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## **CHAPTER 5**

### **The Prison of Carabanchel (Madrid, Spain). A Life Story**

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#### **Introduction**

Since 2007, a group of researchers (anthropologists, archaeologists and historians) from the Spanish National Research Council has been investigating the manifold processes of appropriation and disavowal of the prison of Carabanchel in Madrid. In this chapter we examine the biography of the prison: including not just its birth, life and death, but also its afterlife. The prison of Carabanchel has been one of the most monumental and recognizable symbols of repression in Spain from its construction in 1940 until its destruction in 2008. Even today, it looms large in the imagination of many Spaniards as the quintessential space of punishment in the recent history of the country, although its meanings and functions have changed over time. The short but complex history (and post-history) of Carabanchel makes the prison a multifaceted and often contradictory site. It has been a place of political repression and resistance, a place of memory and oblivion, and of abjection and heroism. Through time, Carabanchel Prison, as a technology of punishment and a symbol of oppression, has changed. Despite its apparently inalterable construction, the materiality of the building has undergone important transformations as well. In this chapter we assess this entanglement of materialities, life histories, collective and individual memories, and regimes of punishment which have simultaneously shaped Carabanchel Prison and the neighbourhood in which it dwells.

We examine the history of Carabanchel through six main phases:

1) Deployment of sovereign power (1939-1944): with the establishment of the Francoist regime after the civil war, the greater part of the prison is constructed. This was the time of

most severe political repression, characterised by mass executions and the overcrowding of makeshift detention centres.

2) Discipline and charity (1944-1953): the inauguration of the prison of Carabanchel, which replaces former detention centres, in June 1944, marks the beginning of this new phase. At the end of the Second World War, the political ideology of Francoism is reshaped to make it less fascist. This coincides with a change in the regime of punishment, which takes on religious connotations through the notion of charity and atonement.

3) Becoming modern (1953-1968): during the 1950s the number of common criminals increased, while the number of political prisoners decreased. The religious approach to imprisonment was gradually superseded by technocratic solutions which prevailed in the 1960s.

4) A new state of exception (1968-1977): the conditions of imprisonment became more severe in the later years of Franco's dictatorship and the early transition to democracy. There was growing and widespread political resistance. Overcrowding and inmate abuse led to widespread riots.

5) The prison as prison (1977-1998): during its only decade of life under democratic conditions and with no political prisoners, the situation of Carabanchel Prison was characterized by drugs, AIDS and dereliction.

6) Between abjection and epic memory (1998-2008): the abandonment process was protracted. The prison was abandoned, looted and vandalized for a decade before it was finally demolished. During this period, diverse actors emerged who used and misused, claimed and interacted with the place in different (often conflicting) ways.

If anything gives coherence to the site as a technology of power through these diverse phases, it is the capacity to define the category of *Homo sacer* in Spanish society, or, more precisely, to make the *Homo sacer* (Agamben, 1995): the one who is deprived of the condition of citizen and reduced to bare life (*zoe*), the one who can be killed without the act constituting either a homicide or a sacrifice (Agamben, 1995: 11-12). *Homo sacer*—and its particular mode of existence, sacred life (*vita sacra*)—exists where there is sovereign power (that is, *vitae*

*necisque potestas*, ‘power over life and death’). The existence of the *Homo sacer* is marked by a relation of exception (*relazione d’eccezione*), through which he or she is included in the political only through his or her exclusion (Agamben 1995: 22). This relation needs an absolute space of exception, which is the concentration camp (Agamben 1995: 24). In our case, *Homines sacri* were successively the ‘Reds’, homosexuals, political dissidents, petty criminals from the low classes, drug addicts, and illegal immigrants. Carabanchel Prison has been a space for redefining the subjects of the state of exception, the physical and legal limits of that state, and the notion of sovereignty. From this point of view, it can be described more accurately as a technology of sovereignty, rather than simply power. As such, it has not stopped working under democratic conditions (cf. Agamben 1995; Mbembe 2003). Although Agamben argues that the space of the *Homo sacer* is the camp, not the prison, we suggest that the difference between camp and prison were blurred during the Francoist dictatorship (and for some time after) and Agamben’s concepts can therefore be applied to Carabanchel Prison as well.

### **Toward the state of exception**

Carabanchel Prison cannot be understood without the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The war legitimized the new regime, justified the unleashing of extreme and widespread violence on the Spanish population, and produced a context that required mass incarceration. But why did Spain’s largest prison have to be built precisely in the neighbourhood of Carabanchel, in the outskirts of Madrid? There were at least two good reasons. The first has to do with the development of the war. The Nationalist army that seemed to be unbeatable—after covering the distance between Seville and the surroundings of Madrid in just three months—was finally stopped in the working-class districts south of Madrid, where the neighbourhood of Carabanchel is located. Carabanchel Alto was captured on November 6<sup>th</sup> 1936, the day before the Battle of Madrid started, but this was the furthest point the Nationalist army was able to reach as Carabanchel Bajo remained under Republican control. The neighbourhood became a frontline for the rest of the war and was largely destroyed, with 48% of the buildings in ruins (Sánchez Molledo 1998: 140). This certainly proved an advantage for large development projects such as the prison, which needed a large, empty lot. But there is more to it: there was the desire for revenge on the working classes that had supported the Republic and prevented the entrance of the Nationalist Army in the capital, and there was the social reorganization of urban space in Madrid, in which the southern belt was designated as a low-class area, with heavy industry and scant services. Regarding the first issue, it is not by chance that the streets

around the prison were all named after fascist generals: Millán Astray, Saliquet, Fanjul (González-Ruibal 2009: 69). The impression of having been collectively punished is still very much present in the minds of many of the prison's neighbours.

The second reason regards the nature of the neighbourhood before the outbreak of the Civil War. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Carabanchel became a sort of heterotopic space, in which a series of institutions were established for those who were either excluded from society or in charge of excluding others. In a short time-span, buildings were constructed for a lunatic asylum, a training workshop for the poor, a hospital for epileptics, a school for orphans, a reformatory, a house for convalescents dependant on the founding hospital of Madrid, an institution for disabled workers, an old people's home, a military hospital and a military camp (Moreno Jiménez 1983: 63-85). Five cemeteries were also built throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Moreno Jiménez 1983: 83-85). It seems as if the authorities had wanted to prove Foucault right, by converting this place in the outskirts of Madrid to a full 'heterotopia of deviation', to which, according to Foucault, belong 'rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons, and one should perhaps add retirement homes' (1986: 25). The proliferation of institutions for deviants before the Civil War could be seen as an early experiment in biopolitics, since they all intended to intervene upon (classify, exclude, and improve) the biological body of the population (Agamben 1995; Foucault 1990).

