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# INMATE ARGOT AS AN EXPRESSION OF PRISON SUBCULTURE: THE ISRAELI CASE

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*The study examines the argot (jargon) of prisoners as a reflection of the norms and values comprising the inmate subculture in Israeli prisons. The phenomenological interview method was used to examine the language of a sample of long-term prisoners for the existence of an inmate argot. Having established that such an argot does exist, the data were subjected to a content analysis, and the salience of the argot terms was assessed using two measures, attention and intensity. The argot expressions were divided into categories with reference to different aspects of prison experience: prisoner status (informers, inmate rank), drugs, sexual relations in prison, violence, prisoner behaviors, nicknames for police officers, and prison staff.*

The behavioral and moral code developed by prison inmates has been documented extensively (Clemmer, 1940; Irwin, 1985; Sykes & Messinger, 1960; Toch, 1992). The norms and values of the inmate code form the core of an inmate subculture, providing its members with informal means to gain power and status and, thereby, a way to mitigate their sense of social rejection and compensate for their loss of autonomy and security (Bondesson, 1989; Sykes & Messinger, 1960). Hence, for the inmate, the code is directly linked to the process of socialization and adaptation to prison life. It has been argued that normative society, its symbols, and its representatives are the natural enemies of the prisoner and, therefore, the existence of such a code is inevitable and universal across all prisons and prison populations (Irwin, 1980; Sykes, 1958). The code is seen as representing a collective and functional stand for coping with the prison environment (Fisher, 1990; Goffman, 1961;

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Kassebaum, Ward, & Wilner, 1971) and alleviating the overall physical and psychological suffering of prisoners caused by deprivation (of freedom, goods and services, heterosexual sex, security, privacy), inhospitable conditions (overcrowding, reduced personal space), social heterogeneity of peers (background, education, intelligence, etc.), confusion between two worlds (outside/inside the prison), lack of stability, relative inactivity, boredom, and an unclear future (Farrington, 1994; Jones, 1988; Kalinich, 1980; Mannheim, 1965; Toch, 1992).

Language, as a main mode of communication, is a key component in socialization and in the development and perpetuation of behavioral codes (Dean-Brown, 1992; Dietrich & Graunmann, 1989; Maurer, 1981; Sapir, 1951). Hence, different social groupings exhibit significant differences in their language. Indeed, the divisions between subgroups in society may be identified precisely by the unique characteristics of their language (Hudson, 1980). The language through which a group thinks and communicates serves to organize the experiences of its members and to formulate their world and social reality (Halliday, 1977). The resources and diversity of a language reflect the "inventory list" of the needs and interests of its users (Elaine, 1982; Fishman, 1972). Thus, in each society, it is possible to identify subgroups sharing similar behavioral and linguistic patterns (Maurer, 1981). Such subgroups may have developed as an organized reaction of its members to opportunities, change, or positive reinforcement or, conversely, to deficiencies, prohibitions, and stress in their environment (Gans, 1962). The language of subgroups may include idiosyncratic expressions that do not exist in the formal language of the larger society or "borrowed" words that are assigned new meanings or are used in novel contexts (Alatis, 1992; Andersson & Trudgill, 1990).

The specific demands on language by a subgroup in a society are often expressed through slang (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990; Hebdige, 1985; Matoesian, 1993; Maurer, 1955; Strong, 1981). Argot—originally defined as a language or jargon of thieves but commonly applied to other groupings—is a particular form of slang (Bowker, 1980; Nielson & Scrapitti, 1995). It has been argued that a prison inmate lives, thinks, and functions within the framework defined by the argot, and, therefore, the argot will be centered on the functions that it serves for the prisoner (Bondesson, 1989). In this study, we focus on the following of the many documented functions of slang/argot: (a) the need to be different and unique, (b) alleviation of feelings of rejection and refusal, (c) facilitation of social interactions and relationships, (d) declaration of belonging to a subculture or social status, (e) a tool of social identifi-

cation leading to a sense of belonging to a group, and (f) secrecy (Partridge, 1970).

