

# Repressive Dynamics and Political Subjectivities: the Case of Peniche Prison<sup>1</sup>

Miguel Cardina<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This paper analyzes the experience of political prisoners in the final stages of the *Estado Novo* dictatorship. It uses the Peniche Fort prison as a case study, exploring the way in which political identities were defined, and even reinforced, throughout the struggle against coercive dynamics. Physical confinement, rules, isolation, surveillance, and punishment laid the foundations for a punitive structure that aimed to produce “docile bodies.” On the other hand, prisoners built up resistance strategies intended not only to escape the objective reality of incarceration, but also to assert their militant subjectivity. The article explores how ideological splits led to distinct cultures of protest and ways of experiencing everyday life inside the prison, whilst also revealing how prison life interacted with broader political dynamics.

## Keywords

Power, subjectivity, prison, *Estado Novo*, political opposition

## Resumo

Este artigo analisa a experiência dos presos políticos no troço final do Estado Novo. Tomando a cadeia do Forte de Peniche como ponto de observação, explora-se o modo como as identidades políticas foram definidas, e até reforçadas, através do conflito com as dinâmicas coercivas emanadas da prisão. O confinamento, as regras, o isolamento, a vigilância e a punição construíram uma teia punitiva destinada à produção de “corpos dóceis”. Diante disso, os presos contrapuseram estratégias de resistência que não só buscavam elidir a realidade objectiva da clausura como reafirmar a sua subjectividade militante. O artigo explora o papel das clivagens ideológicas entre os presos na operacionalização de distintas culturas de reivindicação e modos de viver o quotidiano do cárcere, mostrando ao mesmo tempo como a vida prisional interagiu com dinâmicas políticas mais amplas.

## Palavras-chave

Poder, subjectividade, prisão, Estado Novo, oposições políticas

---

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions and Tiago Fernandes for his thought-provoking comments on a previous version of this article (presented at IPRI Lunch-Seminar: Comparative Politics/International Relations, Lisbon, FCSH/UNL, January 10, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal. FCT Investigator (IF/00757/2013/CP1164/CT0004). E-mail: [miguelcardina@ces.uc.pt](mailto:miguelcardina@ces.uc.pt).

In his study of Brazilian resistance to the dictatorship, Luci Gati Pietrocolla chose the concept of “living in brackets” to encompass three paradigmatic situations: going underground, going into exile, and being a prisoner (Pietrocolla, 1995). Containing different levels of fear, nostalgia, and hope, these situations create high levels of both physical and psychological constraint. Furthermore, they become key aspects of political engagement, particularly in countries governed under dictatorships and authoritarian rule, and consequently serve as powerful mechanisms for creating political identities, even though prison would, at first sight, appear to be the situation in which a suspension or severe decline in militancy becomes most evident.

This article analyzes the experiences of Portuguese citizens jailed for political reasons during the *Estado Novo* period. Taking the Peniche Fort prison in the last years of the dictatorship as an observation point, it shows how “living in brackets” inside the prison was intersected by tensions between the coercive dynamics established by the existing repressive structures and the different resistance strategies adopted by political prisoners. At the same time, the article explores how ideological splits gave rise to distinct cultures of protest and ways of experiencing everyday life in prison, showing how prison was permeable to broader external political dynamics.

### **Prisoners and prisons: the case of Peniche**

The repressive apparatus of the *Estado Novo* consisted of a series of legal provisions, courts, police organizations, and prison structures. Whilst adopting some of the mechanisms for political control already in place or at least embryonic during the First Republic (1910-1926) and the Military Dictatorship (1926-1933), the *Estado Novo* also introduced a classification of political and social offenses (Decree No. 21942, of December 5, 1932). This was replaced on November 6, 1933, by Decree-Law 23203, governing the penalties for political offenses. Later, in 1945, Decree-Law 35015 defined crimes against the security of the state as “attacks and offenses against the Head of State and the government” and “crimes against the organization of the state.” This included rebellion or inciting rebellion in order to bring about a change in government, the incitement or organization of factory closures, and the “incitement to collective disobedience of the law” through “false or biased reports,” the distribution of “written papers for the same purpose,” the incitement of the armed forces, and the encouragement of “political struggle

through violence or hatred.” It also established the penalties for those instigating such events “in speeches or words spoken aloud in public, or in any form of published writing” (Decree-Law 35015, of October 15, 1945).

The *Estado Novo* clearly established a justice system that was based essentially on the secret police. Its work was anchored in a series of plenary courts with the power to judge political offenses, and a group of prisons destined to accommodate those convicted of attacks “against the security of the state” (Pimentel, 2007; 2011). According to Fernando Rosas, such “punitive violence” represented a second “security ring” that could be used whenever the internalization of obedience and order failed, and this turned out to be one of the reasons why the regime survived so efficiently (Rosas, 2012: 183-210). On the other hand, as already stressed, the effects of repression also ended up shaping the political organizations and dynamics of militants engaged in fighting the *Estado Novo* (Accornero, 2013).

Prison was the final link in this chain of repression. Between 1933 and 1936, the *Estado Novo* expanded the system, establishing new prison buildings or refurbishing old ones. The most widely used of these were Aljube Prison in Lisbon (1933-1966), the Tarrafal Penal Colony on Santiago Island, Cape Verde (1936-1954 and 1961-1974), Caxias Fort (1936-1974) and Peniche Fort (1934-1974). In addition, there was a PIDE/DGS prison in each of the main cities in the country and some prison and concentration camps in Africa. From 1971 onwards, Caxias also functioned as a prison hospital and an interrogation centre. While on remand, men could be held at the PIDE delegations in Coimbra and Porto, but they were usually transferred to Lisbon and stayed in Aljube or Caxias, where women who had already been convicted were also held. After the trial, when the sentences had been handed out, the men were transferred to Peniche Fort.

