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Emotions behind Bars: The Regulation of Mothering in Argentine Jails

Prisons in Argentina are typically depicted as negative spaces of reclusion and social control characterized by appalling conditions and by the violence that state workers exercise on the bodies of detainees—characteristics altogether at odds with the notion that these institutions are mechanisms of social rehabilitation.[1] Yet prisons are also enmeshed in affective economies with complex ties to the nation as an imagined community.[2] Prisons and their inmates are targets of fear and retribution, just as they are evidence of failed social inclusion. With the dramatic increase in the number of women in federal prisons over the past two decades, Argentina has grappled with the sticky emotions of fear and rejection associated with imprisoned mothers and the intricate challenges posed by the incarceration of their children, who have committed no crimes. With the growing presence of migrant women in the prison population, the state also crafts punitive regimes that position these "other" mothers in an ambivalent relation to the gendered national collective. By connecting the sociology of emotion with the sociology of power relations, we analyze the penitentiary system as a multifaceted affective economy that produces and sustains boundaries of difference grounded in race, nationality, and gender through the regulation of mothering.

Sara Ahmed (2004) conceives affective economies as collective spaces in which emotions circulate without inhabiting any particular object, body, or sign. In the absence of any clearly identifiable source or goal, emotions can bind certain individuals to particular collectives (us) by insinuating that others (them) provoke specific feelings such as anger or fear through their very nature or behavior. Structuring sentiments of belonging while demar-

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[1] See CELS (2005), Daroqui et al. (2006), PPN (2008), and DGN (2009, 2010).

[2] Benedict Anderson (1991) understands nations as systems of representations through which people are able to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community.

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cating those who warrant membership from those who do not, affective economies are characterized by a double movement: affects flow sideways, creating "sticky" associations between signs, figures, and objects, and they flow forward and backward, tracing a social history of attachments within particular collectives (45).[3] Ahmed's affective economy provides a helpful lens through which to analyze how mothering in prison becomes an object of public feeling with palpable effects—shaping technologies of punishment tailored to the age of children and the nationality of mothers, reducing some women's access to economic assets and livelihoods, and structuring particular modes of agency deployed by imprisoned women in their efforts for social transformation.

Scholars who analyze gender and nation have demonstrated that women's membership in national collectives remains ambivalent due to their double position as symbols and others to the normative male citizen (Yuval-Davis and Stoetzler 2002). As symbols, women incarnate the nation-state because they are assigned "corporeal and cultural roles in reproducing the next generation" (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétreault 2000, 16). Yet as they are nonidentical to the hegemonic male citizen, women are subject to different rules and regulations (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989, 6). Their belonging is less secure and far from equal, a condition that is dramatically complicated by imprisonment. In this article, we explore free-floating emotions that stick to mothering in prison, marking women and their children as particular objects of regulation linked in paradoxical ways to ideas of community and nation. When nonnationals populate the nation's prisons, giving birth to and raising children while incarcerated, they encounter deeply gendered illusions of social inclusion that challenge the nation as an imagined community (Bernstein 2008, 1).

Growing poverty and social inequality brought about by neoliberal economics and stricter criminal policies pertaining to commerce in drugs have contributed to large increases in the prison population in Argentina and elsewhere. As the number of prisoners grows, the demographic composition of the prison population also changes to include far more women, only some of whom are Argentinian. As Julia Sudbury (2005b) has noted, the racialized feminization of poverty raises new challenges for prison authorities. In the next section, we examine the changing demographics of the prison population. We then discuss two distinct affective economies of mothering tied to the age of children, exploring how female prison guards enact

[3] We follow Ahmed's notion of emotions, making no distinction between affect and emotion since this analysis "risks cutting emotions off from the lived experiences of being and having a body" (2004, 39).

technologies of punishment that differentiate biological motherhood from the cultural work of reproducing the nation.

