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Alienation, segregation and resocialization: meanings of prison labor[☆]*Alienação, segregação e ressocialização: significados do trabalho prisional**Alienación, segregación y resocialización: significados del trabajo penitenciario*Clara Luísa Oliveira Silva^{a,*}, Luiz Alex Silva Saraiva^b^a Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais Avenida Presidente, Unidade Administrativa II, Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil^b Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil

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Abstract

In this paper we deal with senses which subjects in prison attribute to work realized in prison, trying to identify relations between these senses and the principles which try to legitimate work activities that reintegrate subject to society. To reach this objective, we've made case study based on semi structured interviews in a female unity of a center of social reintegration. Collected data was threaten through discourse analysis. Main conclusions are related to reinforce of problematizations about role of work in prison: if it is productor of accepted sociabilities, or if it is reproducer of social inequalities, as, in last level, criminality itself.

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Keywords: Meaning of work; Work in prison; Alienation; Segregation; Resocialization

Resumo

Neste artigo, objetiva-se analisar os sentidos que os sujeitos que cumprem pena atribuem ao trabalho realizado na prisão, buscando identificar as relações entre esses sentidos e os princípios que procuram legitimar as atividades laborativas como reintegradoras do sujeito à sociedade. Para tanto, foi realizado um estudo de caso em uma unidade feminina de um centro de reintegração social baseado em entrevistas semiestruturadas, posteriormente tratadas por meio da análise do discurso. As principais contribuições do estudo estão relacionadas ao reforço das problematizações sobre as múltiplas e, por vezes, ambíguas faces do trabalho na prisão, se produtor de sociabilidades convencionalmente aceitas, ou se, reproduzidor de desigualdades sociais e, em última instância, da própria criminalidade.

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Palavras-chave: Significado do trabalho; Trabalho prisional; Alienação; Segregação; Ressocialização

Resumen

El objetivo en este artículo es analizar los significados asignados por los presos al trabajo que realizan en la penitenciaría, buscando identificar las relaciones entre estos significados y los principios que buscan legitimar las actividades laborales como factor de reintegración del individuo

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a la sociedad. Con este fin, se llevó a cabo un estudio de caso en una unidad de mujeres de un centro de reinserción social a partir de entrevistas semiestructuradas, posteriormente tratadas por medio del análisis del discurso. Las principales contribuciones de este estudio están relacionadas con el fortalecimiento de cuestiones sobre los múltiples y, a veces, ambiguos papeles del trabajo en la cárcel, si efectivamente produce la sociabilidad convencionalmente aceptada, o si reproduce desigualdades sociales y, en última instancia, el mismo crimen.

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Palabras clave: Significado del trabajo; Trabajo penitenciario; Alienación; Segregación; Resocialización

Introduction

Prominent subjects in media debates and everyday conversations, violence and criminality engender divergent views in the context of the Brazilian society. Generally speaking, the defense of more rigid measures regarding the correction of criminals and, consequently, the fight against impunity coexist side by side with the discourse that aims to confirm the inefficiency of the prison institution when it comes to accomplishing the goals of rehabilitating criminals and reducing crime levels (Buckeridge, 2011).

However, the complexity around the theme does not involve only this: it also extends to (or perhaps derives from) the formal and informal arrangements that conform the so-called prison system, insofar as tension and conflict emerge from the relations established among its players, ultimately influencing, to a greater or lesser extent, the outlining of public policies for the sector (Cabral & Araújo, 2010). Moreover, in the middle of this web of tension and conflict, the discussion space concerning prison labor is built as one of the mechanisms that would partially make viable the conditions for the resocialization of a subject who has committed a crime.

In part of the literature on the theme, along with the issue of the resocialization, there is a discussion that investigates the economic and social impact of prison labor (Browne, 2007; Fletcher, 2011; Goldberg & Linda, 2009; Lebaron, 2012; Zatz, 2008). We understand that most of these works seek to problematize the relationship among punishment, resocialization and the idea of economic potential, this being attributed to using the labor power of subjects serving time. In the wake of these studies, there is a concern about pointing out aspects of situations involving labor exploitation, impoverishment of labor relations (and, often, conditions), and the accountability of public and private agents for the accomplishment of the social order. One could also point out discussions that place the prison labor as a disciplinary device that rarely encompasses a therapeutic and resocializing character in an effective manner (Bastos, 1997; Costa & Bratkowski, 2007; Lima & Santos, 2008; Ribeiro & Cruz, 2002), as proclaimed in the legislation regarding the penal execution (Lei, 1984).

In general lines, the phenomenon of labor as an analytic category is inserted in a perspective of production (and reproduction) of the concrete space, the space, and the social relations, as well as the psychic dimension of subjects (Bastos, Pinho, & Costa, 1995; Berger, 1983; Clot, 2006; Dejours, 2004; Goulart, 2009; Lima, 2007; Marx, 1968; Schwartz, 2000). Speaking of

a labor activity that has (or does not have) a meaning incorporates the approach of individual and social aspects and, in a greater or lesser extent, concerns a set of questions about motivation, commitment, remuneration, recognition, satisfaction, and quality of life (Andrade, Tolfo, & Dellagnelo, 2012; Coutinho, 2009; Isaksen, 2000; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Rodrigues & Barrichello, 2015; Rodrigues, Barrichello, & Morin, 2015; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Tolfo, Coutinho, Baasch, & Cugnier, 2011).

Starting from these considerations, this paper aims to analyze the meanings that subjects serving time attribute to labor performed in prison, seeking to identify the relations among these meanings as well as the principles that aim to legitimize labor activities as capable of reintegrating subjects into society. By adopting a qualitative focus, a case study was carried out at a female unit of a center for social reintegration, in a context that incorporates the penal execution in the open, semi-open and closed regimes. The choice to carry out the research at a resocialization center was not made by chance. The idea is to understand, through the analytic category “labor”, the dynamics of actions and relations at a social space that is categorized as a space constituted by alternative (and more efficient) models of penal execution. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the women serving time and who, so to speak, perform labor activities at that prison organization. The interest fell on the discourses of female inmates still serving sentences and who are, therefore, experiencing the practice of the so-called resocializing labor, the relations that such practice provide in the context of a prison, and the considerations that orient the present and future positions of these subjects in that social space and in other ones. When speaking of these discourses, we speak of the everyday life at a resocialization center and we speak, by extension, of the production (and control) of subjectivities, as well as of possible resistance acts in the scope of the prison, which is a total institution (Goffman, 1961). The material compiled from those dialogical processes with the participation of the research subjects was interpreted through the prism of French discourse analysis.

