

# **PRISON PERCEPTION BEFORE AND AFTER LIBERATION**

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SPECTO

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# The Ethnography of the Prisoner's Transitions (EPTrans)

- The ethnography of the prisoner's transitions aims at developing an advanced understanding of the reentry process from the subjective perspective of prisoners themselves. The processes, interactions, meanings and conflicts involved in re-entry will be examined from Roma and non-Roma prisoner's point of view;
- The research is conducted in two places simultaneously: Romania and Norway. University of Bucharest will be responsible for the Romanian side and University of Oslo will cover the Norwegian side;
- 50 subjects in Romania (25 Romanian + 25 Roma) and 25 in Norway (15 Romanian + 10 Roma);
- Data collection:
  - Observation;
  - In-depth semi-structured interviews (once the conditional release or the full release was approved in the prison, after one week from release, after one month from release, after three months, after one year - For each interview conducted outside the prison, the participants will receive 50 lei or 10 E);
  - Tests (hope, agency and the level of problems);
  - Pictures (Photo-voice).

# Prison perception before and after liberation

- Extract methodology:
  - 25 participants – Roma and Romanians - recruited from București-Jilava Penitentiary;
  - Interviews made before release, after 1 week, 1 month and 3 months after the liberation;
  - Observation;
  - Confidentiality, anonymity, data protection, ethics.

# Prison perception before liberation

- Deprivation
  - (Time, freedoms, status, family, profession, partner, relations etc.)
    - [a moment of silence] *A problem because I parted from my family, my children, my relatives, my entourage... that's about it for me* (ZM, before release);
- Sufferance - Pains of prison (Sykes)
  - *Here you realize... Whom you lost, you lost your wife, you lose everything, it is very tough. You can have money, be sought-after, it is all in vain, if you are not home you can't fix anything. I have destroyed my psyche here* (SG, before release);

# Prison perception before liberation

- Learning experience

- *It was a long sentence (almost 10 years) I had what to learn, I have seen a lot of things here, we are various people here, there are people of the lowest ilk, how it is said by us, scullions, and that's why they do what they do, to support their family (TV, before release, interview made by Elena Pitiu);*

- Patience and time management

- *What can I tell you... it opens your eyes if you look well, you appreciate your friends differently, stuff, money, even the way to be... And you can also manage time better... namely you can wait, outside scarcely you have the patience to wait... you want it now, you wanted today but here you know: you have X deadline to do something, not certainly instantly and you are obliged to wait, you know that it will come but... for me this is what it means, for others I cannot say (ZM, before release);*

# Prison perception before liberation

- Trust no one (especially regarding other inmates)
  - *It seems everything is upside-down. [...] You meet all kind of people, in a way they are talking, laughing, joking with you but you cannot trust anyone, even in the ones who are sitting at your table (DV, before release);*
  - *No one talks with you for nothing (DD, before release);*
- Unfair trial or considering to be not guilty
  - *How do I say it? a big deception, I consider that I did not live this past year and nine months because of the unfair justice made against me rejecting some evidence by means of I could have proven that I was not guilty... For me it was a calvary! (OG, before release);*

# Prison perception before liberation

- Lack of security
  - *It is very hullabaloo, you have to watch-out that no other muscle-man from another room comes with guts and lifts from your bag (DD, before release);*
  - *Friends in prison? Not at all, only when you have something (AR, before release);*
- Growing up / self restrain (paying more attention to each situation)
  - *I grew up, I am aware of many things, I have start to know people by their faces [...] I`m avoiding conflicts (DD, before release);*

# Prison perception before liberation

- Self orientation
  - *Prison makes you to be cold towards the family. You start to love yourself more than your family (GN, before release, interview made by Andrada Istrate);*
- Tougher
  - *A lesson learned, not to make mistakes, not to commit crimes, to stay beside my family, to appreciate what I don't have near me, a reeducation but not from the prison... you learn here much more bad things. How crimes are made, how to fight back with vulgarity, hot to fight. It is not for reeducation, the penitentiary teaches you more bad things (MI, before release);*

# Prison perception before liberation

- Routine (rules, space, people, limited mobility etc.)
- Prison changed me
  - *I am honest only with my parents, brothers, wife... I started to appreciate the family ties much more, I'm not tolerant anymore towards mistakes. If I feel that somebody makes a mistake on purpose I know that he will repeat that a second, a third time. And I don't tolerate (ZM, before release);*
  - *I have learned to be quiet and to listen (DV, before release);*
  - *Now I think differently, I don't risk anymore (MI, before release);*
  - *If I didn't changed my self, my life had prolonged here (MC, before release);*

