

Witnessing hope in the dark through documentary filmmaking: observations of cross-cultural prison therapeutic communities

Testigos de esperanza en la oscuridad a través del cine documental: observaciones de comunidades terapéuticas carcelarias interculturales

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ABSTRACT

Last week, on August 15th, Japan marked the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. And yet, even now, we continue to witness armed conflicts, occupations, and large-scale human suffering in many parts of the world.

Keywords: therapeutic community; hip hop; the language of connection; unlearning violence; documentary.

RESUMEN

La semana pasada, el 15 de agosto, Japón conmemoró el 80.º aniversario del fin de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Sin embargo, incluso ahora, seguimos presenciando conflictos armados, ocupaciones y sufrimiento humano a gran escala en muchas partes del mundo.

Palabras clave: comunidad terapéutica; hip hop; el lenguaje de la conexión; desaprender la violencia; documental.

Introduction

I often find myself wrestling with this question: *how do we even begin the process of breaking the cycle of violence?*

I understand this International Congress of Group Psychotherapy and Group Processes (IAGP) conference is a space in which people come together—across cultures, professions, and perspectives—to share knowledge, stories, and experiences. A space where, together, we can illuminate new possibilities. It is both humbling and an honor to be invited into this dialogue.

When I was first approached to speak at this conference, I was puzzled. What could someone like me, an independent documentary filmmaker, possibly offer to a room full of experts who have dedicated their lives to healing and transformation? I'm not a clinician, nor a therapist. I don't carry formal titles or any such licenses. I am simply a witness. Someone who has spent over three decades asking these fundamental questions: *Where does violence come from, and how do we unlearn it?*

That question has been my compass. It has led me behind prison walls, into recovering centers, art programs, and cross-cultural encounters. It has taken me to places both familiar and foreign. Along the way, I've made several films that document not only suffering but also healing and transformation.

So, what I offer is less about clinical practice, but about the practice of witnessing.

Documentary filmmaking, to me, is not just about making films. It is about seeing and being seen. It is about saying, *"I see you, and I want others to see you too, only if you allow me."*

It can take months, years, even a decade before the doors finally open. And in that long process, I expose myself to them as well.

The power of documentary film and learning from failure

When I was a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh, studying social and economic development in South America, I took a seminar called “Education in Social Movements.” There, we watched documentary films in every class for the whole semester, on the Black Panther movement, cinema workshops for children in an impoverished area in Chile, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s interviews, struggles of black workers in South Africa, and the first Intifada in Palestine. Raw, urgent images. Powerful stories.

However, the real learning happened *after* the films. The conversations that spilled out into hallways and taverns. The moments of deep emotion—people sharing stories, some even storming out or breaking down in tears. That seminar was chaotic and intense—completely unmoderated—, but it revealed something profound: films don’t just educate; they shake us awake. They connect us.

It didn’t take long before I picked up a camera. I could only afford a secondhand one and a couple of basic classes at the local community film school. I’d spend late nights in a cramped, run-down editing suite, teaching myself as I went.

My first documentary? You don’t want to watch. It is 40 minutes long and about women’s empowerment in a low-income neighborhood in Santiago, Chile. It was part of my graduate thesis. It was a disaster.

My Spanish was about the level of a 5-year-old. The footage made people seasick. And the hardest part—I struggled to point the camera at people. It felt rude, intrusive—even violent. After nearly six months in Chile, I came back with barely enough footage for a decent trailer.

My friends called my film “*the hypnotic film*.” Not because it was profound. But because it put everyone straight to sleep. Even my thesis committee couldn’t make it past five minutes.

Imagine this: you are showing your film, you poured your heart into and right there, in front of you—all three professors, in perfect unison, bobbing their heads as they drift off to sleep. Like a synchronized napping team! But here’s the thing: that failure became my foundation. Because of it and from then on, I knew what I wanted. To make films that don’t put people to sleep—but shake them gently awake.

Encountering Alice Miller

After graduating, I returned to Japan and began working in television documentaries. It was far from the ideal place for a young woman dreaming of exploring the world through filming. The reality was stifling—hierarchical, male-dominated, even misogynistic. I found myself wondering not just what story to tell next, but how to escape that toxic environment before it crushed whatever passion I had left.

