

Co-op Education Challenges to Developing Co-ops with Incarcerated and Previously Incarcerated People

With Lymarie Nieves and Alan Vicens

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Acknowledgements – Resistance to Stolen Lands, Stolen People

- Acknowledge the original stewards of the land and inhabitants of NA.
- Acknowledge the African origins of all humanity, and all the African descendants forcibly brought to this stolen land, enslaved, and whose labor built these countries; as well as those who continue to labor without just compensation.
- Acknowledge other indigenous peoples who have also been exploited and oppressed to enrich colonial and settler powers.
- Acknowledge Mother Earth and efforts to keep her sustainable - and this planet livable.
- I acknowledge the struggles of our ancestors as well as the histories of resistance to asset stripping, anti-Blackness, patriarchy, labor oppression, racial capitalism & all forms of exploitation – those who use mutual aid & economic cooperation for humanization and liberation!
- Thanks to the organizers. Acknowledge our elders.

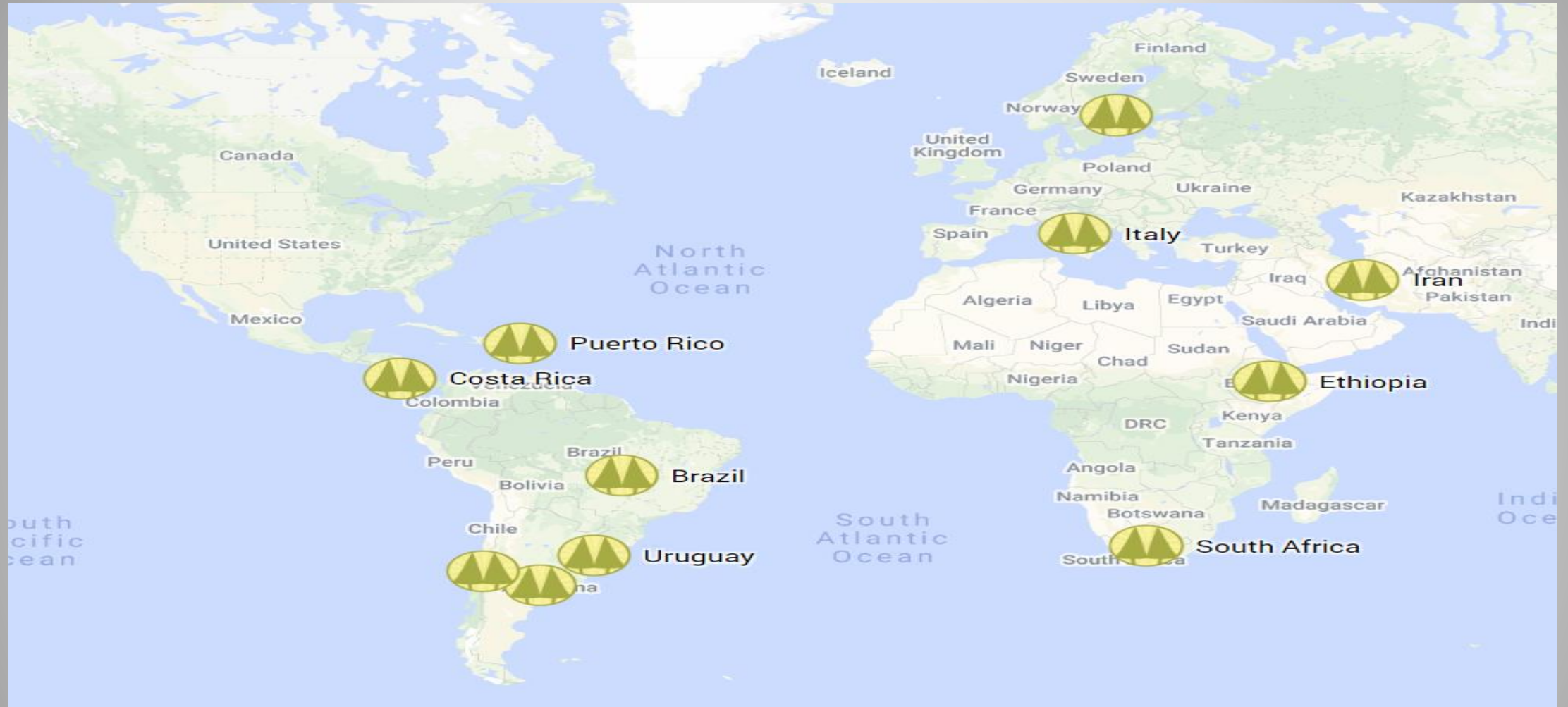
Co-ops address:

