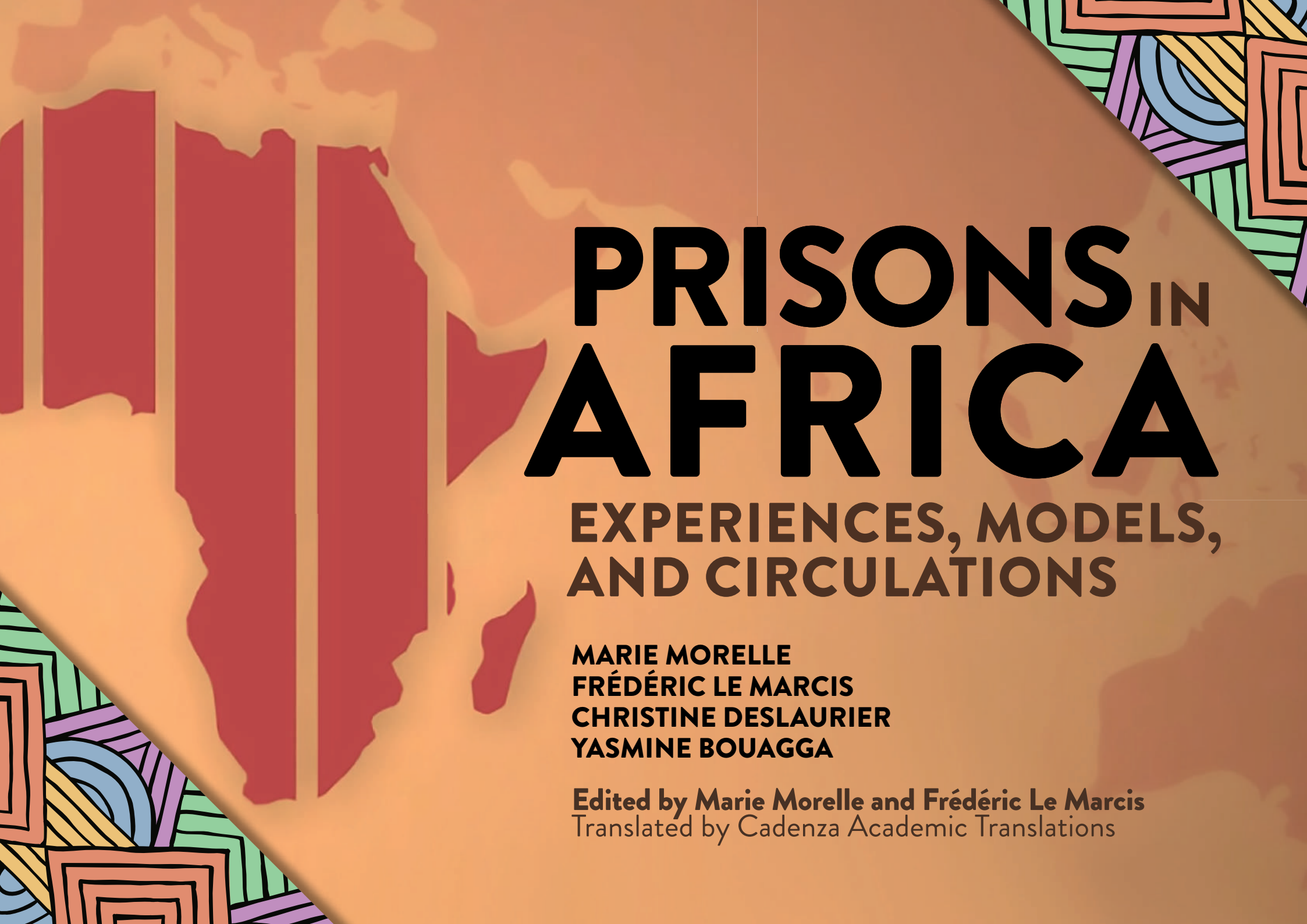


PRISONS IN AFRICA

EXPERIENCES, MODELS, AND CIRCULATIONS

MARIE MORELLE
FRÉDÉRIC LE MARCIS
CHRISTINE DESLAURIER
YASMINE BOUAGGA

Edited by Marie Morelle and Frédéric Le Marcis
Translated by Cadenza Academic Translations

Week 1

Marie Morelle

Are prison systems in Africa specific?

We are going to study the prison trends on the African continent and compare them with global trends.

We want to show you the diversity of prisons in Africa, as well as the diversity of inmate situations. Who are these inmates?

Men? Women? Minors? Pre-trial detainees? Convicts?

We also want to encourage you to detect other forms of confinement on the continent. For example, what difference can you see between an Ebola Treatment Centre and a prison?

In short, this week should support you in the deconstruction of a number of common misconceptions about prisons in Africa

Week 1.1

Prison, Africa, and the world

Prison, Africa, and the world

Frédéric Le Marcis
Professor of social anthropology, ENS de Lyon, Triangle, programme Ecoppaf

Marie Morelle
HDR lecturer in geography, université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, Prodig, programme Ecoppaf

A definition of prison

Frédéric: What are the incarceration trends on the African continent? Before we start, Marie, could you give us a brief definition of prison?

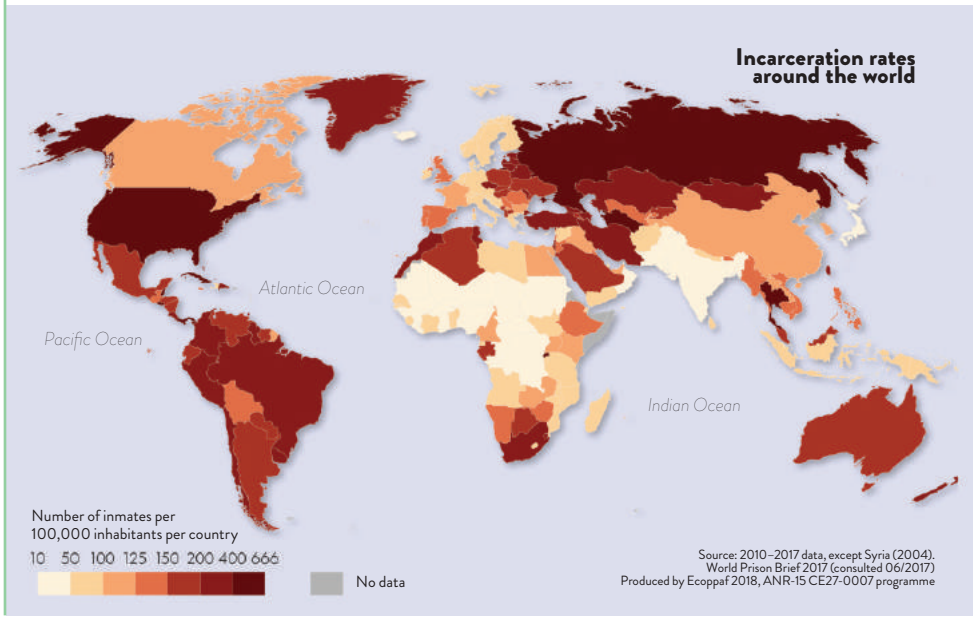
Marie: Prisons are penitentiary establishments where people are placed in detention after a decision by the justice system. These people are deprived of their freedom and they receive a penal sanction. We call this a penal prison. That said, there are extra-penal forms of imprisonment: psychiatric hospitals, administrative detention centres... But that does not mean that laws do not provide for the control of these places by judges.