This paper is divided into six sections, including this brief introduction. Next, some theoretical notes regarding the phenomenon of labor are pointed out. Later, the discussion becomes more specific, insofar as we seek to ponder about prison labor. In section four, we discuss the methodological choices that characterize this study. Finally, following the data presentation and discussion, the final thoughts are exposed.

Labor and subjectivity

Initially, we delimit the concordance concerning the elaborations by Marx (1968), when this author perceives labor as every human action orientated to the transformation of nature. This action or conscious act that emerges as the “vital activity”, to use the term coined by Marx (1968), ultimately distinguishes man from other living beings. By transforming nature, men transform themselves, in a sort of dialectic relationship. Men fulfill themselves in and through labor or in other words, through labor humans can produce and reproduce themselves as subjects.

Authors who came after Marx (1968) also sought, through this or that argument, place labor as one of the fundamental human categories, so to speak, as a phenomenon that structure the individual and social spheres of subjects (Bastos et al., 1995; Berger, 1983; Chies & Varel, 2009; Clot, 2006; Dejours, 2004; Goulart, 2009; Lima, 2007; Schwartz, 2000).

“Being human and working seem to be inexorably correlative notions”, as Berger (1983, p. 13) points out. The act of working is closely related to the act of modifying the social spaces by filling them with meaning. Along these lines, labor appears not only as a means of acquiring material (and/or economic) resources for the survival of the subject, but it becomes mainly a source of self-identification.

The importance of labor in the lives of individuals becomes evident when we turn to its aspect of defining and somehow legitimizing the time frame (days, months, years), the structure of activities (personal and impersonal), and the stages of life (work, study, retirement) (Bastos et al., 1995). Thus, labor affirms itself as an essential analytical category in the construction and consolidation of individual and collective identities. It is an activity that grounds and orders the ways of being and acting, a constituent category, a founder of multiple socialities (Lima, 2007). Hence, labor encloses a psychological function in so far as it marks a rupture between the personal “pre-occupations” of subjects and social occupations thereof, involving processes of invention and renewal, conservation, and transmission of a heritage that develops in the joint or divided activity (Clot, 2006).

Labor transcends herein the category of employment, incorporating a sense of social relationship and of a social production activity. The conception of gestures, the development of know-how, the use of the body, the mobilization of the ability to reflect, interpret and react to a certain reality. Overall, the act of working is encased in a dynamic of engagement of the body and the personality, in order to perform a set of tasks defined by material and social conditions (Dejours, 2004).

Despite its ontological foundation of humanization of beings, labor sometimes alienates and thus dehumanizes. Alienation can take various forms. In capitalist society, taking into account the division of people into two classes with antagonistic interests, namely the class of the owners of the means of production and the class of those who only have the labor force, alienation occurs, for example, when workers produce something that they may not possess or appropriate, that is, when subjects are detached from the product of their labor. Otherwise, labor dehumanizes when it becomes a mere means of exploitation (Marx, 1968).

To Schwartz (2000, p. 41), labor always involves the “use of oneself”. If labor is the “use of oneself”, then the following question arises: who uses it? At first, it is the “use” that is made of the subject, bounded by their own historical conditions, such as those concerning the relations and modes of production. However, it is the use that is not only made of the subject, but the use that each individual makes of himself or herself in labor. The subject who works does not qualify as a “soft mass”, which passively records the marking of acts of work to be played. Even before material and social constraints settled in the acts of labor, the possibilities of a “differentiated management” of oneself are opened to the subject, which is not restricted to the historical and concrete conditions of human existence (Schwartz, 2000). The subject produces meanings or gives new meanings to their labor, even if the activities that characterize it are taken a priori by its aspect of physical and mental dehumanization.

Research on the meanings of labor encompasses areas of knowledge as various as psychology, sociology, and management, for example, as well as different theoretical approaches. The idea of meaning appears in many studies related to aspects of labor content, labor organization and labor conditions, aspects which are specified in concepts such as motivation, commitment, quality of life, recognition, remuneration, and stress (Andrade et al., 2012; Coutinho, 2009; Isaksen, 2000; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Rodrigues & Barrichello, 2015; Rodrigues et al., 2015; Rosso et al., 2010; Tolfo et al., 2011). In this paper, the attempt to analyze the meanings of labor is not restricted to either one of these variables, which end up constituting the functionalist imaginary of organization management. The comprehension of the meanings herein requires an understanding of the production (and control) of subjectivities from different discourses that are (re) produced in different social spaces, especially in total institutions; namely a social spatiality in which people, usually in large number, live “enclosed”, separated from the broader society, having its life “managed” for a considerable period of time. Moreover, at that time the set of organizational processes, practices, and procedures, by founding itself in the violence of the autonomy of actions, makes the total institution true “[...] forcing houses for changing persons; [...] a natural experiment on what can be done to the self” (Goffman, 1961, p. 22).

Understanding the significance (or meaning) of labor includes the perquisition of a set of beliefs, values, and attitudes in relation to the act of working, a set that is formed gradually in a *continuum*, before and during the process of socialization of labor (Goulart, 2009). A similar definition by Goulart (2009) reminds us of the conception of meaning highlighted by González Rey (2009). In the view of González Rey (2009), meanings are the emotional records tied to the experiences and needs cultivated throughout their history. The production of meanings, in turn, is not limited to the individual or social fields, for it encloses what is formed in the two fields within a single system. Every production of meaning is linked “[...] to a personal setting that has a history and a social context that is configured in a certain way before the concrete action of a subject, and which also has a history of the life of this subject” (González Rey, 2009, p. 144).

