

futile, as opportunities for work and education do not exist in deprived communities⁷, and simply creates a problematic population to control. These populations are both a threat to the more powerful sections of society, and an opportunity to exploit through private security. The authors describe how private security acts to create zones of exclusion, where the powerful live in protected spaces, while the marginalised are left to live in neglected wild spaces and are subjected to surveillance. The authors look to a dystopian future where these divisions are exaggerated and intensified. They offer the prospect of worlds conjured up in popular science fiction such as John Carpenter's film *Escape from New York* (US, 1981) or PD James's 1992 book *Children of Men*. While this analysis is compelling, there is a question over whether there are changes afoot. The Brexit vote and the general election of 2019 show that marginalised communities retain some political significance and they cannot simply be romanticised as victims or written off as the powerless oppressed, lacking in agency.

Fitzsimmons and Lea have produced a lively and engaging book, which neatly captures a wide range of concerns about the role of privatisation in contemporary criminal justice. They highlight the myriad failures that expose the limits of the ideological belief that the market is the solution to every problem. They also set their analysis within a broader social and historical context, which adds significantly to their critique. The book is, however, essentially a polemic. It does not seek to reveal the failures of the public sector nor does it really have anything to say about the benefits of private sector involvement. It is

unlikely to convert many people, but will do much to invigorate the critics of privatisation.

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Book review

Positive Growth and Redemption in Prison — Finding Light Behind Bars and Beyond.

By Lila Kazemian.

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Positive Growth and Redemption in Prison is a fascinating and long-awaited book. It pushes the boundaries by highlighting a major gap in studies about prisons and desistance especially in relation to long-term prisoners.¹ It also encapsulates the complete lack of foresight within criminal justice systems to seize the opportunity to nurture desistance in prison. One of the overarching themes is thus that desistance theory has tended to focus on criminal behaviours and crime reduction rather than the ongoing transformations that desisters develop. In the introductory chapter, Kazemian offers a very useful explanation of desistance related terms as many people, including criminologists, are still not 'au fait' with the concept of desistance. The chapter also outlines the four main objectives of the study: (1) the barriers to achieving positive growth in prison, (2) the adjustment process of long-term prisoners, and how to better understand the changes that occur over the course of a long-term sentence, (3) the process of desistance in prison, and (4) by drawing on detailed,

prospective interview data, the ways in which prison prepares for release, and assesses individual and social factors that may impact reintegration efforts after release from prison.

A vital point, made in the book, is that although desistance is about agency and transforming oneself, social structures need to be in place to allow growth and the prison system is missing a glaring opportunity to provide this. This is very poignantly emphasised by the prisoners themselves who felt that reintegration should be a focus from the start of a sentence rather than towards the end. Sadly, this is completely ignored by practitioners (see chapter 2) where the ethics committee felt discussions around reintegration should be asked of the participants close to release. This epitomizes the failure amongst some practitioners to recognize the importance of hearing the voices of those with lived experience.

Although the impact of long-term imprisonment is central, rather than focussing mainly on the negative aspects of prison, it draws out positive, transformative aspects of prison life aiming to answer the key research question which explores: 'the circumstances under which individuals thrive in prison' (p.32). The author unashamedly emphasises the need for positive experiences (even in prison) to be in focus for desistance to progress. This may seem like a controversial claim amongst some scholars who might feel uncomfortable with the idea that imprisonment may provide anything but pain. However, there is a growing body of research which demonstrate that some prisoners do find prison to be an opportunity for self-change.² Authors of this topic may be cautious that their claims might be viewed as advocating prison as a positive

7. For a fuller analysis of post-industrial areas and their inter-relationship with prisons, see Maguire, D. (2021) *Male, failed, jailed: Masculinities and 'revolving door' imprisonment in the UK*. London: Palgrave MacMillan

1. The book is about a longitudinal study of 58 male long-term (10 years or more) prisoners. Seven of the individuals interviewed were foreign nationals, but almost a third of the respondents had parents of foreign nationality.

2. McNeill, F. & Schinkel, M., 2016. Prisons and desistance. In: J. Bennett, B. Crewe & Y. Jewkes, eds. *Handbook on prisons*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing, pp. 607-621.

McLean, R., Matra, D. & Holligan, C., 2017. Voices of Quiet Desistance in UK Prisons: Exploring Emergence of New Identities Under Desistance Constraint. *The Howard Journal*, 56(4), p. 437-453.

