

Restorative detention or ‘work on self’? Two accounts of a Belgian prison policy

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Abstract

Besides being known for population overcrowding, prison staff strikes, and prisoner suicides or escapes, which are frequently reported by the press, prison might also be a place for rare innovative projects. One such project can be seen in a penitentiary policy initiated in Belgium in 2000 aimed at re-shaping the culture of detention towards a culture of ‘restorative justice’. What can be said of this attempt at introducing the concepts of victim, restoration, responsabilization, sensitizing and awareness within prison walls? The present article proposes an illustrative and interpretive account of this prison policy. Rather than restoring the broken victim-offender relationship, its implementation has something to do with detainees working on their ‘self’.

Keywords

restorative justice, prison policy, work on self, discourse, translation process, practice

Introduction

Prison studies have successively highlighted how subcultures are shaped in ‘total institutions’,¹ how discipline is used in non-egalitarian power relations² and how the problems of order and legitimacy structure these organizations.³ Beyond that, the study of prisons takes us back to a whole history of the body and of the bodies designed to fix it, imposing their own rhythm on it, constraining it and getting it to fit into the order of public regulations. From this perspective, prison practices tell us something about the production of the ‘self’ (Mead, 1934). But how can a

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restorative detention policy inform prison practices and, as a consequence, our understanding of prisoners' self-making?

Criminological studies have, for the last 30 years, been devoting increasing attention to the idea of restorative justice (RJ). RJ 'is, at the same time, a social movement with different degrees of self-criticism and a domain of scientific research with different degrees of methodological adequacy' (Walgrave, 2008: 11). A wide range of literature attempts to legitimize RJ as a third way between retributive and rehabilitative models of justice (Graef, 2000; Braithwaite, 2002; Jaccourd, 2003), bringing together aims such as forgiveness, healing and reintegration (Zehr, 1990). Conceived as improving the satisfaction levels of the victims and the local communities affected by offenders (Ashworth, 2002), RJ has been introduced into various institutions (Jones and Compton, 2002; Aertsen et al., 2006), while RJ policies and practices have been extensively studied by many scholars emphasizing 'the reasons to be relatively positive about [its] re-emergence' (Morris, 2002: 596; Armour et al., 2005). This vast literature, however, pays little empirical attention to the interactional dynamics at work in concrete RJ and restorative detention-oriented activities.

Based on the observation and description of one RJ awareness-raising training program and one social painting workshop conducted in Belgian prisons, the two empirical accounts given in this article illustrate how the implementation of a restorative justice policy opens new space for individual normative work to take place in detention. In analysing these accounts, we will draw on two conceptual frameworks, described below.

The first conceptual framework we will use is rather descriptive. Inspired by an ethnographic methodology (Weber, 2001), it draws on the sociology of translation (Callon, 1986) to account for the processes through which RJ discourse has been translated into innovative practices within Belgian prisons. In his seminal article, Michel Callon identifies four 'moments' (i.e. steps) that make up the translation process: 'problematization', 'interessement', 'enrolment', and 'mobilization'. These four moments can be used to empirically analyse how actual situations of language use and practical action, through their description, provide 'a conceptual frame that helps account for, or "trace", a set of "performative" relations – transformations or "translations" – between actors' (Bruce and Nyland, 2011: 387). The empirical accounts, which will be given here, of one RJ-oriented awareness-raising training program and a social painting workshop reveal the role of actors (some new, such as restorative justice advisers (RJAs) and their partners who interact with detainees and guards) and objects (drawings, colours, paintbrushes, etc.) in a process where knowledge (such as psychology, social work, criminology and victimology), norms (such as restoration, treatment, control or rehabilitation, etc.) and practices (speaking, listening, painting, writing, etc.) intertwine.

The second analytical framework we will use is mainly interpretive. Inspired by a narrative understanding of self-making (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999; Ugelvik, 2012), its use rests on the assumption that RJ-oriented practices reveal what *working on the self* (Vrancken, 2006) means. According to Mead (1934), the

social psychological construction of the 'self' consists of a constant conversation between the 'I' and the 'me'.

The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized 'me', and then one reacts toward that as an 'I'. . . . Now, the 'me' may be regarded as giving the form of the 'I'. The novelty comes in the action of the 'I', but the structure, the form of the self is one which is conventional. (Mead, 1934: 175, 209)

The consequences of any action by the 'I' may reflexively form part of the embodied 'me'; thus the 'I' both calls out and responds to the 'me' in an internalized conversation of gestures. (Simpson, 2009: 1336)

To 'work on one's self' does not only designate some form of psychological work undertaken by the person themselves, in some obscure single-bed or, conversely, overcrowded cell. On the contrary, this work on the 'self' (Mead, 1934) happens within a social network and engages not only the internalized expectations of the self (the 'me'), but also the impulsive and creative part of it (the 'I'), referring to a real public policy in terms of 'working on the self'.

