

# Security, discipline, resistance: Deciphering prison scrutiny styles in France

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**Unless prisons assume a social function of pure neutralization, they generally present themselves also as institutions dedicated to prisoner correction and normalization.<sup>1</sup> This disciplinary intention is intrinsically linked to the specific actions of the professionals employed in them: psychologists, criminologists, educators, probation officers and others. The action of these professionals take shape in a security-based framework which, for its part, embodies neutralization objectives, and which, through surveillance and the grid of prison space, aims to reduce internal disorder and foil escape attempts.<sup>2</sup> Depending on the historical time, national contexts, and even the target population within an individual prison system, this security-based framework can be more or less totalitarian, more or less technological and more or less constrained by requirements to respect the prisoners' rights.**

The notion of scrutiny, as constructed in this article, will help us grasp the *intertwined relation* between the monitoring devoted to correction — the disciplinary gaze — and the surveillance devoted to controlling bodies and gestures — the security gaze. Its specific security organization, built around a specific penological and correctionalist objective, gives the prison its singular scrutiny style. In their editorial, Martin and Jefferson point out that prior to becoming a progressive accountability practice — looking into the prison for the sake of the prisoner's rights —, scrutinizing was, and is always, a way to govern, an act of power: scrutinizing the prisoner for the sake of the prison's goals. This is the sense I give to the notion of scrutiny, even though, as we shall see, it also provides a lens for seeing certain forms of internal control in detention. One more word on the notion of 'style'.

Foucault uses the notion of 'penal style' to draw a distinction between the torture of the Ancient Régime and the modern prison.<sup>3</sup> I've appropriated this notion of style somewhat freely in order to identify specific sub-styles of scrutiny in prisons. In this article, I describe two such styles: the 'neo-disciplinary' and the 'warlike'. Furthermore, as the notion of style also reflects the semantic universe of the 'art of government'<sup>4</sup>, I have preferred this to the more classical notion of 'type' or 'ideal type'.

First, from a theoretical point of view, I pin down the notion of scrutiny and the interest it holds for a sociology of the prison. I then give two examples of prison scrutiny styles, in an analysis based on two studies that deployed similar qualitative methodologies. The case studies, conducted within the French prison system are 'prisons for minors' (PM) and 'radicalization assessment units' (RAU). Although these two prison units are different with respect to their organization and their target population, they nevertheless share common features, making their comparison all the more useful.

## Prison scrutiny style: a tentative definition

The notion of scrutiny is not to be conflated with either of two other notions: first, that of 'discipline', that is correction and normalization practices — studied first by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*<sup>5</sup> and then more widely debated; secondly that of 'surveillance', that is, daily practices to produce order, which has been extensively analysed by sociologists and criminologists studying prisons, especially by deciphering the prison officer/prisoner relationship.<sup>6</sup> The notion of scrutiny, I describe here, is found at the intersection of these two types of practices. It serves to

1. Foucault, M., (1975), *Surveiller et Punir*, Paris, Gallimard.
2. Sykes, G. M. (1958). *The society of captives: A study of a maximum security prison*. Princeton University Press; Martin, T., Chantraine, G. (Eds.), (2018), *Prisons Breaks. Toward a Sociology of Escape*, Palgrave.
3. Foucault, M., (1975), *Surveiller et Punir*, Paris, Gallimard.
4. Foucault, M. (2004). « Qu'est-ce que la critique? (critique et Aufklärung) », *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie*, 84, 2, 35-63.
5. Foucault, M., (1975), *Surveiller et Punir*, Paris, Gallimard.
6. For the French case, see for example Chauvenet, A. (1994). *Le monde des surveillants de prison*. Paris. PUF.

