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Introduction

In analyzing the genesis of illegal behavior, criminalization processes, and life behind bars, Convict Criminology emphasizes a capacity to describe and interpret direct experience, from the researcher's personal involvement in the relational dynamics taken for reference (Ross & Richards, 2003). Convict Criminology is derivative and shares intellectual space with Critical Criminology (Taylor, Walton, & Young, 1975), Constitutive Criminology (Henry & Milovanovic, 1996), Narrative Criminology (Presser & Sandberg, 2019) and Post-colonial Criminology (Agozino, 2004 ; Cunneen & Tauri, 2016).

Not having any personal experience of imprisonment, I can hardly claim to be a convict criminologist in the strict sense, but I believe that a significant part of my research in the fi eld of the sociology of prisons is fully compatible with the approach of Convict Criminology. Major authors such as Ross, Jones, Lenza, and Richards (2016 , p. 491) describe convict criminologists as "a diverse collection of individuals who believe that convict voices have been ignored, minimized, misinterpreted in scholarly research on jails, prisons, convicts, correctional officers, and associated policies and practices that affect these individuals". The core idea is that we cannot analyze the forms of socialization in prison without considering the prisoners' processes of signification. Such analyses can be produced by researchers who have spent a period of time behind bars and can bring their experiential findings to the scientific debate on prisons. Their added value comes from the absence of any mediation between the person describing and the person theorizing on the experience. In addition, convict criminologists can benefit (in their research) from easier exchanges (conversations, interviews) with other prisoners by virtue of their shared experience. This facilitates the creation of a bond of trust that would otherwise be difficult to achieve, and it gives the parties a set of shared linguistic and cognitive references. Such elements are crucially important when considered systematically and in depth by anyone attempting methodological speculations on how to conduct research in prison (Wakeman, 2014)

For instance, virtually no ethnographer is in a condition to observe how life plays out in prison at night – a hugely important time that can be elucidated instead by prison inmates taking an auto-ethnographic stance. Another aspect concerns the difficulty that a qualitative sociologist or participant observer, however sensitive and well-prepared, might have in interpreting the language and signs, the words left unsaid, in a world they do not really know. Not knowing how to gauge certain situations, they might fall back on the interpretations of the institutional gatekeepers (the prison staff). In other words, the risk of misinterpreting, being manipulated and manipulating (a problem that always exists in qualitative research), would be exacerbated by the nature of this closed environment characterized by particular power relations. As Earle (2018 , p. 1502) pointed out,

> Researchers are not imprisoned. They do not get convicted and there is no danger of them "going native" in the conventional anthropological sense. They cannot become a prisoner. The convict criminologist is in a very diff erent position, one that implies a degree of "staying native".

With that said, a view from the outside can add value, as well. In describing (in private conversation) his research experience as an ex-prisoner with inmates in Italy's high-security prison circuit, Kalica (2019) reports having had difficulty finding a strategy that could keep the conversation going with other prisoners when they asked him: "But why are you asking me these questions if you already know the answers?" It proved hard to make them understand that he was interested not in obtaining the "right answer," but in analyzing the specific discursive content of the prisoners' responses. Researchers from outside who want to focus on

the convicts' frames of meaning can benefit instead from the pleasure the prisoner takes in explaining the experience of detention. In this role reversal, the experts who draw on personal experiences can see value added to their stories because they are aware of giving the researcher the tools to interpret them (Sbraccia, 2007 , pp. 66–77). Maybe the external researcher – being detached from the staff -versusinmates role structure (cf. Goff man, 1961), and free of the constraints associated with either role (Irwin, 1980) – can more easily arrive at an exchange of views on prison that contrasts the essentialist stance where professional cultures (staff) and prison subcultures (inmates) are strictly in opposition (Kalica & Santorso, 2018). Notwithstanding the imbalance of power between the parties, it is thanks to this pooling of views that the prison culture construct can provide an account of different normative configurations, especially regarding the crucial issue of the mechanisms that informally govern internal relations (Clemmer, 1940 ; Crewe, 2012 ; Sbraccia & Vianello, 2016).