Combining these descriptive and interpretive frameworks allows a critical discussion of RJ policy as it is being implemented in Belgian prisons, a policy sharing some similarities with many other social policies in different fields.⁴ In reality, the individual normative work described in both the empirical accounts given in this article does not correspond to the empowerment of detainees restoring the broken relationship with their victim(s) and/or the local communities as much as it consists of enabling inmates to work on their 'self', in a responsible and autonomous way.

Background

Drawing on the conclusions of an action research project carried out in six Belgian prisons between 1998 and 2000 by criminologists from Leuven and Liège universities (Robert and Peters, 2003; Dubois, 2008), the Ministry of Justice announced that, by 4 October 2000, all Belgian prisons should start moving towards an RJ-oriented model. It was through some very vague and general words that the Ministry of Justice circular established the framework within which the model should be implemented. The task was delegated to new actors within the prison system, called restorative justice advisers (RJAs). One of these was appointed in each prison. Due to their young age (between 22 and 33) and lack of professional experience in prisons, they were novice performers given the responsibility of implementing a new government policy.

Shoehorned into prison institutions that were not expecting them – and which accorded them very limited legitimacy – RJAs have managed, over time, to find their niche, by building numerous partnerships with both internal (detention

professionals, prisoners, governors) and external (NGOs, trainers, facilitators, mediators) actors. Through these interactions, RJAs have tried to translate the criminological concept of RJ into concrete practices.

Interventions by RJAs have demonstrated a wide range of very heterogeneous activities, widely relying on the contacts and networks gradually built up by different actors. These activities, generally organized with one or several external NGOs (named in italics hereafter), have included, for example: training inmates to raise their awareness of the acts they have committed and of their victims' experience (with *Slachtoffer in Beeld* in Flanders and *Arpège-Prélude* in Wallonia); training inmates to deal with difficult situations (*Omgang met lastig situaties*) as well as organizing Personality Human Resources Training (with *PRH* in Leuven Central Prison), social painting workshops (with *Arnica*), talks between citizens and prisoners over a cup of coffee (*Kaffe Detine* in both Leuven prisons), discussion groups with citizens (*gespreksavonden* and *gesprekcyclus* at the Hoogstraten prison), think-tanks (such as the one run by the *Janus* association at the Marneffe prison), mediation programs aimed at connecting offenders and victims (coordinated by *Sugnomé* in Flanders and *Médiante* in Wallonia) and compensation programs (with the help of the Compensation Fund).⁵

Thanks to the work of RJAs, some RJ-oriented activities, and associated words, talks, gestures and memories, have been introduced into Belgian prisons. These activities take place within a detention context marked by overcrowding, lack of work for inmates, the fragility – not to mention the breakdown – of family ties, and the constant presence of fear and violence. And these activities contribute to [re-]establishing a link between the prisoners and the free world and its social norms.

Finally, it is necessary to nuance the importance of RJ activities in Belgian prisons by emphasizing both their 'reduction' and their 'amplifying' effects (Latour, 1995). Relatively contained, the RJ process has attracted the participation of only a few inmates and prison guards, when compared to the overall prison population. In June 2008, the Prison Service cancelled the RJA function, ultimately giving the impression of the RJ process as an unfinished shambles. Subsequently, many ex-RJAs have been invited to work as junior governors in local prisons. Should one, then, see such a reclassification as a successful business strategy that has enabled the promotion of former RJAs, particularly attached to RJ discourse and practices, as suggested by Stamatakis and Vandeviver (2013: 82)? Or should one look at RJ as a policy that has benefited only a few of its participants? This article aims at examining both these points of view.

Methodology

To illustrate these attempts at translating RJ discourse into concrete practices, we will describe activities that formed part of one RJ-oriented training program and one social painting workshop, which took place in Moha Prison in December 2007 and in Mosa Prison⁶ in February 2008.

The prison of Moha is an open setting hosting about 150 mid-term prisoners. These prisoners are living in a community regime based on a full working day or on intensive vocational training oriented towards successful reintegration into society. Centred on a wide range of sporting and cultural activities, the local custodial organization also aims at maintaining a social link with the local community. In this way, relations with the outside world and prisoners' families are facilitated: the prisoners are allowed to make one phone call every day, to receive weekly visits, and to ask for one-day prison leave three times a month. Within this context, RJ discourse was quickly found to be congruent with the prison regime, as their aim is clearly to increase prisoners' sense of responsibility.

Mosa Prison hosts about 300 long-term male prisoners. Built in the 19th century, the prison is characterized by a unique unlocked regime where prisoners have full-day access to work, education, library and sports. Such a regime enhances prisoners' sense of responsibility and encourages both prisoners and NGOs to organize many activities. RJ-oriented activities thus quickly found a place within this environment.

For the purposes of the present study, interview and observation data were collected between January 2006 and June 2008 in the Moha and Leuven prisons. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 90 prison workers (wardens, psychosocial workers, RJAs and NGOs). We were also given free access to a wide range of RJ-oriented workshops involving, more or less directly, RJ facilitators and prisoners. We focus here, first, on a training program designed to raise inmates' awareness of the consequences of their criminal acts (in Moha) and, second, on a social painting workshop (in Mosa).⁷ Our accounts of each of these are presented below and are based on *in situ* observation periods involving extensive note-taking.

