Summary:


1. Research

**Brazilian prisons and Covid-19 or the tragedy foretold**

By André R. Giamberardino, Maurício S. Dieter, Victor S. Dieter

Authoritarianism and the disregard for science make the fight against Covid-19 much harder in Brazil. The resilient campaign against social distancing, promoted by some influential businessmen, the Minister of Economy Paulo Guedes and the President Jair Bolsonaro has now reached a point in which it could fit the description of a “crime against humanity”.

This text is being written in mid-May 2020, while we have more than 12,500 deaths from Covid-19 and 180,000 registered cases, still on an unrelenting upward curve that, however, fails to illustrate the actual situation – considering Brazil has one of the lowest virus testing’s worldwide.

According to official records, which we should take with a good pinch of salt the Brazilian prison system (including prisoners and prison staff) has 338 suspected cases, 645 confirmed cases and 23 reported deaths by Covid-19. Most of these cases are in concentrated in the State of São Paulo, where 35% of the prison units are reported contaminated by the virus. Moreover, current data shows that the lethality rate inside prisons are at least five times higher than on the outside. The main concern is that only approximately 2,000 prisoners have been tested so far, a time bomb that can have great proportions regarding the loss of human lives.

It should go without saying that social distancing is impossible for both inmates and staff in the Brazilian prison system, in particular due to its utterly crammed overcrowding and mass incarceration. In the best of cases, there are between six and eight people sleeping in bunks and on the floor. In the worst scenario, especially in jails inside police stations, there are people literally stacked one on top of each other in what is a degrading experience. This is particularly aggravated by the fact that Brazil has one of the largest prison populations worldwide, with more than 860,000 inmates. In addition, the health system within prison is not as structured as on the outside.

Although Brazil has in its Constitution the promise of a public, universal and free health system, this is a long way from reaching the prisons.
This context, combined with the high contagion of Covid-19, and the great difficulties in structuring health care policies in the prison system sums up to a concerning scenario.

The acute prison overcrowding in Brazil hinders a serious health policy towards prisoners and staff. Under these conditions the system already has an unacceptable rate of avoidable deaths, often artificially classified as natural deaths. The chance of catching tuberculosis, for instance, is 30 times higher inside a Brazilian prison than outside it. The current state of the national prison system functions as a kind of reservoir that reproduces, diffuses and develops a curable, but deadly, disease in society.

Clearly from the perspective of disease control and a basic human rights stance there is an urgent need to release prisoners in health risk groups. This is the official stance of the Brazilian National Council of Justice, which has endorsed the converting sentences to house arrest to early release from prisons for the elderly or those with other illnesses (Recommendation 62 of 2020). So far that is only a suggestion, but it also follows the official line of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (Resolution 1, 2020).

While the number of infections for Covid-19 grows rapidly, Brazilians see weekly protests of government supporters for a total and immediate return to normality – which are currently being combined with protests for a military coup and demanding the shutdown of the Congress and the Supreme Court. The environment in Brazil is tense and polarized and the right to life of the prison population seems to be the least of the concerns of the powerful. It is not without reason that the concept of necropolitics has gained much space in the critical perspective in recent months.

To follow the situation of Covid-19 in Brazil with a critical eye, we recommend the @infovirusprisoes profile (Instagram) or @infoviruspp (Twitter), which is monitoring and checking official information through a group of independent researchers and researchers linked to important universities in the country.

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2. Events (webinars)

- **Seminário Internacional: Emergência dos Direitos Humanos no cenário pandêmico** (International Seminar: Emergence of Human Rights in the pandemic scenario) - 18th May 1h-19 and 19th May h 1830—A capa já expressa o escopo deste Seminário Internacional: é de autoria de Fernando Donasci, fotógrafo, documentarista e jornalista. Vê-se nela uma imagem aérea na qual o autor mira suas lentes para documentar uma das tantas trágicas rebeliões nos sistemas prisionais brasileiros e latino-americanos. Please click [here](#) to register.

