

Respect modules: a metamorphosis of detention?

Research report summary

Lucie HERNANDEZ

*doctor in psychology, lecturer at CIRAP
(Centre of inter-disciplinary research into prisons)*

Paul MBANZOULOU

*doctor of law, HDR and director of research,
documentation and international relations*

Introduction

➤ Research context

For some years now, methods for managing people in detention have been rethought to be in line with legislative changes (the French “prison law” of 24 November 2009 on the meaning of the sentence; the French law of 15 August 2014 on the purposes of serving a sentence). In this context, numerous measures have emerged, with the aim of fostering empowerment and autonomy within the prison experience. The objectives are for the detainee to both take responsibility for their criminal offences, but also for them to participate actively in how they are managed within the institution and in preparation for their release. In the longer term, the ultimate objective is to prevent re-offending. However, these objectives are caught in a confused logic. Prison operations, and the security imperative to which they respond, always outweigh these more social and individual concerns. Many studies have shown, for example, that this security context encourages the “disempowerment” and “depersonalisation” of detainees. Permanently subject to and under the control of an external authority, they are deprived of all autonomy and independence. In confronting this restrictive and violent structure, detainees use opposition and/or resistance, among other things, as “protective” strategies. Generally speaking, these strategies contribute to the emergence of violence between individuals as well as institutional violence.

How can a passiveness, which is such an intrinsic part of how prisons are structured and operate, be reconciled with an active approach of engaging and empowering detainees? Prison authorities are trying to overcome this ambivalence by implementing new methods for managing detainees. In this context, since 2015, they have been experimenting in several establishments with a new system called “Respect Modules”, inspired by a Spanish model (Módulos de Respeto). In these establishments, a building or wing accommodating up to 180 detainees is dedicated to the system. Participants are selected for the system according to different criteria, generally based on their willingness to participate and their behaviour in detention. While encouraging the detainee’s active participation, the system aims first and foremost to prevent violence in detention by working on behaviour. A second objective is to lend more complexity to the tasks of staff to return meaning to the prison professions.

More specifically, the system consists of giving the detainees included in it more flexibility in how they move within the whole detention building, as well as more free and varied access to activities (detainees must participate in 25 hours of activities a week). In return, detainees undertake to comply with a contract and strict internal regulations, which require self-respect and respect for others, the environment and the rules of community life. Dedicated prison officers for this part of the prison observe and evaluate how the detainees comply with these rules. There is a points system for this purpose: depending on their behaviour, detainees may receive positive points and rewards, or negative points, which may eventually lead to their exclusion from the system. Thus, four main principles structure this system: collective life; the active, voluntary and responsible participation of detainees; their free movement; and evaluation of their behaviour.

At the same time, the respect modules put rehabilitation back on the agenda for prison officers, aiming to “restore meaning to the prison professions and make prison officers part of a detention team”. If they choose to be part of the system, prison officers are required (through a new job description) to go beyond the role of prison guards and passive guarantors of the application of prison regulations by an exclusively repressive and disciplinary authority.

➤ Research questions and objectives

This system is presented as changing how prisons work. The scientific literature talks of “revolution” or “metamorphosis”, and the newspapers, about a “new anti-violence weapon”, a “new vision of incarceration”, etc. There is an emphasis on rehabilitation and a central place is given to the concepts of “social life” and “dynamic security”. The system therefore seems to open up new perspectives for the prison, or even a profound change in its nature.

This work therefore aims to understand how and why this system is described as something other than prison and what the drivers of these changes are. To this end, it will investigate the changes at the collective and individual level: What place does social life have within an institution that has always approached it with suspicion or sought to prevent it? How will the missions of prison be presented and/or reconfigured? How will the various actors position themselves and appropriate this system?

