

Reflections From the Country of Nothingness

Conspiracy of Cells of Fire & Theofilos Mavropoulos

2012

When a door closes behind you, another opens ahead. That is how we felt when the door of the prison opened, closing the door on the era when we were free...

A new world appeared before us. A world narrow and built of concrete, where good day and good night are abolished. Prison is a shadow apart in the transparent galley of democracy. Here, time is uncountable and days push slowly against each other, melancholically, indifferent, mechanical. Here, the seasons of the year die within a calendar hung on the wall, and nostalgia takes its revenge, disinterring memories, emotions, loved ones, sceneries and thoughts that never materialized into praxis.

But the wolf that exists within us stays awake and hungry. All these days, all these months, all these years we feed it with thoughts, desires, concerns, plans, rage, and it swallows the bars, the barbed wire, and the locks to run free again some unknown day.

Until then, in prison, the wolves of negation move alone among the multitude of shadows around them. Because the majority of prisoners are miserable shadows of people, for whom prison becomes their only homeland.

Those who live outside the walls should keep in mind that prison, beyond walls, bars, numbers, locks and uniforms, is built of flesh and bone. It is a living beast that exists within the prisoners themselves. It speaks their tongue, copies their gestures, loves their lies and, at night, locks them up. But it wears no uniform, carries no keys or batons, because the prisoners are their own prison-guards.

Here, then, in the country of nothingness, false idols are torn down and myths disappear, leaving behind a humble and cowardly truth.

Before crossing the threshold of prison, we had been seduced by the magnetism of the social margin and the lawbreaking sociology of its image. We had fed ourselves the musty old myths describing the world of prison as that mysterious place wherein the inhabitants may be the vanguard of anarchist insurrection. Especially in Greece, this damned myth of the 'revolutionality' of prisoners is very popular.

There exists an entire anarchist subculture that produces and sells to itself an embellished and idealized tale that speaks of the dignity of prisoners, of their honor code, of their unsubmissive combativeness, of their insubordination. A romanticized fiction concerning alleged combative prisoners cut and pasted to the measure of the anarchist imaginary.

However, all of this anarchist subculture that sanctifies prisoners and projects them the new revolutionary subject has been fed and sustained primarily by people who never had the bad luck to relate with the circles of prison inmates and confirm their passive rottenness. For this reason, this imaginary product is sold with smart quotes and vague words centered on the fiction of the 'instinct of rebellion' in prisoners. This is how stories about prison and its society are shaped and forged to line up with the 'ethical' beliefs of the traditional anarchist space.

For example, the repulsive mentality of prisoner is often hidden behind the beautiful fires of prison riots. What is often missing in the eclectic historiography of 'prison struggles' is that even during riots the majority of prisoners, instead of searching for a way to flee, seek only to sack the prison pharmacy and get high on psychotropic drugs. Meanwhile, there is no shortage of 'grudge matches' over heroin and economic debts. In parallel, the society of prisoners is based on the same idols as the society of the legally 'free': hierarchy, racism, snitching, religiosity, hypocrisy, servitude... It is a mirror held to society on a smaller scale. Thus, everything here on the inside is compressed. Here, nothing and nobody is hidden. Snitches circulate without any difficulty, prisoners humiliate themselves to gain the favor of the powerful, friendship and dignity are easily sold for a dose of heroin, violence against co-prisoners becomes a sign of Power, and lies and cowardice triumph in the supposedly 'hard' world of prison, while the will to live is postponed indefinitely.

This is the immutable reality of the Greek prisons. There is no space for pity, nor for solidarity. We don't feel pity for those who have sold their skins and turned pathetic, nor do we show solidarity with those who passively accept their captivity and chains.

Unfortunately, several anarchists suffer from an ideological rigidity and believe in the metaphysical 'revolutionality' of prisoners. Perhaps it is one way of theirs to respond to the extreme workerism of the communists, placing the prisoners and the lumpen proletariat as the revolutionary subject on top of the podium... But metaphysics has nothing to do with anarchists of praxis. We never liked those 'sacred prayers' that await the awakening of the 'others.'

One of the greatest forms of violence against individual liberty is this dogmatic certainty of class subjects. By seeking to ally ourselves with other social sectors it is as if we recognize the social identities that Power itself distributes. Every presumed social class, from the migrants to the lumpen proletariat, is recognized as such through their cataloguing in the authoritarian reality.

If we wish to deny every social class, we must abolish the ideological platitudes of social alliances, reject the mass social structure, and locate the individual and our own unique selves at the center of our rebellion. We are what our choices make us. Thus, we detest all sentences that begin with the orthodox certainty of mass social identity: 'We the prisoners...', 'We the proletarians...'