Observing incarceration rates

Frédéric: In recent years, various works have discussed the question of a global punitive shift. Some authors have spoken of carceral hyperinflation, especially based on the rates in the United States and Brazil, while others prefer to evoke the Scandinavian model in regard to the lower incarceration rates in Norway and Sweden. What is the situation in Africa?

Marie: You just mentioned incarceration rates. It is indeed important to look at these incarceration rates on a global scale, but one still needs to know what an incarceration rate is. This rate allows us to establish a relationship between the total population of inmates and the total population of a given country at time T. However, there are still some limitations to the incarceration rate. It does not take into account convicted persons who receive alternative sentences. It does not take 'turnover' into account, in other words, the flow of inmates over the course of a year, for example, knowing that prisoners can be sentenced to prison terms of less than one year. That said, the incarceration rate remains an important reference point for establishing a first point of comparison, particularly on a global scale.

If we look at the map of incarceration rates around the world, what do we notice? Well, the African continent stands out! It stands out because incarceration rates are often much lower than elsewhere in the world.



Analyzing incarceration rates

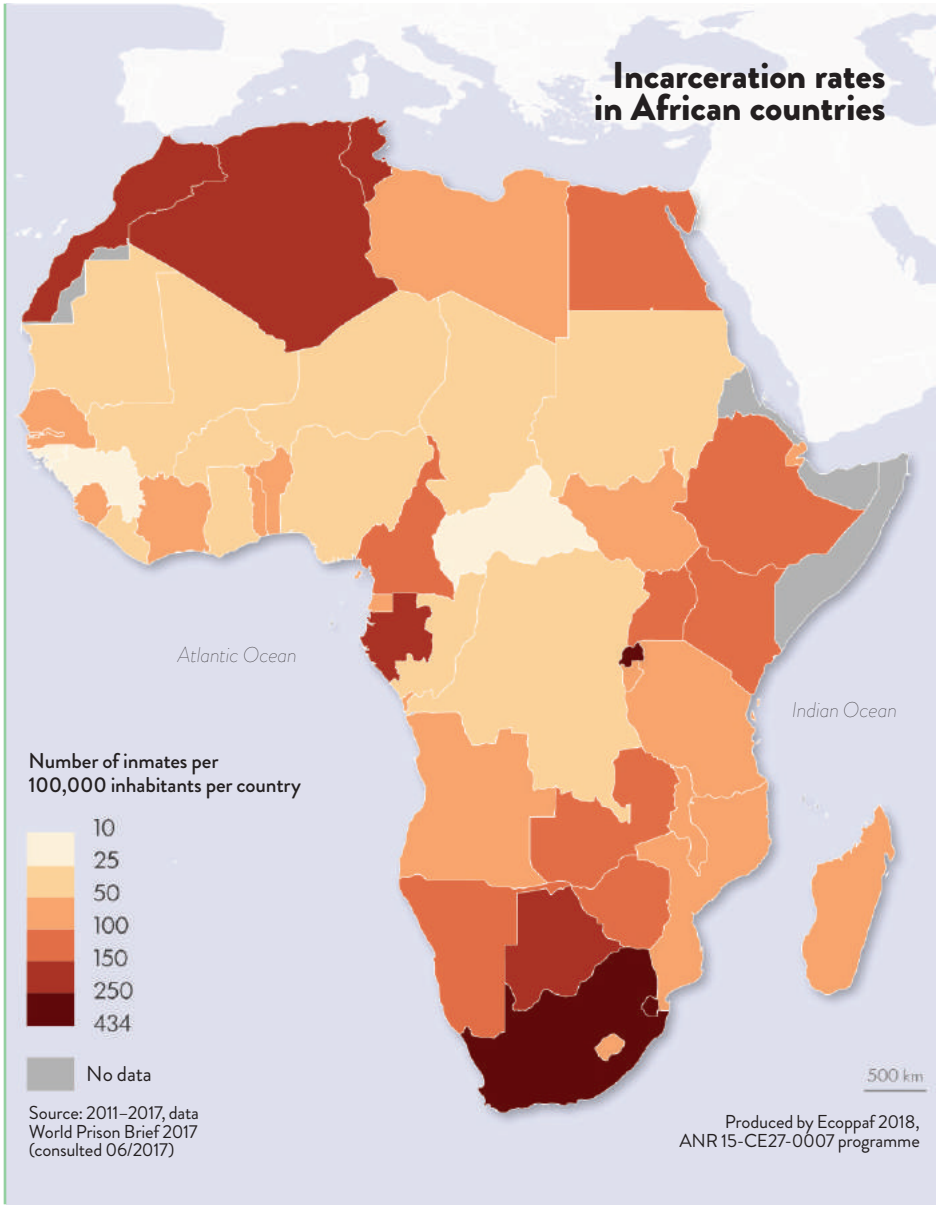
Frédéric: Can we say that there is an African model of incarceration?

Marie: If we look closer at the map of Africa, we can see that the situations are in fact rather disparate. In Rwanda, for example, the incarceration rate in 2015 was 434 per 100,000 inhabitants, because Rwanda suffered a genocide, after which there were investigations, trials, and many convictions.

Frédéric: I notice that the rate in South Africa is also very high.

Marie: Yes, 291 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2016. This is due to the fact that penal policies are structurally repressive in South Africa: people are sentenced and sentenced to prison terms. There are also countries with demonstrably low incarceration rates, such as Burkina Faso, which had 41 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2015.

Frédéric: Here again, we could note that in recent years the rates have increased because the former supporters of Blaise Compaoré were imprisoned after the revolution and in particular after the coup d'état that followed the revolution. And also due to the development of a rather violent anti-terrorism policy.