To answer these questions, we draw on the points of view and representations of three main stakeholders in the system: the institution, the prison staff and the detainees. The aim is to understand the interactions between these actors, which are, in our opinion, the key to understanding how this environment is organised and the subjectivities and individualities that intersect it. We believe that it is these interactions that make prisons what they are, and that make the respect modules what they are, that make them function (succeed or fail).

In this context, in the first section, we analyse what meaning the system looks to give to the prison sentence, through how it operates and the framework it proposes and determines. More specifically, we question the institutional missions and strategies implemented to work towards the objectives targeted. In the second section, we analyse how individuals appropriate this system and what it imposes, through individual and social change and development.

➤ Methodology

We went to four correctional facilities that have had the system in place for at least a year. We also made two study trips to Spain, to two facilities in Madrid and one in León (where respect modules were created in 2001), to understand how the system was initially designed. This exploratory phase was also vital to better understanding subsequent French adaptations. We conducted 58 semi-structured interviews with staff and detainees who were part of the system. In our analysis, we therefore rely on the points of view and subjective representations of these people: on their own interpretation of the system, how they experience it and how they appropriate it.

The Respect Modules: a containing framework

The first section of this analysis focuses on the system's framework. The objective is to analyse, from an institutional point of view, how prisons with respect modules operate: their priorities the roles they determine and the strategies they use to achieve their objectives.

☉ Respect modules: a symbolic freedom

The system's objective of empowerment involves an injunction around how we have to behave as a social actor. In this context, the system operates in such a way as to move away from a coercive security framework towards a more "normative" framework, closer to what can be found in the outside world. There are several elements involved: free movement, daily occupation through activities, rules of life, autonomy in daily tasks and participation in collective life. In order to encourage participation in collective life in detention, four committees are set up, which detainees have to engage with: the hygiene committee (maintaining the common areas), the reception committee (welcoming new arrivals), the activities committee (identifying and facilitating activities) and the conflict resolution committee. This final committee, also called interpersonal mediation, helps avoid or put an end to disputes between detainees, or even between detainees and staff. Although it would be a real additional tool in managing the prison population, generally and on an individual level, it is currently underdeveloped in France and within this type of system. These elements therefore encourage detainees to behave as "citizens of the prison," and above all, as "future citizens of the outside world". They also contribute to making detention in respect modules a "more peaceful", "calmer", "cleaner" and therefore more "normal" environment,¹ and in any case more human. As we will see, this normality is particularly important for people who find themselves in this system, because it enables them, to an extent, to protect themselves from an environment that remains physically and mentally restrictive and violent.

In this regard, and from the point of view of the detainees, the way this system operates, with the fringes of autonomy and responsibility it allows, above all represents a significant kind of freedom. This word "freedom" paradoxically keeps coming back in almost all interviews: the majority of detainees feel they have earned freedom within this system. Given the context continues to be oppressive and violent for these detainees, this is more of a symbolic freedom, a strong symbol of which is the key to their cell. Detainees have a "comfort key" enabling them to manage their own movements, within the time slots set by the establishment.

☉ Observation and evaluation: educational tools or tools of control?

➤ *Observation and evaluation: pillars of the respect modules*

These fringes of freedom exist within a very containing and controlling framework, in which observation and evaluation form two pillars of how the respect modules operate. A points system allows supervisors to evaluate the behaviour of detainees against strict regulations. How does the institution make use of this system and how do people appropriate it?

➤ *The threat of exclusion: the "candy system"*

Staff consider this evaluation to be an "educational" measure, a "tool" to move towards the desired normative approach. For Chantraine (2006), this type of system of privileges – or "candy system" (a reference to the Quebec prison system) – effectively replaces force and disciplinary measures to get detainees to

¹ These words come up regularly in interviews with both detainees and prison staff.

behave in line with the institution's objectives.² However, is there not a risk that this system increases the power and/or instrumental relationships between the institution and the detainees? For Ana Ballesteros Pena, doctor in sociology at the University of Barcelona (2017), it reflects "a system of obedience and submission seeking to construct docile subjects through a system of threats, on the basis of criteria specific to normative and homogeneous citizenship models"³ In psychology, this evaluation system refers back to a learning model called conditioning, which consists of modelling the behaviour of individuals by sanction/reward. While this model has yielded some significant results, it raises numerous questions: What type of behaviour can it actually work on? In what context? What are the long-term effects? Does it have an effect on intrinsic motivation (the interest and meaning that the individual draws from the action) or not?

