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ARTISTIC PRACTICES IN THE PRISON CONTEXT: A LOOK AT THE PEDAGOGY OF THE ARTS BEYOND THE BARS THAT SEPARATE US

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Abstract: This research aims to observe and analyze pedagogical artistic practices carried out in prison environments with women in situations of deprivation of liberty. The temporal cut of the research refers to practices carried out between the years 2016 to 2018, when still in a face-to-face module, carried out in two penitentiaries in two states of Brazil: one in a female penitentiary in the city of Belo Horizonte with the creation and performance of women from Zula Co. Theater, which inspired the work “Banho de Sol” and another one at the Capital Women’s Penitentiary (PFC), in São Paulo, with the creation of artists from Coletivo Teatro Dodecafônico and Rubro Obsceno, which originated the project “Mulheres Possíveis”. During the months of research, notes on the readings and interviews carried out with the artists of the two aforementioned projects and with two former participants of one of the workshops, when they were in a prison context, were taken up and analyzed. This research has a specific focus on women, as they are the ones who suffer the greatest penalties and are subject to numerous situations of disrespect and lack of structure by prison institutions, when compared to the situation of men in the same context. The issue of art against current policy will also be brought to the discussion - the concept of Necropolitics raised by the contemporary philosopher Achille Mbembe - the importance of artistic pedagogical practices in prison environments, their provocations and challenges in this context and the impact of such practices on daily routine of these women. Finally, the implications of these projects will be analyzed a posteriori - in the lives of these women already in a condition of freedom - their reintegration into society and the effects of such proposals in a broader context, encompassing the free population. At the end of the file, there are, in full, the interviews with the two art educators

and the two graduates participating in one of the projects.

Keywords: Pedagogy of the arts, penitentiary system, artistic action.

You have to act like it's possible radically transform the world. and you have to do this all the time.

Angela Davis

Societies, in particular the Brazilian one, inherited from the patriarchal way, the macho treatment addressed to women, an ingrained and easily identifiable behavior in many situations in the daily life of this population. Prejudice, the concept of inferiority, fragility and purity are in the imagination and in the actions practiced both in the micro - the individual in his daily life, and in the macro, small and large institutions. In the case of prison institutions, the worsening of these prejudices generates inequality of rights and deprivation of preservation of the female condition, in addition to a higher rate of social and family rejection.

And society, our Brazilian society thinks that because the person was arrested it is because the person is marginal, that the person is good for nothing. It's not like that! There are very intelligent women there, they do a lot of manual work, but there it is very difficult for you to do manual work, because you have to have authorization, you have to have a visit, so people who don't have a visit, go there and are abandoned by the family also - because the family makes a lot of mistakes in abandoning people in that place - people are nothing in there. (Excerpt from the interview with Scheine Rosângela)

Research and data point to the inequalities suffered by women who commit crimes, having a longer period of imprisonment in the application of their sentences compared to men who committed the same crimes. There are still women who have not even

been tried and are forgotten in prisons, without legal support due to their social condition. Most of these women, almost 70% of all incarcerated women are black and poor, they live in the system of the fourth country that most imprisons and kills women in the world. Besides that *expansion of the punishment industry*¹, the rights of these women are affected by the inequality of sentences.

The situation of women does not improve within these institutions, on the contrary. The lack of structure to receive the female audience in these institutions shows the system's disregard for the specificities of a female body. In many of these places there is no gynecological care, sanitary adequacy - there is a lack of sanitary pads and, in many cases, structure in the bathrooms due to the lack of toilets sanitary facilities - in addition to the units being made for men, as there are no resources to attend to issues specific to the female public, such as lack of humanitarian assistance for pregnant and postpartum women, nurseries for postpartum women to leave their babies, emergency rooms for deliveries and access to a telephone that guarantees that incarcerated women have contact with their children. The violence with which these women are treated when in maternity conditions is an aggravating factor. As the conditions with which they are treated in these environments are not sufficient, they are subject to the prejudice of society, which does not conceive of errors within the social nucleus, abandonment of the family due to rejection, lack of financial resources and/or shame. The lack of children who are under the guardianship of relatives or even the state, when in case of loss of custody, affects the emotional state of these people who are also