Peniche prison was located in the city of the same name and had operated as a military fortress from the sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. It played a significant role in defending the Atlantic coast and later became a prison base. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was used as a refuge by Boers fleeing the Boer war in South Africa. Between 1916 and 1919, after Portugal entered the First World War, Austrians and Germans were imprisoned there (*Aljube...* 2011). In 1934, the fortress was turned into one of the PVDE<sup>3</sup> prisons, and in 1945 it was placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice. Although it was not under PIDE jurisdiction, this police body had access to information (increasingly so from 1965 onwards, when it opened a station in

---

<sup>3</sup> *Polícia de Vigilância e Defesa do Estado* ("State Defense and Surveillance Police"), created in 1933.

Peniche) about important events that took place inside the prison. Documents produced at the PIDE/DGS station in the town reveal that the secret police enjoyed a substantial knowledge of everyday prison life. In fact, this included several reports written by guards who were informers, as well as internal prison documents, analyses of the moral attitudes of the prison staff and the prison doctor, information on the kinds of conversations held at visiting time and even descriptions of the permanent tension between guards and prisoners.<sup>4</sup>

Descriptions that have survived from the earlier years of the fort as an *Estado Novo* prison tell of very poor conditions: prisoners were held in the former stables and old derelict sheds, where the cells were infested with rats, cockroaches and bed bugs. In this respect, it is worth comparing how communists, such as Fernando Miguel Bernardes and Jaime Serra, found prison conditions with the account given by Henrique Galvão.<sup>5</sup> In his diary, written in Peniche in the summer of 1953 and published immediately after April 25, 1974, Galvão describes a general scenario of filth, a lack of proper medical care, cells full of damp and saltpeter, and the constant nuisance of fleas and chickens fed by the guards in the yard with the leftovers of food he describes as “daily poison.” This “anti-communist among communists,” as he describes his situation, identifies discrepancies in the way in which the prison management dealt with him and with the communist prisoners. According to Galvão, this was due not only to an explicit willingness by the prison authorities to distinguish him from the communists, but also to his stubborn refusal to do certain chores, such as peeling potatoes, cleaning toilets or unloading firewood (Galvão, s.d.: 36-37).

Fernando Miguel Bernardes and Jaime Serra, on the other hand, emphasized some improvements that took place at around this time. According to Jaime Serra, better food and overall conditions were granted in the 1950s, thanks to the prisoners’ struggles and their persistent protests, which included refusing meals and going on hunger strike (Serra, 1997: 72). The food was still bad and the medical care inadequate, but Fernando Miguel Bernardes lists a couple of examples as evidence of the positive outcome of prisoners’ protests and their greater ideological awareness: clandestinely sharing cigarettes with those

---

<sup>4</sup> The GNR (*Guarda Nacional Republicana*, National Republican Guard) also sent reports directly to the PIDE/DGS about occurrences inside the prison, such as the hunger strike in 1970, in which it was called upon to intervene. ANTT/PIDE/DGS, proc. 14, NT 1149.

<sup>5</sup> On Henrique Galvão, see: David Raby (2004), “Transatlantic Intrigues: Humberto Delgado, Henrique Galvão and the Portuguese exiles in Brazil and Morocco, 1961-62.” *Portuguese Journal of Social Science*, 3, 3, 143-156; Francisco Teixeira da Mota (2011), *Henrique Galvão. Um herói português*. Lisbon: Oficina do Livro.

in the “segredo,”<sup>6</sup> reading and collectively discussing the newspapers, organizing a library – the Soeiro Pereira Gomes<sup>7</sup> library, established in 1951 – and setting up Portuguese, French, math, philosophy and political economy classes taught by prisoners with a knowledge of these subjects (Bernardes, 1991: 75-77). The 1950s was also a time when a few escape attempts, both successful and unsuccessful, took place, all involving members and leaders of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP).<sup>8</sup> As it was becoming increasingly clear that the prison was showing no signs of being able to prevent further escapes, new premises were designed and opened between 1956 and the end of 1961. The new buildings (Pavilions A, B and C) had better hygienic facilities, but also allowed for closer scrutiny of prisoners.<sup>9</sup>

### Exercising power

Imprisonment was aimed primarily at depriving the subject of the possibility of any involvement in legal or underground political activity. However, through torture and disciplinary action, it was also designed to wear down the prisoner’s subjectivity. This procedure began immediately after arrest, in the early stages of the pre-trial proceedings while the prisoners were held by the PIDE/DGS and were frequently subjected to torture. After this, the prison authorities reinforced their attacks on the prisoner’s subjectivity. Physical constraints, rules, inspection rounds, bans, isolation, a poor diet, and punishments created a coercive network designed to generate “docile bodies,” to use Michel Foucault’s concept (1975: 137-171).

In the late 1950s, Erving Goffman coined the term “total institutions” to describe places – such as mental hospitals, barracks or prisons – where a number of “like-situated individuals cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead

---

<sup>6</sup> Literally, “secret.” This was a small isolated space where inmates that were being punished remained in solitary confinement.

<sup>7</sup> Soeiro Pereira Gomes (1909-1949) was a leading name in the Portuguese Neo-Realist movement and a prominent member of the Portuguese Communist Party.

