Chapter 12
Prison and Social Reintegration: The Voice of a Formerly Freedom-Deprived Individual

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ABSTRACT

This study uses the voice of a formerly freedom-deprived individual, resorting to his memory, perception, and the exchange of the information acquired during his tenure in jail to interpret and understand the implications and manners of thought of those who live the prison reality. Following the qualitative methodology as the approach in the case study, this investigation demonstrates that in spite of the years that have passed, and of the efforts undertaken by the governments to make changes, jails continue being frequently damaged spaces, and in their interiors reigns a particular way of life in which violence is a necessary consequence, where socially diminished individuals retrain, with insufficient programs of attention, limited offers and opportunities of access amongst other restrictions, which end on disrespect and violation of their human rights because many times, more than stimulation for their rehabilitation, which is the proclaimed goal of the penitentiary system, jail is constituted into a place of development of their criminal career.

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INTRODUCTION

Article 272 of the Venezuelan Constitution proclaims that it is the duty of the Venezuelan State to guarantee “the rehabilitation of the inmate and respect for their human rights”. However, deprivation of liberty is transmuted under the shadows of an ideal of humanization and a utopia of re-socialization, in which the individual could serve his sentence in an appropriate space in respect and guarantee his dignity as a person, which allows them to overcome the conditions of original disadvantage, exclusion or social marginalization.

The country’s penitentiary history carries with it a series of problems that trigger successive protests due to prison conditions - especially in the areas of health, work and recreation, judicial delays, property, violence, mistreatment of prisoners and visitors, abuse and corruption by prison officials, the possession and sale of arms and drugs, discrimination of women prison; causing strikes and riots in the prison establishments in the country.

In addition to this, it is impossible to avoid that in the penitentiaries of the country, in addition to the organization and formal norms of these institutions of social control, an intramural culture underlies, an underworld with its own codes and rules governs the daily life of people deprived of freedom.

Some efforts have been made by the national government to appease the crisis and to improve the penitentiary system, implementing various programs, plans, policies and / or projects without obtaining the expected success. It is precisely because of a prison emergency, that the constitutional mandate to create “an autonomous penitentiary entity” is fulfilled, in order to provide comprehensive care of the prisoner, considering the responsibility of the State and Society in the preventive treatment of delinquency and re-education of the individual.

At the end of the year 2013, the last known official figures, the Ministry with Penitentiary Competency reports a total of 53,917 (50,541 males and 3,376 females) inmates housed in 50 establishments, of which 69.31% remain in unprocessed status, in addition to providing assistance to 28,776 graduates with benefits from the penal system, in 06 night centers, 33 supervised residency centers and 30 technical units for supervision and guidance. (MPPSP, 2013: 26)

During this period, the national press - since no official statistics are released - reports 226 cases of injuries and the death of 248 people deprived of their liberty, mainly produced (71.9%) for the use of firearms, to some of these cases (12.7%) are added to high levels of violence, simultaneously using resources such as bullets, stabblings, dismemberments and hangings (Provea, 2014). However, in its management report the ministerial office states that “80% of the country’s prisons are free of weapons” (MPPSP, 2013: 120).
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