

Editors' Introduction

In the last century, Goffman defined prisons as places of residence and work for groups of people who share a common predicament, spending part of their lives under a closed regime, whose all-embracing nature is manifested in the blocking of social exchange and any relations with the outside world (Goffman 1961: 11). Comprehensive, all-encompassing institutions where, from a Foucauldian perspective, a strong bureaucratic organisation manages mass groups of individuals, exerting strict control over them to the point of shaping their actions, relationships and very identity; a disciplinary and punitive regime, structured to produce a specific kind of citizen (Foucault 1975: 135). This is a clear but far too rigid an analysis to reflect what is today the submerged, we might say hidden, reality of Italian and international prisons. In order to understand the experience of imprisonment today, it is more helpful to refer to places of confinement (Pandolfino 2022), where it is necessary to look not only at institutions or places, but also at the relations between sites, practices, social relations and subjective states of mind (Jefferson 2014: 49).

Any discussion of prisons calls for caution, operational flexibility and an interdisciplinary approach capable of broaching an analysis of the overall dynamics of this multifaceted topic. The challenge becomes more complex still when, in addition to the reality of imprisonment, it is also necessary to look at the relationship between prison and health, paying particular attention to mental health. The fatal symbiosis of which Wacquant (2001) spoke, by extension, applies

even more to a prisoner affected by a disability (physical or mental, temporary or permanent) as an emblem of the prison continuum, understood as a constant experience of discomfort and of being the victim of a disadvantage which is unintentional, but still omnipresent, because interpenetrated with the prisoner's very body: a fragile body, but one needing to be domesticated, a body uneducated and for this very reason to be (still further) confined. But, looking beyond the past of criminal asylums and indeed some stale rhetoric of the present, today we are aiming at an approach that seeks to re-educate, heal and cure (Mortari 2021).

This very subject of 'prison and health' was given ample coverage at the conference Crossings/AttraversaMenti: From Criminal Asylum to Penitentiary, held on 6 December last year on the premises of the Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto Prison in Messina. On this occasion, several participants spoke for the Criminal Asylum and Penitentiary, recounting its past glories (the institution opened its doors in 1925, so it has almost a century of history) and the problems of moving from one legal regime to another while still constantly dealing with present and future challenges.

With the aim of shedding new light on a world that is often forgotten, a series of parallel projects (academic research, psychology, psychiatry, pedagogical and film workshops) that focused on the Barcellona institution and/or the inmates, emerged from this conference. The coming together of these works and the contributors, not forgetting the unfailing support of the management and all the prison staff, gave rise to this opportunity to share experiences and future projects, illuminating what has already been achieved in prisons and what yet remains to be done, to make the institution not only a place of security but also one of education and growth, where confinement is not an end in itself and does not just aim to return its subjects to society re-structured according to specific principles (Foucault 1975). On the

contrary, the aspiration is to give them the possibility of self-determination through instruments suited to the needs (Sen 2000) of those who commit crimes out of necessity, ignorance or at the urging of 'fits of rage' (Pandolfino 2020, Sortino 2019).

Following an intense day of exchanges of opinions and stories about the past, present and future of the activities and methods of confinement and care within the Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto Prison (but not only those¹), the need arose to map in-depth focuses, leading to the report of the proceedings included in this special issue of Critical Hermeneutics.

*The event received good local media coverage, capped by the success achieved by the film *After This Exile*², screened for the first time during *AttraversaMenti*, when it won the Grand Prix of the 11th *Olszyn International Film Festival*, in the 'Prison Movie' section.*

*Exactly one year later, we celebrate the work done and the projects still to come into play with the publication of *AttraversaMenti: An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Experience of the Former Criminal Asylum of Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto*, which, not by chance, will be screened within the walls of the *Vittorio Madia Prison* itself, during the second stage of the *Literary Space* curated by the cultural column *Sicilia Mater*.*

This volume contains articles from the fields of psychology, pedagogy, history and anthropology and philosophy. The aim of the editors was precisely to bring to the reader what was experienced at the conference and, therefore, that feeling of partnership and working in

¹ Conference participants came from various parts of Italy, speaking on their educational and research experience at other prisons, see E. Zizioli on the "Germana Stefanini" Women's Prison or G. Del Gobbo and C. Benelli on the Sollicciano and Gozzini prisons in Florence.