<sup>8</sup> On November 3, 1950, Jaime Serra and Francisco Miguel escaped from the old barracks on the north side of the Fort. Francisco Miguel was recaptured the following day. In 1954, a group attempted to escape through a long tunnel dug by the prisoners. On December 18, 1954, Dias Lourenço escaped from the “segredo.” On January 3, 1960, the famous escape of prominent communist leaders and militants took place, involving Álvaro Cunhal, Joaquim Gomes, Carlos Costa, Jaime Serra, Francisco Miguel, José Carlos, Guilherme Carvalho, Pedro Soares, Rogério Carvalho and Francisco Martins Rodrigues, accompanied by the GNR soldier José Alves, who helped the escapees. For a description of the escape, see Pereira, 2005: 702-732.

<sup>9</sup> Pavilion A had two floors with common rooms; Pavilion B, the last to be opened, had three floors with individual cells; and Pavilion C, opened in 1956, had two floors with common rooms and a third floor with individual cells. These new arrangements had the capacity to accommodate 147 inmates, even though that figure was never reached. AHMJ (Historical Archive of the Ministry for Justice), 01.17.01/295, proc. 1 to 100 (Ministry for Justice Cabinet), Prison Services Headquarters, Information.

an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman, 1961: xiii). Despite the differences between them, a number of common features characterize these spaces: everyday life is conducted in the same place under the same supervisory authority, each phase of daily activity is carried out in the company of other inmates and all the phases of the day's activities are tightly scheduled and part of a plan designed to accomplish the aims of the institution. Another key component of total institutions is the profound split between the inmates and the staff, with the latter exercising all the formal power. According to Erving Goffman, the fundamental aim is to modulate and mutilate the self (*ibidem*).

Contrary to a certain interpretation of the “total institution” approach, prisons are not institutions that are separate from the rest of society. They are places subject to internal power dynamics, but they are also open to interaction with the surrounding social context. As Christian De Vito has shown, understanding the processes of radicalization and de-radicalization in a prison context requires considering both internal and external dynamics and taking the agency of the prisoners and prison authorities into account (De Vito, 2014). In his study of Greek political prisoners during the civil war, Polymeris Voglis also emphasizes how their subjectivity is constituted and disputed through different discourses, practices and positionings (Voglis, 2002). The following pages will observe the forms of control and processes of resistance adopted by prisoners from this perspective, demonstrating how prison reveals itself to be a space which is open to broader political and ideological points of view.

Five strands can be identified in terms of internal methods of control. The first is constant surveillance. In a context in which the colonial war had already begun, the *Estado Novo* introduced changes to the prison system and alterations which affected political prisoners. In October 1961, under Decree-Law 43960, the system for political prisoners was changed and they were treated in the same way as ordinary prisoners. This meant the end of certain privileges, such as communal daytime activities, which now depended on individual prison governors. As a result, internal documents show that prisoners spent long periods of time confined to their cells, subject to severe restrictions on their contacts with other prisoners, and suffering arbitrary interventions based on the belief that prisoners should feel as though they were constantly being watched by their guards (*apud* Albuquerque, 2006: 216 and 223).

In fact, surveillance was a key factor in controlling prisoners, and this had clearly been reinforced following the architectural changes made to the fort. The front walls of the

cells were replaced with iron bars, which enabled the warders to monitor prisoners continuously. Locked in individual cells for around twenty hours a day, the prisoners were always watched by a warder, who would hover in the background whenever they left their rooms, listening to their conversations and checking their movements. The warders' scrutiny extended to leisure time, censorship of incoming and outgoing mail, and supervision of the area where visits took place. Warders would listen to all the conversations, occasionally stepping in to reprimand individuals over their content. Sometimes, visits were even interrupted suddenly.<sup>10</sup> In the new prison environments, the visiting area separated the prisoners and kept visitors on the other side of thick glass walls set into a table measuring approximately 1 meter in width, to which extra cubicles were added in 1967 so that each prisoner could only communicate with their own visitor.

The second form of control was punishment. Punishments were an old practice inside the prison, and were inflicted frequently. During his first stay in Peniche in the 1950s, Henrique Galvão remembered seeing a man being put in the “segredo” for not having responded to the roll-call promptly (Galvão, s.d. 62-63). Several accounts recorded in documents sent from the PIDE/DGS station in Peniche to its headquarters, or documents from organizations such as the CNSPP (*Comissão Nacional de Socorro aos Presos Políticos* – National Commission for Aid to Political Prisoners), reported bans, beatings and the force-feeding of hunger strikers (*Comissão...* 1972; 1975).

Another means of exercising power over the prisoners consisted of different types of solitary confinement. On arrival at Peniche, the prisoner was held in isolation for a period of up to six months and could not communicate with the other inmates. During this “observation period,” prisoners remained alone in a cell, ate their meals there and used the recreation facilities separately from the others. For those held in individual cells, the aforementioned twenty-hour lock-ins were another type of isolation, in addition to the occasional punishment in the “segredo.” Although less evident, attempts to break the prisoners' collective organization and the enforced silence at meal and recreation times were also designed to achieve the same purpose. Carlos Brito recalls that on those occasions the prisoners could play chess but not talk unless it was strictly necessary (to say “checkmate,” for instance), which reminded him of “a kind of Tantalus's ordeal” (Brito, 2011: 90-91). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the prisoners' protests led to

---

<sup>10</sup> The 1971 Prison Regulations described such interference as follows: “the officer overseeing the visit must bring it to a halt immediately, reporting the incident to a higher authority whenever (...) he perceives that the conversation is about political or immoral issues, or if there are any deprecatory remarks about the government, the prison warders or the prison rules.” ANTT/PIDE/DGS, proc. 809, NT 1200.

significant gains at this level: at the beginning of the 1970s, cells were open from 7 am to 9 pm, and on birthdays a whole floor could celebrate in the canteen until late.