Labor in prison: some nuances of this discussion

The discussion about prison labor encloses a problem that arises from the relationship among punishment, rehabilitation, and the idea of economic potential, given the fact that it uses the labor power of subjects who are serving time (Browne, 2007; Fletcher, 2011; Goldberg & Linda, 2009; Lebaron, 2012; Zatz, 2008).

An understanding of the different theoretical approaches that underlie the debate about prison labor in contemporary society calls us to the rescue of the general characteristics related to the evolution of the prison institution, or in other words, the emergence of imprisonment as a primary penalty.

Foucault (2007) defends the idea that the emergence of imprisonment corresponds to the period when the institutional mechanisms that gave way and ran a sovereign society were readjusted in order to enforce the premises of a disciplinary society, of surveillance. Specifically in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, in the wake of social and economic transformation, lies the notion of a new kind of exercise of power, capillary, which runs through the social body, differently from the concept of power as something centered and often embodied in the figure of the monarch. In turn, in disciplinary society, and specifically in the prison organization, the forces of the bodies are channeled through the disciplinary devices, in the intent that they become docile and productive (Foucault, 2007, 1992).

In this sense, since those early days, labor appears as one of the disciplinary mechanisms, assuming an importance not as a strict production activity, but as one of the devices that operated to restrict the intellect, the will, and the provisions of subjects (Foucault, 2007). In the words of Foucault (2007, p. 204): “What, then, is the use of penal labor? Not profit; nor even the formation of a useful skill; but the constitution of a power relation, an empty economic form, a schema of individual submission and of adjustment to a production apparatus”.

In more recent times, Lima and Santos (2008) sought to demonstrate this strong relationship between prison labor and discipline, insofar as it requires the obedience of rules that structure the life of the subject, by setting schedules, dress codes, that is, routines or specific postures. However, it is necessary to raise an issue that only in the scope of this theoretical discussion questions the idea of prison labor as a practice that constitutes an example of the effectiveness of the prison system structure. Specifically, the question is: does labor as a disciplining device fulfill the purpose of recovery (or rehabilitation) of individuals who transgress social codes?

The Penal Execution Law (LEP), in its Article 28, states that: “The work of the convict, as a social duty and condition of human dignity, shall have educational and productive purposes” (BRASIL, 1984). Although the LEP confers to the labor status of a legal instrument for achieving social reintegration, given its alleged “educational purpose”, it does not imply the fulfillment of the objectives that justify it, nor the absence of numerous criticisms (or one might say, *re*-considerations) regarding prison labor (Bastos, 1997; Costa & Bratkowski, 2007; Lima & Santos, 2008; Ribeiro & Cruz, 2002).

Enclosing a therapeutic element, according to Bastos (1997), the exercise of the labor activity, as a rule, allows the individual to forget about their disappointments, their troubles, their fears, and especially, “to fill in” time. However, the author asserts that “labor is as a palliative medication that numbs the pain but do not even closely approximate the causes”. Such a statement beckons to the fact that, in a prison, labor sometimes is sometimes considered an activity that dignifies individuals, imputing them with a sense of productivity and utility; at other times it is an activity that exploits the prisoners condition, limiting their “freedom” when they so desire (Bastos, 1997). In that case, labor would be, resorting to an expression by Goffman (1961), an “island” that reveals an apparent liveliness that tends to minimize the psychological stress that comes up against the many attacks against the self, which characterizes the prison as a total institution and comparing it to a sort of “dead sea”.

Most of the time, labor activities performed by individuals serving sentences are marked by strong Taylorism principles, insofar as they require low individual autonomy and lack a common purpose. Working in a prison is quite often perceived as an act that brings along the opportunity to penalty redemption and the ability to get around within the prison spaces (Costa & Bratkowski, 2007). Furthermore, Ribeiro and Cruz (2002) point out to the disconnection between the occupational activities carried out in the prison context and the potential occupational preferences or work experiences that perhaps the subject may have had. This fact ends up adding obstacles to the personal development of individuals and their subsequent relocation in social spaces beyond the prison.

In a way, prison labor as a social phenomenon processed through the relations between convicts and the coordinating team (herein legitimated by legal provisions) also produces segregations. There is a world of crime, or whatever would be called morally reprehensible, and there is a world of labor, morally praiseworthy and which consists, therefore, of a promise or recovery. Prison labor, in this case, would be an instrument to move from one world to another, contributing even to the construction of identities of workers and non-workers in that context (Lima & Santos, 2008).

Prison labor acquires the proposed direction in the legal text when it becomes effective through strategies of minimization of the social vulnerability of individuals serving prison sentences, strategies that are translated into activities that enhance the humanity of the subjects and go beyond the sense of appeasement and capitalization of discipline (Chies & Varel, 2009).

Methodology

The qualitative methodological approach was chosen to fulfill the objective of this research, which is to analyze the meanings that subjects serving sentences attribute to labor in prison while trying to identify the relationship between these meanings and the principles that seek to legitimize labor activities as capable of reintegrating subjects into society. Highlighting the study of facts and behaviors in their natural environments, the qualitative approach emphasizes a profound understanding of the “qualities” of the phenomena, specifically how they are

created, manifested or acquire certain meaning, rather than the mere clarification of measures among variables in terms of quantity, volume, intensity, frequency, or simple relations of cause and effect (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006).

The adoption of a qualitative approach is mainly aligned with the epistemological assumptions made in this research, which are: the objective reality can never be entirely captured, for the understanding of something occurs through representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006); these representations are interpreted by the researcher through its “lenses” that is situated in a historical and social-political moment (Creswell, 2003); and by extension, knowledge has a constructive-interpretative nature (González Rey, 2010), that is, the production of knowledge is not confused with the linear appropriation of a reality and a consequent listing of universal categories. Conversely, the reflections and research practices are legitimated from the intention of producing new “zones of meanings”, or intelligibility fields that, far from exhausting the possibilities of explanation of a research question, open the way to new and future insights in theoretical constructions (González Rey, 2010).

