

Conversational Narratives at Quixote House: How Released Offenders and Religious Members Build Community and Find a New Identity in Winnipeg

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ABSTRACT One of the most worrisome situations in current societies is the failure of their correctional system. Even though jails and imprisonment institutions, at least in developed countries, do not have the shameful conditions which characterized them in the past, the high rate of recidivism shows that the correctional function that morally justifies their existence, with its big budget, has not been successful. Individuals that enter into the correctional system barely escape from it during life. However, there is a house in Winnipeg that is making a difference. This essay is about this house, Quixote House, named after *Don Miguel de Cervantes'* novel hero, and my engagement to build community in it through conversational narratives. Also this essay shows how conversational narrative plays a role in healing trauma and building a community through which released offenders can find a new identity. For this purpose, it is necessary to set first a theoretical context, addressing the situation of recidivism and parole releases and the efforts to reinsert former offenders into society, which entail many challenges such as clean and affordable housing. Then, there is an explanation of how storytelling addressing trauma and community building, the importance of emotions in this kind of narrative, and the possibility of storytelling in ordinary life, especially in finding personal identity. Following Lonergan's approach, there is a description about Quixote House and my engagement as priest but also as a another member of the community in which parolees can find a new identity.

KEYWORDS community, parole, housing, home, religious peacebuilding

Every house has its own history, beyond owners and successes (Burley & Maunder, 2008). This paper is about the house where I live. A house that is identifiable in the neighborhood because in the winter the Christmas lights shine on the porch and in the summer it is decorated with flowers. Indoors, the smell of burnt popcorn often invades all three floors, subtly inviting everyone to leave their rooms and go down to the main floor to watch a movie together. Sometimes when a movie is about second chances and love, tears are shed. This becomes a good excuse for poking fun at someone and, after laughter, to start a conversation.

This house for male adults transitioning from prison to the city of Winnipeg was the dream of a Catholic nun, Sister Carol Peloquin and a Jesuit priest, Father David C. Creamer. She worked as a chaplain in the region's large federal penitentiary for men and, over the years, saw

how many guys never succeeded in their reinsertion into society, after serving their sentences. The priest, an associate professor of Education and Catholic Studies at the University of Manitoba, often celebrated mass in the prison on weekends. Both of them had in common their concern for some men who never seemed able to have a clean and affordable start on the outside after their experiences in prison. Their dream for a program and housing for men such as this, led them to establish a contract with the housing authority in town. Then, Sister Carol will look over the house and select the men who will dwell in it, and Fr. Dave Creamer will become the landlord of the house. Also they will give residence to occasional Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) graduate students to share their lives with each other and build a community of support.

In 2011, I came from South America to live in this house. I was sponsored by the Jesuits of Winnipeg to learn English and pursue graduate studies in the Arthur V. Mauro Centre PhD program in PACS at the University of Manitoba. My research area was the ongoing socio-political conflict in my country of birth, Venezuela. However, my participation as “one more” in the dynamics of the house, noticing the ways in which community is built and impressed by the quality of the conversations and the relationships among my housemates on an everyday basis, sparked my interest in changing my topic. The experience of living among those guys for more than 5 years, and my frequent visits for presiding at masses, and having coffee with the inmates at Stony Mountain Institution (the Federal Penitentiary of Manitoba) made me realize some failures of correctional systems in rehabilitating its population.

In addition to that qualitative approach, the quantitative high rate of recidivism shows that the correctional function that morally justifies their existence, with big budgets, has not been successful. Individuals who enter into the correctional system barely escape from it during life. Therefore, I became engaged in studying why and how the place where I was living, Quixote House, is making a difference. My current PhD dissertation is about this place. In a few months, I hope to present all the results coming from my data gathering and analysis. However, in this short essay, I will address and explain one of the many aspects in my current study of Quixote House: how storytelling plays a significant role in healing trauma and building a community with religious members (Roman Catholic priests known as Jesuits), through which released offenders can find a new identity and avoid recidivism.

Recidivism and Stigmatization

High rates of recidivism are characteristic of contemporary society and this phenomenon has sparked many research projects and scientific undertakings in order to try to reduce what seems to be a failure of the current correctional and justice systems (Amos & Newman, 1975; Benson, Alarid, Burton, & Cullen, 2011; Craig, Dixon, & Gannon, 2013). The term “recidivism” is given many interpretations with various political consequences. But the rate of recidivism is simply the number of incarcerated people who are incarcerated again. The Canadian recidivism rate should be readily available because the justice system keeps a strict record of those who go in and out of prison.