Prison power was also exercised by regulating the prisoner's time and space.<sup>11</sup> Everyday life was entirely made up of routines and repetitions. Each section – that is, each of the pavilion's floors – had its own specific schedule to prevent prisoners from other floors coming into contact with each other. From rising in the morning to bedtime, the time was determined by bells that marked the daily routines.<sup>12</sup> After lunch, there was a recreational period of one or two hours when prisoners could talk to each other, as long as there was a warder nearby. In the evening, recreation would last for an hour and a half and a few games were allowed. During this period, the mail was delivered by the warders, who also announced punishments, reading out lists and other types of information.

The last form of dominance was the possibility of exercising discretion in applying, creating and reversing rules, depending on specific circumstances. Carlos Brito claimed that the beginning of the 1960s gave rise to a “world of interdictions”, in which “everything that was not explicitly authorized was forbidden” (Brito, 2011: 95-96). When it came to requesting books to read, textbooks and fiction were much more likely to be accepted by the warders than essays, encyclopedias or books written in foreign languages. These were usually banned, since the warders in charge of the library did not know enough about languages to judge how dangerous they were (Pereira, 2005: 417).<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the rule was flexible, depending on the prison and the warder in charge.

Keeping a prisoner in jail beyond the length of his sentence was another aspect of this discretion. “Security measures” meant that sentences could be extended for a period of six months to three years and renewed every three years. Even though life imprisonment is not part of Portuguese law, this mechanism paved the way for the possibility of keeping a prisoner in jail indefinitely, if convicted of crimes that threatened the security of the state. According to Irene Pimentel, over 500 out of a total of 12,385 prisoners were subjected to security measures. This would come to an end in the metropolis with Law 450/72, of November 1972. However, the possibility of extending sentences for successive periods of

---

<sup>11</sup> According to Fernando Miguel Bernardes, throughout the 1950s it was quite common for the warders to cite the rules of procedure to justify prohibitions, but in fact there are no records of any actual written rules. At some point, a typewritten piece of paper began to be read on arrival, describing the “prisoners' obligations” (Bernardes, 1991: 77). Later on, in 1971, a set of rules was established, which became another focus for protests.

<sup>12</sup> There were struggles to reduce the number of times the bells rang. As a result, the rules of procedure mention the following “electric beetle rings”: dawn (3 rings), meals (1 ring), playground (1 ring), recreation (1 ring), silence (1 ring). *Regulamento Interno da Cadeia do Forte de Peniche*, ANTT/PIDE/DGS, proc. 809, NT 1200.

<sup>13</sup>Based on the testimony given to José Pacheco Pereira by António Borges Coelho.



three years remained in place, which was specifically aimed at “repeated or likely offenders or those who could be considered dangerous due to mental disorders” (Pimentel, 2007: 459-475).

### **The dynamics of resistance**

Whilst prison power sought to regulate and control the prisoner’s time, mind and body, the inmates developed resistance strategies in order to restrain and confront this. Inside prison, one of the first resistance strategies involved establishing schemes for sharing and solidarity. Communes were therefore organized in order to socialize the distribution of money, tobacco, clothes, and food. Lino Santos Coelho, who was an inmate at Peniche at the end of the 1930s, wrote that the communists had already adopted this organizational model by then (Coelho, 1981: 138-146). Inside the cells, a body made up of two or three party members was in charge of distributing PCP documents and political information. From the late 1960s onwards, the far-left prisoners were to adopt the same model, rhetorically highlighting the egalitarian and independent aspect of such communes.<sup>14</sup>

Visits were also crucial, since they enabled emotional ties and some contact to be maintained with the outside world. In addition to solicitors, prisoners could be visited by certain family members, always with a warder close by, actively watching them. Visits were useful in terms of preserving mental health and breaking the monotony of everyday life, but they were also an important tool in the struggle for better prison conditions, inasmuch as prisoners could use them to spread information about life in prison and clandestinely access documents from the outside.

Studying was yet another means of resisting the anomie created by incarceration. However, it was not always easy to get access to books, and newspapers were subjected to a “double censorship” – in addition to the initial censorship, certain news reports were cut or pages were removed before they were given to the prisoner. The illegal newspaper *Avante!*, the official organ of the PCP, and other Communist Party papers circulated clandestinely and, from the end of the 1960s onwards, were supplemented by material from other ideological sources and documents from far-left organizations. Furthermore,

---

<sup>14</sup>ANTT/PIDE/DGS, PC 1397/67, NT 5933.

Peniche contained a significant group of political leaders and operated, mainly for the younger generation of activists, as a center for political education.<sup>15</sup>

Another resistance strategy was to insist on maintaining the political status of the conviction, dismissing any attempt to link political activity to criminality. Whilst it is true that the regime always drew a line between political and ordinary prisoners, it is equally true that the political prisoners clearly fought to maintain this distinction, as evidenced in the Peniche prisoners' demand to continue being allowed to write "political prisoner" in the addresses on their letters. By the mid 1960s, this had been forbidden by the prison authorities, but the prisoners argued that abolishing it would make them the same as the ordinary prisoners, who were brought to Peniche to do building or cleaning work.<sup>16</sup>

Claiming "political prisoner" status was, as a matter of fact, a key factor in exposing the prisoners' situation and condemning the Portuguese dictatorship in the public arena. This process was mainly pursued domestically (despite all the restrictions imposed) by the CNSPP, established at the end of 1969 to publicize illegal abuses and help the prisoners and their families. Amnesty International – founded in 1961 on the basis of a solidarity campaign to help Portuguese students who had been arrested – also played an important role by promoting international initiatives to defend human rights and focusing on the Portuguese situation. In fact, the attention paid by Amnesty International to political prisoners in Portugal can be seen in the large number of letters and statements sent by several AI international delegations to the Ministry of the Interior, for instance, or to the Ministry of Justice.

