

Carceral Entrapments

Views from the Prison/Street Interface in India

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Abstract

This article focuses on three overlapping layers. First, it illustrates multiple and incoherent expressions of the prison/street nexus in India through fieldwork in prison and a *para* (urban neighbourhood). Second, it argues that existing categories of understanding prison/street porousness – such as a ‘deadly symbiosis’, a continuum, liminality and a carceral state – are inadequate for explaining these expressions of the prison/street nexus in India, which is framed within chaotic environments. Consequently, I argue, there is a poverty of concepts in narrating the prison/street nexus in the global south more generally, and it stems from methodological concerns. Third, the article unravels the methodological lessons from the study of imprisoned populations to examine how these may be used to narrate urban marginality. I take recourse to Lorna Rhodes’ illustration of ‘blind fields’ and ‘punctums’, to show how these may be used to disrupt conventional and hegemonic narratives of urban marginality.

Keywords: carceral, carceral continuum, prison, prison/street, punctum, urban marginality

The prison/street nexus is not a novel point of anthropological inquiry. However, its articulation and understanding have mainly been confined to experiences in the developed West. This article is an instantiation of the prison/street nexus in contemporary India. I use ethnographic snippets from two field sites: a central prison in India and a narrative interview with a gang leader with prison experience, from my fieldwork in a *para* (neighbourhood) in Kolkata, India. The article also has a methodological anchor. Taking a cue from ethnographic practice in prisons, I reveal the ‘punctums’ in these cases, pointing to certain invisible aspects of understanding sociality and organizational life.¹ Lorna Rhodes (2015) (following Barthes 1981 and Gordon 1997) uses ‘punctum’ as a way of highlighting the telling details from prison fieldwork that lie buried and unnoticed but have the potential to reveal concealments, purposeful or unintended.² The punctum is a punctuation mark,



one that conveys meaning, and breaks through the 'everyday surface papering over events' (Rhodes 2015: 274). It is a 'supplement', an 'unexpected and startling emergence of an event' (ibid) that breaks the monotony of a picture, or a description of a field site or an encounter. It belongs to ethnographic practice and is a methodological and political tool in research for significantly unsettling the relationship between what we see and what we know (Berger 1972) and revealing the politics of research and knowledge in a field or discipline.

In each case, I extract some details that indicate the punctum. I use the cases substantively to demonstrate the culture of incarceration, as well as the peculiar nature of the prison/street interface in India and its manifestations beyond the site of its occurrence and material presence. The key features of the culture of incarceration in India are the contingent entanglements of power and privilege and the fusion of functions. In addition, the culture of incarceration involves the spectacle of violence. To put this another way, torture and punishment through bodily harm become public acts. These facets of the culture of incarceration depend on an inherently chaotic everyday life. A focus on chaos has the potential to uncover the use of violence, by the state and its supporting institutions, in otherwise unpredictable sites and ways; and by individuals, to script their survival in the face of the imposition of difficult controls on their everyday, whether in prison or on the street. Contingency, chaos and disorder are thus crucial in understanding how structures of governance and control work. Moreover, the culture of incarceration encompasses the idea that specific disposable populations are susceptible to carceral entrapment. The article elaborates this notion through the two ethnographic cases. In the following section, I engage with the conceptual terrain of punctums and blind fields through reflections on prison ethnography.

Punctum, blind field and the poverty of concepts

Rhodes (2015) urges us to see the punctum and the possibilities unlocked by the blind field in the following ways. First, the punctum is something that we may not understand at the time of its occurrence but may be able to explore in the future. Second, it indicates aspects in our research that we may be aware of, yet which are beyond the grasp of the words, categories and analytic frames in the social science disciplines to articulate what is going on. Third, 'the presence of the ethnographer ... may constitute an opportunity for participants in a familiar scene to signal' (ibid.: 281) to animated and charged moments when other invisible structures and meanings make themselves apparent. Finally, the punctum, or telling detail, is not evident; it is a detail that is 'made visible by preparation and time' (ibid.: 281). It serves as a beginning to a story that militates against a dominant, fetishized one. The practice of *gunti* (headcount) in prison, on the one hand, and a young man's journeys in and out of prison, on the other hand, are disparate instances and fragmented sites depicting diverse aspects of the punctum and the prison/street interface. The two cases illustrate the interface as an increasingly variegated and profoundly carceral

intersection that uses force, renders normative and legal frameworks insignificant, and reframes meanings of confinement and mobility control.

