

VALERIO BISPURI

Prisonniers
Prisoners



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Après avoir achevé en 2014 *Encerrados*, voyage photographique de dix ans au cœur de 74 prisons sud-américaines, j'ai décidé de poursuivre mon exploration du monde des détenus dans les prisons italiennes. *Prigionieri*, *Encerrados* et *Paco* composent une trilogie sur la liberté perdue.

Ce deuxième voyage dans l'univers carcéral a pour objectif d'étudier les conditions de vie et le quotidien des prisonniers des centres de détention italiens, et de comprendre leurs difficultés, leurs besoins et leurs émotions. Les prisons sont un miroir de la société, reflet de faits divers ou de grandes crises économiques et sociales.

En Italie, il existe 190 centres pénitentiaires, dont 55 sont des centres pour femmes. J'ai travaillé dans dix de ces prisons pendant quatre ans et j'ai réalisé combien le système carcéral italien souffre de surpopulation, de l'inactivité des détenus et de structures précaires. Ces dernières années, lentement, la situation s'est améliorée dans certaines prisons, mais les conditions de détention sont toujours très difficiles et les prisonniers souffrent de l'isolement. Dans ces « non-lieux », les personnes privées de liberté tentent de reconstruire des habitudes et des liens, tout en cherchant une solution à un avenir, qui bien souvent n'existe pas. L'État ne fait aucun effort pour la réinsertion de ceux qui ont passé plusieurs années en prison, et beaucoup y retournent peu après en être sortis.

J'ai pu entrer dans les prisons de haute sécurité où sont incarcérés des hommes de la Camorra et de la mafia, comme Poggioreale à Naples, et l'Ucciardone à Palerme. J'ai étudié la réalité des colonies pénitentiaires où les prisonniers sont partiellement libres et peuvent travailler

en dehors de la prison, comme à Isili en Sardaigne. Je me suis immergé dans l'univers carcéral des femmes : l'ancien monastère de Venise, San Vittore à Milan, et Rebibbia à Rome. Je suis allé aussi bien dans de petits établissements que d'énormes centres pénitentiaires. J'ai pu découvrir de nouvelles structures comme la prison de Capanne à Pérouse, ou de petits instituts comme à Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi.

Mais avant tout, j'ai été très proche des détenus : j'ai déjeuné avec eux dans leurs cellules, écouté leurs histoires, partagé leurs joies et leurs peines. Nous avons vécu des moments qui semblaient ceux du quotidien. Ces photos sont aussi le fruit de tous ces instants passés ensemble. Je pense de plus en plus que la prison ne doit pas être seulement punitive, elle doit aussi offrir une nouvelle chance à celui qui est incarcéré.

Durant ces quatre années, j'ai eu l'opportunité de connaître le monde des prisons italiennes de l'intérieur et j'ai perçu une immense solitude. Les détenus sont en permanence en contact les uns avec les autres et pourtant ils sont toujours seuls, à chaque moment de la journée. *Prisonniers* est un projet à la recherche de l'âme de ces personnes privées de liberté. C'est un travail d'analyse anthropologique, sociologique et photographique sur l'être humain, qui fait partie d'une étude plus large sur le monde des invisibles. Ceux qui sont oubliés, marginalisés, abandonnés.

J'ai toujours pensé que pour photographier la réalité en profondeur, il est important de savoir attendre et de faire correspondre ce que nous ressentons avec ce que nous voyons. Il faut du temps pour raconter une histoire.

Valerio Bispluri

↑ Des détenus font de la gymnastique pendant la promenade, à la prison de Regina Coeli. L'image évoque Jésus sur la croix avec les deux gardes à ses pieds.
Rome, Italie, 2016.

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Inmates at Regina Coeli prison during out-of-cell exercise time. The image recalls the crucifixion of Christ with the two guards standing at the foot of the cross.

Rome, Italy, 2016.

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LIEU DE L'EXPOSITION
ÉGLISE DES DOMINICAINS



Cellule de 5 détenus à la prison de Poggioreale, l'une des plus anciennes, des moins bien entretenues et ayant la plus forte surpopulation des prisons italiennes. Elle abrite aujourd'hui 2 000 prisonniers ; il y a 10 ans, il en avait 3 000.
Naples, Italie, 2015.
© Valerio Bispluri

A cell for five at Poggioreale prison. The prison is poorly maintained and is one of the oldest, most overpopulated prisons in the country, with 2,000 inmates, although ten years ago, there were 3,000.
Naples, Italy, 2015.
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Prisoners

After concluding *Encerrados*, a ten-year photographic journey through 74 penal institutions in South America, I decided, in 2014, to continue exploring the world of detainees, but this time in Italian prisons. *Prigionieri*, together with *Encerrados* and *Paco*, form a trilogy on freedom lost.