For the detainees, this evaluation is associated more with a "sanction": In respect modules, there is "something to lose", which the detainees feel they have earned within this system: "freedom", "dignity" and "humanisation". The "minimum" of dignity and humanisation acquired in the respect modules seems to be experienced by detainees as an "earned" act of grace within detention. However, if detainees are deprived of freedom but not of dignity, the traditional conditions of detention tend to prove the opposite. Dignity is associated with, or at least experienced as, a privilege in this context, whereas it should be a formal right. Do respect modules not simply represent how a "normal" prison should operate?

► *From observation to control*

The system's operation, through observation/evaluation, also makes it possible to develop additional and more varied forms of control. First of all, there is greater vertical (top-down) control. Since operating the module requires more observation and vigilance, there is increased control (of private and shared spaces). Free movement has also led to the emergence of remote surveillance, with cameras appearing in some establishments. Horizontal control (between detainees) is now also emerging. In respect module buildings, collective/social pressure is applied: everyone controls each other, consciously or unconsciously. For example, in one of the establishments studied, the whole cell (2 to 3 detainees) is excluded from the system if an illegal object is found in there. This way of working encourages "vigilance" between co-detainees so that they are not wrongly punished themselves. Here, the group becomes a tool of control, an informal social control grounded in personal interest. It is almost a kind of collaboration with the institution, as Goffman mentioned in 1961.⁴ Finally, there is self-control. Not knowing whether or not they are being watched, some detainees are "more careful" or "do not do things" for fear of punishment: being sent back from the system and therefore deprived of a certain personal comfort. For Foucault, self-control, or self-censorship, aims to achieve internal pacification (of society/prison) by internalising disciplinary constraints, standards and rules.

In this sense, through these new forms of control, this system contributes to a form of organisation through self-management/self-regulation, which is useful to the institution because it reduces security costs.

Some detainees experience this framework as "containing". Here, containment takes on two meanings: containing as enclosing versus containing as reassuring. It is containing because it encloses the individual in a closed space, in which he or she is confined for a period of time. However, the "respect module" space is also containing because it contributes, within the limits of its functions and resources, to making the detainee a more autonomous and secure individual. In other words, the proposed framework combines a restrictive dimension (strict regulations) and supportive, almost "educational" action from the prison staff who come to "contain" the detainee: upholders of restrictions and limits, they contribute to embedding the basic rules, but also, with the relationship of dependency that exists between staff and detainee, to the care and security of detainees, through support, flexibility and receptiveness.

² Chantraine, G. (2006). La prison post-disciplinaire. *Déviance et société*, 3 (30), 273 – 288.

³ Ballesteros Pena; A. (2017). Modelos y prácticas contemporáneos de encarcelamiento femenino en el Estado español: ¿Políticas de igualdad o nuevas estrategias de control de las mujeres encarceladas? Doctor in sociology, University of Barcelona.

⁴ Goffman, E., (1961/1968). *Asiles*, Paris, Les éditions de Minuit.

🟢 How is the group managed? What place is there for the group?

➤ *Selection issues*

Structural and functional conditions determine the profile of those who will participate in the respect modules. Generally, three criteria are brought up: the detainee must have “good behaviour” in detention (at the disciplinary level: no incident report for three months), be “compliant with the rules” and be a “willing” subject. Logically, it is therefore these same profiles that determine how the module functions and its atmosphere. One detainee tells us: “as it is an older and wiser population, it gets less heated, and there is less tension and conflict. It depends on the prison population...”