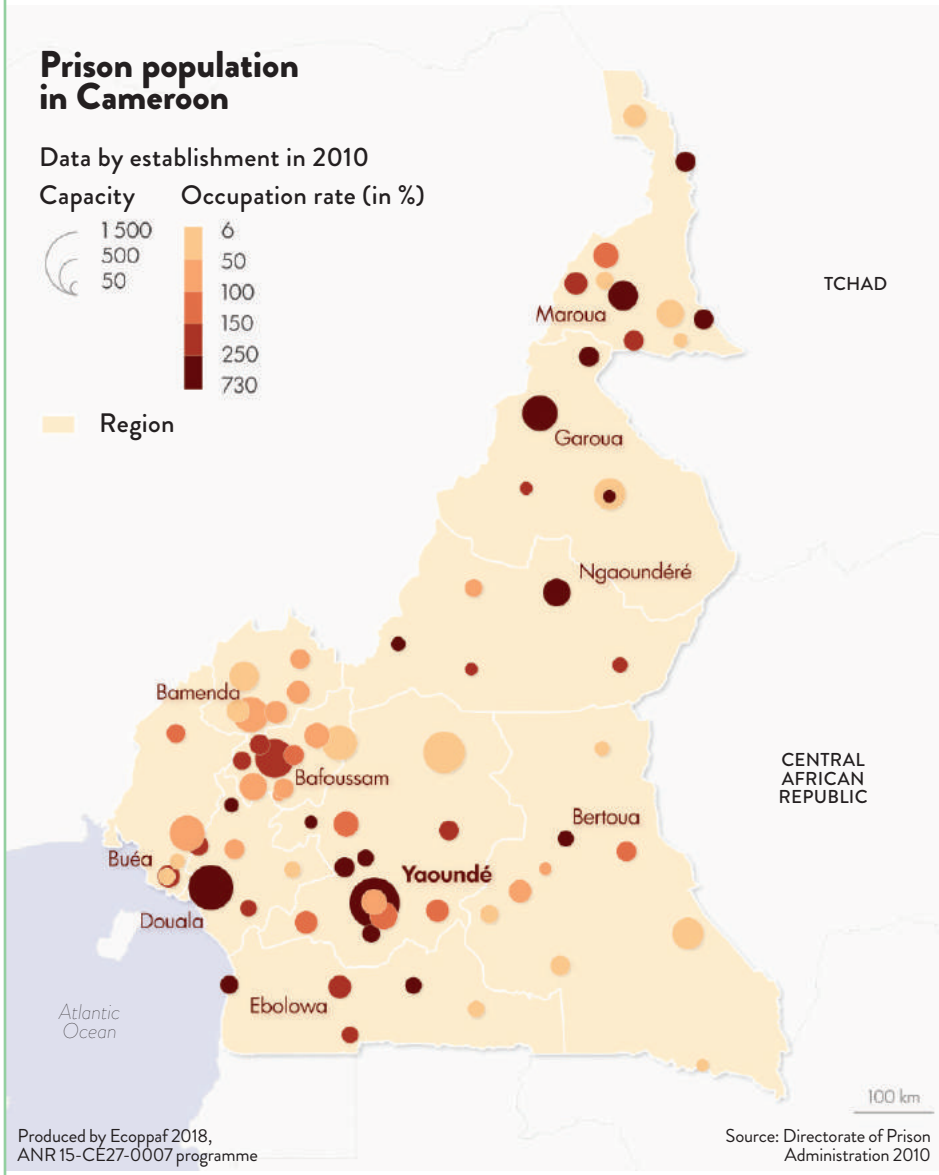
Prison and alternative forms of justice

Marie: Indeed, nothing is set in stone and we will return to this point. However, the rate in Burkina Faso remains quite low, as is the case in some other countries. How can we explain this? First, you have to be vigilant about the reliability of sources. We can also ask the question: Do low incarceration rates mean that the country in question is more likely to use alternative sentences? This is not necessarily the case, especially since these do not always exist. There is perhaps also the fact that people try to seek other forms of justice. And why do they do this?
The first idea is the fact that there may be a mistrust of institutions: police, gendarmerie, magistrates. There are also corrupt and clientelist practices that allow some people to avoid prison. To what source of justice, to what form of justice do people turn? We may end up discussing customary justice. However, these "customs" evolve, they are not fixed. Furthermore, these customary forms of justice (embodied by the village chief, the neighbourhood chief, or a religious leader), are sometimes mobilised to the detriment of minors, social inferiors, young people, or women. They are not necessarily the panacea.

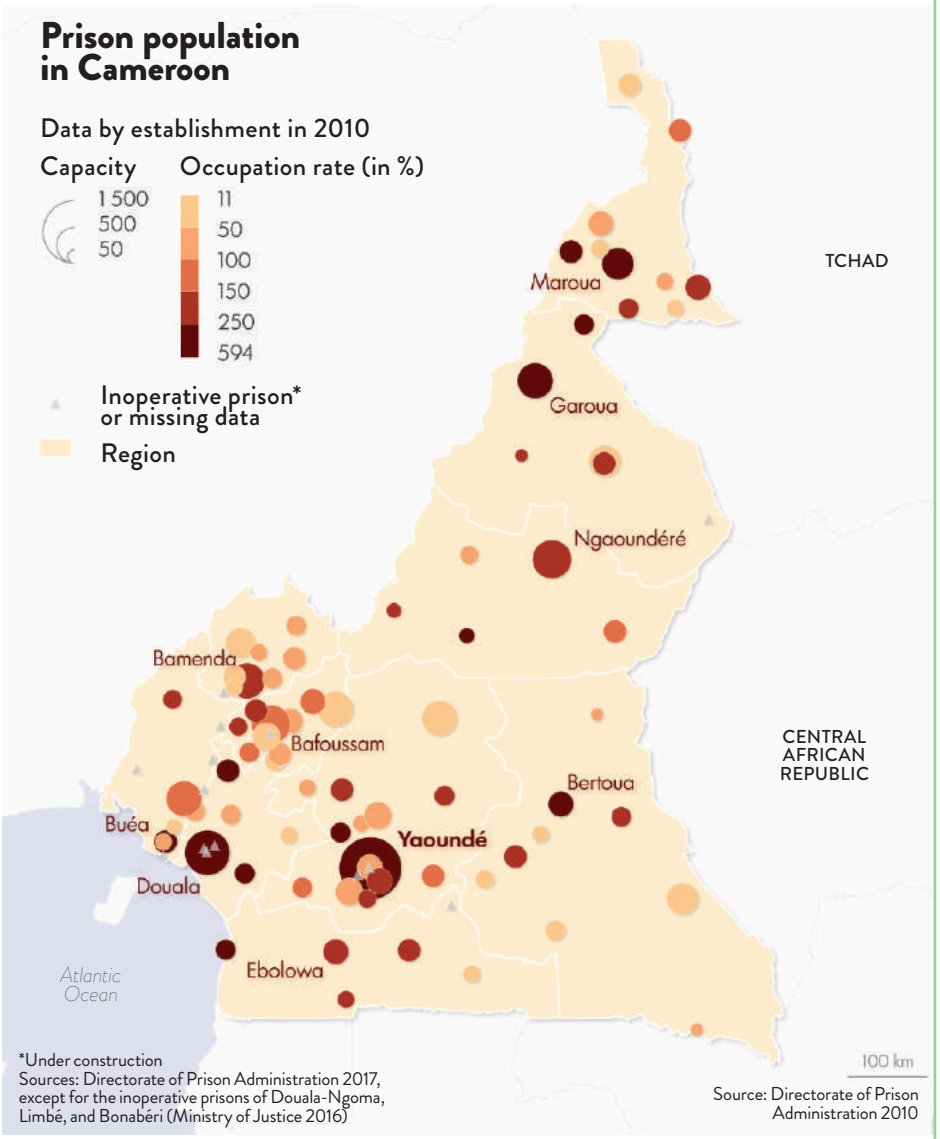
Prison et surpopulation carcérale

Frédéric: When we read the reports of NGOs or international organisations, we often find descriptions of overpopulated prisons. Is this a reality? How should we understand this overpopulation?

Marie: It is important to distinguish prison size from overpopulation. You can very well have small prisons that have limited capacity and are affected by overpopulation. And, inversely, there are large prisons with a high capacity that are not affected by overpopulation. Let us take the example of Cameroon and its prison population in 2010. Some prisons in the Centre Region, in Yaoundé, for example, have high occupancy rates and a situation of overpopulation. However, if we then look at the English-speaking region, around Bamenda, the occupancy rates are low.