Carceral geography (Dirsuweit 1999; Moran 2012; Moran, Gill and Conlon 2013) and prison ethnography (Bandyopadhyay 2010; Piacentini 2004; Reed 2003; Rhodes 2004) have built critiques of the metanarratives of prison studies across the world, such as those of total institutions (Goffman 1961) and the shifts in the exercise of power from sovereign power and disciplinary power to biopower (Foucault 1977). The writings on and theorizations of prisons are based on encounters with the 'well-ordered' Western prison, a category that emerges in articulating the shift in punishment from the terrorizing spectacle of bodily harm to incarceration (Morris and Rothman 1995; Rusche and Kirchheimer 1939).³ The modern prisons of the colonies were set up in consonance with the structure and frame of the well-ordered Western prison, a category through which prisons can be studied and understood, but also an aspirational tag for prisons in the global south.

There is substantial literature on prisons that dwells on the crises of legitimacy and order (Cressey 1961; DiIulio 1987; Sparks and Bottoms 1995; Sparks, Bottoms and Hay 1996; Beckett and Herbert 2008; Cohen 1979). Descriptions and analyses of prison life and governance are generally anchored to the functional frame of the restoration of order and mitigation of the ill-effects of everyday functioning. However, the works of Rhodes (2004), Adam Reed (2003) and Laura Piacentini (2004) depart significantly from this kind of framing as they capture cultural nuances of prison life, resistance and governance.⁴

Reed (2003), for instance, in his study of a prison in Papua New Guinea, examines the prison not through the familiar tropes of power relations and technologies of surveillance but through the workings of time, movement and constraint in prisoners' lives. How does the prisoner learn to be a whole social person amid the absences that incarceration produces and sustains? What can prison life tell us about social life generally? Reed evokes a narrative of contemporary society and sociality in Papua New Guinea through his descriptions of coping in prison. Carina Tertsakian (2008), in her work on prisons in Rwanda, attempts to humanize those who have committed unspeakable crimes by narrating details about their prison lives and the act of witnessing a crime. Other ethnographic writings on prisons in Africa and Brazil, for instance, challenge central ideas of how prisons are governed and the global propagation of norms. This includes discussions on how prisoners are used to manage and control prisoner populations (Darke 2018; Darke and Garces 2017; Jefferson and Martin 2014) and also how global norms such as human rights of prisoners and training of prison staff create contexts for institutional reproduction, extension of bureaucratic power and occasionally new vocabularies of reform (Martin 2000, 2017). I draw from these ethnographic impulses of allowing intimate, local details to resist the metanarratives of institutional space. What emerges is the picture of the fragile, chaotic prison along with the paradoxical image of the dehumanized, yet subversive and resistant, prisoner subject (Bandyopadhyay 2010, 2018).

How to create a prison environment that is both ordered and humane? That has been a guiding question of prison governance. The bulk of prison scholarship has tended to conform to this question, reproducing rather than challenging issues of prison discipline and governance, and thereby also accepting the taken-for-granted linking of humaneness and order. Can a chaotic prison be humane? I use the idea of chaos in everyday lives – and chaotic turns in practices of control and governance in prison – to show how a focus on disruptions may help us to see the invisibilized, and to go against the grain of established terrains of researching and analysing state institutions. The linking of humaneness and order is an element of prison design. This reflects the poverty of concepts and theorizations on the prison, which has methodological and empirical bases. In choosing methodological strategies, as ethnographers, we are trapped within the ‘blind fields’ (Rhodes 2015) of our disciplines and sites. The ‘blind fields’ also emerge from the relative isolation, neglect and manipulative insignificance of the epistemologies of the south (Santos 2014). Writing from the global south within an academic practice that has originated, focused and advanced in the global north has its share of challenges. Acceptance of scholarship, presentation of new ideas, and challenging Western ways of seeing and translating the ‘field-view’ to narrate local concepts that may have no place within the established substantial scholarship are some of the foundational barriers in decolonizing knowledge.⁵

In the context of researching boundaries between the prison and the street, the overwhelming idea has been porosity (Moran 2012), captured variously as a ‘deadly symbiosis’, a ‘carceral continuum’, a transgression of the binary and even a liminal space (Baer and Ravenberg 2008; Moran 2013; Wacquant 2001). However, in this study of the prison in India the prison/street interface emerges as an encounter that cannot be fully understood by any of these frames. In this examination of the chaotic environments of the prison and the street, I employ the notion of *carceral entrapment* as an embedded category to understand the prison/street nexus in India. While drawing broadly from the earlier ideas of ‘continuum’ and the ‘carceral state’ (Beckett and Murakawa 2012; Parenti 1999), I also deviate from them in using carceral entrapment to imply that disposable populations and those at the margins are easily trapped in relations and negotiations of a carceral nature. Viewing the street as a code for ‘urban’ – including the neighbourhood and the environment outside prison – is deliberate and disruptive. It resonates with the argument of this article about the ubiquity of carceral entrapment, beyond the specificities of site (Jefferson, Turner and Jensen 2019).

