



**KILLING (LIFE) TIME:  
A STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCE OF TIME IN PRISON<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:**

Prison emerged in its early forms in Europe in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century and it spread together with capitalism. It operates by imposing to the individual a particular rigid time regime in an extremely limited spatial environment. Although society has been speeding itself up during the last forty years due to the introduction of new information and transportation technologies, prison conserved its own archaic time resulting in a 'gap' between society's and prison's time regime. The study presented in this article seeks to explore how this temporal 'gap' is experienced by prisoners in post-modern societies such as the Spanish and the British ones. The experience of time is not measurable so instead of the traditional quantitative approach used in 'time use surveys' this study scrutinises the inmates' time experience from a qualitative approach. The aim is to describe the kind of time that social practices inside this institution produce through the voices of those who have been incarcerated and through their experiences after recovering their freedom. The narratives used include qualitative 'face to face' interviews to prisoners of Spain as well as autobiographical narratives from prisoners of Great Britain.

**Keywords:**

Prison, prisoners' narratives, social time, time experience, post-modernity

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## I.- INTRODUCTION

### 1.- Understanding prison through time

Prison emerged in its early forms in Europe in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century (Rusche and Kirchheimer 2003, Foucault 1989, Melossi and Pavarini 1981). Since then it spread together with capitalism. Prison, conversely to previous punishments, focused on depriving individual's social life rather than on his/her biological life. It operated by imposing to the individual a rigid time regime in an extremely limited spatial environment. Although society has been speeding itself up during the last forty years due to the introduction of new information and transportation technologies, prison conserved its own archaic time. The 'gap' between society's and prison's time regime has grown in the last decades.

The study presented in this article seeks to understand to how time is experienced by prisoners in current post-modern societies.

However, as Matthews points out, to understand the relation between time and imprisonment first we need to identify the different forms of time that are experienced inside prison and in the outside society (Matthews 1999: 39). But, time is a difficult concept to grasp. We know that we use time as a measure, but the question about what we are measuring is still open.<sup>2</sup> Thus, I have decided to approach to inmates' time experience from a qualitative approach to time instead of the traditional quantitative because, as Bergson affirms, the experience of time is not measurable (Adam 2004:56).

Most specific studies of prison do not focus on the qualitative experience on time. Even when they refer to it, it is usually without support from empirical data (Messuti 2001; Mosconi 1997; Rivera Beiras 1997; Matthews 1999). Notable exceptions are the studies done by Meisenhelder (1985) and more recently by Brown (1998), Goifman (2002), and Wahidin (2006) in which they analysed the time phenomenon from the inmate's perspective. My study follows this line of research. The aim is to describe the kind of time that social practices inside this institution produce through the voices of those who have been incarcerated and through their experiences after recovering their freedom.

In the second section I briefly introduce the qualitative dimension of time, and its relation with prison in post-modern societies. In the following section, I clarify the methodology used in the study. The forth section is properly the analysis of former prisoners' narratives. These narratives include qualitative face to face interviews as well as autobiographical narratives. The following questions will guide my analysis: How do inmates experience time in prison? Is it experienced differently depending on the inmate's background? Is there a radical difference between the experience of time inside and outside prison in our current societies? How do inmates cope with it? Do they present resistance to that time imposition? Finally, in the last section I present the conclusions of the study.

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<sup>2</sup> As St. Augustine noted "What is time? I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled" (*The Confessions*, Book 11 14:17, quoted in Ricoeur 1984: 7). In Western societies time is almost omnipresent as the regulator of daily life but perhaps because of its omnipresence it is extremely difficult to reflect on time.

## II.- TIME AND PRISON IN POST-MODERNITY

### 1.- The multiples dimension of time

In our current societies, clock time rules, and neither common people in their daily life nor most scientists question the linear concept of time (i.e. when time is conceived as a quantity, infinite divisible into space-like units measurable in length). This is the situation in many social science studies where time is usually considered as external to the social setting being described, i.e. as something fixed, unchanging and objectively ascertainable. But this is only one dimension of the phenomenon of time, as time is embedded in social interactions, structures, practices and knowledge, in artefacts, in the mindful body, and in the environment (Adam 1995: 6). That is because time is intrinsically social. It is an instrument of social groups to synchronise their social activities which originally took as reference the recurrent phenomena from their environment (Elias 1989: 26).

Time is a social construct, so any attempt to understand it should approach from its multiple social dimensions. In the study presented I analyse prison time from four dimensions, namely: “past, present and future”; “collective time”; “the individual autonomy in the disposition of time”, and finally “the subjective experience” of it. The first dimension, collective time, relies heavily on Durkheim analysis of the calendar (2001: 23). It refers to the group’s need for an instrument to synchronize social life. Collective time depends on the group organisation and activities, so it varies with changes in the structure, beliefs, values and the customs of the group (Lasén 2000: xiv). Consequently, in a given society there are multiple collective times associated with different groups and social activities (Adam 1990: 122; Lasén 2000: xv).

The second category refers to the dimensions of past, present, and future. These dimensions allow human beings to make sense of their own world. They give human beings an order, a sense of continuity and a possibility of change and development. Any (re)definition of individual or group identity is associated with a change in the present significance of their past. Thus, past, present, future focus on the individual identities’ development.

The third category refers to the individual autonomy in the disposition of time. As Goodin *et al.* (2008: 4) point out, when we say that a person ‘has more time’ than someone else, we do not mean that she/he literally has a twenty-fifth hour in her/his day but that he/she has fewer constraints and more choices in how she/he can choose to spend her/his time. The underlying problem is the control over time and its use. Thus, temporal autonomy is the discretionary control over the individual’s own time (Goodin *et al.* 2008: 4). Here autonomy refers to “one’s capacity to form principles of one’s own and to act upon them” (Goodin *et al.* 2008: 27).<sup>3</sup> Thus, temporal autonomy points to the question of power in the time phenomena.

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<sup>3</sup> The amount of temporal autonomy is dependant on the time an individual can dispose of freely after deducting the time he/she needs to spend to satisfy her/his bodily, financial and household necessities (Goodin *et al.* 2008: 4-5). But also it is dependent on the range of possibilities one has to

The last category is the subjective experience of time. This category relies heavily on Bergson concept of '*durée*' (duration). According to him, "time is becoming and living duration" (Adam, 2004: 55), impossible to divide. Whereas rationality represented becoming as a series of fixed, immobile and finite states, for him becoming was accessible only as a lived reality, impossible to be measured. Rational scientific investigation spatialised time in order to be able to think about it. He called this mathematically constituted spatialised time "temps". In contrast, becoming was only accessible through intuition and the living experience and he called this qualitative temporality "*durée*" (duration) (Adam 2004: 56). Thus, subjective time refers to the living experience of time.

## 2.- The Post-modern acceleration of social time.

The system we use to measure time has not changed in postmodern societies. Perhaps human action may have influenced some change in natural rhythms but essentially the heavenly bodies, the tides, etc. still keep their own rhythms. Human biological time has expanded as the life expectancy has increased. However, the most radical change has been produced in the social dimension of time.

We live in a postmodern or post-industrial society which is far more complex than it has ever been. In this society where the production of goods has been displaced by the production of services, we live through a process of acceleration. This acceleration which implies the capacity of doing more things in less time units is amplified by the constant need for having more time in order to consume the new wide range of services. We manage to accomplish activities faster and to 'save' time that we desperately need in order to spend it fulfilling our consumption of services, which requires even more time. Moreover, because social life speeds up, this acceleration pressures individuals to accelerate their own pace in order to synchronise it with society pace.

Authors use different terms to describe these changes but all of them agree that the way current societies experience time is distinctively different from the way it did during modernity. While Harvey uses the term *time-space compression* to describe the pressure of time in relation to the conquest of the space dimension by new technologies (1989), Castells prefers the term *timeless time* in order to express the impact of the revolution of informational technologies that allows to perform different tasks simultaneously and the experience of discontinuity as the possibility of sequencing breaks down the chronological order (1997). Rosa prefers to refer to the *acceleration of social life*, thinking about the speed dimension, i.e. the increment of the amount of processes or actions done in a same time unit (2003). However, this *acceleration* does not only refer to a quantitative unit because the acceleration of social change reflects the emergence of different institutions rather than a different rate of institutional change (Rosa 2003: 27-8). Finally, Southerton and Tomlison use the concept of '*time squeeze*' to describe the subjective experience of being pressed for time, a pervasive experience in current society (2005: 220).

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spend it. As the authors indicate "having lots of free time is useless (or frustratingly worse) if you lack many of the other resources that are required to make good use of it" (Goodin *et al.* 2008: 31).

The confrontation of different temporalities, such as *clock time* versus *timeless time* in Castells analysis (Castells 1997: 125), had a disorienting and disruptive impact on individuals<sup>4</sup> but also on social institutions (Harvey 1989: 284).

It is under this context of change that the disruptive impact of prison time regime seems to grow.