Then, in order to generate new “zones of meanings” regarding labor in the social space of the prisons, we opted for the case study, characterized by thorough research of actual phenomena in a certain context. The case study was carried out, given the classification of prison spaces, in what one could call a resocialization center, more specifically at the Franz de Castro Holzwarth Social Reintegration Center of the Association for Protection and Assistance to Convicts (APAC) in the city of Itaúna, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The APAC is a civil entity governed by private law and an organization that assists the Judiciary and Executive, respectively, in the penal execution process and the administration of compliance with custodial sentences in closed, semi-open and open systems (Ottoboni, 2001).

Based on the centrality that the perceptions and experiences of the subject in relation to a phenomenon (or reality) assume in the construction of qualitative research (Creswell, 2003), the semi-structured interview technique was used according to the definition of Laville and Dionne (1999), to elucidate the meanings expressed by women serving prison sentences. What are the occupations of the subject who is serving and what are the meanings they attribute to them? What are the expectations of the subject who is serving (and carries out some labor activity) regarding their social reintegration? These were the two main issues that generally guided the dialogical processes. Other questions were asked in order to better understand aspects raised by the subjects deriving from the two main questions, which had been previously defined, considering the thoughts of the researchers on the theoretical framework that ties the subjectivity phenomena, labor, and specifically, prison labor. Overall, in the period from the second half of September to the first half of November of 2012, 19 interviews were conducted, lasting an average of 50 minutes. Thereafter, all of them were recorded and transcribed.

The respondents were women serving sentences in open, semi-open and closed systems and at the time, the corpus of participants included women who had been imprisoned for a month

to those who had already been in the institution for almost three years. Drug trafficking was the most common reason for conviction, but there were also occurrences of embezzlement, murder, theft and trafficking association. At the time, the female ward of APAC sheltered around 30 women and for the purposes of this study, we sought to interview women who performed (or had performed) labor activities, inside or outside the prison.

For the purposes of analysis and interpretation of the meanings expressed in the course of the research process, we resorted to French discourse analysis. As the social production of texts and precisely as one of the forms of social subjectivity, discourses are organized in many ways, enclosing their validity to the understanding of social reality in its very totality. “The use of words is a symbolic expression, which in addition to showing one or more discursive systems, also signifies the unique history of the speaker, which differentiates the associated emotions from the use of words, giving way to its meaning” (González Rey, 2003, p. 213).

To handle the corpus obtained from the interviews, specific discursive strategies were employed, namely: lexical analysis (type of vocabulary); (ii) identification of themes and figures (explicit and implicit); (iii) identification of the key semantics paths structured from the themes and figures; (iv) identification of the interdiscursive aspects; (v) identification of the discursive syntax aspects; (vi) identification of the aspects reflected and refracted in the discourses; (vii) identification of the conditions of discourse production; (viii) identification of the key discourses present in the texts; (ix) identification of the ideological aspects defended and opposed in the discourses; and (x) identification of the position of the hegemonic discourse in each text, in relation to the hegemonic discourses in the society in which they are situated. It is important to clarify that not all of these discourse analysis strategies were used in all discursive fragments. The use of this or that discursive strategy was also linked to the objectives that remained in the construction of each part of the analysis section, detailed below. Moreover, notwithstanding the completion of the 19 interviews and the interpretation of them through discourse analysis techniques, we selected some discursive fragments that were representative of different considerations about the collected material as a whole.

Discussion of results

The main discourses obtained from the interviews are presented and discussed in this section. For the purposes of this study, we chose to present the discursive fragments under the rubric of two broad categories, which delimit the two axes of the article. Precisely, at first, the considerations of women serving time about the work they carry out at the center of reintegration of APAC for women, and at another moment, the perception of these women about their future social reintegration. In other words, at the second level of analysis, the intention was to clarify to what extent the subjects perceive the work they do in prison as a mechanism that may dissolve the challenges for (re) placement or (re) positioning in occupational and social spaces beyond the prison.

The work in APAC: subject, discourses, and meanings

The subjects serving sentences at the APAC social space elaborate thoughts about the relationship they establish with prison labor. Specifically in this resocialization center, women primarily perform activities related to the running of the organization. For example, part of the women work in the prison kitchen, taking care of preparing the meals that are served every day. Another part perform manual services related to sewing shoes for a shoe factory that operates in the region. Furthermore, there are women who are serving sentences in open and semi-open regimes whose work consists most often of performing activities as maids, cleaners, or caretakers. In the case of the labor carried out inside the prison and the manufacturing of footwear, those women get paid a few cents for each finished product and the days worked count for sentence reduction purposes, as established in the corresponding legislation (Lei, 1984).

(001), (002), (003) and (004) are the statements containing the words (and considerations) of the inmates about their work, which consists essentially of sewing sandals for a company of Nova Serrana region, a city in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. In fragment (001), whose main theme is “labor”, the semantic path of “utility” is evident, in the sense of value that labor encloses for the participating subject.

(001) What brought me to APAC was the work, you know. Working is very important when you’re serving time. I don’t know, I think it’s because of our rehabilitation. Because those of us who live in crime, we are not used to working. And to be honest, to me this whole work thing is quite new, to be working all day long. I’m still getting used to it. But working is important, because when I come out I want to change, I want to do things differently, I want to get a good job, I want to come along with my children and, to have that, I have to start getting used to it while I’m doing time. It’s like working outside, we start early, we have a lunch break, we have a certain time to go back to work. That’s why I think it’s the place to readapt indeed. (R24)

One can identify in this statement the discourse of labor as a mechanism for social reintegration. At first, it is clear that the discourse is enunciated by someone whose career was predominantly marked by the practice of illicit activities, for R24 highlights the aspect of newness that the labor practice brings into her life. This explains the mention of the adjustment period that she is going through (“I’m still getting used to it”) because working is not something usual in that subject’s trajectory. In her speech, the enunciator ends up reproducing a polarized view, in which there are only two realities: crime, which is morally condemnable, and labor, which is morally laudable (“Because those of us who live in crime, we are not used to working”). This dual perspective, for its part, extends the categorization of subjects into criminals and worthy citizens (Lima & Santos, 2008).

