

JOURNAL

PRISON SERVICE

January 2018 No 235



REHABILITATIVE
CULTURE

Reviews

Book Review

Neoliberalism and prison management

The limits of neoliberalism: Authority, sovereignty and the logic of competition

By William Davies

Publisher: Sage (2017)

ISBN: 978-1-5264-0352-0

(paperback)

Price: £15.99

Prison management, prison workers, and prison theory: Alienation and power

By Stephen McGuinn

Publisher: Lexington Books (2015)

ISBN: 978-0-7391-9433-1

(hardback)

Price: £29.95 (hardback)

Key issues in corrections (second edition)

By Jeffrey Ian Ross

Publisher: Policy Press (2016)

ISBN: 978-1-4473-1872-9

(hardback) 978-1-4473-1873-6

(paperback)

Price: £70.00 (hardback) £23.99

(paperback)

Neoliberalism is a term that is used widely in academic literature and indeed increasingly in the broadsheet press. As described by William Davies, Reader in political economy at Goldsmith's, University of London, this term describes the transformation that has taken place in public life and has seen the elevation of market-based principles and techniques of evaluation to the level of state-endorsed norms (p.xiv). It is a process that has seen 'economic calculation...spread into all walks

of life' and has involved 'the disenchantment of politics by economics' (p.xiv). In other words economic rationality has become such a powerful way of thinking about the world that it has displaced more value-based approaches. This has certainly been seen in prisons and other public sector organisations, where the rise of managerialism, with the focus on targets, audits and budgets has come to dominate.

In his book, *The limits of neoliberalism*, Davies argues that neoliberalism has gained an intense hold on public policy since the 1980s. He argues that this has come to be accepted as the norm by all political parties and major social organisations: 'The powerlessness of political or moral authorities to shape and direct society differently demonstrates how far the neoliberal critique of economic planning has permeated' (p.5). This domination, he argues has been so powerful that he draws upon the work of sociologist Luc Boltanski to describe this as creating a 'regime of violence' where there is no space to offer alternative visions and contest the domination of neoliberalism. From this perspective, it has become taken for granted as a foundation for public policy and practice. Despite this spine-chilling description of the ideological hold of neoliberalism, Davies, nevertheless argues that the grip is beginning to loosen. He suggests that the economic crisis in 2008 and the subsequent period of austerity has undermined the legitimacy of neoliberalism, the formerly taken for granted position is now contingent, and a space is

opening up for contest and challenge.

It is within this context that it is worth considering two recent books that address prison management in America. The first is by Stephen McGuinn, an assistant professor of criminal justice at Quinnipiac University. His book *Prison management, prison workers and prison theory* is a report of a quantitative study drawing upon data from the Federal Bureau of Prisons Annual Prison Social Climate Survey, conducted on staff between 2006 and 2010. The study illustrates that organisations that deploy softer forms of power, such as legitimate, expert and referent power generate greater levels of employee commitment, rather than those that deploy coercive or reward power. Coercive power, however, does not have a detrimental impact upon efficacy according to this study. In other words, bosses that crack the whip can still get good outcomes, albeit at the cost of worker commitment and engagement. The study is also concerned with worker alienation, which this study shows leads to reduced efficacy and emotional hardening. It could be suggested that such results are unsurprising, but nevertheless, there is some value in providing this empirical evidence. It is also to be applauded that the premise of this study is that correctional employees are worthy of this attention.