It is important to take into account the changes introduced by the regime after Marcelo Caetano replaced António de Oliveira Salazar in September 1968. As noted by Nuno Teotónio Pereira, a key member of the CNSPP, without the minor concessions provided by the "Marcelist Spring," this organization would never have had the opportunity to emerge (Pereira, 1995). In fact, despite the new period of hardening political attitudes that began after 1970, the first two years of the Caetano administration did see the implementation of some measures aimed at "liberalizing, while maintaining the war" (Rosas, 1994: 486). Many of these measures were merely cosmetic (such as changing the name of the secret police and the official party), but there were also more effective

---

<sup>15</sup> José Paiva, convicted in 1970 for membership of ARCO (Revolutionary Communist Action), an ephemeral far-left organization, says: "We obviously longed for Peniche and the chance to meet historical figures such as Chico Martins [Francisco Martins Rodrigues] and the others, who represented myths for people like us. Documentation would only circulate clandestinely, and we knew very little of what was at stake." Interviewed by the author, December 4, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> AHMJ, 01.17.02.01/498, proc. 370.

gestures. For example, the socialist, Mário Soares, and the Bishop of Porto, António Ferreira Gomes, were allowed to return from exile, new trade union legislation was passed, dispensing with the need for the ministerial approval of leaders, and the Popular National Action party opened its doors to new factions, such as the group that became known as the “Liberal Wing”, and was included in the electoral lists of 1969.

This “semi-opposition” advocated a plan to gradually transform the *Estado Novo* into a democracy (Fernandes, 2007). It presented a proposal for revising the constitution which focused on defending pluralism, freedom of association and reducing censorship. Its work also helped draw attention to the situation of political prisoners. In fact, a group of Liberal Wing backbenchers visited prisoners in Peniche and, in January 1973, Francisco Sá Carneiro presented a proposal for an amnesty for political prisoners, although it never reached the discussion and voting stage in the National Assembly. A little earlier, at the end of 1972, a group made up of the families of political prisoners had submitted a petition signed by over ten thousand Portuguese citizens calling for an amnesty for all those imprisoned for their political views.<sup>17</sup>

## Two prisons

From the end of the 1960s onwards, ideological splits started to become central to everyday life inside the prison and to establishing the models for belonging and solidarity. In fact, the importance of ideological clashes in prison was not unprecedented amongst the Portuguese left. For instance, in Tarrafal in 1936-1945, communists and anarchists (and communists amongst themselves) created an atmosphere of ideological conflict that spread far beyond the walls of the isolated concentration camp. However, the conflicts in the 1960s-1970s took place in a different historical time and in prisons where, despite all the restrictions, there was more contact with the outside world. Therefore, after the arrival of the far-left prisoners, the specific impact of the prison factor – in terms of creating solidarity between inmates or producing a shared discourse against the prison system – tended to be superseded by the rigid political-ideological divide. This split translated into different positions about how to confront the prison regime, the attitude to take towards the prison authorities, and how to live the experience of being in jail.

A substantial number of prisoners who were not affiliated to the PCP were, or would become, linked to the galaxy of “Marxist-Leninist” (i.e. Maoist) groups that began to

---

<sup>17</sup> Comissão Nacional de Socorro aos Presos Políticos, Circular n.º 18, 06/02/1973.

emerge in the country from 1964 onwards. In this respect, it is worth stating that the emergence of the “Marxist-Leninist” (M-L) current in Portugal cannot be dissociated from an increasing animosity towards the PCP. It was from within the PCP, particularly with the positions developed by Francisco Martins Rodrigues, a member of the Central Committee, that the theoretical legacy of the critique of the ‘national uprising’ hypothesis was defined, echoing the conflict caused by the Sino-Soviet split.

After this, Martins Rodrigues was expelled from the party and went on – with Rui d’Espiney, João Pulido Valente and others – to found the FAP (*Frente de Acção Popular* – Popular Action Front) and the CMLP (*Comité Marxista-Leninista Português* – Portuguese Marxist-Leninist Committee). In 1965, *Avante!* published the news that two FAP/CMLP members had entered the country, under the headline “Beware of them”. This warning was meant to curb any attempts by the FAP/CMLP to co-opt PCP party members, and was regarded by the former as “grassing” on them to the PIDE. In 1965, after some of its members had entered the country and killed an informer, the FAP/CMLP became the target for intense police persecution, leading to a significant wave of arrests, which removed the group’s leadership (Pereira, 2008; Cardina, 2011).