To sum up, the most interesting approach could be one that combines the added value of Convict Criminology with those of a qualitative sociological study on prisons that includes the narratives and productions of sense of the people who inhabit them or visit them systematically. This is a generic approach that can be applied to any research topic in the prison domain, but it contains a specific element that may make it particularly effective in studies on radicalization (Khosrokhavar, 2016). I will return in the following pages to the question of the biographical reconstructions supporting the hypothesis that prison plays an important part in producing radicalized individuals. These reconstructions are often based on observations and comments that do not come from individuals known or presumed to have been radicalized. This is no minor analytical limitation, as it would be methodologically fundamental to include the radicalized prisoner's point of view. Without it, such reconstructions – deriving from entirely inadequate sources, such as criminal records – produce effects that can actually serve as the essential tools of ideological manipulation (cf. Zara & Ferrington, 2015 ; Sbraccia, 2018b). That is why they should be seriously reconsidered, and possibly compared with methodologically more solid empirical evidence (Ross, 2014). So, bearing in mind the ideological implications, the terms in which prison can be configured as a place of radicalization remains to be explained: specificities of the prison setting, or specificities of the individuals behind its bars?

Internal and external enemies

The continuity of jihadist terrorist attacks in Western countries since the beginning of this century has prompted research eff orts to interpret these forms of political violence. The public debate on the "Islamist terrorist threat" has often adopted the ideological terms of a clash of civilizations, creating genuine waves of moral panic (Cohen, 1972; Ahmed, 2014). This reaction lies outside the interesting, sometimes interdisciplinary analytical eff orts being made by political scientists, orientalists, sociologists, experts on matters of intelligence and religious issues, journalists, psychologists and psychiatrists, historians, and scholars of colonialism. It would be impossible to provide an account here of how the debate has developed, but it is worth outlining some of the fundamental steps in its evolution. In fact, the continuity of the phenomenon under debate has coincided with a marked discontinuity of the references adopted to interpret it. Ever since the fi rst spectacular attacks in the United States in 2001 and in Madrid in 2004, this type of terrorist threat has been described as external (i.e., deriving from the capacity of foreign enemies to organize attacks in the West). This interpretation, however, has been challenged by numerous examples of domestic-born individuals willing and able to carry out jihadist attacks (e.g., Richard Colvin Reid, a British citizen with a Jamaican parent, who in 2001 tried to board a commercial airplane carrying explosives). The idea of an external threat basically revolves around the paradigm of war, and the definition of strategies to combat terrorism as a "war on terror"; it involves military interventions in the terrorists' countries of origin, or where they were trained, and envisages much more restrictive forms of control over international mobility.

Reid, and the attacks in London in 2005, and in France and Germany more recently, are all evidence of the need to reconsider, and oblige us to see the threat as being also (and possibly above all) internal . Of course, there is still a significant degree of foreignness involved, given the ethnic origins of such “enemies”, but terrorists who are the children of immigrants (second and successive generations) have different features. They do not fi t the bill for the fighting enemy in the conventional sense. They were born and grew up (sometimes converted) in the geographical settings where they subsequently commit their violent political actions, especially in Europe (Khosrokhavar, 2017). The construct of the homegrown terrorist (Brooks, 2011) has become important in the analytical setting, although the figure of the foreign fighter has been used in an attempt to newly mark a geographical and cultural distance. This is curious from the semantic standpoint because the adjective “foreign” cannot refer to the terrorists’ citizenship, or to the legitimacy of their legal position. It can only refer to the places where these Western citizens trained and fought (Iraq, Syria, Libya), and their radicalization was completed, also in the technical-military sense (Del Grande, 2018). Reasoning in terms of an internal-external threat is also questionable given the obvious feasibility of the radicalization process – that may prompt the political violence – taking place within the confines of the West (and its prisons). So, how we describe the characteristics of this process needs to change, since it no longer necessarily occurs in faraway places, in a scenario of war and deprivation. It may even happen in the suburbs of Europe’s major cities.