Taking an ethnographic approach (Weber, 2001) in this way enables us to give an account of two real-life events that significantly changed prison practices and modified the representations of both the inmates and the professionals that took part. The purpose of these empirical accounts is to highlight and describe the process through which RJ discourse can be translated into concrete practices, opening some space for prisoners to undertake interactional work on their self.

Raising awareness among offenders

Awareness-training for offenders has now become a classic and widespread prison activity in the field of RJ (Dubois, 2012). Two NGOs offer such training in Belgian prisons: *Slachtoffer in Beeld* in Flanders and *Arpège-Prélude* in Wallonia. One of us attended a module of one of these awareness-training programmes as an observer in December 2007. The module was facilitated by two trainers: a 30-year-old man with a criminology degree and a 45-year-old female psychologist. The training took place in Hoogstraten as a five-hour session once a week over five weeks. The sessions involved a group of six or seven prisoners who

volunteered. This awareness-training module was designed for offenders whose victims were identified (with the exception of sex offenders).

Encouraging prisoners to feel empathy for their victims is a real challenge (Stamatakis and Vandeviver, 2013; Ugelvik, 2012; Van Stokkom, 2002). The aim of the awareness-training module described here is to initiate this process.

According to one of the trainers, the first day of the training 'is meant primarily for people to get acquainted and to establish a climate of confidence in the group'. Participants sit around a table and introduce themselves to each other in pairs, using a picture.

Sébastien introduces David: David is 36 years old. He has been here for four years. He has a 5-year-old little girl. He likes sports and plays football. He loves cars; they are a passion for him. He has chosen this picture [a sandy beach with a palm tree] because he dreams of sunshine and of vacationing with his daughter.

At the end of the round-table introductions, the facilitators ask each of the participants to describe in turn the act that led to their incarceration. As part of this process, Sébastien reports that he stole a crane from a construction site. David has been convicted of car theft. Rachid has committed violent robberies in supermarkets. Hassan has murdered his girlfriend. Gregory caused the death of a young man during a fight and Luke has been involved in a financial scam. Once everyone has had their say, one of the two trainers takes the floor:

Trainer: Each of you is here to talk about himself and his offenses. Everyone has their own reasons. Yet, in the interviews we have had with you, we often heard the same reasons: you want to become aware of your acts and of the victims' experience, to share your experiences, meet others, find out how to fix it, learn to live with your guilt and understand how you got there. We'll try to do this together.

The second day of the training is devoted to what the trainers call a 'mood exercise': it consists of identifying and expressing one's emotions. The trainers try to get the detainees to talk about their pain and their perception of their detention. Some feel humiliated, 'treated as so many cases, not as human beings'; prison isolates them, they see it as a kind of 'emotional desert'.

For David, the hardest part is being stripped of his role as a father, no longer able to see his daughter. He sometimes wonders who he is. He finds it hard to resist the oblivion offered him by medicines and drugs. As for Rachid, he agrees on the penalty but not on the conditions of his detention, and says: 'it is the rule of arbitrariness, here; you never know what to expect. It's unfair to be treated like that by people we have caused no harm to.' In order to survive, Sébastien says that he manages to get along by thinking about his family every day and imagining 'their life together afterwards – but it will take so much time'. David imposes upon himself a disciplined lifestyle: he cooks in his cell, eating a balanced diet, plays sports, reads a lot and looks after the library. Gregory would like to find ways to

keep busy: he is looking for work 'anywhere in the prison', but says he is 'going mad' because he never manages to find anything on a permanent basis.

Everyone takes the opportunity to talk at length about their frustrations and suffering. That day serves as a safety valve, a way to let off steam. The trainers conclude by stressing the importance of strategies the prisoners can use to enable them to get through their detention: they can tap personal, family, moral and religious resources, play sports, etc. The trainers announce that on the third day they will be focusing on problems of defensiveness and on coping mechanisms employed by people who, like them, are suffering, namely the victims.

The third training session begins with a video in which a postman and a young woman talk about a robbery they have lived through. Several months after the event, they are still traumatized. The video is used here as an object to enable offenders to put themselves in the shoes of a victim. After watching the video, the inmates share their impressions with the group. Rachid says he feels sorry for the postman but cannot understand why he is still in such a state several months after the robbery. Maybe this person is 'weak'? The other participants are amazed because the postman is a 'sturdy-looking guy' and they sympathize with the young woman who is traumatized to the point of not being able to work. A discussion then starts about the personal experiences capable of hardening someone so as not to be crushed by this kind of event. Rachid says that his own tough childhood would have enabled him to 'better' respond if he had been in the postman's shoes. Not everyone agrees with him. The discussion then takes a heated turn. A ten-minute break puts an end to the debate.