- **Imagining a world without prisons**—20th May h 8am and 8pm (NZST)—What type of society would we need to have that would enable us to contemplate a society without prisons? A dismissal of those who are incarcerated as troubled and irredeemable people does not allow us to fully understand the real issues behind imprisonment and to effectively respond in ways that support greater collective security. The global over-representation of Indigenous peoples in prisons speaks to lives of restriction and constraint both inside and outside of the wire. Tracey McIntosh (Tūhoe) will discuss and present her work on the incarceration of Indigenous people. Please click [here](#) to register for the morning session and [here](#) for the evening one.

- **What is the state? Is it just another word for “the government”, or something more?** - seminar series with multiple dates (see link below) - What role do institutions like the police and prisons play in our society, and how can we change that? How can we respond to issues like crime and antisocial behaviour in ways that don’t rely on violent coercion from state authorities? The webinar series discusses all these questions, and more. This series is split into five sessions running fortnightly. Please click [here](#) to have further details about dates and topic, and to register.

- **Abolish ICE, Not Just a Slogan: Immigrant Justice in the Age of Coronavirus**—19th May 2020 h5pm (EDT) - How can we build a movement to resist the racist attacks on immigrants and demand not only an end to ICE but justice and relief for all immigrants? Authors John Washington and Justin Akers Chacón discuss how to stand in solidarity with immigrant communities in a time of crisis. Webinar organised with [Haymarket Books](#). Please click [here](#) to register.

5. Resources/Publications

- **Women, Mobility and Incarceration. Love and Recasting of Self across the Bangladesh-India Border**. Author: Rimple Mehta. Routledge—This book explores how Bangladeshi women from poor and undereducated/semi-educated backgrounds who have crossed the Indo-Bangladesh border find themselves in prisons serving sentences under the Foreigners Act, 1946. Drawing on original fieldwork, this book explores these women’s understanding of borders and state sovereignty and how the women - from conservative rural and semi-rural backgrounds which impose a strict moral code - adjust to the socio-cultural context of an Indian prison, where being an inmate is “dishonourable” in their community. Please click [here](#) to order the book.

- **COVID-19: what is happening in European prisons**? The following information on prisons in different European countries has been collected in the last few weeks thanks to the work of the European Prison Observatory members. Please click [here](#) to access the report.

- **"On the same boat were five corpses": European complicity in refoulements to Libya** - A new analysis by Statewatch researcher Yasha Maccanico provides that context, looking at attempts to have the Libyan maritime search and rescue zone struck off international records, the Italian government justifying the closure of its ports to sea rescue vessels in the name of controlling the coronavirus pandemic, and Maltese-Libyan coordination on refoulements.
3. Campaigns

- **Council of Europe anti-torture Committee publishes report on Greece**—The Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) has published today the report on its seventh periodic visit to Greece, which took place from 28 March to 9 April 2019, together with the response of the Greek authorities. Please click [here](#) to access the report.

- **INQUEST is calling for urgent and effective action to ensure access to justice for bereaved families, to improve prison safety, invest in community-based alternatives and reduce the prison population.** Please click [here](#) for the appeal released by Inquest on UK prisons and [here](#) for the latest news.

- **Non-paper on the reform of the Common European Asylum System in the perspective of an EU migration and asylum policy**—Seven EU member states are in favour of a mandatory relocation procedure as part of a revamped ‘Common European Asylum System’, according to two recent documents obtained by Statewatch - the first, a letter to the European Commission from the Italian, Spanish, French and German governments and the second, a ‘non-paper’ drafted by Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain and Malta. Please click [here](#) for further information.

- **Prisons in Italy at the time of the Coronavirus**—Antigone’s work on Italian prisons to cope with the coronavirus crisis. Please click [here](#) for the last report.

5. Films:

**It’s a class war**

- **Roma**—2018—director: Alfonso Cuarón, with: Yalitza Aparicio, Marina de Tavira, Marco Graf, Daniela Demesa, Diego Cortina Autrey

- **Le jeune Karl Marx**—2017—director: Raoul Peck, with August Diehl, Stefan Konarske, Vicky Krieps, Olivier Gourmet, Hannah Steele

- **Snowpiercer**—2013—director: Bong Joon-ho, with: Chris Evans, Song Kang-ho, Ed Harris, John Hurt, Tilda Swinton, Jamie Bell.