understand ‘from bottom up’ the vague coupling between disciplinary order and security-based order, and the way that each prison scrutiny style, via the dynamics of interactions, participates in objectifying and subjectifying the prisoners, and thus represents an essential dimension in the exercise of power and ‘the conduct of conduct’ — that is governmentality — in prisons.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, as power and resistance are co-extensive,<sup>8</sup> the analysis of one necessarily implies analysis of the other. Understanding how forms of resistance are organized makes it easier to describe both the effect of each scrutiny style — especially on prisoner subjectivities — and also what eludes the scrutiny, both materially and symbolically. In this area, two comments are important for the analysis. First, that the *prisoners’ resistance* is not organized solely around the security-based dimension of the institution — which has been studied extensively — but also in reaction to its disciplinary dimension — something that has been the object of fewer studies. In other words, prisoners’ daily forms of resistance are also shaped by the vague coupling between security order and disciplinary order: their resistance is towards prison scrutiny altogether. Secondly, daily resistance in detention is not restricted to the prisoners alone, but can also be observed in *professional resistance*, for instance, denouncing the actions of other professionals as mediocre or even scandalous, or trying to adopt a different way of considering the prisoners and calling into question how the institution treats them, or even repeated absences, investing as little effort as possible, going on sick-leave or resigning vociferously. In short, in order to analyse a specific prison scrutiny style, we must pay attention not only to the interweaving between the disciplinary and security gazes which shape the

interactions between prisoners and professionals, but also to the forms of resistance adopted by prisoners and professionals alike, which are occasioned by this interweaving.

In order to explain and illustrate this general proposal, I will refer to two case studies, based on surveys conducted in two specific French prison units: first, in ‘prisons for minors’ (PM) and then in ‘radicalization assessment units’ (RAU). It is important

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here to stress the fact that the notion of scrutiny is observed at an institutional level, both meso- and micro-sociological. Obviously, the principles guiding professionals’ actions are also expressions of macro-sociological dynamics and penal policies. The two examples I have chosen concern, on the one hand, transformations in the thinking and rationale on education within the juvenile justice system<sup>9</sup> and, on the other, the gradual establishment of the fight against radicalization in France.<sup>10</sup> My aim is to understand these transformations through the way they articulate and conflict with the very logics of the total institution and its relational microcosm, which can only be seen ‘from bottom up’<sup>11</sup>, through qualitative methodologies with a focus as close as possible to concrete practices and

interactions. Furthermore, an ethnographic type of approach also makes it possible to identify the informal, discreet, even hidden dimensions of a prison scrutiny style — and this is one of the priceless contributions of the ethnographic approach.

## Two case studies

A comparison of the scrutiny style prevailing in the PMs and the dominant style in the RAU seems to be especially pertinent insofar as they are both part of the same national prison system, both relatively recent and

7. A more global study of prison governmentality would call for a broader and more systematic analysis of the whole strategic apparatus that gives it shape: architecture, legal system, theories on punishment, internal regulations, scientific statements, penal and administrative measures, etc. (Foucault, M., (1994), « Le jeu de Michel Foucault » in Foucault M., *Dits et Écrits*, Paris, Gallimard, pp. 298-329). The notion of scrutiny catches an important dimension of prison governmentality, without reducing it to just that.

8. Foucault, M., (1976), *Histoire de la sexualité, 1. La volonté de savoir*, Gallimard, Paris.

9. Sallée, N., (2014), Les mineurs délinquants sous éducation contrainte: Responsabilisation, discipline et retour de l’utopie républicaine dans la justice française des mineurs, *Déviante et Société*, 38, 77-101.

10. Sèze, R., (2019), *Prévenir la violence djihadiste. Les paradoxes d’un modèle sécuritaire*, Paris, Seuil.

11. Chantraine, G., Scheer, D., Beunas, C. (2022). Sociology and Radicalization. For a « bottom-up » approach to the institutional effects of the fight against radicalization, *Déviante et Société*, 46, 273-287.

both also marked by the will to adopt a multidisciplinary approach towards the prison population. Furthermore, both reflect the growing complexity in the way power is exercised in prison: the prison officers, especially, now more than ever must contend and collaborate with other professionals. Another significant point in common is that the PM and the RAU have both been in the limelight of the media and they represent 'showcases' for the prison administration. This said, the security and disciplinary gazes are articulated quite differently in each type of unit, with the result that highly distinct scrutiny styles emerge.