Then, I discovered the work of Alice Miller, a Polish-Swiss psychoanalyst. Reading her books, *For Your Own Good* and *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence*, felt like someone had turned on a light.

Alice Miller reveals the hidden mechanisms of violence. At its core, she tells us, lies childhood. Unhealed wounds—carried silently into adulthood—become the very fuel that keeps the cycle of violence alive.

Suddenly, so much made sense—the pain I had carried for years, my brother’s struggles with substance abuse, the oppression and harassment I witnessed at work, the violence and discrimination I saw everywhere.

Her clarity was a revelation. For the first time, I understood the deep, lasting impact of childhood trauma—not just on individuals, but on whole societies. Making a documentary about her work didn’t feel like a choice. It felt like a calling. It took me a couple of years to get connected to her, but I made it.

My colleagues used to call it “*the Cursed Film*.” Because in the process of making, almost everyone who touched it—producers, translators, musicians, and assistants—ended up walking away. Some later confided in me: “*It was just too much*.” Too raw. It forced them to confront things they’d spent a lifetime avoiding. That’s how powerful the material was.

Even though, I convinced NHK, Japan’s public television, to fund it and air the 90-minute documentary. It featured in-depth interviews with Miller herself and the followings. A stage played by the Oxford Theater Company reimagined Hitler’s childhood through her lens. Japanese readers whose lives were deeply shaken by her books. A recovery program in the U.S. built on her insights.

That last recovery program was run by the Amity Foundation, a therapeutic community.

And encountering Amity? That became a turning point in my journey.

What is a therapeutic community?

Therapeutic communities (TCs) have their own history, with roots in both UK psychiatric hospitals and grassroots self-help movements in the U.S. At their core, TCs embody what George De Leon calls “*community as method*.” They are spaces where people heal not because experts fix them, but because the community itself becomes the agent of change. People with substance abuse, mental health struggles, or behavioral issues come together not as passive patients, but as active participants. They engage, take responsibility, support one another. It’s not a program, but a way of life. A way of growing. A way of becoming whole—together.

Amity has a unique and radical approach. Founded in 1981 by three remarkable individuals—two women who survived addiction and incarceration, and a man who is a photographer, committed to the civil rights movement—, Amity grew out of Synanon, the first TC in the U.S. although they didn’t call themselves as that. The three founders of Amity had spent time in Synanon, which is now known as a notorious cult. While Synanon eventually collapsed under the weight of its own authoritarianism, the founders of Amity chose a different path—one that embraced healing, honesty, and community, leaving behind the toxicity.

Enlightened witnesses

In 1997, just one year after my documentary aired, Alice Miller mentioned it in one of her writings. She wrote:

A Japanese crew shot a film of therapeutic work in a prison in Arizona, where the method was based, inter alia, on my books. I was sent the video cassette and found the results very revealing. The inmates worked in groups, talked a lot about their childhood, and some of them said, “I’ve been all over the place, and killed innocent people to avoid the feelings I have today. But I know that I can bear these feelings in the group, where I feel safe. I no longer need to run around and kill, I’m at home here, and I recognize what happened. The past recedes, and my anger along with it” (Miller, 1997).

Most of what she described never made it into the final cut of my documentary. Time constraints forced me to leave out some of the most powerful scenes. But I sent her a few of those clips anyway just to share.

It was Alice who first introduced me to Amity, but she had never seen it with her own eyes. I believe the footage on Amity was a kind of revelation for her. Living proof of what she had long believed: that even those who have caused deep harm can begin to heal—when they are met with what she called *an enlightened witness*—, someone who sees the invisible wounds of childhood, who helps survivors find the words, who validates their pain, and most importantly, who gives them permission to feel.

In the documentary, Miller speaks about the vital role of witnesses. She reminds us: most people we label as “criminals” never had *the helping witness* — an adult figure who loved a child who had been abused offering them their first sense of trust and love while they were still young.