The weakness of this study is that it is derived solely from quantitative data and does not involve any closer engagement with those who work in prisons. In the UK there is a strong recent

history of qualitative and ethnographic research on prison officers,¹ prison managers² and other staff working in prisons.³ This has revealed in rich detail the complex and sometimes messy realities of prison work. The solutions proposed in McGuinn's book, in contrast appear simplistic and unrealistic. For example, he argues:

'Throughout this book, I largely contend that civil society should clearly define prison intention and prison philosophy *and* that prison will be successful if it consistently and fairly meets those definitions' (p.34, italics in original)

There have been many attempts to define the purpose and philosophy of prisons. This has never settled matters as the purpose of the prison is continually contested so that it shifts and evolves over time and between places. The simplicity with which McGuinn presents this argument comes across as callow. Similarly in relation to the use of discretion by prison staff, McGuinn argues that all rules should be codified with the area of discretion prescribed and officers made accountable by recording in detail any deviations or uses of discretion (p.14-17). This view that people operate with perfect knowledge, strictly in conformity with published rules and generating complete documentation, seems to be speculation on the potential of advanced artificial intelligence rather than a description of the realities of the fallible, contested and crafted ways in which prison staff negotiate order and exercise discretion on the ground. There is a concern that in producing such

remote and mechanistic analysis, McGuinn is legitimising the use of neoliberal governance, in particular managerial techniques such as making prison work auditable so as to intensify control, and the deployment of human resource management so as to enlist the subjective capacities of workers, recreating them as self-managing corporate citizens.

In contrast, Professor Jeffrey Ross from University of Baltimore, offers a more critical perspective. Ross is one of the founders of the 'convict criminology' movement, which is concerned with ensuring that the voice and experience of prisoners is incorporated into academic discourse. This book is broad rather than narrow, attempting to offer an overview of the experience of prison for prisoners, but also the challenges for staff and administrators. It is primarily intended for an undergraduate audience but could usefully be read by professionals. The book draws upon a wide range of research, and other evidence including legal cases, personal testimony and popular culture. In doing so, it takes a consistently sceptical perspective on prisons, presenting uncomfortable findings and posing awkward questions. Ross concludes by acknowledging: 'I do not expect every reader to agree with the evidence I marshalled or my interpretation and conclusions...'. This is one of the most significant and welcomed aspects of the book. Ross recognises that prisons are shaped by contested values and that academia is one of the fields in which this struggle is enacted.

Research, analysis and teaching are not politically neutral activities, but are saturated with meaning and contribute to the power struggle.

As William Davies noted, neoliberalism is in the ascendancy, but is coming under closer scrutiny and challenge. The books by McGuinn and Ross illustrate that this is the case in prison management as much as in other fields, where polarised views are being adopted and values contested. Together these books set out the field of struggle, and also invite readers to engage with the question: whose side are you on?

Dr Jamie Bennett is Governor of HMP Grendon and Springhill.

Book Review

An introduction to green criminology and environmental justice

By Angus Nurse

Publisher: Sage (2016)

ISBN: 978-1-47390-809-3

(hardback) 978-1-47390-810-9

(paperback)

Price: £79.00 (hardback) £27.99

(paperback)

The scale of the environmental challenge facing the world has been starkly outlined by the United Nations, who have stated that:

Climate change is now affecting every country on every continent. It is disrupting national economies and affecting lives, costing people, communities and countries dearly today and even more tomorrow.¹

1. For example see Crawley, E. (2004) *Doing Prison Work: The Public and Private Lives of Prison Officers* Cullompton: Willan; Liebling, A., Price, D. and Shefer, G. (2011) *The Prison Officer* Second edition Abingdon: Willan.

2. For example see Bryans, S. (2007) *Prison Governors: Managing prisons in a time of change* Cullompton: Willan; Bennett J (2015) *The working lives of prison managers: Global change, local culture and individual agency in the late modern prison* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

3. For example see Bennett, J. Crewe, B. and Wahidin, A. (eds) (2008) *Understanding Prison Staff* Cullompton: Willan.

1. Available at <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change-2/> accessed on 27 May 2017

Despite this challenge, solutions have proven elusive. In 2015, Pope Francis authored an encyclical letter, *Laudato si*, which addressed the global environmental problems. This letter garnered wider attention in May 2017 when Pope Francis presented a copy to US President Donald Trump on an official visit to the Vatican. The lengthy letter confronts readers with their own individual responsibility as well as that of governments and powerful organisations:

Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity.²

The situation is not hopeless. There have been global inter-governmental agreements to take action. The most recent, the Paris Agreement of 2015, commits signatories to attempt to limit climate change below two degrees Celsius. There have also been active and committed non-governmental organisations, such as Greenpeace, whose pioneering work was celebrated in the documentary *How to change the world* (2015). A political movement has also grown up around the world, with Green parties being represented in many nations at local and national level. An international network of these parties, Global Greens, has involvement from over 100 countries. Individuals are also

making personal choices that reflect their concerns, using consumer power to shape the market. This includes responding to concerns about the industrialisation of food production, the treatment of animals, exploitation of natural resources and climate change.