This comparison is all the more justified because the sociological studies I have conducted and directed in the PM and RAU were spawned by similar questions, with interest as much in the daily work of each professional as in the subjective experiences of the prisoners.<sup>12</sup> The methods deployed are also quite similar: ethnographic immersion over a long period, coupled with several semi-directive interviews with professionals — both professionals in the field and management — and with non-directive interviews, of a biographical type, with prisoners. For lack of space, this article will not discuss the methodological or empirical details of the enquiries, but I refer the reader to other publications.<sup>13</sup> I will limit myself here to a summary of the 'essence' of the scrutiny style in each unit, before showing how forms of resistance are organized and enacted by professionals and prisoners.

### **Prisons for minors: a neo-disciplinary scrutiny style**

Creation of the PM both reflected and reinforced the intense public controversies in France regarding

transformations in juvenile justice. For their defenders, the PM represented a major step forward, the installation of an educational logic in the prison, introducing useful activities instead of sterile idleness. However, their detractors saw the PMs as naturalising the incarceration of minors and a symbol of a society that increasingly criminalized its youth. In fact, historically, the Judicial Youth Protection Service (JYPS) largely built its identity founded on opposition to its big brother, the prison. The idea that education was incompatible with detention was one that prevailed in the JYPS since the 1970s; with the opening of the PM and the massive arrival of JYPS educators in the prisons, neutralization of young men and women through the prison and education in the prison took shape and gave rise to a scrutiny style of its own.

The progressive opening of the PMs in 2007-2008 thus reflects the will to transform incarceration areas reserved for youths aged 13-18 into 'educational spaces', and to do so in order to address the lack of socio-educational follow-up experienced by minors held in the 'juvenile units' of adult prisons. Since 2007, the PMs have only gradually and partially replaced the former juvenile units in prisons. On 1 January 2022, out of the 655 minors incarcerated in French prisons<sup>14</sup>, approximately one third were held in these new facilities and two-thirds were still hosted in the older juvenile units.

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In political and institutional discourses, the juvenile units are seen as a counter-model for the PMs. Briefly stated, thanks to the novelty of the PMs, the unhealthy idleness that reigned in the juvenile units has been replaced by a precisely timed hyperactivity in the PM; the single one-on-one contact between the prisoners and the prison officers is replaced by a multiplication of interactions with a wider range of professionals in the

12. The first PM survey took place in 2009-2011, and I have had regular opportunities to update the data and analysis produced. The RAU survey took place in 2017-2018.

13. On the PM, see Chantraine, G., Scheer, D., Milhaud, O. (2012). Space and Surveillance in a Prison for Minors, *Politix*, 97, 125-148; Chantraine, G., Sallée, N., (2013). Educate and Punish: Educational Work, Security and Discipline in Prisons for Minors. *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 54(3), 437-461; Chantraine, G., Sallée, N., (2015), « Ethnography of Writings in Prison: Professional Power Struggles Surrounding a Digital Notebook in a Prison for Minors », in Drake D., Earle R., Sloan J., (Eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Ethnography*, Palgrave Macmillan, Studies in Prison, London, pp. 99-123. On the RAU, see Chantraine, G., Scheer, D. (2021). Performing the enemy? No-risk logic and the assessment of prisoners in 'radicalization assessment units' in French prisons. *Punishment & Society*, 23(2), 260-280; Chantraine, G., Scheer, D. (2022). Surveillance, Radicalization, and Prison Change Self-Analysis of an Ethnographic Survey Under Tension. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 51(2), 171-196; Chantraine, G., Scheer, D. (2022). What the Fight Against Radicalization Does to the Prison Officer Profession », *Champ pénal/Penal field*, <http://journals.openedition.org/champpenal/13838>; Chantraine, G. Scheer, D. (2022c). Strategies, Tricks and Dissembling in the 'Radicalization Assessment Units' (RAU) – France ». *Déviance et Société*, 46, 375-407; Scheer, D., Chantraine, G., (2022), Intelligence and radicalization in French prisons: Sociological analysis bottom-up. *Security Dialogue*, 53(2), 112-129.

14. Minors in prison represent slightly less than 1% of the prison population in France, which numbered 72350 prisoners as of 1 October 2022.

PM; the long periods spent alone locked in a cell is replaced by a collective life and socialization organized around different focus areas: health, schooling, sports, daily living where the young prisoners take their meals together, and so on. In fact, one particularity of the PM is the co-existence of staff from four different administrations: the prison administration, of course, but also teachers from the national education system, educators from the JYPS, and healthcare staff — who report to the regional hospital and are thus also independent from the prison administration. Without calling into question the primacy of the prison administration, this 'A-team' of professionals are supposed to work together, based on new buzz-words like 'comprehensive management' and 'multidisciplinarity', especially through regular meetings assembling the representatives of each administration to discuss each individual case.