Recent studies describe the difficulties of rejoining society after prison (Ross & Richards,

2009). Some studies link the rates of recidivism to individual characteristics, such as mental illness or the conviction for certain types of offence (Collins, Vermeiren, Vahl, Markus, Broekaert, & Doreleijers, 2011; Serowik & Yanos, 2011; Langevin, et al., 2004; Webster, Gartner, & Doob, 2006). Other studies focus on social and structural factors that impede the “desistance from crime” in the growing convict population (Farrall, Sharpe, Hunter, & Calverley, 2011). For example, the criminal record of an individual creates “a chronic and debilitating badge of shame that plagues exconvicts and exoffenders for the rest of their lives” (Murphy, Fuleihan, Richards, & Jones, 2011). Of course, this kind of labeling affects not only individual released offenders but their principal relationships.

Imprisonment, even when it is a socially and morally justified condition for offenders, is by itself a traumatic experience that has its particular consequences (Haney, December 2001). Comfort (2007) further highlights the fact that the trauma produced in an individual by incarceration can be extended to an inmate’s family and acquaintances. Through their association with someone convicted of a crime, these legally innocent people have firsthand and often intense contact with criminal justice authorities. As they experience various consequences of incarceration, they are confronted by the contradictory nature of a state that has become the primary distributor of social services for the poor; jails included. This situation of “invisible punishments” and stigmatization, which undermines the ability of released offenders to succeed, has also been studied by Gunnison and Helfgott (2013). In their findings, ‘desistance’ from offending is due to both internal factors (such as attitude) and external factors (such as housing, employment, mental and aging health, and religion).

Regarding social conditions, Braithwaite (1989) was an early pioneer in explaining the relationship between social context, stigmatization and recidivism. In his opinion, a high level of stigmatization encourages the formation of subgroups in which those outcast with “no stake in conformity, [have] no chance of self-esteem within the terms of conventional society” (p. 102). The formation of this criminal subculture is fostered by a systematic obstruction of opportunities for this critical sector of the population (Braithwaite, 1989). However, the shame coming from stigmatization can be distinguished from a “reintegrative” shame. This shame is useful for desisting from crime and happens when the individual has a sense of belonging to a community which cares for the individual while acknowledging the harm that she or he has done to it (Braithwaite & Braithwaite, 2001; Tangney, Stuewig, & Hafez, 2011).

The Role of New Relationships in Finding a New Identity

According to contemporary thought on this issue, personal agency and individual “desistance” from crime is the goal in any rehabilitation program (Craig, Dixon, & Gannon, 2013). This indicates a shift in personal narrative and cognitional transformation, considering both the self and its place in society. However, in addressing causes of failure in reinserting oneself into society, some studies focus on relationships and new identity in released offenders as opposed to “individual” attitudes. For example, by analyzing data that include both pre- and post-release factors, Berg and Huebner (2011) conclude that good quality social ties with family lower the risk for recidivism, in part, by facilitating post-release job attainment. Their study

sample comprised a group of men whose involvement in criminal behavior was tracked for more than three years following parole. The findings suggest that family ties have implications for both recidivism and employment. In fact, the results suggest that good quality social ties, and not only familial ones, may be particularly important for men with histories of frequent unemployment to succeed in their reintegration into society. However, the qualitative analysis is limited to a small sample, which may or may not be representative of “parolees”, and there is no indication of strategies which can be applied to strengthen or to create these “quality” ties.

Also, Gunnison and Helfgott (2013) highlight the broader importance of an environment which creates opportunities for change. In this sense, education and an approach that emphasizes humanity over safety and risk are crucial for changing the adversarial framework between community and ex-offender to promote safety. Even in activities in which the individual agency is overstressed, such as psychotherapy, special attention should be provided to the environment in which clients find meaning and have an opportunity to construct their own identity (Saari, 2002).

In fact, according to Saari (2002), to address individual situations using classical psychoanalytic tools, without a concern for the culture and the social conditions of the client, risks reproducing patterns of oppression present in the unseen environment. Restorative justice approaches and critical theorists of modernity find common ground when addressing the negative impact of interventions, such as psychoanalytic and psychosocial tools, without regard for places and relationships. This legacy of the modern era, that reproduced the older pattern of intervention through imposition, exclusion and domination, should be replaced by a new ecology, characterized by spaces born through negotiation (Andermatt, 2012). A space people find safe to speak out and invites the development of a sense of belonging. This process presumes and produces citizen-subjects, able to think about habitability and ecology; agents able to valorize the ‘precious little’ in critical interventions. It seems necessary to take into serious account the experience of dwelling, dialogue, mediation and conversation in everyday life.