The rise of migrant women and girls in federal prisons

The war on drugs in Latin America has produced tougher laws criminalizing possession of, trafficking in, and commerce involving drugs (Del Olmo 1988; Sudbury 2005a; Corva 2008). Transcending geopolitical boundaries, drug traffic underpins complex social hierarchies within transnational networks. In Argentina, as in Mexico, Colombia, and Bolivia, women participate primarily in the lowest levels of the drug trade. Driven by economic insecurity, women seek livelihoods as drug mules or as neighborhood-based microdistributors of drugs (Díaz-Cotto 2005). Moving across national boundaries and within urban neighborhoods, women in the drug trade have greater exposure to the punitive power of the state. The global nature of trafficking networks explains the increasing numbers of migrant women in jails, not only in the Argentine context but worldwide (Kampfner 2005). As gender, race, class, and nationality intersect on the bodies of incarcerated subaltern women, they become objects associated with negative emotions in the collective imaginary.

In Argentina, the prison population grew exponentially during the 1990s after the implementation of neoliberal economic policies in Carlos Menem's administrations (1989–94 and 1995–99). From the 1990s on, the number of women incarcerated increased in absolute terms and in proportion to the total population detained in the country's federal prisons. Between 1990 and 2007, for example, the number of women in federal prisons grew 271 percent, compared to an 89 percent increase for men during that same period (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 23).[4] At the time of writing, 798 women lived in federal prisons; nearly half were migrants between thirty and thirty-nine years of age (29). Women prisoners belong to economically vulnerable sectors of society.[5]

The tough-on-crime agenda coincided with growing economic insecurity produced by neoliberal policies, fueling amorphous anxieties and

[4] The number of incarcerated women grew from 298 in 1990 to 1,105 in 2007. In the same period, the population of male detainees increased from 4,175 in 1990 to 7,885 in 2007 (data from Sistema Nacional de Estadísticas sobre Ejecución de la Pena, presented in CELS, MPDN, and PPN [2011]).

[5] The most complete and up-to-date qualitative and quantitative research study on the living conditions of women in the Federal Penitentiary System was carried out in 2008–9 by the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS; Center for Legal and Social Studies), in conjunction with the Procuración Penitenciaria de la Nación (PPN; National Prosecutor in

the circulation of a profound sense of fear (Kessler 2009). We suggest that the fear and other affects associated with the commercial trade in drugs, which are linked to perceptions of increasing crime, are stuck to the bodies of migrant women contained in Argentine jails for small-scale economic survival activities. As a disproportionate number of poor, marginalized, migrant women were housed in federal prisons, they became objects of fear (Ahmed 2004, 127) and subjects of a new carceral regime.

Our research sought to learn more about incarcerated women and the disciplinary regimes that structure their prison experiences.[6] The Argentine federal prison system for women is composed of eight prison units. Units 3 and 31, where most of our research was carried out, house 77 percent of women detainees. Unit 31 is the only one that accommodates women mothering children younger than four years of age. At the time of our research (2008), sixty-five women were mothering a child in prison, and seventy-five children lived in Unit 31 (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 53).

Most of the women were in prison for the first time (96 percent; CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 31). More problematic still, six in ten imprisoned women had not yet been sentenced (SNEEP 2010, 4). They were jailed during the judicial process to determine their guilt or innocence. Our study classifies almost half (48 percent) of the incarcerated women as migrants, many from neighboring Latin American countries such as Brazil, Peru, and Paraguay (Pacecca 2010, 7; CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 29). Before being sent to prison, the women we interviewed lived in households with an average of five members, three of whom were under age eighteen (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 154). The detention of young migrant women increased the number of small children living in jail because children under age four can be housed with their biological mothers in prison while the mothers await sentencing. The latest information available indicates that there are approximately 150 children living with women in prisons across the nation. Most of them are imprisoned in the province of Buenos Aires, the most densely populated province in Argentina.[7] The most recent study shows that more than half of these children are girls, with an average age of seventeen months. These girls have spent most of their short

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Charge of Prisons) and the Ministerio Público de la Defensa de la Nación (MPDN; Public Ministry of National Defense). We participated as researchers in this study and cite it throughout this article as CELS, MPDN, and PPN (2011).