The ethnographic survey, associated with semi-directive interviews with each category of prison actors made it possible to objectify the 'comprehensive management' project as a scrutiny style that I term 'neo-disciplinary'. In order to grasp the nature of this style, we need to examine how it articulates the vague coupling of security and disciplinary gazes.

The security gaze that prevails in the PM is the result of a skilful mixture of surveillance technologies — cameras, software for entering, written observation notes, etc. — and close-up personal surveillance techniques, since the prisoners move solely under escort. Therefore, as in the large majority of prisons, the PM security system remains central and predominant. Yet it is nevertheless somewhat euphemized and, especially, it is utilised for an intensive behavioural socialization that is at the heart of the PM's penological goal. The surveillance and observation practices are organized around the method for assigning the prisoners to the different living units. Each PM is composed of five 'living units', along with an 'arrival unit' and a 'disciplinary unit', and the internal regulations accord greater or less autonomy depending on the young prisoner's behaviour. With the exception of prisoners subject to specific sentences, the youths spend most of their time outside their cells and have their meals together, in small groups, in their living units. As such, assignment practices are interconnected with security and disciplinary considerations: to be eligible for transfer to a unit with a more lenient regime, the prisoner must at the same time pose no problems for daily order in the prison and also show

that they are willing to prepare for their integration into society. More broadly, this disciplinary gaze consists in multiplying the spheres of intervention: the job is to care for, educate, re-school the young prisoners and inculcate in them a sense of 'penal responsibility', all this during a short period of incarceration — as youths stay an average of two and a half months in prison.

The general layout of the PM facilities thus mirrors the tension between security grid of space and the will to create spaces for socialization, in which the prison administration controls the who, what, where, when and why. The requirement for multidisciplinary, diversification of professionals, the attempt to enclose each dimension of a person in a precisely timed daily routine with an ultra-saturated schedule are all signs of a sophisticated disciplinary gaze. The neo-disciplinary scrutiny style in the PM is the fruit of an apparent

paradox. The aim for a de-totalitarization of the institution, intending to better understand the social complexity of deviant adolescence and instil dominant social norms by means other than coercion, is paradoxically echoed by a form of re-totalitarization of the institution, grounded in the need to enable 'comprehensive management', to know and control the prisoners' every act and gesture, thought and plan.

Each scrutiny style, whether explicitly or implicitly, tends to produce different forms of subjectivity, ranging from enrolment to resistance. In the context of the PMs, the prisoner who is a good 'subject', with the 'right profile', in the eyes of the professionals, is primarily one who is, I quote, 'somewhat at ease in prison, but not too much'; it is also the one whose parents are 'cooperative but not overprotective'. And then again it is the young prisoner who gets involved in the activities proposed without being too reluctant and who accepts, as a condition for the quality of their 'comprehensive management', not only to be observed by different staff members but also to 'be open' and 'bare' parts of who they are in all transparency; it is the youth who is 'genuine' and 'honest' and who acknowledges the 'need for an educator' who is valued or idealized. Lastly and more globally, it is the prisoner who is receptive to the process of 'learning responsibility' and who realizes it is their personal responsibility to get by in life. In the PM, deviations from this 'good prisoner' image are subject to further injunctions and reinforced management: they are required to participate more, demonstrate more transparency and authenticity, be more cooperative and so on.

