

VIOLENCE in prison



STATE OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES
6th
INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH DAYS
in the penitentiary environment

SYMPOSIUM



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CALL FOR PAPERS

Violence in prison is a constant subject of concern for the prison administration; it is today a major issue for penitentiary policies (with an action plan of the director of the prison administration that was presented in 2022). But violence is a slippery object, its definition is never definitively established. The variable and subjective nature of the notion leads to equally variable discourses and conceptions: relativization of the phenomenon for outside observers of the prison environment or security alert for internal actors. From this angle, violence focuses the attention of institutional actors and calls for more robust and ever-increasing security measures. But it also invites us to question the function of the custodial sentence in a democracy and its methods of exercise. In other words, by focusing on violence in detention, the 6th International Research Days in the penitentiary Environment aim to think and rethink violence based on the function and modalities of sentencing in a democracy, as well as the practices and systems for managing violence according to the general frameworks that underlie them, the logics that they follow and the meaning that animates or constitutes them.

Therefore, the choice to question violence from the political, institutional and praxeological angle not only makes it possible to reverse the naturalistic and fatalistic conceptions of violence in prison, but also opens up to reflections and innovative proposals that break or renew the frameworks of thought and action in the fight against violence.

Theme 1: Deprivation of liberty and violence

In the superb study she carried out on prison violence, Antoinette Chauvenet explains that “deprivation of liberty is in itself violence”. (Chauvenet et al. 2005). This assertion is fundamental because it posits and exposes the political nature of our relationship to prison and already gives us a glimpse of the socio-political nature of our relationship to criminal issues.

Indeed, the sentence, the punishment is an imposed measure of justice, as opposed to probation measures which are “contractualised”, although on the basis of a threat of prison. In this sense, a sentence is already violence insofar as it is a matter of forcing someone to do something against their will. Moreover, this punishment is imposed in the name of society. At the criminal court, it is in the name of the French people. However, this punishment of an individual, in the name of his belonging to a political community as a responsible citizen, results in political and physical exclusion from the rest of society (Chauvenet et al. 2005).

In this sense, modern sentencing still retains its original classic dimension of exclusion from the body politic on the one hand and construction of the inmate as a figure of otherness on the other.

- **Exclusion** because the penalty still consists of locking up offenders to protect society – it is both exclusion and protection: protecting society from the threat posed by offenders by locking them up, even if the penalty is, today, endowed with multiple functions: sanction (i.e. punishment), education (under the formulation of «responsible life» close to the old formulation of «amendment»), reintegration, protection of society, consideration of the victim. It is therefore a repressive philosophy in terms of exclusion and defensive protection that underpins our socio-political relationship with the criminal, and as a result, detained persons are doubly excluded from the democratic space and the freedom associated with it. In this respect, the prison sentence by exclusion is the first violence that confinement constitutes.
- **Alterity** because this defensive security concept that creates distances and exclusions, prohibits a common space and places fear at the heart of social relations. Thus, this exclusive and non-inclusive conception of security is based on, just as much as it produces a representation of the inmate as an enemy from within who must be neutralized.

Consequently, this defensive and repressive conception of security opens the way to violence in prison, thus producing the opposite effects to those expected. In these perspectives, expected contributions would mainly be likely to discuss violence from the penalty of imprisonment and the notion of deprivation of liberty. For example, contributions could re-examine the functions of modern prison based on the imperative of neutralization or question the socio-political relationships with the inmates in the path traced for example by Antoinette Chauvenet and her team.

Theme 2: systems and practices for managing violence

The second theme focuses on the measures and practices for managing violence developed within detention. More precisely, the theme aims to question practices based on the concrete and daily experiences of prison actors. The contributions proposed in this area may focus in particular on the norms (legal, cultural, social) that govern the organization of professional practices and the ways in which the actors adapt to them, appropriate them or even reshape them. For example, in order for the surveillance personnel to be able to properly support the persons they are entrusted with, they must benefit from an in-depth analysis of the problems encountered by inmates, but they must also be informed of the difficulties or strengths of the structure to which they belong. Correlatively, these contributions could question the participation of these personnel in the official bodies working to deal with violence (Multidisciplinary Commission, Disciplinary or Penal Enforcement Commission, etc.) to understand the functioning of the institution on the following issues: How do these bodies enable staff to better understand the strategies adopted by the prisons' directorates to combat violence? How do the actors adhere to the objectives of these strategies? We can think that this understanding is essential not only to fuel the motivation of staff in their observation and monitoring work, but also to make them more involved in the evaluation of the strategies and objectives set by management, such as:

- Identifying the problems of the establishment and objectifying them by collecting data specific to the establishment;
- Analyzing incidents and interpreting the consequences on the management of detainees, professional practices and the quality of work of staff;
- Establishing priorities and objectives related to the prevention of violence;
- Implementing procedures to deal with violence;
- Considering the needs of personnel in training, an essential reflection to concretize an action plan with the various professionals.