Because of the selective way the system operates, there is a rift in how detainees are represented: on the one hand, in traditional detention, there is the dangerous offender, a bad object, who does not comply with the rules and sullies the atmosphere in detention; on the other hand, the detainee who complies with the rules and who deserves to be treated as humanely as possible. For Ballesters Pena (2017), the respect module system “labels” detainees in a particular way and establishes a dichotomy between “good” and “bad” detainees. This divide creates tension between the two different regimes. Among detainees, two clans form: those who “collaborate” with the institution and the rest. Among the staff, there are also two clans: those who have “easy detention” and the rest.

➤ *The group dynamic: a source of fear?*

Another one of the founding principles of the system is the group dynamic. The system proposes a structured social life with the objective of (re)socialisation and, in the longer term, rehabilitation/reintegration. The presence or otherwise of this aspect lends the system a specific orientation and way of operating. This is one of the major points of difference between the French and Spanish modules. This difference seems, above all, cultural, with Spanish society placing the group and the collective at the centre of how it generally functions. In its establishments, this dimension can be seen in the architecture (with the many common spaces) and in how the prison operates (the group and the group dynamic are at the heart of the Spanish system: the group is a way to fight isolation, as a “therapeutic tool”, as a “decision-maker”, as a “tool of control” and as a “management tool”). In contrast, in France, the architecture considerably hampers this group dynamic: unlike in Spain, everything has been conceived to isolate and prevent people from encountering each other. Also, in the very way the system operates, groupings are always brokered and very broadly structured by power relations and the restrictions that structure the prison environment. The group is a cause of fear and most often continues to be associated with violence, transgression or conspiracy in the representations. This is another element that moves the system away from its “social” objectives towards security imperatives.

🟢 From recommended objectives to interpreted objectives

The respect module system, which has been limited to the status of experiment since 2015, is not steered and supported politically or institutionally. There is no doctrine that can be used to define a clear status and framework and specific resources. The two major consequences of this, we argue, are:

1) a heterogeneous interpretation of the objectives of the system and its application: the absence of a doctrine prevents any decision being made on whether it constitutes a differentiated regime, or a regime that prepares detainees for life in the outside world or that simply manages detention. Depending on the objective being pursued, the prison staff of the different establishments appropriate the tools and resources associated with this system (free movement, activities, commissions, evaluation) in different ways.

2) unequal involvement of the various services: in some establishments, where the system is considered as a tool of detention, for managing the criminal population, the Penitentiary Integration and Probation Service (SPIP) has withdrawn from its operation. Yet the SPIP has an important role to play within this system, whether with detainees, providing holistic care, or with prison staff, encouraging vital partnership work.

To conclude, analysis of the system's framework and operation has outlined that through these objectives of autonomy and empowerment, the institution aims to transform detainees so that they become individuals who can meet a number of normative criteria, and subsequently integrate into society and the laws, norms and conduct that it imposes. It implements strategies that are oriented towards collective well-being, but are inevitably contaminated, as Bastien Quirion puts it, by the logic of security: strategies of control, selection and deterrence.

The objective of the second section is to show that people do not however passively absorb the strategies of the institution, but appropriate these objectives, through individual strategies and dynamics, so that they are as beneficial to them as possible.

Respect modules: a space for individual and social change and development

The second section of our analysis concerns the individual and social change and development brought about by the respect modules. Through a mirroring effect, this development in turn transforms how the prison operates and, more indirectly, the “face of the prison”: what the prison allows us to see. This leads us to consider the capacity of actors to go beyond the structural and organisational constraints of detention that are seemingly imposed and weigh down on them vertically and unilaterally. For this purpose, we analyse the processes implemented by prison staff and detainees to adapt, appropriate, do, undo, transform or resist the realities of their environment, work and life.