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Forms of resistance by professionals and prisoners alike shed light not only on certain facets of this scrutiny style but also on what it fails to achieve. On the side of the professionals, it is striking to see the misgivings that some hold towards injunctions for ‘multidisciplinarity’ and ‘comprehensive management’. This can be illustrated by three short examples. First: the healthcare staff evoke medical confidentiality to better defend their professional autonomy and affirm that any health issues at stake must be separated from criminological issues; they refuse to divulge too many details on pathologies that some youths suffer from. Beyond the legal imperative to respect medical confidentiality, they justify their reservations by pointing to a risk of stigma — from the professionals as well as from the other prisoners. Second example: many teachers employed by the public education system refuse — or try to refuse — to let the prison officers have a say in regulating disciplinary problems that occur in the prison schoolrooms. Third example: many educators lament the security management of disorderly conduct in prison — for example a youth who too frequently disturbs an activity is liable, based on a unilateral decision by the prison administration, to be transferred to another prison even though these disturbances are potentially an interesting base for educational work with the youths. These different forms of professional critique and resistance thus illustrate both the scrutiny style prevailing in the PM, but also its deficiencies. These expressions of resistance reflect the professionals’ will to take advantage of the educational benefit of a range of intersecting professional views, but all the while resisting the injunction for total and constant transparency that would lead the institution once again down the path towards totalitarianism.

The resistance and critiques of the young prisoners are themselves quite instructive. Most of the prisoners, in fact, appreciate not being locked up in their cell day and night and being able to take advantage of a fairly wide range of school, sports and educational activities. Nonetheless, other prisoners, on the contrary, denigrate the PM compared with the juvenile units where, paradoxically, they felt they enjoyed a certain autonomy in their cells. In other words, the PM’s neo-disciplinary

style is so intrusive that some prefer the isolation and desolation of the juvenile units. In any case, as they have no choice, they must put up with incarceration and adapt themselves. The youths adjust some of their behaviours, and sometimes, even their very ‘role’ depending on the different spaces they frequent and the many professionals they meet there. While on occasion they may be completely open about themselves, especially among fellow prisoners or in private conversations with the sociologist, in general they are under constant observation by others and therefore feel the need to ‘wear a mask’ and if they cannot ‘show themselves in their best light’ at least try to ‘open up a bit’ (behaviourally and/or biographically) to the professionals they encounter. The interviews with the youths brought out an opposition between ‘daytime’, which is described as playing one long theatre role, and the ‘night’ where the youths are obviously locked in their cells, but describe verbal exchanges from one cell to another as ‘times for truthfulness’.

The neo-disciplinary scrutiny style of the PM, that is, the ambition for integral transparency, meets with resistance from certain professionals in addition to efforts by the young prisoners to make their way, as described by Goffman<sup>15</sup>, through the cracks in the total institution. This ‘way’ requires both playing with the cracks in the security and disciplinary gazes and foiling it, by adopting ‘masks’ to undermine the artificiality of the behavioural socialization orchestrated by the institution.

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### **Radicalization assessment units: a warlike scrutiny style**

In France, the series of terror attacks starting from January 2015 amplified the intense political controversies surrounding the fight against terrorism and the role of the prison: traditionally it has been held up as the incontrovertible solution for neutralizing terrorists, but it is also suspected to be a place that fosters the radicalization process. In an atmosphere of panic over national security, the prison administration thus questioned the ways it needed to detect, assess and manage radicalization.

15. Goffman, E., (1961), *Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*, New York, Anchor Books.

In this context, the 'radicalization assessment units' [RAU] are units to which 'radicalized' prisoners<sup>16</sup> are temporarily assigned for assessment purposes. Three initial RAUs opened in 2016, and there are seven in January 2022. Groups of a dozen prisoners, already incarcerated in ordinary detention, considered to be radicalized — and for some, accused of terrorist offences — are transferred to the RAU for assessment by a series of professionals — prison officers, educators, psychologists and probation officers — over a period of four months. Meetings organized bi-monthly are supposed to enable the professionals to discuss each individual case, compare their points of view and gradually prepare their assessments with a view to guide the prisoners' later assignment to other prison sections.

The ethnographic survey, drawing from the methodology previously implemented in the PMs — direct observation, semi-directive interviews with each category of prison actor, biographical interviews — enabled us to identify what I call a 'warlike scrutiny style'. This style is characterized by the fact that the security and the disciplinary gazes are governed by the presumed danger posed by the prisoners incarcerated in the RAU, prisoners who above all are seen as 'enemies of the nation'. In other words, while the disciplinary gaze is organized officially around the objective of an assessment whose results will guide the prisoner's future management, this disciplinary gaze is overtaken and skewed by a security logic to avoid all risks along with a will to neutralize that prevails over any other action logic.