[6] Some of these results were published in CELS, MPDN, and PPN (2011).

[7] Servicio Penetenciario Federal weekly report of October 3, 2010; Province of Buenos Aires Penitentiary System, State Office for Assistance and Treatment (Dirección General de Asistencia y Tratamiento), daily report December 4, 2009 (as reported in CELS and UNLa 2011, 1).

Figure 1 Individual cell of Unit 31 where a woman lives with a child in prison. Photo courtesy of Natalia Efrón. Color version available online.

lives in prison—on average, almost one year (11.4 months; Tabbush 2010, 143). Figure 1 depicts a typical cell in which women live with children.

Cultural meanings surrounding the bodies of imprisoned women and girls cut across multiple frontiers of otherness (Yuval-Davis 1997). Their gender evokes mechanisms of difference and subordination in the national imagination. Because they are behind bars, they are defined as disrespectful of the rules of society. Their association with global chains of drug trafficking lends a sinister cast to their strategies of economic survival. Finally, as migrants of color, they enter the cultural imaginary as a danger to the whitening of the Argentine national identity. These social, ethnic, and gender axes of difference can threaten the national collective. Imprisoned migrant women are readily positioned as ill-adjusted troublemakers who "put whiteness into trouble" (Ahmed 2008, 13). In this unsettling position, they disrupt routine narratives about the role of women in reproducing national identities.

Contrasting affective economies of mothering

Prisons are filled with women's expressions of longing and desire, emotions that are aired in poetry, memoirs, and other cultural productions.[8]

[8] See, e.g., "Yo No Fui" (It was not me), an online publication of poems by prisoners available at http://fanzin31.blogspot.com/search/label/poemas.

Mothering is a key aspect of many incarcerated women's emotional lives, shaped and constrained by prison regulations as well as the inmate's cultural expectations. Prison cultures themselves are rife with emotions that stick to mothering, positioning it as a one of the main social objects that regulate a prison's informal moral economies. For instance, within inmate communities, killing a child is considered to be the worst crime a woman can carry out. As such, it is informally penalized by other women prisoners in everyday exchanges. In the context of prison, as in the world outside its walls, motherhood distributes specific material and symbolic resources.

The otherness that incarcerated women embody is symbolized by their location behind prison walls, physically separated from the nation. Yet prisons also enact regimes tied to national allegories of motherhood, enabling certain technologies of mothering while disallowing others. In Argentina, a woman can opt to live with her children in prison until they reach age four. According to the law, the importance of the biological bond between mother and child warrants mothering in prison, regardless of the conditions of detention.[9] There is no equivalent legal provision for fathers. Men do not have the option to bring their children with them when incarcerated. With this clear gender disparity, the state associates child rearing and early childhood care exclusively with women.

Some of our interview subjects seemed to share the state's gendered assumptions. In response to the question, "What do you think about children being in prison with their mothers?" one respondent noted: "No one can replace a mother's affection and attention. Prison isn't a nice place for children, but I think maintaining the bond is more important." Another asserted: "I don't like my son growing up in a jail but I feel more at ease having him with me, I think I will be able to look after him better" (quoted in Tabbush 2010, 143). As these testimonies indicate, women do not consider prison a suitable place to bring up children, yet preserving the biological mother-child bond is, in their view, fundamental.

The state's presumption about the importance of the biological bond, however, is limited by age. After the child turns four, and regardless of the wishes of the mother, the law prescribes that the welfare of the child is best

[9] In 2008, Law 26.472 introduced an alternative to incarceration, the provision of house arrest for women with children under five. Yet its recent introduction, its dependence on an individual judge's discretion, and its availability only to those who can prove residence in the country ensure that migrant women are unable to access this alternative. Law 26.472, modifications to Law 24.660, December 17, 2008, http://www.infoleg.gov.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/145000-149999/149566/norma.htm.

served by removing the child from prison.[10] If relatives are not able to care for the child at this point, the alternative is state custody. Thus, the law establishes two affective economies of mothering applied to different age ranges of children, one governed by presumptions about biological bonds and the other attuned to the transmission of culture. Law 24.660 apportions the well-being of the child by age, advancing conflicting visions of the demands of mothering in relation to the perceived needs of the next generation. Following Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), we analyze these divergent understandings of motherhood in the prison context as representative of two gendered understandings of the reproduction of the nation: one biological and the other social and cultural.