### 3.- Prison in Post-Modernity

If in the early 1970s prison was regarded as the last alternative, in an abrupt 180° turn in the early 1980s prison was once again considered the principal punishment. This ideology continues until today and has caused a remarkable increase of prison populations all over the western world mainly due to the increase in the length of prison sentences (Millie *et al.* 2005).<sup>5</sup>

The increase in the length of sentences widened the gap between society's experience of time on the outside (which is more and more directed to a time squeeze) and the one inside prison. Thus, as Matthews clearly points,

*“As the world speeds up and social time is accelerating, physical time appears to slow down. Thus a five-year sentence given in 1950 would tend to be experienced as a significantly longer sentence in 2000. Therefore the overall increase in the average length of sentence in real terms in recent years has an even greater significance than might at first appear.”* (1999: 40)

This increase in the length of sentences could be related to the changes in the mode of production in which labour force is no longer as vital as it was because of new technologies, the demise of industrial production and its transfer to other countries. The lower classes that contribute to the majority of the prison population<sup>6</sup> and that have supplied unskilled labour force are no longer as necessary as they were during the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. They suffer high rates of unemployment, are economically poor but rich in time (Beck 2000: 106-107). Their time abounds and thus, under the economic logic of capital, it is not valuable since it is not used in the production of goods. Prison reproduces that logic; it takes their time away in amounts that are disproportionately high in comparison to the time it used to take

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<sup>4</sup> These contradictory elements in the experience of time in our current societies produce negative consequences in the individual such as stress or daily “oppression”. But at the same time they give the individual the possibility to experience a plurality of stimulus and opportunities, breaking in this way the monotony of daily routine (Mosconi 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Moreover, new legislation introduced maximum security prisons and new penitentiary regimes which allowed the restriction of any of the prison benefits such as early release, daily permission to go out, parole as well as the infliction of long isolation period for the prisoners who refuse to conform with authority (Rivera Beiras 2006: 32-34).

In the case of Spain these new measures included the policy of dispersion of the Basque political prisoners which meant that Basque prisoners were located all over Spain sometimes hundreds of kilometers away from their home community (Rivera Beiras 2006: 33).

<sup>6</sup> In July 2002 the British Social Exclusion Unit Report (part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) produced a table showing how prisoners (compared with the general British population) are thirteen times as likely to have been unemployed and that sixty five percent of them have a numeracy at or below Level 1 (the level expected of an 11-year-old) (Jewkes and Johnston 2006: 229).

during the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is exacerbated by the current sense of time compression with which prisoners come to prison from the outside world. The goal is neither to train them in working disciplines, nor to normalise them to fit into society's expectations (as it once was) but to "incapacitate" them because of the risk they represent.

Furthermore, while the pace of time is accelerating in our societies the organisation of time is also changing. In current societies the new mode of production requires flexibility and the capacity to manage instability. While flexibilisation in labour markets and new technologies demand openness to a permanent re-construction and re-structuring of daily activities, prison still reflects the rigidity of discipline technologies from the early industrial societies. "A central feature of prison life is the timetable which provides a regular programme of activities and a semblance of structure and order to the day" (Matthews 1999: 41). The collective time of prison (marked by this non-modifiable rigid timetable) is not only alien to the collective experience of time that work flexibilisation is imposing, but also to the collective experience of time of those individuals who never entered into the labour market and were without any time discipline most of his/her life because of unemployment.

Therefore, as Mosconi states, prison perpetuates in the symbolic sphere through its timetable a time that is already obsolete, the quantified and commodified time of the first industrial society (Mosconi 1997: 92). However, since existence in prison is not completely isolated from society, inmates, personnel and technologies coming from outside bring in the temporalities of post-industrial society. This results in a clash between the time conception of industrial and post-industrial societies.

### III.- The Methodology of the Study

#### 1.- A qualitative approach to time

The object of the study was the inmate's subjective experience of time in prison in post-modernity. Therefore I decided to use an Empirical Phenomenology approach because it allows me to focus on the meaning that a particular phenomenon has for different individuals and the differences in their experience of it (Creswell: 2007 57-8).

I have chosen prisoners and former prisoners narratives as my data sources for the lived experience of time in prison. As Ricoeur points out in his book "Time and Narrative", the analysis of time is best done through narratives,

*"...the temporality cannot be spoken of in the direct discourse of phenomenology, but rather requires the mediation of the indirect discourse of narration. The negative half of this demonstration lies in our assertion that the most exemplary attempts to express the lived experience of time in its immediacy result in the multiplication of aporias, as the instrument of analysis becomes even more precise.*

*In its schematic form, our working hypothesis thus amounts to taking narrative as a guardian of time, insofar as there can be no thought about time without narrated time." (Ricoeur 1988: 241)*

The narratives both of former prisoners and prisoners came from two primary sources: interviews which I conducted with prisoners and former prisoners, and prisoners' published autobiographies.

My sample was a strategic selection of three groups which I assumed would differ considerably in their experience of time in prison: (a) political prisoners<sup>7</sup> and (b) white-collar prisoners and (c) common prisoners. I assumed that "normal" or common prisoners had had a very irregular life, with no job, and only very little regulation and time regime in their lives. Prison actually might have been the first institution that imposed a time regime on them. In contrast, white-collar offenders and political motivated offender had lived according to much more strict time regimes. White-collar offenders had a demanding life and lived at a fast pace. Political prisoners previously belonged to a clandestine armed organisation which demanded some kind of discipline and to adjust to the time schedule of the organisation timing. The different social practices and status that these people had in society imply different experiences of time. Accordingly, the homogeneity of prison time disrupts their time perception in different ways. All political prisoners that were interviewed were former prisoners. This allowed me studying the arrhythmia that they suffer when they recover their freedom. The narratives on which this study is based comprise interviews which I conducted in Spain and autobiographies from prisoners of UK prisons. Although the two countries have a different history in their development of the prison system they also have important characteristics in common. They are both members of the European Union with highly developed socio-economical systems and both societies have suffered from political violence in different degrees during the same time in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, they both have signed the European Charter of Human Rights which might have some impact on the treatment of prisoners.<sup>8</sup>

Because this study is aimed at understanding the experience of time in prison in post-modern societies the participants selected covered the time period after the mid 1970s. The same criterion was applied for the selection of autobiographies. The group of political prisoners comprises of Basque former political prisoners: Luisa, Facundo, Marcos, Javier, and Rodrigo. They were all interviewed alone, except Javier and Rodrigo, whose interviews were carried out simultaneously. In addition, I included the autobiography of Bobby Sands an Irish political prisoner. Whilst all the Basque former political prisoners I interviewed have been found guilty of belonging to ETA with the exception of Luisa who was sentenced for collaborating with ETA, Bobby Sands was sentenced for the possession of a handgun.

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<sup>7</sup> In this work I will respect the prisoner's self- definition as political prisoner because the political status matters in this work not for its legal or political effects but for the individual point of view and how it changes their approach to prison and it influences their behavior inside.

<sup>8</sup> Moreover, even before entering the European Union, from the late 1960s Spain began a process of reshaping its prison system, which was based on forced labour, into a rehabilitative system following the example of the British and other European systems. This shift was completed with the adoption of the new Prison Act in 1979. From that moment, Spain followed the trends of the rest of the Western countries including the differential treatment for political motivated offenders (Roldán Barbero 1988).

Participants were contacted through different NGOs that operated in the Basque Country.<sup>9</sup>

The group of common prisoners includes individual interviews with two inmates currently staying in an open prison, Carlos and Gustavo. I also interviewed Pedro a former prisoner. Carlos and Gustavo were both sentenced for trafficking drugs, while Pedro has been sentenced many times for robbery and drug traffic.

In the group of white-collar offenders, only autobiographies were used, those of Jeffrey Archer and Jonathan Aitken, two former British high level politicians. Archer and Aitken were both sentenced for committing perjury.

All prisoners and former prisoners spent more than six months in prison. All participants voluntarily agreed to be interviewed. I contacted them through three NGOs described above: Exerat, T.A.T., Salahaketa-Araba, and Piso de Acogida Araba.

I first introduced the general project to the participants and assured them of confidentiality.<sup>10</sup> Interviews were recorded with the exception of the one of Gustavo.<sup>11</sup> All interviews were conducted in the Basque Country (Spain).<sup>12</sup> Interviews took place from February to June 2008, their length ranged from 50 minutes to 2 hours.

I left the designation of the place where the interview would be held to the interviewees. Javier, Rodrigo and Marcos chose a bar known for being a meeting point of supporters of the Basque separatist cause. Facundo, Luisa, Carlos, Gustavo, and Pedro chose the office of the NGO which helped me to contact them.

Interviews were unstructured qualitative based on an interview schedule (see appendix section II) It included questions about their prison experience, concerning their past before entering prison, their life in prison focusing on their daily life, the time regime they experienced in prison, how they spent their time in prison, what they thought about their future while in prison, how their life is now after prison, I always finished the interviews by asking them what time meant for them.

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<sup>9</sup> The Basque political former prisoners were contacted through Exerat, a Basque NGO that helps Basque political prisoners and their families. Only Facundo was contacted through T.A.T, a Basque NGO that also works with political prisoners and gives legal advice to victims of police torture besides campaigning against it. Pedro was contacted through Salahaketa-Araba, a Basque NGO that provides legal advice to prisoners and promotes changes in the prison policy in particular it promotes abolition. Carlos and Gustavo were contacted through Piso de Acogida-Araba, an organisation that provides a place to stay: for prisoners to spend their six days town visits (a reward for good behaviour), prisoners in open prisons who spend the day outside, and former prisoners who have recently been released.

<sup>10</sup> The names used in the study to identify them are not their real ones.

<sup>11</sup> Before I began with the recording I asked all the participants to sign a consent form. All of them signed it with the exception of Gustavo who did not want it to be recorded, and did not want to sign the consent form. He gave me oral consent in front of two witnesses (another former prisoner and a member of the Ngo Piso de Acogida-Araba).