The first key dimension of the RAU is that of an extremely sophisticated and extremely restrictive security system that places total constraints on the prisoners' bodies and gestures. Doors are opened to be immediately shut again, movements are minimal and efficient and extremely protocol-based. Cell doors are opened by a team of three prison officers, the prisoners are regularly frisked and no prisoner can leave his cell until the others are in a secured place. We are far from the aim of 'behavioural socialization' that we described in the PMs. Here it is just the opposite: curtail all forms of socialization, which is considered a source of danger

among this specific population. Consequently, the only times the prisoners find themselves together — in small groups of three, transferred there one by one — are during the daily courtyard walk. And during this time a camera observes the prisoners, a measure motivated by concern that something may be in the planning (recruitment, planning an aggression, etc.). The prison officers are constantly on the alert, believing that each prisoner, at any time, might commit a violent aggression. The prison officers make a distinction between the 'ordinary' prisoners and the 'terros', in virtue of their presumed harmfulness: 'ordinary' prisoners are described as 'thugs' while the terrorist prisoners are the 'enemies of the nation'.

In this climate that is warlike, in the literal — not merely figurative — sense of the term, the RAU's official mission is assessment of the prisoners by a multidisciplinary team. The prison officers are responsible for daily observation; the probation officers, educators and psychologists are responsible for individual interviews. All these professionals meet regularly in order to reach a synthesis for the individual assessment of each prisoner. Lacking the space for a detailed description of this processual logic, here is a brief synthesis of the essentials: the assessment professionals are trapped in a circular logic. If the

prisoners are assigned to this type of unit, it is indeed because they are suspected of radicalization by the very people who decided to assign them to the RAU — that is both by officials of the Mission to Fight Violent Radicalization (MLRV) and management of the prison intelligence services. And, if they are suspected of radicalization it is advisable for the assessment work to find the elements to confirm the original hypothesis. This confirmation effort is all the more pervasive when it is a matter of protecting oneself from potentially disastrous professional risks: if the assessment of a prisoner concludes lack of radicalization or presenting no danger, and then in the future this person commits a terrorist offence — whether in prison or on the outside, it is not only the professional who will be severely called into question, but more largely the whole system of managing radicalized prisoners, and

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16. The Department of Justice defines 'violent radicalization' as the 'process of personal or collective identification with extreme political or politico-religious ideas that can lead to the will to transform society through violence' (Jean-Jacques Urvoas, Ministry of Justice, October 25, 2016, [http://www.justice.gouv.fr/publication/securite\\_penitentiaire\\_et\\_action\\_contre\\_la\\_radicalisation\\_violente.pdf](http://www.justice.gouv.fr/publication/securite_penitentiaire_et_action_contre_la_radicalisation_violente.pdf)).

even more broadly the whole prison administration. The professionals are thus under enormous pressure and, as we described elsewhere<sup>17</sup>, their attempts to impede 'dissimulation' by the prisoners entail that the assessors themselves are always at risk of being ensnared in their own trap; they are no longer able to discern those who do not represent any danger: someone who presents himself as radicalized is considered as such, and someone who tries to behave normally is considered as a dissimulator, who tries to hide his radicalization. This bias tends to be more acute during the final meetings, where recommendations are overdetermined by the imperative to take no risks, leading the management to doubt a professional's assessment occasionally deemed as too 'flattering' (Ibid).

This warlike scrutiny style confers value for many professionals. The prison officers, in particular, frequently feel that their professional skills have now become more meaningful: they are no longer mere 'turnkeys' — one of the least gratifying roles in prison — they are also 'protectors of the nation': the mission to neutralize terrorist prisoners takes on meaning not only in the prison microcosm, but more widely in the overall political action to fight radicalization. Nonetheless, some professionals do adopt forms of resistance to this warlike scrutiny style. Some prison officers try to de-emphasize the warlike nature of the interactions through attempts to establish a religious and/or geopolitical 'dialogue' with the prisoners, the aim being to instil 'peace among religions'. The probation officers occasionally refuse the warlike view of the prisoners assigned to the RAU, by attempting to render their work more normal: they see their job as one of 'working with the human (dimension)' — with fellow humans whose defects and qualities form a sound basis for the work to be accomplished in the RAU. They thus affirm that the counselling with RAU prisoners is similar, or should be similar to the interactions they have in ordinary detention. Along these lines, the psychologists and educators regularly criticize the pressure weighing on them. One such tension is quite illustrative of their intervention : although they can rely on their knowledge, diplomas and personal skills to affirm a solid professional identity, this identity is undermined