Prison/street interfaces are located in the overlaps – that is, the commonalities between practices of governance and resistance in the two spaces – in an individual’s crossings between these two physical sites, and in apparently disparate events through which the ethnographer perceives an intersection. This view of the interface resonates with Long’s (1989) conception of the interface, which refers to points of ‘intersection or linkage between different social systems, fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative value and social interest, are most likely to be found’ (ibid.: 2). However,

a closer look at these interfaces reveals the poverty of concepts in dealing with the chaotic everyday life that the ethnographer encounters in these fields. While the ethnographic method encompasses the capacity to narrate unique localisms of universal phenomena and social institutions, it also tends to participate in the project of reproducing well-established narratives. In the two instances presented below, I show how chaos is central to people's experiences both in prison and on the street. Continuities in the two spaces are marked in governance through control, discipline and surveillance, aided by the presence of a chaotic environment. This chaotic environment appears to the ethnographer as a punctum – something that is forcefully present, taken for granted and not fully engaged with in the first instance. The focus on social order – and, in the case of the prison, the urge to perceive an ordered institution – acts as a blind field. The cases reveal punctums of chaos that are integral to the culture of incarceration in India. This culture of the carceral activates the entrapment of marginal, disposable populations in prison and beyond.

Gunti and the culture of incarceration

Everyday prison practice is one of the arenas in which the entangled nature of the prison/street interface comes to the fore, and one of the defining aspects of everyday prison life is *gunti* (counting)⁶ – the practice of doing a headcount of prisoners five times a day. To show how *gunti* acts as a punctum, I briefly describe a typical *gunti* in the female ward of a prison in India in which I conducted my fieldwork. The female ward has four barracks and an open courtyard in the centre. Two buildings flank it, one at the entrance called the *jaali* (mesh). The other, at the other end, is a decrepit two-story building with small rooms, some of which are individual cells, and others utility rooms such as a schoolroom and a sewing room.

Contrary to expectation, the prisoners were not lined up and then counted. The convict warders and the 'writer'⁷ would go back and forth in the wards, ordering everyone to be in place, yelling at anyone who was loitering in the courtyard. There was much abusing and shouting on most days. As the writer in the female ward, a convicted prisoner, would tell me later: 'Till this *gunti* is completed my head remains hot'. Tension prevailed until they got the *gunti* right and received confirmation of it from the main office. This tension – palpable in the yelling and abusing, the running around of prisoners and staff and the frustration of the numbers not adding up – presented a sense of chaos.

In an earlier study (Bandyopadhyay 2010), I discussed *gunti* as an ordering practice that prisoners perceive as 'work', arguing that they derive a sense of purpose from this otherwise regulated, dehumanizing activity. In presenting the meaningfulness of prison life through the everyday practices of governance, I did not paint a visual of chaos. This visual of chaos, which I now bring into focus, is a punctum, and it ruptures the picture of *gunti* as an ordering practice.

The involvement of convict warders demonstrates the entangled nature of power and the fusion of functions within the prison. The convict warders did the task on the ground and reported to the female warder, who in turn was accountable to the

deputy jailors and jailors. Giving prominence to order that emerges from a bout of frenetic activity supports the image of the well-ordered Western prison, as well as the anthropological project of finding meaning in the events of people's everyday lives. The chaos of *gunti* is visible to the ethnographer and yet hidden in the urge to present order and submit to the guiding theoretical impulses in studying a prison. Everyday prison practice is a series of tenuously connected chaotic moments, revealing deep fault lines of criss-crossing identities and practices of control. In retrospect, *gunti* destabilizes basic prison categories – control over time and space, constraints on bodily mobility, and loss of sociality.

Gunti, viewed through the lens of a punctum, unveils characteristics of the culture of incarceration in India that are discernible through the unpredictable, chaotic world of everyday prison life and the entanglement of power manifest in the fusion of functions. The controller and controlled are imbricated in continuous negotiations of power, privilege, and individual and collective gain. They are not divergent. This argument is tricky, as it suggests the Goffmanian idea of the power of every inmate to work the system. It tends to neglect the possibility of total power, control and dehumanization, crucial to understanding prison life. Absolute power is contingent and fleeting in its manifestation, often quickly replaced by either an act of resistance from a prisoner or an act of collaborative management by prisoners and warders.