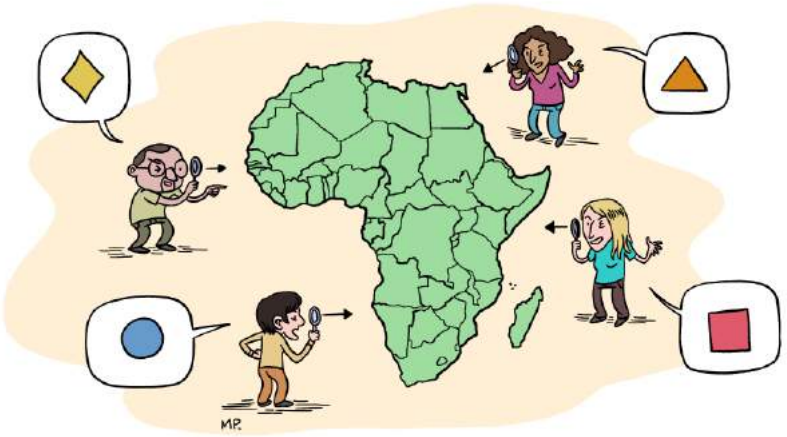


Marie: Let us look now at the 2017 map, where, in this English-speaking region, the occupancy rates increased significantly, and we start to see a situation of over-occupancy. How can this be explained? Well, it's linked to that fact that, since 2016, there have been a number of social movements, followed by repression, and the latent conflict is now causing the number of incarcerations to increase.



Key takeaways

It is important to bear in mind the diversity of prison situations on the African continent: from one prison to another, from one region to another, between countries, and within a single country. It is also important to consider how trends evolve over time: over the long term, medium term, and short term. We must consider the fact that certain African countries are characterised by low incarceration rates. Finally, it is important to distinguish prisons affected by overpopulation (they do exist) from the entire inmate population of a given country.



Reference list

CARIO Robert (2014). 'Justice restaurative : principes et promesses'. *Les Cahiers Dynamiques* 59, 1: 24–31.
COMBESSIE Philippe (2018). *Sociologie de la prison*. Paris: La Découverte, Repères collection.
LE ROY Étienne (1975). 'The Evolution of Traditional Justice in French Speaking Africa'. *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue canadienne des études africaines* 9, 1: 75–87.
MORELLE Marie, **LE MARCIS Frédéric** (2016). 'Que nous apprennent les prisons africaines ?'. *Mouvements* 88, 4: 42–9.
MORELLE Marie, **LE MARCIS Frédéric** (2015). 'Pour une pensée pluridisciplinaire de la prison en *Afrique*'. *Afrique contemporaine* 253, 1: 117–29.
TOURNIER Pierre-Victor (2011). *Dictionnaire de démographie pénale*. Paris, L'Harmattan.

Week 1.2

The plurality of prisons in Africa

The plurality of prisons in Africa

Frédéric Le Marcis
Professor of social anthropology, ENS de Lyon, Triangle, programme Ecoppaf

Marie Morelle
HDR lecturer in geography, université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, Prodig, programme Ecoppaf

Frédéric: People talk a lot about prisons in Africa, either in terms of overpopulation or in terms of disrepair. What is the reality of the situation?

Prisons introduced as a matter of emergency in the colonial era

Marie: Not all prisons are the same. In fact, there is no single way of talking about African prisons. We must distinguish between them. First, we should resituate prison trends in a historical perspective in order to understand the logics underlying the adoption of the penal prison, and then, in concrete terms, the establishment, the construction of these prisons. In Africa, historians agree that penal prison arrived with colonisation at the turn of the twentieth century, even though forms of precolonial imprisonment did exist. In fact, in the colonial context, the first prisons were built as a matter of emergency. Administrators often very hastily turned a military fort or a police station into a prison. Gradually, prisons were built and penitentiary policies were established. Today, old or colonial prisons can be found alongside prisons built at the time of independence and prisons built extremely recently.

The contemporary logics of the construction of prisons

Frédéric: What are the priorities that underlie the construction of contemporary prisons?

Marie: You are talking about prison construction. That leads us to think about prison architecture, which is being debated even today! Architecture contributes to the reflection on what constitutes a prison and what are the objectives of a prison, which are often contradictory. The first issue in the construction of a prison is that of security. The intention is to separate inmates who are presumed dangerous from the rest of society. There is also the desire to avoid escapes, no matter the reality of the situation. A prison therefore starts with high, windowless walls and watchtowers. That is more or less the first priority.

There is also the issue of punishment. Are prisons and their architecture designed in order to punish? That is: How much of a role is given to light? Are inmates allowed to have a view of the outside? This goes hand in hand with the dissuasive purpose of prisons. There is the desire to frighten those who are free so that they avoid going to prison at all costs.

There is also the issue of surveillance and discipline, which is connected to the issue of rehabilitation as well. Architecture organises the space, it divides it up. It aims to foster the control of the daily lives of inmates. In prison, their movements and schedules are controlled. Therefore, at first glance, prison appears as a series of gates, doors, and bars.

The twenty-first century prison?

Frédéric: But is the modern prison different?

Marie: There is still this dilemma between a security imperative and respect for human rights. In the past, people would have said that prisons need to be humanised, and today people say that detention conditions must be improved in order to respect human rights, often under pressure from institutional sponsors or NGOs.

Frédéric: Can you give us some specific examples?

Marie: Let us take the example of access to water, to drinking water, the setting up of cisterns. Many small projects related to these issues are often financed by NGOs. Another example: you can easily imagine what happens to a beaten-earth prison yard during the rainy season. Inmates end up with their feet in the mud, which can lead to various diseases and infections. An NGO can find the funds to pave the courtyard. There may also be the idea of protecting inmates from the sun and putting up sheet metal for shade. These are small-scale projects, but there can be much larger-scale projects. In Douala, in Cameroon, there is a very old, very dilapidated prison in the city-centre. The Cameroonian government launched a programme to build a large prison on the outskirts of the city. The architect in charge of the construction said that it would be an 'Amnesty International' prison, with the idea that there would need to be more space for inmates but also bathrooms, showers, and canteens. The issue of security was still relevant, and the architect also anticipated video surveillance and automatic doors, which relates to the issue of modernity. These techniques embody the modern prison. However, there are other things that must be taken into account: moving this prison to the outskirts of the city will have a significant financial impact on families when visiting their incarcerated relatives, not to mention the cost in terms of time!

Frédéric: Are open prisons being discussed on the continent?

Marie: Yes, they are being talked about today, as in the past! During the colonial period there was another dilemma: that of separating inmates but also putting them to work. For this reason, there were mobile prisons that moved from one worksite to another to put inmates to work, and these prisons are still found today. They are not 'mobile' but 'production' prisons, to borrow the Cameroonian expression, where inmates are expected to leave the prison during the day to work in the fields.

Frédéric: Is this also the case in big cities?

