of abstraction (general categories), all the materials have been read from the beginning, line by line, and the categories formulated near to the text. At the end of the coding process, I grouped them and formed the main categories as follows:

Table 1 Category Statistics

	Category ID	Category Name	Absolute Count	% of SUM	N of Documents	% of Documents
Gender			26	3	1	100
	RQ1-1	Gender - semantics	5	0	1	100
	RQ1-13	Gender - Cos' differences	8	1	1	100
	RQ1-14	Gender - generic	13	1	1	100
CO Profession			246	36	1	100
	RQ1-2	Role perception	67	10	1	100
	RQ1-3	Work difficulties	49	7	1	100
	RQ1-6	M/F Wards management	42	6	1	100
	RQ1-7	Cos' perception on female prisoners	38	5	1	100
	RQ1-15	Cos' background	14	2	1	100
	RQ1-16	Prison management	9	1	1	100
	RQ1-23	Co's perception on male prisoners	17	2	1	100
	RQ1-24	Co's perception on penalty function	10	1	1	100
Practices			160	23	1	100
	RQ1-8	Co's practices towards prisoners	15	2	1	100
	RQ1-9	Co's practices / punishment	16	2	1	100
	RQ1-11	Pratics - Generic	53	7	1	100
	RQ1-17	Discretion	13	1	1	100
	RQ1-19	Researcher's presence impact	14	2	1	100
	RQ1-26	Prisoners' events	49	7	1	100
Relations			194	28	1	100
	RQ1-4	Co's relations with researcher	82	12	1	100
	RQ1-5	Co's relations with female prisoners	35	4	1	100
	RQ1-12	Relation between female prisoners	4	0	1	100
	RQ1-18	Relation between Cos	46	6	1	100
	RQ1-21	Co's relations with male prisoners	8	1	1	100
	RQ1-22	Co's relations with other workers within pr	19	2	1	100
Etnography			43	6	1	100
	RQ1-20	Check other material	4	0	1	100
	RQ1-25	Difficulties during fieldwork	26	3	1	100
	RQ1-27	Field outside prison	2	0	1	100
	RQ1-28	Feelings about prison	11	1	1	100
			669			

The category system has been interpreted in the direction of the research question, and the three main categories, *COs' profession*, *relations* and *practices* chose as the thematic streams for Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

As showed by Table 1, I coded 669 passages. I downloaded the excel file with all the marked quotes and built the analytical chapters on the basis of these main categories, translating them from Italian to English. During the translation process, I had to cope with a methodological and deontological issue: in giving voice to correctional officers' perceptions and statements, which already represents another language to me in the sense that it pertains to a different cultural universe that I could misinterpret (see *infra* paragraph 3.3), the act of translating them into another language that was not mine (nor of correctional officers) seemed even more a strained process. Anthropological studies extensively debated on the process of translating (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Sturge, 1997; Montgomery, 2000; Tymoczko and Gentzler, 2002; Rosman and Rubel, 2020). Indeed, the relation between the source and the target-language is deeply influenced by the interpretative process of the ethnographer. Ethnography is "faced with the embroiledness in colonial discourse of its attempts to comprehend one means of thinking and re-pose it in another (…) ethical questions about the power of representations and scope for doing harm" (Sturge, 1997, p. 23) and has to cope with two main problems. First, source language needs to be comprehended by the ethnographer; second, the position of ethnographer and her critical distance from the society studied introduced some interesting and challenging questions – "from what position does the interpreter interpret"? (Ibidem, p.25). As far as my experience is concerned, although as an Italian studying an Italian prison I might not had to cope with the first, for an certain extent the language has been used from correctional officers to create a distance through the utilization of dialect and the prison terminology. Moreover, since I decided to write the thesis in English, I had to translate from Italian the interpretation I made on everyday prison's interactions and practices. Thus, I encountered the risk of being stuck into a spiral of translating into another language the cultural translation I made through my interpretative approach. To avoid such vicious cycle, I adopted Clifford and Marcus (1986) reflexive approach by "highlighting the actual interaction which takes place in the field and within which the ethnographer is not in fact sovereign and omnipotent" (Sturge, 1997, p. 34), not pretending of untouching the source language and underlighting the instability of meanings in transporting it to the target language, acknowledging their difference both semantically

and politically. Sturge suggests: “Taken further, the approach could begin to address within its own textual strategies the question posed by Said (1989:212), central both to the ethnographic conversation and to the translation process: "Who speaks? For what and to whom?" (Ivi, pp. 36-37). I will explore it in the next chapters.

IV BEING CORRECTIONAL OFFICER: THE SELF AND THE OTHERS

How is it possible that you never ditch yourself from your father's footsteps?
Why the mechanic's son will be a mechanic, and doctor's a doctor?
[Field Note 224]

"You see how our roads diverged, my father's and my own (…) For what was the road I sought if not a repeat of my father's, but dug out of the depths of another otherness (…) my own experience, no longer the echo of an echo of an echo (…). Could everything perhaps have been different – if the rift between myself and my father hadn't been so deep?"

Italo Calvino, The Road to San Giovanni

4.1 Not really my dream job - Shattered expectations: a job that makes the ends meet

During my first encounter with Inspector V, I noticed immediately a sort of urge in showing-off roles, duties, and practices of his life as correctional officer: he wanted making clear to me that he was proud of his job, and, at the same time, that he was not like his colleagues. He can handle it better, manage it better, and, most of all, was the only person who could help me through my research. Nevertheless, when interrogated about the inner motivation that pushed him to pursue this kind of career, he admitted taking up the profession because, once he finished studying, he did not know what to do and tried different public tenders, winning one. He tried to enter the teaching career as well, but he never succeeded. Actually, after twenty years of loyal service within Italian prisons, he still participates to the public tender for school-teaching every year, always in vain.

When in 2010 Schlosser et al. underwent into an extensive literature review on the reasons for seeking a career as correctional officers, they could not find many empirical studies. As the authors report, Holland et al. already underline such "critical insufficiency of information about the psychological variables involved in the choice of (…) those in the

field of correctional work" in the 1970s, forty years before their work (Holland et al., 1976, p. 786). To cope with this shortage of academic sources, Schlosser et al. started from police officers' reasons for seeking such career investigated by Lester (1983) and Foley et al. (2008) and described as follows: the opportunity to help people, camaraderie with fellow officers, job security, the prestige of the profession, fighting crime, and the excitement of the work. Then, Schlosser et al. identified two significant contextual factors enhancing the attractiveness of correctional officer profession: i) having one or more family members "on the job"; ii) individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses might seek a law enforcement career to be more upwardly mobile (Schlosser et al., 2010, p. 35).

Consistently, when Inspector V talked about the period in which he made his professional choice, he shares his feelings about the influence of his family's social status: in high school there were separated classes depending on the students' level, and he was one of those considered as less prepared and "slower in understanding things". This has certainly undermined his future path. He asked me: "How is it possible that you never ditch yourself from your father's footsteps? Why the mechanic's son will be a mechanic, and doctor's a doctor?" [Field Note 224]. Thus, he chose to enter in the prison system, which guaranteed him a good salary and a stable profession. Similarly, every time I asked to his male and female colleagues to describe me their professional path, the constant underlying theme was the uncertainty concerning their own future, and randomization of choices:

> "'*Once I was done with the high school, I participated in many tenders, and this has been the first that I won*'"[23] [Field Note 60]

> "I ask her how she decided to participate in the competition at the time, the answer is the same as her colleague: the competitions have been announced, she participated in many, she was the winner: '*it fascinated me and I did the 6 months of training (theoretical, practical and psycho-aptitude), then based on the ranking I was assigned to Florence*'"[Field Note 72]

> "Talking about her path, I can see that it is similar to that of her colleagues: it has been an unexpected job. She participated in several competitions and eventually she won this one" [Field Note 77]

[23] All the excerpts presented in the chapter are from the notebook and are reported as follows: the notes in first person are transcribed in normal font-style, while the quotations from correctional officers/prison's operators are in italic.

"I ask him what prompted him to do this job: '*not what, who! My father was a correctional officer as well. He asked me if I wanted to continue studying, I said no, here I am*'" [Field Note 166]

"He wanted to try a career in the police and as soon as he graduated, he tried the competition and entered the correctional officers force" [Field Note 255]

In presenting the results of their study, Schlosser et al. conclude illustrating as correctional officer candidates' primary reasons for entering their careers are related to finances and job security, followed by service, power, and status (Schlosser et al, 2010, p.40). This is consistent with previous studies in the field. Indeed, scholars have distinguished between intrinsic (doing something due to its inherent characteristics) and extrinsic (doing something due to rewards or recognition) motivations: the majority of correctional officers (male and female) entered the field to extrinsic reasons (Britton, 1995; Shaffer, 1999). From the excerpts above, it is possible to glimpse some relevant aspects to understand the impact of the biographical background on, firstly, the initial choice, and secondly, the way correctional officers perceive their role and the prison environment. As a first element, we could call it "a family affair": many correctional officers with a high level of seniority chose the profession due to a family legacy. Having one or more family members employed in a law enforcement position influenced the person to select the law enforcement career (Schlosser et al, 2010). Then, it was a job that could "make the ends meet": it is stable, it is remunerated, and if you are good and lucky enough you can pursue higher ranks (Shaffer, 1999).

"He wanted a good salary, so he got it. Indeed, he says that it is one of the main reasons: as an inspector he earns more than 2000 €. Even if you deduct the rent and the car installments, you can save a lot of money" [Field Note 224]

"He entered after graduating in economics because his grandfather and father were in the police" [Field Note 279]

"The elderly colleague, the guard in charge tonight, is nervous. She makes the leg dance, does not stay still, she is not at ease. '*What have you seen so far? This is not a good prison. Not a good job. Notice: no one would come to do this job by choice, we do it because we are from the south and there are no job opportunities*'" [Field Note 352]

> "He is not interested in restraint and surveillance tasks within the section. This morning he was talking to the commander to discuss his possible career advancements" [Field Note 256]

Comparing female and male correctional officers' motivations, from Schlosser et al. sample the former tend to emphasize aspects as guaranteeing community safety and enforcing laws. Jurik and Halemba's (1984) study of female correctional officers agree with Schlosser's findings, since the authors reported that the interviewees did credit intrinsic reasons for their movement into the field. Schlosser et al. explain such difference between male and female motivations as related to the assumption that women working in law enforcement setting tend to adhere to more traditional masculine gender norms (e.g., Detrick, Chibnall, and Rosso, 2001), and, consequently, female correctional officers seem to have interiorized them, to the point of reproducing also behaviors which are "tougher and more masculine to survive and thrive in the correctional facility, which is often physically dangerous" (Schlosser et al., 2010, p. 41). Indeed, when asked to explain their motivation to pursue a career as correctional officers, they are more prone to underline intrinsic aspects related to service than men (Ibidem), as they feel the need to justify their choice by adopting masculine gendered norms' expectations. As far as my fieldwork is concerned, it is possible to see a variance between the seniors and juniors female correctional officers, the twenty-years experience on the job and the younger generation. The public tenders to enter the force is published every two years, and it is open also to civilians. Generally, the new entries come from the military service and approach the job with more frustration that the senior colleagues. It has been repeatedly reported by female correctional officers:

> "We talk about the difference between new and old correctional officers. The new ones – the young ones - seem to be the major problem: while she entered as a civilian, they (the new) are militarized, more combative. There is no communication altogether, but this job is based on the capacity of relationship" [Field Note 78]

> "Inspector C asked her opinion on the young assistants, and her colleague immediately agrees with her vision: '*for the junior correctional officers the job is a makeshift, they do not take it seriously, they are unmotivated and passive. I cannot accept that after only a year you tell me that you are tired. Not after a year!*'"[Field Note 104]

> "Meanwhile, we talk about the newly arrived agents. The colleague asks how long they will need to be supervised: three weeks. '*Three weeks?! But when I entered I was immediately sent to my assigned seat, alone*' - says the assistant colleague, sighing. '*Better this way, so they do not mess up*'" [Field Note 481]

> "Even the new agents, the young ones, are very different and do not know how to team up, they have a military mentality because they come directly from the army, that is not good. They are already shabby at twenty, and after another twenty years of service how will they become? The real problem is the permanent place for the public: it does not lead you to show efficiency and passion, because it is a place that you do not lose. All public employees should have private experience to understand what it really means to work" [Field Note 585]

Summarizing, the occupational drift, to be intended as the process that leads individuals to choose an occupation haphazardly or due to changing life circumstances instead of actively choosing it, has been identified as the driving force to acquire correctional officers' career (Crouch, 1980; Pollock, 1986; Zimmer, 1986; Britton, 1995; Riccardelli and Martin, 2017). Then, on one hand my fieldwork confirms previous studies' results concerning the relevance of extrinsic factors in motiving a career as correctional officers, such as job security and economic stability. On the other hand, more intrinsic factors such maintaining the safety of the community and enforcing law seem to have a double function. Firstly and foremost, they can be a reason of frustration when the reality of the prison system destroys correctional officers expectations developed before entering the job: when intrinsic motivations are ineluctably disregarded correctional officers experience a cognitive dissonance concerning the duties they forecast before entering the job and the reality they are immersed in. Indeed, rather than being mere agents of control with police functions, the environment requests a set of skills they are not prepared nor willing to develop:

> "He underlines how in reality the profession of correctional officer is very different from other police forces, since here you have to assume many different roles: surveillance, psychological support, practical help" [Field Note 219]

> "Here everything is different from what one expects outside. He reiterates his desire to stay there as little as possible, to change prison and above all to go to work in the office, not in the wards" [Field Note 315]

> "We also talk about their mandate, how they work. She does not understand why they teach psychology and related subjects in the course for Inspectors. The explicit request to deal with certain situations that are not in fact the main function of the correctional officers as police force is unfair to her: it seems like a discharge of responsibilities. It is true that the daily work is configured in the relationship with the prisoners, but the fact that it is specifically requested does not seem right to her" [Field Note 636]

> "He also agrees with the other new agent: he thought he would have a policeman role, but in reality theirs is a psychological support function and key bearers, little else" [Field Note 278]

> "It is his intention to stay there as little as possible and try to make a career thanks to his degree. After some initial disorientation, he is now calm, even if always amazed by how his role does not correspond to what he had imagined" [Field Note 280]

Secondly, intrinsic motivations can be also a tool to cope with such frustration and keep believing to have a fundamental social function. In fact, if it is true that they are "very different from other police forces", they are not even like any other public employee. Indeed, the colleagues actually working in the offices of the Department of Prison Administration are called "slackers": they hid from the real job on the field, which is certainly more tough, but it is also the only that permits to comply with the core mission of correctional officer corps:

> "Do you know what our motto, our mission is? It is giving hope, because if you are well, we are well too, we are here for this, to solve the problems" [Field Note 23]

The correctional officer cited above harangued a prisoner with such ecumenical tone in front of me. She was probably showing their motto (*despondere spem munus nostrum* – guaranteeing hope is our duty) to me, instead of her, to show their alacrity and good intention, but it still highlights an important aspect of the profession: it is a job *potentially* with an high social value that requests training and acknowledgement, but due to structural factors (the Department, slacking colleagues, typology of prison population, political parties) has been wretched. Thus, whether correctional officers enter the job to have a job stability or because they actually believe in the mission, they eventually live in an environment they are not prepared to, in which they need to cope with daily emergency and adapt to the deep complexity. "A good day in the prison is a day with nothing happening" is a belief shared by both prisoners and correctional officers (Vianello, 2018),

and be bored represents the best scenario. Indeed, correctional officers do not despise the surveillance' duties due to the intrinsic boredom of certain tasks, - even if it could generate enmity between colleagues ("*boredom leads correctional officers talking behind each other backs or to bother*" [Field Note 210]). In fact, they despise such tasks because do not adhere with the imagine they have about their role. Such aspect is a cutting issue for both female and male correctional officers, even if at a first glance they present some differences in the way they perceive the opposite gender's work environment. Correctional officers' perceptions and expectations are partially influenced by a mainstream narrative on gender roles. Indeed, while male and female correctional officers present similar biographical path and motivations in entering the job, they seem to perceive their role differently (see *infra*, chapter 5). That said, although both female and male correctional officers experience the same work-related frustrations and disattended expectations concerning their role, female correctional officers, while expressing many unpleasant aspects of working in prison, feel some relief in having the possibility to avoid repetitive chores due to different management of the wards:

> "She explains to me that female prisoners are always open from 9 to 21, except for some moments (delivery of food, delivery of therapy, time of counting inmates), unlike the male prisoners, who are always closed. In this way correctional officers have a different role and workload: at least so your job is other than opening and closing all day long" [Field Note 8]

Nonetheless, the feeling of underdoing meaningless tasks is present also in the female section: female prisoners are in an open regime, but using the key is not a fulfilling duty: "*For example, what is the point of me spending my day opening and closing a door with the key? Why not having automatized doors, in order to save time and resources?*" [Field Note 185].

In conclusion, male and female correctional officers share similar motivations for pursuing the career and, apparently, they perform the same activities even if they are likely to describe different individual qualities. Indeed, although the perception of the self and the other is strictly adherent with predominant gendered norms, these are negotiated and implemented according to the context.

4.1.1 Public sector's employee: unattended expectations and coping strategies

As showed in the previous paragraph, the majority of correctional officers pursue the career due to economic reasons, which can be grouped within the extrinsic factors identified by those willing to work for the public sector. The practical matter of job security becomes the main driver of public employees: it does not matter what the duties are, the employee is interested in just finishing the shift and have an economic stability. All the negative aspects of the job are the price to have a way out from an uncertain future. This attitude would entail a minor engagement with the core aim of the organization, but as long as the material reward is assured, it allows to maintain a certain degree of satisfaction and willingness to act accordingly. It only requires following the rules and coming back home (Public employee I in Table 1). Nevertheless, this type is unlikely to be found amongst correctional officers. Indeed, within the wards there is an unbalance between the work/emotional loads and the actual material reward, which reveals to be insufficient to justify job related frustrations and burdens. Hence, most of prison guards pertain to the third typole of Figure 1, *unengaged employee unsatisfied*.