After the break, the trainers play another video. This one tells the stories of the parents and wife of a man killed in a 'carjacking'. They talk about their love and affection for their loved one, 'gone too fast'. When the video stops, a long silence ensues. The participants have nothing to say. After a few minutes of silence, Gregory expresses how deeply touched he feels by these stories. He admits he often thinks about the family of the man he killed. He would like to tell them how much he regrets what he did but he knows the victim's family cannot accept his regrets. Suddenly, people start to speak about their experiences, giving their opinions and listening to each other. After one hour, the trainers conclude the third session and announce the theme of the fourth one.

The trainers believe that this fourth session is the most important one. They begin by giving a summary of the three preceding sessions. They then invite each participant to talk, in under one minute, about the criminal acts that led to their incarceration. When everyone has spoken, one of the trainers announces another exercise.

I will ask you to go back to the time of the event(s) that led to your ending up in prison. How were you dressed? Remember the places, people, and the phrases and thoughts that you had. You have a big white sheet. When you are ready, you can draw yourself as you were at that time, as accurately as possible.

Around the table, the detainees have obviously been taken aback. They exchange baffled glances. Some try to sketch the first lines of their drawing. But very soon, they make fun of their own inability to face up to the task. The trainers encourage them to try to draw 'seriously'. By participating in this task, inmates are, in fact, projecting themselves through their drawing. Once the exercise is completed, the trainers invite the inmates to pin their sheets on a wall in the room.

Now, you will sketch two bubbles on your drawing. Draw one next to your head and write in it what you were thinking at that time. Make another one right next to your belly and write what you were feeling at the time.

According to one of the trainers, 'This method allows inmates to go back to the time of the facts and analyse the emotions they felt that day. We are interested in their emotions'. Facing the wall, Sébastien looks only at his own drawing and no longer sees the other participants. He thinks for a few seconds and then writes inside the two bubbles. This gives a voice to his drawing, some words to his experience. He explains to the trainer:

I was a bit stressed and feeling a little scared because, well ... this time, I had done it without concealing my face. I had just changed my clothes a little, had taken off my earrings and I was not wearing a mask because ... That is ... If a person had passed by when I was near the machine, I could have been passed for a drunkard or as someone who was taking a leak and stuff ... Whereas seeing someone wearing a balaclava, it's scary, isn't it? ... Also, I had taken the risk of doing it without a hood.

As he is saying this, Sébastien is demonstrating he is doing work on his 'self' by activating his ability to put himself in the place of the 'generalized other': 'the response of the "I" involves adaptation' (Mead, 1934: 214). Moreover, through drawing, Sébastien is led to feel new emotions, and to express and respond to them. This exercise brings forward not only the 'me' (the social norms providing that the offender should feel compassion for his victim, regret his act, etc.) but also the 'I' (Sébastien's creative ability and capacity for imagination).

The 'I' reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others ... The simplest way of handling the problem would be in terms of memory. I talk to myself, and I remember what I said and perhaps the emotional content that went with it. The 'I' of this moment is present in the 'me' of the next moment ... I become a 'me' in so far as I remember what I said ... It is in memory that the 'I' is constantly present in experience. (Mead, 1934: 174)

The exercise continues. Inmates are required to do another drawing, but this time of their victims. They are then asked to complete two bubbles with what they think their victims were thinking and feeling when the criminal

act was taking place. The participants take much longer to finish their drawings this time.

Sébastien: It is difficult to imagine what he felt because ... I can guess what he thought, but what he felt ... I can't. It's not easy, eh?

Trainer: Was it hate?

Sébastien: I think so. Hatred and anger. Given that he was not insured, he must have thought: 'Fuck, I'm not insured'. He must have thought he was really finished, that guy. He must have wondered why him and not someone else. Because, well, that's what people always think. [pause] I also think that he must have panicked at not seeing his crane. Yes, yes. He must have panicked.

For the trainer, this exercise is crucial. It allows the prisoners to feel closer to their victims when they draw them and then make them talk. To achieve this, the prisoners must put themselves in the victim's shoes, or feel empathy for them. This is a milestone in the *Arpège* awareness process:

For many offenders, a victim is just a concept. When they imagine what their victim felt, it makes them feel closer to them. In addition, offenders and victims share the same reactions of fear or hatred. Acknowledging victims means owning up to the facts and consequences.

The trainer closes the fourth session by highlighting the importance of this stage and congratulating the participants on how well they have participated.

At the final session, one of the trainers recalls the decisive step taken by participants the week before and re-contextualizes it as part of his summary of the first four sessions. He strongly emphasizes the voluntary participation of the prisoners, the evolution of the group and the personal development achieved by each one of them. In order to make all this 'evolution' more concrete, the trainers offer participants the opportunity to write a letter to their victims. In this case, the letter will not be sent, due to a lack of a framework allowing follow-up with the recipients. The role of this letter is to objectify the awareness process, in other words to translate it into an object. After one hour, Sébastien has completed his letter. He explains:

I have been scared by the wrong I've done to this man. At the trial, I was shocked to see his suffering. Indeed, I saw that the man was not angry at me. He would have liked to find a solution for himself so that he could get a new start. And that's good, because thanks to his attitude, I got a lenient sentence despite the seriousness of my case; I don't know whether that man completely understood what I had done but he ... he just wanted to get his crane back. I don't know why, but I feel indebted to this man. That's why I wanted to write to him and say I am sorry about how things turned out.