### **Deploying the sovereign power (1939-1944)**

The prison of Carabanchel was projected in 1939, just after the end of the Civil War, as a large panopticon building with eight galleries. The plan was designed by architects Vicente Agustín Elguero, José María de la Vega Samper and Luis de la Peña Hickman, the latter of whom would be in charge of the technical challenge of the immense cupola that covered the panopticon. Work began in April 1940 and the first phase was concluded in June 1944. 1,000 Republican prisoners were mobilized for the construction of the edifice, which was directed by another war prisoner, the Basque architect Benito Areso Albizu (Bonet Correa, 1978: 144). The space devoted to the prison (16 hectares) multiplied by four the surface occupied by the building it came to replace, the Cárcel Modelo de Madrid. The new prison was well connected with the city, but isolated, in what was then rural land. Due to shortages in steel supply provoked by the war, the main building material would be bricks, with reinforced concrete for structural elements (Decreto sobre Restricciones, 1941). The construction of the new model prison was symbolically associated with the destruction of the old one.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.1 NEAR HERE> *Prisoners and mats* (1943). Drawing by José Manaut. This artist produced a series of drawings and paintings depicting his experience in Spanish prisons in 1943-1944. Universitat de València.

In 1936 at least two thousand people had been taken by Republican militiamen from the old prison of Cárcel Modelo de Madrid and executed in Paracuellos, in the outskirts of the city (Cervera 1998). Some of those that were killed were liberal and centre-right Republican personalities—not necessarily supporters of the fascist rebellion. There were also people that had no political prominence whatsoever. Within the sympathizers or potential sympathizers of the coup, there was a group of very well known reactionary intellectuals and writers (such as Ramiro de Maeztu, a fascist ideologue, and Muñoz Seca, a popular playwright). Although the massacre was not sanctioned by the Republican authorities, the mass killings of Paracuellos became inextricably associated to the Cárcel Modelo and to the repressive regime of the Republic. The prison of Carabanchel, furnished with the latest advances in disciplinary science, was intended to be a symbol of the humanitarian character of the new regime as opposed to the one that had been toppled. The construction, both literally and metaphorically, of a new prison regime required the destruction of the old one. The Cárcel Modelo was demolished and a square was built in its place, for which a monument in the shape of a colossal cross was planned to commemorate those that were killed under the Republic.

While the massive brick building was being constructed, prisoners had to be put in other places: makeshift concentration camps, detention centres and overcrowded prisons. The enormous number of prisoners resulting from the war needed new and larger spaces of reclusion, hence prisons like the one planned for Carabanchel were intended to solve this problem. The number of prisoners is difficult to calculate due to the many irregularities that plagued the process of detention and incarceration (Gómez Bravo 2009: 25), but the official number of those that had been classified and registered in 1939 alone is 270,000, which gives a hint of the magnitude of the phenomenon. Conditions under this massive regime of incarceration were horrifying: around 90,000 people died in jail between 1939 and 1944 (Gómez Bravo 2009: 37; Vinyes 2002: 32; Moreno 1999; Núñez Díaz-Balart y Rojas Friend 1997: 16-26; Suárez et al. 1976). The main problem that faced the prison system was that it was devised to host between 15.000 and 20.000 inmates in all the existing prisons in the country (Gómez Bravo 2005): That was the official number of inmates in Madrid alone in 1943, although the authorities admitted the existence of as many as 30,000 (Quintero 2010: 3).

In Madrid's main prison, General Díaz Porlier 58, 5,000 prisoners were crammed in inhuman conditions, many awaiting the death penalty.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.2 NEAR HERE> Aerial photograph of the old Model Prison of Madrid, at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. Martín Santos Yubero Photographic Collection, 29974-75. Regional Archive of the Autonomous Government of Madrid.

There were 20 other prisons in the capital (Ortiz Mateos 2008: 9-16; Quintero 2010: 3-4), two of them in Carabanchel, where old disciplinary institutions (reformatories) were reused.

During the period in which Carabanchel Prison was under construction, a complex typology of repressive spaces was developed to detain, filter and classify the vanquished in the war. These spaces included forced labour camps, police stations, delegations of the fascist party (Falange), penitentiary colonies, concentration camps and prisons. They formed a particular operational sequence whose aim was to produce new subjects for the New Spain—and get rid of the social debris during the operation. The network of detention centres with which the dictatorship covered the country was particularly thick in Madrid. The majority of camps reused old buildings, such as schools, factories, seminars, military barracks, and bullrings (Gómez Bravo 2009: 21). This extensive topography of terror—in which almost any place could become a place of repression—tells eloquently of the totalitarian character of the early Franco dictatorship and of its ability to achieve a regime of silence that permeated the urban fabric.<sup>2</sup> In these improvised detention centres, inmates had to stand all day for lack of space; the buildings were extremely unhealthy with the same latrines shared by hundreds or even thousands of inmates, and food rations were limited to one per person per day. In this context, diseases were rife and mortality very high. It was the inmates' families that usually managed to keep them alive by giving them food and clothing (Gómez Bravo 2009: 97-106).

The ephemeral nature of the early places of imprisonment explains in part their disappearance from Madrilenian collective memory, although other, more durable locales, such as the cemeteries, where people were executed, have not been turned into places of memory, either (Ortiz Mateos 2008: 1). In 1940 in the cemetery of La Almudena alone 953 people were executed (Núñez Díaz-Balart y Rojas Friend 1997: 108-109), and in 1944, the year in which the prison of Carabanchel opened, 359 prisoners were executed in the capital (Montoliú 2005: 305). Particularly remarkable is the oblivion of those tragedies that affected important figures in Spanish culture and politics. Thus, while there is a plaque that marks that

the poet Miguel Hernández wrote one of his most famous poems in a particular building of Madrid, there is no reference to the conditions in which the poem was written: Hernández was dying of tuberculosis in a prison and writing his last poems to his newborn child (Ortiz Mateos 2008: 14).

One of the improvised detention centres, the reformatory of Santa Rita in Carabanchel, was transformed into the Central Workers Prison, which provided the labour for building the prison of Carabanchel (Quintero 2010: 6). The inauguration of the new prison of Carabanchel marked the transition between the so-called ‘scaffold phase’ of the repressive post-war policies and the new regime of punishment, which was depicted as magnanimous (despite political prisoners still being executed by the hundreds in the late 1940s). Given the dreadful conditions of imprisonment in the makeshift centres of the 1939-1944 period, it is not strange that political prisoners regarded Carabanchel as an improvement in their lives:

‘Imagine leaving [Porlier prison] and entering Carabanchel, where there is a large space where you can look at and your sight spreads as much as it can... You feel something like satisfaction and you forget then that you are not free’ (Parra Salmerón 1983: 42).

In any case, the attenuation of the repressive system was not actually due to any desire to be merciful but rather to the practical problems caused by having the prisoners living in exceedingly overcrowded conditions: first, their propensity to rebellion (Vinyes 2002: 25-32; Rodríguez Teijeiro 2007), and second, their inactivity, as they were not used in the reconstruction of the country and its beleaguered economy. To relieve the pressure on the prison system, the regime resorted to amnesties and probation. However, the most important solution was a system of reduction in sentences, through which large numbers of prisoners were mobilized for the construction of public works (railways, dams, roads, canals, and Franco’s own mausoleum), and also for some private undertakings (Torres, 2000; Lafuente, 2002; Acosta et al., 2004, Gómez Bravo, 2007). The label under which reductions of sentence were given —*redención* (literally ‘atonement’)— reveals its religious inspiration in keeping with the Nationalist-Catholic ideology of the regime.