Table 1 Level of engagement and satisfaction of public employees

	Extrinsic motivation	Intrinsic motivation
Higher material reward	**I Unengaged employee satisfied**	**II Engaged employee satisfied**
Lower material reward	**III Unengaged employee unsatisfied**	**IV Engaged employee unsatisfied**

Personal elaboration of fieldwork data

On the other hand, as a public employee who chose the career aiming to do a certain type of work[24], a proper material reward could not be enough to develop satisfaction: the self-perception and the identity as public servant would scale back and, although the engagement with the mission of the organization remains high, the social aim is perceived as disattended and the job-related satisfaction decreases (Public employee IV in Figure 1).

[24] Perry and Hondeghem describe public sector motivation as the desire to work for a certain type of organization, and public service motivation as the desire to do a certain type of work (Perry and Hondeghem, 2008, pp. 220-221)

The second type, the *engaged employee satisfied*, is practically non-existent: the immaterial reward is often hindered by structural inefficiency and external stigmatization, as well as the material reward struggles to provide a sufficient reason to overcome the disappoint to feel stuck in tasks deeply different from the ones imagined. If we reverse the direction of the relation from aiming to be employed in public service as cause of dissatisfaction, to living dissatisfaction on the job and developing a narrative as public service's attendant to cope with it, we have an overturning perspective: a redefinition of the objectives. Indeed, while correctional officers might choose the career haphazardly without particular esprit de corps, they eventually develop group identity to cope with job's frustrations and dissatisfactions and justifying their choice. Moreover, here we have seen that also the opposite process is experienced: correctional officers who desire to work for this kind of organization believing in its mandate, quickly become aware of the gap between their expectations and the reality of the job on the field, developing coping strategies that strongly affect group identity and only guarantee a work that makes the ends meet. One of these strategies is searching for satisfaction outside of the professional sphere by construing a career that is stable only concerning the contract and flexible and inconstant in all the other aspects. In the next paragraph I will discuss this latter aspect.

4.1.2 The impermanence of a stable profession

When Perry and Hondeghem (2008), distinguishing between *public service* and *public sector* motivation, describe those who are willing to work for the public sector as influenced by practical matter such as job security and not necessarily having a strong public service orientation significantly offer a hint to better understand correctional officers' differences from the common public employee. Indeed, whereas the conventional perception is that public sector offers job security, career growth potential, and retirement/health benefits, all leading to better quality of life and balance of work and family (Perry and Hondeghem, 2008, pp. 219-220), working for the prison system jeopardize these goals. A perfect exemplification of the process described in the previous pages is retrieved in the peculiarity of my case study: as frequently shared, the large majority of correctional officers hired in the Tuscany prison come from Southern Italy, mainly from Campania. The Region of origin of correctional officers represents an interesting outline to understand the relation between individual expectations and internal organization, since it produces two important effects: a difficult integration in the

territory, and the perception of the job in Tuscany as temporary, thus hindering the development of a real team-unit and burdening the well-integrated colleagues with an overload of tasks.

> "'*The risk of coming to work solely to bring the money home is huge. Exactly, that is the flattening effect we were talking about this morning. In fact, it often happens that, given that many men are originally from southern Italy, they commute: they live inside the penitentiary and get their free days attached in order to come back to the family in their Region, where, as soon as they arrive, the doctor gives them a fake certificate of illness to extend their period of leave. They end up being away 14 days a month: how do you build a group in this way? How can you attribute the responsibility required by the role? Since we are in the public service, they have the tranquility of a permanent job*'" [Field Note 43]

> "His colleagues, on the other hand, live for their job, many are narrow-minded. The real problem is the barracks: many are commuters, they live in the barracks and then go back to their families, they end to put their work before themselves and are unable to decompress: are stressed-out and become ill" [Field Note 228]

> "He shares his story. For a while he lived outside the barracks, living with a girl, but now that is single it is not convenient, the rents are too high: '*you stay here and escape towards home in your Region whenever you can*'. He would like to ask for a transfer, but it will be difficult to get it: '*you would notice it: for 60% we are from Campania here, demanding for transfer is very popular*'" [Field Note 322]

Indeed, commuting and the lack of embeddedness with the territory jeopardize correctional officers well-being and coping strategies. It is less frequent for female correctional officers: "For women is different, since they usually get married here, with husbands and children" [Field Note 43]. Nevertheless, it is not always the case, since often the bond with the origins stays strong, facilitated also by the fact that the new hired live in the barracks and tend to build intimate relationships with colleagues:

> "The youngest, an agent recently hired and newly married, tells me that she will be transferred in September: she will return to Campania. She did not have high hopes for it, is very difficult for the request to be accepted. Now, the problem is that her husband, who works in the male section, will not be able to follow her. They will see how manage it, for now the situation is this" [Field Note 350]

> "She has been working here for a few years, soon she will marry one of her colleagues, they bought a house in Campania. How will they do it? She will try to request a transfer, then they will see. He is uncertain, it will be difficult for him to work in Campania" [Field Note 384]

The commuting creates an absence that is twofold: it is from workplace, but also from teamwork, and creates under-staff issues and disorganization. It is not possible to handover orders or track the starting point of a chain of events, which sometime could also be critical.

> "It is the recurrent argument on the importance of the continuity of duties within the prison: even the inmates, Inspector C. tells me, feel disoriented and no longer know who is in charge" [Field Note 110]

> "See why it doesn't work? It is a continuous blame game and buck passing, few take responsibility. We need working synergy" [Field Note 21]

> "The problem seems to be the same found in the female section: lack of continuity, the practices are started but not finished." [Field Note 58]

> "The problem of non-continuity of work re-emerges. There are always many changes and following the events is difficult" [Field Note 87]

Consistently, the case study shows that stronger the integration in the territory, more engaged the correctional officer in team's activities will be.

4.2 Surviving the bureaucracy: adaptive inflexibility and authoritativeness

The lack of work synergy described above also exacerbates the burden of a daily routine centered on bureaucratic tasks. Indeed, one of the main impressions I had shadowing correctional officers in their everyday practices has been swimming in a stormy workload of papers, handwriting, official communication, double redaction on paper and online, registries, archives, and a meticulous record of every single word or move. As I note down the second day of my fieldwork: "the theme of the infinite bureaucracy of the prison has been the red thread of my second entry" [Field Note 58]. Inspectors have to guarantee the trackability of any single event, not only the critical one. Indeed, they have direct

responsibility and need to be reliable in order to earn colleagues' respect and prison direction's trust.

> "Again, the discussion turns to the question of bureaucracy. The problem is that with the computerization of the practices the work has only doubled: all the digital documentation must have a paper equivalent. For example, in the case of a ban on gathering between two inmates for safety reason, the correctional officer drafts a document in which the charge is contested. This is sent, by hand, to the director, who decides whether the dispute is worth a written warning based on the seriousness of the event. If the answer is affirmative, the warning is completed and then communicated to the inmates. All this will end up in the prisoner's personal file and communicated to the magistrate" [Field Note 64]

The excerpt underlines a significant aspect: who decides, ultimately, is the Director. Correctional officers only warn prisoners and write. From being those who control and rectify, they become pen pusher.

> "Here the situation is unmanageable, the correctional officers feel unarmed and the prisoners know it. While in the male section there is the isolation cell that can be used as a tool in this sense, here (in the female section) we got only the report (which is rarely followed by a punitive disposition) and the closure of the cells. It is just a written report in short, punishment is very rare" [Field Note 242]

The pen is, more or less, a metonymy: correctional officers are conscious to potentially holding the whip hand, but in reality they feel threatened, unarmed, and, most of the times, powerless. Indulging with the metaphor, the pen represents correctional officers' whip: with it they decide *whether* report wrong behaviors and, consequently, punish prisoners. Thus, a "certain degree of discretion" frames correctional officers' practices and decisions: although prison seems to be "a place full of official rules" (Sarzotti, 2010), real life within the prison flows independently from any internal regulation or instructions (Vianello, 2018).

4.2.1 Inflexibly adapting to circumstances

In 2000, Liebling writes: "there is a gulf between the 'rule following' or 'compliance model' of prison work favored by risk-averse officials and the 'negotiation model' actually delivered by most prison staff" (Liebling, 2000, p. 333), and eleven years later confirms:

"the use of discretion is an inevitable part of the work of prison officers" (Liebling, 2011, p.488). Even if the main consequences of this work modality have major implications on prisoners-staff relations, discretion has a significant impact in describing also correctional officers' perception concerning the better way to cope with the difficulties of their daily activities and role. Indeed, whenever I asked correctional officers how much discretion they have, they tend to self-describe as well-equipped with it. Generally, correctional officers perceive discretion as causing tensions between colleagues, producing unpredictability, unreliability, and precariousness. Moreover, disconfirming previous decisions on the basis of a discretional choice belittles the authoritativeness of the team. Indeed, the use of discretion weakens the group cohesion creating an environment in which an authoritative decision loses is grip: something ruling to which prisoners have been compliant today, could be changed and contradicted tomorrow.

> "Anarchy is in force, they say. I ask if some colleague is more permissive than the others: yes many of them. This is problematic, because the permissive correctional officer is not perceived by inmates as the only accountable, he indeed also creates a precedent: then whoever wants to abide by the rules is pointed out as the bitch guard" [Field Note 134]

> "There are many rules, he says, but then everyone does what he/she wants" [Field Note 213]

> "Even if something is foreseen by the regulation, colleagues often interfere and invalidate what was done previously" [Field Note 244]

> "I ask who is in charge today: '*Agent F.*', tells me Inspector A, '*you see, she has the do-gooder syndrome, she is too permissive with the regulation. In fact, when an inmate prefers to talk to her, there is obviously something underneath*'" [Field Note 240]

> "He complains about the management of the prison. There is no common line, some colleagues are more permissive and do not respect the rules. He shares with me a friction he had this afternoon: while he was in the section with another Inspector of higher rank, an inmate asked to show them the shopping list outside the scheduled time. While he said to him that it was not the right time and do not bother, the other inspector examined the list. This event made him furious, because he felt belittled by the other colleague" [Field Note 176]

> "A female prisoner asks her lawyer's number to the correctional officer who works in the prison's registry office so that she can fill out a form. He offers to help her to deal with it. Agent V. gets angry: helping her means meeting needs of the inmates even if they are not in charge for it. It creates a disservice, because it represents a precedent" [Field Note 187]

Even if I will deep the analysis on the use of discretional practices by correctional officers in Chapter 6, it is useful to briefly introduce discretion double nature: as coping strategy to overcome the difficulties perceived in achieving the planned results, and as an hindering factors of their personal authoritativeness. This latter aspect has been particularly evident to me when, during a shift in the female section, I personally witnessed an episode in which different attitudes towards a prisoner's request caused a conflict between two correctional officers. Indeed, an inmate was temporarily outside the ward due to health issues and located in a cell close to the main office. She is a particularly problematic inmate with a psychiatric diagnosis, barely able to manage sociality and interactions. Since she wanted to smoke, she asked to be opened to take the lighter in the office close to her cell, but the two correctional officers did not answer right away. This provoked an insistent request, shouting, and the subsequent reaction of the agent who told her to wait and to lower her voice. Once opened, they continued to discuss. 'You are rude, you think you give me orders, you have to wait, I am not your waitress' – 'But you did not have anything to do, I have to smoke because I am nervous' – 'If I tell you to wait, you wait' – 'But you were talking about your fucking businesses' – 'I don't have to explain to you about what I do'. The screams continue and the Inspector from the school area arrives, trying to calm people down by talking to the inmate. Agent V. turns to me, frustrated: 'Do you really think it is normal? She (the Inspector) come and agree with her?! There is total discretion here'.

What correctional officers identify as a loss of authoritativeness, is likely to be derived by "operational inconsistencies between shifts, work groups, and individual officers" (Gilbert, 1997, p.62), caused by discretionary decisions taken within a frame of rigid model not contemplating situations in which formal rules cannot be applied. Moreover, Gilbert stresses the importance of distinguishing between ranks and roles: the management and leadership positions need to provide agents with less vague, abstract and unstated shared values (ivi). Indeed, since discretionary power of line-officers is structured on values of formal and informal organization, if the former are perceived to be at odds with those of

informal organization, it will increase conflicts between management and line officers generating outcomes conflicting with official hierarchy's objectives (ivi).

> "Inspector A explains to me that with this Director it is not possible to work, because she treats the inmates as if they were her own daughters: '*We need stop to it. We must be smart: going to her when we need a quick authorization, but dilating the time when it is necessary to be authoritarian*'" [Field Note 611]

> "The Inspector discusses with an agent whether or not to allow an anklet sent by internal mail from the male section to a female prisoner. The anklet is not allowed by the regulation, but they know that the director would still permit it. They decide to let it pass. Both, however, are upset: other inmates also have bracelets out of regulation" [Field Note 574]

It is an interesting use of discretionary power. Inspector A shares her strategies with me, describing a previous event she was able to manage in her own way: two inmates working in the kitchen got into a fight and Inspector A suspended them from work. Now, she should have sent immediately the report to the Director, but she opted to do it calmly. Indeed, as soon as the Director would have received the report, she would surely readmit the inmates in a short time. In this way, the Inspector could extend the suspension for the proper time: "we must do in this way, otherwise they take advantage of you" [Field Note 611]. Thus, the use of discretion is something that is perceived as weakening the work groups, but it has also a positive impact when correctional officers need to empower their own authoritativeness, and, if it is fought by the management of the prison, correctional officers use it against them as well.

> "The agent is in the mood to talk: he is frustrated. He firmly believes in the value of his job and does not like being contradicted by his colleagues. He has twenty years of service behind him and knows how to read the situations in which he finds himself. He complains of a lack of collaboration, complicity and mutual respect on the part of the other agents. To explain it to me, he gives as an example the performance of his job here today: you could not open a gate without first closing another, you must pay the utmost attention. However, if he notices that someone is passing by, to facilitate his work he may wait to press the door lock button until everybody passed. Nevertheless, if the Commander see it scolds him, and he just cannot stand it: he

knows what he is doing, one cannot ask to abide to a rule without knowing the context in which a certain decision was made" [Field Note 261]

The concept of contextualizing the decision process is a core asset to understand correctional officers' work, and it helps to understand the positive function of the use of discretion. Indeed, Gilbert recognizes the dichotomic nature of correctional officers' role: they are expected to enforce control behaviors consistent with the human conditions of inmates, and "these circumstances require flexibility, reasonable judgment, sensitivity to others, responsible actions, appropriate use of coercion, and, at times, exceptions to formal policy" (Gilbert, 1997, p. 61).

"Here in prison you have to be able dosing empathy, ability to read the situation and authority, because it is a matter of daily management, which is in the long term" [Field Note 495]

"Being tied to the regulation leads you to be too tight, and on the other hand you risk being too permissive" [Field Note 248]

Consistently, the work of prison officers is based on a day-to-day negotiation of their authority with a skeptical and complex audience, which in not only composed by inmates, and such interactions take place in "a context in which enforcing all the rules 'by the book' would be impossible" (Liebling, 2011, p. 485). Moreover, authority needs to be legitimate, which means used rightfully (Ibidem, p. 486). Liebling offers an interesting point of view on legitimacy and authority, shifting the perspective from the recipients to the power-holders. In fact, the author encourages to consider some "interesting and neglected questions", such as the way prisoners officers regard their own power and their confidence in claiming different type of power at their disposal (Ibidem, p.487).

4.2.2 Authority and authoritativeness. An insight on a universal culture within an unique world

"*So you are studying correctional officers! Well, now everything is different. Before it was believe-obey-fight, now not anymore*" [Field Note 115]. This has been the unfiltered statement of a male Inspector when I introduced myself and the aim of my research. He then told me how all the armed forces have changed: "*Before we had big cars, now only economic cars, you do not have to chase anyone anymore. Everything is different. Let's put*

it this way: before you saw things that you couldn't tell even to your closest people, now that is no longer the case. I do not know if I have made myself clear" [Field Note 115]. The dichotomic relation between a nostalgic memory of a past full of action and the daily routine of the present is not the only bitterness experienced by correctional officers. Indeed, a geographical disparity in managing prison facilities is persistently described as one of the main inefficiencies.

> *'"This is also due to the typology of prison: here we are in a "Red Region[25]", the focus is on prisoners, it is a re-educational prison, the authority is not respected. Politically, the parties themselves are very present and often visit the structure"'* [Field Note 137]

> "'*There is a propensity towards treatment areas, due to political choice"'* [Field Note 40]

> "'*The prison's direction does not control. This is a Red Region, all aimed at the re-educational treatment mandate, focusing on the prisoners and forgetting the function of the prison"'* [Field Note 268]

The idea of a political influence in prison mission and management, the conceptualization of prison main aim, the perception of correctional officers' role, and the hindering factors jeopardizing officers' work are all summarized in these two quotes. The widespread feeling is a lack of attention concerning their role and difficulties, they feel left on the sidelines [Field Note 195]. Thus, when I explain my research's aim, they are often surprised:

> *"You are the first in the world paying attention to us, or, if not the first in the world, certainly the first in this region here, Tuscany"* [Field Note 195]

In the previous chapters, the political influence in shaping imprisonment rates and prison policies has been investigated. Nevertheless, the impact of the regional political culture and environment on the internal management of the prison, rather than only on the policies that lead to the rising/decreasing of imprisonment rate and the comparison between Italian macro-areas, represents a very interesting field of research. Indeed, to correctional officers, prisons in Southern Italy are more rigid if we compare them to the

[25] In 1968 Galli analyses the Italian electoral geography through the identification of territorial political subcultures ("white" and "red" areas) on the basis of ideological polarization between the two parties that dominated the Italian political scene from the post-war years (1948) to the 1990s, the Christian Democracy (DC) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) (Galli, 1968; Caciagli, 2011). The labels "red" and "white" Regions are still used to indicate the prevalence of left-wing or right-wing parties.

laxity experienced here [Field Note 165], and they perceive to "'*have the hands tied, they (the inmates) massacre us, they behave as they are in their own home*'" [Field Note 247].