Two main complementary models have been proposed to explain the unique features of argot: the endogenous model and the import model. In the endogenous model, a novel language is created that assigns names and tags for behavioral patterns and roles pertaining to the prison situation. According to this model, argot emerges as a consequence of prison life and experience and represents a reaction to the pains of imprisonment. The endogenous model posits that because prison societies are likely to hold much in common, these similarities will be reflected in the argot of their inmates (Bowker, 1980; Roebuck, 1963; Tittle & Tittle, 1965). In the import model, the patterns of inmate language and behavior form part of a more general criminal code that is imported into the prison (Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Thomas & Pool, 1975). As will be discussed later, the reality of the Israeli argot appears to encompass features of both these models.

Based on the above review of the development and significance of the inmate code and prison subculture, the function of language in defining subgroups, and, more specifically, the characteristics and functions of inmate argot, the first aim of this study was to examine the language used by prison inmates and to establish that such an argot exists in Israeli prisons. After establishing that such an argot exists, the second aim was to examine the prison argot in terms of the norms and values comprising the inmate subculture of Israeli prisons. Let us first set the scenario of the study by providing a brief description of the Israeli prison system.

### THE ISRAELI PRISON SYSTEM

According to its declared policy, the Israeli Prison Service (IPS) is rehabilitation oriented. After undergoing psychosocial evaluation and classification, incoming prisoners are assigned to a tentative incarceration and treatment plan. In the final stages of their sentence, they are evaluated again with a view to preparing them for discharge from prison (furloughs, outside jobs) and reentry into the community.

Prisoners are expected to work while in prison, are employed in various maintenance-related jobs and in the prison employment center, and receive wages for their work, which they divide equally for purchases at the prison canteen, for their family, and for a deposit redeemable upon release. Educational programs are provided at the elementary and high school level, and higher education is available through the Open University (Wozner, 1985).

Vocational training is carried out in a variety of settings, including courses in the prison under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, on-the-job training programs, and individualized and group training provided by external bodies.

The IPS provides drug rehabilitation programs that operate in individual, group, and family settings (Wozner, 1985). In some prisons, former users (prisoners and ex-prisoners) facilitate group processes to help and support those who want to quit drugs in the framework of the ongoing activities of Narcotics Anonymous.

However, despite its declared aims and policies, in practice, the Israeli prison regime is first and foremost security/custody oriented, and the main concern of the IPS is clearly to maintain "industrial silence." Living conditions are harsh and crowded (on average, 2.6 square meters per inmate per cell) (Wozner, 1985), and interaction with the custodial staff is mostly formal and structured. Relations among the prisoners are power centered and predominantly aggressive. All in all, it seems that the prison regime socializes the prisoners to sustain an offensive/defensive stance—a stance that is hardly conducive to positive change.

## THE STUDY

### METHOD

The design of the study was intentionally flexible to accommodate the data as they emerged and, thereby, enhance both the quality and the authenticity of the findings (Briggs, 1986). This approach allowed access to contents that were not anticipated a priori and exploration of the research topic from the standpoint of the research population, namely, the inmates (Silvermann, 1993).

The phenomenological interview method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; Suchman & Jordan, 1990) was used to collect information from the inmate participants. This method is concerned with the subjective existence of information as a component in the personal experience of the interviewee rather than with its objective or statistical validity (Kidder & Judd, 1986; Kockelmans, 1987). The interview was based on general guidelines to ensure that all those being interviewed would be subject to similar stimuli and, thereby, allow for a common base for data analysis (for an account of interview methods, see Lofland, 1971). The starting points chosen

for the interview-conversation were based on the literature on and acquaintance with the key features of imprisonment and the concerns of inmates.

#### POPULATION

The participants in the study consisted of 30 randomly selected Hebrew-speaking male prisoners serving long-term sentences (minimum 10 years) in the Israeli prison system. The language criterion was applied to allow for efficient and fluent communication with the interviewers; hence, the exclusion of non-Hebrew speaking inmates consisting mostly of Arabs and recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. Because proficiency in the inmate argot may develop as a function of time (Bondesson, 1989), participants were selected from a group that had already served more than 6 years in prison, regardless of their offense, age, and sociodemographic characteristics.