The repressive system of the post-war period is an eloquent manifestation of the nature of the sovereign power after the Spanish Civil War. The ultimate expression of sovereignty resides in its capacity to dictate who may live and who must die (Foucault 1990: 135-159; Agamben 1995: 23-80; Mbembe 2003: 11). According to Foucault, sovereign power in recent

times has been exercised less as a deduction (of things, time, bodies and life itself) and more as a productive force, to ensure, maintain or develop the life of the social body. In Spain during the 1940s we witness a transition between a traditional expression of sovereignty as pure deduction (the ‘scaffold phase’ that prevails between 1936 and 1943) and a more modern conception based on the control of life. The new biopolitical strategy demanded material mechanisms for its implementation.

### **Discipline and charity (1944-1961)**

The prison of Carabanchel was one of these material technologies at the service of the new regulatory power. As noted, the construction followed the classic radial model, which was out of fashion by that time.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.3 NEAR HERE> Figure 5.3 Model of the new prison of Carabanchel (1 February 1941). Martín Santos Yubero Photographic Collection, 29976. Regional Archive of the Autonomous Government of Madrid.

This was not a new architectural form as the old *Cárcel Modelo*, inaugurated in 1883, already had a radial layout, with the characteristic half-star design best-known from Pentonville in England, built in 1842 (Bonet Correa 1978: 143). The plan for the Carabanchel Prison, which was never totally completed, showed it as having a central room serving panoptical functions and eight galleries. It was one of the biggest prisons built in Europe following the system of John Havilland (Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, 1821), upon which it was based (Johnston 1961: 319-320; Johnson 1994). The project was presented in Francoist propaganda as a marvel of modernity, with excellent conditions of hygiene and habitability, including workshops, schools, a library and gymnasium, and housing for the prison officers (S. de M., 1940: 6), with all facilities fully equipped with cutting-edge technological advances. At the same time this purported modernity was mixed with traditional Catholic concepts, such as charity and redemption. This mixture of traditionalism and modernism was evident in the fabric of the building itself: whereas the main entrance still boasted a historicist facade, the rest of the building followed strict rationalist principles—in striking contrast with the prevailing neo-Renaissance style of other public buildings. The only concessions to nationalist architectural styles would be found in the material used. In particular, the panopticon dome would be covered with slate like the roofs of Philip II’s El



Escorial monastery, and the facades, windows and doorjambs of some structures would be made in granite an ‘imperial’ stone widely used in El Escorial (Cárcel de Carabanchel. Elementos 2008; Cirici 1977; Urrutia 2002: 241; Viejo-Rose 2011: 51-53). Moreover, the houses for the prison officers would manifest the totalitarian will of the regime and the intention of turning Carabanchel Prison into a total institution where everyone, masters and prisoners, would reside there together (Goffman 1972: 13). The officers’ quarters would include 80 blocks, a church, gardens and a school. The layout of the housing project is similar to other plans of urban and social engineering undertaken in the 1940s (Urrutia 1997: 357)

The space of the prison proper was divided into three areas: exterior, intermediate, and interior. The first area held the administrative functions, general archive, offices, warehouses, garages, guard rooms, a residence for 25 nuns in charge of the inmates, and the residences of the director, deputy director, and prison administrator. The intermediate zone in turn was divided into three areas: public, semi-public, and private. The public area was for visits. Between this area and the next there was a security gate, which marked the entrance into the confinement area. There were actually a number of gates, whose number and functioning caused a great impact on the inmates entering the prison:

What I remember from Carabanchel was the number of gates I had to cross to enter the building, right? Incredible, right? Many gates, I thought they were five at least, five or six. Then, you crossed them and they were opening and closing, and closing. [Interview by MMZ with LPV, former political prisoner, 21-05-2008]

The semi-public area housed the booths for face-to-face meetings between lawyers, judges, and inmates. In the private area the detainees were processed before entrance into the prison, with admission cells, an office for anthropometric identification, a laboratory, photographic archive, disinfection services, and baths. After the private area there was another security gate, regulating access to the galleries, which had four floors (three regular ones plus a basement with dining hall, workshops, showers, and cooperative store). Not all galleries were the same. Those of recidivists were perceived as harder than the rest:

The gallery of recidivists was the hardest... a terrible kind of galleries, with several floors, which look like a whale’s belly, when you arrived there during the night, and there is almost no light, the light is dim. It is a feeling of being

crushed, that it is impossible not to have when you enter there... [Interview by MLOP with EPM, 19-05-2008].

The idea was that each gallery worked in a self-contained manner, as a semi-autonomous unit: only the infirmary and the kitchen were shared. This created a sense of isolation among the different kinds of inmates (common criminals, homosexuals and political prisoners), who rarely, if ever, coincided with other classes of prisoners. The inmates had a fragmented and restricted vision of the prison: for example, some prisoners say that, for them, the prison was their cell, their gallery and the yard they used. A former inmate even said that he did not have a clear notion of the panoptical space (the control centre)<sup>3</sup>: he only noticed its relevance once the prison was abandoned and in ruins (interview by MMZ with DAG, former political prisoner in the 1960s, 19-06-2008). Beyond the panopticon and the main galleries, there was another module which was called *prisión-taller*, or ‘workshop prison’. Unlike the rest of the prison, this space was for permanent, not transient, inmates. The entire complex was surrounded by a 25-metre exclusion strip and a double wall six metres high.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.4 NEAR HERE> Carabanchel Prison, including all later additions up to 1998. In grey: the intermediate zone. Map by Alfredo González-Ruibal.

The control centre was the most important element of the prison from both architectural and symbolic points of view. It was to be covered by a colossal vault 25 metres high and 32 metres in diameter (by comparison, the dome of Saint Paul’s Cathedral in London has an internal diameter of 31 metres). At a time when the shortages of construction material, particularly concrete, were dramatic, the vault took 125 tons of concrete and 60 tons of steel to build (De la Peña 1956). It was one of the few vaults in reinforced concrete erected during the post-war period.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.5 NEAR HERE> The prison panopticon from the outside. March 2007. Photograph by Tamara Ferrera (Carabanchel Prison Project).

That the most impressive building of the new regime was a prison and that the most extraordinary element within the prison was the room that fulfilled panoptical functions speaks volumes of the new regime’s ideology: a totalitarian system which cherished fantasies

of absolute control. The panopticon ordered the world of the prison, with its regulatory function clearly experienced by the inmates:

Carabanchel causes you a great impression, because it is a very big prison... the room of the dome which is where they distributed you, where [they told you where] you had to go, not to go, you know? [...] That was impressive, that was really impressive [Interview by MMZ with LB, 82 year old former political prisoner, 16-10-2009].

The plan was never completed as envisaged. When the prison was inaugurated in 1944, only one of the eight galleries had been entirely built and construction work continued until 1956, when it was considered finished (even though one of the galleries was never completed). The housing and annexes for officers in Carabanchel were never built.