In short, the radicalization process takes shape when an individual with a conflictive potential encounters a political and ideological narrative capable of focusing this potential on cognitive forms of an oppositional nature (Roy, 2016). Radicalism thus has to do with the cultural domain. It affects individuals’ mechanisms of identity and behavioral change, the structure and composition of their social relations, their worldview, and their existential goals (Kepel, 2016). Its transformative dynamics may or may not trigger a passage to violence, and this is a very delicate issue because identifying this possibility suffices today to prompt invasive prevention strategies that damage fundamental freedoms protected by the rule of law (Bianchi, 2018). The contemporary terrorist emergency is situated virtually within this frame, making it undeniably more fragile and less clear-cut, especially as regards the fi eld of religious rights (Romanelli, 2012). From an analytical perspective, or even for the purposes of devising a prevention strategy, where might this encounter between an individual with an oppositional potential and a narrative of conflict actually occur? Anywhere, if the narrative is a written text, or video or audio material. But if these ideas need to be disseminated face-to-face, then the places where this can happen should be identifi - able, at least hypothetically. This brings us to another element of interpretative discontinuity. As mentioned in a previous paper (Sbraccia, 2017), suburbs and mosques, environments that delineated society’s representation of the radicalization milieu, have been replaced in recent years by a new binomial: the internet and prison.

In my opinion, this attention to the places where the process of radicalization would be most likely to come about is crucial. A possible objection lies in that the differences fade if we switch our focus from the places to the parties involved. The vast majority of the people behind bars come from the suburbs, and from the marginalized underclass. Moreover, if the dangerous phenomenon considered here relates to a violent jihadist version of Islam (beyond any theological accreditation), then the individuals are possibly likely to have attended (acknowledged or informal) mosques where oppositional ideas may have circulated. We try to clarify the picture by pointing out how shifting the focus to the prison system, also as regards de-radicalization policies, can facilitate a tendency for the structural (economic, residential) matrices of the radicalization process to be concealed.

Simplified biographies and a compound dangerousness

The phenomena of prisoner politicization and radicalization are by no means new as a topic of interest to the social sciences. These dynamics have emerged and been analyzed in various territorial settings, and in considerable depth in recent times (Ratner & Cartwright, 1990; Ross, 2014). Findings relating to processes of proselytism in prisons have referred to the struggles for independence (the IRA in the United Kingdom, and the ETA in Spain), and revolutionary movements of Marxist inspiration (the RAF in Germany, the BR and NAP in Italy), to the genesis of the Black Panther movement in the United States, to the galaxy of Islamic fundamentalism in North Africa and the Middle East (Githens-Mazer, 2009), and to the consolidation of far-right groups (sometimes of a white supremacist matrix) in Europe and the United States. But in what sense can we speak of "findings"? One way to fi nd information is for prison staff (sometimes supported by the secret services, cf. Zaccariello, 2016) to record intramural association dynamics that tend to separate generic prison populations into distinct groups of inmates, who may then engage in a struggle for hegemony, or be willing to mediate, thus establishing the informal balance within total institutions (Irwin, 1980 ; Hamm, 2007). These operators can thus provide situated information on the processes in question, but they are influenced by constraints of confidentiality, particular forms of professional acculturation, and discursive strategies that tend to delegitimize the forms of resistance adopted by the inmates (Ugelvik, 2014). They are also effectively excluded from the dynamics of direct socialization typical of prisoners, who may themselves rely on forms of secrecy indispensable to the reiteration of their autonomy. These limitations can be overcome by using environmental eavesdropping methods, for instance, but the heritage of knowledge obtained remains in the hands of the intelligence services and consequently unavailable to researchers (Sbraccia, 2018a).