And yet, she insisted that it’s not too late. Even in adulthood, an enlightened witness can make a difference. Places like Amity have those kinds of witnesses. Miller said she too tried to be one herself through her writings.

First encounter with the experience therapists

I’ll never forget my first encounter with those enlightened witnesses, the staff members at Amity, back in 1995. The moment I stepped into that sunlit room still stays with me. About ten staff members—men and women, including three of the founders—stood to greet me. Not with formality. Not with distance. But with respect. With warmth. With genuine curiosity. There was a kind of deep attentiveness in the room—one I had never experienced before.

First, they introduced themselves one by one. They spoke calmly, clearly, without shame—about childhood rape, family violence, years lost to addiction, and the harm they had caused others. Many had been to jails and prisons. I remember

being so overwhelmed, I couldn't even take notes. But it wasn't just their past that struck me—it was their courage to be able to share what you find most humiliating.

I had never heard people speak like that before. When it was my turn, all I could say was, “*After hearing your stories, I feel like I have nothing to say about myself.*” And everyone laughed.

That moment was a profound connection. It felt like walking into a living embodiment of Alice Miller's world—a place where people face their trauma, not to be trapped by it, but to transform it.

Later, I learned there was another term for them: *experience therapists* — people the approach of utilizing ex-offenders who've done the deep inner work to heal themselves. The term was coined by sociologist Lewis Yablonsky, who once lived inside Synanon himself, whom I had a privilege to get to know.

Back then, nearly everyone on staff at Amity came from that kind of background. Things have shifted since—but even nowadays, many staff are graduates of Amity's own programs. Many were once incarcerated. And that, I believe, is what sets Amity apart. It's been three decades since that first encounter. And only now do I fully grasp what they built. It wasn't easy. It took years of struggle. Immense courage. And deep, painful work—done side by side, in community.

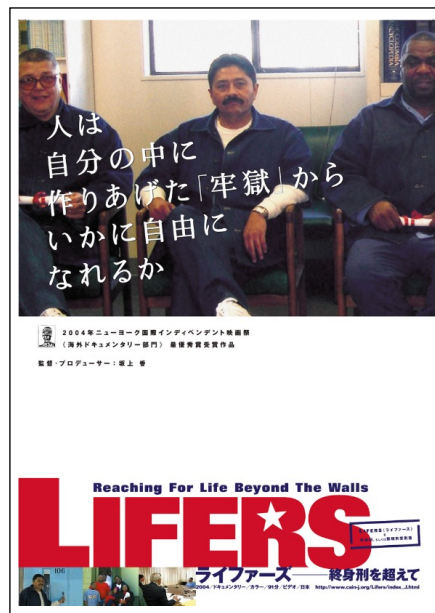
I wasn't just a filmmaker documenting their lives. I joined their workshops. I sat in their circles. I shared my own wounds. That's how I came to know their hearts. And many remain my dearest friends to this day.

LIFERS: A portrayal of prison-therapeutic community

Some of the original staff have since passed, including Naya Arbiter—one of the founders and the compass of Amity—who left this world in 2022. But their spirit lives on. Nowadays, Amity reaches nearly 50,000 people each year: families and children, men and women behind the walls, and those reentering society across California and Arizona. What's even more inspiring is that many of Amity's current leaders are formerly incarcerated TC graduates—or their children.

It's an ongoing movement. A living testament to what it means to face hard truths—and to come out stronger.

To help visualize Amity's approach, I'd like to share a six-minute clip from the film titled *LIFERS* (see Fig. 1. and <https://vimeo.com/594928023/01c4f312fc?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>) I made back in 2004 (Sakagami, 2004). We filmed in several locations across California, U.S., including inside maximum-security prisons.



Source: Sakagami (2004).

Figure 1. LIFERS: Reaching for Life beyond the Walls.

That footage was filmed between 2002 and 2004, at the height of the so-called Get Tough on Crime era. What you just witnessed was part of a long and difficult process: nurturing what Amity calls emotional literacy. The ability to recognize

your feelings. To express them safely. To understand your behaviors to create a sanctuary, a safe space for everyone who participate.