Marie: In big cities, this is not the case at all. First and foremost, in these 'open' prisons, which are mostly in rural areas, the authorities are confronted with a security issue and a risk of escape, which they seek to avoid in cities. In big cities, and especially in a political capital, there is the idea that the prison, with its high walls and the sense of enclosure it inspires, should embody the domination of the state. This is not the case for prisons in small towns or rural prisons. Let us take the case of Burundi, which is a good example. If we look at the map, we see that there is about one prison per province. In general in Africa, the map of prisons in a given country will more or less resemble the political-administrative network. However, other places of confinement should also be considered. There are also isolation cells, where people are kept when information is sought from them (people who are considered to be political prisoners). And, quite simply, in some neighbourhoods there are cells in police stations and cells in gendarmerie divisions where people are sometimes incarcerated for days, outside of the legal framework.

Key takeaways

There are therefore old prisons and contemporary prisons; prisons in cities and prisons in the countryside; prisons in the city-centre and prisons in the suburbs—in short, the nature of prisons on the continent varies in space and time.

Reference list

BERNAULT Florence (1999). *Enfermement, prison et châtiments en Afrique. Du XIX^e siècle à nos jours*. Paris: Karthala.

MILHAUD Olivier (2015). 'L'enfermement ou la tentation spatialiste. De "l'action aveugle, mais sûre" des murs des prisons'. *Annales de géographie* 702–3, 2–3: 140–62.

SALLE Grégory (2016). *L'utopie carcérale, petite histoire des "prisons modèles"*. Paris: Éditions Amsterdam.

SCHEER David (2013). 'Le paradoxe de la modernisation carcérale'. *Cultures & Conflits* 90: 95–116, available at: https://journals.openedition.org/conflits/18743.

Week 1.3

Prisons and prisoners

Prisons and prisoners

Frédéric Le Marcis
Professor of social anthropology, ENS de Lyon, Triangle, programme Ecoppaf

Marie Morelle
HDR lecturer in geography, université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, Prodig, programme Ecoppaf

Inmates: Varied situations

Frédéric: The situation of prisons on the continent is diverse and varied. What is the situation like for inmates?

Marie: There are differences and commonalities. On the one hand, you always have to keep in mind the extreme diversity of the situations of inmates in prisons. On the other, there are recurrences. For example, adults are incarcerated at much higher rates than minors and far more men are imprisoned than women. How can we explain this? Do women and minors commit fewer misdemeanours and crimes? Or is the justice system more tolerant towards them and gives them suspended sentences? There are also legal protections for minors in particular. What we should remember is that upstream of prison, we must understand the penal policies, their practical application, and a given society's representations of justice.

Frédéric: What is the situation for foreigners in prison?

Marie: There is a significant lack of information concerning them. There are foreigners in detention, but not necessarily due to a violation of legislation on foreigners. They may have committed a misdemeanour, a crime, or possibly both. In any case, if you are a foreigner, you are far away from your family and you find yourself in a very precarious situation, with difficulties finding food, taking care of yourself, and advancing your case in court. There may be different forms of solidarity based on religious affiliation or nationality, but they are limited in prison. Ultimately, it is usually international organisations and NGOs who support these inmates. This may be the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), for example.

Pre-trial detainees and convicts: The influence of status on prison experience

Frédéric: Have all these incarcerated people already been convicted?

Marie: No, it is important to distinguish between convicts and people incarcerated in pre-trial detention. The latter have not yet been brought to trial or sentenced, but the law provides for placing them in pre-trial detention. We call these people pre-trial detainees and there is a significant number of them on the African continent. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, the rate of people incarcerated in pre-trial detention is very high. What does this state of affairs mean when prisons are affected by overpopulation? What is the point of imprisonment when you can spend months on end in pre-trial detention? In Cameroon, there are people who have spent more than two years in pre-trial detention!

Frédéric: This is all the more problematic given that people held on remand, in other words, people who have not been convicted, do not have access to prison duties.

Marie: Yes. You mention duties, that is, the possibility for prisoners to work and potentially leave the prison to work. When you are in pre-trial detention, you do not have the same access to cells, to a bed... But there is something else to remember: even a person who has gone to trial and been sentenced in the first instance—to use the French expression *en première instance*—will tend to want to adjust their sentence and possibly have it reduced. They will want to go before a court of appeal. And after going before the court of appeal, they will want to go before another court (depending on the country, this may be a supreme court or a court of cassation). All inmates always have the desire to potentially reduce their sentence, to adjust it, or to contest it on points of order. An inmate can also hope to obtain a transfer, either to move closer to the court of appeal or to their family.

An over-representation of working-class neighbourhoods in the prison system

Frédéric: What are the different types of incarceration and what are the sentences handed down to inmates?

Marie: We desperately lack information. And yet these penal and penitentiary statistics would really be very useful. However, these statistics would not necessarily tell us the exact number of crimes and misdemeanours committed. Not everyone presses charges and not all investigations are conclusive. There are also situations of corruption, but it would nonetheless let us see the main reasons for incarceration and, as you ask, who is incarcerated. If I looked at the files of the records office of the Yaoundé Central Prison, what would I see? I would observe that, in general, people are primarily incarcerated for theft. It is mostly young men from working-class neighbourhoods engaging in informal activity who are incarcerated. However, I'm not saying that all delinquents and criminals are from working-class neighbourhoods. In fact, we should rather ask to what extent the inhabitants of working-class neighbourhoods are more strictly monitored and supressed.

Frédéric: This question has often been raised for Western prisons!

Marie: Yes, it is a universal and recurring question. When a Malagasy prison governor says, 'I have to establish a teaching programme because my inmates have a high rate of illiteracy and a lack of education', it raises questions! Yes, it is legitimate to want to establish a teaching programme, but perhaps we should ask why there are so many illiterate inmates in prison! What happens to those who are guilty of misuse of company assets, embezzlement of public funds, or fraud? Are they systematically prosecuted? Are they systematically given prison sentences? In reality, not everyone is equal when facing prison.

The death penalty: Varying levels of application and abolition

Frédéric: What can you tell us about the death penalty?

Marie: For the death penalty, the situations are disparate. In Somalia, it still exists and there are executions. In Benin, however, the constitutional court abolished the death penalty, but there is not yet a law that would allow the concrete application of this abolition: there are still inmates on death row in Beninese prisons. In Chad, it is more of a partial abolition: although the death penalty has been abolished, people who have been incarcerated and convicted for terrorism can still be sentenced to death. Now, we know that Chad is currently engaged in a struggle against Boko Haram. There are other situations that should be noted. In Cameroon, the death penalty has not been abolished, but no death sentences have been handed out for decades. Those who have been condemned to death are therefore considered to have a life sentence, although they would like to have this recognised in court. And they are willing to do everything for this change to occur. If their sentence is commuted to a life sentence, that opens the possibility to ask for it to be reduced.

Frédéric: But what would they have to do to achieve this?

Marie: First, they would have to have the means, in particular the means to pay for a lawyer. Court-appointed lawyers are few in number and often lack motivation. They are not well paid at all and are often paid late by the state. Family support is also needed. However, when inmates are serving long sentences, this support tends to diminish. It is also necessary to understand the law, to understand what is happening to you. On this subject, I would mention that those inmates serving long sentences will have attended many hearings: not only their own, but also those of fellow inmates. They may have met lawyers, they may have hired lawyers at different times, depending on their means. They will have spoken with NGOs and they may have read penal codes in the prison library. In short, they can gain knowledge of the law and acquire practical knowledge. There are inmates today who call themselves prison lawyers. However, international organisations or NGOs are sometimes unaware of them or do not recognise them. Some magistrates look down on them. But it is important to remember that inmates can also be subjects of their rights.