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by the system and temporality specific to the RAU with its need for 'rapid' assessments, which goes against their professional ethics. More generally, they find it unfortunate that the obsession with the fight against dissimulators hinders them from doing a good job. The high turnover rate and massive resignation of these professionals, who were hired on temporary and precarious contracts, denote an 'exit' as a frequent option for expressing discontent (Hirschman, 1970).

Forms of resistance on the prisoners' side are equally revealing. They are reacting as much to the security gaze — resisting the material constraints and restrictions in the unit — as they are to the disciplinary gaze — resisting the assessment. For instance, the prisoners employ multiple techniques to elude the controls and surveillance: exchanging mobile phones, sharing handwritten copies of prohibited texts during the courtyard walk and other collective periods, keeping watch and warning the others during the guard rounds, and so on. Some prisoners participate in (co)producing a warlike atmosphere in the unit: geopolitical issues and power plays as well as various group allegiances (Daesh, Al Nosra, Al Qaïda, etc.) have found their way into the RAU and partly shape the affinity and rivalry among prisoners as well as their relationships with the prison officers.

The prisoners also adapt themselves to the assessment process itself. Most accept to play along and participate in the interview sessions with the professionals. This displayed willingness to be sincere and authentic nevertheless comes up against the RAU's structural functions, where there is always the risk that 'information' turns into 'evidence', the fruit of a conscious or unconscious work of overinterpretation by the scrutinising assessors. Consequently, almost all the prisoners describe how impossible it is to be sincere in a context where every little gesture is spied on, where each word is picked apart and analysed, and also suspected to be a false bait or a lie. The prisoners describe what they see as an aberration in the very existence of a system to assess radicalization, when the vast majority of the prisoners in the RAU are still in preventive detention and thus, in theory, presumed innocent. The prisoners thus develop strategies to

17. Chantraine, G., Scheer, D. (2021). Performing the enemy? No-risk logic and the assessment of prisoners in 'radicalization assessment units' in French prisons. *Punishment & Society*, 23(2), 260–280.

present themselves in the best light, for example by avoiding sexist or homophobic remarks, in order to avoid saying anything that could enter in a realm of meaning associated with a process of radicalization.

### **Conclusion**

An approach to the prison in terms of its scrutiny style, together, in turn, with a comparison of different prison scrutiny styles, in my view, provides a triple benefit. Firstly, it serves to illustrate the extent to which the security system, in the PM and in the RAU, renders social interactions in prison highly artificial: structurally, in such a microcosm, false semblance abounds and the ability to actually inculcate social norms in meaningful ways is doubtful, if not non-existent. Secondly, it helps avoid a double pitfall. The first consists in observing the prisoners' adaptations and resistance merely as reactions to the security-based system and the pains of imprisonment. Quite the contrary; these adaptations and resistance should be seen equally as targeting the correctionalist objective implemented in the prison. The second pitfall, typical of policy-oriented criminology, consists in abstract thinking or evaluation of the

effectiveness of a penological project or the 'scientific' validity of a criminological tool — such as a quantitative risk evaluation tool, a penological or educational concept, etc. — without taking into account the reality in which these projects and tools will be implemented in a security-based system that overdetermines the real use and concrete application of these tools and concepts. The only approach that is able to grasp this intertwining of security and discipline, specific to the prison world, is one of a meso- and micro-sociological nature, grounded in an ethnographic method. Lastly, an analysis of scrutiny styles makes it possible to see that the professionals' forms of resistance are far from insignificant and that a professional's opinion of other professionals at least helps to abate the arbitrary nature of things in prison; the more the professionals are diversified, the greater a search for a minimal respect of different professional ethics is in fact pursued, the more the risk of totalitarianism may be lessened. As such, while many articles in this special issue have analysed the forms of scrutiny from outside and into the institution, my own contribution provides a complementary view of the forms, limited yet quite real, of scrutiny inside the prison itself.