- **Elysium**—2013—director: Neill Blomkamp, with: Matt Damon, Jodie Foster, Sharlto Copley, Alice Braga, Diego Luna, Wagner Moura

- **La classe operaia va in paradiso** (The Working Class Goes to Heaven) - 1972—Director: Elio Petri, with Gian Maria Volonté, Mariangela Melato, Flavio Bucci, Luigi Diberti, Salvo Randone
What gender of gender?

- **Portrait de la jeune fille en feu**—2015—director: Céline Sciamma, with: Noémie Merlant, Adèle Haenel, Luana Bajrami, Valeria Golino, Cécile Morel

- **Carol**—2015—director: Todd Haynes, with: Cate Blanchett, Rooney Mara, Kyle Chandler, Jake Lacy, Sarah Paulson, Carrie Brownstein

- **Weekend**—2011—director: Andrew Haigh, with: Tom Cullen, Chris New, Laura Freeman, Vaughall Jermaine, Jonathan Race.

- **Tomboy**—2011—director: Céline Sciamma, with: Zoé Héran, Malonn Lévana, Jeanne Disson, Sophie Cattani, Mathieu Demy

- **Set It Off**—1996—director: F. Gary Gray, with: Vivica A. Fox, Queen Latifah, Kimberly Elise, Jada Pinkett Smith

Just Behind the bars

- **Hunger**—2008—director: Steve McQueen (II), with: Michael Fassbender, Liam Cunningham, Stuart Graham, Brian Milligan, Liam McMahon

- **Bronson**—2008—director: Nicolas Winding Refn, with: Tom Hardy, Kelly Adams, Katy Barker, Edward Bennett-Coles, June Bladon

- **Rescue Dawn**—2006—director: Werner Herzog, with: Christian Bale, Steve Zahn, Jeremy Davies

- **Das Experiment**—2001—director: Oliver Hirschbiegel, with: Moritz Bleibtreu, Oliver Stokowski, Christian Berkel, Wotan Wilke Möhring, Justus von Dohnányi.

- **Kiss of the Spider Woman**—1985—director: Hector Babenco, with: William Hurt, Raul Julia, Sonia Braga, José Lewgoy, Nuno Leal Maria, Miriam Pires

Borders and boundaries:

- **Sorry to Bother You**—2018—Director: Boots Riley, with: Tessa Thompson, Armie Hammer, Patton Oswalt, Terry Crews, Steven Yeun, Lakeith Stanfield.

- **Gräns** (Border)—2018—director: Ali Abbasi, with: Eva Melander, Eero Milonoff, Jörgen Thorsson, Ann Petrén, Sten Ljunggren

- **The Big Sick**—2017—director: Michael Showalter, with: Kumail Nanjiani, Zoe Kazan, Holly Hunter, Ray Romano, Anupam Kher, Zenobia Shroff

- **Selma**—2014—director: Ava DuVernay, with: David Oyelowo, Tom Wilkinson, Cuba Gooding Jr., Alessandro Nivola, Carmen Ejogo

- **The Namesake**—2006—director: Mira Nair, with: Kal Penn, Tabu, Irrfan Khan, Jacinda Barrett, Zuleikha Robinson
No Justice, No peace:

- **Tropa de Elite**—2007—director: José Padilha, with: Wagner Moura, Caio Junqueira, André Ramiro, Maria Ribeiro, Fernanda Machado.

- **The Big Short**—2015—director: Adam McKay, with: Brad Pitt, Christian Bale, Ryan Gosling, Steve Carell, Marisa Tomei, Melissa Leo.

- **99 Homes**—2014—director: Ramin Bahrani, with: Andrew Garfield, Laura Dern, Michael Shannon (II), Tim Guinee, J.D. Evermore

- **Fruitvale Station**—2013—director: Ryan Coogler with: Michael B. Jordan, Octavia Spencer, Melonie Diaz, Ahna O’Reilly, Chad Michael Murray

- **Zero Dark Thirty**—2012—director: Kathryn Bigelow, with: Jessica Chastain, Jason Clarke, Joel Edgerton, Jennifer Ehle, Mark Strong

“Distance is a good teacher. You only fully understand that which you have lost”