On the other hand, it is from this last point, that of training, that contributions are also desired. The training of staff when they enter the prison administration - and throughout their professional careers - must enable them to effectively understand the working methods allowing the prevention of violence. The initial or continuing training of prison staff raises the question of the acquisition of the professional skills necessary to understand interpersonal relations with the prison population. The content should be reviewed and the new skills acquired or developed in relation to violence management should be assessed. The identification of certain skills and their learning should facilitate the exercise of functions in prisons where different regimes of modalities of deprivation of liberty are exercised according to the

length of the sentence or the profiles of the convicts. If we take, for example, the contexts of training for trainee prison officers in France, we know that the simulations remain insufficient to allow them to be trained in de-escalation techniques in particular situations with inmates. They do not necessarily have the opportunity to practice interview techniques or the personalization of relations with inmates, making it possible to adapt responses to situations and people. On the other hand, they are better seasoned in the physical techniques of controlling people in a situation of rebellion or acting out violently. In this perspective, contributions will be able to question professional tools that address the prevention of violence or that deal with its consequences without being solely on the issue of active security procedures for the maintenance of security order. Specifically, we can ask ourselves what the existence of new professional practices, based on a positive relationship with the inmate, brings as added value to researching and understanding the main causes of violence or conflicts (Belliard, 2021).

Theme 3: challenges, innovations and foresight

Another observation: violence, its analysis, the diagnosis of the causes and the institutional responses as well as those that come from inmates question the representations of each other, or more precisely towards each other. For example, it is common to notice that both prison staff and inmates are held hostage by negative - and reciprocal - representations which directly affect the need to establish mutual and serene social relations in order to create «the» basic relationship for the security and peaceful of establishments. Almost always, the inmate embodies the figure of the enemy to be wary of rather than that of a valid interlocutor who has control over his experience. From there, two series of questions arise with regard to the prison context:

1. How to accompany people in a process of non-violence, while trying to resolve the paradox of wanting to reintegrate a person by removing their rights to expression, identity recognition and independent living?
2. How to promote the profession of front-line actors (mainly passageway prison officers or professionals in charge of integration and probation) in their face-to-face encounters with inmates while ensuring that these personnel can invest the time, space and activities of these people to facilitate their acceptance of the meaning of the rules for the use of a common space? Moreover, when we know that the penalty of deprivation of liberty constitutes first of all a set of obstacles to the freedom to associate and constraints that weigh on social relations (Chauvenet, 2006).

Contributions are expected here that could present the practices or projects of innovative penitentiary policies centred on the transformation of social relations between penitentiary professionals and convicted persons. Indeed, in a prospective approach, that is to say one that is interested in the future evolution of practices, it would be relevant to question the possibilities of real transformation of social relations in detention in the light of their most or less close proximity to the circle of established practices. Recent evaluations of public policies indicate that social transformation, as a driver of individual commitment, is made all the more possible the further it moves away from the circle of usually instituted practices (Teruel, 2021). This singular result invites at the very least to leave the usual frameworks of reflection to question more broadly the relationship of individuals to contemporary institutions, whatever they are (Le Blanc, 2022). This analysis therefore breaks with a fixed vision of institutions in favour of considering profound changes affecting their symbolic system (Dubet, 2002) and their forms of authority (more clear standards, uncertain professional and social perspectives, the impression of carrying out more and more difficult, even dangerous jobs, etc.). For the penitentiary institution, the challenge here is to find (to invent?) a new language, another vocabulary, «dynamic» practices, essentially in phase with the current issues raised, for example, by the figure of the «prison officer-actor».

In mirror to this, why not imagine, also, emphasizing supporting the inmate towards forms of emancipation and conflicting actions by taking note that the individual is never completely «determined». In this singular conception of the subject, here the categories of experiences are diverse, fragmented, heterogeneous, and the individual remains unpredictable. Under these conditions, the «prison officer-actor» constitutes a great opportunity to lead the discussion towards an economy of singularity and of the possible, against an economy of regularity and probability. The prison officer-actor, a vector of sociality through the contemporaneity of the conflicts that qualify it? We can imagine saying the reason for this, and also explaining the need for it based on sharing national and international experiences.

Keywords: violence in detention, violence of the sentence, professional practices, social relations, security-safety, prison officer-actor

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Procedures for submitting proposals

The titles of interventions (in French or in English), the summaries (in French or in English, 2000 characters maximum including spaces) and the keywords (in French or in English) must be sent to the following addresses:

guillaume.brie@justice.fr

cecile.rambourg@justice.fr

before September 1, 2022.

Scientific Committee

Guillaume BRIE, teacher-researcher in sociology and head of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Applied Research in the Penitentiary Field (CIRAP)

Nicolas DERASSE, lecturer at Lille 2 University, history of law and institutions.

Aurélie FILLOD-CHABAUD, sociologist, deputy head of the research and innovation laboratory office of the Correctional Administration, Ministry of Justice.

Michel FLAUDER, probation director, head of the probation and criminology department (Énap).

Jean-Charles FROMENT, associate university professor of public law, project manager/adviser at the Correctional Administration Directorate.

Astrid HIRSCHMANN, university professor in clinical and pathological psychology at the University of Caen.

Christophe LERAT, deputy director of research and educational innovation at the School of Advanced Studies in Public Health (EHESP).

Jean-Philippe MAYOL, deputy director of the Énap.

Paul MBANZOULOU, HDR, director of research, documentation and international relations (Énap).

Cécile RAMBOURG, sociologist, teacher-researcher at the CIRAP.

Marion WAGNER, in charge of legal studies at the Research and Innovation Laboratory at the Correctional Administration Directorate.