- **Slave labor and lack of control over income**
- **Unemployment and underemployment**
- **Inability to support or contribute to family**
- **Outmoded skills**
- **Isolation and marginality**
- **Social capital formation and leadership development**
- **Recidivism**

Co-op Strategy in Prisons and address PIC

- **World views translated into policy, action, broader ecosystem :**
- **Social cooperatives,co-ops of service providers and clients (mix of workers in social entrepreneurship); have enabled a broader ecosystem of support for prisoners to join cooperatives in Italy & Sweden.**
- **Membership type: worker-owner, or work for social co-op as member.**
- **Work in the prison - + sometimes outside the prison.**
- **Training: Co-op economics, democratic participation, vocational, financial, mutuality.**

Research on Incarcerated Worker Co-ops



Draft map of where there are worker co-ops in prisons/jails internationally (Esther West)

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- **Rehabilitation and skills training program combined with access to financial services and income-generating opportunities**
- **Incarcerated people organize licensed producer cooperatives, with access to outside markets.**
- **Co-op members receive vocational training, financial education, and access to micro-loans and micro-insurance.**
- **Over 31 active cooperatives range from dairy and vegetable farming, cobblestone cutting and paving, metal works, carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, bakery, weaving and sewing.**

Ethiopia Mekelle Prison Initiatives

- **Members save about 1/3 of their co-op income, provide remittances to their family, pay other expenses.**
- **Formerly incarcerated members may continue their membership & participation from outside.**
- **Low Recidivism: annually 16 co-op members returned to prison out of a total of 1416 released prisoners.**
- **Prison officers at Mekelle are also trained in co-op management and leadership in order to better help the inmates to be successful.**

Mekelle cont'd

The Mekelle Prison Project

Creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for women and youth

Mekelle, Ethiopia



International
Labour
Organization



Italian Development
Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- **Began with art therapy in Guyama Penitentiary, Puerto Rico**
- **Wanted to create a business, co-op model appealed to them; they demanded co-op education**
- **Volunteer co-op educator from PR League of Co-ops**
- **Changed co-op law – meeting with Governor**
- **Rephrased the 7 principles; internal rules**
- **MOU with Corrections Department – 15% -25%{office space, electricity, etc}; have to pay for extra security**
- **10% profits retained; 65% to owners**
- **Extremely low recidivism rate.**

Cooperativa ARIGOS, Puerto Rico

- **Education and Training.**
- **More control over one's life and work**
- **Decent humanized work with living wages and ownership equity**
- **Develop trust and solidarity relationships**
- **Increase skills and capacities, new kinds of leadership**
- **Change behavior in prison/prison experience**
- **Rehabilitation, resocialization, reintegration**
- **Reduce recidivism**

Benefits

- **Cooperativa Arigos internal rule: members must pay child support and contribute to family expenses outside.**
- **Former member stated that this model is the only option they had for jobs to support their families.**
- **Weaver (2015) similar: importance of control over work, sense of family, ability to support family.**

Family Support

- **Enabling policy and legislation**
- **Strong consistent cooperative advocates on the policy level and in the community**
- **Broader social and cooperative ecosystems to support incarcerated people; strong co-op movement**
- **Use of social cooperatives**
- **Worldview: focus on & capacity for rehabilitation, restoration; transformation**
- **Funding & devoted resources not restricted to the worker co-op itself, but adaptable and applicable to specific contexts**
 - **Ex: vocational training, financing, support for returning citizens, co-op education, customers**