deprived of psychological and/or psychiatric follow-up within prisons.²

To think about all the circumstances that involve the imprisonment of many of these women, there was a movement to bring closer this discussion of women in prison and the importance of artistic-pedagogical actions within these spaces of hostility and conflict with the essential rights guaranteed by the article 205 of the 1988 Federal Constitution. Due to the mandatory social distance caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, a physical meeting with the directors and participants of the analyzed projects was not possible. However, through the interviews and telephone conversations, one can see the importance of these people in the lives of the ex-prisoners and the affection they feel for the support and welcome they had in difficult moments while in prison. Artists Talita Braga, from Zula Cia de Teatro, Letícia Olivares, from Coletivo Rubro Obsceno and graduates Scheine Rosângela Ferreira and Miriam Baião, participants in the workshops of the "Mulheres Possíveis" project, agreed to give interviews for this research as a moment of sharing of their experiences and reinforcing the importance of what they lived through, so that similar actions and the right to education can reach more women. As Talita Braga says, it is a way of "taking a human look at these women and understanding that humanity and that life has many points of view".

When entering the penitentiary complexes, the artists rely on what they came across: women. Women like any other, but with a history of absences, deprivation of rights, abandonment and successive violence throughout their lives and who, when arrested, enveloped in a discourse of order and compliance with the institution's rules. The privileges of middle-class white women

1. Term used by actress and lawyer Dina Alves in her article Black women: the most watched, punished and poorly paid by Sesc. Available in: <https://www.sescsp.org.br/mulheres-negras-as-mais-vigiadas-punidas-e-mal-pagas/>

2. There are women who need continuous treatments and suffer from a lack of medication, which aggravates the crises and the clinical picture of their psychological illnesses.

were highlighted by Talita and Letícia, the interviewed artists leading the projects, as a difference that increases the degree of inequality between them and women in deprivation of liberty.

And our life goes on, we leave there and go eat pastry, go to homeopathy, go look for therapy, go home and your husband made a delicious meal and you just heard that the other woman's husband killed her son than 5 months and she is paying for this crime. So it's a huge abyss and we leave with the feeling that what we're doing in there is nothing compared to what needs to change within this system. It's nothing! (Excerpt from the interview with Talita Braga)

As previously mentioned, it is revealing and indisputable data about racism, discrimination and the difference in treatment that black and poor women experience throughout their lives.

Looking at incarcerated women, drawing a parallel with those who are free, we note that: "the huge difference is the succession of violence to which they are exposed, social inequality, structural racism and sexism"³. When they meet, they are people wanting to help and curious women willing to take different paths from there. Each proposed exercise is a way of supporting, giving direction and sharing experiences that make that space something beyond walls that oppress. The two projects analyzed here differ in their conduct and in the way they were received by the institutions, but they converge in the desire for dialogue, listening and care for similar bodies, through what they know how to do: art. In the "gaze game" proposed by the artists of "Mulheres Possíveis", for example, the estrangement of having another woman look into her eyes and see a person beyond the "envelope of the imprisoned woman" imposed by society is a movement to bring

to memory the woman that that person who is imprisoned really is. Such a gesture evokes her feelings, her freedom in being able to look into someone else's eyes without reprisals and not just having her look conditioned to the ground, as required by local regulations. The time, which chronologically lasts from 5 to 10 minutes of exercise, is challenging in that there is someone standing really looking at another person. However, the reason for this clash of bodies is another, more than the relationship between two people, "there is a space for expression, for recognition even, for being seen, for saying "I exist" which is very strong"⁴. There is an exchange of silent dialogues, of feelings that are constantly erased within these places.

In this same project, when they bring a suitcase with 80 clothes so that these women can change and take off the standard uniform, they also bring a memory of each one's individuality, taste, style, choice. This issue of choice is very strong in the theater, because based on it you make decisions that change the whole meaning of a life. So, when these exercises are brought into these complexes, it's not to do a fashion show, it's to work on much deeper issues, identity, intimate, that reverberate in every decision in these people's lives. "Each one chose the clothes they thought suited her, you know, and we put on the clothes and we danced, sometimes we made stops like that, like a statue, without moving. That kind of thing, and I really loved making art."⁵ This type of activity goes against the policy of erasing the subject that exists in the country's punitive institutions. The focus of these institutions is not on re-socializing these people, but on punishment. Remembering mistakes and always looking to the past prevent the person who committed a crime from seeing other

3. Excerpt from the interview with Talita Braga.

4. Excerpt from the interview with Letícia Olivares.

5. Excerpt from the interview with Miriam Baião.

possibilities for life outside prison and from having the autonomy to face circumstances that could lead him or her back to crime.