Frédéric: You are talking here about informal practices, informal knowledge. Can you expand on this a little more?

Marie: I don't want to make generalisations. But let us take the example of those sentenced to death, in certain prisons, in certain countries. In general, they have a private cell that they share with two or at most three other inmates. So, they are not in areas affected by overpopulation. In a much more informal way, they have the right to move around the prison, to go to other detention areas, to go to the yard, which is not the case for other inmates. They can also hire other inmates to cook and clean for them. This is important for these other inmates because, although they will not necessarily be paid or receive money, the fact of having access to an area that is not affected by overpopulation (in the case of overpopulated prisons) allows them, in pragmatic terms, to have easier access to the showers and the toilets. Furthermore, some inmates develop informal economic activities, such as preparing fish, selling doughnuts, or trafficking cigarettes or alcohol.

Key takeaways

To understand the prison experience and the diversity of situations, we must consider the penal status but also the social origins of inmates. We must also take into account their age, their gender, and finally all the informal statuses acquired over the course of their incarceration or incarcerations.

Reference list

CUNHA Manuela Ivone (2001). 'Trajets et dérives autour d'une prison de femmes'. *Ethnologie française* 31, 1: 81–7.

CUNHA Manuela Ivone (2007). 'Les liens du trafic : parenté, voisinage et genre dans des narcomarchés'. In KOKOREFF Michel, PERALDI Michel, WEINBERGER Monique (eds.) *Économies criminelles et mondes urbains*, pp. 109–19. Paris: PUF.

GODOI Rafael (2014). 'Flux pénitentiaires et vases communicants : le va-et-vient entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur des prisons'. *L'Ordinaire des Amériques* 216, available at: http://journals.openedition.org/orda/1102.

GODOI Rafael (2009). 'Gérer le vivre-ensemble dans et hors de la prison : la trajectoire d'un agent pénitentiaire à un moment de transition'. In GEORGES Isabel, CABANES Robert (eds.) *Sao Paulo. La ville d'en bas*, pp. 151–66. Paris: L'Harmattan.

MANDELA Nelson (1994). *Long Walk to Freedom*. Randburg, South Africa: Macdonald Purnell.

MORELLE Marie (2015). 'La prison, la police et le quartier. Gouvernement urbain et illégalismes populaires à Yaoundé'. *Annales de géographie* 702–3, 2–3: 300–22.

WACQUANT Loïc (2001). 'Symbiose fatale. Quand ghetto et prison se ressemblent et s'assemblent'. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 139: 31–52.

WACQUANT Loic (1999). *Les Prisons de la misère*. Paris: Raisons d'Agir.


CRIMINALITY
?!
PRISON
PRISON
MP

Week 1.4

Informing, comparing, providing testimonies: Prison Insider

Informing, comparing, providing testimonies: Prison Insider

Frédéric Le Marcis
Professor of social anthropology, ENS de Lyon, Triangle, programme Ecoppaf

Clara Grisot
Multimedia hub coordinator, Prison Insider

Bernard Bolze
Director and co-founder, Prison Insider

Frédéric: Clara Grisot and Bernard Bolze, you are among the co-founders of Prison Insider. Prison Insider is an association whose mission is to produce and spread knowledge on prisons throughout the world. How did Prison Insider start and what is the genealogy of this association?

Spreading knowledge on prisons throughout the world

Bernard: This association is very new; it is only two years old. In practice, it came about due to the fact that, a long time ago, at the intersection of my activity as a journalist and community activist, I had the idea to create the Observatoire international des prisons in the early 1990s, which occupied about a decade of my life. After the international dimension of the OIP came to an end, I noticed twenty-five years later that no one had occupied this space. This question can be approached in different ways. In any case, the idea was to bring together friends and acquaintances with a variety of skills so that they could take up this question and find a contemporary formula for addressing the situation of prisons in the world. And thus, Prison Insider was born.

Frédéric: Prison Insider's raison d'être is based on the idea that prison is basically like a black box. Its presence reassures society because criminals are locked up there. But, ultimately, not many people are interested in what happens behind these walls. Do you agree with this assessment?

Tackling preconceived ideas and showing what prison is like

Clara: Yes! And then, since Prison Insider tries to enter this black box, you realise that this idea does not stand up to reality. On the whole, it is the sick, the poor, and minorities that are imprisoned, and mass incarceration is the result of a political choice. It doesn't have much to do with a variation or increase in criminality. Furthermore, people who are imprisoned are in fact destabilised by the ordeal. When they leave prison, they are even more vulnerable, even more excluded, even more marginalised, and it is therefore a vicious circle. Since these people are excluded, little interest is shown in them, and you can observe a relative lack of interest in this question. It is not very encouraging, but it is important to work on this issue.

Frédéric: This lack of interest that you mention in terms of what happens inside prisons, is it shared throughout the world or do you see differences from one region to another?

Clara: It may be less a question of a lack of interest than a desire not to see and not to know. From the moment when a person commits a misdemeanour, an offence, or a crime, this person is stigmatised, excluded, and blacklisted by society, and often their families are too. The result is great disdain, great silence. Not everyone behaves in the same way with people who have experienced incarceration. You can see, for example, that some societies are more inclusive, and in other places the family is much more present, especially in Latin America.

Connecting different sources of information on prison and developing a comparative approach

Frédéric: The Prison Insider website presents analyses, data, and summaries, as well as testimonies, what status do you give to these different sources of information?

Bernard: You could summarise our production of information according to three universes: the raw and factual information that we favour, in other words, being able to describe, to say what is happening in terms of physical integrity, in terms of access to care, and in maintaining family ties... there are many more examples of these rights. And then the idea quickly came that we could compare this data. It is very important for a region, for five countries in Europe or five neighbouring countries in a region in Africa to be able to compare practices between them: how visits are arranged, how inmates are fed, how health care is accessed, how inmates' basic level of hygiene is maintained. It is of enormous interest to us that this comparative data be used to lift each other upwards; that users, in a sense, that families or friends of prisoners can say, 'Look how they do it over there', or that community activists as well as NGOs can say, 'Look how they do it nearby, why couldn't we do the same, pull ourselves up?' The third thing is to provide testimonies: testimonies are very important for us because, beyond the somewhat chilly nature of the technical legal aspects, testimonies put a face to the issues, they provide humanity. They are people talking, they are not cases, not numbers, not prison register numbers: they are individuals. Testimonies serve to illustrate our aim.

Frédéric: In this project, do you now cover all countries with Prison Insider?

