Nainita Madurai

ANTH 379 Final Paper

Prison’s Children: La Paz, Bolivia

11/22/09

The Situation: Prison Communities – Slide 1

The articles I chose to read were about children serving time with their incarcerated parents in prisons in Bolivia.

These prisons are unlike any in the United States.

They are like small towns contained within the secured prison walls.

Inside the walls there are no guards, inmates are expected to elect representatives, create laws, and enforce the laws themselves.

In larger prisons, such as San Pedro, there are even different sections of the prison; the section you live in determines your socio-economic status within the prison.

There are mixed reactions to the presence of children living with their parents in prison.

The article from TIME that specifically focuses on children living in detention centers for women, says that the environment is almost better for them to live in.

Most of the women are there for drug violations and other minor crimes.

On the other hand, San Pedros Prison, houses male inmates as well and although most of them are also there for drug violations, the male presence still increases the dangerous situation the children are in.

The children in this picture are all living in the Obrajes Women's Detention Centre in La Paz.

The Situation: An Environment for Children? – Slide 2

The communities are elaborate and well thought out.

In jail, an inmate can purchase a better cell and food if they have the money; they can also create markets and restaurants to sell items.

Kindergartens as well as day cares are attached to many of the prisons and older children are allowed to leave to go to school and come back

The inmates have small, cramped cells to share with their children, however the situation in the jails might be better than the alternative.

If they didn’t live there many of the children would be on the streets fending for themselves

Both these pictures are of children who lived or are living in Obrajes Women’s Detention Center

The boy is named Gabriel, he says he likes where he lives and that he likes going to kindergarten, many of the children are unaware that they even live in a prison (many were also born there)

The girl is named Nicole, she used to live in the Center with her mother, but now lives with her dad outside; she says that she would rather be in there with her mother and younger sister than out in the city

The Situation: The Problems – Slide 3

Despite the benefits, there are far more pressing costs to having children living in the prisons.

Though violence is not as prevalent, it still occurs.

Children may also witness prostitution and the ever-prevailing drug trade.

Perhaps the worst problem is that some children are even abused sexually and physically by violent inmates.

In one rare case, a girl was raped and strangled in a man’s cell.

These problems have spurred humanitarian effort to improve conditions for the children; they understand that getting them out of prison may not be feasible or the best idea but they can try to help them while they are staying in prison.

The Situation: In Photographs – Slide 4

 These images give you an idea of what life is like in these prisons.

 The first picture is just the courtyard with a marketplace.

The second is of a man at his “restaurant” that sells food that is better than what the prison serves.

The third is a wall of an indoor soccer field, it reads “Liberty and Justice for All”

The fourth picture shows a man holding tour guides and a history of the San Pedros Prison; many tourists come to these prisons for illegal tours run by inmates (much like tours of the favelas in Brazil)

Relevance to Our Class – Slide 1

Family

Though we discussed this during the first part of the semester, I still thought I would bring it up.

 Keeps families together, and even has a softening effect on parents.

 It really shows how important family is in the culture.

Gender : Marianismo and Machisimo

Women are responsible for raising children and must still follow some of their roles of marianismo within prison

Men must also uphold Machisimo; though they are prison they still show dominance over women and often it is the men who set the rules and govern the prisons

Drug Trading and Violence

Drug trading is ever-pervasive in Bolivian society; even within prisons, where most of the inmates are incarcerated due to drug-related charges.

This shows how pervasive the drug trade is in the culture, society, and economy of Bolivia

Relevance to Our Class – Slide 2

Modernization/Globalization

With globalization and the spread of information, increased humanitarian aid was sent to these prisons.

Technology resources for the children such as computers were provided to some prisons.

Identity

The children who attend school (outside of the prisons) are often ostracized for their living situation, and often they do not feel at home in the jails.

On the other hand, many children were born in jail and know now other way of life

The interesting thing I found was that the jails effectively model the world outside their walls.

Prison life is very similar to life in the slums of La Paz, with possibly even less violence.