The inauguration of the prison was an occasion for the regime to show to the world its humane side. In June 1944, when the inauguration took place, it was quite clear that the Second World War was taking a bad turn for the Axis powers, so it was the moment for Spain to distance itself from other fascist states: according to this rhetoric, there were no dungeons in the country, the age of the Inquisition was long gone, and political prisoners did not exist. Instead, there were state-of-the-art prisons, where common criminals could even work to earn a salary in order to maintain their families and reduce their sentences. Of course, this idealized image meant covering up certain practices, which suited the Middle Ages better than the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, in the same year of the inauguration, two prisoners were put on a diet of bread and water for fifteen days after complaining about the quality of the food (Gómez Bravo 2009: 44). The inauguration ceremony again mixed modernity and tradition: the building was blessed, a mass celebrated (Figure 5.6), a folkloric show performed, and the inmates paraded in military style.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.6 NEAR HERE> Above. Inauguration of the prison (22 April 1944). Martín Santos Yubero Photographic Collection, 1417-1. Regional Archive of the Autonomous Government of Madrid. Below. Bishop blessing the entrance to a gallery from the panopticon (23 May 1955). Martín Santos Yubero Photographic Collection, 6958-11. Regional Archive of the Autonomous Government of Madrid.

The building with its modernist look captured the attention of media reports and documentaries (Quintero 2010): the large prison grounds, the modern kitchens, the brand-new, clean and empty cells—everything that could not be depicted in the other Francoist prisons.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.7 NEAR HERE> The vision of the victor and the vision of the vanquished. Left: authorities in an official visit to a brand-new gallery in Carabanchel Prison. Martín Santos Yubero Photographic Collection, 22432-2. Regional Archive of the Autonomous Government of Madrid. Right: prisoners moving into Carabanchel with their beddings. Drawing by José Manaut (1944). Universitat de València.

Carabanchel Prison became a powerful media image, a showcase of the new regime and a false metonymy for the Spanish penitentiary system.

Prisoners started arriving at Carabanchel early in 1944. It seems that the untenable situation in the prison at General Díaz Porlier Street forced an early transfer to Carabanchel. These inmates were later joined by those imprisoned in the Santa Rita reformatory (Gómez Bravo 2009: 150). As noted, the arrival at Carabanchel Prison was experienced with a sense of relief by some prisoners (Parra Salmerón 1983: 42), but overcrowding soon became a reality again. There was room for 2,300 inmates in the prison, but only one year after the inauguration there were already 4,922 political prisoners from the war (the so-called *anteriores*), 535 post-war political prisoners (called *posteriores*) and 1.552 common criminals (Anuario Estadístico de España 1946-47; Quintero 2010), that is, three and a half times its maximum capacity. Conditions continued to be hard, with scant food, health problems, forced labour, military discipline, censorship, beatings and torture, and executions. This led to increased resistance, especially on the part of the Communist Party, who saw one of its members killed by torture inside the Carabanchel. The protests of the inmates, who tried to bring international attention to their desperate circumstances, were countered by Francoist propaganda, which insisted on the absence of political prisoners in Spain (a message that was reinforced by a reprieve in 1945) and the insistence on the humanitarian and modern nature of the prison system. This propaganda was mostly aimed to foreigners. For Spaniards, the enormous prison of Carabanchel sent another message, a monumental warning about the futility of all revolt against the regime. The architectural logic of Carabanchel Prison responded to the needs of a totalitarian ideology: order, control and surveillance, but it also intended to comply with the new image that the regime was creating for itself: *disciplina con*

*humanidad* [discipline with humanity] and *caridad justa* [charity with justice] (Gómez Bravo 2009: 54). Agamben writes that ‘The camp is the space opened when the state of exception becomes the rule’ (1995: 188). The prison of Carabanchel represents this moment in which the exceptionality of war is normalized and the politics of exclusion and inclusion begin to organize the entire society.

### **Becoming modern (1953-1968)**

The prison of Carabanchel was not materially transformed in any substantial way after the late 1940s. Some buildings, however, were added which reflect changing ideologies and notions of imprisonment. After 1950 the political situation in Spain stabilised, to the desperation of all the political prisoners who had pinned their hopes on foreign intervention. As a staunch anti-communist, Franco started to play an important role in the geopolitics of the Cold War. The total number of political prisoners, nonetheless, steadily decreased throughout the 1950s, with 30,000 prisoners in 1952 and half that number in 1959 (Bueno Arús 1978: 125). Similarly, the number of political prisoners in Carabanchel fell. Those who remained were in preventive detention, either because they were being transferred to other prisons or because they were awaiting trial by one of the central courts in charge of judging political offences (first the Special Court for the Repression of Communism and Freemasonry and later the Court for Public Order).

The abandonment of the plan for a large housing project for prison officers is significant of the prevailing ideological changes: there would be no all-embracing, total institution in which ‘master’ and ‘slave’ would live in close contact. The time of overt totalitarianism was over. On the contrary, several institutions were inaugurated reflecting the modernizing tendencies of the new regime. A first step towards a more modern penal regime was the inauguration of a reformatory for young offenders in 1953, which included training workshops where youngsters could learn to be tailors, leather workers, carpenters, or electricians (Figure 5.8 and Figure 5.9).

<INSERT FIGURE 5.8 AND 5.9 NEAR HERE> Youth reformatory in Carabanchel (24 September 1960). Martín Santos Yubero Photographic Collection, 18063-9. Regional Archive of the Autonomous Government of Madrid. Note that the religious foundations of the disciplinary system are still obvious: the letters on the plinth of the statue read *redención*: “atonement”. Photograph by Santos Yubero. Exhibition of inmates’ handicrafts (1962).

Martín Santos Yubero Photographic Collection, 22432-17. Regional Archive of the Autonomous Government of Madrid.

Another institution that was inaugurated at this time was the Psychiatric Hospital, which had been already projected in 1944 (Barrios Flores 2000: 39). It hosted new kinds of subjects (new categories of *Homo sacer*), who, like political prisoners, were subjected to strict social control (Figure 5.10): the so-called *vagos y maleantes* [vagrants and crooks] and homosexuals.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.10 NEAR HERE> Facade of the psychiatric hospital at Carabanchel Prison. Martín Santos Yubero Photographic Collection, 22353-73. Regional Archive of the Autonomous Government of Madrid.

These new institutions imply a shift from the religiously-oriented management of punishment and rehabilitation of the former period.

This shift towards a more modern and professional perspective on the disciplinary process is more explicit, however, during the 1960s, when the modernizing trends became dominant in the entire prison system in Spain. They were a reflection of wider social, economic and political changes in the country at that time, which have been described as *desarrollismo*, ‘developmentalism’. In the case of Carabanchel, these transformations were epitomized in two new institutions: the School for Prison Studies (1961) and the Psychological Laboratory (1965)<sup>4</sup>. Experiments were carried out on inmates in this latter place, including electroshock and lobotomy (Roldán Barbero 1988: 204).

<INSERT FIGURE 5.11 NEAR HERE> Prisoner undergoing a session of electroshock. Psychiatric hospital of Carabanchel (9 March 1962). Martín Santos Yubero Photographic Collection, 22353-8. Regional Archive of the Autonomous Government of Madrid.

These services were superseded by a Prison Watch (1968), whose central offices were in Carabanchel. Some of the changes in the treatment of inmates, laws and regulations, and the training of prison officers were also a reaction to the demands made by the political prisoners and their continuous struggle. As noted above, the 1940s witnessed a transition in

the exercise of sovereign power: from a regime of deduction (of bodies, property and life) to one of production. The biopolitics of Carabanchel from the mid-1950s onwards would be clearly oriented at ordering life, including the definition of what is a ‘life worthy of life’ (Agamben 1995: 151). For that end, the execution wall and the torture chamber were less useful than the psychiatric hospital and electroshock. This is not a tale of evolution, however. The regime ended as it began: returning to an *estado de excepción* [state of emergency] with killings and mass imprisonment of political dissidents.

