

THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN INMATE IN THE SOCIAL REHABILITATION CENTER FOR WOMEN IN QUITO

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1. Context

The development of a penal system in Ecuador since the Nineteenth Century notifies the historic and bibliographic evidence to define a complex process of institutionalization and organization of the state system - through the construction of the State-Nation - that serves a regulatory and reforming role of the Ecuatorian post-colonialist society. The origin of the penal system for women in Ecuador through the creation of institutions such as the “ex penal” García Moreno or the prison for women “El Buen Pastor” are evidences of the strive within the Ecuatorian society – since the process of set up of the State-Nation - for control, surveillance but most of all the establishment of institutions close to the State. These are destined for enfeimement and rehabilitation of persons who put at risk material values or committed offence against moral and religious norms.

2. Summary

Total institutions as prisons seal procedures of control and reorganization of individuals who have violated the norms of modern society or have to convert into “ideal” subjects. In this way society justifies the confinement and immunisation of prisoners through guided practices that combine the control, tension and submissiveness of human beings in order to maintain permanent control and adaption to norms and customs. Taking care of the “inmates” permits social institutions cut off links with the exterior world and deliver them a cultural reality attached to “normal”. In this way the adaptation schedule of each of them – being shorter or longer – has the objective to protect human beings from the drives of desires. Due to this, total institutions such as the rehabilitation centers obey the primary objectives of systematic desecration of the identity of prisoners as well as the the deprivation of freedom. The authority of total institutions covers all aspects of behaviour of prisoners. Aspects such as clothes, manners, nutrition, and the living together are marked by the imposition of a hierarchical authority with the capacity to penalize and correct any offence, in particular of those prisoners who have been in permanent conflict with society.

The field of study that determines this research is the Social Rehabilitation Center for Women in Quito, institution in charge of surveillance and rehabilitation of women in the capital since 1954 as a result of the presidential decree of the President José María Velasco Ibarra until August 2014. This establishment of confinement has been functioning based on a burocratic system with its “inmates” with the Model of Penitentiary Management implemented since 2013, which established certain principles that guided the daily life of women deprived of freedom. The research exhibits the field work realized during a period of four months with methods of social research in order to analyze and understand the daily living of the prisoners of the pavilion “El Dorado”: watch and describe in detail the activities they realized to determine the construction of their identity. In effect, it compiles and describes the information of Ruth, Nelly, Katalina and Lucía, through four life stories that describe each of them.

Talking about social rehabilitation in the Ecuadorian context as spaces that accept the responsibility to “reclaim” subjects who have committed offence against the moral and material values has converted into a matter of “tabú “ in Ecuador, as the discrimination of persons who have entered centers for different circumstances is recurring. In the case of women deprived of freedom in the CRSFQ¹, discrimination has been something normal since their confinement, term and even more so after their release. All prisoners were victims of physical and psychological violence since the moment of confinement in spite of the work of the center’s authorities.

As being confined to a limited physical space, the prisoners “condition” their bodies and minds to a new situation. With this objective, they convert the authorities and the inmates into their “new” social world. To such extent that in the CRSFQ the new inmates started to internalize rules and norms that served them for their socialization and their acceptance. Indeed, the construction of their social world had as starting point the relations initiated in this space. When sharing a small room with three bunk beds and more than five women (Trabajo de campo, 2014), the interaction took place in all forms. Prison was converted into a new “home”, and in this way within this physical space they recreated activities of daily routine such as make up, doing the laundry or cleaning the room with their co-inmates.

3. Conclusions

It is possible to mention that within the CRSFQ, the inmates introduced habits and customs which they recreated as “free” women. It became obvious during the field work that the prison for women recreated the habits of “housewife” in the inmates. For example, having a clean cell, the clothes in order and always “presentable” for the persons who arrived was seen as positive. For this reason, and in spite of the implementation of control, surveillance and norms of behaviour within the center, the inmates constructed their social world based on habits implemented since their childhood in social institutions such as the family, religion or home, and other habits internalized since the moment of confinement in the center and which converted into part of their rehabilitation process.

In effect, the prisoners of the CRSFQ accommodated through new social links which shaped their term in the center but created a new “society” as each of them assumed assigned roles. At the same time they were governed by schedules and regulations imposed by the authorities of the center and shared spaces of free time as the exterior world does. The women of CRSFQ realized activities which strengthened new social links and integrated their human condition as “bad” into parameters that strived to convert them into better women for society through work and physical and mental activity. As a result, each prisoner assumed a role assigned in the institution which represented their new condition with the aim to “repair” through punishment and obedience.

It is possible to compare the situation of a prisoner and her condition with a clay figure which is being shaped by an artisan who assimilates and converts the figure being created into the materialization of all the artisan imagines her to be. At the same time, it reproduced the social reality of the prisoners in the CRSFQ till their transfer to a confinement center totally specialized in surveillance and control. They were subject to an institution which for long periods and uninterruptedly focused through the personnel and the incorporation of activities to “shape” their bodies, their behaviour and in general their life; converting a woman who had committed an offence against the society into a woman full of principles and virtues such as love for work and discipline. It is at this point when the woman

¹ Abreviation of the until 2014 so called Center of Social Rehabilitation for Women in Quito, located in the city of Quito, sector El Inca.

“victim” of a crime should purify her body and soul to achieve to be integrated again into society and be useful. A total institution assumes that the correction of persons who have committed crimes is realized through the integration of rules and behaviours which society sponsors for its total functioning.

The criminalization of women within the Ecuadorian society is for obvious reasons the most debated one due to the gender factor which establishes in women a behaviour of apathy and indifference to violence. Nevertheless, from a different perspective, the remarkable fact of female population in the prisons of our country victims of repression and indifference of society which pushed them to crime. For this reason approaching the situation in depth allows to discover, far from judging, the physical, mental and social condition of each women from the moment of confinement, and the clasification and valuation of their personality and behaviour. Analyzing and interpreting all the process denominated disfigurement of the “I” which forms part of all the adjustments which the prisoners internalize by obligation or obedience, and which respond to the construction of the personality which was in process during the execution of the punishment of each of the prisoners. This way all social and cultural activity, and the same strict time schedule imposed on the prisoners during the existence of the CRSFQ responded to the necessity to construct in each woman of the center her identity according to the establishment and state policies such as the Model of Penal Management 2013 which involved the prisoners in representing and personify the condition of prisoner during their stay. For this reason, the word “prisoner” which ws of comun use during the existence of the CRSFQ responds to the implentation and consumption of all those adjustment which el center imposed on the women with the objective to construct their new personality based on principles of respect and obedience.

Being present as spectator during the research allowed to observe each activity which were realized specifically by four women of the pavilion “Dorado”, prisoners who due to their physical and social condition involved themselves in all activities which the educational area proposed till the closure of the center. For this reason there is no doubt that the prsence of the “norms of the house”, meaning all procedures which Ruth, Nelly, Katalina and Lucía went through during their stay imposed on them the seal of prisoners of the CRSFQ. Indeed, having integrated all rules of the center, and having been part of the courses and activities which promoted activity and work converted these four women into functional subjects who reproduced involutarily in each of their activities the discipline and obedience as regulatory principles of their new identity.

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