Therefore, in building a social network for supporting released offenders with their reinsertion into society, one of the most important challenges is to address simultaneously the different interests and narratives that all participants have in that process. Parole officers and treatment providers hold onto prescriptive approaches because they know their own ‘truth’ about individual offenders. These approaches, based on qualifications and supremacy, are justified by the legal system. Timing and personal commitment are crucial to achieve success. However, this network quickly shows its fragility, if there is not a “where” in which the former incarcerated people can start a new narrative about his own life, heal from trauma and build a new identity in society.

Storytelling: Addressing Trauma and Community Building

When offenders are released and go to community before the end of their time, they are called ‘Parolees’. Parolees are signaled as marked for transformation. Society expects a change in them. This is illustrated by the expectations and conversations with probation officers and

treatment providers. “Parole” means “word” in French, so, the word of the man or woman defines her or his identity in front of society, and allows them to be out of prison through a promise to stay away from crime and addictions. In the release process, a parolee’s word is often pronounced taken from a script given to them, to obtain the desired freedom. They say a word, but it is not “their” word. It is just something others want to hear. This is a different word from that word already told, by their actions and declarations in front of the Court, in which they were found guilty.

Parolees are surrounded by prescriptive approaches to their own truth. Sentences, law, medical health diagnoses are used by parole officers and treatment providers in order to assess the situation of parolees. Prescriptive approaches are based on oppression and supremacy, which in the legal system appears to be justified. The functionaries of the correctional System, acting under the law, can use force so that parolees will maintain their “word” which allows them to be out of prison. However, through storytelling another kind of approach is possible to find the word in them. This word really will emerge from within, and not only in response to others in society. A word that will help to resolve the conflicted identity of parolees: inmates who are out of prison.

According to Senehi (2009), storytelling is an innovative methodology in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This approach is based on the importance of narratives shaping cultural attitudes in how groups and individuals address their conflicts. Storytelling is a universal event that is always related to truth, meanings and intentions of the participants, despite several sources, media, environments and audiences in which stories are told (p. 202). For this reason, through storytelling, participants can readdress their situation, raise awareness about the structures that have led them into conflict, and serve as a source for transmitting and assuring new understandings and settings for a more peaceful movement into society.

Based on Foucault’s assumption that discourses may serve power within society, as long as the power is shared (Senehi, 2009, p.203), storytelling is accessible to everyone. In fact, stories could bring with them stereotypes and jeopardize the identity and mutual recognition of the groups involved in conflict (p. 204). So, regarding identity, storytellers in their conflict transformation have to balance the different experiences, world views and meanings brought in those stories and channel them to gain in mutual recognition and respect (p. 205). Nevertheless, sharing stories could also fuel emotions when not well done, can perpetuate hatred and antagonism. So, storytelling confronts the dilemma of how to comprehend these emotions and to learn from them without being stalemated by strong feelings (p. 206).

Storytelling must also face morals that underlie any story. In these morals, religion, values, and worldviews play a double role: on one hand, they will justify discrimination and rejection; and on the other, they will advocate for higher values which lead to unselfish behavior. For that reason, it is problematic to deal with different perceptions and cultural values in shaping stories, without subtle preaching for conversion to another religion or worldview. Hence, storytelling may help any particular dynamicity in order to find non prescriptive ways to find and adapt values that support a more peaceful life (p.207).

Storytelling shows many advantages that contribute to its implementation in a conflict

transformation process. In fact, storytelling promotes social openness and awareness through personal interaction; also, storytelling is accessible to everyone because neither costly training skills nor high-priced instrumentality are required (p.209). As intersection between human agencies and structures, storytelling could provide a safe space in which intimacy, mutual listening, dialogic behavior, joint work and collaboration, can be experienced by members of any group. Therefore, storytelling has an important role, not only in conflict resolution or transformation processes, but also in peace education, violence prevention and community empowerment (p. 210).

All these useful purposes for storytelling are possible because, through this activity, everyone can have a voice (word) which is embedded in the flow of temporary and fragile outcomes. Law, with its necessary general and permanent statements, and only coming from the powerful state, seems exactly the opposite. Storytelling can counteract the effects of prescriptive approaches to parolee's conflicted identity and humanize the process for their transformation, not just as "law-abiding citizens", but as full human beings and conscious adults.