<sup>12</sup> The interview with Facundo was held in the town of Hernani, the rest in Vitoria-Gasteiz.



I decided to combine interviews with autobiographies because these allowed me to analyse white-collar offenders' cases which otherwise I would not have secured. The autobiographies of Jeffrey Archer and Aitken were chosen because they have been high-ranking politicians, and their detailed account of their prison experience provides the perspective of individuals who had been in positions of power. Bobby Sands' autobiography was chosen to complement the oral narratives of Basque political prisoners. It also had the advantage of using narratives from two different countries, namely Spain and United Kingdom.

The interviews and published writings were analysed along the time categories presented. This allowed for identifying patterns of similarities and shared experiences across all three groups and within each of the three groups. Finally, comparisons between the different groups were prepared. For the analysis, I listened to the interviews several times and took extensive notes. Likewise, autobiographies were read several times and the text marked in order to identify elements that were shared. Following this, significant statements from the interviews as well as from the autobiographies were transcribed and categorised according to the temporal categories introduced in the first section: past/future dimensions, collective time, individual time autonomy, and the subjective experience of time. As the interviews were conducted in Spanish the statements selected were translated into English.<sup>13</sup>

Following these preparations I selected statements from the narratives, assigned them to their respective group and ordered them by categories. This was done under the following objectives: to understand their conceptions and experiences of time in prison, and whether they engage in practices to re-appropriate time in prison; to explore the "temporal culture" of prison and prisoners and its links with the post-modern "temporal culture"; finally to compare the results from the analysis of the distinctive experience of time of each group with the features of the post-modern experience of time.

#### **IV.- THE PRISONERS' TEMPORAL EXPERIENCE OF PRISON**

##### **1.- The Past-Present and Present-Future dimension**

###### *1.1.- Past-Present*

The individual's past configures the person's identity so any (re)definition of his/her identity implies a change in the presentation and significance of his/her past. Prison, a total institution in Goffman's terms, operates a process of normalisation on the inmate's personality (1992). This process demands from the inmate to leave their

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<sup>13</sup> To translate the Spanish prisoners jargon to the English one I relied mainly on the analysis of the difference between Latin American prisoners jargon and English speaking prisoners that have been identified by Birkbeck and Neelie Pérez (2006). However, Birkbeck and Neelie Pérez found that time is experienced differently in Latin America and they argued that this can be seen in the expressions used to refer to prison time. I had to be careful when applying their work to the translation of all the expressions. Spain shares its language with Latin America, but Spanish society is closer to the rest of European societies than to Latin American societies in culture, economic situation, technological development, and most importantly for this study, in prison conditions and regulations. Thus, I also used books from English speaking authors about prisoners experiences previously translated to Spanish to check the best way to translate prisoners expressions.

individual past behind and construct a different present identity. The purpose is to prepare them for returning to society with a socially acceptable identity.

One purpose of the isolation of the inmates from the outside, from their former environment and of imposing a rigid routine is to transform and rehabilitate them. In the case of **Marcos**, a political prisoner, prison was erasing his individual past together with his identity:

*“...you think of the past and of the future but in my case, I don’t know about the others, I’ve forgotten lots of things about the past, in me prison had an amnesia effect...I’ve forgotten many things, many passages of my life, I couldn’t remember them because I didn’t get the chance to talk about them or relate to the people I lived those times with, I couldn’t see them even sporadically, once or twice in a year, you see? Well ...prison sets a social distance from your environment and from the moments you lived, right? Let’s say that your mental pictures... start blurring...” (Marcos)*

The other Basque political prisoners struggled to keep their identities by holding on to their past memories and to avoid accepting their institutional definition as criminals. As **Rodrigo** expresses:

*“... what do you hold on to? to prison? that is, to the present? Of course not, you cling to the past, not to vindicate it, but because if not: what the hell! My thing is the life I had there, I mean, the life that I want is my country, my people... my family, my friends...they are there, you know, where were them? Well, in the past...” (Rodrigo)*

So they grouped together in prison to reinforce their identities. Their families and friends also organised to visit them regularly so that they kept their ties with their community and their past alive during the long years of imprisonment.

The experience of **Bobby Sands**, an Irish political prisoner, is similar. Bobby and his Irish comrades refused to wear prison uniforms because that would mean that they accepted the treatment as criminals and not as prisoners of war by the British Government. This refusal to conform with the requirements of the institution resulted in tortures. In order to cope with the harsh imprisonment and make sense of his resistance, he constantly went backwards in his memory:

*“And I thought of my dead comrades again. My friends who had stood beside me one day and were dead the next. Boys and girls just like myself, born and raised in the nationalist ghettos of Belfast to be murdered by foreign soldiers and lackey sectarian thugs.” (Sands 2001: 55)*

White-collar offenders, like political prisoners, struggled to keep their past alive and preserve their identities. However memories are also a double edged sword, since they remind the white-collar offenders how far is their present from their past life. The endless weekends are the time when memories from past life are brought back.

*“I feel very low. This is the worst period of the day. You think of your family and what you might be doing at this time on a Saturday evening - James and I would have been watching the Open Golf from Lytham & St Anne’s...” (Archer 2004: 39)*

*“I found myself thinking about the Sunday lunch I imagined ...in my absence, my mother and sister would be presiding. All the children would be round the table.” (Aitken 2005: 45)*

Common prisoners had a different relation with the past. For most of them their past was criminal life, so they kept bringing it back just to reinforce their identities as ‘criminals’. For others they lived through different stages in their past before entering prison. This can be illustrated by **Carlos** a common prisoner, he had two different “past”. The first one, “the far past”, comprises of his life until he migrated to Portugal to study at university. The second, “the near past”, started when he arrived in Spain to make some money and engaged in drug trafficking. He always stuck to his “far past” with the idea that one day he would finally have saved enough money to return to Portugal and continue his university course. He resisted to completely lose that identity:

*“... all the time I was in the streets I had the idea to go back [to Portugal to study] even though I had a girlfriend ... I always warned her that as soon as things were right for me I was going back...” (Carlos)*

When he entered prison he realised that he was not longer the one of that ‘far past’ but has become a ‘criminal’. From that time onwards, he worked to recover his identity as a university student.

### *1.2.- Present- Future*

The future appears to us as unknown, uncertain and out of our control. However, humanity develops institutional practices looking for safety, security and certainty, trying to give some predictability to the future (Adam 1990: 138-139).

In prison the future is scaring because it is not chosen, and simultaneously impossible to change. Moreover, because of the different systems of early release (which depend on the assessment of individual behaviour), it is not certain how long the time served will actually be. Finally, inmates are neither sure how their future outside prison is going to be like.

The future is even more risky for many of the Basque political prisoners because of their engagement in an armed organisation. Thus, before entering prison they were already cautious to make plans for their future.<sup>14</sup> Basque political prisoners entered prison in the early 1980s with extremely long sentences up to 30 years. However, they were confident that they would be released in a short or not too long time because they expected to be released as a result of the resolution of the conflict. There had been previously a general amnesty for all political prisoners<sup>15</sup> as **Facundo** explains:

*“... in the moment of entering prison, we talked to each other and said ‘Well, how long are we going to be in? You have to take into account that at that time most [Basque] political prisoners had been there for 3 years... then*

<sup>14</sup> As **Facundo** points out, they were arrested when they were young (in their mid-twenties) and therefore as most young people they were living mostly in the present:

*“... of course when you are young you don’t plan, you don’t worry about ‘what am I going to do?’... when you are young you don’t make the same projects, you live one day at a time...” (Facundo)*

<sup>15</sup> A general amnesty was declared in 1977.

*the perception of the duration of the sentence depended on the people who were in... Before amnesty, our people had served ten years at the most... then we thought 'well, that is the maximum that's been done' and ten years seemed forever... I had just entered and saw that some people had been in for 3 years and said 'wow...three years, that's a lot'..." (Facundo)*

However the conflict was not solved and they had to readjust their expectations:

*"...what happens? That the years pass by and you say 'no, this is still the same' so, subconsciously the mind starts adapting... in that moment things didn't come out right for us [the political solution to the problem] but well, your take it easy, [you think] political conditions will get better and you always keep the faith that one day it will come [the solution and consequently, the liberation] ..." (Facundo)*

To cope with their long sentences they left their individual projects and future aside and identified with the group's political future:

*"...your personal future is almost left aside, the militant future, the political future of the organisation and of the Basque national movement towards independence, everything is based on that, that's your future..." (Javier)*

This experience was shared by **Bobby Sands**, an Irish political prisoner:

*"but just as sure as the tomorrow would be filled with torture so would we [Irish POW] carry on and remain unbroken... some day victory would be ours and never again would another Irish man or woman rot in an English hell-hole" (Sands 2001: 117)*

It was also impossible to plan the future after prison since the system of early release based on the inmate's good behaviour did not give certainty, as **Facundo** and **Marcos** both political prisoners express:

*"...the exact date changes all the time... depending on the redemptions...according to your estimations you are free before or after, that's hard to do... then, until the [date] is set there's no certainty...when I was told the date one year before release I say 'ok, that's the date' and then you estimate that time redeemed, what is to come and what might be redeemed ... of course that by that time judges were cutting redemptions down... if they take redemptions away, you are there for all your sentence..." (Facundo)*

In the case of political prisoners, the political atmosphere also influenced the idea of that they had of their future in one way or the other. Because the Basque conflict is still ongoing and they are still engaged with the cause, they are cautious when planning their future after their release. They feel that a political decision could take them back to prison again anytime:

*"...I don't want to buy a house, I don't want to get married, I don't want a mortgage, not as long as this continues [Basque Country political conflict] because... not long ago a comrade that had been in for 21 years and been released, was applied a new legislation and had to go in for 4 more years, how can I know that it won't happen to me?" (Javier)*

For white-collar offenders thinking on future in prison is very difficult because it is completely opposite to their previous life, as **Archer**, white-collar offender, expresses:

*“When I remember that if my appeal fails the minimum time I will have to serve is two years, I can’t imagine how anyone with a life sentence can possibly cope...” (Archer 2003: 25)*

However after entering prison **Archer** realised the necessity to think with a perspective on the future:

*“On the slow journey back to Belmarsh, I once again consider what the future holds for me, and remain convinced I must above all things keep my mind alert and my body fit. The writing of a day-to-day diary seems to be my best chance for the former, and a quick return to the gym the only hope for the latter.” (Archer 2003: 36)*

This necessity to retake some control over his future is shared by **Jonathan Aitken**, another white-collar offender:

*“The 18-months sentence meant I would be out of jail in nine months’ time because of the automatic 50 per cent remission on all prison terms of less than four years... I could do my best to use the next 270 days in a positive way. Learning and changing would be my priorities. Nothing would be easy, I knew, but the worst was now over.” (Aitken 2005: 13)*

All these activities they projected to do in prison could work for some time but they also had to face the future in the long term:

*“Tony warns me that, wherever I go, I’ll be quickly bored if I don’t have a project to work on. Thankfully, writing these diaries has solved that problem. But for how long?” (Archer 2003: 151)*

*“I began to wonder whether I could possibly find a way to be positive in prison. Probably not, was my conclusion. I would be a crossing of the desert, to be endured with time without the grin. But after prison?” (Aitken 2005: 16)*

To cope with prison **Archer**, and according to him most prisoners he knew, surrendered to a dream of a better future and just hope for the best:

*“In my particular case, there is Hope, a word you hear prisoners using all the time. They hope that they’ll win their case, have their sentence cut, be let out on parole, or just be moved to a single cell.” (Archer 2003: 82)<sup>16</sup>*

In the group of common prisoners I found two different situations. For some it is only possible to cope with future in prison by focusing on future goals. These are the cases of **Carlos** and **Gustavo**, both common prisoners, who took a job and as many courses as they could. They lived present in prison but always with a future perspective. Presently, **Carlos** after 6 years and **Gustavo** after 7 months obtained the special status that allows them to spend the day outside.

For others, like **Pedro** (another common prisoner), they can cope with prison only by hoping that something unexpectedly good will shorten their sentences. In the case of **Pedro**, he always hoped he was going to escape from prison but he never did.

White-collar prisoners and political prisoners stick to their past to preserve their identities. This is by no means easy to achieve since prison isolation impacts on

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<sup>16</sup> In Archer’s case this hope comes from the possibility to be re-categorised as a D prisoner which would mean he will be transferred to an open prison, an issue that constantly occupied his mind. (2004a: 104)

them. The distance imposed between life in prison and the individual's previous environment breaks up ties with his past. For some common prisoners this distance allows them to leave the past aside and reconstruct their lives.

The future perspective is difficult to handle for inmates. Political prisoners left their future aside and did not think about it. White-collar offenders used their time in prison for projects with a future perspective and in that way they re-appropriate their future. Some common prisoners were able to cope with future by engaging in activities with future perspective, others just hoped something extraordinary will free them of their dark future.

## 2.- Collective Time Dimension

In prison collective time is defined by the institutional time regime. This rigid time regime imposed on inmates determines a special moment for each activity. Each inmate regardless his wish has to comply with it. The homogeneous and repetitive use of time does not only help prisons to be kept in order but also forces inmates to adjust their rhythms to the institutional one. This use of time has slightly changed since the times of the houses of corrections. Prison collective time is based on highly defined routines and long periods of inactivity, it is the time of a community that is not allowed to change.

### 2.1.- Timeless prisons

An ideological change took place in the late 1970s, which signified a shift from rehabilitating prisoners to controlling risk. This change is reflected in the architecture of the new maximum security prison but also in its internal regime. In the years of Franco prison buildings were old and large. Inmates were forced to work or to spend their time doing nothing, depending on the prison. Prisoners lived in communal bedrooms. **Pedro**, a common prisoner, remembers his first sentence in 1971:

*"...in Franco's times the law was what the screw [warden] wanted... there were prisons where there was no job of any kind..., it was a constant coming and going through the courtyard... there were no cells, there were communal dorms, 30 or 40 double bunk-beds, 40 or 50 prisoners per dorm, they opened the door in the morning, gave you breakfast and the only thing you could do was to walk up and down the courtyard until lunchtime, then a little nap, they opened the door and up and down the courtyard again, dinner, after dinner watching TV until 9m, in those days TV was not allowed inside the cell... and in the prisons where there were jobs, there were forced jobs, I mean, if you didn't have a reason to be in the courtyard, you weren't allowed to, in the workshop time you had to be inside the workshop, no matter what you were doing..." (Pedro)*

**Pedro** remembers those times with certain nostalgia. According to him at that time there was a sense of solidarity among prisoners. In those old big prisons, prisoners lived almost on their own. However, this solidarity among prisoners allowed them to organise their resistance to the authorities. With the introduction of the system of privilege and rewards based on good behaviour established in the early 1980s the resistance was broken and the solidarity vanished.

**Rodrigo, Javier, Facundo** and **Luisa**, all of them Basque political prisoners, lived in this kind of prison system when they entered prison in early 1980s. Buildings were

derelict and the institution only imposed a basic fixed timetable which included the time of the wake up call and getting up, opening of cells, lunch, return to the cell for a 'siesta' after lunch, dinner and going to sleep. The description of **Rodrigo, Javier** and **Facundo** of the prison of Carabanchel from 1981 to 1983 exemplifies this:

*"...it was a time when there were an important number of [Basque] prisoners and well... we could live together in a good atmosphere and beside that, we entered in Madrid...in [the prison of] Carabanchel, many comrades entered and it was a way of living in conditions which were quite deficient, but... we even organise ourselves the time to prepare the food, etc, we could get food from outside..." (Rodrigo)*

*"...[we were a] communes of political prisoners...we were several in one cell...in the cell we used to be, at least in my times, only us with the prisoners from other organised armed gangs... the corridors used to be open too.. so that we could go down to the courtyard if we wanted... we were not forced to go down to the courtyard..." (Javier)*

In this regime, political prisoners organised for themselves collective activities such as political assemblies, courses on political theory, sports. They lived following their own rhythm.

## *2.2.- Maximum security prison as a maximum imposition of time*

This regime was soon to be exchanged by a militarised one. In these new prisons a rigid and pervasive control over activities was imposed. The militarised regime obliged them to present themselves to be counted several times during the day, to endure body searches and to live in single cells.

*"... in the year [19]81 the prison of "Puerto de Santa María" was inaugurated... there was already a maximum security prison in Herrera [in La Mancha]... a total change of regimen, all that stuff about staying in your cell and all that, no. I was the one who rang in the morning and that meant 'To the courtyard! In lines!...' it was there when the confrontation as regards that started, we were not willing to put up with that kind of military regime... that turned into a total cut of communication with the outside ... that happened in Herrera...in those [max security] prisons the cells were individual.." (Rodrigo)*

This description of the prisons of maximum security of Puerto de Santa María and Herrera de la Mancha are similar to the description of Long Kesh, where **Bobby Sands** and the Irish political prisoner also suffered a change of regime. **Bobby Sands** and his Irish comrades were held isolated or with only one cell roommate. They were not allowed to spend time together, and they were locked up in their cells the whole day so they communicated through the windows by shouting:

*"A few of my comrades shared their experiences and injuries out the windows of a few cells down the wing." (Sands 2001: 30)*

**Bobby** and his group were not allowed to have any belongings so his life was timed by meals:

*"I heard the rattle of the trolley and I knew breakfast was coming..." (Sands 2001: 30)*

Irish prisoners (even under isolation) organised Gaelic classes. Gaelic reinforced the group identity as Euskera did for the Basques. Language classes were collective

and useful activities. Moreover, Gaelic and Euskera respectively allowed them to communicate without being understood by prison:

*“...one of the boys shouted ‘Rang anois summoning’ the lads to their doors for an Irish language class. The teacher was at the far end of the wing. He began to shout out the lessons at the top of his voice from behind his heavy steel door, asking questions, spelling out words and phrases, while the willing pupils scratched and scribbled them upon the dirty mutilated walls. It was a rough and rugged way of teaching but it worked...” (Sands 2001: 53)*

This change of regime led to the group of Irish political prisoners to engage in a strike. They refused to wear prison uniforms so they were held naked with only a blanket. Irish political prisoners demanded to be recognised as prisoners of war and to be held in a more relaxed regime, like the one they had previous to 1976. In 1984 Basque political prisoners engaged in a strike of communication. They disobeyed every order from prison officials and stayed all the time in their cells without any communication with the outside. In this strike, like the one by Irish prisoners, Basque political prisoners were fighting to recover the possibility to organise themselves as they were allowed to do before, and to recover their use of their collective time. They wanted to live collectively according to their own rhythm.