#### PROCEDURE

The interviews were held in the prisoners' cells during the afternoon hours, each session lasting approximately 3 hours. Interviewees were encouraged to share their experiences with the interviewer in a setting conducive to a sense of interpersonal involvement. The interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Preference was given to recording rather than taking notes, to maintain ongoing eye contact between the interviewer and the interviewee.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

In view of their essentially qualitative nature, the data were subjected to content analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Weber, 1990). The argot terms were divided into six main categories: (a) prisoner status (informers, inmate rank), (b) drugs, (c) sexual relations in the prison, (d) violence, (e) nicknames for police officers and prison staff, and (f) other. Two measures were employed to assess the salience of the argot content areas: (a) *attention*, provided by the frequency of words and expressions pertaining to a given category or topic, and (b) *intensity*, assessed by the importance assigned to a given category or topic as reflected by its connotation (e.g., positive, negative) and the number of terms assigned to it (Krippendorff, 1980). The analysis is, therefore, essentially thematic and based on categorization of content

areas. This system serves to pinpoint the most salient norms and values of the inmate code and the thinking patterns that typify the research population (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

## RESULTS

The findings showed that an inmate argot clearly exists in Israeli prisons. All in all, over 482 argot terms were identified, some "endogenous" (Sykes, 1958; Tittle & Tittle, 1965) and some "imported" (Irwin & Cressy, 1962). The unique nature of the argot terms and expressions is clearly demonstrated by the fact that virtually none of them are to be found in the pages of a regular Hebrew dictionary.

### PRISONER STATUS: INFORMERS, INMATE RANK

A significant number of argot expressions reflected the importance of loyalty and adherence to the inmate behavioral code such as "never to inform on a fellow inmate" (Giallombardo, 1974; Irwin, 1985; Toch, 1992). Argot expressions related to this aspect of the prison subculture were associated with high intensity: At least 10 different terms were used to describe informers (for a detailed list, including a verbatim translation into English, see the appendix). This high intensity reflects the strong negative sanctions applied for infraction of this code (verbal and physical violence, social isolation, withholding food, withdrawal of commodities such as cigarettes and drugs). To cite an inmate,

A prisoner who *sings*, becomes a *snitch*, and a *maniac* has to know that he will be treated as a *maniac*. . . . He will be ambushed, knifed, his face will be cut . . . so everybody will know who he is, and that they should never act like him.

On the other side of the same coin, eight expressions were identified describing prisoners who adhere to the code and never betray their prison mates (see appendix). Such inmates (called "right guys" or "good guys" in the United States) (Irwin, 1980) are characterized not only by loyalty to the code of conduct but also by their ability to stay "cool," maintain their self-respect, never show weakness, and help other prisoners, irrespective of the severity of sanctions imposed on them by the custodial staff (Toch, 1992).

This point is very important in view of the personal benefits—psychological and social—stemming from opposition to prison policies. Such prisoners gain satisfaction from active or passive acts against the prison authorities.

The aim of such acts is not to “win” but to demonstrate a degree of personal autonomy. In return, they are held in high esteem by their fellow inmates and, over the course of time, may become leaders or arbitrators. The status of such inmates is illustrated in the following example, which includes expressions such as *ustazim* (leaders), *rais* (arbitrator), *asli baldum!* (what a man!), *do him intifada* (terrorize him), and *do him kussa* (cut him up):

You see prisoner A? He’s one of our leaders. You can sit with him *face* [to face] and talk, tell everything and he, like a living safe, will not *whistle* or reveal anything. Even if they put him in a punishment cell, cut him up, threaten, terrorize him, nothing will move him. He will never *open* or lose his temper.

## DRUGS

Prison inmates naturally seek out ways to compensate themselves for the “pains of imprisonment” (Bondesson, 1989; Lockwood, 1980); hence, the active, albeit covert, commodity market within the prison (Parisi, 1982; Wooden, 1982). Participation in the market also serves an important psychological function for inmates—creating a sense of control over their destiny and satisfaction at outwitting the prison supervision system.

Drugs are the most highly valued commodity in the inmate economic system. Indeed, drugs are so central and dominant in prison life that it can be fairly stated that they form the backbone of inmate culture. Their high demand stems from the large financial profit to be gained from drug sales, the fact that many inmates are regular drug users, and the tendency of many non-users to seek temporary “escape” from the stresses and tensions of prison life by means of drugs (Parisi, 1982).

The importance of drugs and drug dealers in the prison is expressed by a wide variety of argot terms: Over one quarter of the argot terms were related to the topic of drugs (128 out of a total of 482). These terms can be grouped into seven subcategories: names of drugs, quantity of drugs, ways of use or administration, smuggling methods, craving, drug effects, and the state of the drug market (see appendix).