Another source of information derives from biographical reconstructions tending to describe the experience of detention as a turning point in the life stories of people involved in a particular process of socialization (radicalization) that takes shape in prison. A problem of considerable theoretical and methodological importance concerns the accuracy of such reconstructions. Who produces them? What means do they use to do so? Is the content verified? Prison as a place that creates a fracture in a prisoner's biography is a constitutive element of a narrative plot that has become fundamental in the literature on contemporary forms of jihadist radicalization. We now take a look at the basic structure of this process inasmuch as concerns the experience of those who were subsequently accused of violent "terrorist" actions. Before going to prison, these individuals (the children of immigrants) live by their wits on the margins of society in rough suburban districts (Awan, 2008 ; Khosrokhavar, 2017). They have little formal education because they dropped out of school early on. They drink, smoke, and stay out at night. They steal and/ or push drugs on the street, and often have a drug problem themselves (Sbraccia, 2015). They have conflictual relations with the police. They have no interest in religion and never attend religious centers, though they defi ne themselves as Muslim. After a stint in prison, they stop going to the same places and seeing the same people. They tend to keep to themselves, and conduct a quiet life. They change their lifestyles and habits, giving up drugs and alcohol. Aspects of their outer appearance (clothing, beard) change, too, and they show considerable interest in religious texts and practices. What marks the boundary between before and after is their prison experience, which has at least accelerated a change, if not prompted a conversion and a parabola of radicalization. This hypothesis is naturally viable and, as mentioned earlier, historically plausible – but turning it into a demonstrable reality is a very different matter. Accurate information about encounters in prison between radicalizers (radicals or already radicalized) and the radicalizable are often lacking. Biographical trajectories are oversimplifi ed, or not confirmed by the parties directly involved (Bilel & Lindemann, 2017). The correlation between before, during, and after imprisonment seems to be exaggerated without any reliable data on the people a given individual associated with before being arrested and after being released. Any relationships with potential agencies of radicalization (internet, charismatic

individuals and groups) before or after the individual went to prison are not investigated, almost as if they could be removed from the horizon of possibility. The period “during” their detention in prison takes on a core relevance within a nebulous narrative (Walklate & Mythen, 2016). But what might be the political-cultural motives behind a polarization of the discourse on prison as a place of radicalization? One answer could lie in an attempt to construct an ideological framework around what we defined elsewhere (Sbraccia, 2017) as a compound dangerousness . Although several good-quality scientific and journalistic contributions have emphasized significant differences in the social characteristics (socioeconomic class, ethnicity, geographical origin, level of formal education, place of residence) of radicalized individuals who have attempted or succeeded in completing “acts of terrorism”, there is a dominant ideal type that captures our attention. This is a young man belonging to a marginalized minority trapped in the underclass of contemporary Western societies (Wacquant, 2008), a “classic” subject of interest to traditional Criminology, who embodies the features of a combination of individual and social disadvantages. This combination is then “organized” by producing stereotyped life stories. In the case in point, an added feature of this narrative is the young man’s possible evolution from thug to terrorist, opening up a scenario that changes the level of social dangerousness he embodies (Clarke, 2014). The main threat thus comes from an already stigmatized (criminal) individual. He is already known to be unreliable, and his nature as an internal enemy is confirmed by his previous criminal record, and any political leanings he may have are automatically delegitimized.

To combat this oversimplification, all we have to do is acknowledge the relevant biographical stages and the level of complexity that they actually contain. This can give us, in cognitive terms, a better idea of the links between individual choices, structures of opportunity, and dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). If these are our goals, there are no easy shortcuts to be taken: the “lived order” (Pollner & Emerson, 2001) – before, during, and after detention – cannot be reconstructed in any other way.

Socialization in prison and interpretative models

> It is in the best interest of most governments, including the United States, to claim that political prisoners are simple thugs. (Ross, 2014 , p. 278)