The tension between these two political groupings spread to the prisons, eventually leading to physical confrontation.<sup>18</sup> In a document confiscated by the PIDE in Caxias – where “Marxist-Leninist” prisoners had initially been held while awaiting trial – they stated the need to keep themselves separate from the PCP inmates. In this document, a clear distinction is made between the leaders and the rank and file, whilst reaffirming the imperative need for the latter to stay away from the former. In addition, some comrades were criticized for having allowed themselves to “be caught, to a certain extent, by the appeal to unity in the words and deeds of the revisionists.” The text, however, was rather harsh on the practical results achieved, suggesting two major causes for this political “failure.” The first was the fact that Marxist-Leninist prisoners were “in the same boat as the revisionist leaders, sharing their daily struggle against fascist jailers,” which might make them temporarily forget that “revisionists are not misguided communists, but a bourgeois current.”<sup>19</sup>

The second reason deals with the issue of “conduct”: “talking” or “not talking” to the police when questioned and tortured. It is, in fact, quite relevant that “bad conduct” in

---

<sup>18</sup> For instance, in 1971, the Peniche station of the DGS reported to the organization’s headquarters that Communist prisoner Dinis Miranda had been badly beaten up by inmates Henrique Guerra and António José Condeço. ANTT/PIDE/DGS, proc. 14, NT 1149.

<sup>19</sup> “Algumas experiências da actividade na cadeia em 1966”, ANTT/PIDE/DGS, PC 1397/67, NT 5933.

the hands of the police appears alongside factors such as a lack of political culture and experience, all labeled as of secondary importance in relation to the chosen political line. The fact that a significant number of FAP/CMLP prisoners were unable to maintain a totally uncompromising attitude when faced with PIDE/DGS interrogators, as was deemed essential in their own code of conduct, helps to explain this. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the issue was actually neglected. Despite being the acknowledged main theorist of this current, Francisco Martins Rodrigues, for instance, stated that he was not pursuing contacts outside the country because he had embarked upon a process of self-limitation caused by having “talked”.<sup>20</sup>

A document from the Marxist-Leninist current confiscated by the PIDE/DGS dates the aggravation of differences to 1968. At that time, the “struggle against the warders’ presence in the canteen was broken,” prisoners no longer walked out of their own visits after someone else’s had been interrupted, and there was “an attempt to cool down the struggle triggered by a comrade being beaten up.” It was then claimed that “revisionists” were “class enemies, not only in theoretical and abstract terms, but in all practical matters.” “Revisionist leadership individuals” were to be addressed in the polite third person, the playing of games and the shared reading aloud of the news were abolished, and birthday parties (“a token echo of a bourgeois ideology”) and religious celebrations were not to be attended.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, the line drawn between the inmates manifested itself not only in separate celebrations of significant dates, but also in the choice of which events should be celebrated. Whereas everyone celebrated May 1 – although not together – the far-left also celebrated January 18 (the date of an unsuccessful workers’ uprising against the *Estado Novo* in 1934), October 1 (the anniversary of the 1949 Chinese Revolution), the October Revolution in Russia (November 7) and February 4 (the start of the armed struggle in Angola). On the other hand, the PCP members celebrated October 5 (the Implantation of the Portuguese Republic in 1910) and December 1 (the Restoration of Portugal’s Independence from Spain in 1640). These commemorations defined ideological positions, as can be seen in the case of José Luís Saldanha Sanches. Arrested by the PIDE in 1965, he walked into Peniche as a PCP party member, but left it in 1971 a Maoist, although not yet with any links to the MRPP (*Movimento Reorganizativo do Partido do Proletariado* – Reorganizing

---

<sup>20</sup> Francisco Martins Rodrigues, interviewed by the author, January 29, 2008. About torture, confession and silence, see Miguel Cardina (2013), “To Talk or Not to Talk: Silence, Torture, and Politics in the Portuguese Dictatorship of Estado Novo,” *Oral History Review*, 40 (2): 251-270.

<sup>21</sup> ANTT/PIDE/DGS, PC 2645/65, NT 5795-5796, vol.3.

Movement of the Party of the Proletariat). Saul Nunes and Acácio Barata Lima recall his stance towards emblematic dates as a sign of his changing political allegiances: he observed the death of Ho Chi Minh, but not December 1 or October 5 (Accornero and Cabral, 2011: 17-46).

Tensions further increased during the course of the hunger strikes that the most radical prisoners embarked on from 1970 onwards. The PCP inmates did not join the strikes. One strike, which began on July 15, 1970, had arisen in the aftermath of a conflict between João Pulido Valente and the warder António Poupa, after the latter had refused to provide the former with a razor blade. Several days of protests and punishments followed, and 22 of the 47 prisoners went on hunger strike.<sup>22</sup> Other hunger strikes were recorded between 1970 and 1972, triggered by prison discipline or aimed at expressing solidarity with some inmate who was undergoing punishment or was the victim of a situation regarded as unacceptable.<sup>23</sup>

In January 1972, far-left prisoners demanded segregation from their fellow PCP inmates, and the prison authorities decided to group them together on the second floor of Pavilion B. That same year, in early July, the struggle against the warders on that floor and against the newspaper cuts began, together with demands for open cells, in order to allow prisoners to move from one cell to another. The PCP prisoners also had several demands of their own. In September 1970, Manuel Martins Pedro sent an official request to the Ministry of Justice, demanding rules of procedure, less aggression from the warders, music, shared visits, talks with solicitors, replacement of the prison authorities, medical care and better food. In November 1971, an informer inside Peniche Fort reported to the DGS the contents of a submission made by “18 inmates from the Russian tendency” to the Prison’s Chief Executive. Four shared visits per year were requested (Christmas, New Year, Easter, and on birthdays), as well as the endorsement of the rules of procedure with the suggested amendments, an open-cell regime during the day, a television set and a record player, free delivery of books, magazines and newspapers sold in the country, table tennis facilities, private visits from solicitors, visits from family and friends, the chance to write to anyone, medical appointments with specialists, and proper medical equipment.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> “As lutas dos revolucionários portugueses no interior das prisões”, Grupo de Base “A Vanguarda”, s.d.