Women's bodies as biological reproducers of the nation

As Yuval-Davis notes, reproducing the nation entails biological and cultural work (1997, 131). Within the affective economies in Argentine prisons, these two kinds of work devolve on different populations.

The state envisions women whose children are under four years of age as essential to biological reproduction, and the prison regimen emphasizes a form of mothering concentrated on bodily exchanges, most notably breastfeeding. The reproductive work of the body is constructed as a priority for the child's development, irrespective of the social and material conditions of incarceration in which it takes place. The mother-child relation is imagined as a biological dyad in which the mother provides bodily resources necessary for the child's growth and development. Yet this supposedly biological connection is produced by social circumstances powerfully associated with migrant women's lack of support networks.

In contrast to a purely biological understanding of mothering, half of the incarcerated women with children under age four opted not to take their sons and daughters with them into prison (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 172). Indeed, when faced with this decision, women who had reliable support networks challenged the law's construction of appropriate mothering. Lack of alternative child-rearing options, rather than a biological bond, was the main reason women chose to house small children in federal prisons (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011). These limitations disproportionately affect migrant women, who have more precarious social networks in the

[10] Law 24.660, Ley de Ejecución de la Pena Privativa de la Libertad (Law that regulates imprisonment), June 19, 1996, http://www.infoleg.gov.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/35000-39999/37872/texact.htm.

country and therefore fewer choices available for child care. Rather than embodying the ideal of reproducing the nation, the presence of children in prison symbolizes women's restricted child-rearing choices.

The following accounts from our interviews reveal constraints that influence decisions made when women of different nationalities enter prison: "There are people who can leave their children outside, but I can't leave her outside with anybody." "When I was arrested, all my acquaintances dropped out of sight, I didn't have many options than to bring her with me." "I told my partner to keep the kids and he said 'no.' The government took my children, they didn't even consult me" (quoted in Tabbush 2010, 151). These statements help explain the higher number of migrant children living with women in prison: women who lack social and family networks in Argentina assume the duties of full-time mothers in jail (Tabbush 2010). The prison regimen for full-time mothering, however, has profound consequences, such as excluding incarcerated mothers from educational and work opportunities and isolating them socially and institutionally.

Before being sent to prison, more than half of the women we interviewed provided key economic support for their families. One-third of our interviewees continued to support their households throughout their incarceration, sending them the meager income they earned from their work in sweatshops inside prison (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011). Incarcerated mothers note that working while inside jail provides revenue to improve living conditions: funds to purchase additional food, clothes, cleaning products, early childhood educational materials, and toys that enhance children's development (175).

But access to such economic resources is mediated by guards. Female prison guards regulate this flow of material resources by deciding who is allowed to work and who is not. These guards shape mothering into an exclusively biological exercise by creating institutional obstacles that prevent migrant mothers from accessing economic and material resources. More than half of the women with children in prison do not work or participate in educational activities due to gendered and racialized barriers constructed by the carceral regime. The absence of any child care during work hours and educational activities precludes women with children from participation. Moreover, migrant status itself constitutes a fundamental obstacle. Many migrant women do not possess the necessary documentation (usually a work permit or national identification number) to be able to work legally in Argentina's prisons (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 76–77).

Social networks provide a second source of economic and emotional resources for imprisoned women. Friends and family members bring various provisions, along with emotional support, when they visit. But migrant

women have less contact with social networks from outside. Over half of them had never received visits from friends or family members during their incarceration, mainly due to the great distance from their homes (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 95–96).