In this case, labor still adds a sense of “change” (implicit theme) or even of “rehabilitation” (explicit theme) of the subject whose practices before going to prison were not circumscribed to a kind of institutionalized order and legitimized by society’s hegemonic groups. Em “[...] It’s like working outside, we start

early, we have a lunch break, we have a certain time to go back to work [...]”, labor appears as something that legitimizes the subject’s time structure and activities (Bastos et al., 1995), as a means of imposing a given discipline (Foucault, 2007; Lima & Santos, 2008), operating therefore at the last level, as an instrument that insinuates the (re) integration of the subject in this social order.

The semantic path of “utility” and the theme of “labor” also sustain the discourse of redemption in the discursive fragments (002) and (003).

(002) Working is very important in here. Working is good for us to progress in life, something to keep our minds busy. Because I mean, an empty mind is something, especially the mind of a convict. Empty minds are not good, we only think of bad things. And at APAC, there’s always something for us to do. Exactly for that reason. It’s a book, a service, it’s everything, something for us to keep our minds busy, so we never think of bad things. (R2)

(003) It’s great. I love working because an idle brain is the devil’s playground. So when we are working, we draw away from things, we don’t think of things outside. As much as I have my children and I love them too much, I think of them less when I’m working. So the work here at APAC is very important, very much indeed. And you can ask anyone in here. I wake up early and if necessary, I’ll work until 10 at night because I love working. Even outside, I love working. While I’m working, I’m not arguing. You don’t see things other people do. You’re focused. So working is very important here at APAC. Working is very important anywhere. (R3)

In (002), we can perceive the discourse of redemption from the fact that, in the view of the enunciator, labor allows the realization of a subject, offering conditions to “progress in life” in a way that is legitimized by society. From this idea it is possible to infer the idea of legitimacy in the lexical selection: “Working is a good thing [...]”. In the fragment (002), the adjective that qualifies labor is “good”, in an implicit opposition against the lexical item “bad”, or whatever is not legitimate in the context of the APAC (indiscipline behaviors, for instance), as well as within social spaces other than that of prison. Therefore, R2 reproduces the hegemonic discourse about labor as a fundamental practice for the development and dignity of subjects, or to “progress in life”. Hence, labor is configured as a mechanism that would allow the redemption of the deviated subject who is serving a sentence.

Resorting to the popular saying “the idle brain is the devil’s playground”, the enunciator of (003) interdiscursively defends labor, as it falls under the category of activities that would serve to restrict the degradation process of subjects. Here, again, the “redemptive” aspect of labor is established. In discursive fragment (002), R2 also associates labor to the sense of filling the psychic dimension of the subject, represented by the figure of the “mind”. If the subject does not endeavor in performing an activity which entails some materiality (from the figures “book” and “service”), what is established is the emptiness of the states

of consciousness and sub-consciousness of that first. The mind's emptiness suggests the act of thinking about everything that is not legitimized in a given social space. The imposed labor fills such a void, delimiting what may be the object of reflection by the subject: "And at APAC there's always something for us to do. Exactly for that reason. It's a book, a service, it's everything, something for us to keep our minds busy, so we never think of bad things". In that case, labor allows to "escape" from the elaboration of a certain type of thoughts, regarded as "bad". R2 is silent about what "thinking of bad things" consists of, in the scope of their autonomy as a subject, for instance. To R2, labor is a social practice that rescues the subject from certain thoughts, even though the implicit assumption suggests the imprisonment of the same subject in other thoughts.

In the discursive fragment (003), the theme of "escape" appears again in the considerations of the subject on the value that labor entails. The idea of "escape" incorporates herein the sense of subjects running away from themselves, or not reflecting some of their own characteristics, relationships, and positions. Specifically to R3, labor assumes the sense of estrangement (a theme implied by the lexical item "drawing away") from something, that is, the practice of any labor activity operates in order to distract the subject, making them ponder about what causes suffering. For instance, R3 claims to have lost some awareness of some aspects concerning the character of her position in the set of relationships established at APAC ("While I'm working, I'm not arguing. You don't see things other people do"), as well as those concerning (and located) in other social spaces (the situation of family in the broader society, for instance).

The meanings that R2 and R3 attribute to the work they carry out at APAC resemble what has been explained by Bastos (1997) on the topic of prison labor. For this author, labor, in most cases, allows individuals serving time to forget their disappointments, troubles, and fears. The fact is that even when labor incorporates a sense of "escape" or something one could even call an "alienation", this agrees with the ideas of Schwartz (2000), when the author states that labor involves the use of oneself by this very self. We understand that in the view of the speakers of (002) and (003), labor is a reorganization device for life in prison, even if this device implies estrangement from certain aspects of their own personal reality.

The semantic path that we call "nature of labor" characterizes the fragment (004). In this discursive fragment, the meanings concerning labor inscribe it as a social practice that allows the differentiation among individuals of different social spaces in the context of prison, namely: the closed and semi-open regimes.