Prisoners are the pariahs of society. They are at the margin of society. But not at a margin that wishes to attack the system's center; rather a margin that desires, envies and feels jealousy toward the world's center and its dominant values. Quick and easy wealth and the religion of money are still the values of the society of prisoners.

In few words, prisoners have not negated the dominant society. Quite to the contrary, that society does not accept them. It is one thing to be a negator, and another thing to not be accepted. One thing is the combative margin of anarchist illegality and offensive, and another thing is the passive margin of the lumpen proletariat and of self-pity. We, as anarchists of praxis, opt for self-exile from the dominant civilization, and choose to fight against it, while the majority of the

‘criminal offenders’ are exiled without having denied the dominant existent for themselves. But, instead of turning the rage of their exile to attack, they express it as a complex or syndrome of self-destruction...

So, we believe that the lumpen proletariat is digging its own grave. They are a multitude that has been unable to overcome the ethical and social contempt that they have been dealt and, as a response, reproduce it internally, turning it like a knife against themselves, through the use of drugs, self-injuries in prison, religious faith, and self-pity. Thus, they incarnate the common idea of ‘criminality’ that was constructed by the bourgeoisie, becoming its ‘valiant’ representative, as drug addicts, pickpockets and ‘villains’.

The majority of prisoners consists of a hodgepodge of instincts with no consciousness. For this reason, they are the worst of all possible allies. They are a riffraff that is quickly bought and that destroys itself even faster through addiction to narcotics. Prison inmates are the residue of this specific society. They are not the negation of society, but one of its rote products.

The only diversion that survives in the mire of prison is carried out by some minimal minorities, individuals who refuse to become the expected statistics. In the past, these minorities created rebellious situations inside the prisons of the Spanish State (e.g. the ‘Coordinator of Spanish Prisoners in Struggle’, COPEL), inside the prisons of Italy (e.g. the ‘Proletarian Armed Cells’, NAP), and elsewhere.

The rage and pain of these prisoners was converted into the gasoline of vengeance and of an ingrained consciousness. Their hatred for the system became the praxis of their own existence at war with the tyranny of prison-guards and prisons of those times, through escapes, armed attacks and explosions (in the case of the NAP), as well as a radical awareness. These are the brilliant exceptions that prove the sad rule of passivity among the prisoners.

In closing this text, we know that it will generate many objections and disagreements, which will merely reflect every frozen ideology that refuses to watch as its myths tumble down. A blurry esteem has existed for years among anarchist circles in Greece that have been seduced by the idea of political sympathy towards the prisoners. Even we thought that among the circles of delinquents we would be able to see the first instincts of insubordination and insurrection. Unfortunately, myths are prettier than the truth, and surely those who have interacted with circles of ‘criminal offenders’ understand what we are saying.

But what is of value for an anarchist of praxis is to demolish the myths and move on, with the controversy forever in his/her thoughts and actions. Everyone should try out their own experiences and arm their own desires. The only certain thing is that prison is a damned place where society stores all that scares it and all that it doesn’t want to see. Prison is a contemporary picture of Dorian Gray, just as ugly as the truths of the dominant civilization. Nothing beautiful survives in here, beyond one single thought: that of escape and the demolition of every prison.

Only on the ruins of prison society will the black rose of negation flower.

Thus, we are sure of one thing. Among the prisoners we have found behaviors and attitudes that are hostile to our values. We have met many persons who are an ocean apart from us in perceptions and dignity. There are also more than a few prison inmates to whom we would show no amount of mercy for all the shit they’ve done. Even so, there is not one person — not even our worst enemy — who justifies the existence of prisons. We despise the pseudo-courtesies of humanitarianism. Prison is an enduring torture, a psycho-machine that feeds on memories, emotions, flesh and bones. And to those who hasten to ask ‘what will we do with the rapists, the pimps, and all that type of trash...?’, the answer is simple. The question is not if these scumbags

'deserve' to be in prison, but rather if we ourselves can ever accept the existence of prisons. What's more, there is always the wonderful violence of the right to take the law into our own hands. Thus, everyone should think about whether they want to be part of the construction of a society whose monuments are prisons and courts, or a destroyer sowing the whirlwind that will tear down every institution of captivity, freeing thoughts, emotions, actions... For the constant anarchist insurrection...

Koridallos prisons, October 2012

Conspiracy of Cells of Fire, first phase, Theofilos Mavropoulos

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