The everyday gestures being worked on with theater exercises - such as physical contact - also bring the feeling of existence beyond the penitentiary walls. When a round of conversation, massages or hugs is proposed, it is brought to the memory of the body that that human being is made of affections. The prerogative that these people always need to be isolated from anyone else, or that the slightest contact can generate conflicts falls apart when there is someone who can give and receive a hug, a word, a consolation. Because of these very strong questions that were taken by the projects, the touch, the meeting, the memories and talk about what these people's lives were like before prison, these people see their lives again beyond the mistakes they made. Talita Braga tells about a remarkable exercise for her and one of the women in the complex: one of these women did not remember anything about her life before her arrest and, thanks to the meetings in the theater workshops, managed to recover her memories. With the experience of exercises that work memory as triggering material, this girl remembered that she listened to the song "Secretária" by the singer Amado Batista, on Sundays, with her mother. She remembered what they both ate and did while the music played. The result of this experience became scene material for the show "Banho de Sol", which rescued precious memories of a woman from the moments when her life was not reduced to a record number through which she started to be identified (the INFOPEN). This number characterizes the mistake made and reinforces a state of suffering and rejection all the time.

One of the interviewed graduates, Scheine Rosângela, spoke of the importance of people in this moment of deprivation of liberty, appealing to this human dimension that is

so lacking in prison environments. Miriam Baião also mentions this in her speech when she says: "I say, as I always say, that I was passing by and suddenly a hand reached out to me and I intertwined in that hand. I always say this line, which is to be part of it". The person trapped there is not just an INFOPEN, he has a name, an identity. It's not letters put together to make a sound, it's a word that was chosen for each person at birth and that can forever identify them. The importance of playing the game of saying your name and the name of the other inside a prison is, in a small way, to give back that identity, that life that goes on violently, but that is not limited to this moment. It's not forgetting that there are names, records, stories, memories and a future. When you say your name out loud and when you say the other's name out loud, it takes shape. The name has a sound, a meaning and gives the feeling of belonging.

It's like this: it's a feeling that overcomes all pain and drives us through life. I learned a lot and I felt very lonely, because I'm a very difficult person to get along with. Since I was a child I was always very reserved, so it was very difficult for me to fit in. So this workshop made me fit in more with the girls, talk more, you know? Feeling better there, because before participating, I felt very reserved, I didn't really like to talk, I don't know if it's because I had no subject. I mean, I have a subject, because I've always read a lot, I've always really enjoyed studying, I studied there at PFC, I completed my second degree. (Excerpt from the interview with Scheine Rosângela)

When the game "Oppressed and Oppressor", referring to Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, is experienced, another way of living and relating is presented. In it, these women have the possibility to stop and think about the situation they are living at that moment, about what they are witnessing, about everything that happens in

their daily lives and the different ways they react to oppression, punishment and abuse. of power, in addition to being invited to analyze the context, reflect on the direction that situation may take and be aware that actions can be multiple and not necessarily only violence. The game encourages them to look for new possibilities to face such situations within this violent world, characterized by the succession of violence and faults. And so, with socializing, games and artistic practices, they bring back to these women the tastes, desires, dreams, joys and hopes of a life outside the penitentiary walls. This is one of the main objectives of the educators with these workshops. Leaving aside this idea of an art related to presentations on stage, they are “leaving” the scene to make room for other women that society does not want to hear. Women who carry the title of criminals become a problem to be placed on the sidelines in closed places, far from the socializing of others, usually in cities in the interior. Thus, they do not have to deal with the problem of increasing criminality that comes with a package containing racism, structural machismo and inequality.

We have many prejudices, we have no idea what is behind that wall and we fantasize a lot, fantasize about our prejudices; fantasy because of structural racism; fantasy because of the movie we see and it was very shocking for us the first day, because we found women who were very open; with a lot of desire to do theater. (Excerpt from the interview with Talita Braga)

ART AGAINST THE GRAIN OF NECROPOLITICS

In his studies, Foucault observes the organization of powers and government domination in the management of life, through the concept of Biopolitics. That is, the person in power has the right over life

and death, decides who lets live and who can die. Recently, the theorist and philosopher Achille Mbembe developed the concept of Necropolitics, according to which legitimizes the death of some for the safety of others. This concept is applied in the dynamics of penal institutions, in which a direct parallel with the structure of the so-called free society is noted. In the unhealthy survival conditions of many of the country's prisons and penitentiaries, Necropolitics is at work, in the abandonment of bodies to death, in the imposition of severe punishments, in the quality of food and in the lack of medical treatment. When someone acquires a disease it is very easy to see, this is due to the sanitary conditions of the cells, occupied with a much larger contingent of people than they support. The overcrowding of prisons, together with the lack of medication and poor nutrition, generate a wide range of diseases, including skin diseases.