In this sense, through narrative therapy research, Cade D. Mansfield, Kate C. McLeana and Jennifer P. Lilgendahl (2010) have recently found how individuals can process their difficult times in life storytelling, linking those events to the self, in creative ways, which is "especially important to self development and to well-being". (Mansfield et al., 2010, p. 249). Stories inside and outside prison can provide offenders with an alternative mechanism to deal with the labels that society, law, officials and treatment providers place on them. In fact,

...narrative processing involves recollection, reflection, and the formation of connections between events and characteristics of the self. Furthermore, we propose that a more complete understanding of how individuals use challenge to develop the self can be gained by studying the relationships between narrative processing and important outcomes, such as wisdom and well-being, in different types of challenging events.

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We view the processes of narrating personal growth and thinking complexly about past events as mechanisms serving self-integration, which may connect past events to the current self. Specifically, we expect that these are complimentary processes that lead individuals to think about the current self in relation to past events, and to the formation of a narrative of how the self has positively evolved since that event. Resolution, on the other hand, serves to allow an individual to "let go" of an event, perhaps lessening the need for further processing and searching for self-understanding. (Mansfield et al., 2010, p. 249)

Through storytelling, parolees can also deal with unresolved narratives that have hindered their humanization process and played a role in justifying their past criminal activity. Storytelling can provide to parolees a vision of the complexity and the necessity for growth, which will serve to construct the self through linking past events to an understanding of

the current situation. Finally, these stories can open up possibilities for the future self, by distancing certain painful events from the self (Mansfield et al., 2010, p. 250). At this stage, parolees may see their transgressions as a source of wisdom in distinguishing personal and mainstream narrative, which does not guide individuals to deal positively with transgressions. As Mansfield et al. (2010) state:

One reason that we expected narrative processing of transgressions to predict wisdom is that our culture does not appear to have a clear template, or master narrative, to guide individual reasoning in transgressions. In fact, if there is any master narrative for dealing with transgressions it is one that does not explicitly encourage self-exploration (p. 252).

At this point, parolees will deal with their reality with “a word” that is outside law and medical (prescriptive) approaches: Ambiguity (p. 253). By tolerating their self-ambiguity, parolees will create strategies to deal with past painful events and opportunities for their future. In fact,

Management of this ambiguity also invokes the potential for personal growth. Although we expected that narrative processing in the form of personal growth would be less common in transgressions than in traumas, we also expected that those who did the hard narrative work of finding personal growth in the context of a transgressive event would be especially likely to develop wisdom. (Mansfield et al., 2010, p.253).

Recalling painful events to shape stories can lead to emotions. In turn, emotions in storytellers and story-listeners can hinder the whole process if they are not well addressed. Unresolved narratives have the potential to keep the self “stuck” in the painful emotions of difficult events, which may be harmful to a healthy, positive sense of identity (p. 250). Therefore, using storytelling with parolees for their reinsertion into society will require an especial attention over the emotions, which narrated events will spark in searching for a new identity.

Studies about the strong relation between identity and emotions are abundant. Emotion could be an indicator for dealing with really important issues in the shape of identity. Also, any personal identity is illustrated by how and what leads someone to express her/his emotions. Emotional management is a topic that has many new approaches and followers, because emotions are part of everyday life, in connection to the human pursuit of happiness. “Defining emotions”, as is stated by Aubrie Horrocks and Jamie L. Callahan (2006), “and understanding how it affects us all, is crucial to success for both individuals and for society as a whole” (p.6).

This understanding and definition of emotions is also crucial for success in rehabilitation, because released offenders need a new identity to fit again into society. Moreover, “the importance of emotion within the process of identity creation is apparent when concepts are specifically applied to a variety of social contexts and structures” (p.71). In the case of

parolees, they face a new setting for their social context and structures once they are out of prison. So, one of their first tasks in the new identity search is to find out which emotions to feel and manage, and also with whom and where to communicate these emotions (p. 71). According to Horrocks and Callahan (2006):

Identities are created and maintained through communication and interaction, resulting in a structure that allows individuals to feel comfortable, confident and safe in sharing their thoughts and experiences, while substantiating functionality and productivity. Through expression, we are valued and respected in both the public and private arenas of our lives (p. 71).