Clara: The organisation is still young, but that is of course the long-term goal. We had to start somewhere and so we began by collecting information, by identifying people in different countries who may or may not participate in identified organisations. We then decided to engage in research by geographic zone. We began with a first cycle on Latin America, where we covered around ten countries, then we continued with a cycle on Southeast Asia to see what was happening in Indonesia, Singapore, and the Philippines, where we were able to highlight the mass incarceration of drug users, for example, and then we conducted a cycle on Africa. The idea of these geographic cycles was to discover the major regional trends while always maintaining the idea of comparing what is happening both within a region and between regions. And then this year we are maintaining these networks, we are deepening our ties with these countries, as well as with European countries. Our current network of correspondents is spread over five continents and includes around forty organisations. And it is clearly a dynamic to maintain and develop.

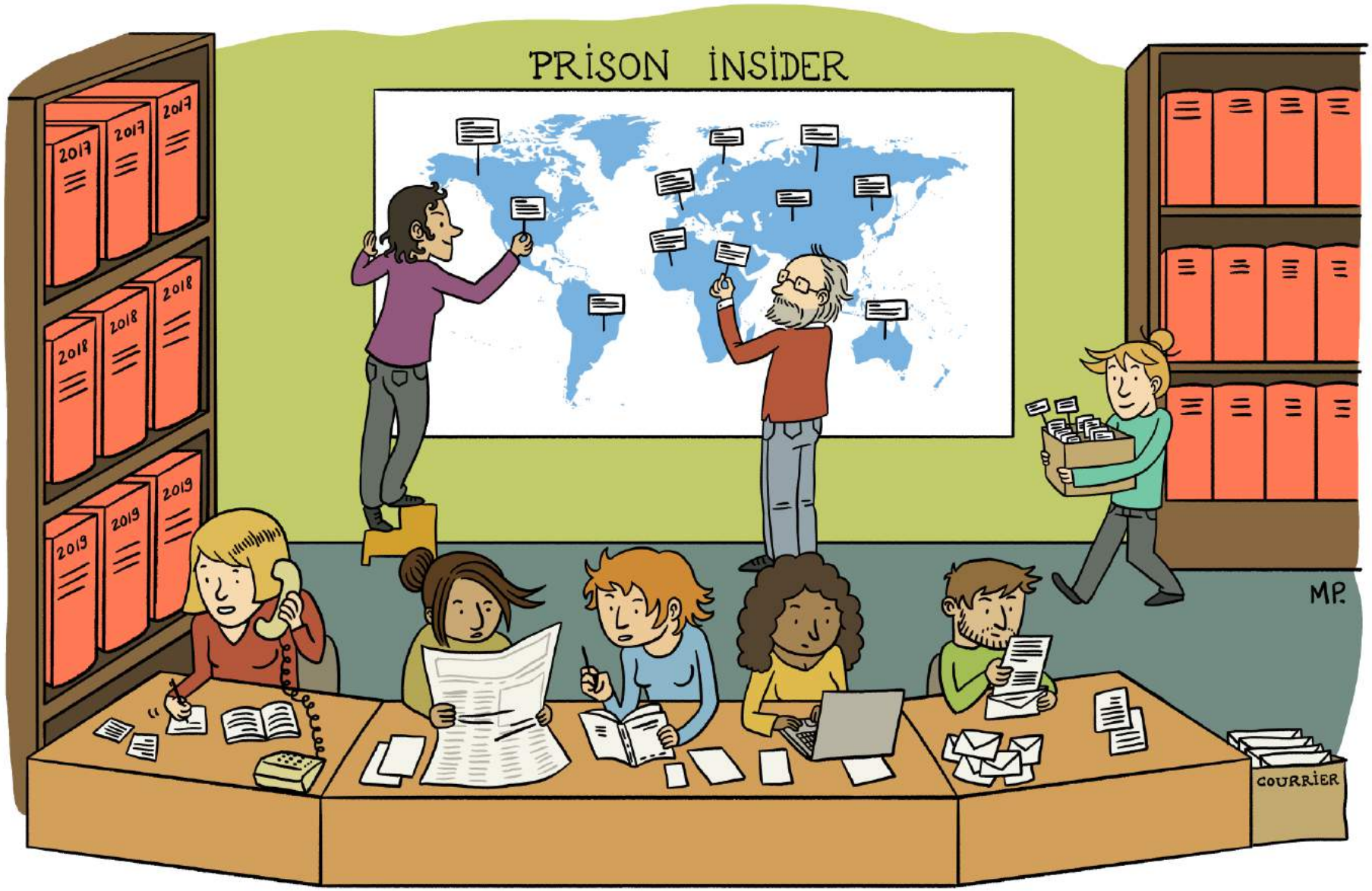
Contributing to Prison Insider

Frédéric: How do you recruit these correspondents or rather how does one participate in this adventure?

Clara: Prison Insider does not recruit correspondents, as Prison Insider contacts people who are interested in this question and who could give information on the organisation of a country in terms of all of its organisational aspects and on prison policies, for example. Beyond that, Prison Insider is a collaborative tool, and everyone can participate in it. We look at the question of incarceration as it is, that is, as a universal question that concerns everyone, and there are multiple ways to join the adventure of Prison Insider.

Bernard: At the start of the year, we install on our internet platform what may be called the template, in other words, the organisation of the penitentiary system for a given country. We invite the people who have watched this MOOC or read this BOOC, all the actors in civil society who want to join us and especially those who want to take account of the state of their own prisons. It is not for our own pleasure, but to say: 'I want to participate in the transformation of prisons on a global scale, but starting with where I live.' We therefore invite everyone to send to Prison Insider's address everything that arises over the course of the year: press clippings, press releases, reports, written documents, and images that concern their country. This information will be included in the country file so that at the end of the year we can close this file and continue the next year. We will therefore have a sort of annual report that is built up over time.

Internet link: https://www.prison-insider.com


PRISON INSIDER
2017
2018
2019
COURRIER
MP.

Week 1.5

Beyond penal confinement: Ebola Treatment Centres

Beyond penal confinement: Ebola Treatment Centres

Frédéric Le Marcis
Professor of social anthropology, ENS de Lyon, Triangle, programme Ecoppaf

Veronica Gomez-Temesio
Researcher in anthropology, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Copenhagen

Frédéric: We dedicate our session to the question of confinement beyond prison walls. In the social sciences, three places emerge as emblematic figures of confinement: first, prison, which Michel Foucault explained was there to discipline and punish; the psychiatric hospital, which Erving Goffman reminded us was there as a totalitarian institution to organise the lives of individuals, but which was met with resistance; and, more recently, the work of Michel Agier shows how the camp has become a major tool in handling refugees. On the African continent, however, another experience makes it possible to approach from a new perspective the question of confinement, its logics, its experience, but also its contradictions. This experience is that of the treatment of patients in Ebola Treatment Centres established between 2014 and 2015 in the three countries of the Mano River during the Ebola epidemic. These three countries are Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Veronica Gomez-Temesio conducted ethnographic research over several months in a Guinean treatment centre in Wonkifong. Currently a researcher at the University of Copenhagen, she shares her analysis with us.

What is an Ebola Treatment Centre (ETC)?

Frédéric: What does an Ebola treatment centre consist of?

Veronica: Ebola Treatment Centres or ETCs are places where all the people infected with the Ebola virus are gathered and detained. Rather than simply being care centres, they are in fact quarantine centres, because when a virus starts to spread in society, epidemiologists recommend breaking the chains of transmission to keep the virus from spreading too far. With this goal in mind, all people infected, all sick people, are ideally placed in an enclosed space, in a quarantine centre like Wonkifong, which we can see in the photograph. To do this, enclosed centres are established throughout the countries affected by the epidemic, where staff in protective apparel treat patients.