The exercise of physical violence inside federal women's prisons is a quotidian and systematic practice.[11] As the latest research demonstrates, physical violence perpetrated by female guards and state agents has escalated as the number of migrant women in prison has increased (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011). Beyond physical violence, women are subject to isolation as a generalized sanction, searches of their bodies and cells, and geographical transfers from one prison to another—all of which are used as threats, punishments, or ways to keep incarcerated women from reporting abuses (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011). And for migrant women, their lack of social networks contributes to technologies of punishment that are differentiated by nationality.

Women living with their small children are often treated with greater respect and subjected to lower levels of physical violence than other inmates, but they are not exempt from punishment. Prison guards apply specific sanctions that target the mothers' ability to care for their children in prison by limiting access to social networks outside the jail. The punishment most often applied to incarcerated women with children was the suspension of visits from families and friends, creating an additional institutional obstacle to accessing cash, goods, and emotional support for incarcerated mothers (Gentile and Tabbush 2010, 15).

Institutional obstacles to employment, educational activities, and social and kinship networks reduce women living with their small children in prison to their capacity to exercise the biological technologies of mothering. Sharing cramped cells with their children, denied the financial means to improve their condition, and isolated from friends and family, they are enmeshed in an affective economy conceived by the state as biological reduction. Physical presence and bodily sustenance are the only technologies of mothering allowed to them. Violence lurks as a quotidian means to shore up the performance of biological bonds.

[11] The CELS, MPDN, and PPN study (2011) revealed that 69.3 percent of incarcerated women acknowledge having witnessed situations of physical violence in prison; 32.4 percent of the interviewees observed physical violence being perpetrated directly against a detainee by prison personnel, and 20 percent of such situations occurred with a frequency of once or twice per week. Almost one in ten women (8.1 percent) claimed to have been personally subjected to physical violence by prison personnel. Of those subjected to assault by guards, three-quarters suffered injuries such as marks and bruises all over their bodies, fractures, and loss of teeth (109).

This reduction to biology has consequences for children living in prison as well as for their mothers. When mothering is conceived primarily in terms of biological resources, children too are cut off from social and cultural enrichment. Nearly two-thirds of the mothers interviewed reported that their children seldom left the jail. The children only knew the outside world through the short journeys involved in their mothers' transfers to the courthouse (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 185). As a Peruvian woman living in Unit 31 remarked, "If I had another chance, my daughter wouldn't be locked up with me. My daughter doesn't know much about the outside world. She only knows the streets outside from the transfers to the courthouse. When she came to the prison she was one year and four months old, and next week she will be four" (quoted in Tabbush 2010, 156). In the absence of local support networks, most migrant women had no one who could take children on outings or trips outside the prison unit. Lacking contact with the outside world, the children's life experiences were based on relations of control and power, grounded in the authoritarian culture of the prison (Varela 2009). Even the children's games manifested this profound isolation, imitating prison procedures. In the words of one incarcerated mother, "my daughter plays at counting inmates, which she learned from the warden who does the daily count" (69).

Children living in jail are also drawn into processes of institutional violence. Their day-to-day life is marked by the logic of control over spaces and bodies characteristic of the prison complex. They are exposed to the violent practices typical of the dynamics of penitentiary governance. One interviewee described the way growing up in prison affected her child: "My eight-year-old son was born in the unit and still remembers details of my detention. He remembers his mother being dragged and beaten by the [guards]. He finds it hard to forget the injustices he witnessed. My son saw two inmates stab each other" (quoted in Tabbush 2010, 162). Within the confines of these locked spaces, children learn codes, behaviors, roles, and social expectations exclusively associated with the prison complex. The same woman continues her thought as follows: "You can tell my son is a '*tumbero* kid.'[12] He is different from my other children. When he comes to visit me he wants to stay with me, he doesn't want to be outside. He is like a twenty-year-old, he talks like an adult. He hates the police. . . . The way he speaks is heartbreaking because it is so 'cold'; with me he is very sweet, but only with me" (162). As the women interviewed suggest, their children are also constructed as *tumbero* kids within the national imaginary. Affective econ-

[12] *Tumbero* is a deviation of the word *tumbas* (tomb), and is the Argentine slang referring to jail and the people who inhabit it.

omies embedded in exchanges between guards and inmates filter into the national consciousness as children of incarcerated women are performatively produced as marginalized collectives within the next generation of the nation.