Therefore, although managing emotions in front of the correctional system officials is absolutely necessary for building a new identity for parolees, it does not seem enough, due to the high rates of recidivism. The place in which a new identity should be constructed and emotions managed is not just the medical or parole office, but the place where parolees share their ordinary lives. Places where they can talk about themselves, work together and create new stories, in which the emotions fueled can be understood and truly heard. If parolees and other people in rehabilitation are empathically heard and supported in the recognition and acceptance of the emotions produced by their stories, according to Carl Rogers (1940 [1992]), healing is possible (pp. 163-164). However, this success is more achievable if parolees can find people willing to listen to their stories, without any monetary interest, and share their emotions every day within a community, in their own place of living.

Ordinary Life and Storytelling

Behavioral economics and social psychologists have researched the importance of listening and storytelling in everyday life. The work of C. Callahan and C.S. Elliot (1996) highlights the influences of informal and everyday life context to assess values and to understand decision making-processes in individuals, which are crucial activities in that type of psychology:

...since each person has a unique history, he or she constructs and experiences a different frame of reference. This implies that people are influenced not only by frames suggested by a specific situation, but most important, they often create their own contexts - constructions of their own unique memories. It is these local, intrinsic frames, rather than some 'objective' reality (or experimental situation), that influence a person's interpretations and judgments (p.86).

Free-narrative approaches, listening and conversation are now among the tools available for researchers in order to “describe the interpretations and conceptual accounts that people use to assign meaning to their experiences” (p. 110). Learning about ordinary people's accounts and justifications or their preferences and beliefs require the use of this narrative approach. In fact, “We are constantly required both to interact with others and to reflect upon our own thoughts, and telling stories is the fundamental way for us to interpret

situations and understand experiences” (Horrocks and Callahan, 2006, p.73). However, at this point, the interest in storytelling in everyday life is focused more on research methods than as a healing source for traumatized people attempting to build identity.

The first step to this shift in the role of storytelling is the importance that storytelling has as a channel of communication. This communication in informal settings reveals the interplay of emotions and interactions, external or internal, circumstances and values that lead the people in their decision-making process. Through this listening, people feel encouraged to talk about “what happened” and “why I did what I did” finding by themselves answers to questions that they never asked themselves before. These ideas, that come with feelings and emotions expressed in every day communication and storytelling, start to build a sense of “who I am” through this private experience, that can be complemented with public experience. Therefore, “interactions influence our thoughts and, likewise, our thoughts influence our behaviour. It is this cyclical process, influenced by emotion, which builds an identity” (Horrocks and Callahan, 2006, p.73). Authenticity and functionality in the individual:

...is produced through balancing emotion management with identity management, maintaining it all through story telling. The way we communicate our emotions builds a history of identity, and we can rely on this history of experience to determine an individualized balance of authentic expression (p.73).

Based on this same idea, Mariana Souto-Manning (2012) considers the importance of conversational narratives in identity building and behavioral changes. Through conversational narratives individuals can question their realities, identify the influences that have brought them to the situation there are currently facing and the conception and role of their worldviews, beside systemic and institutional discourses (p.3). More in depth, narrative therapists “believe that people give meaning to their lives and relationships through stories” (Combs and Freedman, 2012, p. 1034). Based on Michel Foucault’s concept of power, in narrative therapy:

...even in the most disempowered of lives, there is always lived experience that is obscured when we measure those lives against abstract, universalized norms. Narrative therapists seek to continually develop ways of thinking and working that bring forth the stories of specific people in specific contexts so that they can lay claim to and inhabit preferred possibilities for their lives. (Combs and Freedman, 2012, p.1039)

Also, narrative therapy addresses identity as a fluid matter of relationships. All persons are performers of their own story and have the task to merge and add meaning to all the stories distributed in the many places they act. In fact,

Each of us is always performer and audience at the same time. On one hand, we become who we act like we are. We constitute ourselves through the choices we make. On the other, we are shaped by the responses and expectations of those around us. Our notions of how we can act in a given event are influenced by our memories of

how people have responded in similar past events, and by which particular people are present in the current episode (p. 1044).

Parolees are permanently confronted by institutional and abstract discourse, but through conversational narratives they can find their authentic expression. If their stories are heard, emotions can be expressed, and the new identities that they are finding can be safely developed. This task should be faced every day, beyond the stereotypes or strategies they might have developed for self-protection during their incarceration. In my opinion, religious communities were able to provide that space and promote this process of healing and community building by founding Quixote House.