Lifers

Prison is the last place you'd expect to find emotional literacy. The dominant culture inside prison is built around isolation. Control. Punishment. In that environment, empathy and emotional safety are often non-existent. And the core values a therapeutic community (or TC) depends on—like integrity, autonomy, flexibility, and openness—simply don't thrive under rigid, punitive systems.

So, the program must bend. It must adapt. And it does.

But at Amity, the staff—many of them formerly incarcerated themselves—go out of their way to create what's missing. They invent new ways to offer something different. Something human. Something healing.

Toward the end of the film *LIFERS*, there's a moment I wish I could share. It happens during a Christmas dinner inside the prison unit—right in the middle of a six-month lockdown. Against all odds, the staff made it happen. I was there. I witnessed the risks they took. I witnessed the joy, the gratitude, and something even deeper: a profound sense of belonging. For many of the men in that building, it was rare, if not the very first time in their entire lives, that they felt truly seen and connected. And the film's ending captures that powerful truth.

Beacon House: 20 years after LIFERS

One of Amity's core principles—especially when working with long-term inmates—is authenticity. People who've lived through addiction, trauma, and violence don't need another lecture. They need to see change. They need to feel it. They need real people, with real stories, who've made it to the other side. That's why Amity hires people who've walked that path—former addicts, former inmates.

Naya, herself a true representative, always said: in this community, lived experience isn't a bonus; it's a requirement.

And healing doesn't end at the prison gate, because recovery isn't an event. It's a journey. That's why Amity's commitment to aftercare has been there from the very beginning. Last year marked 20 years since the film *LIFERS*. Back then, almost no one believed that people serving life sentences could ever truly return to society. Support programs were nearly nonexistent. But Amity was one of the very few offering hope against a state system that is designed to individualize, isolate and separate versus creating inter-connections through a fundamental recognition of our inter-subjectivity.

Nowadays, the landscape has changed—dramatically. In California, more than a thousand lifers are released every year. Most have spent decades inside. Many of them have completed countless programs, worked tirelessly for a second chance, and done everything they could to make amends—in their own way.

One of the clearest signs of this shift is Beacon House in Los Angeles, a home created *exclusively* for released lifers, run by Amity. It opened in 2018. One of its very first staff members was Ozell, one of the men featured in the film *LIFERS*. Sadly, he passed away during the pandemic. Today, Beacon House is home to 50 or 60 men at any given time. Some stay six months. Others, much longer (Fig. 2).

And here's what makes it so special: every single staff member was formerly incarcerated. Most were lifers. And the director? She is the woman on the far right in the photo which I took last year. I've known her for a long time and have seen how hard she's worked to overcome addiction. I'm proud of her for stepping into a director role and even starting university.

Last July, I spent a week there, joining a workshop called Arts and Celebration. Every month, Beacon House holds these week-long workshops for newly released men. Each with a different theme, but always the same goal: healing, rebuilding, and reconnecting.

Every day, we watched one or two films that challenged us. We sat in slow, honest conversations. We shared poetry, drawings, short performances, and creative ceremonies at the beginning of the day and the end. And through it all, I began to understand — *this* is how they survived the unbearable prison life: by creating, by painting, by writing, by telling their stories on stage.



Source: Sakagami.

Figure 2. Experience therapist at Beacon House.

Also, I realized something else: you can't expect someone to walk out of a cage after 20, 30 years and just "go back to normal." It doesn't work like that. Everyday life comes rushing in. It's simply too fast. Too superficial. And the workshop creates a pause. A breath. A space to remember. Having served a life sentence does not define who you are. You've done everything possible within those walls — and your efforts hold meaning beyond them, in the world outside. And they need to be reminded.

Prison Circle: place of unlearning violence

Now, let me take you to Japan's prison system.

For decades, it was defined by this: order, discipline, and silence. Its priority has been preventing riots and escape. Above all, to make them suffer for what they have done.

Rehabilitation? That concept didn't even exist in Japan's legal framework until 2005. Until then, prisons were purely for punishment.

We finally abolished mandatory prison labor two months ago. The Ministry of Justice even pledged to focus on rehabilitation. But let's be honest: the daily reality hasn't changed much. Prisons are still ruled by routine, silence, and punishment. There's very little space for actual transformation.