© Veronica Gomez-Temesio

Frédéric: Why does it seem relevant to consider Ebola Treatment Centres and prisons together?

Epidemics and criminality share a common response: confinement

Veronica: It is very pertinent to think about them together, first of all because they are enclosed, shut-off spaces in which populations that are considered dangerous to the rest of society on the national and global level are detained. More than just a logic of care, ETCs follow a logic of risk control, like prisons. Populations are gathered in enclosed spaces in order to protect the rest of society.

Frédéric: Indeed, there is an inherent paradox in ETCs, where there is both a practice of promising care and a practice of control.

Veronica: Precisely! In the ETC project, there are two logics: isolating the virus and treating the patients. Here we see a caregiver with a young child, you could say that these two logics form the theory of ETCs, they underpin the construction of these centres. But in practice, it should be emphasised that the logic of control takes precedence over the logic of care. And this logic can spread even outside the centre. I will give you an example: during the epidemic, every person that was exhibiting rather general symptoms—like headaches, diarrhoea, vomiting—all these people were sent to centres for detection, to test for the disease. Therefore, during the epidemic, in neighbourhoods or villages that were thought to be at risk or where there were believed to be carriers of the virus, there were campaigns—which were called 'search and sweep' campaigns. People who had rather general symptoms were forced to go to centres where they stayed for several days at the risk of potentially fatal contamination if their symptoms were not Ebola-related. People were sorted into categories; there was a real logic of triage, because lives judged to be dangerous were separated to protect other lives that were judged to be important to protect. Here, I am referring specifically to the massive financial support sent by the United States and Europe to West Africa during the epidemic; funds that were intended to save lives, of course, but above all to keep Ebola from reaching us.

Frédéric: The notion of controlling risk, whether it be an epidemiological risk in ETCs or the risk of criminality in prisons, is common to both ETCs and prisons. But are there other factors or other aspects or points that are shared by these two spaces?

ETCs and prisons function according to similar logics: That of total institutions

Veronica: ETCs and prisons have many things in common. The most obvious is the architecture: they are enclosed spaces. When you are sent to an ETC, you are not asked your opinion. You are sent there involuntarily, and you only leave when you are told to. You can see the gates of Wonkifong here. You leave your personal belongings at the entrance, you leave your clothes and you receive new ones, you receive an identification number. There is a real redefinition of the person as soon as you step into the detention area. And it will no doubt

remind you of the experience of mortification described by Erving Goffman. Yet I think the most important point here is that ETCs and prisons share in some way a definition of life or a philosophy of life. In these places, patients and inmates undergo a process of dehumanisation; and I am referring here to the work of Hannah Arendt. Hannah Arendt thought of camps as places where the individual is removed from his or her political life. In this sense, in ETCs, the individual is reduced to a toxic body to be managed; a body that must be fed, washed, and clothed, but also an individual who will be stripped of all of his or her rights. The most frightening aspect is that this continues even in death: you can see here the graves of the patients of Wonkifong, the cemetery where more than 150 patients are buried, and they are all in anonymous graves. The families therefore often do not know where their relatives are buried and these people were buried without any other form of proceedings, without a funeral, without social or familial support.

Frédéric: The stigma outlasts the experience of the ETC, and it is striking that this logic also applies to inmates who still carry a stigma after prison. Faced with this dehumanisation, can we observe forms of resistance or even accommodations in prisons, like those described by Erving Goffman in psychiatric hospitals, for example?

Resisting dehumanisation?

Veronica: There is resistance because clearly no one can ever be entirely reduced to a mere body. Thus, we see resistance in this opposition between biological life and political life. Compared with prisons, there is not really rebellion in the form of mutiny or riots in ETCs, but there is a struggle to remain human. Individuals demand contact with their family; families want to see them in ETCs, bring them food, and emphasise that these people have a first and a last name; that they are defined by more than just being a contaminated body.

ETCs and putting to work?

Frédéric: We could perhaps expand on this comparison from a historical perspective. When colonial prisons were established on the continent, the logic of control of populations was accompanied by a logic of putting to work, and this notion of putting to work persists today in the penal camps found in rural prisons, where inmates are also there to work in the fields. Is it possible to speak of putting patients to work in ETCs?

Veronica: They are not really working because these people are seriously ill, and they stay at most fifteen days in the ETC, if they survive. However, although these patients do not produce anything, they perform work in that they are protecting society. Their body is working to protect society. Something happens within these quarantine tents: the work of patients is really to use their body as a barrier to the spreading of the virus. In fact, they protect the rest of society by sacrificing their very person and that is very important work. Next, we should not forget that many clinical trials take place in ETCs. Medicines that have not yet been licensed are tested on patients. In order to study the virus, their blood, sperm, vaginal secretions, tears, and breast milk are taken. Therefore, the bodies of patients produce an economic value on the global pharmaceutical market.


© Veronica Gomez-Temesio

Key takeaways

ETCs should be included in the long-term history of the devaluation of black lives. The logic of ETCs therefore follows this process, this history of dehumanisation that is found in both slave policies and in the control of populations by the colonial power. The form of ETCs, the form of camps, is not new in Africa, since camps and confinement served as the model for managing epidemics in the colonial era, as shown by Guillaume Lachenal's book, *Le médecin qui voulut être roi*.

Does this arrangement save lives? Yes, it saves lives! But which ones? ETCs, along with other initiatives such as vaccine trials, have made it possible to suppress the virus. To speak a little provocatively, we can say that these arrangements have saved lives, but they have saved our lives! Because these places of confinement above all prevented the virus from leaving the African continent. We see here a caregiver in protective gear spraying the area around the centre to prevent the virus from spreading. Now, a little less provocatively, we can recognise that the efforts of the international community clearly helped people survive and leave the centres alive. But we should not forget that these places really put humanity to the test, because patients there were treated as bodies, not as human beings. And ETCs are truly places that reveal the persistence of racial and political segregation in the contemporary world. And, just like with prisons, we can no longer avoid questioning the legitimacy of these places.


© Veronica Gomez-Temesio

Bibliographie

AGIER Michel (ed.) (2014). *Un monde de camps*. Paris: La Découverte.
ARENDT Hannah (1951). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace & co.
LACHENAL Guillaume (2017). *Le médecin qui voulut être roi. Sur les traces d'une utopie coloniale*. Paris: Le Seuil ("L'Univers historique" collection).
LE MARCIS Frédéric (2015). '"Traiter les corps comme des fagots" Production sociale de l'indifférence en contexte Ebola (Guinée)'. *Anthropologie & Santé* 11, available at: http://anthropologiesante.revues.org/1907.
GOMEZ-TEMESIO Veronica (2018). 'Outliving Death: Ebola, Zombies, and the Politics of Saving Lives'. *American Anthropologist* 120, 4: 738–51, https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13126.
GOMEZ-TEMESIO Veronica, **LE MARCIS Frédéric** (2017). 'La mise en camp de la Guinée. Ebola et l'expérience postcoloniale'. *L'Homme* 222: 57–90.