Quixote House

In 1994, a Roman Catholic nun, Sister Carol Peloquin, SNJM, shifted her mission from that of a teacher in a private girls' high school to become the Roman Catholic chaplain in a male federal penitentiary. During her chaplaincy she required the services of many priests in the city. One of those who frequently celebrated Mass in the prison was Father David Creamer, S.J., an associate professor of education and religious studies at the University of Manitoba.

Sister Carol realized that many men were returning to the prison due to a lack of support in the community. She was given authorization to conduct a pilot project that would take the format of peer support. It was approved and started, in 2001, under the name "Next Step". Through the Next Step peer support program, parolees and volunteers meet weekly to talk about their experiences, to exercise compassionate listening, and to take advantage of opportunities for personal development (Rosemberg, 2003, p.4).

In these conversations, the issue of clean and affordable housing was often present. After some time, the idea of having a clean and safe house, in which parolees could have an affordable room and support themselves so that they do not return to prison, seemed real and approachable. This was due in large part to the willingness of Father Creamer to act as the landlord of such a house. In this role, Father Creamer was to collect the rent and to make sure that the house was always in good condition. However, his role expanded to sharing much of his free time with the men, and also writing letters of reference, related to jobs and housing, for men who had to move on after the expiration of parole.

In December 2007, at a Next Step meeting, when the topic of a name for the house came up, one of the parolees said that, for him, such a house was like a dream, and people who would live there would be living a dream. This was reminiscent of the song "To Dream the Impossible Dream" from the Broadway musical *Man of La Mancha*. He proposed naming the house after Don Quixote, who in the play sings that very song. The Next Step group agreed and the name stuck, as Don Quixote is a universal symbol of how impossible things can come true if there are those with the "eyes" to see them. Even though the apparent goal of the house since its inception was only to provide clean, affordable, alcohol-free and drug-free housing for parolees, Quixote House also became a safe place for them to share stories, anxieties, and dreams through everyday conversations and sharing (Creamer, 2013).

Quixote House has a simple schedule and simple rules. Residents are not allowed to smoke or drink alcohol in the house. Everybody has daily and weekly chores for the maintenance of the house. A weekly schedule is posted on a board near the kitchen, and residents sign up to cook one meal per week for the group. There is no curfew, but residents have to inform the house, or at least indicate on the board where they are. Everybody in the house does the dishes and prepares the list for grocery shopping. Nobody is forced to live in Quixote House, and not every parolee can live in Quixote House. Ordinarily, candidates are carefully evaluated by the coordinators of the Next Step program while the men are still imprisoned and participating in Next Step. In fact, everyone in Quixote House has participated in the Next Step, although not every participant of the Next Step lives in Quixote House. Also, those who live in Quixote House must pay room and board each month (for utilities, a furnished room, wireless Internet and food).

As it happens in every shared residence, the men at Quixote House are permanently embedded in the dynamic of continuous non-coercive conversation and dialogue. This sometimes takes some weeks to start, but once it starts it stays and, as it happens every day with the same people, the men soon realize the necessity to be coherent with the stories they tell. As everybody pays to live at Quixote House (nobody is paid or forced to be there), all residents share the same simple lifestyle, irrespective of the background of each person. Through conversation, everybody can express his point of view, have the opportunity to assume responsibility for his actions and convictions and allow himself to be openly criticized by others through jokes or direct confrontation. Therefore, Quixote House is not only a building in the neighborhood, but a home. It is built and shared not just by its current residents, but also by ongoing contact with former residents, volunteers and religious members (Jesuits as well as the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, such as Sister Carol), who believe in the same common vision of humanity that found and maintained through the parolees' stories. This sort of 'peace system' makes possible the mediation of the different narratives, with other agents involved in the process of the reinsertion of released offenders in society.

The Presence of Religious Members at Quixote House

According to Jeong (2000), to design a 'peace system' is to be against the militarist and neo-liberal paradigm currently commanding the world. The distinction between religious and secular powers has proven to be a "useful tool in conceiving and developing tolerant practices within institutions" (Bartoli, 2004, p. 148). Also, according to SpearIt (2012), balancing suppression coming from the state and intervention in the community is never an easy task, and analysis in gang research suggests that successful strategies of intervention depend on a coordination of both effects (p. 512). The efforts of ex-gang members and religious organizations who have been dedicated to the process of peacemaking include groups like the *Nation of Islam* and the work of organizations like *Homeboy Industries* (Boyle, 2010). Organizations like this provide spaces in which "many people connect with one another in activities that enrich their spirits: All can be crucial in healing, creating

community, giving back and teaching” (SpearIt, 2012, p. 514)