(004) In the closed regime, the work is more therapeutic, handicrafts and all. It's more to keep you thinking, pondering and all. The work is more like that. When you get to semi-open it's more disorganized, more agitated, you run here, you run there, you clean here, and you escort, and it's already completely different. It changes water into wine. Here at the semi-open it's more professionalizing. Here you can become professionalized, you're closer to freedom. You are entitled to rights after external labor. APAC helps us, here we have sewing machines and we can learn things. They recommend

us here, so I think when we change to semi-open, it's more of a professionalizing activity. It's like, as if our freedom was coming, like 'hey, have you taken a position?!' You can no longer think like you used to when you were in the closed regime. You have to have more responsibility. I think it's more like that. (R4)

Initially, R4 draws attention to the differences that permeate the nature of the work activities carried out in the closed and semi-open regimes, which are different social spaces for serving sentences. The imposition of different types of labor ultimately reveals the conception of the subjects that conform each social space at APAC. More precisely, in the closed regime, which is the first stage of criminal enforcement, activities contain a therapeutic nature, for the deviated subject, perceived as a "social patient", needs conditions and time to reflect upon the process of "amendment", which would be equivalent to a healing process: "In the closed regime, the work is more therapeutic, handicrafts and all. It's more to keep you thinking, pondering and all". It is assumed that the production of handicrafts, for example, which in most cases includes the application of techniques that cannot do without a significant concentration, would enable the development of patience in the subjects before the peculiar circumstances of the prison. In the semi-open regime, labor is linked to the theme of professionalization: "Here at the semi-open it's more professionalizing. Here you can become professionalized, you're closer to freedom". The subject who advances in penal execution is closer to freedom; it is, therefore, necessary to assign them activities that require them to improve their sense of responsibility (aiding the "escorting" of other inmates, for instance), since they will have to "be useful" in society, so as to have alternatives that avoid recidivism.

In short, to R4 the characteristics that conform labor influence how subjects perceive themselves and others in the same or in different social spaces, which reinforces the presupposition of labor as a fundamental constitutive category of the individual and social identities of subjects (Lima, 2007). The subject that occupies the social space of the semi-open regime thinks differently from the subject who is serving under a closed regime. The lexical selection "You can no longer think like you used to when you were in the closed regime" is elucidative in this respect. R4 discusses the work she does and, in a way, her position as a subject in the semi-open regime (this is indicated by the choice of the lexical item "here" to refer to the social space of the semi-open regime, as well as of "there" to refer to the closed system). Nonetheless, she acknowledges (by implying that this happens through remembering their own experiences since all subjects who are in the semi-open system should remain in the closed regime for a certain period) the "other" and the labor activities that the "other" performs in the closed regime.

The (im) possibilities of life after prison

The fragments (005) (006) (007) and (008) contain the reflections of respondents about the (re) integration or even the occupation of places in society other than the places subscribed

in the realms of what is deviant, marginal or illegal. This section of the paper presents discursive fragments derived from considerations on the role that the work done by the APAC convicts plays in a future process of subject resocialization. At this point, the discursive fragments reinforce the idea of labor as a practice that are tangent to other aspects of the lives of women serving sentences and that will be released sometime. Yet, as part of the discussion on the production (and control) of subjectivity in organizations, the practice of “labor” gives opportunity to subjects to ponder about their positions in prison and other social spaces, about their relations with individuals from different groups, such as family, friends, prison officials, and the society in general.

Generally speaking, the reflections of the subjects refer, first, to what Bastos (1997) calls infantilization of the subject, that is, the subject feels and positions themselves as unable to open new ways without institutional “care”. Such infantilization is revealed here in enunciations about the lack of preparation and fear of facing the world “outside”. What is also evident in these discourses is the awareness of the prejudice or stigmatization (Goffman, 2008) against subjects who are serving – or since we are dealing with meaning production concerning a “future”, have served – sentences. More specifically, R13 builds a discourse that encompasses the themes of “recidivism”, “fear”, “prejudice”, and “hope”.

(005) To be honest, I think if I was to be freed today, I think I still wouldn't be ready to go out. I think I should stay longer. Today this regime is very important, I have to mature longer, for as much as I feel like going out. I think I'll have more, I'll value my freedom more, I'll be able to rebuild my life. My life's purpose is another one already, my dreams. I think the time I'm going to stay in, I'll become more and more mature. If I tell you I'm ready to leave, I'm actually not. Not yet. Some negative thoughts still cross my mind. Sometimes my greatest fear is to fall back into drugs again. I'm afraid of what's going to be like when I come out because I don't want to mess with that anymore. It's like, the house that I have, I know if I come back to my house, I'll also come back to crime [...] You know, like, I have this view from my mom, when she came out. The people reject us very much. It's like, you're a former convict, they'll always smell a rat. Because I've already committed a crime and they think I'll commit another one. I think this part is going to be hard, but not impossible to regain people's trust. My mom often says that she got back to crime life because she didn't have an opportunity. But I think that, in fact, there should have been more effort on her part, right? Because she didn't have the will to look for it more. Because one, two, three, even ten doors can be closed, but one will open sometimes. This is what I think when I leave, I'll move away from Itaúna. My husband and I talk about restarting our life somewhere else. I think about leaving Itaúna. It'll be easier to restart my life somewhere else. Where I don't know anyone. (R13)

In the very beginning of the discursive fragment (005), R13 confesses not to be ready to leave the social space of the prison and therefore to occupy a non-marginal place in society. This

idea of lack of preparation and, soon after, the mention of the so-called “negative thoughts” are presented as two discursive elements that adduce to the recurrence phenomenon. In this context, the lack of preparation refers to the fact that the subject realizes that her amendment (or correction) process is yet to be completed, given the crime committed. And in this case, the expression “negative thoughts” suggests that the subject conceives thoughts concerning a chance of relapsing.

The feeling of fear pervades the reflections of R13 on the possibility of being released from prison. The respondent says she is afraid to relapse in criminal activity when she is in social spaces outside the prison. The return to the social spaces that are part of the subject's trajectory (her “home”), appears almost as a return to crime: “Sometimes my greatest fear is to fall back into drugs again. I'm afraid of what's going to be like when I come out because I don't want to mess with that anymore. It's like, the house that I have, I know if I come back to my house, I'll also come back to crime [...]”.

Moreover, when pondering about her social reintegration, R13 implicitly refers to the prejudice against subjects who have served prison sentences. The verb “reject” and the expression “to smell a rat” suggest the difficulties faced by individuals leaving prison when they seek to occupy new places in society, different from crime. She is aware that she will probably be a target of segregation upon completion of her sentence and, in fact, the speaker cogitates moving away from town. In other words, the subject realizes that moving to an unknown location can be an alternative, for by omitting her deviant position of former convict would be a way of escaping (or mitigating) prejudice.