> "*Inmates here have no respect for authority, they do not respect the rules, they have nothing to lose, they always try to make requests even knowing that are not due*" [Field Note 131]

> *"This is a place saturated with rules but devoid of any rationality. There are rules but no one respects them. There is no authority, not even authoritativeness: in a given moment there is a rule, the minute after its opposite"* [Field Note 185]

Liebling, describing the correctional officers' exercise of authority in shaping the quality of prison life, recalls Sennett (1980), who proposes that authority is a serious business (Liebling, 2011). It is indeed, and, from the words of correctional officers mentioned above, the lack of it is an even more serious issue. Moreover, correctional officers distinguish between authority (the power to enforce rules and give orders) and authoritativeness (the quality of trustworthiness and reliability that make possible to exercise authority). While the first is perceived as undermined by the political influences of left-wing institutions (namely, the credit and importance of the Guarantor of Prisoners' Rights in shaping and controlling the direction of the prison, and voluntary associations), the second is thought to be dismissed by the prisoners themselves. Correctional officers explain the latter as strictly linked with the typologies of prisoners and their culture:

> "'*In the South there are prisoners who belong to a certain type of crime and are used to respect a code of rules, so they are more likely to submit to those of the prison. Here (in Tuscany) they are all criminals, they come from Maghreb, they have nothing to lose. They go out and back, go out and back, they seem to like living in this way or being here*'" [Field Note 138]

Authority, "a bond between people who are unequal" (Sennet, 1980, p.10), has a dialogic nature and is "continually sought, interrupted, disrupted and sought again" (Liebling, 2011, p.486). It is interesting to reflect on the twofold meaning of authority/authoritativeness that emerges from the Field Note 138: correctional officers refer to a sense of respect towards authority regardless of the beholder, which pertains to a logic typical of organized crime. Indeed, since this kind of prisoners are used to behave on the basis of a code of rule, hence correctional officers perceive that they can also understand, respect and obey to

another one, even if they do not adhere nor agree with it. Petty crime, on the other side, is perceived as disorganized and anarchic, it does not want to recognize any form of authoritativeness and, eventually, of authority.

> *"'In southern Italy, where there are often high security detainees, this does not happen: there true authority exists. Pay attention, I said authority, not even authoritativeness'"*
> [Field Note 137]

The reference made by correctional officers to specific codes of rules of inmates, which are pre-existent to the incarceration of both prisoners and guards, recalls Irwin and Cressey's (1962) critique to the emphasis made by structural-functionalism on a peculiar "prison culture" able to shape and frame inmates behaviors, creating different subcultures of prison community (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958). Clemmer defines prison culture as "habits, behavior systems, tradition, history, customs, folkways, codes, the law and rules which guide the inmates, and their ideas, opinions and attitudes" (Clemmer, 1940, p.294). Thus, the author introduces the concept of prisonisation, to be intended as the process by which prisoners take on the "folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary" (Ibidem,p.299), while Sykes (1958) suggests that specific condition of confinement leads inmates to adjust and adapt to the pain of imprisonment through the development of an "inmate code". Irwin and Cressey, on the contrary, distinguish between a "prison culture" and a "criminal subculture", arguing that inmates' behavior "classified as part of prison culture it is not peculiar to the prison at all" (Irwin and Cressey, 1962, p.142). Indeed, although the authors recognize the influence of imprisonment's problems in shaping an inmate society, they do not believe that the solutions developed by inmates are found within the prison context, but are part of a latent culture: since groups of inmates share "latent social identities" from their membership in the same outside group, they also will share a latent culture (namely, a culture originated in a different group that the one in which they are within the prison) (Ibidem, p.145). From a preliminary analysis of my ethnographic study, correctional officers' categorization of inmates seems to be consistent with Irwin and Cressey's theorization: the peculiar subculture of organized crime is reproduced within the prison and facilitates inmates in acknowledging prison guards' authority and authoritativeness, conversely dismissed by petty criminals' (lack of) code of rules. Nevertheless, as argued by Roebuck (1963) one year after Irwin and Cressey's

contribute, the typology of prisoners' subcultures identified by the two authors is weak, since it does not show which are the learned behaviors of prison population that are commonly shared in or out prison. Furthermore, an external subculture "would not necessarily predict the behaviors of its members in prison" (Roebuck, 1963, p. 198), considering the deprivation caused by an institutionalization process that leads to infantilization, impersonalization and degradation (Clemmer, 1940; Bettelheim, 1947; Sykes, 1958; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Goffman, 1961). Thus, I rather move the focus on the nature of correctional officers' perception of prison life, their job, and prison population. In fact, their biographical background, expectations and interiorized stereotypical imagine of "respectful prisoner" produce an ingroup narrative that is continuously shaped by a unique social environment, regardless of its adherence with the real inmates' behavior. Consistently, my fieldwork confirms Vianello (2018) suggestions on the cultural and normative dimension of prison system. The author shows that the very nature of the penitentiary, constituted by a constellation of single institutions representing separate worlds that are governed by their own logics and based on precarious balances, creates a common universe of shared information on the differences between each prison.

> "He describes it to me as a decidedly more regimented prison within authoritative rules and practices, where every single movement of prisoners or staff had to follow specific procedures and protocols. Here, in comparison, there is much more laxity. In other words, everyone does as he pleases. I ask him which of the two situations he preferred apparently, here we work a little better, without too much pressure. On the other hand, however, you fall into the opposite excess: you feel more lost because everything is a victim of approximation. As we go up, under the ladder, he points to a bicycle left under there: it would not have been admitted at all in any other prison" [Field Note 541]

Consequently, all the prison population (correctional officers, prisoners, various personnel) participates to an early socialization on specific working methods and interactions to be expected in that specific prison (Torrente, 2014; Vianello, 2018). Furthermore, Vianello proposes an advancement to the main theories about the subculture of the prison community briefly exposed above, claiming that there is not a culture of inmates contraposed to a prison culture, but the latter "as a set of rules, codes and behaviors, is structured as a common culture among all social actors of the prison in

response to the characteristics of a unique moral and social environment" (Cfr Vianello, 2018).

Such moral and social environment is characterized by mistrust and diffidence, which are fostered by a feeling of self-insecurity. Indeed, the inmates coming from organized crime might represents a type of prisoner who eases correctional officers' work, and at the same time a threat:

> "Agent V. tells how he was struck by Roberto Saviano's analysis of the difficult role of correctional officers who work in southern Italy: having to deal with real criminals, they are more subject to threats and intimidation, so the job becomes more difficult. It's a systemic problem, he says" [Field Note 193]

Indeed, although prisoners who are member of organized crime acknowledge correctional officers' authoritativeness, they also possess intimidatory resources that jeopardize their authority.

> *"Not all prisons are the same, in some situations you cannot use the pen* (explicit reference to threats from inmates in 41bis[26])*"* [Field Note 428]

In the next chapter I will shows results from the fieldwork concerning correctional officers' perception towards prisoners. In approaching it, it is important to keep in mind one relevant point I made in these pages: the existence of a prison culture which informs all the inhabitants of the prison system, correctional officers included. Indeed, their perception on the flaws of prison world is daily shaped and reproduced by such world itself.

[26] In 1975, the Italian Ministries of Justice and Interior jointly established the Article 41-bis of the Prison Administration Act, also known as *carcere duro* – hard prison regime (Ordinamento Penitenziario, 1975). The article 41-bis has been applied to prisoners with the highest security risk in the prison system.

V IDENTIFYING AS CORRECTIONAL OFFICER: A RELATIONAL FACTOR

"Well, you know that was the worst of it - this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity - like yours - the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly"

"They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretense, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend"

Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness

In the methodological chapter I used Edgar Lee Masters's poem from Spoon River Anthology to grasp the different theoretical stances on the relation between the self and the external reality: what is knowable and how. We have also seen that by applying an interpretivist approach, the researcher and the social world cannot be detached and the observer and what is observed are co-dependent. Definitely, within the debate around the formation of the identity and the relation of the self with the others, the idea of an interconnection is deeply rooted. An interesting aspect is related to the crucial role of the juxtaposition: the definition of the self is affirmed through the differentiation from the other. Evoking the mirror metaphor, in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* Hegel states that the Self can only be mirrored by the Other. Indeed, to Hegel, self-consciousness is preconditioned by the recognition of the Other, who must be excluded to allow the self-consciousness through the power of differentiation. Thus, the conceptualization of the process of *othering* (namely, the formation of identity by defining what we are not), has been coined by Spivak in 1985 and widely applied in postcolonial studies. Nevertheless, Said's *imagined geography* (1978) already soundly captured the process of alienating non-European countries and shaping them as something distant, exotic and (exclusively for this very reason) fascinating through a colonial gaze. The Orient is constructed and geographically identified as something different, other than us. Twenty years later, with a

different nuance, de Beauvoir explains how the othering of women in patriarchal societies has produced infantilization, incapability and subjectivity (1997): as Spivak's, de Beauvoir's conceptualization is embedded in degrading the other, there is not fascination or exoticism. There is always someone in power that describes, and other that are described as inferior (Jensen et al., 2011). The Conrad's quotes at the beginning of this Chapter perfectly exemplify this process: to the protagonist of *Heart of Darkness*, the worst part of all was catching a glimpse of humanity in those the protagonist believed to be horrid creatures. The Self is affected by the fear of the possibility to be seen, even partially, as connected with Others that have been dehumanized. Through the analysis of the impact of dehumanization during genocides, Waller (2002) shows how linguistic construction plays a relevant role in putting victims outside the moral universe of humans: calling Jews "vermin" and parasites, or Tutsis "cockroaches" during Rwanda genocide (Waller, 2002, pp. 246-247), contributed in justifying the perpetrators' crimes.

In this chapter I investigate how correctional officers' identity is daily constructed and affirmed through the juxtaposition with the inmates and the main gendered narratives, how stigma and preconceptions shape the relations within the penitentiary, and, on the other hand, how such relational dynamics impact and reify prison's roles.

5.1 Someone, somewhere else

Fiction and reality are intertwined: Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and the two late 60s social experiments - 1967's Third Wave experiment[27], as well as 1971's Standford prison experiment[28] – precede Tajifel's systematization of social identity theory (1970, 1974, 1979, 1986). According to positive distinctiveness, a key component of social identity theory, "individuals strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity" (Tajfel and Turner,

[27] The Third Wave was an experimental social movement created by Ron Jones in 1967 to explain how the German population could have accepted the actions of the Nazi regime during the rise of the Third Reich and the Second World War. "How could the Germans behave as they did after the war claiming that they knew nothing about the holocaust?". Ron Jones aimed at answering at this question and decided to create a game that reproduce totalitarian societies' rules. "*I don't know. Let's try an experiment. I will be the dictator, and you will be the movement," cited Mark Hancock his ex-professor in the interview (Linda Taffee/Palo Alto Weekly, March 2017). Thus, on the first day, Ron Jones initiated discipline by introducing a salute, wearing armbands, standing up and addressing Professor Jones and all that under the slogan strength through discipline* (Podrug, 2019, p.7).

[28] Zimbardo writes: "*In my own work, I wanted to explore the fictional notion from William Golding's Lord of the Flies about the power of anonymity to unleash violent behavior*" (Zimbardo, 2016, p.310)

1979, pp. 33-47) for their social group using verbal and non-verbal cues, and the comparison with an Other is essential. Ingroup-outgroup logic is confirmed through *us versus them* narrative to build positive esteem for an external perception. In prison, the Other is even more frightening: even if some correctional officers seem acknowledging the fortuitousness of being on the wrong side of the prison's gate, they struggle to find concrete similarities between them and prisoners.

> "*We (*the Inspector and a female detainee, ndr*) have the same age, you see, that's how it goes, we're not that far apart, (*the only difference*) is that I am a cop and she is an inmate*" [Field Note 444]

Indeed, the Field Note 444 is nothing but an explicated relief. The correctional officer is aware of sharing the same biography and background of the prisoner, but eventually they are deeply different: the Inspector says that life challenges you, and you can cope with it developing strategies that value you as better human being. The "only difference" – to be a cop or an inmate – is something that has been chosen. Nevertheless, he is sympathetic with her:

> "*Inspector! How are you?*"
>
> "*Well, well, what about you? Children?*"

They tell me they've known each other for a long time. She updates him about her four children: she is happy to have managed to get two adopted, while one has started the Hotel Management School. The youngest is in Morocco with his father. Inspector V. makes fun of her, recommending to behave properly.

> "*Of course I will do it! You know I'm on your side, as you are on mine!*" she responds, turning towards one of the Inspectors at the prison's entrance - who replies, embarrassed: "*that is not true!*" [Field Note 441]

That, in fact, is not true. They have the same accent and age, but are not on the same side, and he is relieved. He feels better than her. Moreover, such comparison is gender sensitive: male prisoners are depicted as criminals, uneducated and savages, while female prisoners are lunatic drugs abusers with severe psychiatric disorders. Moreover, to correctional officers and prisons' personnel the vast majority of their issues depends on the lack of liability as mothers.

"*There are no criminals here* (in the female section, ndr*), they are out of their mind, they are people who are not in possession of all their faculties. In fact, women do not commit crimes except for hormonal imbalances or for issues related to children, here there are only women with psychiatric disorders who should be put inside a clinic, certainly not here, for us the management is very difficult*" [Field Note 49]

"While the Inspectors settles the papers relating to a ban on meeting between two inmates, they discuss whether suspend the ban or not. Indeed, one of the parties does not want to suspend it. "*Don't you want to take it off anyway?*" – "*oh no, in these cases you can't do anything about it, if one is afraid you have to leave it as it is. Moreover, these two both have psychiatric problems, are particular subjects, the safer the better*" [Field Note 366]

"He, the Inspector tells me, has worked in the female section for eighteen months, which is why he is known and popular. But according to him women are worse than men. Men are physically violent, while female prisoners make you the "bicycle". "*Do you know what a "bicycle" is? When you build up a case, when you make things up. Here it happened that some colleagues went to trial because some inmates, only out of envy, said that they passed them drugs. Female are envious*" [Field Note 444]

"The Inspector describes her as a paranoid and self-pitying person" [Field Note 520]

"She is an inmate who does not wash herself. These are dirty" [Field Note 530]

"*Did you see that one (*female prisoner, ndr*)? She is scary, with all those tattoos, she looks like an anarchist, a black bloc*" [Field Note 94]

If Italian female prisoners are bad mothers with psychiatric issues, foreigners and transexuals are even worst:

"The agent exclaims: "*these Nigerians are terrible!*" [Field Note 233]

"One of the latest entries is a Nigerian who does not speak, who is like a pet. They will call her *"the little nigger"* several times" [Field Note 567]

"*They* (m to f transexual inmates, ndr) *have tantrums. After all, the trans are real collectors of the frustrations of both sexes*" [Field Note 290]

The intersectional discrimination perspective (Crenshaw, 1993), which ought not to be understood as the sum of different discrimination (to be a woman, *and* a foreigner, *and* a member of a lgbti community), but rather a specific condition (to be a Roma woman, to be a foreigner trans man), fosters the dehumanizing effect of the othering process within the penitentiary system.

In fact, the cultural aspect is crucial and seems related to the impact of the regional political culture (see *infra*, chapter IV) and to the type of prison and its population. Indeed, although correctional officers alternate different feelings towards inmates, these are often defined as insolent natural criminals who lack basic life principles.

> ""*Eight months old babies cannot be weaned with pasta with pesto and pasta with tomato sauce! It takes meat broth with parmesan, not pasta! This has to stop. Now I call the nurse*". Inspector A explains to me that the mothers within the prison are gypsies. "*Who knows what they feed them in the fields!*" - Her colleague presses: "*here we are in Italy and they eat Italian*"" [Field Note 122]

> "In the room with the inspectors, they talk about another inmate. They can't connect the name to the face: what color of skin does it have? Black, yes, but how much? Brownish or black black?" [Field Note 658]

> "The Inspector is stopped by a colleague.
>
> -"*Do you know what happened, Inspector? Yesterday during the shared activities a prisoner asked me if he could greet a prisoner, I said no and he called me a racist*"
>
> - "*You must not fall into provocations*"
>
> -"*eh, but... "*
>
> - "*Do not be offended! What he said is just a way of being, a choice of life. Do you feel racist?*"
>
> - "*No, I don't think I am*"
>
> - "*See, you were right not to intervene, if he had offended you it would have been different, but in this case there is nothing wrong*" [Field Note 116]

Field note 116 is quite interesting for multiple reasons: first, it reveals the frustration of being called out as racist every time something is negated, even when the correctional officer is only following internal dispositions; second, from the words of the Inspector to be racist is meant not as an insult, but a way to be. Consistently, racism is so endemic

within the prison system that is both a lens through which reading correctional officers' behaviors from prisoners' perspective, and a lens that disguises cultural incomprehension and difficulty of communications as irreconcilable gaps between born criminals and guards. "In this case there is nothing wrong": such self-absolving and provocatory statement seems to be fostered by the prison context and environment.

> "The Inspector loves going to northern Europe, to him it is a better destination than the South *"in Europe, but above all the world: by being here I have become, I would not say racist, but allergic to race*" [Field Note 226]

> "*Everybody becomes racist in prison*". I ask him to explain his point of view to me. "*They come here, they are criminals, they have nothing to lose, they treat you with contempt. There was a recent case of someone who should have received a pension of … thousand euros and did not want to leave because he claimed it was his right. But do you think it is right that we are here starving and then they return rich to their own country? Now, I don't want it to pass that everyone then becomes racist, it's bad if you write something like that, but how could it be otherwise? Does it seem right to you, tell me?*" [Field Note 172]

In fact, from the Inspectors' point of view, being racist is the natural consequence of the continuous exposition to an environment in which the main function – to educate and reintegrate those who violated the law and thus the social pact – is largely delivered to foreign people who seem "not giving a damn" of being there, obliging correctional officers to annoying duties and incrementing taxpayers' costs. The causal effect is indeed evident: if the prison is full of not Italian, who is not Italian is more keen to develop criminal behavior.

Even more so, such racist approach is reproduced outside the prison walls, and commented within. Indeed, once Assistant D. told to me and her colleagues that while on the bus on her way to work, she witnessed a dispute between a North African immigrant and a Peruvian over a seat.

> "*I instinctively took the side of the Peruvian, even if the North African would probably have some mental issues. Okey, they are criminals, but they don't behave like that crazy!*" [Field Note 375]

Nevertheless, the main narrative changes in the very same discourse, and inmates from hopeless become poor people with bad fate.