This culture of the carceral emerges from and is sustained by a sociocultural field beyond the prison. The entanglement of power evident in such a fusion of functions has colonial antecedents and is reminiscent of governing through networks of informers. Carceral culture in India also instates a system of patronage and negotiated access to positions of power and authority. Patronage and negotiated citizenship are equally vital for comprehending how the dispossessed and marginal populations in the 'urban' attempt to carve out successful lives in the face of constrictions of livelihood opportunities, increased surveillance, control and containment within boundaries.

The categories of order, coercion, totality and, in part, even resistance are the blind fields in prison research, which Rhodes (2015: 278) discusses as the inherent opacity of the prison in the sense of physical inaccessibility: an overbearing unreachability, or a highly constrained reachability and knowability that is predetermined through particular images, concepts and metanarratives. These metanarratives may belong to our disciplines, or they may be specific to the sites we research in and the questions we seek to answer. Thus, in prison, the unsighted fields are those that lie behind institutional routines, publicly available information and popular discourses around the institution. The chaos of everyday life lies behind institutional and ordered routines. The disorder shows the unpredictability of daily life and lives that resist patterns. Contrastingly, the patterns we find and articulate in representing prisons unfold from within the boundaries of our disciplines.

The moment of mild chaos marked by not getting the *gunti* right or the moment of complete confusion marked by an attempted escape by a prisoner is the 'accident' that 'pricks' me and motivates another telling of prison practice and its constitutive role in the culture of the carceral (Bandyopadhyay 2018). Chaos during *gunti* acts

as a punctum. It may not be visible in everyday life, but it becomes apparent in the event of a disruption such as an innocuous mistake in counting or a more severe disturbance after an escape or an attempted escape (ibid.). Chaos, the entanglement of relations of power, defiance of routines and the violence of the imposed everyday constitute the sense of carceral entrapment experienced by prisoners. The chaos has analytical significance in that it exposes the paradox of defiance and rule-abiding everyday life, as well as emphasizing the impact of entangled power relations through a fusion of functions. These facets of everyday prison life indicate the carceral entrapment. Contingency and disorder are occasions for the practice of subversions. Entrapment, thus, suggests not mere conformity to an established everyday rule, but also each individual's contribution to the making of a chaotic environment. They are constitutive of the culture of the carceral, forging new and unpredictable forms of repression. In the next case, the narrative of a gang leader with prison experience is used to show the continuities of the culture of the carceral beyond the prison and illustrate the idea of carceral entrapment further.

Carceral journeys: a gang leader's narrative

Bhai is a feared criminal and a local *dada* (goon) in the slum neighbourhood close to Kolkata, West Bengal, where I conducted fieldwork to explore the lives of people who were in and out of prison and were well placed to articulate the prison/street interface. This *basti* (slum) is more than a century old. The land was occupied in nineteenth-century metropolitan Calcutta by migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, who were answering the demand for cheap labour in the industries and jute mills in the area.⁸

As a migrant from South India (Tamil Nadu), Bhai was an oddity in the area, with migrants hailing primarily from North India. When we met, he had recently been released from prison. My interview with him was preceded by days of hearing stories of his nefarious crime, about twenty years ago, of murdering a man, playing football with the severed head in an open field in the neighbourhood, and then walking with the head, talking to it and displaying it to the mother of the murdered man. I use Bhai's narrative to demonstrate how his life serves as a punctum in the understanding of urban marginality and how it encapsulates the idea of carceral entrapment. In continuation of the idea of a chaotic environment, Bhai's story embodies the chaos of the prison and the *para*. However, this experience of chaos also leads me to engage with the vulnerability and unpredictability of criminal entrepreneurs and prisoners' lives, where other scholars have tended to stress certainty and power (Kumar 2018; Michelutti 2018; Piliavsky 2015).

We sat in a newly finished temple – one that he had built with his money – and talked about his life, and about crime and prison. His men surrounded him; they came with him on bikes and stood at a distance as we sat in the temple premises and talked. The urban folklore attached to his previous crime signified the grotesque way in which Bhai was introduced to me. As he had served time in the prison where I had done my doctoral fieldwork, our initial exchange was about the prison and

our common acquaintances there. Then Bhai spoke about the illegal activities in the *basti*, his *amdani* (earnings) from those engaged in illegal work, the threats to his life, and the gang wars in the area.