The critical importance of drugs in the prison sometimes serves to override the primacy of inmate loyalty. A number of inmates reported that they would be ready to betray their friends and the inmate code of conduct for the sake of the drug. Some stated that they would even be ready to harm a drug user who returned from leave without bringing back a drug supply. Words such as *kriz* (withdrawal syndrome), *atraf* (insanity), *chocho* (crazy), and *lezamer* (to inform) can be found in the citation from inmate G:



Believe me, all the gang see me as a good guy, as someone who will never betray them or inform on them to the authorities [prison/police]. . . . But sometimes when I get the withdrawal syndrome and I want to smoke drugs, I go insane and become really crazy and then I have no God and I am capable of doing anything, even inform. The main thing is that they should bring me the *stuff* [drug].

#### SEXUAL RELATIONS

Deprivation from heterosexual relationships constitutes one of the most significant pains of imprisonment (e.g., Bowker, 1980; Hawkins & Alpert, 1989), and the replacement of heterosexual relations by homosexual behavior in prison has been widely documented (Cordilia, 1983; Toch & Johnson, 1982). Surprisingly, our data indicate that the incidence of homosexual intercourse has decreased and the argot once used neutrally to describe it is now used derogatively to express negative sanctioning of such behavior. Although many of the argot expressions in this area have not changed, their contextual meaning has: A total of 48 expressions (10%) were related to sexual relations and homosexuality, many of them highly imaginative and, quite often, borrowed and adopted from everyday language for their argot usage. For example, *sandwich* is used to describe homosexual intercourse, *scuba diver* is used to describe oral sex, and *muffler* receives a sexual connotation due to its resemblance to the male sex organ.

In the line with delegitimation of sex among the inmates, many sexual terms are now used to express contempt of prisoners, regardless of their sexual preference or conduct. For example, prisoners who cooperate with the authorities during investigations are termed *whores*, and prisoners who submit to other inmates without a fight are termed *cocksinelles* (transvestites). Eventually, prisoners labeled by one of the humiliating sexual terms (10%) have two options, either to fight and defend their honor, thereby improving their social status, or to submit to constant and long-lasting contempt on the part of their fellow inmates.

#### VIOLENCE

Power struggles between different groups of prisoners, often expressed by violence, are a common feature of prison life. This phenomenon creates a climate of fear in the prison and serves to accentuate gaps between weaker and stronger inmates. According to Toch (1992), there is a strong connection between environmental conditions and conduct (e.g., mental illness, vio-

lence, recidivism). The following characteristics of the prison environment and inmate life clearly pertain in Israel's prisons.

*Overcrowding.* Proshansky (1970) talks about the connection between overcrowding and anonymity, constant exposure to the eyes of cellmates, the feeling in the inmate that his life has been invaded, and his sense of not having any privacy even in his most intimate activities. Overcrowding is highly evident in Israeli prisons with, on average, 2.6 square meters per inmate per cell.

*Boredom.* The problem of "passing the time" is as old as imprisonment itself. Many prisoners, especially those who do not work, suffer from the inability to divide their time into significant portions: Each day is virtually identical to the day preceding it and holidays and social events that mark out the time of people outside the prison lose their significance in the prison. Prisoners, especially those serving very long sentences and those not entitled to a remission (Johnson, 1987), lose their ability to construct and use their time in a productive way (Goffman, 1961). This situation is conducive to frustration, tension, and, in turn, outbreaks of violence.

*Economics.* Although basic needs are catered for, the average inmate lives in spartan surroundings and suffers from a deep sense of deprivation (Sykes, 1958). Denial of access to commodities and resources leads inmates to search for ways and means to create a clandestine economic system for the supply of consumer goods. Such a system contains a number of possibilities for victimization and violence. Bowker (1980) identified eight characteristic types of economic victimization: loan sharks, fraud and gambling, inflated prices, theft, robbery, protection money, planned shortages, and nonsupply of products.

When the supply of products, especially drugs, is low, inmates are likely to become violent. Such inmates change from *juchaim* and *mavarim* (cunning and sly) to *madrubim* (crazy), picking on the weak, beating up fellow inmates, spilling teeth and robbing. Any inmate in possession of commodities without meaningful defense is robbed.

