The Contradictions of Prison Life and the Return to the Human in Man[*]

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At a time when most research on prison life focuses on extremely specific problems, this paper focuses on critically re-examining the key premises of prison life. The subject of the paper is the function of prisons in society, and the questioning of the role of prisons in relation to prisoners. Therefore, the main objective is to examine the issue of resocialization and adequacy of implementation. Previous research and case analysis show that respect for humanity among prisoners and employees in the prison environment is one of the basic prerequisites for successful resocialization. In this sense, prison can be seen as an indicator of social well-being and progress. In other words, it is necessary to create opportunities in the prison environment that exist in society as a whole for working on oneself, for example, through education, psychotherapy, and various other activities. In this way, the gap between the prisoners and the society can be reduced.

KEYWORDS: contradictions of prison life / human in man / prisoners / resocialization / individuation

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Introduction

The prison environment is characterized by uncompromising isolation, constant surveillance, a lack of intimacy, relationships based on distrust and aggression, as well as social, sensory, and intellectual deprivation (Granados et al., 2023; Skowroński & Talik, 2023; Tadić, 2024). Also, a large number of prisoners live in prisons. For example, the prison population in Serbia consists of 10,787 prisoners (Aebi & Cocco, 2024), while the total number of prisoners in world prisons is approximately 11.5 million (Fair & Walmsley, 2024). The growth rate of the prison population in Serbia from 2013 to 2023 was 15.9% (from 140 to 162 prisoners), which is 25% higher than the European average (124 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants) (Aebi & Cocco, 2024). Consequently, prison life carries its own contradictions, such as how to implement resocialization and ensure the quality of life of prisoners in an environment that is not a natural human environment.

Most research focuses on phenomena such as adaptation to the prison environment, psychosocial climate, group dynamics and norms of prisoners, reactions to deprivation, or imprisonment as a process present in those sentenced to several years in prison (Knežić, 2017; Mejovšek, 2002). A large study of integration into the prison social system conducted by Radovanović (1992) revealed the weaknesses of the re-education model due to the strength of the prison culture focused on opposition and hostility toward prison treatment programs and societal norms. Such a culture necessitates a reaction from prison staff that involves applying a repressive model instead of a re-education model. In this way, the vicious cycle is perpetuated, making it challenging to find a viable solution that would contribute to creating a more humane environment in prisons.

In this paper, we intend to briefly recall these contradictions and ask how it is possible to communicate with prisoners in such an environment, addressing them as people and not as "numbers", which is the basic condition for them to experience human contact as a value and change in the direction of adapting to life in society.

Contradictions of Prison Life and Duality in Human Nature

Perhaps the most appropriate way to begin the story of prison life is to recall Zimbardo's experiment (Zimbardo, 1972). The group of people was divided into two subgroups: those who were imprisoned and those who guarded the prisoners. The subgroup guarding the prisoners changed its behavior to be rude, disrespectful, humiliating, aggressive, and oppressive toward the prisoners. This tells us many things, but from different perspectives of looking at the problem. One perspective is that of social psychology, which suggests that people are more

influenced by the social environment than by personality traits (Ross & Samulels, 1993). In addition to Zimbardo's experiment, this is confirmed by many similar experiments, the most famous of which is Milgram's experiment, which proved the strength of the social influence of authority on obedience in the implementation of punishment (Milgram, 1974). In other words, the prison environment itself has a strong influence on shaping prison life.

On the other hand, we can approach it from the perspective of personality psychology and clinical psychology and ask what dynamic forces operate within the personality that lead to changes in people's behavior. How is it that people who behave normally in everyday life can change to such an extent that they become implacable, cold-blooded, and aggressive "guards" of prisoners? As psychologists of individual differences would explain, the latent traits that exist in a person do not have to be manifested in everyday life but in specific situations (Kamin, 1969). This indicates the duality in human nature. We see it in the examples we have given so far, such as conformity versus innovation, latency versus manifestation, and it exists in a series of examples such as destruction versus creation, love versus hate, sociality versus antisociality, and the like.

What does all this tell us? That it is not unusual to expect that behaviors conditioned by the prison environment and the division of social roles between guards and prisoners will manifest themselves in the prison environment. That certain predispositions in the form of latent personality traits will be manifested through social roles and will influence the development of social identity characterized by belonging to certain groups. However, if all this is already known, why do we try so hard to study the lives of prisoners? What is it that escapes our attention? What are the hidden elements that we want to see? What are the riddles to which we seek answers? One thing is certain: we ask ourselves why there is aggression and destructiveness in human nature, where the need to cause injury to another human being comes from, and where the need for destruction, violence, warfare, and killing comes from. But we can also ask ourselves why there is love and creation, where the need to help another human being comes from, and where the need for creation, care, peace, and birth comes from.