I have been in and out of prison for the last ten years and now my life has become like it no longer matters where I am – inside and outside, it is all the same. When I am out I am busy making arrangements for my people here, my family and everyone else, as I know I can be back inside any day. One time, when they took me to prison, men who were in plainclothes and not in uniform came and took me away. I did not even know they were the police until I was in the *thana* (police station). People like us, we reach this place where enemies are all around. There is no difference between the police and your enemy. They are everywhere.

Bhai ran an extortion racket in the neighbourhood. He took only from those who became rich through ‘illegal *dhandra*’ (business) and protected the poor, invoking a Robin Hood persona, along with his deep-seated insecurities and vulnerabilities. A few years after this meeting with him, he surrendered to the police. He continued his extortion racket from inside the prison with the help of close aides. The prison was his protective shield as it enabled his life to continue without its attendant risks.

However, the court ordered his release on the grounds of insufficient evidence. In January 2019, I received news of Bhai’s violent death; he had been shot and killed in his own home. As the murky details of his death emerge, I return to our conversations: his fear of the people closest to him; his deep trust of the very people he seemed to fear; and his constant refrain of living to protect his people. His killing, allegedly by those closest to him – his wife, son and other aides – continues his narrative, though unspoken, in the same vein, articulating the extreme vulnerabilities of an otherwise powerful man. The literature on criminal entrepreneurs, political dynasts and *dabang* (strongman) local leaders and politicians in India (Kumar 2018) resonates with many strands in Bhai’s narrative. The performance of violence in everyday life to script an authoritative presence and to make a living; the use of kin networks and relations of patronage as legitimacy for such power; and systemic corruption as an enabler in the making of the local leader are some common themes (Kumar 2018; Michelutti 2018; Piliavsky 2015; Sanchez 2012). However, in important ways, Bhai’s narrative is an instance of the nature of carceral entrapment that departs from the literature mentioned above on the criminal entrepreneur in India. It presents the vulnerabilities in the figure of the leader and the paradox of control and the lack of it. Bhai’s death offers us an animated moment to understand the fragility of a powerful person. In his oral narrative, he voiced this fragility only implicitly. Two moments in Bhai’s life act as punctum – his surrender to the police as a way of protecting his life, and his death, allegedly executed by those within his circle of trust. Bhai steered his life with a sense of power, expressed in the performance of violent spectacles and a paradoxical feeling of fragility.

Bhai’s life signifies a break from the ordinary view of the neighbourhood⁹ and the collective experience of urban marginality. The dominant frames for understanding urban marginality revolve around material deprivation; lack of resources

for specific disposable populations, such as migrants and those belonging to disadvantaged social locations of caste, class, race and gender; dispossessed citizenship, negotiated through various means; and the experience of violence and its omnipresent threat in everyday life. The unstable, shifting boundaries of legality and illegality, Bhai's status as an outsider and an insider, a sense of precarity and the use of violence pervade his experience in prison and the neighbourhood. The totalizing effects of both spaces are embodied and manifested through narratives of how freedom and agency are marked out in the lives of individuals traversing these spaces. They reveal the continuities of governance practices in these spaces and the constant struggle to achieve calm and order. Underneath this façade lies a chaotic, muddled, opaque everyday where the anthropological concepts of the researcher are hopelessly inadequate in grasping these worlds.

For Bhai, his perceptions of friends and enemies guided his presence in these spaces. Everyday violence and his search for an elusive rest defined his crossings between the prison and the street. To return to our discussion of interfaces, the interface is not just about what the physical locales represent or a crude juxtaposition or continuity in their experience. Instead, it epitomizes a set of cultural strategies such as harnessing a fear of violence, ability to unleash that fear on another, recognition of constant danger, finding a band of followers who will help in negotiating that danger, building networks with influential individuals and carving powerful positions in prison and on the street. For individuals living on the margins in the urban neighbourhood, their survival depends on being able to garner and use these cultural strategies. In prison and on the street, the production and reproduction of chaotic everyday lives are central for a complex interplay of power to emerge, for enabling displays of agency and practices of subversion while sustaining the selective legitimation of violence and the arbitrary exercise of power and vigilantism.

The lack of power and privilege, marginality, dispossession and, paradoxically, persuasive negotiations to create a successful everyday life are integral to this narrative, and they signal several remarkable moments in our understanding of the prison/street interface. For instance, Bhai's surrender should not be seen as a slippage into a life that was turned over to the law in an encounter with constrained choices. Instead, it holds allegorical significance for the prison/street interface: fear and bravado are intertwined; resistance and submission to authority are both writ large on this action, as is a strong urge to recreate the possibility of successful everyday life when trapped.