Our data indicate that the prison population is divided into two groups, those who dominate (*king of the castle, real man, cowboy*) and those who are submissive (*shoes, rabbit, invalid*). Interestingly, some of the latter terms are specifically used to describe prisoners serving time for crimes considered abhorrent by the inmate code, such as rape, child abuse, and so forth (Cordilia, 1983).

## NICKNAMES FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND PRISON STAFF

According to Irwin (1985), when people are forced to cope with stress, they seek out optimal ways to avoid pain and gain social support. The prison regime sets exceptionally severe obstacles to inmate adjustment. Irwin (1985) and Johnson (1987) argue that prison policies and their implementation (formal and informal) contain a clear element of intentional malice and cruelty. This is because members of the penal system, like most of the public, believe that inmates are bad people who deserve to be rejected and treated mercilessly. As a total institution, one of the main aims of the prison is to ensure inmate subordination by imposing strict rules and restrictions with harsh penalties for noncompliance (Goffman, 1961).

The humiliation experienced by the inmate peaks when he finds himself housed in an overcrowded cell (Irwin, 1985) and when he discovers that his custodians know him by the details connected to his crime but have no interest in his individual needs, anxieties, or other personal problems. It is no wonder, therefore, that inmates perceive and analyze the prison and the reality within it in terms of malice and cruelty (Hawkins & Alpert, 1989). As a rule, inmates relate to the prison authorities in a negative manner, expressing contempt and tremendous anger toward them. The argot nicknames assigned to prison staff are as humiliating as possible, and encounters with staff are described in terms of power and inequality (*David and Goliath*), the weak prisoner always suffering and the bad, powerful prison guard always abusive. These descriptions are seasoned with aggressive expressions and a strong drive for revenge.

However, it should be noted that inmate attitudes toward the custodial staff are characterized by ambivalence: on one hand, hatred, distrust, and negativism (Bondesson, 1989) and on the other, due to their power and capacity to influence the lives of inmates, deference and subordination (Johnson, 1987). The ambivalence revealed by this dual role is illustrated in an interview with inmate A, which took place in the room of a prison guard. Alone with the interviewer, inmate A used words such as *maniac* (the most derogatory term possible), *abu-antar* (show-off), *wisach* (contaminated), *sharshuchot* (prostitutes), *halakot* (financial bribe), *chanjar* (knife) *brara* (criminals), and *mezargeg* (seriously beat up an inmate):

Believe me, they are all *maniacs* . . . worse than our maniacs. First, because they can file complaints about us about everything, they think they have power and they are full of poses. Second, they are all contaminated. Some of them have traded drugs with us. Some of them have been fixed up with prostitutes by us. Some have problems outside the home. Some have accepted financial bribes from us in exchange for knives, pistols, and other things. But, when there is an

inspection or an *intifada* in the prison, or they know that *the moment is about to fall* [the right moment has come] and if they play it right, they will be promoted, they forget about all you've done for them let you fall, and then you receive a severe punishment.

However, when the prison guard happened to enter the room, there was a complete turnabout in the inmate's tone:

How are things my brother? What's up? Believe me, they [the prison guards] are poor things and have a hard job. They're also stuck with us in the prison, and living with all the *brara* [criminals] is definitely not easy. We've known one another many years already and I have never seen him *mezargeg* [seriously beat up a prisoner]. That's why you can talk with him *free free* [say all that's on your heart] about everything and you know he's like a safe . . . nothing gets out.

#### ARGOT STYLE

According to Irwin (1980), the harsh realities of prison life induce linguistic inventiveness and improvisation (see also Andersson & Trudgill, 1990). Clemmer (1940) noted that of all the different factors that influence the development of a unique vocabulary in prison, humor, imagination, and cynicism are the most salient. Indeed, the linguistic recreation and humor that characterize the inmate argot is perceived as a way of coping with the harsh conditions of the prison environment (overcrowding, excessive noise, lack of basic comforts) and achieving in-group exclusivity (secrecy) and social cohesiveness (Partridge, 1970).

Imagination and creativity are highly evident in the argot of Israeli prisoners, and many of the argot expressions feature a degree of cynicism: For instance, *the Hilton* is the F Wing of one of Israel's largest prisons, *hotel* is a synonym for prison, and prison cells are *hen houses*.