> "At a certain point, to the Inspector the Maghrebi prisoners, who were labelled criminals just few seconds before, become poor devils: "*here, compared to other prisons, there are above all unfortunates who do not even have eyes to cry. It easy to end up in prison: a cheating wife, for instance*" [Field Note 143]

> "This place leads to oblivion, brings sadness, these people are not a social alarm, they are a danger only to themselves" [Field Note 50]

> "Once the educator goes away, the Inspector turns to me: "*She has a fear that is dying!*". Apparently, the educator is new and the being alone with female prisoners scares her. "*But how can you be afraid? Have you seen these inmates, what could possible do to you?!*" [Field Note 360]

Thus, correctional officers tend to reproduce interiorized constructs on prisoners, and their behaviors adhere with them. Notwithstanding what seems a confirmation of the stereotypical *Us vs Them* narrative as an impact of the institutionalization effect, is possible to glimpse a counterbalanced representation of correctional officers' relation with prisoner, where differences are voided and what really counts is the way inmates choose to behave. While I was there doing my fieldwork, I could not help but noticing that correctional officers' narrative and judgment on prisoners did not only emerge from rooted prejudices continuously reproduced in the institution they work for, but from an interiorized and overwhelming feeling of threat. Indeed, correctional officers feel threatened by prisoners: because they sense a lack of authority and authoritativeness (see *infra*, Chapter IV), and because inmates are considered responsible for all the troubles they have to deal with. These two perceived factors merged, eventually resulting in a shared truth among prison staff: you cannot trust prisoners, not even if you are a prisoner.

> "Two inmates arrive, an elderly Italian and a young Latin American. The agents wonder why the elderly inmate, although new but still an Italian native speaker, should be helped by a foreigner. They ask her why. "*I help her to understand what the steps to take are*" – The correctional officer turns to the new inmate: "*Alright, but don't trust her: here nobody gives anything for nothing*" [Field Note 191]

> "*They think to be really clever*" says the Inspector referring to two female inmates who took apart the third bed they had in their cell, asking it to be taken out. The inmates say that don't want it because it is rotten, but the Inspector is of another opinion: she is sure that the bed is ok, it is just an excuse to get rid of an extra bed and remain alone in the cell – "*They are in a honeymoon - You know, love stunts need space*" [Field Note 293]

These last episodes openly exemplify some interesting aspects: prisoners are not trustworthy and always try to find some escamotage to trick prison guards.

Chapter IV offered a crucial insight on the identity of correctional officers, through the discussion of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations pushing individuals to undergo correctional officers' profession, lingering on the troubled balance between expectations and coping strategies. Nevertheless, it is now clear that the construction of the identity as correctional officers is inextricably connected also with their representation of the counterpart, their opposite, and, most of all, that latter is a projection of the need of being recognized as something different and more socially desirable. Correctional officers behave according to the image of the role that the penitentiary system constantly reproduces, and being able to adhere with it implies a characteristic representation of inmates. The real question concerns how this universe of people is perceived as distant or pertaining the same world lived by correctional officers. The penitentiary system is constituted by people (not so) different from them, who fill and give substance and meaning to their role and professional identity. The front-stage and back-stage of their performance (Goffman, 1978) are two complete separate worlds or are somehow interconnected?

> "I always tell my fifteen-year-old son that we can all end up in prison. Just a small mistake, such as meeting the wrong person, and you are done. Anyone who says that prison is a world apart is wrong: prison is a part of the world" [Field Note 149]

The same Inspector who firmly believes in the punishment and differentiates prison population by provenience and backgrounds, surprisingly offers a reading of prison as a place inherently embedded with external life. There are not two separate worlds, but a unique place, in which some parts are organized to receive people who tripped over. Nevertheless, we could further the interpretation of the Inspector's statement looking at the implications for the configuration of her professional role. Prison is not only "part of

the world" as a consequence that everyone could suffer from misbehavior, but as an monolithic and ineluctable institution, the only one conceivable and with an incontrovertible positive function. There is not space for imagining Other, *other* than a place which hosts someone (not so much) diverging, somewhere (not so distant).

5.2 Responsibility for the Other. Interiorized denial

Before investigating the everyday relation between the two main inhabitants of the prison, is significant to deepen the representation of the Other developed by correctional officers not only from some intrinsic characteristics of inmates (ethnic origin, gender, class status), but from their behavior in prison. Hence, shifting from how such representations impact the construction of identity as correctional officers to their effects on the relations with prisoners, it is interesting starting by observing correctional officers' reaction to a very common practice: self-mutilations and attempted suicides. Indeed, if we take into consideration the peculiar process studied by the sociology of denial, the gap increases. Emblematically, the dehumanizing effect deriving from prisonization severely impacts also correctional officers' judgements and narratives about critical events occurring in prison. Indeed, during several occasions Inspectors, both male and female, referred to suicide attempts and deliberate self-harm from prisoners as annoyances which deeply irritated them. The first time I heard correctional officers talking about it was during an informal event. They invited me to have a pizza all together, and, during the dinner, they shared personal professional experiences:

> "*You happened to find the salami, sometimes, didn't you?*", an Inspector roughly asks to her colleague referring to a suicide attempt then foiled. I felt a deep discomfort: they speak of these events as normal business, indeed, as a real annoyance" [Field Note 343]

"*Finding a salami*" (an illustrative metaphor for suicide, which compares cured meat hanging to the wall to hanged corps) – it is not the most inspiring choice of words. Nevertheless, what seems an irreverent mockery of a tragedy, hides a shared animosity against attention-seeker prisoners, who are believed not having a real intention to commit self-harm. One August morning, correctional officers shared with me that the day before they had a tough shift: a female prisoner made a suicide attempt. The toughness, however,

was not given by the fact itself, but by the effects it caused: indeed, it implied a delay for those who finished their shift, bringing other papers to fill.

> "*We almost found the salami. But in reality she always pretends doing it, to be seen*" [Field Note 533]

> "Meanwhile, the inspector tells me about yesterday. She too is quite annoyed by the critical event: "*I was finishing the shift, then that idiot decided to do the scene*". It appears evident that the suicide attempt was not believed and that it only increased the hatred towards the detainee" [Field Note 551]

Thus, critical events are every day's business. What emerged from the field should not be intended as a desecrating façade with racist elements, but as a rooted and experienced answer from a professional context in which the dissociation between what you expected to be your role is daily disconfirmed by what it practically is. The distress caused by experiencing high-level emotional discomfort is often coped creating a distance and finding an explanation that could lower the real severity of critical events[29]. In other words, correctional officers are keen to deny the seriousness of self-harm conducts as a coping reaction. Cohen offers an interesting insight on what he calls "states of denials", which he defines as "assertions that something did not happen, does not exist, is not true, or is not known about" (Cohen, 2001, p.3) aiming at investigating the impact of the knowledge of the suffering of others and the reaction to the events that surround us. The author identifies three possible denials: literal, interpretative, and implicatory. While the first simply negates that something brutal happened, the other two recognize the incident, but imply that the meaning (interpretative denial) or the significance (implicatory denial) of it is different than it appears. In addition to the content of the denial, Cohen inquires whether it is personal, official, or cultural and the role of the agent – whether him/her is the victim, the perpetrator of a bystander. Furthermore, since "denial is frequently the first and often the most enduring reaction to accusations of wrongdoing" (Bickford, 2002, p. 1051), the author examines the perpetrators' motivation for denial: they could deny responsibility by appealing to obedience, or conformity, or necessity. Perpetrators could even deny the victim, claiming to be the real victim him/herself. Strictly linked to these,

[29] The use of desacralized terminology as a coping mechanism trough irony and sarcasm should not be underestimated as well. Dark and black humor is indeed used as a response to navigate difficult work situations in prison, from both correctional officers and prisoners (Crawley and Crawley, 2008; Bennett et al., 2008).

the condemnation of the condemners, the appeal to higher loyalties, and moral indifference, are all claims that easily show the applicability of the concept to the penitentiary system and correctional officers. Nevertheless, concerning suicides and critical events, correctional officers are both perpetrator and bystanders: they are not directly responsible for self-inducted injuries of prisoners, but do have responsibility on their wellbeing. They indeed stand by prisoners and observe their behaviors but are also responsible for them. The process of denying seems to be, in most of the case, as a strategy to underestimate both the meaning (*they cut themselves to draw attention*) and the significance (*they just fake it, is rare that someone eventually get hurt*).

During the fieldwork, I witnessed two significant episodes of correctional officers attending critical events and prisoners' distress.

One morning, before entering the Inspectors' office, I was told that they were handling a complicated situation. Since the inmate who had been temporarily transferred to the cell next to the head office had finished oxygen therapy, she could be transferred again in the female section, but she can no longer had a single cell due to the overcrowding. The inspectors eventually found a suitable accommodation, even if this meant moving another inmate to a cell with two Nigerian girls. The *casus belli* originated from the fact that the new inmate was a smoker, while one of the two Nigerian prisoners was severely cardiopathic and absolutely forbidden to be exposed to passive smoking. This resulted in a clear refusal by both Nigerian inmates to accept the newcomer, which prompted in a turmoil in the section, with subsequent closure of all detainees as punishment. In addition, both sections unanimously filled out a written statement complaining about the behavior of the inmates in question and contracting out. Eventually, the Nigerian girl arrived in the Inspectors' office to be heard.

When the prisoner entered the room, she was in an evident state of agitation. She continued to defend her position, with poor Italian, that she had nothing to complain about accepting a third person in the cell, only that she cannot accept a smoker who openly admitted being keen to smoke anyway, not caring about Nigerian prisoner's health status. A confrontation begins with Inspector A, who tells that orders are orders and must be carried out without hindering them, that she hardly believe that the inmate would have been calm even if the third would not be smoking. Then, she must write a report and the Director will decide the consequences. The Nigerian inmate cries. She shared her story:

she was transferred here because there is no clinical center in the prison of origin, she is ill, she does not want to cause trouble, only to protect herself. Inspector A. writes in the report that the only reason for disagreement was smoking, but the inmate refuses to sign it, she wants her lawyer. As she leaves, she suffers a sudden illness and faints in the aisle. The correctional officers in the office are certain of her staging: "*while she fell to the ground she leaned against the wall, she can only be a fake*".

From a correctional officers' perspective, to be used to this kind of critical event might seem like a risky false alarm. *To cry wolf*, to use an English idiom. More sarcastically, "fake it until you make it" is an aphorism that can have some counter-productive effect: we could rephrase it as "believe it as fake until it really happens".

The second episode happened during the first period I spent in the male section. A medical event occurred: a detainee had a heart attack and the ambulance must be called. The detainee was under Protective Custody and a reinforced escort was needed. I witnessed the event from the earliest stages. The Inspector on duty (Inspector Z) called the younger colleagues and told them to change, get into plain clothes and be ready to follow the ambulance. He said to one of the guards: "*take the machine gun, you will use that*", but he has been corrected by his colleagues: "*do not call it in this way, say PM12*". The Chief Inspector was worried: "*Is the detainee conscious? While we are waiting for the authorization of the Director, let the ambulance enter and let it stabilize him, otherwise it is risky, it takes too long*". Inspector Z is calm instead: "*Look, these never die*". In any case, he decided that while we were waiting for the ambulance, it was better to go down to the shop and freshen up a bit. Some phone calls had to be made: to the Commander, to the Director, to the Carabinieri so that they send a reinforcement directly to the hospital. I waited a little further in the aisle. Eventually, the Carabinieri must be recalled: they were warned that the ambulance would go to the hospital closest to the prison, but it was sent to city center instead. "*Then it is really serious*", the Inspector told me, abruptly changing his mind, "*there is no cardiology center here, it is only in the main hospital*".

The dehumanizing effect of the prisonization not only affects prisoners and correctional officers, but all the penitentiary's universe. Indeed, as Vianello shows, each actor working and spending time daily in the prison is susceptible to its "unique moral and social environment" (Vianello, 2018). Hence, during the fieldwork I met a wide range of persons gravitating in the prison: volunteers, doctors, nurses, local politician. As a way of example,

when I participated in an exchange between an Inspector and the psychiatrist, the latter raspingly commented a suicidal attempt committed in the trans section. The doctor's tones are brutal: he is told about the self-injurious behaviors of the trans inmate (including ingestion of razor blades and batteries) and he bluntly says:

> "I hope that the inmate would succeed the next time". Even for the attempted suicide carried out by the female prisoner has equally sweet words. He and the Inspector seem to be on the same line" [Field Note 554]

The next chapter will show the impact of correctional officers' and prison personnel's practices on inmates, focusing on the influence of a merit ideology. I would like to report an event that will be further commented in that section to better illustrate the diverging reaction to a critical event and the practical application of interpretative and implicatory denial.

One morning, after the lunch break in the prison's cafeteria, I got back to the male section with the Inspector. Once we arrived in front of the entrance of the ward, we met four new agents sitting in front of the gate. One approached the Inspector, telling her that a prisoner "*has sewn himself*". I did not understand immediately: due to the strong southern accent, I misheard, understanding "he is cooked" (in Italian there is assonance between *cucito* - sewn, and *cucinato* – cooked). No, it was really sewing: one of the inmates performed a demonstrative act by sewing up his mouth. The Inspector is struck, she does not want me to get in the section and see him. Thus, she calls her colleagues working in the section to check the situation: the prisoner is already in the infirmary, so I can go up without too many problems. Once up, the doctor also enters the Inspector's office. The discussion becomes heated. The doctor, recognizing me as an outsider, seems very embarrassed and asks the agents to follow her out. Later, I will understand that she specifically asked the Inspector to drop the fact without proceeding with a report, because the detainee agreed to seek treatment and be quiet. The agents, especially the head of the section, are beside themselves: "*We are public officials, she is a doctor, and we must account for everything that happens, especially if it is of this gravity!*" [Field Note 556]. Nothing else will be discussed throughout the afternoon.

Nevertheless, depending on the context, the appeal to a sense of duty and responsibility sometime wavers. For instance, one day, while waiting for the Inspector in the main office,

I spent some time with her colleagues dealing with paperwork: they must digitally insert a critical event that happened in the male section. The software, which is directly connected with the Ministry of Justice, has a drop-down menu with limited options.

> Inspector 1: "*Which one should I opt for? In the drop-down menu there is no fitting label*"
>
> Inspector 2: "*Put disciplinary offense*"
>
> Inspector 1: "*I can't find it ... ah, yes, here it is. But then he asks me for a further specification and the case is not one of those indicated. At the end, it is just one prisoner who punched another in the head*"
>
> I risk an intrusion: "*Maybe personal injury?*"
>
> Inspector 1: "*What are you talking about! Nobody died, after all is a punch in the head out of anger, I mean, it happens!*".

Consistently, we should ask which is the threshold that determines what it something "that happens", and what something worth reporting.

If we look at the three events applying Cohen's analysis of the denying process, a different range of scenarios emerges. Concerning the first episode - the Nigerian prisoner fainting as a result of deep emotional distress - correctional officers show a disbelieve on the meaning of the collapse (interpretative denial): it was an overdramatization in order to move some pietism on her health situation. Whether it originated as a response to a perceived incommunicability or as a provocative intention to demonstrate correctional officers to be wrong, does not matter at the eyes of Inspectors. What matters is that the prisoner deliberately disobeyed to correctional officers' orders, and when scolded, she carried out an act to not be reported to the Direction of the prison. The second critical event – a prisoner from the Protective Custody suffering a heart-attack - was initially underestimated both on the meaning (interpretative denial) and on the significance (implicatory denial). Indeed, the spontaneous reaction of the Inspector was to be bothered: generally, when the transport to the hospital's emergency room is needed, the doctor needs to sign the certificate, then the director is asked for authorization. The problem arises because it is necessary to find three agents who can escort and guard the prisoner, and at least one of them should have the driving license. In addition to this, they

have to deal with sudden lack of personnel and relocate them and all the shifts. Thus, as everything in prison, it produces an endless bureaucratic procedure which overburdens correctional officers' work. Since the main narrative depicts prisoners as troublesome and critical events are rarely believed, a heart-attack is not a heart-attack until the prisoner ends in the cardiological unit and proves that the meaning and the significance of the event are real. Lastly, an act of protest of a man who sewed his own mouth: the body is again a tool to express suffering, but the meaning is different. Here, the nature of the gesture is, out of doubt, provocatory. The self-harm is not toward himself, but the prison system itself - consistently, it is undeniable. What is interesting is the reaction of the personnel: while the doctor aimed to not taking action against it, correctional officers demanded to report it as a matter of responsibility. Indeed, the doctor looked aware of the possible consequences for the inmate and thought that the significance should not be overestimated in order to take care of his mental state, but Inspectors believed in the corrective value of reporting and, most of all, did not want to be accounted responsible.

Finally, it is important to linger on the intertwined nature of correctional officers' and prison staff's denial, and sense of responsibility. As an Inspector told me one of my very first days during the fieldwork, being prepared to external investigation and judgment is crucial.

> "While we wait for the next inmate to be heard, I ask for more details on the necessary bureaucratic chain of information: with what margin of discretion do correctional officers decide to report the events to the Director and the Department of Penitentiary Administration? There is margin, but critical events must always be reported no matter what: "*the Direction must always be informed about everything, because cannot be unprepared if the news hits the newspapers. We must always report*" [Field Note 95]

Consistently, the responsibility of correctional officers is not on the prisoner, but on how the prisoners act. Indeed, even those correctional officers who are empathetically committed to inmates' mental and physical wellbeing, eventually yield to prioritize camaraderie and self-defense against any direct responsibility, denying the seriousness of critical events and strictly following bureaucratic protocols with punishing measures. Moreover, the second episode shows how the sense of responsibility permeates all prison's walls and affects prisons personnel at large. In fact, the medical staff working in prison

tend to apply a preservative approach: for instance, although the transfer to the hospital should be validated only in case of imminent danger to prisoners' life, if in doubt the doctor always signs it. This clearly foments correctional officers' narrative on prisoners taking advantage of it just to have some attention or to enjoy a little vacation outside the cell.

In general, it is possible to observe that mistrust, patronization and interiorized frustration deeply influence the way correctional officers see prisoners and interpret how they act: they indeed are seeing as having a hidden agenda, trying to take advantage of situations. Even if the single prisoners' practice is not directly oppositional, it might result in an overload of work (any critical event is always followed with infinite procedures and prolonged shifts). Comparing this generalized feeling with the interiorized image of prisoners as someone frighteningly closer to them, from whom is in fact important to reaffirm a certain degree of distance to stabilize self-identity, as well as with the frustration from betrayed professional expectations, it is possible to perceive how such dangerous mixture produce a bi-directional blaming process, toward prisoners *and* the penitentiary administration.