In addition to control over these bodies with regard to health, there is also control over behavior. Heads down, eyes always looking at the feet, hands behind the back, queue when moving, bodies frequently directed towards the wall. These are rules that robotize human beings, making them lose control over their own way of being in the world. And finally, there is control over the minds, reducing them only to “yes sir” and “no sir”, remembering at every opportunity the mistakes made by these people, always making them look to their past. There are no chances or initiatives for projecting the future, for a different life, for real resocialization within society, for nurturing dreams and building projects. Necropolitics is the system that governs prisons and penitentiary institutions, leaving the person who is deprived of liberty in deprivation of development, learning, affection, care, life. The law that prevails within many of these

walls is the law of punishment, abandonment, neglect. These are the bodies left to die that the vast majority of society does not want to deal with.⁶

So they also know the limits of that place and any freedom is seen as rebellion, so we learned to play with that and listen to it in order to continue, because I think that if you don't pretend to be with the system, you don't stay inside from him, you leave. (Excerpt from the interview with Talita Braga)

It is in this context that art takes the opposite path and goes against everything that dehumanizes a person. In the case of the two projects reported here, the workshops did not take place and were developed “with” women prisoners, they were developed with and for women, with their individualities, thoughts and their life baggage like any other woman. There, in those environments of the workshops developed by the four educators, both in the project carried out in the penitentiary of Minas Gerais and in those carried out in the Women's Penitentiary of the Capital of São Paulo, one did not see the error, one saw the person beyond the committed acts. This is the primary function of art education carried out in prison contexts: to bring to the wheel questions that elevate thoughts, that work on communication, the encounter, the gesture, the touch, the care, the treatment, the critical thoughts, that is, everything that the prison system does not want. “In addition to being a moment where they talk, this action brings the movement of the body, an affective proximity to each other through this movement that the action generates” (Artist Vânia from Coletivo Dodecafônico quoted in Letícia Olivares' speech in an interview)

In addition to the relationship with oneself, the artistic practices provided in these workshops work with women on the

issue of the other, the perception of otherness. Looking at someone other than yourself and the affection that person may receive from you; looking at the other and putting yourself in that person's shoes changes your view and makes you cultivate a feeling of empathy. Putting yourself in the other's shoes, in the other's skin and receiving what the other is receiving is a power that changes the way you see the world around you. The importance of these meetings is in the words of Miriam Baião, when she reports significant moments of her experience: “Sometimes it was when we made circles or even, I don't remember the name, that we could hug, walk, make gestures with the hands”.

With this work being built together, there was a transformation in the daily routine of the women who lived in these spaces. The change in behavior and in the relationship between detainees was seen in a different way, a condition no longer of bodies on alert, in a situation of conflict, but people with similar life stories, who could lean on each other to get through a common phase of their lives. The arts workshops - not for all of them, but for many of them - were a pleasant surprise, in which they discovered themselves as artists. Not that media artist related to fame and flattery, these women germinated the artist who had been there for a long time, but who did not reveal herself due to the obstacles of a difficult life. A whole consciousness was transformed in the encounters. Activity time has never been an escapist moment from reality. On the contrary, it was by dealing with the reality of the condition of the moment, with all the layers behind the subjectivity that builds a human being, that the new happened: the new of perspectives, of ways of behaving, of dialoguing, of dealing with with difficult situations, dealing with violence, with

6. The Capital Women's Penitentiary is differentiated in terms of some assistance in the area of health and activities for incarcerated women. There, women have workshops, literacy projects and specialist professionals in caring for women's bodies.

colleagues, with choices, with themselves. “It’s wonderful, because we discover a talent that we didn’t even know we had. It’s really good, because you discover so much that you didn’t know you could do, that you end up discovering yourself”. (Excerpt from the interview with Scheine Rosângela).

And when change happens in one medium, the surroundings transform. The way an institution works is stipulated by a vertical relationship - from top to bottom, so that the behavior of security agents follows a pattern according to which they were trained and which is repeated almost mechanically. When there is a generalized profile of people deprived of liberty, it is assumed that such people are violent and undisciplined, which automatically generates feedback based on the imposition of rules through repression. It is a human characteristic to rebuke with violence what is not achieved in dialogue. In the case of prisons, the dialogue stage is, in most cases, suppressed, almost as if it were useless to resort to this alternative in this space. This logic carries with it the feeling of revenge against these people for the crimes committed - physicalized in the form of punishment and violence, even when it is accompanied by a discourse of resocialization as legitimization of the behaviors and decisions taken by the units’ directors. When art and education manage to penetrate this gear, a whole dynamic, also vertical, begins to change, only in the opposite direction.