This first affective economy produces a particular form of mothering in prison. It positions the biological ties between mothers and children as a fundamental priority irrespective of the social and material conditions in which they develop. It also reduces migrant women to performing as full-time mothers without adequate assistance to foster the well-being of their children. Bodily sustenance and physical proximity are the hallmarks of this biological regimen, as mothers are bereft of opportunities for work and external social networks. This detachment also leaves incarcerated children isolated from the outside world, growing up with limited ties to kinship networks or other family members.

The biological construction of mothering has temporal limitations as well. Considered appropriate during early childhood, the regulatory logic is inverted when children reach age four. At the moment the state deems that a child moves from nature to culture, it orchestrates a second affective economy.

Incarcerated mothers as undesirable agents of cultural transmission

Once children are able to move about freely and talk, showing the ability to understand and learn—in other words, when they reach an age to begin schooling—the law's concern about the biological bonds between mother and child ceases. From age four, priority is given to a second affective economy in which migrant women are constructed as transgressive mothers whose existence violates norms of motherhood within the national allegory (Bernstein 2008). Given their multiple axes of otherness—their gender, their deviation from social norms, and (often) their migrant status—incarcerated women are defined as unable to perform the gendered role of cultural reproducers of the nation. The circulation of affects within and beyond the prison walls positions migrant women as unfit mothers, incapable of reproducing national identity and passing national symbols from one generation to the next (Yuval-Davis 1997).

Thus the law mandates that the child must leave the prison complex at age four. The legal discourse abandons any notion of maternal rights: when children reach a certain age, the law dictates that it is not a mother's right to have her children stay with her. It substitutes a doctrine pertaining to the "best interests" of children, particularly in "view of their development and overall education" (Molero 1999, 205). Whereas young children

are considered pure biological bodies, as they age, speech and schooling are deemed essential to progressively humanize them. Toward that end, society removes them from the dehumanizing environment of prisons. Incarcerated women are transformed from an essential biological resource to potential contaminants whose alleged deviant moralities threaten to corrupt cultural reproduction. Children of imprisoned women have hope of belonging to the nation only if they are separated from their transgressive mothers. For this reason, four-year-old children are ejected from prison—even when the state cannot guarantee them a home. Half the women interviewed whose sentences extended beyond their children's fourth birthdays did not know where or with whom their children would live after leaving prison (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 186). This could lead to absurd situations in which migrant offspring remained institutionalized in Argentina after the state expelled their mothers back to their countries of origin.

Transition to life outside prison is precarious for children of incarcerated migrant women, who have not benefited from regular prison outings. With no knowledge of or continuous contact with social life outside jails, or with the person responsible for their care once they leave prison, children are particularly vulnerable and insecure upon their release from prison (Tabbush 2010). As fear sticks to the bodies of transgressive mothers contained behind bars, the law extracts children from the only home they have known. In removing them from mothers marked as sources of cultural contamination, the law sentences young children to normalization within the confines of heteropatriarchal regimes.

The institution deemed appropriate for passing on national culture to future generations in Argentina is an imagined heterosexual, patriarchal, nuclear family outside prison. Yet the significance of home for children ejected from jail is necessarily different from that ensconced in the national imaginary, precisely because the state does not foster or allow any relationship between children in prison and their future caretakers. In the rare instances in which prison authorities have allowed contact with potential future caregivers, the results have been far from ideal.

Prison authorities occasionally turn to evangelical religious organizations to foster the "best interests" of children in prison (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 185). These religious organizations actively construct incarcerated women as bad social and moral influences for their children. Indeed, several religious organizations proposed that migrant women put their children up for adoption. Two migrant women recalled situations in which evangelist organizations offered to take children who had no other chance of leaving the prison, promising to provide them with substitute

families (185): "Some 'nuns' recommended that I should allow a religious group, I think they are Jehovah's Witnesses, to take my daughter out; but I don't trust them to bring her back" (Peruvian nationality). "They suggested I put my little girl up for adoption while I was in prison 'for both our sakes.' They suggested she should stay with an evangelic family" (Spanish nationality; quoted in Tabbush 2010, 157).