*“January [19]84: a collective claim, we locked ourselves in a cell, we weren’t going to do anything, it was a totally active claim, not just denying to go out of the cell but also to face prison personnel, the extortion, trying to provoke the maximum tension possible, of course, we were totally isolated, the first two months they wouldn’t take us to the yard, we communicated through the windows, the tactic then was a collective banging of doors in the mornings, midday and at night, five minutes banging doors, that produced a sound, an unbelievable sound, to create tension... plus all the families living around the prison... anything, any requirements that they made us, the answer was totally active, we completely denied ourselves... it was the police, we went to the yard with the “guardia civil”...a lot of tension... we were 10 months until, in the end, previously we had handed the direction a set of issues that we wanted, we thought they were more or less logical... inside prison we have the same right to have a life, a regime of life... to be able to communicate among ourselves, not to suffer totally unpunished provocations by...the prison personnel and well, 10 months later the director accepted these conditions, and since then we had a kind of life which is more reasonable and more relaxed...” (Facundo)*

This strike ended in a temporary victory for the group of Basque political prisoners. In the years to follow the rights they had won were taken away by the prison authorities. The possibility to live collective time was completely lost when the policy of dispersion was implemented by the end of the 1980s. As Basque prisoners were not longer held together and were spread all over Spain, they lost the possibility of organising themselves. They had to live under the collective time of the prison, which at the same time became more and more regulated. Isolation became widely used against political prisoners as **Marcos, another political prisoner**, testimonies:

*“...out of the 6 years I was in prison, I lived 3 in a let’s say “yard modality”, normal courtyard and the other 3 I was in an isolation cell and that’s another story, is the prison inside the prison...” (Marcos)*



*“...continuous isolation, the one I lived, are normal cells, in the cases I lived, they were smaller than the normal ones...you only have room to make three short steps inside the cell or you have to be sitting down or lying down... the isolation [cells] are underground and we have a window with bars and on the other side of the bars, like in some cases I knew, there is a plate with tiny wholes so that you can pass a ciggy, you live in this situation with artificial life well practically all day long... one day you have breakfast inside the cell, have lunch inside the cell, and dinner inside the cell, they give you food through the trap door... have breakfast in the cell, open the yard, open your door, a body search... and they take you out to the yard for 3 or 4 hours ... in the yard you are with 5 people... 4 days in the morning... at 1 they take you inside... you spend 20 hours inside the cell and 4 in the yard..” (Marcos)*

Under the regime of isolation, collective time did not longer exist for those who were excluded from the community of prisoners. Moreover, new prisons were internally divided into different wings or sections. Inmates of one section had no contact at all with inmates from other sections. Even so, Basque political prisoners managed to meet at times.

### *2.3.- The strict use of time*

The widespread use of isolation only affected political prisoners. Prison regime changed after the 1980s becoming highly regulated with many learning activities and some job opportunities. This is the prison that **Carlos** and **Gustavo**, both common prisoners, found when they entered in 2001 and 2007 respectively. The soon understood that even when work was not compulsory it was the key to improve their good behaviour records.

**Gustavo** obtained a job as an orderly and could move freely around the prison. He was also in the group of prisoners who were the first to be out in the morning and the last to return to their cells. Because of this job, he and the other prisoners in this category had the privilege to eat alone after the other inmates had finished their meal. In prison staying in the gallery fifteen minutes more or eating half an hour later are big privileges and demonstrations of power, precisely because the timetable is meant to be very rigid.

**Carlos** and **Gustavo** had jobs, a privileged position in prison, so they tried to avoid the yard where the social life of inmates took place as much as they could. For the authorities and personnel, the yard is the place where the prisoners who did not take up any ‘positive’ activity spend their time. So being related to them was not convenient for an inmate who wanted to be considered a model prisoner.

Even when they tried to adjust to the prison timetable by engaging they found themselves at some time overwhelmed by the monotonous and routine life in prison, as **Carlos** expresses:

*“...up and down, up and down, there is nothing else, a Monday can be exactly the same as a Sunday... this routine is boring... it’s boring even if you are constantly working or in activities, it comes a time...I’ve never seen a person [tolerating] doing sports 3 years in a row, they get bored by the year and a half... with the workshop is the same...” (Carlos)*

**Carlos** and **Gustavo** lived the collective time prison imposed and they mastered the demands of prison. In contrast, **Pedro**, another common prisoner, never conformed to the prison timetable and always was in a struggle against the system.

In fact **Pedro** represents the vast majority of inmates since, according to him, only a minority has jobs such as the one **Carlos** and **Gustavo** have:

*“Now you can work in prisons, but come on, it was not common... I mean, having workshops in prison... 10 or 15% of the inmates could work in prison like in Sevilla, ‘cos there aren’t any production workshops, there is no inmate who can actually make money by working...”(Pedro)<sup>17</sup>*

To white-collar offenders prison schedule is a completely shocking experience. They are used to the standards of the outside so neither **Archer** nor **Aitken** considered work in prison real work:

*“My group consists of four inmates whose purpose is to fill a small plastic bag with all the ingredients necessary to make a cup of tea...My job is to seal up the bag and drop it in the large open bucket at my end of the table. Every fifteen minutes or so another prisoner..., comes and empties the bucket. This mind numbing exercise continues for approximately two hours, for which I will be credited with two pounds in my canteen account.” (Archer 2003: 134)*

*“Work was a complete misnomer. I was one of about 30 prisoners sent to Workshop One, a factory floor space in the basement of the prison. It took the best part of an hour to get there because frequent head counts, recounts and body searches applied to our working party as we progressed at a snail’s pace through numerous locked gates and checkpoints towards our destination... [the work] was so mind-numbingly boring that it quickly led us into bad habits... One was to fold large plastic bags down into small squares which we then stuffed into tiny plastic envelopes. ‘To incentive you, you are on piecework rates,’ said the factory manager. This sounded admirable too until you learned the rate for the piece, which was 0.1 p per bag folded. Any really fast worker could get a bag into its envelope in 30 seconds which meant earning 12p an hour. Most of us were far slower than that because this pay incentives talking and time-wasting much more than folding bags... This was not real work, it was a time-filling exercise.” (Aitken 2005: 46-7)*

White-collar offenders are used to live in the post-modern information society in which people are all the time communicated through mobile phone, internet, etc.. Thus, in prison the restrictions on the communication with the outside obliged white-collar offenders to make a conscious use of time,<sup>18</sup> as **Archer** illustrates:

*“James [Archer son] is the first through the door..., followed by William [his other son], then David [his former driver]. Once we have completed the hugs and greetings I explain that I wish to allocate the two hours judiciously. The first half hour I’ll spend with William, the second with James and the third with David, before having the final half hour with all three of them.” (Archer 2004a: 189)*

<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that the percentage that **Pedro** indicates is close to the figures that the Human Rights Watch presented in their Global Report on Prisons (1993): 20% working population in prison.

<sup>18</sup> In an English medium security prison visits must be booked in advance and they are limited to one every two weeks (Archer 2004a: 21), letters are not limited at all and phonecalls are limited to a £2 phonecard per week which give time for a call according to destination, for example twenty minutes for a national call (Archer 2003: 17). So the two-hour visit every two weeks and the twenty minutes phonecall per week is the time to establish contact with the outside.

Time is abundant in prison and because of this, it loses its value. Even when time is strictly regulated by the use the inmate does of it, the institution does not operate in the same way. For the institution inmates' own time is not important and they have to conform with the needs of the institution. In this way time is used to re-affirm the power relations within prison:

*"My tiny window is flicked open and Ms Newsome shouts, 'Archer, you're being moved to House Block One, get your things ready.' I should have realized by now that such a warning would be followed by at least a two-hour wait, but inexperience causes me to abandon any attempt to shave and quickly gather together my belongings." (Archer 2003: 63)*

*"Waiting in prison for your next activity is not unlike hanging around for the next bus. It might come along in a few moments, or you may have to wait for half an hour. Usually the latter." (Archer 2003: 122)*

*"Banged up for another two hours because the staff are having their fortnightly training session in the gym... One good thing about all this is that the tax payer is saved having to fund my pottery class." (Archer 2004a: 126)*

*"I arrive for my pottery class to find it's been cancelled because the teacher hasn't turned up. Shaun tells me this is a regular occurrence, and he seems to be the only person who is disappointed because he was hoping to finish a painting. It gives me another couple of hours to write, while the other prisoners are happy to go off to the gym or their cells while still being paid £1.40." (Archer 2004a: 168)*

*"Pottery is cancelled as once a fortnight the prison officers carry out a session of in-house training, which means we're banged up for the rest of the morning." (Archer 2004a: 201)*

*"Pottery is cancelled because Anne's car has broken down, so all the prisoners in the art class have to return to their cells..." (Archer 2004a: 224)*

Inmates' time does not count so appointments can be just cancelled or they can be kept waiting. This situation lived by inmates from all the three groups is particularly painful for white-collar offenders whose time used to be valuable before.

In sum, the prison timetable has varied slightly since 1970s. The same timetable based on two rigid shifts (morning and afternoon) still continues up to these days. The prison uses a factory timetable emptied of its productive activities. Work in prison is not real work. Those two 'shifts' are mostly spent by inmates in the yard, where social life takes place with nothing to do except talking and walking.

The prison regime has included more activities for prisoners but this brought more regulation. However, this regulation only applies to inmates because their time does not count to authorities.