🟢 Prison officer–detainee relations: reciprocal, plural and dynamic relationships

First of all, we will look at the complex interpersonal game created by the asymmetrical relationship between detainees and prison officers within the respect modules. What is the nature of these interactions and how do they develop?

➤ *Complex and varied relationships*

Due to the very status of these actors, relationships between prison officers and detainees are mainly founded in (and analysed from the perspective of) constraint, and power and adversarial relationships. However, it is important not to pigeon-hole these relationships as singularly antagonistic and confrontational. By taking the points of view and experiences of the people involved in these relationships as a starting point for our analysis, we aim to report on the complexity and heterogeneity of these interactions, and their development within the respect modules.

➤ *Interpersonal continuity and balance: “instruments of pacification and stabilisation”*

The evaluation system (“carrot–stick”/“candy” system) proposed in the respect modules seems to encourage collaboration, which initially takes the form of a negotiation. We negotiate to obtain something or not lose something (a point, “a little freedom”, peace, tranquillity, etc.). Relationships are negotiated in the form of a “give and take” system: we offer something for a something in return. In this type of exchange, everyone benefits personally. The negotiation is not necessarily expressed verbally or explicitly, as one might, for example, offer up information in return for permission to leave. Here, more symbolically, a few degrees of freedom are being exchanged for a kind of social peace. While this mutual dependence is at first sight utilitarian, for some people it develops into other types of relationships, particularly thanks to the “interpersonal continuity” that the system enables: the dedicated teams of prison officers working on the respect module unit. In this context, prison officers and detainees come together every day and spend time talking and getting to know each other. From then on, they establish relationships of exchange and cooperation (Chauvenet, 1996⁵, Vacheret, 2002⁶) or “gift exchange” relationships (Benguigui, 1997.⁷) In this type of interaction, which is a priori selfless, relationships of respect, kindness and trust are central. Since trust is foundational, the interpersonal continuity that plays out in this system, and as it progresses, its stabilisation, are essential.

Talking about cooperation seems paradoxical for people who, at first glance, have no interest in creating or nurturing a social bond. But the selection made in respect modules means that the people who find themselves in this module have a common objective, which can only function within a mutually beneficial

⁵ Chauvenet, A. (1996). L'échange et la prison, in FAUGERON C. et al. *Approches de la prison*, Paris, De Boeck Université, 45-70.

⁶ Vacheret, M. (2002). Relations sociales en milieu carcéral. Une étude des pénitenciers canadiens. *Déviance et Société*, vol. 26(1), 83-104.

⁷ Benguigui, G. (1997). Contrainte, négociation et don en prison, *Sociologie du travail*, 39(1), 1 – 17.

relationship: to have as easy lives as possible – whether professional lives for some, or daily lives for others. In this context, the “gift exchange” mentioned by Benguigui does not materialise as an exchange of material goods or services, but as an exchange of words, time spared and spaces shared. In the interviews, all the participants highlight that these exchanges are quantitatively and qualitatively better. The words “trust”, “listening”, “reciprocity”, “sharing”, “recognition”, “support” and “respect” are evoked as much by the prison officers as by the detainees when talking about these interactions. These exchanges are ultimately essential for the prison to function “properly”, whether from an institutional or individual point of view (as we will see in the following sections). They represent “instruments of pacification and stabilisation” (Benguigui, 1997), or “tools for reducing tension and maintaining calm” (Vacheret, 2002). They neutralise power relationships, at least temporarily and partially.

➤ *Demarcated relationships*

Relationships develop but nevertheless continue to be adversarial, with a clearly defined boundary between oneself and others. On both sides, the interviews show that there is always some kind of demarcation, due to the very statuses of the people involved: “they are similar, but different”, or as Mauss wrote in 1923, “we fraternise and yet we remain strangers”. Indeed, as other researchers who have worked on social interactions in prison have observed, even with relationships that tend towards cooperation and exchange, there is still an adversarial element between the two camps. However, what differentiates the boundary we are talking about from the “gulf” mentioned by Sykes in 1958⁸ or the “insurmountable gap” of Goffman in 1961⁹ is that the boundary under this system now seems to be more “symbolic” than physical or material. It is “necessary” to keep this boundary in mind, to “keep the right distance”, on the one hand to protect oneself and on the other, to cooperate without descending into compromise. This “good distance” involves authority and adopting standardised and coded behaviours.