Human in Men

If we were to look at the questions from the previous chapter from the perspective of duality in human nature, what is fundamental would again escape our attention. What we are looking for in the title of the paper we marked as human in man, while dualities are marked as contradictions that prison life carries. Now we are just coming across the essential question: what is human in man? If we took animal and human as opposites, we would have to notice that the animal is

contained in the human organism; therefore, it is an integral part on which the human is built. The very word "builds" directs our attention to the hidden assumptions underlying the previous sentence, which is development. According to Darwin's theory, the living world develops, and man is the last in the animal chain of development. Man is a specific living being because, due to certain characteristics, he stands out from the animal world. Man lives in a human community that has a history, where development continues as the development of civilizations and cultures, to put it succinctly, that is, speech, writing, thinking, beliefs, convictions, skills, etc., develop. The historical development of mankind is reflected in human posterity through individual development. In his theory of motivation, Maslow (1970) identified self-actualization as the supreme motive. In other words, every human being has potential that can be developed in an adequate environment.

Based on the previous expositon, we can reformulate our initial question: how can the prison environment be changed to enable the individual development of its participants? However, with this question, we have gone beyond the framework that society (and/or the state) supports. For society, there is a task to socialize individuals to become shaped as society expects them to be. In this sense, prison exists as an institution that deprives those people of their freedom who have not behaved in accordance with the rules that society imposes on them. That is why it is said that in prison, people should be resocialized to return to society with acceptable forms of behavior. More precisely, we are asking what to do to start the process of individuation in the participants of prison life, as opposed to the process of resocialization. When we talk about individuation, more emphasis is placed on the individual and less on society, as in the case of resocialization, and therefore the appreciation of the human in a person is indispensable. In other words, Zimbardo's experiment shows the direction in which human behavior can move when it is left to the animalistic nature of humans (Zimbardo, 1972); however, the rules of prison life fundamentally tend to reproduce the rules of social life, which imply respect for the humanity of a person and respect for others.

To examine the existence and measure the degree of appreciation for humanity in individuals residing in prison environments, specific indicators must be identified for measurement purposes. When referring to participants in the prison environment, we encompass all individuals present within the prison, regardless of their status as inmates or employees. Notably, working with prisoners may be perceived as a demeaning position in society. Therefore, it is crucial that employees receive societal appreciation for their work, enabling them to extend appreciation to prisoners. In a sense, contemporary prison life can be viewed as an indicator of a country's societal development. Consequently, it is unsurprising that some of the most developed Scandinavian countries serve as models for prison organization and life (e.g. Norway, Sweden, Denmark) (Ilijić, 2022).

Their system notably incorporates two key elements: provision and gradation. The term "provision" pertains to human needs, ensuring that every prisoner has access to a diverse range of activities. These activities include education (Ilijić, 2022), not limited to training and lectures, but also access to literature of choice for self-education. Additionally, psychotherapy is offered as an activity with the potential to initiate and influence human development and individuation. Gradation, on the other hand, refers to the evaluation of prisoners in relation to the potential danger they pose to the social environment, specifically assessing the extent to which desired resocialization has been achieved. This system categorizes prisoners based on their level of risk, with those deemed dangerous to others or themselves being held in specially secured areas. As the level of control decreases, prisoners may progress to an open type of prison, where they reside independently in apartments designed for their needs within the local community. In such settings, employees serve more as supportive figures for independent living rather than as controlling authorities. In fact, no one should be subjected to stricter condition than are necessary (Ilijić, 2022).

In other words, the indicators for measuring the degree of respect for humans in the prison environment could be determined by the presence of different forms of offerings to prisoners and employees that exist in the society in which the prison sentence is implemented. This determination takes into account societal development and explains the differences that exist in the prison systems of different countries. Additionally, it should be noted that our approach is based on following the trends of positive criminology, while monitoring negative trends involves investigating the presence of negative forms of behavior such as humiliation, oppression, violence, and the like.

Individuation in prison

Finally, we would like to recall one example of individuation in the prison environment, which is known in American culture. It concerns Rubin Carter, also known as "Hurricane" (*Rubin "Hurricane" Carter*). The example is well-known because Rubin wrote his autobiography, "*The 16th Round: From Number 1 Contender to Number 45472*", while in prison, in which he maintained his innocence (Ritter, 2015). Namely, Rubin was a boxer and was preparing to win the championship when he was arrested and convicted of murdering three men in a bar. Due to public pressure, Rubin had a second trial and was again sentenced to prison. He was released thanks to a *habeas corpus* appeal after twenty years in prison (Ritter, 2015).

We cite this example because Rubin spent time in prison reading and studying literature, which enabled him to write an autobiography, fight for his freedom, and after his release, continue his work with the Association in Defense of the

Wrongly Convicted and the Innocence Project. For his work, he received two honorary doctorates in law from York University (York University, Toronto, Canada) and Griffith University (Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia).

Conclusion

After such a exposition, which raises more questions than answers, it would be too pretentious to provide any kind of conclusion. A more appropriate direction for our aspirations would be to understand the relationship between the prison institution and society as a whole, as connected phenomena based on which we can monitor the extent to which the prison reflects the society we live in and how the changes we aim to implement in social relations within the prison can improve our understanding of the society in which we live, and perhaps even guide changes in society. Changes in society would then effect changes in prison life until perhaps the reorganization of the prison institution is reached, or it would be more appropriate to replace it with a different mode of existence.

Acknowledgment

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