² The documentary is the result of the *Cinema forma dell'anima* project. A teaching project of visual education carried out between 2017 and 2018 inside the *Casa Circondariale di Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto (Me)* by the *Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (Cpia)* with the involvement of a group of about 40 Italian and foreign inmates, the lead characters of the work.

concert that is far from easy to achieve, especially in the case of closed institutions such as prisons (Vianello and Sbraccia 2016, Casale 2019, Pandolfino 2021). For this reason, readers will find small contributions from those who were active participants in the work but, without specific academic expertise, shared important aspects of their experience. Two examples are the criminologist psychiatrist and ex-governor of the former Criminal Asylum, Nunziante Rosania, and the current prison governor, Dr Romina Taiani.

With these intentions in mind, I will now quote part of the moving opening of the conference proceedings during which Father Giuseppe Insana, known to all as 'Father Pippo' (a former chaplain of the asylum and a leading volunteer at Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto), shared a poem with those attending, written by a former inmate and recounting the pain of imprisonment, the cry for help and the need both to see oneself and be seen by others.

Amphora...

Who can ever read my soul.
Who will ever know of my pain and
imprisonment on the floor of an ocean.
I am but an amphora at the bottom of the sea,
built by a craftsman of his time.
My colours have long faded,
marble and clay, splendours of yesteryear, worn away!
I am only a memory of old, healthy hands, prodigal in ingenuity;
only a memory, lost in a time that is far away, now...
A past splendour, but yet I have memories: of everything from
when I was born, of smiles, praise, good wishes!
But the cruel waters plunged me to the darkest remoteness from the sun.
I was abandoned in the sea like a useless amphora and there I lay
aware of what I once was.
I would like to emerge from the mud, but no one now has any recollection

of who I once was.

Memory becomes short, the sun disappears behind dark clouds,
everything is born to perish: so, little by little, does my hope.

Once I was a beautiful amphora at the hands of that good
craftsman!

If only the depths would dissolve, vanish,
perhaps someone would recognise me and could, perhaps with caution,
still quench their thirst with the smiles of the past,
now lost in a fathomless Void!

*A starting point, as a state to be surpassed and overcome in a
future that will make those words ever further removed from what is
actually experienced within these walls.*

Caterina Benelli
Giovanna Costanzo
Roberta Pandolfino

References

- Benelli, C., Del Gobbo, G. (2016). *Lib(e)ri di formarsi. Educazione non formale degli adulti e biblioteche in carcere*. Pisa: Pacini.
- Benelli, C., Del Gobbo, G. (2012). Ri-educazione all'esercizio della cittadinanza attiva Ri-educare all'esercizio della cittadinanza attiva e alla partecipazione democratica nella gestione della "cosa pubblica": un'esperienza di ricerca azione partecipativa per la biblioteca nell'istituto penitenziario La Dogaia di Prato. *Metis*, 2.
- Casale, G. (2019). Le difficoltà di accesso al carcere e i limiti alla ricerca qualitativa. *Culture e Studi del Sociale*, 4(1): 77–93.
- Costanzo, G. (2022). Sulla pena, sul tempo vissuto e sulla giustizia riparatrice: Paul Ricoeur e il diritto di punire. *Critical Hermeneutics*, 6: 93–122.

- Costanzo, G. (2022). *Sulla giustizia non violenta e sulla giusta pena in P. Bettineschi, R. Fanciullacci, S. Zanardo, Essere in relazione. Scritti in onore di Carmelo Vigna*. Naples - Salerno: Orthotes, 85–96.
- Foucault, M. (1975). *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Editions Gallimard.
- Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Doubleday.
- Jefferson, A. (2014). Conceptualizing confinement: Prisons and poverty in Sierra Leone. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 14(1): 44–60.
- Mortari, L. (2021). *La politica della cura*. Milano: RaffaelloCortina.
- Pandolfino, R. (2020). *L'ex OPG di Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto: la storia, l'archivio, i pazzi criminali*. *Humanities. Rivista online di storia, geografia, antropologia e sociologia (University of Messina)*, 9(1), 191–213.
- Pandolfino, R. (2021). A Closed Circle: An Ethnography of the Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto Prison, Messina. *Urbanities. Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 11(2), 71- 86.
- Pandolfino, R. (2022). Riconcettualizzare la carcerazione. I (non)luoghi della delinquenza e della malattia mentale. *Critical Hermeneutics: Biannual International Journal of Philosophy*, 6(1): 177–204.
- Sen, A. (2000). *Lo sviluppo è libertà. Perché non c'è crescita senza democrazia*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Sortino, A. (2019). Paranoici e uxoricidi. Tracce dal manicomio criminale di Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto. *Genesis. Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storiche*, 18(2): 83 – 104.
- Vianello, F., Sbraccia, A. (2016). *La ricerca qualitativa in carcere in Italia. Etnografia e ricerca qualitativa*, 9(2): 183–210.
- Wacquant, L. (2001). Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh. *Punishment & Society*, 3(1): 95–133.