Prison is often seen as a crucial environment for sociologically interpreting contemporary radicalization, but the dialogue with qualitative sociology of prisons appears to be instrumental and limited (Sbraccia, 2017). In an eff ort to reshape its social dangerousness, to give it a subversive element, some authors (cf. Brandon, 2009 ; Useem & Clayton, 2009 ; Ballas, 2010 ; ICSR, 2010 ; Mulcahy, Merrington, & Bell, 2013 ; Clarke, 2014 ; Goldman, 2014 ; Zahn, 2017) “discover” a potential for conflict that can be nurtured and turned into action through a specific process of prison socialization. Prison is thus represented as a neutral place where dangerous encounters can take place between three types of inmates: the radical, the radicalized, and the radicalizable. This view can be traced back to the theoretical frame developed by Robert Merton in his Social Theory and Social Structure of 1968 (Merton, 1968 , cf. Agnew, 2010), where the ideal type of the rebel was included. From a theoretical point of view, this figure is interesting as one capable of attracting other subjects proposing different sets of values. What happens when the rebels appear, defining new cultural frameworks and producing a counterhegemony? What happens if rebels and ordinary criminals (innovators) meet in prison? Are jihadist radicals looking for the “thugs” in the shadows of the prison system? Are their attempts at communication and recruitment really feasible?

The works by Hamm (2007 , 2013) on the penitentiary system in the United States emphasize a marked skepticism among inmates he interviewed regarding this possibility. Prison personnel encountered in the fi

eld also describe a fragmented prison population and an environment where “preventive” control measures over forms of aggregation oriented towards a “political” conflict would be relatively easy to implement (cf. Cloward, 1960). In research conducted in Italian prisons, too (Sbraccia & Verdolini, 2017), although the prison staff are seen by the public as important in containing radicalization phenomena, they tend to tone down the assumed subversive transformation of the (relative) social dangerousness of the prisoners under their observation. More articulated stances emerge from the important study published by Khosrokhavar (2016) on the French penitentiary system. Whatever the specific empirical findings, however, after more than a century of studies on prison systems, the idea of these institutions as neutral containers of processes of social and subjective transformation seems entirely unfounded. Instead, it is the tension between the practice of institutional control, eff orts at rehabilitation, the shapes of bonds of solidarity, styles of penitentiary government and co-government, and the morphology of internal conflictuality (a far cry from the idea of neutrality) that deserve investigating with appropriate qualitative instruments and an adequate theoretical awareness. This is where the Convict Criminology approach to research on penitentiary systems would prove precious. Consider, for example, the classic comparison between the deprivation model and the importation model (Clemmer, 1940 ; Sykes, 1958 ; Cloward, 1960 ; Irwin, 1970) for the purposes of analyzing forms of socialization in prison. I think the two models should not be seen as alternatives to each another, however. They can be usefully combined in the analysis of radicalization in prison.

Using the deprivation model, we can focus on endogenous prison factors in relation to the dynamics of subjective adaptation to this environment. During the process of institutionalization, amidst violent dynamics comprising elements of disculturation and acculturation, prisoners can feel isolated, disoriented, afraid, and extremely vulnerable (Mulcahy et al., 2013). The solidarity and support offered by charismatic individuals and cohesive groups of inmates would afford them a sense of protection and identification. These individuals and groups can enable inclusive pathways based on various canons of membership, from street gangs to the most structured criminal organizations; from a shared ethnicity to the same geographical origins, skin color, or religion; from a xenophobic attitude to a revolutionary project aimed to change radically the structure of political order. Radicalization in prison could be one pathway and, given the considerable numbers of prisoners who are Muslims or have converted to Islam, this could lead to their involvement in a violent jihadist project. Simply put, from the point of view of the radicalizable individual, this is a way to react to the pain of imprisonment.

According to the importation model, subcultural affiliations are considered in terms of their exogenous components, referring to attitudes and bonds developed outside the prison walls. Such forms of affiliation would be reinforced by the experience of detention, which would induce individuals to rely on shared identity resources and values to protect themselves or participate in the power dynamics within the prison. In this case, radicalization in prison could be defined as a medium of collective identification.