5.3 Tightening a loose bond. The struggle of being empathetic

In 1984, in the Report of the Control Review Committee, Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) stressed the importance of the relationship between correctional officers and prisoners:

> At the end of the day, nothing else that we can say will be as important as the general proposition that relations between staff and prisoners are at the heart of the whole prison system and that control and security flow from getting that relationship right. Prisons cannot be run by coercion: they depend on staff having a firm, confident and humane approach that enables them to maintain close contact with prisoners without abrasive confrontation. (Home Office, 1984: para. 16)

Liebling (2011) further developed such statement, distinguishing between different kind of relationship and perspectives. Specifically, the author argues that attitudes and conducts of prison's officers shape the moral quality of prison life.

Undoubtedly, prison's life is characterized by the everyday interaction between correctional officers and prisoners: it is inevitable and entails an important impact in the

construction of prison guards' self-image. Indeed, although in paragraph 5.2 I showed how correctional officers suffer of being overburden with duties that are perceived divergent from those they expected, the feeling of being other than someone who opens and closes the cells is important. Even more, correctional officers depict themselves as the essential gate between prison and society.

> "*Outside people does not know our work, when in reality we are the only connection with the outside world for the inmates: they confide in us. From our side, the empathy is strong, it is not just all about security*" [Field Note 388]

This is particularly evident when they share details on their everyday activities and practices with inmates. Indeed, the same Inspector H that had some animosity against the shifting of their role towards a more supporting function (see *infra* paragraph 4.1 – "it is true that the daily work is configured in the relationship with the prisoners, but the fact that it is specifically requested does not seem right to her"), suddenly contradicts herself when, just moments after having vented, she proudly tells me about a prisoner (whom Inspector H will define "*with a brain like that of a little bird*") who is particularly difficult, aggressive, self-harming. A real disaster. They had to put him in the security room because he was unmanageable, with serious issues. Nevertheless, Inspector H immediately found a connection with him: she seems to be the only one he trusts, he wants to talk only with her. She also allowed the prisoner to come back to the main ward, warning him that at the first false move he would return to the safety cell. In fact, even if it is true that "a stitch in time saves nine", she told him that no more stitches were allowed, referring to the fact that he would have to stop cutting himself[30]. Later, when Inspector H will mock Inspector H about the Commander's decision of appointing her as the only one in charge of the prisoner, she would just pretend to be annoyed, openly smiling.

Filling the gap with empathy is indeed a strategy that correctional officers do understand and apply.

> "*One of the problems here is that communication is completely missing, while this work is based on the relationship. I don't even read the files of their crimes, everyone is different. I don't care what they did before or the cause of their entry, I judge their*

[30] In Italian, the Inspector made a word pun using the same term: "*con i punti, punto*", literally "you are done with stitches".

actions, I don't loathe these people. Even more because they can feel it and it could create a permanent gap between us and them. It takes empathy, it takes resilience" [Field Note 79]

The relevance of the context you are immersed in is, obviously, fundamental. Indeed, senior Inspectors and prison guards come to terms with a reality they got used to know and to cope with. Moreover, correctional officers often know inmates since many years, both due to the duration of the sentences and recidivism.

"I speak to a senior agent I already know. Among the various things we say to each other, her difficulty in dealing with the inmates that she has known for years and who treat her with compliance stands out: *"I tell them not to hug or kiss me, but they do it anyway! How could I do?"*. I will witness it with my own eyes immediately: an inmate throws herself at her neck *"Agent, I know it bothers you, but I don't care and do it no matter what!"*. They both laugh*"* [Field Note 252]

As the Inspector in the male section proudly complained about the unrequested task of emotionally support a troubled prisoner, also the senior correctional officer pretended to be annoyed by the affection of the prisoner. The reason is quite simple: whereas there are various studies on the relationship between prisoners and correctional officers that tend to emphasize the behavior of the latter considering them as monoliths, it is important to consider them sociologically, trying to deconstruct the "academic romantic's 'Other'" (Liebling, 2000, p.349). Indeed, when I write about a "*them versus us*" tension, approaching a narrative of prisoners depicted through correctional officers' lens as Other, I am also aware of that it represents only one side of the story: the rhetorical emphasis on the distance and antagonism between staff and prisoners is counterbalanced by cooperation and accommodation as well (ibidem).

Today, in the female section an inmate had a tantrum. She ordered something to eat to be shared with her son, who also is a prisoner in the male section. They are supposed to meet in the visiting room. Something went wrong: the dessert is not the one she ordered. Her son fancies cream croissant, but these ones are with chocolate. She lost her temper: she took the dessert from the fridge, screamed, threw it on the floor in the corridor, threatened the agents, and finally came back to her room. She did not want to see her son anymore. Surprisingly, correctional officers let her vent. When Inspector A. arrived, she tried to calm her down: "*You say these things, but you*

don't really think them, try to chill". Inspector C. explained to me: "*I have known her since 97, her son died in a fire in the trailer where they lived, she got burned to save him. After that she was never the same again. She is completely gone*" [Field Note 26]

There is a knock on the door, an inmate looks in. She says to Inspector C "Hello, beautiful!" and leaves. The inspector turns to me: "*These are the twenty-three, not of age, but of years in prison! We've known them for twenty years, in the end they love us. We raised and nurtured them. It's something that makes you smile but also sad*" [Field Note 112]

The Inspector share a story: he was once threatened by an inmate altered by an alcoholic mixture made from fruit soaked in the terrace. He was about to be cut with a razor blade, but the other inmates intervened to stop him. "*They did it because a relationship is established anyway, they know us*" [Field Note 141]

An inmate looks in the room. She is an old acquaintance, a woman who left a few months ago who lives homeless in the city. She got a final five years and now she is back here. She greets all the officers, even the Inspector. She has a history of drug addiction and self-harm, the marks and scars are evident all over her body. She stands in the doorway, barely looking out. She exchanges a few words with the Inspector, asks her for a stamp because she wants to be allowed to write to her boyfriend [Field Note 575]

Punishment, accommodation, negotiation, affection. Indeed, negotiation and discretion are crucial in shaping prisoners - correctional officers' relations: prison guards shall never lose the ability "to deploy authority effectively (and not to abdicate in the interests of 'good relations') (since it is) a crucial skill for officers to possess, in the eyes of prisoners and staff" (Liebling, 2000, p.343). Moreover, "prisoners prefer officers to be 'straight', even if they were giving unwelcome news or instructions" (Ibidem). Operationally, it means to administer a dose of "verbal skills, 'tactics of talk', to cajole prisoners into compliance by applying formal rather than informal sanctions" (Ivi, p.337). Nevertheless, it often results in infantilization, and from strategic empathetic talking shifts to condescending and patronizing:

Inspector A shows to her colleagues a drawer next to the desk. Pointing to the contents, she says: "*Look, if you need her you can find some reinforcements*". There are sweets and chocolates. The inspectors share with me few anecdotes. Often, they say,

it happens that to convince a prisoner you have to resort to some sweets. The other day, for example, during a transfer, a prisoner claimed some methadone, but he had already had his dose and would have to wait. The Inspector then convinced him with a piece of chocolate: she told him that if he had been calm, he could have had some more. It worked immediately. "*They are like children, you have to have your own tricks to convince them*" [Field Note 620]

"*Eh, but here you eventually learn some tricks. I also take the piss out of them, saying that they understand, that they are intelligent, that other inmates are unable to understand*" [Field Note 25]

The Inspector addresses her very severely: "*I know you, even if I can't promise you anything for the interview you are asking to have, I don't want to see any trouble. Maybe we you will be able to have it tomorrow. I will try again to give it to you today, but if I hear screams, I see cuts, or the colleagues tell me about arguments, I'll come to the cell and I'll kick your ass, do you understand?*" - "*Do not worry, you cannot imagine!, in a few days I will be able to complete a semester without critical events for the very first time, look, I even told my mother that I want to frame it!*" - "*That's right, tell me how long have you been in prison*" - "*Several years*" - "*And how long have we known each other?*" - "*Always several years*" - "*That's it. Look, I'm serious, you have to stay calm, otherwise I'll kick your ass*" – "*But if I told you I'll finish the semester soon!*" [Field Note 480]

Consistently, since it is crucial to create and reproduce authority and compliance, a way to reduce the gap is identifying a prisoner and entitled him as person of trust.

We meet a working prisoner, the Inspector treats him in a benevolent way. "*He has been here for many years, he is an important, special figure, because you know that you can trust him and you need to keep calm in the section*" [Field Note 215]

"*The relationship between escort officers and inmates is very different from that between assistants and inmates: here inside the prison you must be able to measure empathy, ability to read the situation and authority, because management is daily and in the long term. During the escort, however, everything is different: you have a goal, to take the prisoner from A to B without any critical events, so you talk to them first and look for a compromise*". He mimics to me: "*Listen mate, clear pacts long friendship: tell me what your intentions are and we will act accordingly. How many*

times do you want to stop, where, what are you planning to do, I don't want trouble here". The section is different [Field Note 495]

Hence, identifying as correctional officer is a daily renegotiation, both internal and external. At the end of the previous chapter, I remarked the relevance of a culture informing all the prison's inhabitants, correctional officers included. In this chapter, we have seen how the relational factor acquires a double significance. Indeed, it is deeply influenced and hindered by the unceasing reproduction of an antagonism by correctional officers, to differentiate themselves and affirm their role as public officials with authority – putting themselves in a superior hierarchical level and showing condescendence at most. Notwithstanding, at the same time correctional officers cannot help but admitting the incredible power of deploying their authority through relational means: being flattered to be recognized as a good professional able to be respected and to manage the most difficult cases. Most of all, they are satisfied to be helpful and efficient: their self-image, within themselves and exteriorly, is safe. It might not be the role they expected, but they discovered - and are happy to share – a different way to be socially labelled as a *good officers*.

The next chapter will investigate the link between authority, formal and informal sanction, and how correctional officers tend to "use their vastly underestimated discretion against legitimacy and not for it", aiming at illustrate "what works' for today, 'what works' for tomorrow or the end of the week, and 'what is fair'" (Ivi, p.340).

VI ACTING AS CORRECTIONAL OFFICER: AUTHORITY TROUGH DISCRETIONALITY

"Approved attributes and their relation to face make every man his own jailer; this is a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell."

"The expressive coherence that is required in performances points out a crucial discrepancy between our all-too-human selves and our socialized selves.
As human beings we are presumably creatures of variable impulse with moods and energies that change from one moment to the next.
As characters put on for an audience, however, we must not be subjects to ups or downs.
A certain bureaucratization of the spirit is expected so that we can be relied upon to give a perfectly homogenous performance at every appointed time."

Erving Goffman, 1978 - The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

The stylistic footprint of choosing quotes from narrative at the beginning of each chapter and re-reading them through the main sociological lens has not been followed for this last chapter. In fact, although the literature offers countless examples of Goffman's theoretical stance, the sociologist's use of a dramaturgical metaphor to illustrate individuals' performances seemed to be the proper tailpiece for this work, intertwining both.

In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Erving Goffman conceptualizes the construction of identity analyzing interpersonal interaction. The individuals switch from a front stage and backstage behavior, and, while in the former the person (the *actor*) is aware of being observed by an audience, thus following certain rules and social conventions aiming at adhering to social desirability, in the backstage the performance is not necessary (Goffman, 1978). Consistently, the Self is not owned by the performer, but is the negotiated result of the performance enacted in front of an audience. Most of all, such interactive process creates a shared culture, which is indeed inter-subjectively negotiated rather than internalized through an individual order (Faccio and Costa, 2013).

I already clarified the risk of neglecting macro-analysis of the organized system and institutions and focusing only on micro-interactions, and I agree with Denzin on the misleading nature of Goffman metaphor (Denzin, 2002): a political understanding of the institutions is needed and cannot be overlooked (Faccio and Costa, 2013). Consistently, acknowledging the importance of both macro and micro perspectives - or, to better say, using micro to explain the macro - has laid the foundations for this work, and in analyzing the construction of correctional officers' identity (see *infra*, chapter IV) and relations with prisoners emerging from correctional officers' representations (see *infra* chapter V), I centered the analysis on the daily interactions occurred in the penitentiary always considering them as the outcome of a complex system of institutional power and culture. On the same line, in this chapter I take into consideration correctional officers' practices and discretional use of power looking at them as the individual response to the unique environment of the penitentiary, which shapes behaviors within a limbo of strict rules that apply to all the prisoners, and elastic case-by-case judgement.

6.1 Reporting dirty looks. The grey-zone bureaucrats

In Chapter II of the theoretical framework, I mentioned Lipsky's choice of referring to the field of corrections to exemplify street-level bureaucratic discretion. Provocatively, the author stresses how prison guards' objective judgement on inmates' silent insolence, perceived only by some "dirty looks", might be questionable (Lipsky, 2010). In the same chapter, I found extremely helpful Dubois's argumentation about the intertwined nature of state apparatus and street-level bureaucrats' visions, which are each other's eyes: the schematic vision of the state's policies is mirrored in everyday practices of its bureaucrats, which confirm and enhance it (Dubois, 2014). Before proceeding with the presentation of what I observed during the fieldwork in terms of use of discretion and leeway degree, I need to take a step back. Notably, the rationale behind outlining the analysis of the ethnographic notes in three different chapters followed a funnel approach: in order to observe and interpret correctional officers' practices, I thought it was important to investigate how a correctional officer sees his/her role, which are the motivations that pushed him/her to choose such professional path, as well as which are the main representations he/she has on prisoners of both sexes (or, to better say, of *all genders*). Extremely simplifying, we are in front of an environment which demands a wide set of

skills: control, psychological support, practical help. In most of the cases, correctional officers did not expect and/or are not willing to develop and deploy such competences. Moreover, they struggle to find a correlation between the mission and function they believe the prison should have, and their daily activity. To wear the cloak of bureaucrats with the power of writing reports is far from the image of the police officer they anticipated. On the other hand, we have also observed that a large part chose the job amongst very different options, with the only aim of ensuring economic stability. In both cases, the impact with the prison system is disconcerting: in the best scenario, they feel useless, or ineffective, lacking in being recognized as authoritative. One strategy implemented by correctional officers is time dilation. Indeed, engaged in a personal battle against horizontal subsidiarity, blaming the Regional political culture of invalidating penitentiary's objectives through the application of a too much lax and indulgent approach, correctional officers strictly implement internal directives at their own time, taking advantage of the bureaucratic red tape to prolong punishment or suspend decisions. Consistently, correctional officers are in a grey zone of Dubois's description of bureaucrats: they effectively are the State's arm and do contribute to shape the State's proxemics, but eventually develop a feeling of betrayal towards the *real bureaucrats*, those who ambushed in the office with higher ranks, away from the true hard work.

> "The problem of non-continuity of work re-emerges: there are always many changes and following the events is difficult. She refers to those of the Department of Penitentiary Administration, those who are in the offices, as ambushes" [Field Note 88]

Correctional officers' life seems close to Schopenhauer's pendulum, swinging between papers and empty time.

> "The inspectors begin the usual paper filling process (turn on the computer, print the correct documents, write the spontaneous declaration of request for cancellation of the ban on meeting, prepare a document on word with correct heading where you send an official report to the director, print again, have the inmate sign, attach everything and hand over to the appropriate person)" [Field Note 92]

> "The agent seems nice to me, even if a little forced. She asks me what I think of the profession, I tell her the usual phrase that I recycle to everyone about the paper overload. "*Yes, we have a lot of papers! In fact, now I have immediately to arrange the*

desk, look what a mess, from all these papers you say". I feel a slight discomfort" [Field Note 379]

Even if the act of filling papers is experienced as a burden of unnecessary workload, it is a lifeline to avoid being accounted responsible of negligence. In fact, correctional officers strongly rely on it (see *infra*, field note 95), sometimes also overusing the tool, reporting every single move of prisoners without a clear rationale.

A colleague says to the Inspector A. to have filled a disciplinary report on the trans inmate refusing lunch. Inspector A immediately intervenes: "*You mean that you notified the fact*" – "*Yes, with a report*" – "*But did she refuses food because she went on a hunger strike or because she doesn't want food from the refectory and eats anything else?*" – "*No, there is not strike. She simply did not want lunch" – "You see, they are two different things: if it is for a strike then you have to fill a report, otherwise no, many inmates refuse food, it is within their possibilities*" [Field Note 298]

The report of the suspension of therapy must also be entered in the computer system. The interface is simple, but there is always the same problem: correctional officers are required to report every single event, but not all of them are critical events. The suspension of a therapy by autonomous, voluntary decision, without any demonstration intentions, does not appear in the drop-down menu. But it must be inserted. How to do? After a telephone clarification, eventually the Inspector understands that a report is not needed: apparently if the doctor provides a medical certificate is sufficient, and you can avoid sending the report by computer [Field Note 467]

The confusion of interpreting disciplinary bureaucracy as a mere punishment tool, rather than a precise and official resource to restore illegitimate situations, is well exemplified by an event I witnessed during the fieldwork. During one of my mornings in the female section, a young officer came to report to the Inspector an event that happened a few days before, concerning a razor blade. The Inspector had already explained to me that new inmates entering in prison must leave all their belongings, which will eventually get back in their possession after being inspected. I asked if this procedure is implemented on the basis of internal regulation, but the Inspector told me that it "*has never been completed*", and therefore is based on internal circulars and directives. Either way, razors are definitely

not allowed in the female section. Nevertheless, they are often used as bargaining chips, crossing the boundaries of sections: the other day, a female inmate was found with a razor blade in her bra. The young officer immediately filled a disciplinary report without proceeding with a direct action, but the information somehow arrived at the inmate, who verbally abused the officer. The Inspector intervenes by clarifying some points: when an offense such as possession of a razor blade is revealed, the first thing to do is to restore the situation, seizing the object. The report is only consequential, "*we cannot intervene solely with bureaucracy*". The mistake therefore cost the prisoner a negative reaction: "*You should scold her, seize the blade and explicitly explain what awaits her. Filling the report without warning the inmate and allow her to keep blade makes no sense*" [Field Note 35]

The lack of any rationality is evident to me as well: to the officer, the inmate should be punished for the significance of her act (*doing* something forbidden), regardless the merit of the act (*owning* something forbidden). The issue here, in enforcing rules, is being aware of what these rules effectively are, and if they change. Since the internal regulation is not existent, and you have to keep track of service provisions, the temptation to resort to common sense and personal discretion is high.