And yet, during all this, something unexpected happened. A small but radical experiment began: a TC was introduced inside a brand-new prison. In 2009, Shimane Asahi Rehabilitation Center—Japan's most high-tech prison, housing nearly 1,500 men—launched the country's first-ever TC, modeled after Amity, the one I have been talking about. Limited to just 40 first-time offenders. Symbolically, it was groundbreaking.

How did that happen? Well — it started with my film, *LIFERS*. Back in the mid-2000s, a few people working on Japan's new rehab initiatives saw it in theaters. And after watching, they said: "We want to try this in our new prison." They were talking about Amity's model. A prison-based TC grounded in openness, vulnerability, and mutual support. And I remember laughing — "That's impossible." Because I had seen enough of Japan's prisons: nothing felt more emotionally shut down, more tightly controlled. A place where vulnerability seemed not just risky, but unthinkable.

I was invited to visit the TC in the opening year, along with Naya and Rod, two of Amity's co-founders. And what I saw stunned me. The TC seemed to be working. I mean really working. And to my astonishment, my film *LIFERS* was adopted as part of the official prison curriculum. Not just for the 40 men inside the TC Unit, but for every single inmate in the facility.

After having spent a few days there, I approached the prison authorities to request permission to film, but every single one of them turned me down. Then I kept asking and being rejected simply because there had never been a single documentary film on Japanese prison. But I didn't take "no for an answer" and kept asking. It took six years just to get a camera inside. Years of negotiation, rejection, harassment, and resistance. Ten years to finish the film. In 2020, *Prison Circle* (Sakagami, 2019) was finally completed.

Prison Circle (Fig. 3, also see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Es7sJvcyQDE>) follows the process of transformation of four young men inside Japan’s first prison-based TC. It explores the deep connection between childhood trauma and violence. And how, through group work, men begin to unlearn both.



Source: Sakagami (2022)

Figure 3. *Prison Circle*.

It was released during a global pandemic. I thought: “How much bad luck can one person have?” But timing didn’t stop it. And here’s what still moves me: six years later, *Prison Circle* is still being screened. Every week. In theaters, schools, and community centers across Japan. To me, that says something profound: there is hunger. A deep hunger—for a safe space. A space to speak honestly, authentically. At Amity, they call it Sanctuary. And there’s something else people are drawn to the possibility of transformation — even in the darkest places.

So, what’s changed? The TC still exists. Sixteen years later, it’s still the *only* one. Still no aftercare program. Still no scale. But it’s *there*. It *survived*. Right in the middle of a system that hasn’t changed. And the whole system must be changed — if not abolished —, since its foundations are flawed. Prison abolition is a subject, related, but not for this speech.

Here is what I’ve witnessed since the introduction of the TC Unit to the Japanese prison:

From silence... to honest conversation.

From isolation... to community.

From punishment... to learning for change.

From emotional suppression... to emotional literacy.

From self-pity... to accountability.

From pure shame... to restorative justice.

All this—directly from Amity’s curriculum. Translated. Adapted. Lived.

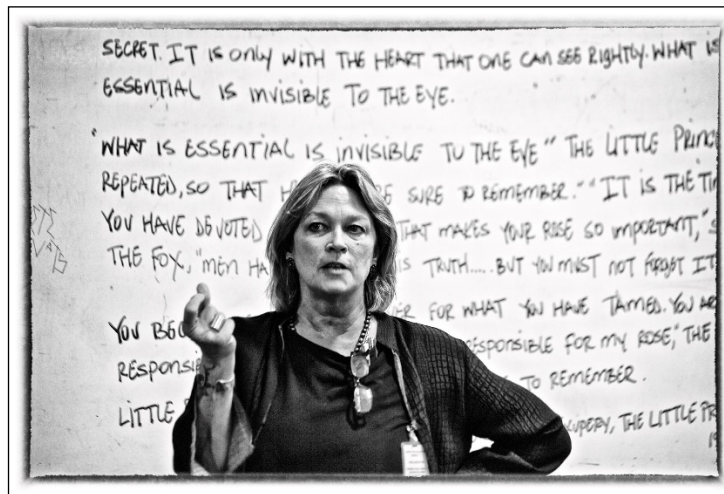
What about the TC graduates I’ve stayed in touch with since?