Political prisoners were confined in what became the legendary ‘sixth gallery’. This was a special gallery, separated from the rest and with roomier cells. A former prisoner remembers the difference between the other galleries and the sixth, in which the materiality of the prison was very much involved (and incorporated into the memories of inmates):

when you came from the gallery where you had been in isolated confinement [10 days before being assigned a place in the prison], it looked almost cosy, because you arrived there and the cells were opened all day long. It was a gallery without the smell, this characteristic smell that enters through your nose, a sour smell which is there permanently and with this noise, with these echoes that there are inside the big galleries... this was a small gallery... [Interview by MLOP of EPM, 19-5-2008].

Political prisoners were organized in ‘communes’, which were coordinated by a so-called ‘mother’ or leader in charge of economic and logistical matters. The commune furnished the inmates with material support and, most importantly, information about the organization of the prison, advice on regulations, hints on the appropriate attitude to keep the morale high, and a structure of collective and individual behaviour that helped to mitigate the conditions of imprisonment (Suárez y Galante 2008: 96). Many inmates talk about the ‘Prison University’, referring to lessons in literature, languages, maths or physics given by fellow prisoners.

Between the 1940s and the 1960s the neighbourhoods around the prison (Carabanchel and Aluche) witnessed important transformations (Moreno Jiménez 1986). As the prison became “modern”, so did the neighbourhoods. Interestingly, they were first reconstructed after the war in a pseudo-rural style with small, one-story houses, which were considered consistent with the humble people who had to inhabit them: poor people and families of peasant origins (Urrutia 1997: 358). During the modernizing process, these houses were

replaced by rows of modern buildings to house a growing number of workers, employed in the industrial belt south of Madrid. The architecture and materials of the new housing developments echoed those of the prison: masses of red bricks with no adornments, and rectangular windows and doors. The socio-economic problems caused by these neighbourhoods, deprived of social services and with a working class population uprooted from the countryside, nurtured the prison with new inmates during the following decades—a new category of socially-excluded subjects.

### **A new state of exception (1968-1978)**

After the early sixties, there were no substantial changes in the materiality of the prison. The institutional, social and political environment, on the contrary, underwent important changes. The anachronistic prison of Carabanchel would be more and more an extraneous element in the urban landscape. This impression of ‘matter out of place’ would grow with the progressive decay of the premises, which would become obvious in the images of the 1977-78 prison riots.

Between the late 1960s and the end of the dictatorship in 1975, the number of political prisoners grew again, as a result of generalized opposition against the regime. Political repression affected now even the middle and upper classes that had supported the regime, as well-to-do students increasingly joined the ranks of the resistance.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.12 NEAR HERE> Political prisoner in his cell by the end of the Francoist dictatorship. Collection of the Carabanchel Prison Project.

In 1973, a state of exception was officially declared and many young people were arbitrarily detained and taken into prison. Many students followed the communist order to not pay the fine in order to spend time in jail as a sign of resistance. This allowed many youngsters to prove their anti-Francoist pedigree (Puicercús 2009: 74-75). The truth is that the regime became relentless in its attempts to control a society which was clearly deviating from the authoritarian lines designed by those in power. Strikes and demonstrations proliferated, along with mass detentions, tortures and, once again, killings. The last people executed during Francoism, three members of the FRAP (a revolutionary communist group) and two members of ETA (Basque separatists), were taken from Carabanchel and killed by firing squad on 27 September 1975.



The state of exception did not end with the death of Francisco Franco. Although Franco died in November 1975 political prisoners did not start to be released before the summer of 1976, after the Law of Political Amnesty was passed. Conflicts inside the prison grew as common criminals began to adopt the model of resistance that had been used by political prisoners. This led to another state of emergency, continuously challenged by those who suffered its implications. Common criminals started to use the self-denomination 'social prisoners' with which they hoped to manifest that there were social causes behind their exclusion. They considered themselves 'prisoners of Franco' and demanded to be recognized as victims of the dictatorship, arguing that the ultraconservative morals of the regime, the strong social inequalities that it had fostered, and the rigid class system on which it was based had all deprived them, the so-called 'social prisoners', of opportunities making them marginal and invisible (Lorenzo Rubio 2006: 88).

During the 1970s, prisons became overcrowded again, this time with common criminals coming from the working class neighbourhoods of Madrid, and living conditions worsened. Food was remembered as repulsive by the prisoners:

Food was nasty, right? But really, really nasty. You know, you picked up some beans and when you were going to eat them, they had solidified... there were bugs, anyway...  
[Interview by MMZ with LPV, former political prisoner, 21-05-2008]

As had happened at the beginning of the prison's life, inmates had to rely on the food provided by relatives and friends to be properly fed. Shortly after Franco's death, the problem was tackled with a reduction of sentences which released 5,000 inmates (Lorenzo Rubio, 2006). Common prisoners, however, felt disillusioned and betrayed when the political amnesty of 1976 did not include them (Blanco Chivite 1977: 84-85). The limited pardon for common criminals (of which several had already been issued during Francoism) and the maintenance of the draconian laws issued during the Francoist regime (such as the Penal Code of 1944) encouraged the riots that broke out during the last years of Franco's regime (Bueno Arús 1978: 126). On 31 July 1976 a riot broke out in Carabanchel, when prisoners from the fifth gallery refused to leave the yards and enter the workshops. Other inmates climbed on to the roofs with banners asking for 'total amnesty', 'pardon for common criminals', and 'reform of the penal code'. Other prisons joined the rebellion and two associations emerged, the most important of which was COPEL (*Coordinadora de Presos en Lucha* [Coordinating Committee of Fighting Prisoners]), which was created in Barcelona in January 1977 (Lorenzo

Rubio 2005 and 2006; Galván 2009). Their demands were ambitious and included political-legal claims (such as the abolishment of the Trial Law), changes in the operation of prisons and their staff, and improvements in the prisoners' living conditions. The influence of the political prisoners was obvious in their communiqués, where they explained their fight as 'the "Social Struggle" against the obvious Injustice (sic) of a brutal regime that has created the socio-economic bases of the inequalities against which we rebel and that has institutionalized repression as a form of Government over the Peoples and Men of Spain' (Lorenzo Rubio 2006: 90).

However, the idiosyncrasies of the common criminals and the extreme repression that was unleashed against COPEL leaders hampered coordination among the different prisons and doomed the revolt to failure. Strikes, walkouts, hunger strikes, self-harm, arson, and riots multiplied and were met with transfers, disciplinary measures, and confinement cells. These actions reached their climax during the Battle of Carabanchel on 18 July 1977 in which several hundred inmates occupied the roofs of the prison in full view of journalists and neighbours.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.13 NEAR HERE> Riot led by COPEL in Carabanchel, July 1977.