In both models, identity processes and the need for protection have a decisive role. In both cases, these phenomena play out in a diachronic key (over longer or shorter time spans), and should therefore be investigated in a historical developmental frame, as suggested by Sutherland and Cressey (1978). It would appear feasible to combine the two models together as follows. Imprisoned (radical or already radicalized) “terrorist” recruiters would import forms of aggregation constructed outside, referring to strategies for political action projected towards the conflict in the outside world. In prison, they would be among a mass of deprived and isolated individuals who are potential candidates to proselytize. Once again, prison seems a perfect place for such an encounter, but this poses a problem of interpretation when we consider a fundamental ambivalence of religious practices in prison that we will return to in the last section of this chapter. We know from penological studies that conversions, spiritual rebirths, and interest in praying and reading sacred texts have always been seen as positive signs of a convict’s repentance. Such practices have always been promoted and supported in Western prisons, partly because they can help individuals under

severe psychological strain to find a greater degree of stability and serenity. Religion is even seen as an alternative to the use of psychoactive medication. Particularly for the more fragile and isolated inmates, prayer and a faith shared with other inmates can serve as a resource, offering solidarity and a sense of belonging and protection that can limit the damage of institutionalization (Rhazzali & Schiavinato, 2016). So, it would seem very difficult to identify an unequivocally dangerous element in a "radical" version of Islam, especially bearing in mind that a process of radicalization does not necessarily end in violent or illegal behavior.

Further important doubts are raised by a tendency to defi ne the roles of the social actors who interact in a process of radicalization in prison too strictly. The image of culturally well-equipped and organized charismatic inmates (the radicalizers) who off er support and containment to naïve prisoners with no significant bonds living in an identity vacuum contrasts with sociological reporting on prison groups and subcultures. It seems like a reification of ideal types that lacks the support of empirical evidence. If we look, for instance, at one of the most important Western experiences of prison politicization (in weighted quantitative terms) – in Italy's prison system of the 1970s – radicalization was neatly described (Abatangelo, 2017) as a mechanism of reciprocity between political and common prisoners, as regards both the content of the training and learning, and the off er and acceptance of solidarity resources.

So, what place can we attribute to the political dimension of the process, if we are talking about a conflictual ideology? As Beckford, Joly, and Khosrokhavar (2006) pointed out, imprisonment could be seen as a sort of revelation that finally makes individuals who go to prison become fully aware of their destiny of subordinate inclusion, setting their horizons of opportunity lower. It is worth noting here that, according to John Irwin (2004), the author who helped to make the development of Convict Criminology possible, this is the fundamental latent function of prison. His hypothesis is thought-provoking, and there is no shortage of historical and literary evidence to support it (X & Haley, 1964; Jackson, 1970 ; Abbott, 1981). Even more recent research has borne witness to this effect of imprisonment on the cognitive structures of some inmates. One such case is the previously mentioned work of Khosrokhavar (2016). In Italy, thanks to the commitment of a militant organization (OLGa, 2014), we have had a chance to access the content of letters written by inmates in high-security prisons, accused or condemned of crimes related to jihadist terrorism. These letters often mention how time in prison is an "opportunity" for socio-political reflection oIt is not by chance that both of these studies focused on the narratives and reflections of people behind bars: given the previously-described ambivalent approaches and theoretical issues, there seemed to be no alternative. In my opinion, such contributions should not necessarily be interpreted strictly according to any specific models, as if the importation and deprivation models were part of n what forms the control and repression of minorities can take.

It is not by chance that both of these studies focused on the narratives and reflections of people behind bars: given the previously-described ambivalent approaches and theoretical issues, there seemed to be no alternative. In my opinion, such contributions should not necessarily be interpreted strictly according to any specific models, as if the importation and deprivation models were part of their ancestry. From an analytical standpoint, the dialectic that appears decisive here is between forms of oppression and forms of resistance in prison (Ugelvik, 2014) – and before we can take a stance, we need to have the right tools to elucidate the question.

Possible developments

To make progress in the study of radicalization in prison, it is essential to produce more qualitative sociological research that includes the prison inmates' attributions and productions of sense from an

epidemiological frame compatible with Convict Criminology. We need to off er thick descriptions of prison life and forms of socialization, devise critical tools that enable an analysis of the narratives of inmates who are not necessarily isolated individuals at the mercy of the prison institution's violence (Scraton & McCulloch, 2009), develop and test innovative analytical approaches, collect and analyze auto-biographical materials produced by subjects convicted for terrorism, and deconstruct the ideological representations of prison itself. In particular, we need to stop accepting a doubly inaccurate description of the relationship between the prison environment and radicalization. In the absence of empirical evidence or any serious theoretical exchange of views, prison should not be depicted as an ideal recruiting milieu for already-radicalized individuals and/or as the perfect place for dealing with radicalization using means of prevention (intelligence).