The “respect modules” context therefore contributes to redefining the security model, moving towards a model of dynamic security: security is maintained in the prison space while positive relations between the prison staff and detainees are developed.

These modes of relations between prison staff and detainees reveal tough identity and interpersonal challenges. Each person’s objective is to reinforce, or at least protect, their identity during these interactions. Using their own strategies and mechanisms, they must work on and negotiate a subjectively positive image, threatened by a stigmatising institution. Thus, engagement in this type of relation depends to a large extent on two processes: 1) The relationship that prison staff maintain with their profession; and 2) the relationship that detainees maintain with their identity as detainees.

👉 Questioning professional practices and identities: the quest for meaning at work

Analysis of the complexity of the professional position of prison officers, and the contradictions they are caught in, leads people on the ground and researchers to the same conclusions: beyond strong organisational and structural restrictions, prison staff generally do not have a rewarding professional identity, nor sense of meaning in their work.

How does this relationship and this meaning given to work develop within the respect modules? The meaning given to work, resulting from an individual and collective construction, is closely linked to the issue of the (real or symbolic) recognition of the work. This recognition seems central to the analysis of prison officers’ professional practices. The scornful judgement of the profession of prison officer associated with the notion of “dirty work” (developed by Lhuillier, 2005¹⁰), indeed highlights the profession’s need for recognition

⁸ Sykes, G M., (1958). *The Society of Captives*, Princeton University Press.

⁹ Goffman, E., (1961/1968). *Asiles*, Paris, Les éditions de Minuit.

¹⁰ Lhuillier, D. (2005). Le « sale boulot ». *Travailler*, 14(2), 73-98.

on a personal and social level.

➤ *Self-recognition: room to manoeuvre and “power to act”*

In the respect modules, prison officers have expanded fields of action. They are given the opportunity to go beyond the role of prison guard. In addition to the interpersonal possibilities already mentioned, they can now propose and/or lead activities, evaluate the behaviour of inmates, conduct “pre-selection” interviews and participate in various multidisciplinary meetings. Generally, through the technical team, they participate in the module’s operation by proposing adaptations or changes when necessary. They also play a central role in the launch phases, since they are involved in writing the internal regulations and various documents for the system. These expanded opportunities, or room for manoeuvre, can potentially become instruments for developing “power to act” (Clot, 2006¹¹) in the subject’s work. “Power to act” allows people to recognise themselves in what they do, but also to develop taking initiative and responsibility. By giving these prison officers more opportunities, they are granted a central place in detention. In this sense, prison officers become subjective participants and no longer just an object of an organisation.

➤ *Self-recognition: purpose and utility in work*

In respect modules, prison staff have a new perspective of their work and their task. In interviews, officers describe their work from the outset as “important”, “interesting”, “new” or “changing”. A sense of satisfaction is now associated with this profession. It is “satisfactory” because the people working in it obtain “results” that can be directly observed, meet objectives and rise to challenges. It is “interesting” because they can use new knowledge or find different or more complex ways of doing things. The autonomy granted to detainees means prison officers are freed from numerous tasks concerning organising and assisting the movements of detainees, and can concentrate on new tasks or take the time to do other tasks they previously did not have, or simply could not do at all. These elements provide many benefits, making them feel better about their work as prison officers.