In the fragment (005), despite the predominance of discursive elements that support the themes of recidivism, fear, and prejudice, R13 does not fail to pronounce aspects that indicate the theme of hope when it comes to social reintegration. In some parts, R13 shows her faith in the possibility of building a trajectory that is no longer marked by criminal activities. Precisely, the fragments are: “I think I'll have more, I'll value my freedom more, I'll be able to rebuild my life. My life's purpose is another one already, my dreams” and “Because one, two, three, even ten doors can be closed, but one will open sometimes”.

(006) I'm afraid of the world outside, anguish for being this long away from my children, from my mother, you know? I regret leaving my ex-husband, he was very good to me. I feel mad for doing that, all because of the medicines. I hope I can quit and take control of my mind. I cry just by talking about quitting them. So I get very anguished about that. It's very sad. I suffer from depression, and when it sinks, I start feeling scared, very scared, I feel drug withdrawal, and I also suffer from bipolar disorder. Then, when this starts sinking in, I feel like doing drugs. And I'm scared of being released and seeing everything happen again, all because of drugs. I feel distressed knowing that at any time I'm released, I can be convicted or not. I don't know, honestly, I imagine myself doing drugs again if I leave APAC now [...] I'm afraid of what can happen to me today, tomorrow or the day after, when I'm out. It's difficult. This makes me so sad. But

unfortunately, it's the truth. I can't just go on and say: 'I'm doing fine'. That would be a lie, and I'd be lying to myself. Because the more I expose this feeling, the more I get off my chest these things I'm even ashamed of saying, the more relieved I feel, and I feel stronger. Because two people who were with me, doing time, they would say 'we're fine, we're strong', they left and fell out for drugs again [...] (R5)

From the sentence "I'm afraid of the world outside [...]", a statement that begins the fragment (006), we can infer that the speaker conjectures the very possibility of her social reinsertion with fear. The implicit assumption is that in the social space of APAC, i.e., a prison, the enunciator feels protected, whereas, beyond the prison walls, sensations of insecurity and fear of something would be manifested. Initially, R5 does not define exactly what this "thing" that creates fear is, but as the fragment (006) goes on, she ends up affirming what is so frightening about the "world outside": the possibility of relapsing. This is what she fears.

The act of relapsing in criminal activities is implicitly implied in the expression "seeing everything happen again", i.e. insisting on the reproduction of the same practices that led her to the path of crime and therefore, to prison. In the following lexical selections, it is possible to notice how the themes of fear and recidivism are deeply intertwined in the processes of pondering about the social reintegration of the subject: "And I'm scared of being released and seeing everything happen again, all because of drugs" and "I'm afraid of what can happen to me today, tomorrow or the day after, when I'm out. It's difficult". The reference to the recidivism phenomenon is evident from the account of the experiences of other individuals serving sentences in the same social space as R5: "Because two people who were with me, doing time, they would say 'we're fine, we're strong', they left and fell out for drugs again". In this context, the verb "fall out" means that the subject was not able to sustain a conduct aligned with the principles legitimized in society and, inversely, she relapses in crime. Hence the feeling of protection inside APAC (and of fear being outside).

(007) When I go out, it's going to be difficult. Because we should never say that we are rehabilitated. Because there's a whole lot of temptations outside. It's going to be difficult indeed. Because you'll have to live, first of all, in the middle of the society with people who have not served time, it's difficult. There will be a different side. But I'm ready for whatever happens. I beg God to not let me fall down again. Because I looked for this with my own hands, now I have to overcome it. What I have to do is build confidence in society to live even better. (R3)

R3 uses the adjective "difficult" to characterize her process of occupation of spaces "outside" the prison and "outside" APAC. First, the perceived difficulty is caused by the danger of recidivism, that is, of the subject persisting in crime. The speaker demonstrates disbelief in the full rehabilitation of former convicts in view of the numerous opportunities of committing crimes: "Because we should never say that we are rehabilitated. Because there's a whole lot of temptations outside". Another

challenge, of which R3 is aware, refers to prejudice. While considering their future coexistence with the subjects who have not served sentences, the speaker acknowledges (and assumes) the position (or spaces) of what is different, that is, what is on the margins of society. "It's going to be difficult indeed. Because you'll have to live, first of all, in the middle of the society with people who have not served time, it's difficult. There will be a different side". To be "alike" is to not having been convicted, which makes prisons a sort of "mark" of difference in relation to all others.

However, R3 tries to show courage in facing the obstacles involved in the occupation of positions (or places) in social spaces different from those of prison. In the sentence "But I'm ready for whatever happens", this notion of courage is implicit, which seems to come from clinging to a spiritual or religious entity, more precisely, "God". For instance, the stretch "I beg God to not let me fall down again", the discursive character "God" appears as responsible for preventing the enunciator from reoffending.

(008) I work at the house of one of the workers on duty here, her name is Gilda [fictitious name]. And I benefit from that, you know? I don't get paid much, but we see the people, how society is going to see me, I'm going to have contact with people. I've been washing clothes, doing the dishes, cleaning a house, doing what I did before, just like in my own house. Oh, people don't know I'm a convict because I'm not from Itaúna. And I don't mention it either. The person who knows is the worker on duty, you know? She knows, already, since she's worked here since I arrived, she knows me, you know, she used to observe the way I behaved and all, the way I was. So, it's like, I can't say much because she knew me before, and people out there still don't know I'm a convict. I was quite afraid to leave for external services, I was afraid of people, I was afraid of confronting the world outside. [...] But I think that if I'm to find another job here, how am I going to approach someone and tell them I'm doing time, how's that person going to treat me at that moment? That's why I'm still with Gilda because she's a worker on duty and saw my intimacy in here. She doesn't pay me much, I can't buy anything, but I'm afraid of how someone else will see me since I'm a convict. (R22)

In the fragment (008), the choice for the expression "external service" guides the inference that the respondents speak from the position of the subject who is serving in the open system, the last stage of penal execution. Thus, the first actions to occupy other places in society, different from that of the deviant have been undertaken by R22: "I work at the house of one of the workers on duty here, her name is Gilda". However, the themes of "fear" and "prejudice" prove to be closely related when it comes to the thinking process of the subject regarding her reintegration in social spaces beyond the prison. The implicit assumption is that, for fear of not being accepted in other social spaces, the enunciator seems to omit the fact that she is serving a sentence: "Oh, people don't know I'm a convict because I'm not from Itaúna. And I don't mention it either. The person who knows is the worker on duty, you know?"

