

## "From Extreme Punishment to Community Healing"

Hello

Thank you...

...to let us share our experiences with each other and understand the actions they compel us towards - and perhaps expand our moral imagination around this very complicated issue.

I'll start by reading the testimony I have shared with Illinois Lawmakers in our efforts to reinstate Parole in the state of Illinois - a first step in a long road towards prison reform and perhaps even one day: restorative justice.

On September 9, 2017 at 1am, I got into a car that I mistakenly believed was my Uber. He let me go at 5am, after 4 hours of sexual assault. My world collapsed. My assailant was never caught. I was diagnosed with PTSD and dissociated from my body rendering me totally useless to my own theater.

Dancer/Choreographer colleagues from Serbia invited me to spend a month with them to invent a physical re-embodiment practice for myself based on trial and error. I emerged from this boot-camp with renewed presence, cautious optimism, new tools, and a feeling that I may be the only victim in the world who has ever received such care. I was compelled to pass this healing on to others. I discovered that trauma is stored in a part of the brain that has no access to language - that the body keeps the score. Hurt people hurt people. Responsible parties are traumatizing others out of their own complex traumas.

I was now harboring a new and paralyzing fear of men. I risked positioning *myself* to be held hostage by my experiences. and I concluded that *my* healing likely required drawing closer to this fear.

So I began teaching movement therapy for trauma rehabilitation at Cook County Jail and Stateville Correctional Facility.

This work immediately complicated my narrative.

We needed each other to heal, we needed to see one another, to confess and cry together and to remember that 'I am because of who we all are'.

As we dove into the movement therapy itself, one of my students said: "It is not in my best interest to be this vulnerable." How horrifying to imagine that we have placed them in an environment where they may forget entirely how to remove their armor!

Some of them found a way, melting in a shaft of sun after seven years of solitary confinement, listening to the joints of their fingers creak and finding that they have the ability to make time fly, rediscovering a little dance they had when they were 4 that had always felt better than stillness.

But hope, restoration and healing is rarely what we offer those we incarcerate. Earned Discretionary Re-entry is a critical piece of restorative justice. I have met men eager to make amends, eager to invest in their fellow-man, who are buried alive in an institution with no exit. What good is justice without the possibility of change? The goal must be restoration and incentive to transform their lives and maintain relationships with family and loved ones. The

ultimate goal must be to reimagine our institutions as healing spaces so that those who have committed a crime can be restored to their community and return to productive lives. A second look, a light at the end of their tunnel - gives them something to hope and strive toward, but also provides the needed motivation and incentive for us as a society to truly transform our viscously punitive correctional system into a space of healing and restoration.

I *personally* do not feel safe inside a system that locks people up generically/ categorically and throws away the key.

Mercy has been my freedom and my oxygen as the world has become more frightening and complex. It is my deep belief that people with long sentences need opportunities (after they have they have been held accountable) to be reviewed for release, so that all of us can heal.

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The more I have spoken to people about this bill - the more I understand our country's entrenchment in extreme punishment.

Prime example: COVID

What's happening in the rest of the world at this moment? In response to the coronavirus epidemic, ALMOST IMMEDIATELY on March 26, 2020, Ethiopia pardoned 4,000 prisoners. Iran, with notoriously horrific prison conditions and high incarceration rates, temporarily pardoned 85,000 prisoners on March 17—closer now to 100,000—which is forty-one percent of their total prison population. Turkey released 90,000 prisoners by April, thirty-one percent of their prison population and Afghanistan released 10,000 of their 30,000 prisoners (thirty-three percent).

California and New York (our most generous states) have pardoned a mere two percent of their prisoners.

Can we ask ourselves what kind of catastrophe it would take for us to reconsider our incarcerated citizens? Only in our great free country has the very mention of pardon become ridiculous.

There are so many factors...

- Mass incarceration as the new Jim Crow
- White Supremacy and Systemic Racism - the 'otherness' of our prison population - and our dedication to our ignorance.
- Politicians stoking fear for votes and the media (Fox News) creating monster criminals for ratings
- A democracy is as strong as its population is educated. Politicians removed Civics classes from our High schools in the 1960's to increase their power over the people.
- Misunderstanding the cycles of violence and trauma and how people arrive at a place of committing a crime.
- the idea that this is the only solution...A lack of education on all the systems of restorative justice that have existed before prisons -
- A misunderstanding of UBUNTU!! eg. GUNS
- There is no healing for any of us until there is healing for all of us.

I'm so grateful to be here with you this morning - because it will take every last one of us to expand the moral imagination of our very broken systems.