This second journey into the world of prisons delves into the everyday life of inmates in Italian prisons, endeavoring to grasp their struggles, needs, and feelings. A prison holds a mirror up to society, reflecting the full range of behavior patterns, from small dramas to major economic and social crises.

Italy has 190 penal institutions, 55 of them for women only. I moved between ten of these prisons over four years, and realized how the Italian prison system struggles with overcrowding, the dearth of activities for detainees, and inadequate facilities. While there have been gradual improvements in some over recent years, the conditions still mean extreme and critical isolation. In these "non-places," people deprived of personal freedom attempt to develop their own routines, to express affection, and find an alternative for the future, a future that often does not exist. The government has no measures to support the rehabilitation of men and women released after years of detention, and many return to prison after only a short time on the outside.

I was granted access to maximum-security prisons where inmates linked to the Camorra and other mafia groups are locked up, prisons such as Poggioreale in Naples and Ucciardone in Palermo. I experienced the reality

of institutions where prisoners have a certain degree of freedom and are allowed to work outside, for example at Isili in Sardinia. I experienced life on the inside of women's prisons, in the ancient monastery of Venice, in San Vittore, Milan, and the women's section of Rebibbia in Rome. I saw small jails and vast penal institutions. I discovered newly built facilities, such as Capanne prison in Perugia, and small centers such as Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi.

Above all, however, I had the opportunity of being in close contact with the detainees. I had lunch in their cells, heard their stories, and shared in their tears and laughter, experiencing what seemed like ordinary moments that were just part of everyday life. These images are also the product of such moments spent together. More than ever, I believe that jails should not only punish, but must also lead to new opportunities.

Over these four years, I was able to understand Italian prisons from the inside, and what I discovered was immense loneliness. The detainees are in constant contact with others, yet are always alone, at every moment of the day. *Prisoners* is a project that searches for the souls of these humans who have lost their freedom. It is an anthropological, sociological and photographic analysis of human beings, and part of a broader investigation into the world of persons invisible, those who are forgotten, marginalized, cast aside. I have always believed that to capture reality in all its depth, it is crucial to know how to wait, to be able to balance what we feel and what we see. It takes time to tell a story.

Valerio Bispuri

EXHIBITION VENUE
ÉGLISE DES DOMINICAINS



Des détenues s'amusent pendant la promenade, à la prison de Capanne qui a ouvert en 2009 et accueille des hommes et des femmes.

Pérouse, Italie, 2018.

© Valerio Bispuri

Inmates fooling around during exercise time. Capanne prison which opened in 2009 holds both men and women.

Perugia, Italy, 2018.

© Valerio Bispuri



Valerio Bispuri (born in Rome in 1971). After a degree in letters, Valerio Bispuri realized that photography was the language for him to express himself and describe reality. Since then, photography has been his life. He has been working as a photoreporter since 2001, collaborating with Italian and international magazines. His first work was on the Romani people and their world, and saw him visiting camps in Rome, Naples and Bologna, and even going to remote villages in Bosnia. Valerio Bispuri has worked in Africa and Asia, but has spent most of his time in Latin America, adopting Argentina as his second country. He decided very early to stay away from breaking news, preferring to live somewhere with no major events, but rather an ongoing critical situation, devoting himself to long-term projects, and

documenting social realities that affect and strike him. Photographic narrative has become his way of dissenting in a society that excludes more and more people, hence his interest in the marginalized, forgotten, invisible people. For ten years Valerio Bispuri has been working on "Encerrados," showing the living conditions of prison inmates in South America. "Encerrados" was exhibited at Visa pour l'Image-Perpignan (2011), at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome (2011), at the Bronx Documentary Center of New York (2014), and in 2015 it was published as a book by Contrasto. In 2017, he completed another long-term project running over more than 14 years on a drug now widespread in certain South American countries: "Paco, a drug Story." The work was exhibited in Istanbul by the International Green

Cross (2014) and at Visa pour l'Image-Perpignan (2016), where it was nominated for the Visa d'Or award, and in 2017 it was published as a book by Contrasto. "Encerrados" and "Paco" have been awarded international prizes, including the Sony World Photography Awards, the Picture of the Year prize, a Days Japan International Photojournalism Award, and the Latin American Picture of the Year prize. His latest project, "Prigionieri," is on Italian prisons; it is being exhibited this year at Visa pour l'Image-Perpignan, and will be published in September by Contrasto. Valerio Bispuri is currently working on three other long-term projects, one on the trafficking of women in Argentina, one on the life of deaf people in Italy, and the third one, in Africa, on persons living with psychiatric and neurological diseases.