Bhai's narrative shows that the prison is made present in people's lives outside by the possibility of imprisonment. Inside, it was characterized in the lives of many young male prisoners by a narrative inversion in their reflections on life in both prison and *para* (Bandyopadhyay 2010): the *para* was a space of insurmountable constraints, leading to a path of violence, crime and, finally, prison. In contrast, the prison was a space of possibility, with potential for agency, resistance and freedom, though limited.

Scholars have formulated the interface as networks of precarceral ties that create a sense of continuity between the inside and the outside (Da Cunha 2008;

Padovani 2016) and may alter the nature of carceral sociality and the institution. Judah Schept (2013) uses the notion of ‘carceral habitus’ to reflect on how communities participate in producing the carceral state. Previous relations subsist within prison walls. The symbolic and real separation between the inside and outside can no longer be taken for granted. It is imperative that the focus shifts from prison to the webs and relations between inside and outside, uncovering the reconstitution of these spaces and the specific and local manifestations of these flows.

The culture of incarceration, visible to the prison researcher, could serve as a punctum for the urban ethnographer. Unearthing this carceral logic and its impact beyond the prison is possible when we view the street through the lens of the prison. In referring to the prison/street interface in terms of a culture of the carceral, I am suggesting an alternate view of urban marginality. Urban marginality – otherwise trapped in the metanarratives of deprivation, the clamour for space and the systematic processes of disenfranchisement – then emerges as a kind of ‘carceral entrapment’. Individuals on the margins in urban areas (people in slum areas, or those broadly identified as ‘disposable’, live with the perennial possibility of an encounter with carceral spaces. To put this another way, the chaotic, disordered environment of people’s everyday lives is rife with carceral possibilities. In everyday life on the street, then, a peculiar relationship between carcerality and the citizen subject is created and sustained, rooted in a cultural matrix of control, resistance and sociality grounded in hierarchies and submissiveness.

Everyday chaos and carceral entrapment

The insights from the cases presented here revolve around the use of violence as a common strategy to resolve matters of everyday life. Consequently, the local goon, the prisoner, the ordinary criminal, the political prisoner and the ‘disposable’ are all tarred with the same brush. The unhindered availability of this disposable body means it is subjected to surveillance, violence and the threat of imprisonment. This availability represents the carceral continuum, which in turn is marked by the permeation of surveillance mechanisms, and by violence as a strategy for maintaining both order and the chaos that both frames and follows such violence. The two ethnographic vignettes – of *gunti* in prison and Bhai’s journeys in and out of prison – underline the extent of the chaos within institutions of order and spaces of social organization. The chaotic display of violence and of ensuring that the body marked ‘disposable’ is made available to be further marked through processes of violence and erasure – this is how relationships of the ‘carceral’ spill out onto the street. Such spilling out suggests the idea of the continuum superficially. However, what disrupts the notion of a carceral continuum are privilege, power and the chasms between caste, class and gender within the notion of the citizen. ‘Continuum’ implies a continuous sequence of elements with opposing extremes at either end; the adjacent elements have some similarity yet they also progress in an orderly fashion from one extreme to the other. The idea of distinctive extremes is central to the continuum because, in the case of the prison/street relationship,

the two extremes are the prison and the street. However, this formulation, which echoes the binary, fails to capture the unpredictable nature of violent practices across different sites. Bhai's narrative, for instance, oscillates between his insider and outsider statuses in the neighbourhood, as well as between the deep trust he has for his people and his sense of insecurity, often arising from his fear of the very people he trusts. He does not perceive the police and members of a rival gang as distinctive and standing apart. In Bhai's life, they are in the same category; their actions of arrest, constant surveillance and violence are indistinguishable. For him, that is what marks the continuity between prison and street. There are no extreme points – just a sense of sustained insecurity and fear within one inherently chaotic environment. A focus on extreme points in a continuum establishes an ordering principle for viewing the relationship between the prison and the street that threatens to invisibilize the chaos of the everyday. Thus, the continuum is unable to account for how people make use of everyday chaos to both exert violence and resist it. Nor is it able to document the production of serendipity that such chaos generates.

The recognition and analysis of the spillovers of chaos and violence serve to decentre, even if only temporarily, the familiar discourses of urban marginality. This allows the emergence of complex narratives of marginality that underline the significance of unpredictable workings of power and privilege, along with their consequent negotiations. The state no longer needs the prison to display its control over disposable populations, to deny freedom or to claim exclusive embodiment of the carceral space. The slum neighbourhood, the prison and the street merge through the inherent possibility of the exercise of violence. The street is now where many of the horrors, otherwise confined to carceral contexts, can be openly realized, like a Foucauldian spectacle.