That research setting these goals and using these methodological approaches is basically lacking because the knowledge produced outside these frames is ideologically biased and inconsistent (Clarke, 2014 ; Ross, 2014). Taking the analytical perspective that I have tried to outline in this chapter, there would be numerous territories to explore. So, to conclude – in a fi eld that I hope will also expand in a comparative international sense – I would suggest the four following possible lines of future research.

Religion and prison order

One terrain where a prison sociology oriented towards the Convict Criminology perspective could work alongside the sociology of religion (Kerley, 2018) concerns analyzing forms of religious experience behind bars. There seems to be a clear assonance with the idea of a revelation already developed in political terms. We have already mentioned the ambivalence of religious practices vis-à-vis keeping the peace in prison populations (dimension of ambiguity). Going beyond the historical precedents (suffice it to mention the bond of Catholicism for the political prisoners of the IRA [McKeown, 2001]), this ambivalence suggests that religion can both promote and contain internal conflictuality. So, taking an openminded look at the various hypotheses, it would be hugely useful to consider the empirical evidence coming from the descriptions of people with direct experience of these situations. De-radicalization strategies have been identified and (sometimes) implemented in various parts of the world (ICSR, 2010; Russo, 2019) in the context of an institutional governance of the phenomenon. The most common and accepted approach is to have reliable imams working in prisons. Conveying a moderate view of Islam, they would have a fundamental role in combating theologically unfounded and dangerous misinterpretations. But this raises the problem of the relativity of the concept of reliability (Sbraccia, 2018a). For instance, how can this reliability be perceived as such by both the prison authorities and the inmates in the setting of a dualistic staff -inmates logic? Some research findings (Sbraccia, 2017) indicate that, being aware of how prison intelligence has developed, some (Sunni) Muslim prisoners would more easily place their trust in a fellow inmate capable of leading their prayers, rather than in an imam accredited by the Ministry of the Interior and the prison staff.

Configuration of conflicts

Dear companions, . . . the prison management refused permission for one of our companions to phone his family in Algeria. Just as he was asking the guard to give him a reason for this mistake, another companion spoke to the same guard for the same reason. The guard responded with an order to keep his mouth shut, and then launched into a series of insults against the companion's mother. We immediately started a protest by beating on anything to hand and setting fi re to the whole section. Two hours of chaos later, the whole section was still making a racket, shouting and insulting the guards. (Letter of 11 August 2009 written by B.A. in the special section for Islamist prisoners at the Macomer prison in Italy. In OLGa, 2014 , p. 11)

The general theme of how conflicts develop inside prisons can take specific shape in jihadist radicalization. This seems to entail a dimension of strategic incompatibility . While the politicization of inmates refers to a political interpretation that projects the action on society “outside”, and on links with movements and groups that operate beyond the walls, its positioning inside prisons modifies its features (Goldman, 2014). To off er effective resources of solidarity, identity references and protection, charismatic convicts (informal leaders) and the structured groups that form around an ideological matrix seem to be obliged to make themselves visible. To some degree, they must make a stand and take part in the internal conflict. They have to be capable of using violence. They need to make demands (Ross, 2014 , pp. 280–281). Such processes for taking credit for the conflict have been reported in studies on the radicalization of prison inmates (Ratner & Cartwright, 1990; Quadrelli, 2004). On the other hand, the dynamics of affiliation and conflict need to remain hidden and invisible to establish terrorist cells in prison because the strategic objectives of their actions lie, by definition, outside the prison. Prison is seen as a place where intelligence systems are in operation, and can probably count on the collaboration of other prisoners or rival groups (Hamm, 2007). In short, either the goals of radical groups are part of a broad range of political actions, or they are limited to the sphere of terrorism, and the latter poses constraints of secrecy on recruitments and aggregations. It would consequently seem very difficult to clarify this theoretical quandary without a situated analysis of the morphology of conflicts developing behind bars.