Notwithstanding the excess of time, the strict timetable produces paradoxical situations like being rushed inside prison as **Archer** describes:

*"I am first at the gate, because I'll have to be in and out of the shower fairly quickly if I'm to get to the library before the doors are locked." (Archer 2004a: 99)*

### 3.- The Individual Autonomy Dimension

Temporal autonomy is the discretionary control over how one chooses to use one's own time. I have argued that prison was not so much about controlling the prisoner's actions but rather a denial of their temporal autonomy. They are all the time deprived of the possibility to do whatever is not specifically permitted. Temporal autonomy in prison is reduced to the space within the timetable imposed by the institution and the range of possible activities that prison provides.

*"...there is always a norm: you are also at the expense of that norm, you never have the initiative to be able to say 'I get up when I want, I do what I want'... you are imposed when to get up..." (Facundo)*

The changes in the collective time regime from early 1970s until the present have obviously had a huge impact on the autonomy that prisoners can exert over their time. On the one hand, prisoners used to have much more autonomy before the changes when prison service was not so pervasive and all-encompassing in the regulation of daily life. On the other hand, contemporary prisons offer several possibilities of activities: courses in Spanish, university degrees, workshops, craft education and different kinds of jobs. All of these provide the inmate with a variety of activities to choose from, and they decide on how to spend their time. However, the way they do it is scrutinised by the prison service as it provides information for future permissions and early release. Thus, even when there is autonomy, this is regulated by the authorities.

Basque political prisoners suffered the most from the change in their prison regime at that time. Isolation which before had been a provisional measure began to be widely used. The inmate was locked up in the cell for 23 hours per day and that reduced the choice to spend their time to: thinking, reading, writing and doing the physical exercise the cell dimensions allowed. In order to kill some of that time, they invented activities such as:

*"... with the blade of a pencil-sharpener I managed to carve a piece of wood ... there were people who even made balls to play 'pelota' [a Basque game]... they unweaved a jersey, took the wooden and made balls..." (Javier)*

**Bobby Sands'** experience was similar. His temporal autonomy under the regime of isolation was minimal. He was locked up 24 hours a day in his cell with no belongings so he killed time by walking in the cell to keep him warm. He also engaged in other activities like making useful tools to share things (from cigarettes to toilet paper) with other inmates, i.e. :

*"I began stripping pieces of thread from one of my flimsy blankets and started to plait them together to pass the time, making a long line that hopefully would come in handy latter." (Sands 2001: 68)*

The complete deprivation of activities forced him to search for something to kill time:

*"I gathered a few crusts of bread from the floor and flung them out the window to the smaller citizens, the sparrows, and stood watching them pecking their little hearts out. Many an (sic) hour I passed at this window just watching the birds, I thought... They [the sparrows] were my only form of entertainment during the long boring days and they came every day now since I began throwing the crusts of bread out to them." (Sands 2001: 51)*

### 3.1.- Individual autonomy in current prisons

Almost all the evidence gathered from interviews and autobiographies show that the majority of prisoners spend their own time when they leave their cells and go down into the yard to talk, walk and play domino, chess or other games with cards or dices. An important part of the prison population uses drugs which have a strong impact on how they perceive time.<sup>19</sup> In this section I will focus on how each group use different strategies to make use of their temporal autonomy.

**Jeffrey Archer**, a white-collar offender, was a writer before being sent to prison. Thus, he decided to write a diary and used his time instead of wasting it. It also helped him to preserve his identity as writer:

*“Eventually I turn my mind to the future. Determined not to waste an hour, I decide to write a daily diary of everything I experience while incarcerated.”*  
(Archer 2003: 11)

Immediately he tried to create a similar routine in prison to the one he had outside:

*“I resolve to spend the time that I am locked up in my cell writing, sticking to a routine I have followed for the past twenty-five years - two hours on, two hours off - though never before in such surroundings.”* (Archer 2003: 20)

Prisoners have to live following the routine imposed by the prison schedule. Even prisoners who were well organised and led lives according to time schedules before entering prison dislike the prison routine because it is not their own but institutional:

*“I’m used to a disciplined, well-ordered life, but it’s no longer self-discipline because someone else is giving the orders.”* (Archer 2003: 77)

Even so, for white-collar offenders to create their own routine was vitally important to be able to adjust to prison. In that way, they planned their days doing meaningful things. Even if they did not have complete control, they managed to re-appropriate some of the time that had been taken away by the institution.

*“I’ve now fallen into a routine, much as I had in the outside world. The big difference is that I have little or no control over when I can and cannot write, so I fit my hours round the prison timetable. Immediately after evening lock-up is designated for reading letters, break, followed by going over my manuscript, break, reading the*

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<sup>19</sup> Finally, an important part of the prison population can only cope with prison time regimes by turning to ‘inner time’ and becoming more involved with their own inner experience (Matthews 1999: 40). Taking drugs is one way to do it since the inmate “is able to place time into further suspension and thereby release [itself]..., albeit temporarily, from the apparent timelessness of prison life.” As Matthews says “Drugs do more than tranquilise or anaesthetise the prisoner: they readjust time” (Matthews 1999: 40-41) because “For those who were regular drug users before entering prison, drugs normalise time, in that its passing corresponds to those forms of social time which were previously experienced on the outside”(Matthews 1999: 41). But also the drug subculture “provides a way of organising daily life and giving meaning to the prison routine that for some approximates to the normal routines of life outside the confines of prison.” Thus, prisoners engage in activities like buying or trading which correspond to the activities conducted on the outside (Matthews 1999: 41). However, since these actions do not seek to change prison conditions but merely to avoid them they could hardly be defined as actions of resistance but rather as ways of coping with prison time experience.

*book of the week, break, undress, go to bed, break, try to ignore the inevitable rap music.” (Archer 2003: 150)*

*“Gradually I settled down into a slower-paced routine whose main ingredients were work, exercise and blending into the community.” (Aitken 2005: 46)*

The routine in prison is double-edged since after a certain time prisoners get inevitably bored, any thing which can break that routine is welcomed:

*“Although my life is beginning to fall into a senseless routine, I hope to at least break it up today by going to the gym.” (Archer 2003: 77)*

This is particularly the case when these breaking points are based on their desires or decisions. In contrast the routine they have created for themselves is many times broken by the institution, thus making their idea of having control of their lives obsolete in the end:

*“I’m pacing up and down the cell waiting for the gym call when a voice bellows out from below, ‘Gym is cancelled.’ My heart sinks and I stare out of the barred window, wondering why.” (Archer 2003: 77)*

Prisoners who lived outside in a (post-modern) hurry, can only cope with prison by engaging in as many activities as they can, trying to emulate their former life:

*“8.00 pm - Pottery followed by an interview with the lady from Belmarsh, followed by education, followed by the gym, followed by Sergio and his lecture on emeralds, interspersed with three writing sessions. I’m exhausted.” (Archer 2003: 163)*

In his emulation of his former life, **Archer** reached a point where he organised his social life by means of appointments:

*“Lunch. I haven’t had a chance to speak to Dale or Sergio yet, so I fix appointments with Dale at 2 pm and Sergio at 3 pm.” (Archer 2004a: 100) “Fletch wants to come to my cell at six and read something to me. I ask if he could make it seven, as I’ll still be writing at six. ‘Suits me,’ he says, ‘I’m not going anywhere.’” (Archer 2003: 218-219)*

Interesting enough, **Marcos’** narrative (a political prisoner) agrees with white-collar offenders’ narratives. His previous profession as an actor made him to live in a post-modern society in contrast with their comrades who lived in their small communities. Thus, he lived prison similarly as **Aitken** and **Acher**:

*“I, for example, was missing hours. A day is 24 hours long and I would have liked it to be longer, why? ‘cos I created some challenges for myself, right? I studied, I like studying, reading, writing...I like writing letters a lot, well then I said to myself ‘I have to write a number of letters, I have to write this and that or I have to study all this and I have to do a certain number of hours of exercise and then I have to...’I don’t know... well the day was not long enough so I had to say ‘ok, I leave it here and catch up tomorrow’, then life was lighter, if you do something, in some moment of the day you forget reality, in fact it is impossible to forget but at least you can say that you forget where you are...” (Marcos)*

In his diary **Jeffrey Archer** made daily entries at the exact time, that indicates his constant use of the watch. Again, **Marcos’** narrative is closer to the experience of

white-collar offenders than to the one of their comrades. For **Marcos** having a watch allowed him to feel some sense of control over his time:

*“... It [the watch] is quite important... however, when I was on the streets I didn't use a watch... if I needed to know the time, I looked for a clock or I asked someone... Why [is the watch important for me in jail]? Well, 'cos you check and say 'it's 4:30 in about 2 hours or so we are having dinner' or 'it's just 20 minutes until they open the [coffee shop] and we can have a cuppa'... I dunno, there are certain occasions where they take you in isolation, you have no radio, no one, you don't know what time it is, I wanted to know the time... I needed a watch and then during the 'vis-a-vis' you know you only have an hour so you are constantly looking at the watch instead of asking all the time, you get used to having your own watch and you say 'ok I got 10 minutes left'...”*

On the contrary, **Facundo** (a political prisoner) reflects the general opinion of this group, i.e. the watch is not so important:

*“...inside/prison/ everything is so restricted, the timetable is so strict, you kind of know more or less the time to go back to your cell or you know we have lunch at 1... you don't really need a watch that much, unless you are thinking of studying for 30 minutes and they I want to do something different, in that case you would check[your watch], but the watch is not very useful to organise the day... 'cos everything has already been organised for you according to the norm... you don't have that responsibility, that was something you had... outside you have to organise your life and take the initiative ...”*

**Facundo** only thinks of the watch as a tool for organising activities severely restricted under the prison regime, but for **Marcos** to 'know' the time is to re-appropriate some control over his time.