The battle ended with riot police breaking into the prison and eventually distributing the rebel leaders to other institutions. The lack of solutions made the conflict more radical: measures were eventually taken to democratise the system, introduce reforms, and change the penal code (Lorenzo Rubio, 2006: 92-94). Violence, however, continued unabated: a young anarchist linked to COPEL was beaten to death by a group of prison guards on 14 March 1978, and a week later the General Director of Prisons, Jesús Haddad, was killed by the terrorist group GRAPO. Haddad was succeeded by a progressive university professor, Carlos García Valdés, who carried out the reform of the penitentiary system that succeed in dissolving the revolt (Bueno Arús 1978: 128-131). The prisoners' movement ended during the last months of 1978.

### **The prison as prison (1978-1998)**

A new prison law was passed in October 1979 that replaced the one from 1849. This law ameliorated the situation of common criminals, but also implied the end of Carabanchel, as there was no place for a macro-prison with a large number of inmates but without a modular structure in the city centre. A map of five new centres was devised for the periphery of

Madrid (García Valdés 1998: 9). The 1980s was a period of decline for Carabanchel Prison. Some politically-charged episodes remained, however, such as the death in prison of the Basque terrorist Arregi in 1981 which led to a riot by the other 52 imprisoned ETA members. Shortly before the closure of the prison some of the members of the terrorist group GAL (*Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación*, [Counter-terrorist Groups of Liberation]), who were leading a dirty war against ETA,<sup>5</sup> spent some time in Carabanchel (Faucha y Fernández 2008: 79). Included among those imprisoned for politically-related offences were the men who refused to do military or community service (*insumisos*), with their presence in Carabanchel indicated by graffiti on the walls of the prison (*No hay prisión que pare la insumisión* [There is no prison that can stop the refusal to do military service]). The presence of Basque inmates was materially corroborated during our fieldwork by several Basque Nationalist newspapers and stickers, a placard in which prisoners asked for two ill comrades to be sent back to the Basque Country, and a poster with photographs and names of Basque prisoners.

Nevertheless, the prevailing prisoner profile at Carabanchel during its last years was the young common criminal from the working class neighbourhoods, drug-addicted and involved in drug-related offences—the so-called *quinquis* (Cuesta 2009). Furthermore, AIDS was rife in the prison. For want of a political subject, AIDS-infected addicts became the new *Homo sacer* during the transition period—a figure that had its own *Muselmann*: the inmate in the terminal stages of the disease who had abandoned all hope. Carabanchel in the 1980s and 1990s can only be described as a place of abjection, a symbolic and spiritual ruin before the actual, physical ruin. Documentary films by Adolfo Garijo record the state of decadence and dirtiness of the prison and the desperation of its inhabitants<sup>6</sup>. The prison yards are shown filled with rubbish, and the cells decrepit and messy. The traces of this last episode of the building's life were what we, the researchers, documented when we visited the place in 2006. The abject materiality of the prison's decadence had completely erased the aura of the place as a symbol of political resistance during Francoism [Figure 6.14], depriving it of that excess of meaning which it had had for over 30 years. What remained during the last years of life of Carabanchel was the prison as pure prison.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.14 NEAR HERE> Debris from the prison hospital. May 2007.  
Photograph by Alfredo González-Ruibal (Carabanchel Prison Project).

When we first entered Carabanchel in December 2006, the prison had already been thoroughly looted. We could, however, still see traces of the last inmates in the vacant cells:

the decoration on the walls, the cork panels where they pinned up photographs, their graffiti. Albeit subtly, these actions also changed the materiality of the prison. We even discovered some personal belongings, such as playing cards, a hand-made weapon, paintings made by the prisoners in the workshops, medicines, notebooks and books (including the textbooks used by inmates enrolled in the UNED, the Spanish equivalent of the Open University). There were traces of the prison guards as well: we found newspapers and documents abandoned in their rooms— vacation requests, an invitation to a wedding, and several letters complaining about the suspension without pay of some officers in 1993.

Most of the graffiti is from the 1990s, and is painted on the walls or, more frequently, on cork panels. The graffiti reveals much about the social and ethnic extraction of the inmates and about their problems. Of the 12 recorded references to neighbourhoods in Madrid, 11 were to working-class neighbourhoods (Parla, Móstoles, Alcobendas, Barrio del Pilar, Moratalaz, Vallecas, Usera, Getafe) and only one to a middle-to-upper class neighbourhood (Pozuelo de Alarcón). There was also graffiti that mentioned Poland and Romania. Another, very elaborate graffiti was written in Polish, and others were written in Arabic, in all likelihood made by Moroccans or other Maghrebi people. One inscription, ironically, says in Spanish: ‘I was condemned without evidence. No problem! They look after [all?] of us well. Thank you. Ali’. Irony is also present elsewhere: ‘Thank you, Mr. Judge, for putting me in jail. You can’t imagine how grateful I am’, and ‘Discipline!!! Now!!!’ Some graffiti makes reference to the kind of crimes that led the inmates to prison: ‘Here was Juanito for stabbing a son of a bitch’. Others represent the prisoners’ desires: one of them is a drawing of a tree from whose branches come out a naked woman, a car, money, whiskey, a syringe and a marijuana leaf. The decoration of the cells is similar: the pictures glued to the cork panels or walls are extremely repetitive and can be reduced to two categories: women and cars/motorcycles. Curiously, many of the photographs of women are not openly erotic: they seem to have been taken from gossip magazines and represent glamorous women.

Interestingly, some of the graffiti bears warnings: ‘I hope you never make a blunder again, but if you make it, think it well. I hope this is useful!’ Some graffiti mention girlfriends and friends: ‘Sergio, the one from Comillas, loves Ana and loves her to the death, 16-8-95’. There are many reflections on drugs: ‘Freedom is not injected, it is conquered’, ‘Born to die young’, ‘Heroin, no, no!’, ‘Cheer for life and the dickheads who keep taking drugs, fuck off’, and ‘I have tears in my eyes not because of this shit but because I’m thinking of my family and the harm that I’m doing to them. Damn heroin! How many ruins you are causing’ (Figures 5.15).

<INSERT FIGURE 5.15 NEAR HERE> Graffiti with drug-related theme: ‘I have tears in my eyes...’. November 2007. Photograph by Alfredo González-Ruibal (Carabanchel Prison Project).

Drugs and AIDS were very present in the ruins of the prison: the infirmary had been vandalized and dozens of syringes, blood tests, pills and medicines lay on the floor. Much of the post-abandonment graffiti referred to heroin consumption and its nefarious consequences, including memorials to former inmates who had died in prison as a result of drugs or drug-related diseases. In addition, in the officers’ rooms we found several documents mentioning the discovery of drugs and alcohol among the inmates’ belongings.

The material evidence of a growing foreign population points to the emergence of yet a new *Homo sacer*: the petty criminals of the lower classes give way to immigrants. Again, life in the neighbourhoods and inside the prison is tightly interwoven: immigrants represented a growing percentage of the population in Carabanchel and Aluche.