Against this background, Angus Nurse, a senior lecturer in criminology at Middlesex University School of Law, has produced an introductory text on green criminology and environmental justice. Nurse explains that the concept of 'Green criminology' is not easy to define and is contested, but proposes that it is, 'an umbrella term for a criminology concerned with the general neglect of ecological issues within criminology' (p.4). He goes on to say that this field of study 'extends beyond pure definitions of 'crime' to consider the nature and extent of environmental harm and the negative impact of human action on the environment' (p.9).

The book has sections which cover specific issues. This includes a focus on animal welfare, drawing out the links between animal abuse and inter-personal violence, and environmental crimes such as pollution. Such matters are marginal in the field of criminology and are generally under-policed and dealt with relative leniency compared with the harm that can be caused. It is this gap between the formal law and environmental impact that is particularly important to positioning 'Green criminology' as a branch of critical criminology.

This idea is explored in more depth throughout the book. This includes the challenges of globalisation such as cross border impacts, and differential regimes of regulation and enforcement. As is highlighted in this book, such differences can intensify the gap in

power and inequality. This is illustrated by the high profile response to the Gulf Oil spill of 2010 in America, contrasted with the long-term harm inflicted upon the Ogoni people in Nigeria who have experienced the loss of economic, social and political rights as well as suffering chronic health problems.

Although the UN have highlighted the global challenge of climate change, Nurse argues that there is weak regulation and enforcement in this area. There is greater hope invested in non-governmental organisations who undertake public campaigning, support law enforcement action and engage in political lobbying.

This book is a helpful overview of 'Green criminology and environmental justice'. It particularly positions this within a wider critical criminology field. It highlights the marginalisation of environmental issues within criminology and the ways that criminal law entrenches and reinforces certain power interests including those of corporations, political elites as well as broader social inequalities regarding race and gender.

For readers within the prison system, it does not specifically address what can be done within policy and practice to respond to the challenges of environmental justice. There are certainly issues about the architecture of prisons and the incorporation of green technology and the natural environment including trees and plants. Also there are aspects of the regime that can be enhanced, including incorporating the care of plant and animal life. Just as with any other organisation, prisons have a role in promoting environmental awareness and action, the notion of citizenship in the 21st century encompasses this responsibility.

2. Cited at <http://www.newsweek.com/pope-francis-donald-trump-climate-change-encyclical-614724>

This book is a welcome introduction to the important area of Green criminology. Although in some ways it is a bleak assessment, it does provoke the idea that change is not only possible, but is necessary.

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Book Review

Prison life in popular culture: From The Big House to Orange is the New Black

By Dawn Cecil

Publisher: Lynne Rienner

Publishers (2015)

ISBN: 978-1-62637-279-5

(Hardback)

Price: £58.50 (Hardback)

Carceral fantasies: Cinema and prison in early twentieth-century America

By Alison Griffiths

Publisher: Columbia University Press (2016)

ISBN: 978-0-23116-106-0

(Hardback)

Price: £32.95 (Hardback)

Recent years have seen a growth in academic interest in the representation of crime and imprisonment in the media. Many scholarly books and articles have been produced and there is even a journal, *Crime media culture*, dedicated to this topic. This work is concerned not only with examining the content of texts, such as films, documentaries and TV shows, but pays particular attention to the relationship between media, representation and society. From this perspective, the media does not simply reflect public attitudes and values, or current political orthodoxy, but also has a role in creating or

constituting these attitudes, values and orthodoxies. The diverse range of media representations and the ways in which viewers engage with and consume these is a form of discourse in which different ideas are articulated, considered and tested. This body of academic work takes seriously the role of prison films and TV shows as one of the sites in which public policy and practice is contested and formed.