He then offers to read his letter to us:

I am writing this letter to tell you how sad the bad news [the victim's company had to go bankrupt] has made me feel. I want to apologize honestly, and upon my release, I intend to repay your assets as much as I can. I hope that one day your company will start all over again. This is what I desire most.

In this account, the word 'suffering' stands out as a feeling that allows Sébastien to connect to his victim. In presenting his wishes to his victim, Sébastien expresses some of his own feelings, which thus leave the realm of the unseen (and unspeakable) as they are put down on a sheet of paper.

The session ends with a written evaluation being completed by participants. They fill out a questionnaire drafted by the trainers, who later bring lemonade and cookies. Meanwhile, discussions continue in an informal atmosphere. The trainers are satisfied with the smooth running of the module and the participation by the inmates, who have fulfilled the role expected of them. The trainers are ready to run the module again, in another prison, and if possible by next year, with – who knows – another group of inmates that will have become interested in it through the grapevine.

The use of painting to make social scars visible

Within the Belgian context of restorative detention, social painting workshops are another typical RJ-oriented activity. From 2002 to 2008, these workshops have been facilitated by one man: Yves, of the *Arnica* NGO. At about 60 years of age, Yves is an artist with long grey hair. His movements are fluid, his eyes piercing, his words clear and precise, as are those he uses to define the concept of social painting:

Social painting is a derivative of social art. The seven forms of art are everywhere. Painting is based on colours, sculpture and shape. Drama is the art of speech, and is used to convey what we have seen in others. Dancing is the art of movement. Architecture is the process within which action starts, and the seventh art, the cinema, is the art of human biography. Social art could be described as using all these art-forms for people to meet, to reach the core – which brings us together: an aesthetic objective to be achieved together in an aesthetic manner. An ethic. Above all, remember this: art is also the realm of fantasy, of childhood. Regrettably, people no longer dream today, because we are so obsessed with action.

Through the medium of social painting, Yves claims that he tries to make participants more aware. Such awareness enhancement, however, is not an individual task but a collective one.

In a social painting session, taking part in a joint task (three participants work together on one sheet) makes the participant experience the active results that the

shapes and traces he is creating have on the other participants: he can perceive the others' reactions and feel what 'it does to them'. Social painting reflects how the participant responds to others in the situation he is depicting.

Yves' workshops usually consist of a four-phase process. The first phase is based on discovery and experience, so as to show the prisoner that everything has a 'dark' and a 'light' side to it. The purpose of this phase is to get participants to reflect on the positive and negative sides of things. In the second phase, Yves attempts to challenge the groups of three on their relationship with the 'dark' and the 'light' sides of their lives. He explains that they are all standing between these two sides, and that they can connect to them by narrating their biographies. In the third phase, it is assumed that participants will realize that they will use colours according to what they feel but also in accordance with the colours and shapes that the other two members of their group have already applied. At the heart of this phase lies their relationship with others. Finally, the fourth phase covers the explanation that each member of the group provides to account for their choices. Then each member's biographical accounts, and in particular, the stories of assaults and crimes, can begin. Yves has designed this framework after experimenting for over 20 years with this approach. He has worked with disadvantaged young people, often placed in an institution by a judge, coming from very different cultural backgrounds, and with detainees in almost all Belgian prisons.

At the beginning of the workshop we observed, five groups of three participants are formed around one object: a white sheet of paper placed on a table. A collective process can then begin. Yves approaches the group formed by Youssef, Yvan and Tom. In order to initiate the conversation, Yves emphasizes the importance of the lines they will draw with their pencils while stressing – and this is the standard to be met – that they have to achieve an aesthetic objective:

In a painting, it isn't that easy to erase a trace. All traces are visible and will act upon each of you. The aim of this task, even though it takes place under difficult conditions, is to create something beautiful, aesthetic, which all participants can identify with.

Tom says he does not know how to start, what colour to choose, what shape to outline. Yves then seizes the opportunity offered by that reluctance to make the first stroke himself. This initiates a pragmatic process and, while drawing lines on the sheet – using blue, red and yellow – he explains:

Social painting is a way to take a look at yourself. In and from the painting are emerging pictures which we must, in one way or another, do something with: shall I throw these images back again into nothingness or shall I emphasize them to make them visible? In some cases, it's fun to do. In other cases, there are images⁸ that, when we attempt to paint them, cause a lot of resistance and fears. We need to try to understand these images and their shapes. Each picture has a 'dark' face and a 'light' one. 'Evil' is often the result of a 'good' that has failed to materialize, which

was not seen, recognized ... [pause]. This brings us to aspects of ourselves. Okay? [Pause] When working on pictures, either on paper or in my heart, I get to gradually realize that I am an artist and at the same time an artifact. I realize that I cannot intervene in the painting: when something has been 'missed', it is not thrown away but is worked upon, integrated, and transformed.