### **Between abjection and epic memory (1998-2008)**

The prison of Carabanchel was finally vacated in October 1998. The last inmates, 2,000 men and 500 women (Faucha y Fernández 2008: 79), left for other prisons. Despite the fact that the move had been imminent since 1991, the prison was abandoned in an almost catastrophic fashion: everything was left behind. In April 2010 an exhibition in Madrid showed a diversity of materials collected after the abandonment. These included documents of the inmates, the prison officers and the authorities: psychosocial reports, inmates’ petitions, ordinances, minutes, certificates of entrance and departure, personal letters, and medical prescriptions, among other items (*Carabanchel, La memoria en ruinas, abril 2010*). At the same time, acts of memorialisation began to be organized as soon as the prison was closed: in 1998 the General Direction of Prisons organized guided tours in which notable ex-prisoners took part, as well as a photo exhibition with images of the history of the prison. In 1999, Rosendo Mercado, a famous rock singer from Carabanchel offered a memorable concert in one of the prison yards. There were also some early suggestions of turning the prison or part of it into a museum, such as the proposal of a socialist senator of preserving the panopticon as early as December 1998.

Shortly before the prison was vacated, a long process of negotiation began between the Ministry of Interior, the owner of the building, and the city council, which had jurisdiction

over urban regulations, to decide the future use of the terrain. The large estate and its privileged location allowed for speculative operations that could provide a significant amount of money to the Ministry, money that could be used to finance other prisons. In 1997, the city council and the autonomous government of Madrid, both in the hands of the right-wing Partido Popular, approved an urban plan that allowed for the construction of 1,300 residences to be placed on the open market. This triggered an immediate reaction from the neighbours of Aluche and Carabanchel, who conducted a popular plebiscite in 1999 about possible uses of the terrain. 32,371 votes were cast, with 99.38% demanding the construction of a hospital on the prison grounds.

In June 2005, following an agreement signed in 2002 between the Ministry of the Interior and the city council, the old prison hospital was transformed into an internment centre for foreigners (*Centro de Internamiento de Extranjeros*). This was also a material transformation since the old building was externally refurbished (or camouflaged) with bright, colourful paint. A nearby space was used as an office for the administration of residence permits and other police procedures for immigrants. The transformation of the *Homo sacer* was thus completed: from the local lower-class addicts (who by that time had almost disappeared) to the foreigner. As Agamben has noted, ‘the capitalist-democratic project of eliminating the poor classes through development not only reproduces internally the people of the socially-excluded, but transforms in bare life all the populations of the third world’ (1995: 201). The situation now is as contradictory as it is surreal. We have a prison for ‘illegal immigrants’ who lack residence permits, a police office to provide these permits; furthermore, the ruins of the old prison are now occupied by other immigrants (some of them presumably illegal as well) living in the derelict building, alongside local homeless people.

During its period of abandonment, Carabanchel Prison became a place to which a multitude of actors laid claim while others disowned it. Those who claimed the space were the above-mentioned immigrants and homeless people who were squatting in the premises. There were also the gypsies, Romanians and others who were stripping the prison bare, taking away copper cables, pipes, steel rods and iron bars to sell. There were graffiti artists from all over Spain who came to Carabanchel as though on a pilgrimage and whose images established a dialogue with the building and its history. However, this dialogue took place with recent history only—the prison as prison.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.16 NEAR HERE> Post-abandonment graffiti with prison theme. November 2007. Photograph by Cristina Sánchez-Carretero (Carabanchel Prison Project).

This is probably due to two reasons: first, the erasure of the political history of Carabanchel by the more recent history of abjection and, second, the likely identification of the graffiti artists with the social prisoners, people living on the margins of society and persecuted by the establishment. The aura of the ruined prison attracted other artists, namely photographers. Amateur and professional photographers participated in an exhibition organized by the neighbourhood association AVA (*Asociación de Vecinos de Aluche*), which has been the most active group involved in preserving the memory of the prison. The exhibition comprised eighty images, both historical and modern. Finally, the prison and its terrain were also forcefully claimed by former political prisoners, their relatives, friends, and socially aware neighbours. They had to fight against those who disowned the prison: the Ministry of the Interior, the city council, and the neighbours who felt uncomfortable with the symbolism(s) of the building and wanted to get rid of it. This political revival meant glossing over the recent period of Carabanchel as a prison for common criminals.

Several associations had been fighting since 1993 to prevent the prison terrain from being handed over to private housing development. The associations demanded social services for an area that had traditionally been deprived of them. Key in their requests was the construction of a public hospital. The population increase brought on by new houses, instead of a hospital, would render the neighbours' situation even more difficult. These demands roused little interest outside the neighbourhood until January 2007. At that moment, the right-wing candidate running for the presidency of the city council offered to build a hospital on the terrain vacated by the demolition of the prison—despite the fact that the city council had no right over the property, which belonged to the Ministry of Interior (in the hands of the Socialist Party). Nevertheless the neighbours of Aluche and Carabanchel organized a festive parade into the abandoned prison and symbolically set the foundation stone for the new hospital, as a way to put pressure on the socialist government to act.

During 2008 the citizens' movement increased, in line with the gradual destruction of the prison by looters and vandals, which was carried out in the open, often using trucks to take away the larger materials and parts of equipment. The building's owners (the Ministry of Interior) did nothing to prevent this. On the contrary, it seems as if the destruction was tacitly encouraged by the authorities, so as to accelerate the ruin and force the neighbours to accept any solution. The filthy ruin of the prison became another stigma for the neighbourhood. However, from 2007 onwards the prison itself in its materiality finally became recognised as an important actor. During the previous decade at least, the impressive building had been

regarded at best as a hindrance. The projection in 2007 of the documentary *Carabanchel Prison. A model of a repressive space*, made under the guidance of our research team, acted as a partial catalyst for this new sensibility. There had been some proposals to maintain part of the building as a memorial, made by candidates of the socialist party. It was, however, during the last months of 2007 and during 2008 that the movement to conserve part of the building grew stronger.

<INSERT FIGURE 5.17 NEAR HERE> Rally inside the prison. 27 September 2008. The preservation of part of the prison as a memorial occupied an important place in the demands presented by the neighbours at this meeting. Photograph by Víctor M. Fernández (Carabanchel Prison Project).

In February 2008 the neighbours held several assemblies in which they endorsed an ambitious plan for the prison terrain taking the preservation of the panopticon into account:

Using the emblematic dome of Carabanchel and adapting its eight galleries, the neighbours propose a Cultural Centre devoted to Peace, human rights and historical memory. This proposal includes a centre for conferences and exhibitions, a library with a historical archive, a conservatory, a school of languages, a centre for artists, and a Museum of Memory<sup>7</sup>.

With this initiative, Carabanchel Prison was abandoning the realm of abjection and re-entering social memory as a space of epic remembrance in the struggle for democracy. From that moment on, the neighbours based their demands on the rejection of all land speculation, on the construction of a hospital, and on the preservation of the panopticon. Using the newly discovered language of heritage, the neighbours tried to have the prison of Carabanchel declared a *Bien de Interés Cultural* [Property of Cultural Interest], a category that would have prevented the destruction of the prison. The attempt was not successful. In June 2008 the Ministry of Interior (socialist) and the mayor of Madrid (right-wing) approved a plan in which the neighbours were not allowed to participate. The authorities considered that the new plan complied with the neighbours' demands: it modified previous proposals and offered to assign 55% of the terrain to public facilities, and only 650 new private residences would be built, rather than the 1,300 originally planned. The problem was that under the label of public facilities, they intended to build offices for the Ministry of Interior, including those of the



School of Prison Studies and other penitentiary institutions. Therefore, the link between Carabanchel and the prison system was simultaneously broken with the disappearance of the building and reinforced through the establishment of new penal institutions, thus maintaining the notion of the area as a heterotopic space of deviants, a notion that had emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the proliferation in the neighbourhood of orphanages, poorhouses, military barracks and mental hospitals.