They’re some of the most self-aware, emotionally intelligent people I’ve ever met. Living proof that healing and growth is possible—even inside the most rigid, controlled environments Erving Goffman called a “total institution.”

Finding *their* language: Juan’s story

One of the most important lessons I’ve learned through filming TCs—both in the U.S. and Japan—is this: to truly understand someone, you need to find their language. And you need to learn how to access it. And by “language,” I don’t just mean words. It could be dialect. Prison slang. Poetry. It could be haiku, hip hop, dance, painting, photography, theater—or even a small, quiet act. Language is anything that lets a person express who they are—comfortably and truthfully.

At Amity, the curriculum is filled with quotes from poets, philosophers, psychologists, and activists: Maya Angelou, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Gandhi, Mandela, Hannah Arendt, Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Angela Davi, etc., but what stays me and perhaps many of the residents are the stories of people who found their language. Like Juan (Fig. 4).



Source: Mullen.

Figure 4. Naya Arbiter lecturing.

In 1982, Juan was sent to Amity after gallbladder surgery. The hospital noticed the track marks on his arms. But Juan wouldn't admit to using drugs. He barely spoke about himself.

Then one day, Naya saw him whispering to a stray cat in Spanish. His gentle and tender voice. A kind of language he never used with people.

So, Naya brought him a kitten.

Cat as common concern

"She'll die if you don't care for her," she said. Juan accepted. He named her Negrita. At first, he only spoke through the kitten: "There's not enough heat." "The food's too spicy." "Too noisy to sleep." Never for himself—always for Negrita.

For a year, he and Naya observed each other. Slowly, a story emerged: Juan had spent 14 years in prison. Escaped twice. And not once had he received a letter. No visits. No human connections.

But Naya saw him. She saw how Juan could see right past their words, straight to their truth. And she trusted him.

Later, when she started the jail project in Pima County, she chose him as one of the main staff. That program cut recidivism by 40%. That success helped launch prison-based communities across California—projects that changed tens of thousands of lives.

Juan passed away in 1988. But Amity still teaches his story. And in their workbooks, in their seminars, you'll find many more stories like his. Because Naya understood something essential: healing doesn't begin when we force someone to speak our language. It begins when we try to *listen for theirs* (Fig. 4)..

The language of connection: Hip Hop

I've been going through something similar myself lately—inside juvenile detention facilities in Japan. Over the past five years, I've been facilitating a series of hip-hop workshops based on restorative justice principles and filming them inside boys' facilities.

At first, the facility staff were skeptical — some even openly hostile. They worried that hip hop would be a bad influence on the boys. And I understood. The lyrics could be raw. The words were harsh.

But as the boys performed — again and again —, something inside them began to shift (Fig. 5). We, the artists and volunteers, kept showing up — not to judge, not to correct, but simply to listen. And slowly, their voices changed. The lyrics became more vulnerable. Their hearts, more open.

They began rapping not just about bravado or rage, but about pain. About numbness. About not knowing how to feel. It was as if, for the first time, they were being heard. I even saw some of the facility staff wiping away their tears.



Source: Sakagami.

Figure 5. Hip Hop workshop inside.

And when we — adults — take the time to learn that language, when we listen without trying to fix or control, and dare to sing in response to their songs, something extraordinary happens.

Because change doesn't begin with control. It begins with connection — a sense of being heard.

Right now, I've been making a film that captures exactly this.

And I'm not alone. Some of the graduates from the prison-based TC who appeared in my film help run workshops and share their experiences. One of them is Sho, a central figure in *Prison Circle*. Sho is a skillful facilitator who learned these skills in the TC. We've worked side by side, even in juvenile facilities. And the boys love him. Even those who haven't spoken for weeks — or months — open up when Sho is in the room.

Why? Because he's been there.

Sho is from Okinawa, a southern island of Japan. He speaks in a rich, distinct dialect. But when he entered prison to serve an eight-year sentence, he fell completely silent.