Contrary to what is commonly thought, the intervention of religious members in building a home, such as Quixote House, is not a matter of benevolence, as is traditionally seen in the colonial narrative (Fontan, 2012). Fontan (2012) makes the case for a different approach to peace, one that does not rely on “benevolence” or any other narrative that serves the social and economic interest of the complacent ruling elite. It involves the dismantling of “official” narratives, asserting the first person and subjective experiences of all those involved as visible and relevant (Fontan, 2012, p. 24). In Quixote House, religious and non-religious members interact from who they are, sharing their stories and experiences, reframing by themselves their conflictive identities and accepting failure as part of their process toward harmony and peace with the rest of the society. As Fontan states, there is no universal tool to bring peace, and so the positive peace and social justice are myths that should be transcended (Fontan, 2012).

Therefore, the role of the religious member of Quixote House is to be a “peacebuilder”. However, building a home with released offenders requires a paradigm shift that enables “peacebuilders” to employ a different array of understandings of what can be facilitated, strengthened and enabled to flourish on the “ground” (Fontan, 2012, p. 42). According to Fontan (2012), decolonizing peace stems partly from decolonization of the mind, so people do not need outsiders to have peace (p. 49). What they need is to develop a capacity for introspection, autonomy and self-confidence as a community, and this only happens through living with the people affected on a daily basis, and observing more than claiming to know what they need (p. 51). Home is the place in which this capacity can happen and be developed. This transformation addresses the structure of the society by giving more attention to human needs than serving merely institutional values. This happens on the micro and macro level: the individual, who tries to avoid the use of violence towards any person to achieve a collective peace, which is more than mere tranquility; and the broader relationships, by trying to make them fair and based on truth and happiness. Therefore, as the transformation touches the rest of the institutions and communities involved in the process of re-entry, a mediation that comes from members of the religious community is needed. In this regard, the process is not anymore ‘former offender—correctional services and its sponsored programs’, but instead ‘released offenders—correctional services and its programs—home’. While the dyad is unstable, “the triad is the human way of gaining support, power, leverage and stability” (Augsburger, 1992, p. 153). The Home, whose continuity is supported by religious members, become the third party in the conflict, and mediates towards its transformation (Bush & Folger, 2005). This transformation reaches not only the immediate ones implied but also it focuses on fair relationships among all entities in society.

The platform, mediation and meaning that a home provides works along with other instances in the transformation of the conflict between society and former offenders. In the international peace system, according to Diamond and McDonald’s (1996) multi-track diplomacy, institutions, communities, individuals and activities, with a different level of involvement, “work together whether awkwardly or gracefully, for a common goal: a world at peace” (Diamond & McDonald, 1996, p. 1). In the case of released offenders, home

will be part of the system with its own perspective, languages, attitudes and memberships, impacting the rest of the tracks of the system, including other religious communities and the state. Moreover, applying System Thinking to peacebuilding, Diamond (2012) finds some dimensions in peacemaking that receive little attention; such as the inner dimension, the energy dimension, and the evolutionary dimension (Diamond, 2012, p. 623). The importance of the inner dimension to peacebuilding demands the creation of a safe space for developing emotional reactions (Diamond, 2012, p. 627). Then, home will be the space in which those emotions are developed, and a new meaning found. Home mediates so that emotions are not suppressed but connect participants at home and members in the whole peace system toward a more fair and respectful treatment of those journeying out of prison.

According to Augsburger (1992), a mediation position is always vulnerable and delicate, and thus mediation can only happen when a basis of common commitment—common connections between parties and a continuity of the outcome—is assured (p. 197). In urban societies, the identity of parties is framed by individualism, an ego-centered and autonomous context. However, home can provide a collective identity, softening individualism and the preferred highly rational and formal approach coming from the state, in which structure for achieving individual performance with the outcome is crucial. On the contrary, the need to create a home, as it is in traditional societies, the process is affective and informal, and relationship is crucial for achieving an outcome that favors, not only individuals, but the community as a whole (Augsburger, 1992). Mediation follows in order to preserve these relationships and mutual respect. This respect and preservation benefits not only the particular former offender dwelling at home, but, and especially in the case of a home built by religious members and former incarcerated people, impacts the whole community. According to Senehi (2009), regarding identity, storytellers as peacemakers have to balance the different experiences, world views, and meanings brought through stories that are shared in order to gain in mutual recognition and respect. The presence of a home like this invites further reflection about the treatment applied to released offenders and how social justice matters to everyone in the community.