The use of violence or the threat of its use; cultural strategies such as using a chaotic environment as an opportunity to express agency or to resist an ongoing circumstance; the use of systems and relations of patronage to script narratives of survival. These are some of the features of the prison/street interface that the two cases discussed above have in common. Further, typical to the interface are practices such as the deliberate, yet unavoidable overcrowding, the fusion of functions, collaborative management of subversive practices, and penalization of various minority identities, all of which indicate an insidious design of the state to contain its disposable populations. Paradoxically, this carceral entrapment also allows for successful everyday lives to continue, mainly through mechanisms of implicit control, constant surveillance and containment.

Conclusion

Hyperincarceration, coupled with practices that cast a carceral mesh around the urban poor, shape the penalization of poverty and engender a continuum between the prison and the ghetto (Wacquant 2001). Scholars such as Teresa Gowan (2002), Jamie Peck (2003), Peck and Nik Theodore (2008) and Brett Story (2016) have

also explored the relationship between the prison and the city, between prison and marginal populations in the urban landscape.¹⁰

Wacquant (2001) and carceral geographers privilege the idea of carceral spaces across sites and unearth the relationship between carceral spaces and an increasingly punitive state. Despite its radical content, this writing draws on the concept of the continuum, which serves the prison–street binary. The state upholds this binary for the successful working of its many classificatory systems and documentary practices such as the classification of legality and illegality, good and bad citizen, the patriotic and the anti-national, the ordinary criminal prisoner and the political prisoner. Carceral geography, through its particular attention to the organization of space, lays bare how penalty and carcerality are not confined to the prison. They are visible in the internalization of the carceral regime, the carceral practices beyond the boundaries of the prison, the interviews between prisoners and their families, and in prisoners' furloughs, as well as in the precarceral ties of prisoners, which carceral geography understands as heterotopic, or liminal. Yet in these interpretations too, there lies buried the dichotomy of the prison and its other. The analysis of prison/street interfaces, in contrast, shows that it is unproductive to make these distinctions in an anthropological exploration of the prison/street in the global south. For instance, if we think of open prisons and private prisons, or of the elements of 'openness' and 'privatization' that are found in many prisons (in India), they could be categorized as 'heterotopic'. This view neither challenges the statist perspective nor approaches a more politically engaged way of examining policies around prisons and the marginal populations in the 'street'. Categories such as well-ordered prison, coercive organizations, total institution and the shifts from the spectacle of the scaffold to the torture of the soul frame the anthropology of prisons. Everyday life in prisons of the global south challenges these prescriptive formulations of studying prisons. Similarly, ideas of a continuum, a carceral mesh, racialization of poverty and criminalization of race cannot be superimposed onto conditions of urban marginality.

Such overarching, powerfully articulated themes and theorizations set research agendas for the study of urban marginality and the prison/street interface in the global south.¹¹ As scholars writing from the global south, it is crucial to represent the unpredictability and chaos – and, paradoxically, the growing certainty of the carceral mesh in people's lives. The prison/street interface acknowledges the chaos of everyday life. Chaos is the norm, making 'order' an imposed aberration; this poses a challenge to the ethnographer eager to analyse how individuals negotiate in situations of chaos to create a sense of order, albeit fragile. It also challenges the sites within which we locate the violence that the modern state unleashes on its citizens. Both these aspects – the sites and the recognition of the state's capacity to unleash violence on its citizens – are often made unrecognisable in their chaotic lives. One of the sharpest indictments of a state emerges from testimonies of torture from its citizens. However, such narratives also enable the state to mask its far more insidious role in terrorizing and using violence in the everyday lives of its citizens. Prison research shows that these distinctions between prison and street, torture and

everyday discipline, order and chaos act as blind fields, compelling research to be articulated in the language of the state. The realities of everyday life as experienced by marginal citizen/prisoner subjects defy both the language of the state as well as the narrative of order we impose in our understanding of any social organization. Prisons, for instance, have been studied with categories from the framework of prison administration, thereby fulfilling a self-serving function. Any deviance from ordered everyday practice, such as an escape, is analysed as an aberration.

The cases discussed here point to the entanglements of power within the private and public domains and institutions of everyday life. Such entanglements are also sites of random violence and increased surveillance. The anthropological unravelling of this interface facilitates discussion on the production, control and management of citizens in both carceral and non-carceral spaces. The carceral is being constituted anew through practices of punishment within and beyond prison, not just through techniques of surveillance and self-discipline but with raw, brute force and its ever-present threat in the public space. The carceral complex is also evident in the frequent incidence of vigilantism and the rise of an army of vigilantes. The street becomes a space where everyday conflict and ideological clashes of identity, religion and national belonging are enacted and performed.