# Rebirth (liberation moment)

- Liberation -> a new beginning, a new interpretation of his social world (rebirth)
  - *I don't know. I don't have words to express. I've waited this so long. I don't know and I hope, I don't hope, I surely will change and I am changed from the moment I walk out the gate I will leave out all my slangs, all my expressions from here I leave them here and outside I am somebody else (SG, before release)*
  - *I would be rebirthing in a way. I will look to avoid such ugly situations. Especially that the day I got the trouble it was written in my horoscope to be cautious in that day. Couldn't I not enter that location (a bar)? Against fatality you cannot put in front. This was my fate. That's it. (OG, before release)*

- L.R.: *Have you thought about prison? Did you slept well?*

- *DD: Well, I dreamed once that I was there, that I was making the bed and waiting the call-up. But I realised that it was just a dream by my memory. But I even don't want to... I don't want to remember this. I don't like to talk from my past (DD, 3 months after liberation).*

# Prison perception after liberation

- After 1 week leaving the penitentiary some of the participants are very affected by their time spent in prison
  - *[L.R.: How did you sleep in the first night?] – Not to good, I had the insecurity that I'm not at my place. The second, the third day I realized that I'm home and that it is not a dream (BV, after 1 week);*
  - *I kept the things from there, I mean the bad should be made, to be tidy, I had the impression that the guards are coming to call-up. Well, these are remaining to your conscience, you know? Slowly by slowly I will recover to normal, you know? Any chaos or any sound I`m hearing it... you know? I`m jumping out, you know? I have left out even that day (the first night) at 4 in the morning, I think there was a cat and I thought that it was somebody on the house, I went in the middle of the yard... they all started to laugh (DD, after 1 week);*

# Prison perception after liberation

- Interpreting prison while being free (in the first week)
  - Thank to God that I`m outside, I have a new life [...] When you are deprived by your liberty a very large and powerful stress is coming, you think not to make any problems, that you are far away from your home, from your brothers, this means stress. In liberty I don't have any stress (MC, after 1 week);
  - Its too beautiful outside, if you don't have freedom you don't have nothing. You are as a dead man. You see the world, the landscape, the people from the street, the trees. There you didn't see anything. You get nuts when they keep you as this on a long term. [...] Look, last night I didn't eat because I didn't had any food. I had the money from the penitentiary when I got out, those are not money, 1 million (100 ron –25 euro). I want to have to buy 2-3 eggs, 1 potato, a coffee. Here you are no longer in prison to knock on your door and give you food. Here only the good Almighty helps me. The people close the door to you. 3 days ago I was with a friend at the subway and I have asked a cigarette and the man said to me that he didn't had any. You understand them, you see how the economy is (TV, after 1 week after serving 9 years and 4 months in prison);

# Prison perception after liberation

- The first month for most of the participants seemed like a *honeymoon* while they enjoyed freedom. The penitentiary for a part was something that happened long-time ago, some had diffuse memories of the actions while they were incarcerated while for others the experience was still affecting them
  - *I was happy from nothing, I lived every moment, I saw a tree and I was glad, I saw my family, the world around me* (GN, after 1 month);
- For few participants not going back to prison is a vivid argument and inhibits their behavior (including avoiding former entourage, not go out to steel, etc.)
  - *I don't want to make friendships with no-one. I have entered once in prison. I don't know with whom they associate, what are there occupation. [...] Besides my daughter I don't want to make any other friends* (YM, after 1 month);

# Prison perception after liberation

- After 3 months most of the participants don't remember or don't want to remember specific moments from prison
  - [...] *I don't want to remember this. I don't like to talk from my past (DD, 3 months after liberation);*
- For others the concept still represents an inhibition for not breaking the law
  - *If I think well, I consider each day passed by from this life to be ordinary. But I don't have what to do, I have to slowly, slowly adjust to society, otherwise I will go to prison. Let others go (to prison). I don't like it there anymore (UI, 3 months after liberation after 9 years and 6 months sentence).*

# Prison perception after liberation

- While for others prison is something that now is part of their identity:
  - *You can not erase the time from your mind. It's like the army, school, like high-school. The same is for prison. [...] I see myself as I person that got out of prison and wants to make a lot of things (ZM, after 3 months);*
  - *...what can I say?... I know what to say? (silence)... I am an ex-convict that tries to remake his life (DV, after 3 months);*
- If the concept of prison was focused in the interviews made in prison on the activities made by and with other inmates there are situations where the discourse changed from his experience to a larger concept with a negative aspect in relation with the institution and it`s workers
  - *[...] the food was at it was, the guards talk with you, they almost want to beat you, they talk bad language, they are rude, they swear and they don't take you in consideration, as the regulation!? No, they have to talk to you with `Mister`. But you have to call those from the human rights to do that (BV after 3 months).*

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- Website: [www.reentry.eu](http://www.reentry.eu)

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**Questions and discussions**

**Thank you!**

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