> "Another problem is related to the ability to keep track of what is happening, especially with respect to binding service provisions, which are not only communicated via email or posted but must be signed in person. For the rest, current regulations are used with a certain degree of discretion" [Field Note 69]

> "The two Inspectors have to sort the papers: today there are many questions from inmates, some concern the hairdresser, others the change of cell. The less reliable ones are directly torn off and thrown away" [Field Note 608]

The event of Field note 35 happened in May 2019. Interestingly, in July of the same year, the issue of allowing razor blades seemed ready to be solved: Inspector A. is trying to organize a meeting with the Direction and the various operators in order to discuss the possibility of allowing the use of razors also for women: "*They are allowed in the male and in the trans section, moreover the blades are used as a bargaining chip, the best way to respond to an offense that has now become practice is to convert it into a regulated law. We will see what we can do*" [Field Note 405]. This is a crucial key to read the impact of practices on the justification of prison's regulation. Indeed, something that has been historically considered as an offense gradually became a reiterated practice behind

correctional officers' back, which has not been followed by any of the predicted risky behaviors. The only way to re-establish order is to regulate it with new dispositions and, authoritatively, proclaiming it admissible. What emerges is that prison - a place full of rules, is in reality a place where the rules are daily negotiated and re-shaped according to the situation, and, more than often, according to correctional officers' own discretion.

To stick on the example of external objects allowed in the wards, three other events well illustrate how correctional officer deal and use the discretional power of inflexibly referring to internal regulations. According to circulars and dispositions, inmates can own blankets within specific measurements and shapes. Most of all, blankets sewn in double layer cannot absolutely be allowed, in order to avoid the risk of inmates hiding something inside of it. One morning, a female prisoner received a package of laundry that she had sent outside to wash and disinfect. Among other things, the correctional officers find a blanket that does not comply with the allowed measurements, double-layered. They got upset, and forbid its entry, seizing it. The detainee pointed out that she had actually owned that same blanket for many months while in detention, and no one had said anything. She had just sent it out to wash it, and so now she wanted it back. The answer of correctional officer is adamant: "*you should have thought before sending it out. Now you cannot have it*". The underestimation of the influence of such behaviors in building a trustworthy relationship with prisoners is observable. The total lack of a continuity of practices and rules, gives space to a continuous negotiation during which the only resource is the power of the single individual who decides to allow - or not, something that should be forbidden - or not.

The second event is equally of interest, since it is linked with what I have called the *grey zone* of Dubois's description of bureaucrats: the constant feeling of betrayal by those hierarchically superior. Indeed, while I was in the female section, a correctional officer entered Inspectors' room showing a bag: "*Look what I intercepted from the Director!*". In the bag there is an aluminum pot. "*Do you think I going to let something like that through? It was aimed at an inmate!*". The pot does not seem to fit right: by internal regulation, inmates can have pots no wider than 20 cm in diameter, with plastic handles. This is 23, has wooden handles and an internal iron disc. "*Among other things, when I told her that she could not give it to her, she also made the gesture as if to say "What a bore!" can you imagine? Look at what I wrote: this pot cannot enter because the regulation prohibits it. She*

must stick to it!" - "*Do more: tell her that you will take it over and that it will only be given to the inmate once she has come out. In a few days she will be leaving anyway!*". Inspector A turns to me to explain that with this Director it is not possible to work, because she treats the inmates as if they were her own daughters [Field Note 609].

Finally, the third event I would like to discuss furthers the complexity of correctional officers' system of choice, adding a moral dimension.

> "Meanwhile, other colleagues discuss the possibility of allowing the entry of porn magazines for an inmate residing at the ATSM (mental health unit within prison, NDR). They shrug their shoulders: "*Why deny them? What harm does it do? Indeed, a vibrator would also be allowed to enter! Some inmates tried to make it anyway*" [Field Note 597]

> "Among the various requests, an inmate asks for porn magazines. "*What do we do, will we give them to them?*" They say, laughing. The Inspector chill immediately the mockery: "*Anyways, let's think about it for a moment*" [Field Note 622]

Thus, I felt a bit surprised. Indeed, I am well aware of a case of a female prisoner whose request of a vibrator was denied, since a local organization handled the case willing to build on it a legal precedent in order to wide the possibilities for prisoners to freely access to sex-toys. In this situation, correctional officers show in front of me an openness that I struggle to interpret. I tend to see it as a provocation, and at the same time an expression of a kind of tolerance from the side of correctional officers. Attention must be paid to the statement: "*Some inmates tried to make it anyway*", which confirms that the precautionary function of regulation is often neglected, and it just follows through and is adapted to what actually happens within the wards' walls.

Dubois' analysis of bureaucratic interaction confutes the irrelevance of the individual features of agents, stressing that the hyper-codified environment of bureaucracy is in reality constructed on the encounters between a public who does not know agents' attributions, the members of the institution who are not aware of what is happening at the desk, and the agents themselves who are uncertain of their function (Dubois, 2016).

> "The theme of the infinite bureaucracy of the prison will be the red thread of my second entry. The Inspector who was present during the health emergency stays an extra hour to close the report. Left alone, she confesses that she feels in difficulty

> because she has been nominated Inspector only recently, without pursuing the same path as Inspector A: she was not chief superintendent but only agent. "We are not qualified, we do not know the protocol well and especially we are not sure about the exceptions. We, I mean, who come from the ranks" [Field Note 59]

This latter point is important, since clarifies how the role of the agent is directly constructed during the confrontation with the client, and it is strongly influenced by biographical factors as experience, age and moral values. As a way of example, in field note 608 (see p.) correctional officers decide to tear off and throw away the requests from prisoners that they label as *less reliable* – less reliable for who and according to which shared system of values, is difficult to assess. The next paragraph investigates the degree of discretion and moral code of correctional officers.

6.2 Disciplinary strategies. When punishment is not enough

In Chapter 4 I showed how correctional officers' frustration of feeling powerless has evolved in internal strategies to survive the perceived lack of authority. Nevertheless, even the established practice of deciding *whether* report wrong behaviors and *when* conveying it to the Director, seems not sufficient to overcome the issue of properly educate prisoners.

In commenting one of the numerous critical events happened, Inspector A shared with me her own proposal for improving the disciplinary force within the wards. Apparently, a few days before an inmate asked for her cell to be opened five minutes earlier than usual, and since the assistant did not respond promptly, the inmate began to yell at her. Once opened, the inmate continued to scream, claiming that the assistant with her attitude was depriving her of dignity, and with a kick she pushed the cell's gate against the officer. The assistant's hand got stuck between the wall and the cell's gate. In the emergency room she was given a six-day prognosis. Now, what to do? How to behave? First of all, disciplinary report and closure regime, but she shall also be moved from the prison. The Inspector confesses to be deeply frustrated, in this case she feel powerless:

> "Let's go back to talking about transfers and their punitive function. Before the inmates feared disciplinary reports because they could lead to a transfer, now it is much more difficult, especially for female prisoners: this prison is the only women's

prison in the Region. This has greatly weakened the power to intimidate of the police force" [Field Note 469]

In reality the detainee herself, who in her statement denied the attack saying that it was an accident due to a moment of anger for personal reasons and not against the single assistant, eventually asked for a closure regime in order to not dealing with prison police personnel. The Inspector describes her as a paranoid person with a tendency to victim complex. "*Surely, the assistant will file a complaint against the prisoner, but in the meantime we have to decide how to act against her. Solitary confinement does not seem to be a good way, moreover, in a few days the prisoner will go on an award permit - it was not possible to revoke it in time. In fact, the action takes place on two levels: from a disciplinary point of view, but also from a punitive re-educational point of view. Following the report there will certainly be a disciplinary measure, but she should be subject to immediate punishment within the ward*" [Field Notes 519]. We come to talk about the methods that, as department coordinator, she plans to adopt for the management of women's sections. During a meeting with the operational team, she proposed to overturn the punitive logic towards wrong behaviors: instead of incurring punishment, prisoners should do not have access to rewards. In short, the additional treatment activities must be considered as rewards not easy to access for everyone, but only for those who prove to deserve them. Those who misbehave will not suffer a potentially mild punishment, but they will not have access to the benefit [Field Notes 518-522].

According to the Italian penitentiary regulation, the compliance to rules of conduct might be interpreted as acquiring sense of responsibility that deserves to be rewarded. To the art. 37 O.P., in fact, "the rewards represent the recognition of the sense of responsibility shown in personal conduct and in activities organized in institutions". The law, therefore, is not satisfied by a "passive compliance with the rules of conduct", but requires "behaviors deserving of a positive appreciation because motivated by a sense of responsibility, demonstrated in the community life of the institute". Moreover, to guarantee the impartial exercise of administrative power, art. 76, paragraph I, also identifies the conducts' typologies deserving positive consideration. Nevertheless, the discretional nature of rewarding behaviors deserving positive appreciation seems to not be limited to objective system of regulation. Indeed, whereas the presence in prison is justified in terms of demerit - because of the actions carried out that have generated a negative contribution

to society, according to the law – the individuals, rather than the misconducts, are primarily judged for specific proprieties that do not fit with the society imaginary. Consistently, the social and working reintegration of prisoners is based on a rewarding approach that creates shared knowledge between prison's operators and prisoners on behavioral and moral code. Moreover, prison system provides incentives for prisoners to behave accordingly. In particular, good behavior is often rewarded by sentence reduction, period of parole, and the provision of in-prison privileges. For instance, according to the good behavior institution, a deduction of forty-five days for each single semester of served sentence is granted to the prisoner who has proven to participate in the work of re-education, as recognition of such participation, and for the purposes of a more effective reintegration into society. In case of no compliance, the forty-five days are not deduced.

Thus, the proposal of a negating the access to specific rewards due to misbehavior is already existent. Clearly, Inspector would like to extend it to all the accessible benefits, even those which are granted by law, such as work[31]:

> "She also has clear ideas about work: there is not for everyone, the attribution system takes into account only the length of time in detention, not the actual need or conduct. Each prison has different criteria. She believes it is not a good system: it is not fair that you can behave as you please, that you can have a thousand disciplinary reports, and still have access to work. You must deserve it, the re-educational function should also pass through this" [Field Note 648]

"*Only for those who prove to deserve them*"- "*You must deserve it*". In Chapter 2 I focused on the disciplinary categories of deservingness and merit, showing the applicability of neoliberal paternalism approach as assessed by Soss et al. (2011) to the punitive system, which implied a constant monitoring of behaviors through a system of incentives (Soss et al., 2011). Dubois sees in agents' high degree of leeway and independence a powerful tool to define their role and assign identities and behavioral rules (Dubois, 2016). Concerning correctional officers' role in the rewarding system, Chantraine and Sallée typology (2015) retraces three axes structuring their practices: i) supervising, separating, isolating (practices linked to management activities); ii) negotiating, discussing, punishing

[31] The art. 15 of the penitentiary system, law no. 354, identifies work as one of the elements of the rehabilitation treatment, establishing that, except in cases of impossibility, the offender and the inmate are guaranteed employment.

(informal practices to prevent incident and reduce internal disorder); iii) observing, recording, tracing (practices strictly linked with the ultimate power of prison guards – traceability of inmates' conduct) (Chantraine and Sallée, 2015, pp. 117-118). The tendency of correctional officers to judge through their own moral compass and the consequent claim on prisoners behaving according to it, has been often showed to me, intertwining the three axes in which the informal practices fulfil the ultimate resource to regain authoritative power.

One time, while I was spending the morning to the male section, a prisoner entered the room asking to be heard. He reported various problems. First, he should be enrolled in the educational program of the prison, but the day the school began he discovered to be not on the list and did not start the fourth grade along with his classmates. Second, the same thing happened with the music course: he had to enter the course but was not allowed to go. Third, he would like to change the ward. The Inspector takes it upon herself to resolve everything, especially the school. As for the change of cell, she told him that it was not possible because there were not free cells, and to abstain to send a formal request because it would be thrown away. Nevertheless, since *"you know everything long before we do, as soon as you hear of a cell that must be freed then write. Now is useless*". In the room there is a good atmosphere, the prisoner is teased because wearing the Juventus shirt (there is historically a high competitiveness between Juventus and city's soccer team). Everyone laughed, including the prisoner, justifying himself by saying that he has been in Italy for 20 years and that he betrays everything but not his football faith. Once he left the room, the Inspector discovered that the prisoner was not allowed to the fourth grade since he failed the year before and, therefore, he should be re-enrolled in the third grade, but it is not known whether this year the course will be activated or not. "*As long as the music class is concerned, I don't care, the important thing is school. Once an inmate really cares!*" [Field Note 649]. This encounter is full of information that is worth pondering on. Indeed, the Inspector deliberately chooses which of the three requests deserves her attention, basing the decision only on what she would expect from the prisoner: to be a good student. Whether he cares taking part to the music class or not, to the correctional officer is irrelevant. The same for the request to be transferred to another cell: it is, if at all, an additional burden during a complicated shift. At the end of the day, prisoners should only show good intention dedicating to tasks that would give sense to their re-education,

through hard work and commitment. The amusement of a course of music is not included. The music class already represented a bone of contention on another occasion:

> "The other day, some correctional officers had a dispute with the music teachers concerning the possibility to safekeeping the instruments within the wards. Correctional officers would not take on the responsibility without an explicit authorization from the Director. Today, the discourse of the instruments left by the music teacher in the section comes out, raising complaints about teachers' behaviors. Among other things, assistant D. wonders how useful it is to make prisoners go to music school: "*Wouldn't another job be better? Maybe something professionalizing*".

Nevertheless, the influence of representations and stigmatizing prejudices on prisoners has a strong impact on correctional officers' personal beliefs on their re-educational path.

> Her colleague answers back: "*It depends, if they would be hired in a restaurant where I use to go out for dinner, it wouldn't suit me so much!*" [Field Note 376]

Chantraine and Sallée typology (2015) could be used as a starting point to summarize these initial findings I observed during the fieldwork. Indeed, correctional officers' preference of informal practices over management and observational activities has been observed as a practical and efficient tool to overcome the feeling of being negatively affected by lack of authority and being perceived as passive agents. In fact, whereas the authors' ethnographical findings substantiate Crewe's quotation of a British guard: "*All we've got is the power of the pen*" (Crewe, 2011) as the ultimate real power owned by correctional officers, my fieldwork experience shows how the triptych *observing, recording and tracing* could not be considered an empowering force without the discretional and informal practices that give to correctional officers the power to decide *when*, and *if*, actually doing it.

> "*Inspector, why, despite everything I do, you never punish me and you don't put me in isolation?*" – "*Because that's what you want, it already seems like an excellent punishment to leave you where you are*" [Field Note 561]

Hence, the power of the pen as a punishment tool is weakened, and the most neglected function has been reattributed to it: to just write, without real consequences – a bureaucratic function. What emerges in some correctional officers, is a high level of self-indulgence. In fact, they are persuaded that everything they do really has a positive

outcome, in the long run, and that prisoners do not understand that what is necessary today will have a great positive impact tomorrow. Furthermore, they believe that part of their mission is to induce a personal change in prisoners, who should change their behavior as requested to be a better person and citizen.

> "*The real satisfaction of this job is seeing a person changing from scratch. Obviously in the face of a critical event it is necessary to take precautionary actions immediately, but the treatment takes time, it is prolonged over time*" [Field Note 147]

6.3 Authority in gendered wards: how punishing and rewarding change

In the previous pages I largely used the concept of practices to interpret correctional officers' representations and professional routines. Moreover, practices have been fundamental to investigate the relational aspects between guards and prisoners, guards and prison staff, guards and their senior chiefs (see *infra*, chapter V). Adler and Pouliot define practices as: "competent performances. More precisely, practices are socially meaningful patterns of action, which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world" (Adler and Pouliot, 2011, p. 4). Thus, using Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus, Pouliot asserts the ontological priority of the logic of practicality in relation to the mutually constitutive dynamics between agency and structure (Pouliot, 2008). The author defines practices as the result of inarticulate, practical knowledge that makes the action "self-evident" or commonsensical – namely, are the result of the habitus – a form of "learnt ignorance". Then, Pouliot explains that the inarticulate nature of habitus is comprised of "corporeal knowledge", in contrast to representational knowledge: "Being a female or a male, to take a general example, is a bodily form of knowledge that informs most of our practices without conscious reflection about it. People behave in gendered manners often without any explicit teaching; their masculine or feminine behavior is not something they can readily express in words" (Ibidem, p. 273). Hence, it is possible to affirm that agents act intentionally without intention, or, in other words, "individuals make choices, but do not choose the principles of these choices" (Wacquant, 1989, p. 45).

In the theoretical framework I discussed and presented the debate on gendered organizations, meaning that "gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life" (Acker, 1990, p. 567). Narrowing the analysis to the practices, a gendered practice is consonant with the assumptions about the differences between women and men and, in its repetition, contribute to the reproduction of these differences (Acker, 1992). Britton's study on gendered organizational logic and practices in male and female prisons (1997) provides an interesting example of gendered practice – namely, the assignment of duties on the basis of gender. The result of author's research reveals "the essentialism at the core of the prison's hegemonic occupational masculinity" (Britton, 1997, p. 810): the perceptions of the assignments tended to be dichotomized into "safe" and "unsafe" positions, with the latter (for instance, dealing with violent inmates) seen as inappropriate for women. Interestingly, such dichotomization of roles has been confirmed during previous research I had the opportunity to conduct in prison: female correctional officers do have a surveillance role, but when an outbreak of violence in female prison happens, it is (violently) handle by male correctional officers. Thus, the order enforcement – a competent performance, a protocoled and ruled system of actions – is declined in a specific practice that changes, in the same environment, based on the gendered role of correctional officers and prisoners.

6.3.1 (Acting as) female correctional officers

In the main corridor of the female section's ground floor there is a framed print, portraying two kittens staring to a glass of water, in which a red fish swims in circle. Even though the print has a remarkable size, I did not immediately notice it. It has been there since the very first time I entered in the penitentiary, and, even if I saw it, I never looked at it. Now, without any information about when, who, and why it has been hung on the wall, I can merely interpret it through the lens I acquired spending time in the section. Whether it was intended as an Orwellian friendly reminder of the ubiquitous eye of someone caring and only potentially dangerous, or only denoting the creepy taste of some former correctional officer unaware of its double meaning, I found it interesting. First, it is in the female section, and I struggled to see anything similar in the male wards. Second, it is both reassuring and warning at the same time, a perfect metaphor of the carrot and stick tactics.