Observations on what makes the co-ops successful

- **State/Federal laws; Prison bureaucracies**
- **Corrections administrations/prison directors keep changing and not always interested**
- **Lack of information about cooperatives**
- **Social inequalities and potential for elitism**
- **Society's view of prisoners as non-deserving of human rights**
- **Commodification of prisoners and prison slave labor – will corporations free labor?**

Barriers to developing & supporting incarcerated workers' co-ops

- × **Who's in power matters; support changes over time – how to institutionalize**
- × **Unlearning to re-learn – need to transform our thinking as well as systems.**
- × **More continuous education. ...**
- × **Lets hear from the experts on accomplishments and challenges in these contexts in Puerto Rico – especially co-op education accomplishments and challenges.**

Challenges and needed supports



• **Co-op Educators & Developers of Excellence**

- **Lymarie Nieves and**
- **Alan Vicens**

Quixote Sculptures



Cooperativa ARIGOS

Making Art with Children



Cooperativa ARIGOS cont'd

Transformation!

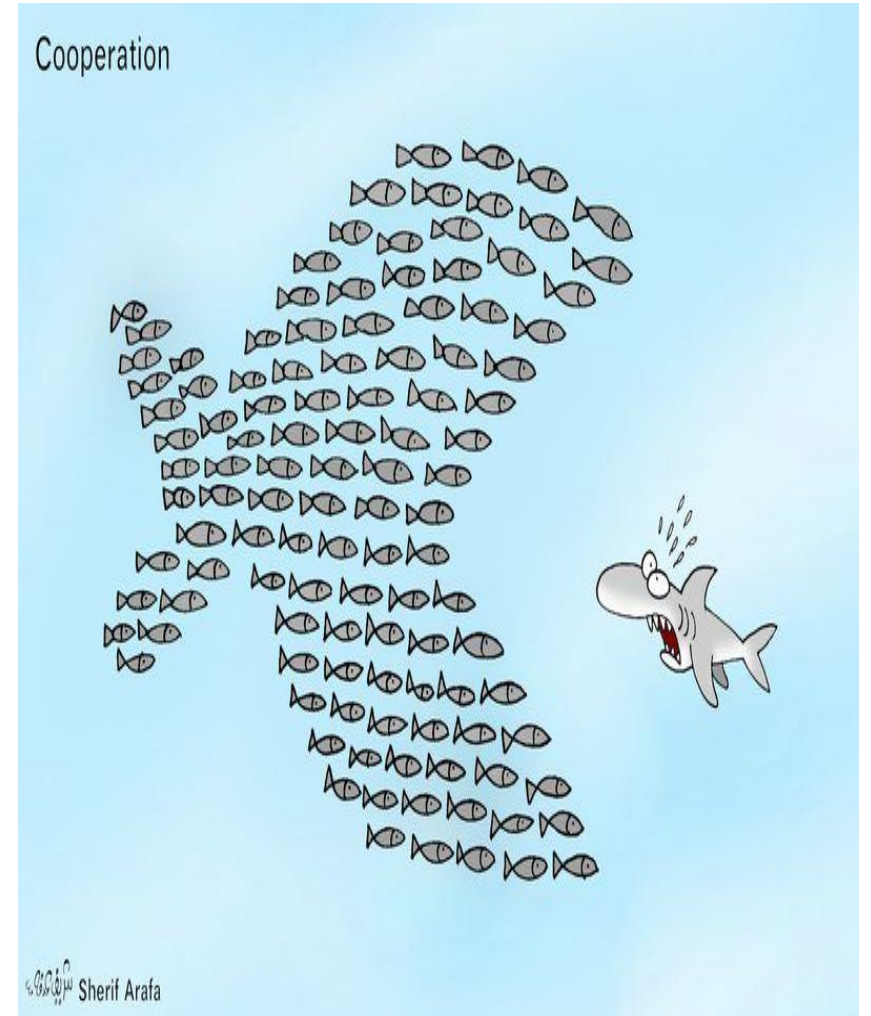
Questions?

Thank You!

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Freedom Quilting Bee



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