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Mario and Zunduri: Human capacity and processes

What does it mean to leave no one behind when we talk about freedom? Is it only about being free from the yoke of labour or sexual exploitation? Or is it about something more? Capacity is freedom says Amartya Sen, but there are however, sources of *unfreedom*. *Unfreedom*s that deny us a certain “set of opportunities”, of alternatives from which to choose, leaving thousands exposed to desperation and to a universe of risks. I want to talk about two cases in which we have worked in the last years. Two very different faces of social reintegration.

Mario and his brother Enrique were child and women traffickers for which they spent 12 years in jail. Making unbelievers believe, they speak openly today about what they did and how they did it. It took place in the area of « La Merced » in the center of Mexico City, where they had grown up watching their own mother deal with different exploiters. Mario wasn't always a trafficker, he was taught. And there are two things that I want to recover today from his testimony: First, the fact that he is conscious and recognizes the damage he infringed on his victims. Being let into their world, something that really shocked me was the clarity in which Mario explained the violent process that he would use to break the will of his victims. Second, that he can elaborate on the reasons why, knowing the harm he was doing, he did it regardless. Hunger, poverty, violence. A logic of survival of the strongest. " *I don't know when I became this. I just know that the moment when I became violent, for me, I stopped being a victim. And I did the same for my brothers, and I converted them from victims to perpetrators* ».

Why I find it relevant to entertain this logic is because I want to make the point that, although there are no justifications, there are social, economic and cultural logics to human trafficking that cannot be ignored. Otherwise there wouldn't be such strong patterns through the world. In my country, teenagers in areas of great vulnerability are many times faced with little alternatives that, in a way, force them into terrible paths and their most attractive option is becoming a child sicario or a human trafficker. Taking this into account, isn't Mario a product of the system as well? of his unfreedom?

In 2014, Zunduri arrived to the shelter after having being held victim of labour exploitation for five years in a dry-cleaner in Mexico City. The conditions in which her trafficker, a woman named Leticia, held her were inhuman to such degree that her body had underdeveloped. She suffered severe anaemia and malnutrition, and her height had decreased almost 25 cm. Being a 22-year-old woman, she looked like a 14-year-old girl. According to the medical report, she was covered with more than 600 wounds and her internal organs corresponded to that of an 81-year-old woman.

After her legal complaint, five people were sentenced to jail: a mother, a father and two daughters. The whole family had been a part of it. But no one had taught them. Leticia and her family hadn't grown up in a community South to Tlaxcala in which this kind of thing can be normalized, she hadn't been exposed to these environments, and hadn't been recruited by anyone. And yet, if you compare the relationship dynamics between victim and

perpetrator, the process of dehumanization; it can almost identically be compared to the MO of the Garfias brothers. How did she know how to do it? How did the family get from being « good, normal people », from Leticia's daughter even being friends at school with their victim, to literally chaining Zunduri with a 3 meter long chain, by the neck and waist?

During this 6 years, I've observed the importance of processes. The gradual process in which a person becomes a victim to the point in which they end up consenting to their own exploitation. The process in which Mario learned how to “kill the feeling” to be able to “work”. The process in which Leticia and her family convinced themselves that they had reasons enough to do what they did. When this dawned on me, I felt scared. If anything this case has taught me is to fear my own capacity. The terrible capacity that normal people can have to take advantage of another's disadvantage, and justifying themselves while doing it. Traffickers are not born traffickers, they have grown into a role. Step by step, threshold by threshold, violent limits are crossed with very « rational » ideas. Let's remember both slavery and the holocaust were perfectly legal. Having said this, my larger question is: if we have this capacity to do such terrible things, to take away life in this way; can we maybe be equally capable of giving life back? Can we create a process of positive capacity?

We do not pretend the impossible: there are many limits to the timely, economic and human resources we possess. However, we believe that with enough creativity, we can draw concrete ways and design the thresholds to create that other type of capacity; to promote the acquisition of very specific skills, habits and attitudes for the resolution of shared problems. What we do is that through different methodologies and projects,

we work with small-medium scale groups. From schoolyards to university campuses, we have inaugurated a series of projects that aim to create capacity in new generations, teachers and parents. For example, one of the new projects we're launching soon, *Operación Mi Comunidad*, will be dedicated to 3 municipalities from Mexico City that we have studied and that are seriously exposed. We want to provoke a whole set of soft skills and networks to bring more security. It is a plan we've been twitching for a while now, that I am really passionate about and for which I'm preparing to measure its impact.

This I have learned: Processes need to be made and experimented with. That is what social entrepreneurship is all about: making educated guesses, testing, learning from them, and surviving that frustration. I do not come here to present a unique model as I did last year. I have accepted that there will be a constant flow of ideas and plans needed.

I want to close by saying that, if it weren't for this other side of things, these expressions of beautiful human capacity that I've also seen during these years, I wouldn't be here. I would not be able to sustain any great expectation after all that we see in this work. I am convinced that threshold-by-threshold we can change the order of things, that perhaps maybe we can start to invert the cycle, make it virtuous. Creating capacity is freedom. It is the liberty of being able to take control of one's own life. That we may not only make good programs but stronger individuals and communities to share the responsibility of those plans with.

For the freedom of children to choose a good future. For the freedom from blinding desperation, and the freedom of fear and want. This is what it means to leave no one behind.