Crewe, B. and Ievins, A. (2020) 'The prison as a reinventive institution', *Theoretical Criminology*, 24(4), pp. 568-589. doi:

10.1177/1362480619841900. Honeywell, David (2021) *The Ambiguities of Desistance: ex-offenders, higher education and the desistance journey*. Emerald Publishing.

experience, but this misconception has been addressed previously by Crewe and Ievins³ who state that while there should be no defence of imprisonment, the narratives of the few who do find prison to be transformative, are worthy of further analysis. This is not the case for many, but rather gives hope to those who can seize the opportunity to turn a difficult situation to their advantage.⁴ Kazemian makes this clear in her core arguments: 'Because this study examines some of the constructive changes that may be experienced by individuals over long periods of incarceration, this should not be interpreted as a call for more people in prison, or longer prison sentences' (p.7). Referring to Comfort's⁵ concerns about whether prisoners can thrive in prison, the author makes an important point that in this study, the prisoners' anguish began before prison. This is also highlighted in other studies whereby prison for some was an extreme yet beneficial escape from their dysfunctional lives. Desistance is not straightforward but rather a very complex set of experiences and identity transformations and as the author purports, does not reflect the many complex offender identities such as those who have committed severe crimes. These complexities are often overlooked which is raised in chapter 5 'Lotus in the mud'. Here Kazemian points out that previous desistance literature is not always pertinent to prisoner populations.⁶

One such complexity is that for some long-term prisoners, prison offers the time and space to reflect, so in chapter 4 'The desistance

paradigm' Kazemian argues for long term prisoners to be given the encouragement to flourish. Long term prisoners do learn to adapt and here Kazemian draws from my own reflective paper⁷ where I recall how during my time of incarceration in the 1990s, I requested to be moved to the prison unit where the majority of lifers were housed. This was because I was aware of their stabilising influence. Chapter 6, 'The Barriers to Positive Growth in Prison' highlights the gaps within the French systems where there is a disparity between the physical and mental health services whereby psychologists' input is not provided for release decisions. This leads to some prisoners not engaging with psychologists. Despite these obstacles 'Achieving Positive Growth in Prison' (chapter 7) gets to the crux of utilising prison time and space to reflect and be introspective. But whereas some found long term imprisonment to be a time of self-reflection, it eventually lost all meaning. Chapter 8 'the Desistance Narrative' draws on how the participants saw themselves as victims rather than offenders and how a significant number of the participants were open to mediation with victims of crime although not the victims linked to their own offences. Yet despite such positive intentions by the prisoners, there is a weakness of progression because bad behaviour is always the main focus with little if any reward for good behaviour. Perhaps this is because of the points raised in chapter 9, 'Life After Prison' where there was a lack of interest by the

prison to focus on reintegration at the start of a prison sentence. Yet most of those who were desisting were clear that the process of self-construction needs to be initiated at the beginning of a prison sentence. Kazemian describes perfectly how the prisons focus on security results in a 'crippling neglect of the reintegration needs for prisoners' (p.182).

Overall, this is a book that crosses many boundaries of desistance scholarship. It draws the often overlooked and possibly controversial aspect of desistance. This is how and why some individuals are able to make positive transformations while serving prison sentences. It is a discussion that many would most certainly find difficult to comprehend given the punitive nature of incarceration. It also highlights the multicultural similarities across prison cultures which makes such a compelling contribution to the academic disciplines of criminology, criminal justice and cognate disciplines. Moreover, for practitioners within the criminal justice system and third sector organisations who work with prisoners and ex-prisoners, it evokes a discussion that needs to be kept alive because by listening to the voices of those with first-hand experience of prison life, we can do so much more to improve things.

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3. Crewe and Ievins (2020)

4. Honeywell (2021)

5. As discussed on pages 5 and 6. Comfort, M. (2012). "It was basically college to us": Poverty, prison, and emerging adulthood. *Journal of Poverty*, 16(3), 308–322.

6. As discussed on page 91. Bottoms, A. & Shapland, J. (2011). Steps towards desistance amongst male young adult recidivists. In S. Farrall, R. Spark & M. Hough et al. (Eds.), *Escape routes: Contemporary perspectives on life after punishment* (pp. 43–80). London: Routledge.