Adoption and child rearing by religious groups offer an alternate means to establish a relationship between jailed children and the national collective. Religious groups promise to guarantee the cultural transmission of national values in ways that incarcerated migrant women cannot. By enabling such overtures from religious organizations, the state invests in and shores up a markedly conservative conception of poor families. The notion that cultural reproduction of the nation can be divided from biological reproduction and subcontracted out to appropriate nationals fuels a fantasy of a nuclear patriarchal Argentine family, often at great odds with reality. It also sustains another punitive technology deployed within the prison to control incarcerated women.

Women who wish to maintain contact with their older children who have been taken to live outside the prison are peculiarly susceptible to a form of punishment tailored to that desire. Guards can use the threat of denying visitation to control and punish incarcerated mothers. A volume that collects the life experiences of imprisoned women (Dillon 2006) recounts the story of Paola, a young woman who attempted to defend her right to visit her older daughters who lived in foster care outside the jail, only to have her claim of rights infuriate a prison official. Annoyed by Paola's insistence on her right to see her daughters, the chief of prison guards threatened her when she prepared to exit the prison for a visit: "You are not going anywhere, do hear me? You have already lost your rights as a mother. Now, don't try to make demands because you have already lost that entitlement. Forget, even, being allowed to talk over the phone with your daughters. You will not see them ever again, do you hear me? I have already spoken with the D.A. and he knows exactly who you are. There is no one able to save you" (245). The force of the guard's threat is intimately tied to the affective economy of mothering that the state so carefully nurtures, then quite brutally disrupts. By manipulating a mother's desire to maintain a relationship with her children, the prison devises a technology of punishment that can be every bit as effective as physical punishments.

But the violence embedded in that manipulation can also trigger collective action by incarcerated women: demands for better living conditions that can escalate to violent protests. As postcolonial perspectives have re-

peatedly noted, negative othering processes are not just precoded by hegemonic ideologies but also "draw on and create alternative significations of the same actions and events" since the social "is always crosscut with fissures that have a social and political history that *signifies otherwise*" (Hemmings 2005, 558).

Mothering as a restricted platform for agency

When it comes to lodging complaints, emotional appeals to motherhood provide women with a legitimizing anchor for their protests. For example, in June 2008 the women living in Unit 31 launched a hunger strike to attain better living conditions for the children living with them by sending a petition to the president of the Justice and Penal Affairs Committee of the Senate, stating: "We are detainees in the mother's ward of Unit 31 and we address this petition to you in a desperate attempt to seek help, since no one is interested in our children and, least of all, in us. . . . There is no way of describing the impotence we feel. It is our children who are in danger."[13] The vast majority of women with children in prison have made requests or complaints to the penal institution. Women in Unit 31 have complained of the poor quality of the food, which "does not meet the basic needs of the children" (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 174–75). Concerns with their living conditions and access to social and health services, which they describe as maternal concerns, afford legitimacy to their requests. They are acting for their children as well as for themselves. Performances of motherhood through protests challenge prevailing social conditions in prison, yet they can also reify hierarchies grounded in nationality and gender.

Migrant women in jail tend to be less familiar with prison regulations and the possibilities for action to improve their conditions in prison. As a consequence, they make fewer complaints and are less likely to protest. Most incarcerated migrant women have no previous prison experience, have little contact with their consulates, and did not reside in the country before their arrest (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 102). Nevertheless, in specific cases such as the abuse of a migrant girl who was under four years old by members of a religious group, incarcerated women have mobilized protests that cross racialized national divisions.