In chapter 4 and 5 I presented correctional officers' professional expectations on their role and the importance of balancing empathy and authoritativeness. During the fieldwork, I had the possibility to deepen both these aspects, meeting male and female professionals and comparing their main narratives on the differences on two levels: semantical and practical. As a way of example, Inspector A always referred to male and female prisoners and colleagues as "boys" and "girls" [Field Note 11]. Undoubtedly, she was influenced by my presence in using a specific register of communication and set her tone favoring an informal environment, toe-curling and infantilizing. Nevertheless, this not only mirrors a specific mindset in which sex segregation in prison is justified but has a direct effect on the internal organization as well.

> "I ask how long the shifts last: 6 hours, generally, sometimes 8 hours if there is a shortage of staff. The 6 hours shift is for "girls" and it is justified by the fact that "*they have double jobs, at home and in prison*", while "boys" can have longer shifts. I take the opportunity to ask you if she prefers to be called *Ispettrice* (female inspector, ndr) or an *Ispettore* (male Inspector, ndr). She says that to her it is not important: "*It is part of a professional sphere, it does not question my personality, it does not offend me*"" [Field Note 36]

Britton studied the ways gender-neutral practices reinforce gender inequality among officers corps, and how it benefits male correctional officers (1997). Thus, in analyzing the inner meaning of Field Note 36, the difference in the shifts' organization within the two sections might be intended as a way to ease female correctional officers' workload, recognizing the double care work burden the women have, and as a practice rooted in a stereotyped narrative that reinforces and reproduces a specific social model based on gendered role.

Consistently, norms about gender, which should not be understood as given but as situated in a relational process based on negotiation, affect correctional officers work and it is mirrored also in the relation whit inmates and diverse attitudes of correctional officers that work in female and male units of the same prison: a detainee reported that she experienced a diversified treatment in respect of the possibility to receive items from outside, since she and the other female prisoners have not be allowed to received tobacco, while in the male unit the correctional officers were more keen to permit it. In this case, a general rule – allow or not allow some items from the external – has been declined in a

gendered practice – do not allow some items only on the basis of gender because female prisoners are not considered trustworthy and more incline to fight and tease each other.

Gendered narratives permeate the way male and female wards are managed also in the everyday practices. One time I was in the female office with Inspectors, and while they were filling the papers, I remained standing. They invited me to take a chair, but the only left was the one where the inmates sit. I hesitated, since I did not want to take the sit of female prisoners coming to be heard. Inspectors insisted: "*Look, here we allow them to sit, in the male section they are not so kind. Prisoners have a different attitude; they should take their hands out of their pockets. Our colleagues demand respect, it's different here*". I ask Inspector A if she changes the way she acts when assigned to the male ward. She says no, because, although inmates know they have "*someone to talk to*" in front of them, they always do it with a lot of respect" [Field Note 98].

"Some to talk to": in paragraph 5.3 I stressed the pivotal role of empathy as a coping strategy and a skill to effectively communicate with inmates. During the fieldwork, I expressly asked how is for a woman entering this kind of profession:

> "*In reality, it is not difficult, outside there are stereotypes but then they do not apply in prison. Unfortunately, in the section you work with prisoners of your own sex, but then the functions are the same*". I ask why she said "unfortunately" and she tells me that it is linked to the typical female listening skills: men are more hasty, they don't bother to waste time on prisoners, they try, on average, to immediately close the most insidious practices. On the other hand, with experience, she has learned to listen and welcome, so as not to make the person feel to be forgotten. Obviously, she doesn't generalize, but a woman probably has this kind of attitude more easily [Field Note 73]

Interestingly, from the words of the Inspector, the stereotypes that do not apply in the penitentiary are "*those from outside*", namely the imagine of correctional officers' work as a predominantly male activity. On the other hand, all the stereotypical narratives - the typical female listening skills and male superficiality - do apply.

> "They are tidying up the office: since last September they had to leave the female ward to participate in the training course for inspectors, thus a male colleague oversaw the room and you know, "*men are more superficial*" [Field Note 109]

A female Inspector shared an interesting point of view with me on this matter during a morning I spent at the male section.

> "*The elements are many: a woman who works in a male section is paradoxically more respected, because it does not arouse competition or aggression. It seems to calm people down. Of course, it is often a problem to have one's authority recognized, especially to Muslim prisoners, but this decompression effect is clearly visible. Same thing, overturned, in the female section: a male colleague softens the competition between women, even if at times it can trigger a seductive charge*". She cannot enter a male ward or search a man, but in reality she often deals with the search of cells: a colleague does the body one, she the environmental one" [Field Note 633]

Thus, working with prisoners of the same sex is perceived as a triggering factor in intensifying competition and aggression, and the presence of opposites sex correctional officers has a decompressive function. Nevertheless, from both sides there is also a "seductive charge" to be taken into account and that is normalized and socially naturalized.

> "In commenting the change in attitude of male agents in front of me, the Inspector tells me that this is also an aspect of working as a woman in a men's section: "*You saw, they act in this way even with the nurses. It's normal. With us (middle-aged women, NDR) it is obviously different, we are almost a mother figure*" [Field Note 670]

Thus, female personnel are generally considered attractive and seductive and senior correctional officers tend to construct light-hearted relations on this basis.

> "We arrive upstairs, a young agent is in charge of the checkpoint. The Inspector is in the mood of playing around. He caresses her. "*How beautiful are you today! What did you do, with the hair, with the blush!*". She smiles pleased" [Field Note 449]

My attention is captured by the double-standardized perception of femininity when referred to correctional officers and prisoners. Indeed, while the latter are described as individual who deceived their social role, and share this narrative within the prisoners' group itself – "We meet a female inmate who reiterates the concept: there are no women here" [Field Note 457] - the former are recognized as an asset, as someone able to decompress a world saturated by testosterone and superficiality, and, even more, someone who need to be protected from the brutality of the male section.

As far as correctional officers' opinion on working in the male section concern, the general comment reflects negative perceptions, and the male wards is described as an unfriendly and dangerous place.

> "I tell to the Inspectors that the following day I will spend the morning at the male ward with Inspector K. Some junior assistants listen to the exchange and exclaim: "*The male ward! Poor thing, how disgusting. I don't really know how they can stand being there, it's all dirty, there is a terrible smell already as you go up the stairs. The female prisoners are at least cleaner*" [Field Note 401]

> "As we go up the stairs, the words of some police assistant about the feminine come to mind: "*At the male section? Can you resist, with that stink?"* [Field Note 627]

Nevertheless, when the discourse switches to the internal organization of the two sections and working modalities, the opinion gap amongst female assistants and Inspectors widens.

> "*Perhaps, if we could supervise the section two at a time, instead of one by one, it would be better, because female inmates are open, the more violent ones tend to want to command inside the section and have a leadership position. If an assistant runs alone in section, she is afraid, but if there are two they support each other better. In the male section it is different, they are closed. There are many episodes of violence even among prisoners, only they are not reported: often they say to have accidentally fallen, to have slipped, it is no one's fault. If we insist they would make us read between the lines, saying "I cannot tell it". This is the climate of the sections*" [Field Note 589]

Indeed, having to supervise and control inmates in an open regime rather than in a close one shapes their daily activities differently, and change self-security perceptions. Some agents explain how different is working in the male section from the emotional burden point of view: if in the female section the emotional sphere plays a main role, in the male section it does not and things are easier [Field Note 129]. Moreover, while the male colleagues working in the male section have the isolation cell as punishment tool, in the female section there is only the disciplinary report which is rarely followed by a punitive disposition, and the threat of closing the section [Field Note 243]. Conversely, some correctional officers believe that working for women is much better. In fact, the male inmates are impossible, and the shifts are heavier: once a colleague working in the male section is assigned to a specific ward, that place becomes fixed; female correctional officer

can vary at each turn. Perhaps this possibility is better to her [Field Note 386]. What endures permanently is the bad reputation of female prisoners as a group. Consistently, when correctional officers are asked to express their beliefs on critical cruxes between female and male colleagues, they switch the terms of the matter on prisoners.

> "*The situation is dramatic; it has changed a lot. There is no big difference between the problems of the male and female prison police, what has happened is that the preparation of the body has greatly improved and the prison population, especially women, has drastically worsened*" [Field Note 48]

Notwithstanding all the internal organization issues in managing the female section previously discussed, from Inspectors' perspective it is still a blessed place of which women in prison should be grateful, but at the end of the day they just show resentment and ungratefulness.

> "The Inspector tells me that a few days earlier a delegation of young magistrates came to visit the prison. One of them said that female section is a happy island, because they are open, they have activities, they have a shower in the room, they have a very nice green area. She says it with a proud smile, but then adds: "*You see, the inmates don't appreciate it*" [Field Note 571]

In the theoretical framework I presented the hypothesis of the existence of a double standard within the penitentiary, where reward-punishment system is supported by different model of judgment rooted in specific gendered bias. From the fieldwork results, we can see that the correctional officers' representation of a deserving prisoner varies on the basis of an intersection of variables, and that sex in just one of them. Undoubtedly, there is a composite group, *the prisoners*, and an embedded and shared idea of what does it mean amongst correctional officers' in-group narrative. Nevertheless, there are other two groups: women and men, and within those we find many subgroups - Nigerians, drug-users, lesbians, desperate, violent people. Finally, we have also saw that the discretional use of correctional officers' power tends to implement practices through diverse modalities within the two sections, confirming the original hypothesis of this thesis.

VII CONCLUSIVE DISCUSSION

In the Handbook of Social Theory, it is possible to read: "We are all now acutely aware of the fact that defining a field is regarded by some commentators as a potentially dangerous political act, not only for what is defined as important through inclusion, but, perhaps more significantly, for what is implicitly defined as unimportant through exclusion"(Ritzer and Smart, 2000, p.1). Such acute awareness has been the methodological asset of the present thesis. Deciding whether one particular fact was relevant or not, reporting it and using it to show how my work is able to respond to the research questions and how these influenced the way I observe the facts, has been a important and compelling exercise. Indeed, altough my work has the only intent to offer a relevant scientific insight to better interpret and understand how penitentiary mechanisms work, the process of choosing specific analytical dimensions and excluding others, has been challenging. Moreover, in the methodolology chapter I problematized the possibility to effectively understand the complexity of a disciplinary model rooted on gendered and meritocratic assumptions by analysing a local Italian prison. Indeed, we saw that applying an emic perspective on correctional officers' standpoints and shared views allowed to observe and interpret their representations and practices, as well as how prison works, but whether it is possible to use such results to grasp and understand specific forms of social control on a general level, must be the object of a deeper discussion. I am going to present it in this conclusive chapter, discussing correctional officers' level of discipline and disciplining power.

7.1 Correctional officers as disciplined individuals

The correctional officers' motivation to pursue the career in an Italian prison is of great interest to grasp a better understading on disciplinary strategies. Indeed, as already explained in the methodological chapter, I draw from Hammersely the belief that the process of understanding social phenomena requires to locate them in a broader context, in order to effectively understand how they came into existence. Consistently, the type of correctional officer emerging from this ethnographical study strongly relies on the literature on poverty governance: the welfaristic social inclusion model requires commitment to work not only to prisoners, by imposing them expected behaviors, but also to correctional officers, who generally enter the profession to pursue a stable

profession. The anthropological type of individual of the liberal era – namely, the consumer of good and services, is either the one bearing the keys of the cells and the one beyond them. Indeed, we have said the *disciplining* is teaching obedience and shaping the correct citizen who will not disrupt social order, and the reference to prisoners is clear, but we have also said that its ultimate goal is to reshape the ways poor people think about and regulate themselves. The commitment to a profession that does not adhere with the self-representation of the individual nor is satisfying, not more than to guarantee a specific model of living, is highly exemplificatory of these disciplinary strategies. Indeed, the naturalization and the interiorization of an identity compliant with the maintenance of social order is almost complete: correctional officers enter a professional role and seem to remain only for an economical opportunity. The changes in the social control mechanism described by Soss and colleagues (2011), which affect not only poor but also lower-level governing authorities, clearly emerged from the fieldwork hereby presented. Nevertheless, even if I have showed a certain degree of adherence of correctional officers to disciplinary strategies that pertains to wider social control mechanism typical of the neoliberal paternalism, the context of penitentiary is still out of focus, and whether the prison culture influences correctional officers, pushing them in reproducing its codes of formal and informal rules, it not answered yet. In doing so, the interpretative key must be found in the cognitive dissonance that correctional officers experience once entered the job. As showed in chapter IV, the level of engagement with the mission of the organization could either exist as intrinsic motivation to enter the field or being developed as coping strategy to justify the permanence in the profession – hence, correctional officers are prone to believe in the mandate of the prison and tend to act according to it. What haphazardly confutes the disciplinary power of prison on correctional officers is the way prison works in that specific context, and the narratives they use to explain the prison system shortcomings. In other words, correctional officers do believe in prison's mission, but blame the prison system to be unable to pursue its own very mandate. Thus, according to this interpretation it seems that they cannot be defined as "disciplined individual" within the prison's gears. The ubiquitous power of the total institution of disciplining correctional officers by informing their thoughts, feelings, and actions, must come into terms with the daily discomfort of discovering the high value of their role always doubted and, at the end of the day, not so much useful to pursue the re-educative function of the prison. Undoubtedly, they blame the prisoners, but they also blame the prison system itself and

struggle to hold on and believing in the imaginary of correctional officers as poor people saviors.

Thus, in table 1 we have seen that it is possible to divide correctional officers in four main categories, depending on the level of material reward, and the type of motivation that pushed them to pursue the profession. Nevertheless, from what we have seen in paragraph 4.2.2 and in the following chapters, the level of engagement should not be referred to the mission of the penitentiary in general, to which correctional officers are prone to adhere, but to the specific prison they work in.

i) *Unengaged employee satisfied*: correctional officers who entered the job due to extrinsic motivation, but the material reward guarantees a sufficient level of satisfaction for the job, and the negative aspects of the job are a burden they are willing to take;

ii) *Engaged employee satisfied*: correctional officers who entered the job due to intrinsic motivation, and the material reward is the one expected. They are completely satisfied and believe in the aim of the institution;

iii) *Unengaged employee unsatisfied*: correctional officers who entered the job due to extrinsic motivation, and the material reward is insufficient. They pursued the profession just for economic stability, but they struggle to achieve it;

iv) *Engaged employee unsatisfied*: correctional officers who entered the job due to intrinsic motivation and the material reward in insufficient. They believed in the mission and mandate of the institution, but eventually the scarce economic reward led to unsatisfaction.

Of course you can also find some agent who completely disrupted any bond with penitentiary's high mission, but from my ethnographical study such disrupting mechanisms are a rarity, and, most of the time, muted by the self-sustaining penitentiary system that tends to reproduce itself in spite of everything.

> "The prison correctional officer says something particularly interesting*: "Prisoners are a source of income for the State: in fact they have a cost*[32] *that must be covered, the structure*

[32] According to Antigone's Report (2021), each prisoners costs to the State 143€ per day. If we analyze the total costs of Justice in Italy, we see that in 2021 the Government spent 8 billion for Justice administration, 35% of each is devoted to the penitentiary system. Nevertheless, more than the 3/4 of funding are personnel and administrative costs, while the funding for educational projects and treatment are residual. Thus, a critical

must be maintained, the state has an interest in keeping them in prison" (Journal entry, 25 May 2018 (b))

The excerpt above is from previous research I conducted in the same prison. It is bewildering, and surely it influenced my willingness of carrying on the present work, but it remains an isolated incident. In fact, as I just wrote, the penitentiary system powerfully reproduces its internal dynamics and mechanisms even if the level on engagement and satisfaction of correctional officers is low. Indeed, whether they chose their professional path due to extrinsic or intrinsic motivations, they eventually develop a sufficient level of engagement to stay. The pivotal difference is in what they are engaged in: they are not engaged to the mission of the local prison or to the penitentiary system in general, but to what I called "*a universal culture within a unique world*" (see *infra*, p.94). So much so, that no matter to which category of table 1 a correctional officer belongs. Indeed, while on one hand they develop an in-group culture shared with all the prison community, on the other they are socialized to peculiar working methods and interactions in a specific prison and tend to reproduce them in order to resist and contrast what in their working environment seems hindering their professional mandate. In other words, we can observe correctional officers who either enter the profession firmly believing in its mandate, or correctional officers who enter the profession only as a way to achieve a proper income and eventually start to believe the mandate to be correct and binding thanks to the adherence with the prison culture. The threshold between being or not being disciplined, is to accept (or not) and agree (or not) with the specific administration they work in.

Coherently with this interpretation, table 1 could serves as a footprint to describe another relation: between correctional officers' areas of resistance and prison disciplining power. Indeed, the majority of correctional officers represent the ultimate frontier against the evolution of the penitentiary towards laxity. The perception of being the saviors of a system collapsing under very specific political pressure is at large, and from the fieldwork the local and regional contexts significantly become the negative factors affecting their professional mandate: they commute not only for reasons linked to private life, such as the low embeddedness with the territory, but also for the shared belief of working in a

view against prison system claims that the system itself tends to accept the high numbers of prisoners only to justify balance statement items and personnel costs.

prison unable to fit with the penitentiary purpose. They are engaged to an in-group narrative that believes the need to fight against a system that does not valorize them and that is corrupted, developing strategies of resistance against it and against prison populations. What we should interrogate is whether such battle against the system is, at the end of the day, feeding the crystallization of the system itself. What is possible to observe, indeed, is the absurd effect of the prison system pushing their principal actors to negate and contrast any progressive modification towards a more open regime. Thus, the four categories emerging from table 1 might be used to retrieve correctional officers' adaptive strategies and resistance to prison disciplinary control.

Table 2 Type of correctional officers depending on the influence of disciplinary control

		Level of identification with the institution	
		High	Low
Level of identification with the professional role	High	**I Disciplined proselyte**	**II Disciplined subversive**
	Low	**III Disciplined bureaucrat**	**IV Undisciplined detractor**

Personal elaboration of fieldwork data

On this matter, since we have said that eventually all employees tend to develop a level of identification with their professional mandate, either to justify their permanence or thanks to the in-group effect, it is interesting to discuss the differences between these groups focusing on their relation with the local prison's administration. Indeed, (I) *Unengaged employees satisfied*, (II) *Engaged employees satisfied, and (*IV) *Engaged employees unsatisfied,* will tend to reproduce penitentiary's codes of formal and informal rules, regardless to the level of satisfaction with the material rewards received, and are disciplined according to prison's system. Consistently, taking into consideration the influence of disciplinary control, it is possible to group correctional officers in the following types:

i) *Disciplined proselyte*: correctional officers who entered the job due to intrinsic motivation and do not question the appropriateness of institution's managing approach;

ii) *Disciplined subversive*: correctional officers who entered the job due to intrinsic motivation and keep a high level of identification with their professional mandate, but are in conflict with institution's managing approach;

iii) *Disciplined bureaucrat*: correctional officers who entered the job due to extrinsic motivation, but eventually develop a level of identification with their professional mandate as a coping strategy to justify the insufficiency of the material reward. They do not question the institution's managing approach and are compliant with the working strategy.