<sup>23</sup> That is precisely what happened on Christmas Eve 1972, when prisoners linked to far-left groups and anticolonial movements went on hunger strike for an end to the “security measures” that Domingos Arouca was being subjected to. ANTT/PIDE/DGS, proc. 809, NT 1200. About Domingos Arouca, see Peixoto and Meneses 2013.

<sup>24</sup> ANTT/PIDE/DGS, proc. 809, NT 1200.

A series of concessions made by the prison authorities created a sense of unease amongst the warders. One of them mentions an “explosive situation,” which made his colleagues fear for their own physical safety. He states anxiously that “since 1947, when I started working at the prison, the inmates have never been so defiant as they are right now, mostly those belonging to the Chinese tendency.” A written declaration submitted in January 1971 by the head of the DGS unit in Peniche to its central headquarters noted that the warders were “rather fearful of the way orders are being implemented therein,” with “ever greater benefits being granted to political prisoners,” and accused the Chief Executive of the Prison Services of giving in and therefore supporting the prisoners and their families’ demands.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the warders’ behavior and the “special arrangement” at Peniche remained the subject of several public warnings, namely by the CNSPP (*Comissão...* 1972: 83-88). The dismissal of Manuel da Encarnação Falcão as Prison Governor in 1973 was instrumental in mitigating the harshness of prison conditions. However, as can easily be understood, this process of reducing control, surveillance and police violence in Peniche was the outcome of the prisoners’ persistent fight to erode authority and reclaim their own time and space while in prison.

After the revolution of April 25, 1974, political prisoners were released from the Caxias and Peniche jails, although not on that same day. At dawn on April 26, prisoners still remained inside the fortress. From April 26 to 27, prisoners were interviewed in the middle of the night by representatives of the Armed Forces sent by the National Salvation Junta, and began to be released. The presence of three prisoners convicted of blood crimes – Francisco Martins Rodrigues and Rui d’Espiney from the FAP/CMLP, and Filipe Viegas Aleixo, from LUAR (League of Unity and Revolutionary Action) – created a deadlock which was only resolved when they were released on probation, in the custody of the lawyer Manuel Macaísta Malheiros. Their definitive release only took place the following day (Oliveira, 2013: 79-102).

It must be borne in mind that the prisoners’ release process was marked by the split between the two factions and the memory of what actually happened therefore differs according to political allegiances. Fernando Miguel Bernardes claimed that most inmates explicitly refused to “leave without an assurance that not a single political prisoner was to remain behind bars,” failing to identify any conflict (Bernardes, 1991: 146). However, Rui d’Espiney and Francisco Martins Rodrigues recalled the solidarity expressed in an assembly of the far left, who refused to leave while any of those convicted of “blood crimes”

---

<sup>25</sup>ANTT/PIDE/DGS, proc. 14, NT 1149; proc. 809, NT 1200.

remained in jail. The former recalled that only prisoners from the first and second floors attended the assembly, while the “PCP inmates were on the floor above, where things took a completely different path: when the time for release came, they all walked out.” Martins Rodrigues also states that PCP prisoners started to leave, and it was the group of Marxist-Leninist, LUAR and anti-colonial inmates who remained inflexible.<sup>26</sup>

According to the far-left prisoners, this position reflected the lack of solidarity shown by communist prisoners towards the struggles which had taken place inside the prison. They, in turn, claimed that constantly challenging the warders and the prison authorities led to petty fights and generated a tense environment that obstructed even minor progress. Joaquim Pires Jorge illustrates this perspective quite accurately: “From the mid-1960s onwards (...), a few far-left supporters were jailed. They were rather meek and not at all organized, and kept to themselves. While in jail, they embarked upon some typical far-left tactics which were doomed to failure from the outset and were mainly aimed at attacking the Party and other political prisoners. They would start these struggles and soon give them up, due to a lack of awareness and political determination” (Jorge, 1984: 90). Ultimately, what was at stake were two distinct approaches as to how a militant should behave in prison, and what kind of action was legitimate and necessary against the state power.

## Conclusion

Observation of Peniche prison during the *Estado Novo* period demonstrates how broader social dynamics penetrated inside the walls of this penal institution. Thus, the prison was affected by political life on the outside, which also influenced the forms of socialization that hardened militant identities and reinforced political divisions. In effect, prison had become an arena for confrontation: on the one hand, there was the attempt by the prison authorities to tame both mind and body, seeking to instigate the “mortification of the self” (Goffman, 1961), and, on the other hand, there was the resistance to this process.

Confronting the established prison rules and practices therefore became a key factor in (re)building political subjectivity. This stance adopted towards the existing codes of behavior and the prison authorities was intertwined with ideological splits which had

---

<sup>26</sup> Rui d’Espiney. Interviewed by the author, July 1, 2008. Francisco Martins Rodrigues. Interviewed by the author, January 29, 2008.



infiltrated prison life and laid the foundations for different cultures of protest and ways of experiencing everyday life in prison. In fact, in these final years, the dictatorship was clearly unable to use the control mechanisms that it had developed as efficiently as it had done a few years earlier, both due to the rising visibility of the prisoners' situation on the outside and the prisoners' protests against prison discipline and authority on the inside. Being in prison therefore constituted a particular way of "living in brackets," which had very specific effects on the decay of the *Estado Novo* in its final years.