Like any language, argot is dynamic and likely to change: New words and expressions are invented, and old words acquire different meanings in new contexts—in this case, the prison context (Elaine, 1982). The findings of this explorative study clearly demonstrate the contextual roots and the underlying mechanisms of Israeli inmate argot. Innovation and changes in the content of the argot are dynamic, imaginative, and creative and spread quickly throughout the inmate community. The principle of “one word equals one meaning” is not relevant in the case of argot: There is a constant desire on the part of its speakers to introduce dramatic changes. Metaphors and creative elements are adopted for their entertainment and illustrative value, for their power to attract the attention of listeners, as well as to soften the harsh realities of prison life and to ensure secrecy and group cohesiveness (Partridge, 1970).

These elements are clearly apparent in Israeli inmate argot. For example, *bakbak* and *pishpesh* (bed bugs) are used to describe tea leaves (tea bags are prohibited) due to the widespread presence of bed bugs (especially in the hot summer months) and their appearance (small and black). The parallel between a prisoner who *relays* information to the police/prison authorities and the function of the antenna used by radio and television stations led to the adoption of the term *antenna* for inmate informers. *Haifa/Tel-Aviv/Haifa* denotes a system for using Persian cocaine—inhaling it through a rolled up piece of paper or bank note, one end touching the drug and the other inserted into a nostril, moving along one track of the drug in one direction, and returning along the second track in the opposite direction.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study show that an inmate argot clearly exists in Israeli prisons. The findings also support the notion that inmates do not feel any obligation to adhere to codes and norms imposed on them by the prison authorities (Kalinich, 1980). Accordingly, prisoners develop their own system of norms, values, and behaviors (Sykes, 1958; Toch & Johnson, 1982), which serves as the core of inmate subculture (Sykes & Messinger, 1960). The analysis of our data throws light on the inmate subculture and the relative salience of its norms and values. Communication of the inmate code is accomplished through argot, the prisoners' own language, a jargon that conveys its specific messages and defines its rules and behaviors. Moreover, mastery of argot reflects the personal background of a criminal and his status in prison (Hebdige, 1985). Israel's prison community masters argot and uses it proudly.

The present study, the first of its kind to be conducted in Israel, succeeded in identifying several aspects of the prison subculture and the code of Israeli inmates through their use of argot. Qualitative analysis of the attention and intensity of the argot expressions revealed the importance and significance attributed to components of the code by the prisoners. The highest level of intensity was found for "adherence to the inmate code and loyalty to fellow prisoners." Attention was highest for "drugs," as indicated by the many argot terms related to this category. Note, however, that this may stem from the need for a large vocabulary to accommodate the wide variety of drugs and the need for terms to describe their transfer, sale, and so forth. Violent behavior and domination are also expressed through argot, and the terms and expressions themselves may have a significant effect on a prisoner's status. Indeed, in many cases, not only do these terms describe the situation of an individual

but they also serve to create it. The most surprising finding of the present study, standing in contrast to previous descriptions of prison life, is obtained for attitudes to homosexuality in the prison. According to our respondents, homosexual relations, once commonplace in Israeli prisons, are now rare, and the terms once used to describe it are now used to humiliate fellow inmates or to describe submissive or negatively sanctioned conduct.

Interestingly, the source of many of the negative terms in the Israeli prison argot is the Arabic language (see appendix). It would therefore be interesting to examine whether the adoption of words and expressions from a minority language by inmate argot also exists elsewhere: for example, whether negative terms in American prison argot stem from Spanish words.

In sum, the present research into the argot used by Israeli prisoners succeeded in uncovering a number of important aspects of the norms and values of the inmate subculture of Israeli prisons as well as significant components of their inner world. It is suggested that in-depth understanding of this type may, in turn, serve as a supporting tool in assessing the pain, distress, and needs of prisoners in an attempt to help them overcome such difficulties and seek out efficient coping strategies.