By advising participants to trust their own hands because 'they know what to do', by emphasizing the progressive and incremental nature of their painting, the barriers between Yves and his students gradually break down. People listen to each other, even though Yves does speak much more than the inmates – who are dubious, while poring over their white paper, of their own choices of gestures and colours. Yves respects their hesitations, waits patiently and encourages participants with a look. Little by little, the white space of the sheet fills up, colours blend, everybody feels involved, seeks their own boundaries, exceeds them and starts to dare.

The delicacy and mutual respect found among participants is a touching sight. Look at their smiles, their sighs ... Their hands dance across the paper, then stop to make way for a moment of reflection ... And here we go again: they are creating. Action!

Youssef is in two minds about which colour to use to draw the path to the house he has already painted. Tentatively, he extends his brush to the palette of mixed colours. Yves encourages him:

Yes, orange, or-ange [the French word is made up of 'or' (gold) and 'ange' (angel), gold angel]. That's great! You recognize that's the right colour, don't you? The house looks sweet and warm. ... Or-ange is the symbol of the bond that brings you back home.

Youssef no longer hesitates. With a determined look, he chooses orange and draws the path. Yves goes on:

To enter the house and find peace, we must cross a threshold: the black line. Before this threshold, there are our fears. They are black. We've got to confront them in order to transform them. What are your fears?

Youssef: I was afraid of the SPS.⁹ I was afraid you were going to show them these paintings and they would write reports from them ... A report on what is not right with me.

Yves: How long have people been afraid of the wolf! In the Indian tradition, the wolf can help you to know yourself. It helps you as long as you remain alert to its lessons. Sometimes, wolves are harsh, at other times sweet. Take an interest in the wolf and in your fears. They will teach you to add your verbal force to the strength of your body.

Youssef seems to soak up Yves' words. Tom and Yvan, who have stopped to listen to Yves, resume painting after a few moments of meditation, one to paint an orange sunset, the other to light up the house windows with a touch of yellow. Youssef follows their lead and plants a Christmas tree.

After two hours, white sheets have gradually been covered with colours and shapes, in a peaceful atmosphere, lulled by Yves' voice who, watching for their hesitations, attempts to unlock them, using a language as colourful as the painting can be. Today's session has mostly been a matter of dreams and fears. During other sessions, Yves guides gestures by encouraging participants to talk about their crimes, their families, their victims and their own future. The images that appear on the paintings make it possible to bring what did not exist into existence; they accompany quite a long and slow process of expression for the detainees.

From policy to practice: The limits of the translation process

The cases presented above highlight the processes through which RJAs, their partners and the prisoners enact and bring together RJ practices. These processes consist of translating relatively vague and unclear political intentions into empirical content. Referring to the sociological concept of translation, Callon (1986) states that there are four 'moments' (or steps) that mark out the process: *problematization*, *interessement*, *enrolment* and *mobilization*.

Problematization (and this is nothing new) means articulating problems. Through social painting and awareness-training, prisoners are encouraged to express some common problems they are experiencing: boredom while in their cell, lack of space for reflection and creativity, feelings of remorse, regret, etc. After expressing these early feelings, prisoners soon face up to new problems while participating in RJ activities: lack of inspiration, difficulty in expressing their emotions and in feeling empathy for their victims, etc. Discussions with trainers and interactions afforded by painting and drawing the victim become spaces in which to put *problematization* into practice. The participants define one another, locate each other and gradually come together: they take part in group exercises (when sitting around a table) and they also stand as individuals (when they find themselves alone staring at their sheet on the wall). They are co-artists when they form a group of three around one blank sheet, which is to be transformed into a collective achievement.

Though *problematization* is the first step in the translation process, this step is not enough by itself. Indeed, 'each entity enlisted by the *problematization* can submit to being integrated into the initial plan, or inversely, refuse the transaction by defining its identity, its goals, projects, orientations, motivations, or interests in another manner' (Callon, 1986: 204). The reasons why people (prisoners, trainers, facilitators) join together in RJ activities are based on profit-sharing arrangements. The artistic, emotional and occupational dimensions – the list is not exhaustive – can be used to justify their involvement in RJ projects. These reasons make up the *interessement* 'devices'. *Interessement* is the second step in the process of translating

the concept of RJ into 'visible' practices: 'if successful, [it] confirms (more or less completely) the validity of the problematization and the alliance it implies' (Callon, 1986: 206).

However, as with *problematization*, *interessement* on its own is not enough to account for the entire translation process. 'Enrolment designates the device by which a set of interrelated roles is defined and attributed to actors who accept them. Interessement achieves enrolment if it is successful' (Callon, 1986: 206).