Still from fear of not being accepted in other social spaces, the enunciator conforms to work in the place that was granted to her, i.e., in “the house of the worker on duty”. Apparently, she can only be resigned. The considerations of R22 are marked by the awareness of the “society’s” prejudice against subjects serving sentences. The lexical selection that allows such interpretation is: “But I think that if I’m to find another job here, how am I going to approach someone and tell them I’m doing time, how’s that person going to treat me at that moment? That’s why I’m still with Gilda because she’s a worker on duty and saw my intimacy in here. She doesn’t pay me much, I can’t buy anything, but I’m afraid of how someone else will see me since I’m a convict”. In this case, it is possible to glimpse the perspective of segregation inserted into a kind of process that, at least a priori, would be legitimized by the ideals of inclusion or reinsertion (Chies & Varel, 2009). In other words, the discourse reproduces a very common situation, proposed in the research by Bastos (1997) as well as Buckeridge (2011), in which it falls to the woman who is serving or has served time, in most cases, the occupation of certain social spaces, the performance of social roles; more specifically, the exercise of certain domestic activities (washing, cleaning, taking care of the house) often marked by economic and social devaluation.

Final thoughts

The purpose of this study was to analyze the meanings that subjects serving time attribute to prison labor, seeking to identify the relations among these meanings and the principles that aim to legitimize labor activities as capable of reintegrating subjects into society. In fact, its contributions run along some axes. The first is outlined in order to strengthen the historical and cultural aspects of subjectivity theory (González Rey, 2009). The production of meanings by the women who “speak” in this paper relates to the positions they have occupied in the world. Nuances of the experience of living in the world of crime become clear when the subjects delimit their perception of their work from a dual perspective, i.e. of what is right or not, what dignifies the man or not, of what is morally established and accepted or not. From this, it is possible to identify a process of production of subjectivities through institutional discourses and therefore through hegemonic discourses constructed in society. Precisely, the ways of being at work and thinking about labor in prison are produced according to the perception that this would be configured as a mechanism to correct the subject who once did not fit in the defined and “naturalized” standard of legality. Thus, the women who are serving time run through the meanings of recovery and labor as something redemptive, which can free them.

However, labor concomitantly incorporates a sense of the subject’s imprisonment, which has been called alienation herein. This is because the act of working, at times, is perceived as an action that allows the “escape”, the estrangement from reality, sometimes preventing the subject from opening spaces for singularization (or autonomy) through critical thinking. The labor practice assumes the sense of an “island” that acts to minimize the psychological tension that arises from the numerous

attacks on the self, which on the other hand characterize a total institution, as Goffman (1961) has observed.

Labor also reveals itself as a segregation mechanism inside and outside the prison social spaces, insofar as it delimits the extent of subject categories (Bastos, 1997; Costa & Bratkowski, 2007; Lima & Santos, 2008) as criminals and workers, that is, the inmates who are engaged in recovery (those who perform labor activities in prison) and those who are not (those who do not perform labor activities in prison). Moreover, the labor activities highlight the differences among subjects, based on gender roles, reflecting aspects of the inequality process that women face in other social contexts, in the social space of prison. It is up to women serving time to perform craft works or making clothes and shoes (as for most women in APAC stitching sandals). This is work that, in most cases, circumscribes women’s performance to a stereotypical domain of the domestic and the private. Segregation is reproduced after the subject leaves the prison or rehearses his departure, as with individuals who are serving sentences in the semi-open or open regime, what is left for these is to carry out certain types of labor activities that provide little satisfaction in financial and social terms.

This paper helps to strengthen a discussion about the fact that labor in prison is not a panacea for the prison system problems or even for the country’s social system, in an attempt to reduce the rates of crime and violence. The speeches produced herein allow considerations on the fact that the resocialization centers are presented in the discussions about the reform of the Brazilian prison system as alternative models of penal execution. Such centers can be “alternatives” to the extent that the majority is formed by a joint management between state and a non-governmental organization. This occurs because the label of alternative is questioned (that is, what is presented as a more effective proposal for the reintegration of individuals who have committed crimes) for resocialization centers where, as is clear from several of the interviews collected, subjects prove to be deeply dependent on institutional care or a sort of organizational protection, feeling frightened and unprepared about the future occupation of places different from the deviating ones, in the broader society.

The research reinforces the problematization on how far prison labor meets its precept of producing conventionally accepted sociabilities, or if it just subtly perpetuates the logic of exclusion in the guise of an alleged inclusion, functioning only as a gear in the vicious circle that, instead of minimizing, increases crime. Recipes or formulas are not inferred from this study (and the intention was not that), but the reflections encouraged by it suggest something that may seem simplistic, but that in fact constitutes the core of the legal, sociological or individual matters regarding prison labor. More precisely, prison labor needs to be translated into a mechanism for approximation, not detachment from the “outside” world, with all its possibilities (not its “impossibilities”). This goal cannot be fulfilled while the rehabilitation meanings are linked to the alienation and segregation of (and through) labor.

With a view to deepen the discussion on prison labor, we suggest the investigation of the trajectories built by convicts after serving sentences at APAC, in order to scrutinize how labor as one of the elements that allow the production (and control) of

the ways a subject can be and relate within the social space of prison, ends up (re) producing, (re) organizing, (re) adapting (or not) the ways of being and relating to social spaces different from a penal execution space.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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