On November 2, 2009, incarcerated women organized a collective protest to request an external medical examination for a Bolivian girl whom they believed to have been sexually abused during an outing with a reli-

[13] Petitorio de la Mujeres de la Unidad 31 al Senado de la Nación (Petition made by women living in Unit 31 to the Senate), June 2008, http://proyectoyonofui.blogspot.com.ar/2008/07/petitoria-de-las-mumeres-que-estuvieron.html.

gious organization.[14] This protest was brutally suppressed by the prison response team, composed mainly of men. Armed with sticks, shields, and a water hose, the guards kicked and pushed the women and dragged them across the floor. Some of the women were accompanied by their children, and when they were beaten, some children were injured as a result. For several days after the violent incident, the supervisory body, the national prosecutor in charge of prisons, was denied access to investigate the events that had taken place.[15]

This case demonstrates the limits of the maternal agency the state accords to incarcerated women. Mothers can make symbolic claims on the state for food, clothing, and health care. Protests and petitions regarding the everyday conditions of life in prison are deemed acceptable. The legitimacy of maternal protest, however, does not extend to complaints related to acts of sexual violence, which touch on the basic human rights of children living in prison and the prison's failure to provide minimal safety to children in its care. Violence functions as a limit to maternal forms of agency. Moreover, the threat of violent retaliation by prison officials deters women from lodging complaints with institutions of control outside prison. And retaliatory violence by agents of the state is far from a rare occurrence: it is one of the main forms of abuse that incarcerated women mention to third parties (CELS, MPDN, and PPN 2011, 145).

Conclusion

The two affective economies that structure mothering in prison shape collective identities in contemporary Argentina within and beyond the confines of penal institutions. Distinctive modes of mothering in prison—mothers as biological reproducers of the nation and as undesirable agents of cultural transmission—illuminate the construction of otherness as foundational to the contemporary consolidation of national boundaries. The law envisions incarcerated women as essential biological resources for their children, but resources that are disposable when the promise of physical sustenance gives way to fear of moral contamination. Although these two maternal economies apply to both Argentinian and migrant women in prison, the bodies of incarcerated migrants are especially affectively sticky,

[14] On rare occasions, the Federal Penitentiary System allows religious organizations to organize outings for the children of the prison. These short trips are neither regulated nor supervised by agents of the state.

[15] Information collected in the complaint lodged by the National Prosecutor in Charge of Prisons, filed on November 19, 2009, in the First Federal Criminal and Correctional Court of Lomas de Zamora.

linked to negative emotions associated with their foreignness and various racialized ascriptions. Their difference is accentuated in prison, as they are denied access to work and educational opportunities and isolated from the emotional and economic resources provided by external support networks. Restricted to full-time mothering, migrant women are nonetheless constructed as moral threats to their own children, as well as to the Argentine nation. To contain the contagion associated with such deviants, the state severs contact between mothers and their children, removing children older than four from the prison and placing them in the unsupervised care of strangers.

The quotidian exchanges of women and their children living in jail are policed by prison guards, who produce and sustain these two affective economies of mothering. As agents of the state, the guards regulate the movement of people, access to work, educational opportunities, social networks, degrees of isolation, and the possibility of contact between mothers and their children after removal from prison. Deploying multiple punitive technologies, these agents of the state shape experiences of mothering, the nature of childhood for *tumbero* kids, and the scope of agency allowed incarcerated women.

By coupling the sociology of emotion with the sociology of power, this study illuminates vulnerabilities created and silenced in the affective economies of mothering in prison as well as harms perpetrated by the state against incarcerated women and their innocent children. By examining the emotions that the national imaginary attaches to the bodies of migrant mothers, the study also documents processes of racialization and gendering in prison that are seldom subjected to scrutiny. State violence, basic human rights violations, and prison's abusive power relations function as limits to maternal agency for Argentinian nationals and migrant women in prison. By attending to the peculiar stickiness of negative emotions associated with migrant women, however, it is also possible to glimpse how prison regimes shore up the boundaries of the nation. Thus, our findings affirm the import of Yuval-Davis's claim that "we cannot leave the emotional outside our considerations and our theorizations of social justice and equity" (2003, 5).

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