The concept of *enrolment* (the third step in the translation process) underlines how prisoners turn into 'good students' or co-producers of a common task, forgetting the fear, threats, incidents or past prejudices that usually characterize social ties between them. Since they provide a constant back and forth movement with the outside world, RJ activities enrol inmates who are sometimes painters, spectators or active participants in a conversation designed to encourage them to relate to their families, their homes, their victims, inviting them to review their experience, and even to imagine and create another project elsewhere.

The fourth step in the translation process lies in the *mobilization* of allies. Indeed, some victims express themselves on behalf of thousands of others by means of video pictures; some prisoners do the same as representatives of a class of offenders. Therefore, a stubborn question unavoidably arises as a real challenge to the whole process: 'Will the masses follow their representatives?' (Callon, 1986: 209). Will the other offenders and victims also engage in the implementation of an RJ process and thereby increase the visibility of that policy? The paintings adorning the hallways of some prisons convey a message of RJ. In the same way, the participants in painting workshops or training modules discuss their experience of detention. However, the magnitude of this translation process depends primarily on organizational and political factors, related to the organizational conditions and to the funding of such initiatives, in addition to their distribution and advertising.

The four 'moments' of the translation process make it possible to illustrate how the idea of RJ is taking shape, along with the activities but also with objects likely to travel and transport this idea in their turn. Admittedly, however, the exercise is flawed with obvious limitations. Not all prisoners who participate in RJ activities will come into contact with their victims. Not all will become painters. Although it does have its spokespeople, RJ has nonetheless proved to be confined to only a few experiments, constantly to be reproduced or rearranged with other audiences and leaving on the tables, at the end of each session, some empty bottles of lemonade and a few biscuit crumbs.

A kind of restorative work that raises questions

In terms of RJ, the reader will realize through the two experiments related here that nothing gets fixed for the victims, in the sense of 'restoring' what was injured or 'restoring' the broken relationship between offender, victim and society. Moreover, if the victim enters the prison walls, their presence is most often a matter of recalling, representing and imagining. It is being mediated via an image (a video, a

drawing, a painting) or a letter. Admittedly, victim-offender meetings or mediations may be undertaken. However, they remain rare, probably because of the 'problematic' dimension of their victim for many offenders (Ugelvik, 2012: 264). Yet, across all the studied areas, what is probably most manifest is the desire of most prisoners to distance themselves from their prison experiences, still often considered as isolating, an experience recounted by inmates (in the awareness-raising training we observed) as dehumanizing, impersonal and bureaucratic.

If the founding myth of the prison sentence is the humanistic search for the right sentence leading to the condemned person's repentance, incarceration has successively been conceived as a device for punishment-deterrence-incapacitation, then as an opportunity for re-socialization through work, education, support and care (the rehabilitative perspective) and, finally, as a means of risk management (Feeley and Simon, 1992). In short, prison is the production site of an individual, created both by the law and its deprivation, including the right to come and go freely. This would suggest that underlying this representation of an individuation process imposed on the inmate can be found a deep wellspring, intended not only to socialize individuals but also for the sake of protection: the protection of society as a whole, the protection of guards, of stakeholders, of the prisoner against himself, but also detainees' protection against victims' subjectivity and protests. It is precisely this protection that disrupts the 'restorative' activities now being developed in prisons with the intrusion of new objects, new people and new activities. It is also the silence that is broken by victims' pictures and words now making their way into prisons, not so much to increase the weight of guilt as to link individuals in a vast chain of actions, situations, cries, reactions, words and feelings that were puzzling, perhaps even forever haunting their heads and minds.

Where prisons of the classical model were struggling to create separation and isolation, RJ policy seems to be looking to fill a gap, attempting to fill up and humanize the space. RJ work appears to be relatively vague, and is difficult to describe by its protagonists. However, this work is gradually being established by RJAs as a means to 're-humanize' prisons by allowing the emergence of the 'generalized other' – the victim or the ordinary citizen, i.e. 'the attitude of the whole community' (Mead, 1934: 154) – while focusing on the speech and the expression of the 'self' as it intertwines with rights and criminal acts. The aim of RJ work is primarily to *work on the self* (Vrancken and Macquet, 2006). RJ activities engage not only the prisoners' conventional part (the 'me', for instance, the prison sentence as space and time leading to repentance) but also their autonomous and creative ability (the 'I'), through the work that is being undertaken by the prisoners on their self.

The 'I' both calls out the 'me' and responds to it. Taken together they constitute a personality as it appears in social experience. The self is essentially a social process going on with these two distinguishable phases. If it did not have these two phases there could not be conscious responsibility, and there would be nothing novel in experience. (Mead, 1934: 178)

In this context, the activities we have described provide an overview of prisons that is quite different from that reported in the Foucauldian analysis of power (Foucault, 1977). Our account features subjects capable of exhibiting self-discipline and of working on themselves under the attentive care of prison guards. The idea of individuals working on themselves is by no means original. But what we mean today by 'working on one's self' is part of an institutionalized working relationship with others (Vrancken, 2010: 58), illustrated in this case by a genuine questioning, undertaken in order to connect with others. This ongoing work is supported, for a brief moment within a prison term, through RJ activities. To become [the newly connected] self, it seems that one should seek to make an introspective reflection upon one's self, one's actions. Even through these activities that are important *per se*, the dynamics of the strategy employed with inmates is more important. After all, some RJs have offered workshops in drama, writing, and video-editing, and inmates could also have opted for photography or sculpture workshops. Examples abound.