**Archer** and **Aitken**, both white-collar offenders, did not only engage in activities useful for them but also engaged in activities to help other inmates. These activities reinforced the status they had (on the outside) inside prison and establish a difference between them and the rest of inmates:

*“I remind Judy that... would like to use my time to teach other prisoners to read and write. Judy considers this suggestion, but would prefer I gave a creative-writing course, as there are several inmates working on books, poems and essays who will have dozens of unanswered questions.” (Archer 2003: 143)*

*“One by one the guys in the queue came into my cell, and sat on my bed as I read them the letters they could not read for themselves. On that first evening I thought this activity was probably a one-off event. I was wrong. For the reading and writing of prisoners' letters, often on the most intimate subjects imaginable, became a routine feature of my daily life throughout my sentence. I was also the entry ticket which enabled me to become accepted as a 'regular guy', a fully fledged member of the prison community.” (Aitken 2005: 37)*

In regimes where inmates are not locked up in their cells the problem of having so much time with so little to do is oppressive. Autonomy requires not only the freedom to act but also the resources to put that freedom into practice. The

situation of contemporary prisoners is similar to the one of poor people who have a lot of free time but cannot use it since they do not have the resources needed for travelling, going out, to cinema, etc.. In that way the postmodern prison continues where the industrial one started, with a time regime similar to that of the underclass and excluded. However, unlike the prison in the industrial period, the time regime does not simulate work, but reflects unemployment and service employment (as e.g. cleaning) **Archer**'s narrative illustrates the situation:

*“Sunday is always the longest day in prison. Wayland is short-staffed and there is nothing for inmates to do other than watch wall-to-wall television... in Wayland you're out of your cell without anything to keep you occupied.”*  
(**Archer** 2004a: 145)

Common prisoners' decisions to engage in activities are often geared towards improving their record of “good behaviour” with prison officers. Work in prison is the most obvious case. When **Carlos** was offered to be responsible for cleaning he immediately accepted. Although he had taken the system of rewards and privilege into account, there was another reason to accept the job: The rewarding feeling of being useful.

*“... work [in prison] isn't like the job of the people who are free, even though [the interns] try to make them look similar ... those people [inmates] when they work in the workshop they consider themselves valuable, useful for the society because they work...”* (**Carlos**)

**Gustavo**, another common prisoner, managed to obtain a part-time the job as orderly. Due to this job, he had a special regime, he could leave his cell in advance of the other prisoners and was locked up one hour later. One of the things he appreciated most was to be able to eat after the other prisoners had finished their meals. It is interesting to explore why **Gustavo** was enjoyed this so much. He did not win more free ‘time’ or any other privilege, he ate the same food and sat at the same table as the others. It seems that what he liked was the sense power that he got from being off schedule, the power of not being just another inmate, but a special one. In an institution that has the objective to homogenise the inmates as far as possible and mostly achieves this through a time regime, **Gustavo**'s special temporal treatment is highly valued.

If inmates do not get a job inside prison, their autonomy is dramatically reduced. That is because besides not having the opportunity to kill time in the job, they are regarded by the prison system as behaving in a non-cooperative way so their choices to study or to engage in craft courses are limited. In those conditions, according to **Pedro**, inmates cannot choose even whether to stay in their cells or go down to the yard. They must leave their cells:

*“If you are not working, you are walking in the yard all day, you can't even stay in your cell, which would be the normal thing to do...”* (**Pedro**)

With so much time and nothing to do, it is not surprising to find that a great part of prisoners devote their time to the consumption of drugs. Their autonomy is lost to their addiction, and they find it difficult to engage in any other activity. As **Pedro**, a common prisoner, says they spend their whole time thinking about drugs:

*“... [the addict prisoners] spend 24 hours a day walking to see how they are going to manage to have another go 'cos 3 or 4 hours later you will feel like getting high and of course a person that is 24/7 thinking about getting high does not even notice how terrible prison treatment is...”* (**Pedro**)



Prison deprives inmates of most of their time autonomy. This paternalistic behaviour of the institution towards inmates led Archer to write in his diary that being in prison:

*"...feels like being back at school at the wrong end of your life." (Archer 2003: 88)*

Inmates who play by the prison rules can benefit from these new opportunities and at the same time work towards an early release. However, this attitude implies accepting the authority of prison and that the institution knows what is best for the inmate, better than the inmates themselves.

#### 4.- The experience of subjective time

The experience of subjective time is the individual perception of time. It is only accessible as a lived reality and hard to be measured. The subjective experience of time is highly volatile, diverse and differs from a situation to the next. **Facundo**, a political prisoner, explains:

*"... you do time, time is your life, is all your past and all the things you want for your future and for your present... I associate it with the person itself...there are shorter times, longer times, that's why it is so related to the mind and the person, there is where time is and there is the possibility to change time along...it can be terribly long or short, it is you who, in the end, configures time..." (Facundo)*

I have shown in the previous subsections how prison experience can be analysed from different time perspectives. These were the dimensions of past-present-future, collective time and individual time autonomy. I will argue that the subjective experience of time in prison can be understood as the result of the combination of all these dimensions.

It is shaped by collective time because of its imposed and rigid social rhythm. Inmates need to adjust up some extent to the prison timetable or they will be punished, but also to the other prisoners' time such as talking time, playing time, etc., otherwise they will be left alone. In prison collective time as I have analysed imposes a monotonous routine. It is this routine that produces boredom and with it the sense that time passes extremely slowly. All the interviewees agree that dealing with boredom was their main problem, as **Archer** illustrates:

*"The biggest enemy I have to contend with is boredom, and it's a killer." (Archer 2004b: 245)*

Within this collective time frame, as Husserl pointed out, the 'living present' of the inmates includes both what has been and what is to become. The past of inmates defines their identities, and their future defines their. Both the past identity and future expectations shape their subjective perception of time. Nevertheless, inmates have the possibility to change this perception. Even inside prison where individuals only have a restricted temporal autonomy, the different groups of prisoners all agree that the way time is experienced depends on how they made use of it. However, strategies to 'kill time' in prison differ between groups.

The group of Basque political prisoners dealt with boredom as long as they could be together with their comrades. **Luisa, Javier, Rodrigo, and Facundo** point out that those years in prison allowed them to establish such close friendships that they feel their time in prison was not lost. Their strong past identities as Basques gave them a sense of group identity. They adjusted to prison rhythms because they first adjusted to the rhythms of their groups. The collective time of their group was defined by the outside and their past experience of the long duration of a political process with a necessary long-term perspective. They lived their time in prison as part of their commitment to this ongoing and long struggle. Consequently, prison time was not meaningless for them, and they were as patient. This patience helped them to use time inside prison for different self-improvement activities such as studying, writing, reading or physical exercise. They managed to make time in prison not a burden but a resource. When they returned to society they missed those periods of time they used to have completely for themselves:

*“... time inside and time outside, I used to have time...I had all day to read, to do manual work... sometimes I get scared when I want to have a walk with a friend and I can't find time, I want to read a book and it takes me a month and before [in prison] it took me a day, those things you had time for and now you don't...” (Javier)*

**Marcos**, another political prisoner, who entered prison twenty years later, also used his time in prison for self-improvement activities. In contrast to the rest of the group he engaged in such a packed routine that his days were ‘not long enough’. His past identity comprised not only the political struggle but also his profession as actor. Thus, he managed to live prison time following the rhythm of the post-modern life he had outside. Even in prison he was in a hurry.

A key for his strategy to cope with prison time for all the group of political prisoners was to keep a delicate equilibrium between having some future perspective through the activities they engaged, such as following a course of studies, and at the same time focusing on the present:

*“it depends on how you set yourself up for [what inmates do in prison], there are people who are only there to be, be and nothing else... if you have some kind of initiative or a little vision, you devote yourself to learn something, to take care of yourself, at a physical level and mental level ... [however] the only way to carry this out can't be by counting down... you have to live a day at a time and see what happens day by day...” (Facundo)*

These strategies to cope with time were possible only because prisoners had access (even if restricted) to books, paper, etc. However, all the Basque political prisoners spent many of their years in prison under a regime of isolation. Under this regime they spent 23 hours a day in their cells, and their access to books, paper and other belongings was even more restricted (e.g. they could only have three books and had to change them once a week). So boredom was inevitable for **Javier** :

*“[under isolation] you read the same three book a hundred time, you get so bored that you spend all day long looking at the ceiling and thinking, thinking...” (Javier)*

Similar to this experience was the one of **Bobby Sands**:

*“In the first light of morning boredom began to set in. The day ahead would seem like eternity and depression would soon be my companion again.” (Sands, 2001: 26) “the arrival of dinner did not only mean food ... it also*

*meant that you would only have half a day left to battle with.” (Sands 2001: 45)*

Both the white-collar prisoners adjusted easily to the collective time prison imposes. Because of their backgrounds, they complied normally with prison rules and consequently they do not experienced isolation. Even so, they had to cope with the long hours of being locked up, an opposite experience to their post-modern highly dynamic life they used to have:

*“What is almost impossible to describe in its full horror is the time you spend banged up...” (Archer 2003: 82)*

*“When I wake, I begin to think about my first week in prison. The longest week of my life.” (Archer 2003: 87)*

So, **Archer** tried to fulfil this temporal emptiness by writing a diary. Although he wrote several entries every day, he warns the reader not to consider that his days were a continuum of interesting events:

*“I would only ask you to think about the endless hours in between [the entries].” (Archer 2003: 82)*

By being locked up in the cell with nothing to do made them be fully conscious of time:

*“As the cell door slams shut, I reflect on the fact that for the next seventeen hours I will be left alone in a room nine feet by six.” (Archer 2003: 39)*

In these circumstances, avoiding the consciousness of time and forgetting about it is highly tempting. One way to achieve this is through drugs, another strategy is sleeping:

*“Last night Jules made an interesting observation about sleep: it’s the only time when you’re not in jail, and it cuts your sentence by a third. Is this the reason why so many prisoners spend so much time in bed? Dale adds that some of them are ‘gouching out’ after chasing the dragon. This can cause them to sleep for twelve to fourteen hours, and helps kill the weekend, as well as themselves.” (Archer 2004a: 20)*

Although tempting, neither **Archer** nor **Aitken** used sleep or drugs to avoid prison time because it was completely against their past identity. Instead of trying to kill time, they searched for ways to fill their time with meaningful activities directed towards a future perspective:

*“Even when at weekends we were banged up for 22 to 23 hours in the day, I filled almost every minute with journeys of the mind, pen and spirit. Rarely did I take a nap during the day. [An ex-prisoner] had warned me of the depressing effects he had noticed on prisoners, during his time in jail, if they tried to ‘sleep away their sentences’...” (Aitken 2005: 75-6)*

In a way similar to **Archer** with his diary, **Aitken** fought boredom mainly with four activities: praying and bible reading, studying, reading and writing letters.

*“The four disciplines [described above] kept me busy and also surprisingly fulfilled. By changing them around and even adding more activities to them, such as learning poetry and keeping my diary, I was never bored. One way and another I made the best of the long hours of solitary bang-up and turned its curses into blessings.” (Aitken 2005: 77)*

Thus, they both managed to make their time pass faster through activities, however, such activities were not the ones characteristics of a post-modern life but rather of a noble pre-industrial life-style (a monkish life in a monastery (praying) or of the educated middle classes in industrial societies). They used pre-post-modern activities to spend their time because are the activities that suited in the prison unmodified regime.

Common prisoners did not have a community inside prison like political prisoners to support them, nor did they have the background that allowed white-collar prisoners to engage in writing their own diaries. Thus, they did not enter prison with an outside identity and strategies that could help them to cope with time. Consequently, they had to engage with what prison provided them to cope with the slow passing of time.

Whilst **Carlos** worked in the workshops and used the rest of the time to study, **Gustavo** got the job of orderly which demanded him to work the seven days a week. **Gustavo** also attended several courses such as on electricity or bricklaying, not so much because of the knowledge they could provide him with but to be able to talk with the teacher. The teacher brought a sense of time outside back to the inside. The hours he spent talking with him “flew away”.

**Carlos** and **Gustavo** agree on that they had to keep themselves moving. **Gustavo** expresses this necessity to keep on moving: *“if you stop, you become a living dead”*. They coped with time by not thinking about even the short term future, and by absolutely focusing on the present:

*“... to me, time since the moment I am here in jail has to be lived second by second, and make plans about the seconds going by, not long termed plans... if you consider that life has stopped, it will . But if you say ‘no, it will not stop here. I can do it’...” (Carlos)*

Activities became the resources to fight boredom, but similar to **Archer**, the daily fight was not easy at all:

*“day by day in jail is difficult...it is (in those moment) when we say that (we do time)...but it is not that we are missing activities to do, there are activities, but they are... the routine...it’s boring...” (Carlos)*

It is even more difficult for inmates who do not have the initiative or the possibilities to have a job in prison. **Pedro** used to kill his time inside with drugs. Drugs not only help prisoners to forget time and lose the sense of time when they are ‘high’ but also when they are ‘down’. Everything that matters for an addict are drugs, and thus drugs provide a rhythm of activities and excitement:

*“... I realised a lot less [of the facts happening around] when I was hooked ‘cos in that dynamics, I was looking for the next pico(dose), you know what I mean, when you quit, jail is much more frustrating ...” (Pedro)*

Even if **Pedro** found time in prison extremely frustrating, he did not develop any other strategy to kill time. He, like the vast majority of inmates, spent most of his time in the yard, walking from one side to the other, reflecting with his monotonous endlessly repeating movement the way time passes in prison.

## V.- CONCLUSIONS

### 1.- The pervasiveness of prison time

Time in prison is omnipresent. It measures the punishment through the sentence length. It is also used to determine the conditions of life inside through its meticulous time regime. Prison takes away prisoners' time and imposes the institutional time onto them. Thus, a better understanding of prisons needs a reflection on the specific characteristics of time inside, however, time inside can also inform our understanding of time outside.

Our perception of time has changed over time. This change was essential for the emergence of prison; prison is the "child" of changing perceptions of time. From this perspective the role could be explored that prison had in the consolidation of the time regime imposed on the working class during industrialisation.

Against this backdrop the next sea change in the perception of time after the second half of 1970s in Western societies is identified. A process of time compression started in these societies, engendered by changes in the mode of production and new technologies. Both led to a social acceleration which makes us feel that we were constantly in a hurry.

Contemporary prisons have lost their early function as a productive unit and consequently also lost their function in the formation of workers through the imposition of time discipline. Presently, prison does not need to prepare unskilled workers, and consequently its only remaining function is to punish. However, prisons have kept the time regime from the previous era of its "birth". Its fixed timetable has not radically changed. In post-modernity prison did not follow the acceleration or time compression of the rest of society. On the contrary, prison time expanded in the last 30 years as indicated by the increasing length of sentences. This can be seen as a contradiction to the rhythms of society but in fact it is not. In post-modern society time is extremely valued and a scarce resource only for a part of the population. The lower classes, i.e. unskilled workers and the permanently unemployed, do not live in a hurry because they have time in excess. Unskilled labour has largely moved to third-world countries where labour is cheaper. In post-modern societies time is experienced differently according to the social class individuals belong to. The vast majority of the contemporary prison population always came from lower classes; however, presently migrants and foreign born individuals are added. Therefore it is not surprising that prison has not fundamentally changed its use of time. Prison, corresponding to the productive system, considers their time as not valuable, and treats it accordingly.

During the last 30 years new labour market strategies eroded working class solidarity and their power to organise, e.g. through temporal contracts. Coinciding with this, prisons developed a system of privileges and rewards that individualised prisoners and depleted group solidarity. This system required that prisoners could actually take part in activities to show "good behaviour", and therefore numerous activities were implemented in prisons. This on the one hand provided prisoners with more resources to use their time, but on the other hand there were never enough jobs for every inmate and the activities offered were also used as a mechanism to enforce conformity with prison authorities. Bargaining prison time

with inmates allowed the prison system to induce individualistic behaviour in inmates and to keep them docile.

My analysis of the three groups of prisoners revealed how time is experienced differently according to the previous social status of the inmate. Clearly political prisoners and white-collar offenders are minorities in the prison system. However, this allows to shed light on the different ways time can be experienced. Surely within the group of common prisoners more divisions could be made according to their background, but for the purpose of this study it was enough to analyse them as a group to highlight similarities or differences with the other two groups.

From the narrative interviews as well as from the autobiographies it can be concluded that the inmate's previous experience of time will affect how they deal with prison time. Those who previously lived in a hurry will suffer the shock of imprisonment the most. However, they will easily conform to prison standards of behaviour and so they will live a more relaxed time regime than the rest of prisoners. They need to transform wasted time into invested time, and they could achieve this through their skills such as writing or reading, which are not that common among the rest of the prison population.

Political prisoners did not suffer from the prison time regime in the same way, even when they were under a regime of isolation for many years. Their time consciousness was tied to a long political process, as well as to the sense of group identity that this process engendered. They lived the rhythms of their group and they kept that rhythm even in isolation. Political prisoners show us the strength of prisoners when they organise themselves, the possibility of resistance even when facing a total institution, but most importantly this study shows how they kept their own organisation of group time instead of the institutional imposed one.

In this group Marcos was the exception. He did have the sense of group identity, but his rhythms were the ones of outside society because he worked all over Spain. In fact the way he dealt with time was closer to the white-collar group than to the group of political prisoners.

Finally, the common prisoners clearly have a different experience of time. Each of the three interviews shows different ways of dealing with time. Gustavo used all his social skills to conform to prison standards, and he obtained a job which gave him a more relaxed timetable. He kept moving all over the prison (he was an orderly) to kill time. Carlos accepted the imposition of the prison time regime completely by taking up a job in the workshop. He tried to spend his time the way prison required of him. Routine brought boredom but he faced it by focusing on the hope that suffering will pay off. The case of Pedro is in contrast to this. Pedro represented in this study the majority of the prison population who never had a regular job. He used and abused of drugs to kill time inside. He always fought against prison authorities, however, his lack of skills led him to kill his time in the yard. The yard is where most inmates kill their time by walking nowhere, talking about the same things, playing the same games. It is the yard in these interminable walks from one side to the other where time and with it life slowly dies.

The acceleration of our times has not penetrated prison. Even though, the offer to inmates of a wider range of activities could be understood as seeking to diminish

the clash between outer time compression and time inside. However, reproducing the capitalist logic that made consumption only accessible to medium and high classes those new activities that prison offers are only accessible to a minority inside. If one of the characteristic features of post-modernity is an acceleration of social life, which implies doing more things in less time, prison represents the opposite side, an institution where inmates do more time without really doing anything.

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