## Sources and Bibliography

### *Archives*

ANTT/PIDE/DGS – Arquivo da PIDE/DGS. Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo.

AHMJ – Arquivo Histórico do Ministério da Justiça.

### *Interviews*

D’Espiney, Rui. Interviewed by the author, July 1, 2008.

Paiva, José. Interviewed by the author, December 4, 2007.

Rodrigues, Francisco Martins. Interviewed by the author, January 1, 2008.

### *References*

Accornero, Guya (2013). “La répression politique sous l’Estado Novo au Portugal et ses effets sur l’opposition estudiantine, des années 1960 à la fin du regime”. *Cultures & Conflicts*, 89, 93-112.

Accornero, Guya and Cabral, Manuel Villaverde (2011). “Saldanha Sanches militante”, in Paulo Otero, Fernando Araújo and João Taborda da Gama (eds.). *Evocações do Prof. Doutor J. L. Saldanha Sanches*. Lisbon: Coimbra Editora, pp. 17-46.

Albuquerque, Paulo Pinto de (2006). *Direito Prisional Português e Europeu*. Coimbra: Coimbra Editora.

*Aljube*. *A voz das vítimas* (2011). Catalogue of the exhibition *A Voz das Vítimas*, Fundação Mário Soares, Instituto de História Contemporânea and Movimento Cívico Não Apaguem a Memória!

Bernardes, Fernando Miguel (1991). *Uma Fortaleza da Resistência*. Lisbon: Avante!

Brito, Carlos (2011). *Tempo de subversão. Páginas vividas da resistência*. Lisbon: Edições Nelson de Matos.

Cardina, Miguel (2011). *Margem de Certa Maneira. O Maoismo em Portugal. 1964-1974*. Lisbon: Tinta-da-China.

Cardina, Miguel (2013). “To Talk or Not to Talk: Silence, Torture, and Politics in the Portuguese Dictatorship of Estado Novo”, *Oral History Review*, 40 (2): 251-270.

Coelho, Lino Santos (1981). *Memórias de um Rebelde—Testemunhos do Terror Fascista*. Lisbon: Editora em Marcha.

Comissão Nacional de Socorro aos Presos Políticos (1972). *Presos Políticos. Documentos 1970-1971*. Porto: Afrontamento.

Comissão Nacional de Socorro aos Presos Políticos (1975). *Presos Políticos. Documentos 1972-1974*. Lisbon: Iniciativas Editoriais.

De Vito, Christian (2014). “Processes of radicalization and de-radicalization in Western European prisons (1965-1986)”, in Lorenzo Bosi, Chares Demetriou and Stefan Malthaner, *Dynamics of Political Violence. A Process-Oriented Perspective on Radicalization and the Escalation of Political Conflict*. Surrey: Ashgate.

- Fernandes, Tiago (2007). “Authoritarian Regimes and Pro-Democracy Semi-Oppositions: The End of the Portuguese Dictatorship (1968-1974) in Comparative Perspective”, *Democratization*, 14 (4): 686-705.
- Foucault, Michel (1975). *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Galvão, Henrique (s.d.). *Diário de Peniche*. Lisbon: Livraria Popular de Francisco Franco.
- Goffman, Erving (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Jorge, Joaquim Pires (1984). *Com uma imensa alegria. Notas autobiográficas*. Lisbon: Avante!.
- Oliveira, Luísa Tiago de (2013). “O fim da PIDE/DGS e a libertação dos presos políticos”, in Luísa Tiago de Oliveira (ed.). *Militares e Política. O 25 de Abril*. S.l.: Estuário, pp. 79-102.
- Peixoto, Carolina Barros Tavares and Meneses, Maria Paula (2013). “Domingos Arouca: um percurso de militância nacionalista em Moçambique”, *Topoi*, 26 (14): 86-104.
- Pereira, Nuno Teotónio (1995). “A Comissão de Socorro aos Presos Políticos”, *Público* newspaper, 17/01/1995.
- Pereira, José Pacheco (2008). “O Um Dividiu-se em Dois”. *Origens e enquadramento internacional dos movimentos pró-chineses e albaneses nos países ocidentais e em Portugal (1960-1965)*. Lisbon: Alêtheia.
- Pereira, José Pacheco (2005). *Álvaro Cunhal. Uma biografia política. O Prisioneiro (1949-1960)*. Lisbon: Temas e Debates.
- Pietrocolla, Luci Gati (1995). *Anos 60/70: O viver entre parênteses. A perseguição política aos revolucionários e suas famílias*. São Paulo, PhD Dissertation.
- Pimentel, Irene Flunser (2007). *A História da PIDE*. Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores / Temas e Debates.
- Pimentel, Irene Flunser (2011). “A polícia política do Estado Novo português— PIDE/DGS: História, justiça e memória”, *Acervo*, 24 (1): 139-156.
- Serra, Jaime (1997). *Eles têm o direito de saber. Páginas da luta clandestina*. Lisbon: Avante!.
- Rodrigues, Francisco Martins (2009). *História de uma vida*. Lisbon: Dinossauro / Abrente.
- Rosas, Fernando (1994). *O Estado Novo (1926–1974)*. Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores / Estampa.
- Rosas, Fernando (2012). *Salazar e o Poder. A arte de saber durar*. Lisbon: Tinta-da-China.
- Voglis, Polymeris (2002). *Becoming a Subject. Political prisoners during the Greek Civil War*. New York / Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Received for publication: 35 July 2014

Accepted in revised form: 26 January 2015

Recebido para publicação: 25 de Julho de 2014

Accete após revisão: 26 de Janeiro de 2015