In these activities, as in those reported previously, it is mostly a matter of working deeply on what is being felt before summoning up the other – namely the victim – so that inmates realize that they also share feelings, memories, fears and suffering. In this sense, and in consideration of the technical, relational and emotional network mobilized around inmates, can we assume that an attempt to improve prison conditions is round the corner? This trend towards humanization could be seen here as the crystallization of institutionalized psycho-relational experiments. These contribute to the implementation of policies oriented toward 'working on the self', through encouraging the emergence of a network-oriented approach among disparate actors (offenders, victims, various facilitators). As for RJ activities, when they are properly carried out in groups, they are not meant to create stable groups, but to mobilize an ability to speak about shared experiences, to prompt inmates to realize the consequences of their own actions and to live out cross-experiences that produce similar effects on their victims, beyond the bars and walls at the foot of which the world actually does not stop. Participants know they are not alone and can make themselves heard.

Conclusion

Even though RJ has often been marginalized and described as a 'utopia' by detention professionals and by some analysts, our empirical accounts show that some RJ practices have, in fact, made their mark. Although fuzzy and geared towards the introduction of a new, more 'humane' focus within bureaucratic organizations, RJ policy has allowed new actors – whether RJs, trainers or facilitators – to integrate this work gradually, to create new activities and to disseminate new knowledge related to the phenomena of victimization, empathy and reflexivity. By forging partnerships with outside NGOs, RJs have allowed new operators to get inside the walls of an institution that otherwise would have remained sealed off. Around the concept of RJ has emerged the possibility of establishing a small and

incremental prison shift, based on the injection of social ties in a universe where the effects of dissocializing remain critical.

According to our two brief accounts of RJ practice, it appears that the challenge of prison policies nowadays lies not in implementing an RJ-oriented culture within Belgian prisons but in developing innovative strategies for bringing actors together – prisoners, victims, NGOs, prison staff, citizens, etc. – with the aim of encouraging self-production as well as of producing others within prisons. A whole normative field of work is unfolding in prisons, in an attempt to produce a responsible and autonomous individual, in the same way as this approach is spreading elsewhere in the world outside prisons. For instance, similar work lies at the heart of other contemporary approaches designed to train and heal oneself (Holmqvist, 2009), to help oneself recover (Smith-Merry et al., 2011), to become more flexible (Heyes, 2011) and to integrate oneself into a community (Shaik, 2010). All these approaches aim at constructing oneself while connecting to others, as well as to laws and organizations, to knowledge and the environment.

There is, after all, a normative gamble being taken here, to implement the contemporary subject by means of the social network, of knowledge, skills, the law, the capacity to create projects, etc. If this gamble is also taken in the prison environment, we may wonder in future about the issue of the anthropological significance of such a choice. We will need to examine these practices and to understand why, sometimes, things get stuck, resist – due to silence, escalation or opposition to the injunctions urging actors to become involved in all these approaches (Vrancken, 2010: 146). We will need to understand why some people in a situation of isolation, and more fundamentally of downright indigence and daily misery (Wacquant, 2009), sometimes have greater expectations – in terms of aid, of financial and legal interventions, of support through day-to-day prison care – than becoming involved in participatory processes.

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Notes

1. See Clemmer (1940), Sykes (1958), Goffman (1961), Irwin and Cressey (1962), Thomas (1973).
2. See Foucault (1977), Stastny and Tyrnauer (1982), Christie (1993), Snacken et al. (1995), Wacquant (2009).
3. See Lemire (1990), Sparks et al. (1996), Liebling (1997), Carrabine (2005).
4. We refer here to the policies spreading in the world outside prison (Vrancken, 2010) and based on discourses aiming at restoration, care, guidance and integration while connecting people with others as well as with laws and organizations, knowledge and the environment (Shaik, 2010; Smith-Merry et al., 2011; Thunus and Schoenaers, 2012).

5. 'An experimental compensation fund for prisoners was established in 2000, managed by Suggnomé and sponsored by a charity. . . . Through a process of communication with the injured party, an insolvent offender can ask for support by the fund in order to reimburse the victim, on the condition that he carries out volunteer work in the community in consultation with the victim' (Aertsen, 2006: 73).
6. Please note that prisons real names have been changed in order to protect anonymity.
7. For further illustrations about other activities in the regions of Flanders and Wallonia, see Dubois (2012).
8. This task of putting experiences into pictures also convenes dialectics between the 'me' and the 'I', making the artist work on his/her self (Mead, 1934: 209).
9. The SPS is the Socio Psychosocial Services, a body that reports to the penitentiary administration.

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