So they received this audience with great care, so much so that the correctional officers who were standing behind, who were even wearing a hood - you can only see the eye - and with the shotgun in their hand, during the presentation, at the end of the presentation, when there was a scene where we sing “Evidências” - which was one of our students who chose to sing and told her story, the penitentiary agents started to sing. With a shotgun, they began to sing

“Evidences” along with them and they lowered the gun and sat down to watch until the end. (Excerpt from the interview with Talita Braga)

From this movement, people who manage to look into the eyes of another person, who manage to think of another path in life that does not lead to more violence, who try to be the best version of themselves for themselves and their family, come out of the walls. They start to feel protagonists of their own lives, they feel belonging and responsible for building the social dynamics in which they are inserted. The following excerpt, from the interview with Miriam Baião, demonstrates this well: “I always liked to draw, more landscape. There I started to master another side that I didn’t know I had, which is starting to look more at people and I also started to gain a taste for drawing graphic pencil caricatures”. And here she explains the effects of these projects on her life: “(...) when you learn to control yourself, see yourself and take advantage of the project opportunities you have there, I think you leave there a great person and That’s what I did. I got very attached to the projects.”

And far from being magical attempts at salvation, such initiatives enforce the right of these women to have guaranteed education, to have access to the basics for the intellectual and physical formation of the citizen. “This made me continue to be able to show other women to believe more in themselves and that they are capable of going (much more) further” (Excerpt from the interview with Miriam Baião). These educational and artistic practices act as cracks, exceptions, where they must be the rule, revealing the power of a society educated to respect, dignity, love and reciprocity.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From what is exposed in this article, one can validate the immense importance of the arts in the lives of women who are placed on the margins of social life and below many of the problems on which neither civil society nor government authorities are interested in working. The difference that art, education and care make in people's lives can give new meaning to the past, transform the present and build futures different from those to which a portion of society is condemned to follow. In the cited projects, it was possible to perceive the concern with the individual placed in the foreground, instead of their previous actions. With the focus on the person, different actions can be expected and received. That is, the power of the acts to focus on the person makes all the difference, it is not about focusing on the action of the past, on something that can no longer be reversed, but on the results, also the result of the actions of these people.

Listening to these women was one of the key points for these considerations. Listening to them and being able to follow a little of their steps now in freedom was a way of proving the power of such projects in following the lives and decisions taken by the egresses. These, now artists, are people who see themselves as belonging, not only to a possible society that accepts them, but also in a profession that guarantees them contact with their subjectivities.

In a movement of listening and openness to conversations, space was given that they hardly get because of their status as egresses. These women are always marked as egresses from a prison system, the conception of egress in society's imaginary comes before the woman who conquered freedom. In this research, the important thing was to be able to record the voice of these women beyond any label and above any prejudice. Thus, the mouth that speaks is not the one full of apprehensions,

fears and shame; it's a free mouth to declare your overcoming and new phase of life.

As resistance to a punitive system, the need to allow the creation of critical thoughts, analysis of ideas, debate of opinions is demonstrated. Thinking is natural and necessary for humanity. We know that thinking can be dangerous, but preventing these people from having their own ideas and taking away their right to dialogue is much more lethal for society. Stimulating the exercise of creating and cultivating ideas can be dangerous, but not thinking is even more dangerous, because those who do not think do not evaluate their actions or measure the consequences.

With the affectations and changes in treatment, it is not only the behavior and decisions of these women that change, the whole dynamics of society also changes. One cannot deny the belonging of these people to society, this is a serious mistake, because the changes these people go through transform the way in which the social gear will work, since a population is composed of all the agents belonging to it. When they are reintegrated into society, relationships, socializing, encounters, conversations, opportunities change.

The results of this research were positive and hopeful. It is known that much can still be done, but noticing that the change in one life alters the destiny of an entire family, an entire descendant, is already a relevant sign. Finding people who love art and who see themselves as part of this universe strengthens the thought that art is truly for everyone, it belongs to everyone who is satisfied with it and that education transforms lives.

As a major intention is the hope that this topic, these conversations, actions, ideas, wills and everything that involves the issue of the right of people deprived of their liberty does not stop in this article. May more research,

more projects and more arms be opened to this dialogue and may this be just one more of the cracks made in a wall that one day may cease to exist.⁷

7. The interviews, in full, are attached to this article.

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