Intervention and Suspicion

Samuel Peter Maull

Doctoral Candidate, Department of Anthropology

In this brown bag I will present material from the first chapter I've drafted from my dissertation. In this chapter I talk about the death of a man in the jail and how the fallout from his death highlights the dynamics of intervention there. I focus on the programming staff in the jail and the ambivalent position they end up taking between the incarcerated men and the deputies. They have to both advocate for the families - to get the men 'cleared' to have visits and they have to do some policing of the families when they come to visit. Their intermediacy becomes dangerous for them when they start to be perceived by the deputies as being too close to the families. A social line distinguishes between the people who fill the jail (and their families, by extension) - the 'criminal element' - and civil society. I explore how the suspicion of the deputies is part of a broader logic of intervention in criminal justice. Intervention operates across this line, identifying the targets of intervention and the problems to be intervened on within this 'criminal element,' whose criminality is always/already confirmed by their being targeted with interventions. I conclude that these interventions cannot succeed because they always reinforce the structural distinction between civil and criminal.

I work with incarcerated men and their families in a local jail. My research focuses on the construction of mutually imbricated concepts of race, family, and responsibility in criminal justice (both the formal court system and the informal governance in the jail). I explore the ways in which the criminal justice system/prison industrial complex recognizes and affirms some forms of intimacy, while suppressing, punishing, and pathologizing others. By focusing on this intimate work, often overlooked in scholarship on mass incarceration, I aim to map the material conditions under which racial and gendered violence is reproduced. My work draws from Abolitionism, Punishment and Society Studies, Critical Race Theory, Afro-Pessimism, Affect Theory, Queer and Feminist Anti-Social Theories and Political Economy, particularly Autonomism.

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