➤ *“Identifying yourself in what you do”: an identity issue*

In the way it operates, the system helps to instil meaning into the tasks assigned to prison officers: it gives them the opportunity to combine their tasks of “rehabilitation” and “security”. By making their tasks less ambiguous, their professional identity, which was previously fragmented, seems strengthened and unified. Prison officers feel they are doing their job, the job they were supposed to do since the introduction of the joint task of “safety”/“rehabilitation” by the law of 22 June 1987. It is also important to underline that it is not the just the system that produces this “more social” side to the job, it is the prison officers who are selected or volunteer to work in this module who produce it themselves. These prison officers bring out this aspect of the job because it corresponds to the image they have of it, and makes the job more worthwhile for them (unlike others who value the job for its more “virile” security side). The prison officers describe these values to us through, among other things, their “personality”, their relationship to work and their previous experiences or their future professional plans.

➤ *Social recognition*

Another form of recognition plays out within the collective and within the relationships that are formed and develop at work. This is the recognition that the individual receives for their knowledge, skills and reputation (Dubar, 2000) from the various people that make up this collective.¹² In this sense, the collective is a commodity for work activity, providing that the person is able to become part of it and have their own contribution recognised (Clot, 2008). In the respect modules, the more important place given to prison officers through

¹¹ Clot, Y. (2006). Clinique du travail et clinique de l'activité. Nouvelle revue de psychosociologie, 1(1), 165 – 177.

¹² Dubar C., (2000). La socialisation. Construction des identités sociales et professionnelles, Armand Colin, collection U (3e éd).

a wide range of activities means they are consulted more and empowered more. Their words and points of view are listened to more within detention, and by the various services. Furthermore, being integrated into a dedicated team, with a common objective and a “separate” operation (compared to traditional detention), encourages group cohesion within the prison staff. They refer to a collective and common standard that fosters a sense of professional belonging, and thus, more broadly, a collective and professional identity.

➤ The detainees’ appropriation of the system

In this final section, we analyse the strategies that detainees use to adapt and appropriate how the system operates, and through them, the individual dynamics that play out in this context.

➤ *Relationship to the body, space and time*

In the first section on the relationship to the body, space and time, we show how imposed daily activities and rhythms fill a void for detainees. In addition to occupying their time and their mind, these rhythmic and standardised occupations give them the feeling of some control over the environment (they reclaim the space). However, it is important to emphasise that when they talk about it, detainees do not necessarily seem to associate meaning with it: they do not associate these occupations with something useful for their sentence and for preparing for their release.

➤ *Relationship to the identity of the detainee/offender*

The detainees initially develop identities in opposition to the “other detainees” of traditional detention. The respect modules group allows them to protect an identity, one of a “normal subject.” This group reassures them because it gives them the opportunity to perceive themselves and be perceived beyond the stigmatising and demeaning identity of “bad detainees.” Subsequently, they build their relationship with prison staff. The loss of identity is not as strong because detainees acquire an identity in the eyes of prison officers, “an existence as a person” (Vacheret, 2002). They feel re-humanised and this feeling contributes reciprocally to their self-image.

➤ *Relationship to rules: adapt by complying*

To adapt to the rules imposed by the system, and ensure that they are as beneficial as possible, detainees use different compliance strategies. We have established several “typical profiles”:

- strategic compliance: here, it is the detainees who clearly “play the game” of the institution, to “fake” and instrumentalise the system. For the most part, they have an interest in playing this game, something to be gained.
- survival conformism: conforming to protect yourself. This conformism concerns the most vulnerable people, who see this system as a means of living out their time in detention more peacefully. This strategy mainly involves perpetrators of sexual offences for whom the interest here is not material, but is about “getting out of it,” leaving their cell without being attacked or insulted.
- normative conformity: these detainees adhere to the rules and standards that they convey. Here, the normality associated with compliance with the rules protects an identity and a status. These are often older people, who have a higher social status than the average detainee.
- containment conformity: complying because the rules provide a reassuring and containing framework. For these inmates, usually young people or first-time arrivals, the rules are strict and difficult to apply but provide them with a framework they did not necessarily have in the outside world.
- failed conformism (or “bad conformism”): bad actors who enable the system to survive. Those who are excluded from the respect modules unit serve as “models of punishment” for the others.