Concentration vs. dispersion

Studies on radicalization in prison that prefer to look at prevention tend to focus on assessing the eff ects of various tactics for combating the phenomenon, but often neglect its previously described ambivalent dimensions (cf. Brandon, 2009 ; Clarke, 2014). These tactics have a variable geometry, taking shape in practices along a continuum from concentration to dispersion. Although single states may show a predilection for one or other orientation, there are also examples (Sbraccia & Verdolini, 2017) of control measures that combine formalized regulatory tools with informal methods (which are nonetheless typical of prison governance). Concentration and dispersion can thus coexist, even if they refer to opposite practices (ICSR, 2010). In the former case, there is a risk of stabilizing the sense of belonging and confl ictual identities, even though concentration often entails closed and punitive detention regimes. Certain groups of inmates are isolated from the common prisoners in an eff ort to prevent proselytizing and recruiting behavior. In the latter case of dispersion, this risk of contamination is partly accepted, and the prevention strategy relies on another form of isolation: radical prisoners are grouped with inmates who are uninterested or even hostile to their ideas. The ambivalence of the approaches to prevention is not only of an operational-managerial nature. It also refl ects a potential strategic confl ict between institutional objectives. On the one hand, the aim is to keep the peace among prison populations and combat the phenomenon of radicalization in prison. On the other, intelligence agencies need to observe and understand how the phenomenon takes place. Here again, it is worth considering the attributions of sense expressed by inmates (or ex-inmates) submitted to the various prevention regimes, and certainly also the opinions of the agents of institutional control involved.

Extremism and support programs

De-radicalization strategies and practices reshape the structural ambivalence of detention in terms of its eff ects as a deterrent and as a form of rehabilitation. Apart from the previously mentioned involvement of

accredited imams, programs that focus on providing support are based on the traditional armamentarium of prison welfare systems, offering educational, therapeutic, recreational, academic and occupational resources (Useem & Clayton, 2009). There is an evident and theoretically quite well-established dimension of contradiction here (Poynting, 2016 ; Bianchi, 2018). As Ahmed put it (2014 , pp. 360–361),

> within the "war on terror" the discourse on Islamic affiliation remains the dominant characteristic of the constructed enemy. . . . It was the construction of a threat and the security actions conveyed as being necessary which made controversial legislation appear imperative and, in the quest for victory, any limits such as democracy and the rule of law have been undermined.

If the mechanism of compound dangerousness identifies the radicalized as the most insidious enemy in the subversive sense (beyond any hypothesis of a social pact), then why invest the increasingly limited resources of prison welfare on such people? Surely, for these individuals, there "should" be special highsecurity circuits and particularly harsh and oppressive detention conditions (as actually happens in the majority of cases). These issues are therefore another case supporting the need to conduct situated studies on the mechanisms of attribution of sense and the notions of dangerousness, as voiced by the inmates and the institutional actors involved. It seems particularly important to investigate their interpretation of the radicalization phenomenon in terms of how the process actually plays out. An attributive type of prevention strategy would therefore not really be intended for the radicalized jihadist, for whom de-radicalization would not be an option. Instead, it would be a set of measures designed to attenuate the damage caused by imprisonment and oppose its effects in confirming a destiny of oppression.

With reference to these lines of research, an analytical framework oriented to defi ne the configuration of meanings that the involved actors construct and reproduce should be developed in qualitative terms and would highly benefit from the methodological specificities of Convict Criminology. The ambiguity in the relations between religion and prison order would be described through the lenses of a lived (directly experienced) order; the dynamics of prison conflict and their incompatibility with a perspective of radicalization explained on the basis of a situated view of such conflict; and the potential contradiction in the fi eld of the concentration-dispersion strategies and the ambivalence of the specific programs of support to fight radicalization understood on the basis of their impact on convicts' routine.

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