The typical ethnographic methods used in a study of the 'urban' are participant observation, closely following the lives of a group of people across different sites; locating oneself in various sites of the urban question; social mapping; and other participatory methods. Together they are used to weave connected stories between different sites and present urban marginality – a story of neoliberal governance strategies along with the successes of various documentary methods that the state uses to identify, isolate and decide on the treatment of 'disposable' populations. For the ethnographer experiencing and researching urban marginality, there is something conspicuous about the encounter with urban marginality. It appears blatantly and aggressively on the urban landscape, despite attempts at concealment and sanitization of space.

The disclosures prompted by prison ethnography go beyond the site and reveal the blind fields in the representations of urban marginality. Prison ethnography highlights the processes of sense-making and meaning-making in states of chaos. Meaning does not necessarily indicate order. Order implies that relations between things, people and the organization of space are in their designated or appropriate locations. It is a state in which the laws, rules and norms regulating public behaviour are observed, and authority prevails. Though interested in sense-making and meaning-making, ethnographers often conflate meaning with order. Meaning and order do not reconcile in the anthropology of prisons.

Each chaotic turn in the prison quotidian thus has potential as a punctum, alerting us to the possibility of using the prison as a methodological vantage point for examining the street. What does prison research hide? Two notions are significant here: the first is the idea of the disavowal of prisons (Armstrong and Jefferson 2017), and the second that of a counter-visual ethnography (Schept 2014). The former raises a methodological question – what happens if the prison is under

erasure? The latter makes a case for seeing that which is hidden but is significant in structuring the present. Both these conceptualizations evoke, in some measure, the invisible. It is similar to the attempt in this article to disrupt the close association between geographical location and an anthropological research question as central to the ethnographic method. The ethnographer may look for answers to questions of urban marginality in prison and study imprisonment and the governance of disposable populations outside the prison. Affirming the literature that nuances the idea of the field in anthropological fieldwork, I have displaced the apparent associations of research questions with their sites and attempted to build an understanding of an institutional space through research in a separate and disconnected space.

The terms 'social' and 'organization' also cannot be taken for granted, as they often are when we place the prison as a special type of organization. Chaos, the continuous building and rebuilding of modes of sociality and the challenge to existing conceptions of institutional spaces arise from disrupting the views of the prison and the street through the lens of prison ethnography. Above all else, I am exploring the possibilities inherent in the everyday for the recognition, consideration and analysis of chaos in our anthropological efforts to understand and discover patterns in the social organization of the prison and the street.

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Notes

1. I draw the idea of punctum from the works of Barthes (1981), Gordon (1997) and Rhodes (2015).
2. Barthes (1981), Gordon (1997) and Rhodes (2015) refer to the punctum as something unintended. In its surprise and spontaneous element lies the possibility of expansion.
3. For Rusche and Kirchheimer (1939), the shifts in punishment can be understood along with economic considerations of society.

4. Accounts of prison governance in Africa (Jefferson and Martin 2014) explore interdependency, entanglement, diffusion of authority and pragmatic choices as ways of understanding prison governance. These themes destabilize the idea of prison governance as the organized work of control and management of constraints by those in authority, synchronous with the notion of the well-ordered Western prison. Also, see Darke (2014) for an account of inmates managing a men's lock-up in Brazil.
5. See Carrington et al. (2018) for discussions on building a Southern criminology with a focus on the implications of colonial power and the attempts at indigenous knowledge production.
6. For a discussion on access, ethics and representation in fieldwork in a prison in India, see Bandyopadhyay (2010, 2015).
7. A few prisoners responsible for some everyday administrative practices and for managing prisoners under their care were known as the 'convict warders'. Prisoners with some education worked as assistants to the officers and were known as 'writers'.
8. In 2001, the West Bengal government changed the name of the city Calcutta, a name acquired during British rule, to Kolkata, which reflects the Bengali language pronunciation more accurately.
9. For a review of the concept of the neighbourhood and its place in understanding the urban, see Allen (2018)
10. See also Jefferson, Turner and Jensen (2019), who reflect on stuckness as a way of theorizing the experience of people in diverse sites of confinement, such as prison, ghetto and camp. They argue that ever-present abjection and the possibility of death are constitutive elements of these sites of confinement. Andrew Jefferson (2017) has also argued that the prison is a space for the exacerbation of social deprivation already experienced by an unwanted population.
11. For a review of the literature on the concept of urban marginality, see Chappatte (2015).

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