The prison was finally demolished in October 2008. The works started at night to avoid problems. It is worth mentioning that the removal of the last statue of Franco in Madrid was also carried out at night. The fact that the demolition was undertaken shortly after the neighbours started to claim not just the terrain, but also *the building itself* speaks eloquently of the threat that the authorities saw in the new demands and in the process of heritage-making.

It is rather strange that the destruction of the prison took place at precisely the moment in which the socialist government was working strenuously to comply with the demands made by the associations of historical memory through the practical implementation of the so-called ‘Law of Historical Memory’ (issued on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October of 2007). Within this legal framework, funding was and is provided to grassroots associations to recover and preserve the memory of the victims of the Civil War and Francoism. Part of this funding is employed in exhumations, but also in the study and conservation of cemeteries, prisons and concentration camps. How is it possible that in this context the prison of Carabanchel was completely destroyed without leaving a trace? After all, keeping the panopticon alone would have not been such a waste of space and money in an estate of 16 hectares.

One explanation might be that the memory of the prison could not overcome the abject associations of the last two decades prior to its demolition. But there are other possible reasons as well. The historian Ferrán Gallego (2009) has recently argued that the socialist party has an ambiguous relationship with the 1960s and 1970 because they did not play a leading role in the struggle for democracy at that time, unlike during the Civil War—the period privileged by the Law of Historical Memory. Rather, the Communist Party (PCE) and the unions were most active during that time. The majority of former inmates that have participated in the memorial acts surrounding Carabanchel belonged to the PCE or other communist parties and unions, on which account the strongest political supporter for the idea of turning Carabanchel Prison into a memorial has unsurprisingly been Izquierda Unida (IU)—the heirs to the PCE.

It is worth comparing the fate of the two historic model prisons of Madrid (Cárcel Modelo and Carabanchel). Both were places of memory and both ended up razed to the

ground. In the case of Cárcel Modelo, a memorial landscape was created, but it was so ambiguous that it has been forgotten: few people today would be able to associate the place with the massacres of 1936. The architectural ensemble that replaced the Cárcel Modelo was more a monument to victory in the Civil War and the establishment of the dictatorship than to those who died in the prison. Interestingly, the last element to be erected was the memorial chapel itself, which was soon transformed into an administrative building. In the case of Carabanchel, no official efforts have been made to preserve either the building or the memory of the prison as an essential place in the struggle for democracy. How is it that two opposing political regimes have reacted in similar ways to the same kind of negative heritage? The abject connotations attached to prisons may help to understand why the authorities felt uncomfortable towards the ruins, but there are many examples of detention centres turned into museums, from Robben Island to Alcatraz (Strange and Kempa 2003). Another reason might be economic speculation, as both prisons were in the centre of Madrid, but the preservation of at least symbolic fragments would have been enough. It is possible that the ambiguous memories for which the prisons stood sealed their fate. If the socialist party had an ambivalent relationship with the struggle for democracy during late Francoism, the Francoists in turn had a similar ambivalence towards those who were taken from the Cárcel Modelo in 1936 and shot. After all, Franco and his henchmen had been involved in extreme political violence and massacres of civilians, too.

## **Conclusion**

The imposing presence of the prison has disappeared from Carabanchel. Nothing is left but a wide gravel surface. The physical erasure, however, has not prevented the neighbours from continuing to celebrate memorial acts around the space where the prison stood [Figure 6.18].

<INSERT FIGURE 5.18 NEAR HERE> Commemoration of the second anniversary of the destruction of Carabanchel Prison: *Carabanchel en la memoria* (“Carabanchel in memory”). 23 October 2010. Photograph by Francisco Rubio (Carabanchel Prison Project).

In this sense, the prison continues to be alive, leading a phantasmal existence, and a distributed one—as things, documents and photos survive in many homes in the neighbourhoods of Carabanchel, Aluche and beyond.

In this chapter we have tried to show how Carabanchel Prison has served to define throughout its history and post-history different regimes of sovereign power and categories of

‘naked bare life’: ‘Reds’, homosexuals, the lower classes, drug-addicts, and illegal immigrants. We have shown how these definitions have been supported by a diversity of material strategies, which have succeeded (and often erased) each other: first, the construction of the colossal totalitarian prison; later the establishment of workshops, laboratories, and other institutions related to a ‘progressive’ attitude towards prisoners, the derelict space of the prison as prison in the 1980s and 1990s, the ruins as the space of the poor and the marginalized, and the gaudy colours that camouflage the existence of yet another space for the *Homo sacer* under a democratic regime: the illegal immigrant. We have seen furthermore how materiality has been fundamental in shaping memory: how the former inmates remembered the material textures and ‘thingly’ qualities of the prison—the difference between the political gallery and the others, the monumentality of the dome. We have also demonstrated that the filthiness and dereliction of the building contributed to its displacement in the collective memory from a symbol of political resistance to a place of abjection, and that, as decay progressed, the ruins were finally re-valued as ruins and claimed as heritage.

The prison of Carabanchel has always been a place of conflict and the number of stakeholders and conflicts has not ceased to grow. New actors were added to the initial fight between ‘Reds’ and the dictatorship: homosexuals, young offenders, and a growing number of ‘social prisoners’. The latter became the main actors in the final phase of the prison, sharing their space with Basque terrorists and people who refused to do the military service (*insumisos*). Finally, the end of the prison has allowed for the emergence of multiple voices and practices that have taken hold of the repressive space—in one sense, liberating it. During the six decades through which the building of the prison presided over the neighbourhoods of Carabanchel and Aluche, the presence of the past permeated the practices of the present: the construction of the prison resounded with the echoes of the Civil War battlefield and the pre-war heterotopic spaces of deviation; the common criminals of the COPEL adopted the language of the political prisoners; the graffiti artists dialogued with the prison space and with its histories. With such historical density and with so many ramifications and connections, it will be difficult to annihilate the memory of Carabanchel forever. Even as a void, its powerful presence still haunts those who encounter it today.

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<sup>2</sup> In a sense, the makeshift centres of detention that proliferated after the war can be considered an antecedent of their Latin American counterparts of the 1970s (Funari et al. 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Although not exactly a panopticon, we will use this name throughout the text to refer to the control room, which fulfilled panoptical functions.

<sup>4</sup> A similar process was taking place elsewhere in Europe, under democratic regimes.

<sup>5</sup> The GAL was active between 1983 and 1987. Its activities were sponsored by some top officials within the socialist government of Felipe González. The revelation of government participation in the GAL in 1995 was one of the reasons for the defeat of the socialist party in the general elections of the following year.

<sup>6</sup> *Carabanchel, la otra orilla*. 1987. [www.adolfogarijo.com](http://www.adolfogarijo.com) (accessed 9-8-2010).

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.carabanchelalto.org/aavv/article.php3?id\\_article=360](http://www.carabanchelalto.org/aavv/article.php3?id_article=360). Accessed 29 March 2011.