Why? Because he was forced to speak *standard* Japanese.

I still remember filming those early days while Sho was inside. Later, he told me just how deeply humiliating it had been—to be stripped of his language. He didn't know how to speak the way "they" wanted. So, he stopped speaking altogether.

He only began again when he saw others sharing their truths. And he wanted that too. He started reading and writing. Slowly, he began to find his own language.

And in juvenile facilities? It's even worse. Dialects are literally banned. Most of the time, the boys aren't even allowed to speak to each other.

Please take a minute and imagine you are in an isolated detention center where you are banned from speaking pretty much all day long. Only time you are allowed is with the facility staff. You get your accent, intonation, words, and expressions corrected. If you don't obey, then you get punished more. It is torture.

Last year, in this restorative hip-hop workshop, I paired Sho with a boy from Okinawa. I asked them to interview each other to write poems together. They spoke in their native dialect the whole time. Remember? Speaking in dialect is banned. But the staff silently let it slide. That boy had never looked so alive.

And then they performed. Raw. Beautiful. True. Funny. Very touching.

The forces trying to silence them are strong: rigid institutions, cultural deprivation and imposition, strict rules, etc. And in film, censorship is still very real. Even when people give full, informed consent after their release, we're still forced to blur their faces. Cover their tattoos. Erase every trace of individuality. All in the name of "protection." "Risk management." But I think it is a bureaucratic erasure of human dignity.

Here's what I believe now: it's because of the darkness that we must keep fighting—persistently, sometimes quietly but not in complete silence, so we aren't crushed totally by authority; with creativity and humor, so we don't burn out; and above all, in community; people who share similar concerns and we always need to include young minorities with lived experience — because no one heals, no one grows, alone.

Conclusion: a hard truth

I would like to end this with a hard truth about Alice Miller. After her passing in 2010, her son, Martin Miller, published a memoir — and also appeared in a Swiss documentary film titled *Who's Afraid of Alice Miller?* In both, he revealed that he

had been seriously abused by both of his parents. The film is part reckoning, part search — a son trying to make sense of the brilliant theorist, and the mother who ultimately failed him.

His mother, Alice, was Jewish. His father, Andreas Miller, a former Gestapo officer. During World War II, Andreas discovered Alice's identity and used it to threaten her. Eventually, she married him and gave birth to Martin. Learning all these was devastating for me. But what's even harder to grasp is this: the woman who devoted her life to exposing the wounds of childhood trauma had, for many years, been complicit in the abuse of her own child.

Some might say — it was her fault. That she should've done the work. She was the expert. But I ask myself: Who helped Alice face her wounds? Who stood beside her in the dark? Did she ever have enlightened witness of her own? Again, we live in a world of unspeakable cruelty from conflict and mass killings to the unprecedented speed and technologies of seeing and consuming. But if we don't confront the roots of that cruelty — if we don't face our wounds, our silences, our histories, our current social and global systems —, the cycle will never end.

So how do we break it? How do we create spaces where people can finally confront what Alice Miller could never speak of — wartime trauma, and everything that followed? How do we awaken from a kind of global amnesia that numbs us to the past—and its impact on the present? How do we even begin to find a common language? I don't think there's a single answer. But I do believe in the power of asking these questions — again and again. And in continuing the search. Especially by listening. Really listening — to the language of those who carry lived experience. In prisons and in juvenile detentions. In schools. In hospitals. In workplaces. In families. Across generations. Across borders.

Because no one — no matter how brilliant, how wise, or how strong — should have to carry the weight of the past alone. Healing is not a solo act. It's a shared journey. That's what I've learned through the act of witnessing.

Now would you all pay attention to the screen?

This is a typical yard of the juvenile facilities.

What do you see? (Fig. 6.)



Source: Sakagami.

Figure 6. A juvenile detention center yard.

Now what do you see? (Fig. 7.)



Source: Sakagami.

Figure 7. A juvenile detention center yard with a flower.

What else would you like to see in this photo?
Or is there anything you'd like to remove from this?
To make that happen, then what do we need to do?

Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

Availability of data and material

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