Paulo Freire (1970) also addresses the importance of narrative in achieving the goal of any education process, which is humanization. In the process of education, instead of appealing to imposed codes that ignore the narratives of those who are learning how to be fully human, a new codification, made through reflection by those whose narrative has been ignored is indispensable to reach authentic humanization. In fact,

This method does not involve reducing the concrete to the abstract (which would signify the negation of its dialectical nature), but rather maintaining both elements as opposites which interrelate dialectically in the act of reflection. This dialectical movement of thought is exemplified perfectly in the analysis of a concrete existential, “coded” situation (p. 21).

According to Freire (1970), ignoring narratives in education has proven to be oppressive,

because it forces learners into a static fatality, which leads to resignation, alienation or violence (p. 85). Therefore, storytelling allows non oppressive education, in which cognition and narration are exercised simultaneously (Freire, 1970, p.80). The dynamicity of storytelling and continuous dialogue deepens the consciousness of all the participants because, while they learn about every situation as a historical reality, they also learn that these situations are susceptible to transformation. Through their own inquiry, everyone involved in the process will comprehend their real situation and together find means for its transformation.

For instance, parolees, at the moment of their release, need to learn skills to manage their new reality, which is perceived “as dense, impenetrable, and enveloping” (Freire, 1970, p.21). According to the problem-posing education model, occasions for relapsing, as one of the common problems parolees have to face, could be a topic for dialogue and discussion in order to find, through narrative, a better knowledge and creative ways to deter relapse. This knowledge can be acquired without repeating the oppressive approaches which denies the creativity, singularity and humanity of any stakeholder during the learning process.

Freire (1970) appeals to a de-codification of that reality that should be made by the same participants or victims of that problematic reality (p. 104). Abstract concepts codified from another concrete situation, cannot address different realities except through oppression. Therefore, parolees require, in order to avoid recidivism, a decoding process in which storytelling plays a role, because participants commonly express world views through their personal representation, such as folk tales, life stories and also, their silence (Freire, p. 105). Paraphrasing Freire (1970), when that reality is clearly seen in their own codification, this awareness will give to parolees the subjectivity required to deal with the oppressive conditions of their release and to grow in humanization.

This contrast between “more abstract realms” (on which the legal system is built) and “spaces, practices and ethics” toward peace, demands an understanding of the everyday life in which those practices and integrative power are exercised. In fact, when integrative power is practiced, it communicates appealing images of the future to persuade other people that these are valid, despite other discourses (Boulding K. E., 1990, p. 122). Everyday practices shows that every form of peace “is unique, dynamic, contextualized and contested” (Richmond & Mitchell, 2012, p. 33). However, “more abstract realms” set aside everyday practices of peace by labeling them as a “utopian experiment” (Boulding E. , 2000). In this process the new identity is not also found by former incarcerated people, but also for the religious members, whose actions are also criticized and tested in everyday narratives and conversations flourishing on on the “ground” (Fontan, 2012, p. 42) and not under institutionalized discourses.

Conclusion

In my five years living at Quixote House, I have seen how the process of finding a new identity in former incarcerated people happened, thanks to the engagement of religious people and volunteers in building a home for and together with them. I have seen the impact in the community and the open possibility to network with other initiatives, faith-based or not. I have met more than 20 men who lived at Quixote House, and since then, they have never come

back to jail.

However, the identity found at Quixote House is not a definitive one. It is signaled by ambiguity. As identity is relational, those who reside at the house cannot decide or decree in isolation “who” they are. For many in the broader community, the Quixote House residents are still dangerous men who should be locked up, and this identity comes from the information displayed if someone searches for their names on the internet. But, in Quixote House, the information displayed by computers, registries or diagnoses is complemented with the new knowledge and identity that comes from every day conversation. The pervasive objectification of them as victims is transformed through fluent relationships in a house where everybody is free to serve and care together about what they have attained: freedom and trustworthiness as a former incarcerated people and the religious members who accompany them.

Therefore, conversational narratives and storytelling play a role in healing trauma and building a parolee’s new identity. This educational and identity-building process requires a safe place where conversational narratives or storytelling can happen in ordinary life. This storytelling is promoted, listened to, and exercised freely thanks to the everyday presence of religious members (Jesuits) in the home of released offenders, consciously searching for a new identity to re-start in society. In this new identity, despite other discourses, particular human dignity is recognized and encouraged, and peace at home and in the rest of society becomes feasible and real.

About the Author

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