Those who are potentially dangerous are the (III) *Unengaged employees unsatisfied*: the correctional officer that shared with me her views as I reported in the note Journal Entry 25 May 2018 (b), fits in this category and represents the IV type of Table 2, the *Undisciplined detractor*:

iv) *Undisciplined detractor*: correctional officers who entered the job due to extrinsic motivation and do not believe in the mission and mandate of the profession, nor agree with the modalities of managing the institution.

Thus, we can observe three different kinds of disciplined correctional officers: (I) Disciplined proselyte, (II) Disciplined subversive, and (III), Disciplined bureaucrat. While the first one exemplifies the greatest level of adherence with the institution's codes of behavior and rules, the other two show interesting adaptive strategies to prison disciplinary control and represent the large majority of correctional officers observed in this study. Indeed, we encountered them in Chapter IV (see *infra,* pp. 145-146), where I describe correctional officers who chose the career haphazardly and develop group identity to cope with job's frustrations, or, on the opposite, correctional officers who pursue the profession believing in its mandate but disregard the managing approach of the institution they work in, developing coping strategies that partially affect group identity. It might seems contradictory to label them as "disciplined", but if we look through the argumentative patina surroundings those who loosen the institution's camaraderie bonds, we can observe a group of correctional officers who are so committed to the penitentiary's authority and mission that prefer to blame and combat the local institution they work in rather than question the whole system, *de facto* carrying on their daily activities, one scapegoat per day – volunteers, Regional parties, administration. Thus,

disciplined subversives are the most docile disapproving employees, since with their actions they renovate the corps' authority and authoritativeness against the administrative approach, which change according to the single Director's visions – and we have seen that the Direction might change, but the prison culture stays still, even if it is daily re-adjusted and reproduced. Of course, correctional officers could shift from one category to another and those who entered for extrinsic motivation could develop high engagement with the professional mandate. Vice versa, who had intrinsic motivation, unlikely distance him/herself from the professional mandate. Even more unlikely, it is possible to see some minor area of resistance to the disciplinary approach from (IV) *Undisciplined detractors*, who did not interiorize, nor reproduce, nor believe in the professional mandate, and rather criticize it from the inside[33].

7.2 Correctional officers as disciplining individuals

At page 22 I closed the paragraph stating that the core objective of diagnosing mental illness is identifying individuals who create disequilibrium in social order, and that being or not mentally unbalanced is not the real concern, which rather is managing those who do not adhere with the average population. I am aware that, once arrived at the conclusive chapter, such premises could appear disconcerting: I investigate the representation of deviance only linking it with correctional officers' representations, and the conceptualization of pathological became a key concept to deepen such aspect. Notwithstanding, various theoretical stances define the process of preservation of social order through forms of social control that involve shaping individuals to achieve a higher level of compliance, and it targets specific segments of individual due to the representation they have among society. Consistently, correctional officers represent the penitentiary system's arm that leads such process: indeed, in the previous paragraph we have seen that it is possible to group correctional officers in four categories, according to the level of discipline they interiorize. Such discipline is also performed through a narrative on who the deviants are, shared and reproduced within the group, that eventually reify and confirm a strong in-group identity. Thus, in Chapter V we have seen that the construction of the identity as correctional officers is linked with the representation of prisoners, who

[33] This last category is particularly interesting and could represent a possible field of investigation, focusing on the motivations they have to stay, and the alternative paths they have when decide to leave the profession.

are confirmed as their opposite and affirmed through differentiation (see *infra*, Chapter V). Indeed, correctional officers behave according to the image of the role that the penitentiary system constantly reproduces, and being able to adhere with it implies a characteristic representation of inmates. This process doubles the disciplinary effect of the penitentiary system: the docile body is the one who is obliged to behave differently, as well as the one who is convinced that it is the only correct way to behave, and oblige others to act accordingly. The need of being recognized as something different and more socially desirable pushes correctional officers to develop critical judgment on prisoners, and it is possible to retrace a pattern depending on the level of their adherence with prison culture. On this matter, it is interesting to pay special attention to the (II) *Disciplined subversive*, and (IV) *Undisciplined detractor*. The correctional officers who pursue the profession believing in its mandate but disregarding the managing approach of the institution they work in, are keen to blame both the Administration and the prisoners for all the troubles they have to deal daily. On one hand, indeed, we have seen that they experience a sort of cognitive dissonance between the expectations on their role and what the chores are in practice, and they feed a shared animosity within the group against the lack of authority and authoritativeness caused by a too much tolerant Administration, and on the other, they blame prisoners, who are depicted as untrustworthy, ignorant, uneducated, and dumb. To the extreme opposite, we have a rare minority who criticize the professional mandate from the inside who are aware of the special targeting of segments of the population who are in conditions of marginalization. Nevertheless, even if the (IV) *Undisciplined detractors* seem to resist to the disciplinary power of the penitentiary system, they are eventually informed by the prison culture which reproduces a characteristic representation of inmates, applying an infantilizing, condescending, and patronizing approach. Indeed, the correctional officer who shared with me her thought as reported in the previous pages (Journal entry, 25 May 2018 (b)), before starkly repealing the mission of the penitentiary system ("*prisoners are a source of income for the State*", see *infra*) describes prisoners as passive and ignorant agents, on whom correctional officers learn to maintain control.

> "She says that working with female prisoners, after so many years, is very automatic: they know the inmates, who are almost always the same for decades and they know how to approach them, what to say and what to do to get listening and respect. This is also thanks

to the prisoners' cultural level, in her opinion equal to zero. They use a more suitable, less formal language" (Journal entry, 25 May 2018 (b))

Probably, it could be interpreted as the correctional officer's awareness on the special targeting of the penitentiary system toward individuals that are more "manageable" and easier to control. Nevertheless, it is also a manifestation of how, as much as the (IV) *Undisciplined detractors* could be critical against the professional mandate, they ultimately adapt and show compliance with in-group strategies to interact with prisoners, remaining in the same job for decades: they escape disciplinary power, but are not impenetrable to prison culture and its formal and informal codes.

7.3 Disciplining man and woman in a correction setting through merit lens

In the theoretical framework (see *infra*, Chapter II) we have seen that the developing of routines of practices and stereotyped perceptions of the clients is a common characteristic of street-level bureaucrats, and Lipsky (2010) defined correction facilities as the highest refined example of street-level bureaucratic discretion. We have also seen that whether to Sykes (1958) prison represents a machine translating the dictates of society into action, the set of rules and routines of correctional officers is a choice among alternatives, and it is necessary to examine both the basis of these choices and the general objectives. During the fieldwork, the lack of authority and authoritativeness jeopardizing correctional officers' sense of duty to motivate prisoners to obey, and the discretional use of a system of reward and punishment, have been observed. Such in-group perception of feeling useless and ineffective is shared by disenchanted correctional officers who unfit to the cloak of bureaucrats with the power of writing reports, as well as unenthusiastic correctional officers who are only interested in making the ends meet. The disciplinary categories of deservingness and merit show how the system of incentives and the agents' high degree of leeway and independence represent powerful tools to reaffirm correctional officers' professional role and assign identities and behavioral rules according to the prisoners' representations developed by the agents. Moreover, the unresolvable discontinuity of practices and rules amplifies a continuous negotiation between the one who decides to allow and those who ask permissions. If we use the four categories as described in the first paragraph of this chapter, we can see how while the (I) *Disciplined proselyte* and the (III) *Disciplined bureaucrat* will tend to strictly follow the internal

regulation, using leeway only to behave consistently with the necessity to flexibly adapting to circumstances, the (II) *Disciplined subversive* will be prone to use discretion as a coping strategy to overcome the difficulties perceived in achieving the planned results due to the lack of recognition from the penitentiary administration, applying tools as time dilation (see *infra*, Chapter IV). Finally, the (IV) *Undisciplined detractor* will be keen to use discretion to survive the context and to apply formal and informal rules with the minor negative impact to prisoners and colleagues, resorting to different kind of practices without predominantly choosing one. Consistently, we could observe the following repartition:

Figure 1 Correctional officers' practices and level of discipline

I Disciplined proselyte Negotiating, discussing, punishing	**II Disciplined subversive** Observing, recording, tracing
IV Undisciplined detractor *Lack of a well defined pattern*	**III Disciplined bureaucrat** Supervising, separating, isolating

Personal elaboration of fieldwork data

On this line, I also observed that the practices linked with the ultimate power of prison guards, namely the traceability of inmates' conduct – *observing, recording, tracing* - could not be considered an empowering force without the discretional and informal practices that give to correctional officers the power to decide *when*, and *if*, actually doing it – *negotiating, discussing, punishing*. Then, how the practices of negotiation, discussion and punishment are shaped and framed, according to correctional officers' perception of their own role, level of discipline, and representation of the inmates, strictly depends on the interiorized concepts of merit and deservingness. We have seen how Liebling (2000) research on informal/formal modes of social control helps in understanding the differences between non-compliance with the rule to avoid bureaucracy red tape and non-compliance with the rules on the basis on unfair and unequal judgement of the prisoner's traits. As emerged from Chapter VI, the influence of representations and stigmatizing prejudices on prisoners has a strong impact on correctional officers' personal beliefs on their re-educational path. If we merge the fact that the high leeway level is used as a strategy to reaffirm authority with the tendency to readapt punishing and reward practices

on a daily negotiation, which depends on the individual level of trustworthiness, it is possible to understand that the prison system is not *influenced* by a merit-based judgment, it is *rooted* on it. Moreover, the disciplinary value of such system is not only observable in the effects on prisoners, who are induced to start a personal change to be a better person and citizen, but on correctional officers themselves, who daily reconfirm to be on the right part of the gate and, generally, the history: workers, keen to hold the burden of doing the correct thing. Consistently, we observed that, as far as the criteria to label prisoners *meritorious* are concerned, the negative outcome of being incarcerated depends on the original sin of being part of specific segments of the population that, in a way or another, are condemned to end up in prison due to intrinsic characteristics that they partially chose to assume (drugs abuse and dealing, mostly) and they are born with (provenience, mostly). Nevertheless, the sin's amendment is possible through correct behaviors, which can be summarized in a general rule: do not disturb and mind your own business. Consistently, at page 61 of the Methodological Chapter, I wrote: "*I would also investigate how the sanctioning and rewarding system would have been influenced by an unequal narrative of meritocracy based on different gendered expectations*". What the fieldwork offered on this matter, was a confirmation of practices rooted in a stereotyped narrative that reinforces and reproduces specific social model based on gendered role, both concerning correctional officers and prisoners. Indeed, before even investigating the influence on the rewarding and sanctioning system, the gender division and segregation have practical consequences also on prison guards working modalities and expectations, not only on the organization of different shifts according to gender to ease the workload of "girls who have chores to do also at home", but on the attitudes as professional as well: women are unsurprisingly described as someone able to listen, more patient, and caring. The parallelism with a maternal figure is often used, and it is the exact opposite of the one permeating all the descriptions on female offenders: women in prison bear a *maternal excess* on both sides of the gate, either deceiving their social role, and suffering for it, or being recognized as an asset lowering competition and able to manage prisoners' emotional burden. As long as the differences of working with prisoners of opposite sex is concerned, in Chapter VI we have observed the decompressing function of such segregation, since working with prisoners of the same sex is perceived as a triggering factor in intensifying competition and aggression. Male and female correctional officers have different preferences on working within the two wards, but generally share the same

judgment on female prisoners: they are considered untrustworthy and more incline to fight and tease each other. Indeed, as Chapter V showed, if male prisoners are depicted as criminals, uneducated and savages, female prisoners are lunatic drugs abusers with severe psychiatric disorders. Nevertheless, we have seen how correctional officers, rather than acting differently only on the basis of gendered expectations, use these to construct a specific imaginary on prisoners that leads to the developing on an in-group narrative that intersects a wide range of aspects, such as provenience, social and economic status, cultural level. Surely, the prison culture is saturated by gendered divisions, and these are reproduced daily, reinforcing external social models and naturalizing gender segregations and differences as disciplinary strategies of social control. At the same time, the merit-based rewarding and punishing system is undoubtedly influenced by such narratives and tend to reproduce them (allowing or not items in the sections, pretending specific behaviors, being more inclined to permit access to benefits on the basis of prisoners' gender).

Thus, we have saw how gendered stereotypes of meritocracy influence correctional officers' representations of the self and prisoners. On this latter aspect, in the following table I propose a categorization of the impact of such stereotypes on (II) *Disciplined subversives* and (IV) *Undisciplined detractors*.

Table 3 The meritorious male and female prisoners depending on correctional officers' type

Type of correctional officers	Prisoners' gender: **Female prisoners**	**Male prisoners**
II Disciplined subversive	Obedient prisoner	Proactive prisoner
IV Undisciplined detractor	Respectful prisoner	

Personal elaboration of fieldwork data

On one hand, while we have saw that the (I) *Disciplined proselyte* and the (III) *Disciplined bureaucrat* are keen to follow the rule resorting to a low level of discretion, the (II) *Disciplined subversives* seem prone to use discretion as a coping strategy to overcome their disagreement with prison administration. Thus, their practices vary, influenced by specific

representations that tend to reward those kinds of behaviors that recognize and not obstacle their proper level of authority. The exemplification of the meritorious female offender for correctional officer could be label as i) the *obedient prisoner*, according to the pretty feminine characteristics expected from women as described above, while the meritorious male prisoner could be label as ii) *proactive prisoner*, who shows operatively good intention to adhere with correctional officers dictates and is keen to participate to prison's treatment activities[34]. On the other hand, the (IV) *Undisciplined detractor* uses his/her discretional power only as a tool to survive the context and work smoothly. Consistently, the only meritorious characteristic demanded to prisoners of both genders, are respect and personal loyalty – indeed, to the (IV) *Undisciplined detractor* the adherence with the prison's dictates does not matter, they prefer that prisoners do not violate the personal pact of not making trouble and let them work.

Notwithstanding the tendence of the discretional use of correctional officers' power of implementing practices through diverse modalities within the two sections, I would rather focus on the fact that the gendered nature of correctional officers' approach and moral compass, which is not only reflected in the leeway degree they have in deciding for prisoners' possibilities and paths, but it is the ontological material constituting the prison. Indeed, the penitentiary is a building in which the walls are made of special one-way mirrors: correctional officers and prisoners believe to occupy two different rooms, one of those who observe and one of those who are observed, but in reality they both live within a hall of mirrors, in which the social models of outside are perpetually reflected inside and bidirectionally reproduced and reified, permeating all prison population practices, expectations, self-and-other representations. Eventually, the *Self vs the Other* narrative is deconstructed and the trick discovered: the prison culture is shaped on the rhetorical use of peculiar gendered, racial and classist models that are naturalized and interiorized by all the people passing through prison's walls.

[34] Who writes is definitely aware of the risk of choosing such labels in perpetrating a gendered narrative, but they should be read as a result of correctional officers' representations and point of view, as emerged from the fieldwork.

Acknowledgements

My PhD experience has been a real rollercoaster. In these three years my personal and professional life are deeply changed, as am I. Moments of despair have been accompanied by periods of full joy, and these all have the same constant: a bunch of careful and funny people always by my side, and a melting pot of professionals that empowered me as a human and as a researcher.

It might seem rhetoric, but all the people living and working in prison and prison system not only are the protagonist of this thesis, but also the agents of a sound and deep personal change. I hope to contribute to raise awareness on your reality and change structural injustices. Thank you to allow me doing it.

Franco, I would not have even imagined gaining an expertise on the prison system without your mentorship. In all these years, your example and your friendship have been a continuous stimulus to do and be better.

Grazia and Susanna, thanks to you female offenders and gender issues represent a significant part of my expertise. The possibility you gave to me to interview and meet women living in prison has been life changing, but most of all I value our relationship.

Sandro, while I am fully aware that I have not been the most diligent PhD student, I am firmly convinced that having you as a tutor really made the difference. Your patience, support, and scientific advice guided me to accomplish something I am proud of, and I am really grateful and honored to have walked this path with you.

Francesca and Gabriella, you followed the idea of this thesis during all process and your suggestions and support have been a significant added value.

Alice and Luigi, you are role models in flesh and blood, as friends, academics, explorers, and parents. Despite our 28 years apart, I really enjoyed your son choosing me as his girlfriend.

Ivana: you have been such a surprise! I really value our friendship and you are a living example of how to survive academic life. You are a beautiful human being.

My friends and colleagues of the XXXIII PhD cycle: Alessandra, Anastasia, Emanuele, Marco, Matteo and Silvia, as well as room 103's mates Edoardo and Dario: you made these three years funnier and nicer!

Eli, you are a great human and a wonderful sister.

Bionda, you are the only person from whom I would accept tangerines, which have a better taste now.

Maddi, Marghe, Marti and Zero: you are the dearest thing to me, thank you for every single word and hug.

Fuitine, you have been an active part of this journey and without you I would be probably lost. I loved any moment of it and I am looking forward to start other adventures together.

Patrizia, Leonardo, Chiara, Maria, Stefano, Hassan: I have the privilege to work with people I respect and esteem. Thank you for everything you did for and with me.

Katia and Sofia, we probably won't save the world, but we are certainly curing some of its bruises. Thank you for being you.

What I am today is the results of a universe of people, and past, present and future are inextricably tied together. I had and have many families, to which I am grateful and that I will always treasure. Time and life change everything, but this is permanent. Ale, Fede, Mimma, Andrea, Carla, Franco, thank you.

Mamma, Papà and Gabriele. We are not the most conventional family of all, but we are the greatest team possible. Thank you for always believing in me, not matter what.

Last but not least, I will always remember July 2020 as the moment I was lucky enough to literally open the door to an empowering and wonderful force that made my days fabulous. Camillo, you filled me with the beauty of empty moments, curing my restlessness. Thank you for all the zombies, uneaten meals and love.

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