#### APPENDIX

##### List of Major Terms in Israeli Prison Argot

###### PRISONER STATUS (INFORMERS, INMATE RANK)

<i>Phonetic Terms in Argot</i>	<i>Verbatim Translation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<b>Informers</b>		
Awacs	Intelligence airplane	Informer
Antenna	Antenna	Stool pigeon
Wiseh	Dirty (Arabic)	Informer
Muzikai	Musician	Not to be relied on
Patsooa	Invalid	Collaborator
<b>Inmate rank</b>		
Ganoov	Stolen	Fool
Cochav	Star	Joker/clown
Klavim	Dogs	Inmates who obey the boss
Melech hata	King of the castle	Prison leader
Hayalim	Soldiers	Inmates who obey the boss
Na'alayim	Shoes	Submissive inmate
Naknik	Sausage	An inmate who does not act by the inmate code
Soos	Horse	Stupid
Shafan	Rabbit	Coward
Pa'amom	Bell	Noisemaker

(continued)

## APPENDIX Continued

## DRUGS

<i>Phonetic Terms in Argot</i>	<i>Verbatim Translation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Gushim	Blocks	Ground grains of heroin
Glickstein	Name of an Israeli tennis player (the "White sport")	Heroin (because of the white color)
Duvdevan	Cherry	Opium
Litfok	To knock	To inject drug
Galglim	Wheels	Ball-shaped portions of hashish
Harman	Horny	Wants to use drugs
Telephone	Telephone	A tool to smoke hashish
Mizvada	Suitcase	An inmate who delivers drugs in his rectum
Efronot parsiiim	Persian pencils	Persian cocaine
Pagaz	Shell (artillery)	Cigar filled with tobacco and hashish
Tarnegolim	Roosters	Drug portions wrapped for insertion in rectum
Shokolad	Chocolate	Hashish
Re'evim	The hungry ones	Dogs trained to discover hashish
Shvilim	Paths	Drug arranged in rows
Tractor	Tractor	A tool to smoke hashish
Narkis	Narcissus	Drug addict
Ekdah	Pistol	Injector

## SEXUAL RELATIONS IN PRISON

<i>Phonetic Terms in Argot</i>	<i>Verbatim Translation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Exhauster	Muffler	Homosexual
Zonda	Intragastric tube	Homosexual rape
Tapet	Wallpaper	Homosexual
Sandwich	Sandwich	Homosexual intercourse
Tsolelan	Deep-sea diver	Oral sex
Shagrir	Ambassador	Homosexual

## VIOLENCE

<i>Phonetic Terms in Argot</i>	<i>Verbatim Translation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Shofech shinaim	Spilling teeth	To hit/to wound
Nofel al halashim	Falling on the weak	Annoying/disturbing other prisoners
Kipa aduma	Little Red Riding Hood	Ambush

## APPENDIX Continued

<i>Phonetic Terms in Argot</i>	<i>Verbatim Translation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Madroob	Crazy (Arabic slang)	A violent prisoner
Picasso	Picasso—name of painter	Face wound
Puntcher	Flat tire	A stabbing
Krav hatoolim	Cat fight	Lots of noise without violence
Rich-rach	Zipper	Cuts
Intifada	Uprising (Arabic)	To terrorize
Kussa	Zucchini (Arabic slang)	To cut up
Chanjar	Knife (Arabic)	Knife

## NICKNAMES FOR POLICE OFFICERS AND PRISON STAFF

<i>Phonetic Terms in Argot</i>	<i>Verbatim Translation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Shiltonot	Authorities	Police/prison staff
Caftor	Button	Policeman/prison guard
Lool	Hen house	Prison cell
Columbia	Columbia (the country)	Prison full of drugs
Cachol meza'azea	Shocking blue	Patrol car
Malon	Hotel	Prison
Tsipor	Bird	Prison guard/police officer who cooperates with inmates
Abu-antar	Show-off (Arabic slang)	Prison staff
Wisach	Contaminated (Arabic)	Police/prison staff
Sharshuchot	Prostitutes (Arabic slang)	Police/prison staff

## MISCELLANEOUS

<i>Phonetic Terms in Argot</i>	<i>Verbatim Translation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Indian	Red Indians	Arabs
Aron	Cupboard	Rifle
Yatsa letayel	Went for a walk	Was kidnapped
Dag shamen	Fat fish	A person/prisoner who can be robbed easily
Cova'im	Hats	Swiss francs
Poel	Worker	Drug dealer
Kufsa	Box	Brain
Shod be-tseva	Colorful robbery	A robbery with casualties
Shalach lo zer	Sent him a bouquet/wreath	Liquidated
Tistakel al haramzorim	Look at the traffic lights	We are being followed
Brara	Inferior fruit (Arabic slang)	The bottom of the underworld



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