These different forms of conformism promote a give-and-take system, in which everyone can benefit: this conformity reinforces the institution in its objectives because complying is to commit to do or respect socially permissible things. Detainees also draw personal benefits from it, as this study shows. Ultimately, these individual strategies also contribute to the system's proper operation. However, it is unclear what the long-term repercussions will be; the literature in social psychology shows that conformism makes it possible to change behaviours only on the surface and only periodically; whereas the objective of this system is to create behaviours that will endure...

➤ *Self-perception: feelings and emotions*

Finally, we note that the system channels different emotions, feelings or behaviours induced by prison and the constraints and suffering associated with it.

Daily life in respect modules helps some detainees manage part of their stress and anxiety related to detention and the deprivation of liberty. More specifically, support from the staff, free movement and detainees being more busy contributes to a certain "well-being". The operation of this system also generates "less anger" and "less hatred" (and thus less violence) among the detainees, towards the institution, the other detainees or towards themselves. Indeed, the way the system operates is considered less unfair, less degrading and less dehumanising than traditional detention. Finally, for some detainees, becoming part of the respect modules was the opportunity to find strength, with the support of professionals, to work on personal problems affecting their health (cannabis consumption, weight loss, medication intake). However, it is again necessary to qualify all of these results: pointing to something "slightly better" does not in any way remove the violence and the negative effects that being locked up, deprived of freedom, represents for a person.

Conclusion

The respect modules seem structured along two ambivalent or even paradoxical lines. On the one hand, they allow the detainee a certain kind of normalisation and symbolic freedom, through pockets of permitted autonomy, whereas on the other hand, they provide more control and new methods of control, with the risk of creating new forms of domination and instrumentalisation. Through the strategies the detainees implement, however, we have seen how they adapt and appropriate this ambivalence, so that it is beneficial to them, physically and mentally. This is also the case for the institution, since this ambivalence produces the obedience it requires.

Above all, the system means disorder can be managed on a local level. Unlike Spain, where the system is presented as a system for social rehabilitation and preventing re-offending, at the moment in France the system corresponds to a tool for managing detention. To move towards this objective of preparing detainees for release and rehabilitation, it would be necessary to focus not only on the behaviour to be changed, but more psychological and social variables, through a more holistic and systemic approach. To do this, it is also important to put the group back at the centre of the system: on the one hand, by working with and on this group; on the other hand, by letting this group express itself (groupings, facilitation of activities, reflection on the conditions of detention, etc.). The institution limits and controls forms of collective expression, contributing to its instrumentalisation. In other words, the organisation does not enlist the detainees to contribute to producing institutional activity, preferring a context of top-down imposition, with which detainees do not always associate meaning.

Given the persisting realities and restrictions of prisons, the aim of “managing detention” is nevertheless necessary and important: the system uses relationships to make it possible to combat the tensions and the effects of isolation, disempowerment and depersonalisation in detention. The respect modules change the nature of these relationships, rebalancing them. They enable each person to change their perspective on the other, by moving beyond the roles and statuses imposed on everyone by the institution. In this environment, this balance encourages reciprocal and peaceful relationships, which benefits everyone involved. At the same time, it guarantees the prison authorities a certain social peace. The notion of “dynamic security” takes on its full meaning here: the security aspect (control, surveillance) is ever present – on the one hand more discreet, on the other, more enhanced – but there is a genuine desire to encourage positive relations between people.

440 av. Michel Serres
CS 10028
47916 AGEN cedex 9
☎ **+33 (0)5 53 98 98 98**
Fax : +33 (0)5 53 98 98 99
www.enap.justice.fr



 **CIRAP**

Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherche
Appliquée au champ Pénitentiaire