

Prisoner Words: Autobiographical Paths for a Narrated Prison Pedagogy.

Pedacri-ULL, 2022

pedacriULL@gmail.com

Our experience in a single penitentiary institution over the last decade obliges us, in an exercise of prudence and honesty, to tell you, we imagine without the possibility of transfer or direct translation, about our work there. We sense that each penitentiary institution, regardless of the fact that in each country they are designed and obliged under the same regulations, in the Spanish case by Royal Decree 190/1996, which approves the penitentiary regulations, isolated and almost detached from the others, almost by its very nature as a prison and inmate institution, tells its own story, forms its own community on the fringes of the world.

We have known little of other institutions except for occasional encounters where marginal experiences are shared, where solitudes cross each other, who without much encouragement narrate how they water the desert at the same time that the haze makes it grow even more, all around them. For this reason, participating here is an unavoidable opportunity to begin to weave links that form a network that interconnects us, that allows us to exchange experiences and projects so that we can, together, form a tapestry of penitentiary pedagogical cultures.

As if it were a story, We going to tell you the plot of the Prisoner Words project, whose protagonist is the word. We think words and the good treatment with words becomes the art of communicating and communicating with the other, it abounds in opportunities to imagine other ways of coexisting with the different and of resolving conflicts, it offers the possibility of resignifying experience, revisiting the past and understanding ourselves as historical, contextual beings, as protagonists of our own story, deciphering its morphology and appreciating the alternatives and the possible consequences of each act on others.

A decade ago, north of the south, in a village between the coast where the Atlantic dances a tango with the waves and the slopes of the volcano, we have been holding the Los Silos International Storytelling Festival. We take the word off the stage to the beaches, the banana plantations, the living rooms of the houses, the alleys, the squares, the parks, the woods, the ravines, the rural schools in the surrounding area, the senior citizens' centres, the gender violence associations, and so on, in this desire to reach everyone who needs to hear a story. And in this desire, we wanted to go through the bars with words.

Making the path as we go, we found or discovered the method that we will call ELCEN (Listening, Reading, Talking, Writing and Narrating). We are influenced by the zout of Paulo Freire, his work of literacy for the oppressed, his intuition that zout their own experiences we could construct narratives that would show them the arbitrariness of the contexts and the opportunity to change them in order to change their environments. We are influenced by his disciple Augusto Böal who introduces the performing arts to favour experiential reflection from the deconstruction of the personal plot in the elements of dramaturgy, and we are inspired by Propp who, in his morphology of the story, reveals the essential parts on which any person can narrate in order to understand themselves.

We started telling stories with the intention of creating a space of trust, a comfortable setting where people deprived of their liberty could express themselves without being judged. The

starting point was to listen to them, so that they would learn to listen to themselves and to be listened to, with no other aim than to generate sufficient complicity so that their narratives would become increasingly and intensely autobiographical. At the same time, we added poetry and literature to the stories, the reading club was born, where we connected the experiential with fiction, analysed their links to discover that in order to write we need to think about the life we have lived and the world around us

Talking, sharing, exchanging views on what we have heard and read leads us to build with the prison community a common space where we can look at what worries us. The time has come to face the white paper and turn into words what we have locked up behind our own bars of fear. It doesn't matter the spelling mistakes or the first grammatical kicks, original stories emerge which, read by their own voices, narrate the unrepeatable, which, when listened to, are re-signified, are endowed with a new meaning that makes it possible, by going outside oneself, to make another decision, what before torments and hides now consoles and allows.

But we are still inside and so are the words. Between the Festival and the Penitentiary Institution, from their close collaboration comes the opportunity for people deprived of their liberty to narrate their creations in a theatre, in front of an audience, so that for one day they not only feel freedom but also feel like protagonists. Their nerves, their broken voices, their raw stories invite a stunned silence from the audience, neither one nor the other can believe what is happening. Until a thunderous applause breaks out. What they imagine has happened, what they didn't think could happen, those pieces of broken memory are now an invitation to the community to think about the nature of crime as something beyond the nature of the offender.

Since then, little by little, we have been increasing and broadening the experiences around the word. Thus was born the radio station and with it the sound stories, thus was born also the prison newspaper, the scenic experiential workshop, the project of narrated cultures and a couple of years ago, the invitation from somewhere in Syracuse to participate in the European project that summons us to be among you today. The moment we accepted to be part of the Chrysalis and the Butterfly family, we understood that we needed to strengthen our organisational structure and reflect on why we do what we dream of.

A few days ago, we remembered when we started with a couple of people deprived of their freedom and now we fill the auditorium with excited people, carrying their texts, eager to read them and to improve them. It is not worth mentioning the prizes and mentions accumulated, but it is worth noting that the impact of Prisoner Words has increased the educational sexes in the Penitentiary Institution by 200% and that the relationship between prisoners, educators and warders has improved notably. And after ten years we are preparing the first book of autobiographical stories with the prisoners, a digital book in double format, written and narrated, accompanied by musical and pictorial compositions, as a further step in hosting the experience to build another prison culture where the confined voices are heard. And in the midst of the pandemic, we have found a new autobiographical passageway: the Internet. From radio broadcasts we produce audiobooks and narrative pills that swarm the networks and allow us to listen anywhere and at any time to what deserves to be told behind bars. But as we live in times of transition between the word and the image, we have somewhere in the illusion another dream; the cinema. But this, for the time lent to us today, is another story.