Dawn Cecil, an associate professor of criminology at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, has produced an excellent overview of the primary forms of media representation including news, films, documentary and TV shows. She adopts a social constructionist perspective, drawing heavily upon the distinguished work of Ray Surette.¹ This perspective asserts that people construct their view of reality by drawing upon a range of sources, including direct experience, the experience of influential friends or relatives, political campaigning, and media consumption. In relation to prisons, as most people do not have direct personal experience of the criminal justice system, they rely more heavily upon media representation in order to shape their view of reality. Many media criminologists have argued that images of prisons have embedded within them values and judgments about who is in prison, the conditions in which they are held, and the legitimacy and necessity of that institution. Cecil argues that these values are often distorted, but their repetition has a cumulative effect. She argues that: 'Limited personal experience mixed with a reliance on imprecise or incomplete information is a dangerous combination, particularly in a nation in which imprisonment plays such a large role.' (p.3).

This book provides an overview of different forms of representation and is a useful primer, but in its analysis of feature films and documentaries, it is particularly strong and Cecil makes some provocative and powerful arguments. Cecil acknowledges that cinematic images of imprisonment have been iconic and memorable but is sceptical about the ongoing significance of prison films: 'for many, the silver screen provided their first glimpse at prison life. Given the availability of prison films and their enduring quality, for generations these films played a pivotal role in shaping views of prison. In today's media landscape, however, one might question whether prison films remain influential' (p.29). She argues that the prison film genre has become tired and predictable, losing its impact and financial viability. In addition, she argues that the changing media landscape has reduced the novelty of prison imagery. All of this leads Cecil to lament that 'For the most part, these films have become relics of the past' (p.47). There is no doubt that this is an important provocation. For many people, myself included, the significance of prison films has been taken for granted. Cecil shakes that complacency. That is not to say that I agree with Cecil's gloomy assessment. Films remain an important source of information about imprisonment, its practice and values. Although much media production and consumption today is instantaneous, prison films are often viewed in a more considered way with greater attention, they have a prestige that means they carry weight and credibility, they also have a wider geographical reach and remain in circulation for a longer period than other media forms. They do not, therefore, entirely conform to the

1. Surette, R. (2014) *Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice: Images, realities, and policies* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

model of disposable consumption. I would also challenge the assertion that prison films have run out of steam. Some recent prison films from the UK have had a lot to add: *Everyday* (2012) on the experiences of the families of prisoners, *Screwed* (2011) on prison staff culture, *Bronson* (2008) on masculinity and media representation, and *Starred up* (2013) on violence, life histories and psychotherapy. The big Hollywood blockbuster may be in hibernation after *The Shawshank redemption* (1994) but that does not mean that meaningful and influential prison films are extinct.

Cecil goes on to argue that it is prison documentaries that have come to replace films as the dominant and influential media form. She rightly draws attention to the commodification of prison documentaries through series such as *Lockup* (2005-17), which has run to over 200 episodes. Such documentaries do not attempt to offer an educative or overtly political perspective, but instead focus on extreme institutions, unusual and particularly violent people and incidents. Rightly, Cecil asserts that these representations are partial and inaccurate: 'This non-fiction imagery is not actuality, it is a representation. The prison world is reflected through a fun house mirror of sorts since it is impossible to transfer the physical world to a visual image. There is always a certain amount of distortion' (p.191). By focussing on particular individuals and behaviours, these films serve to legitimise imprisonment, and obscure the impact, including those on minority groups. In contrast, there is a vibrant market for independent documentary that is often critical of current

approaches, highlighting the negative effects and attempting to humanise those in prison.² Although these documentaries are less prominent, they nevertheless are often a more effective vehicle for alternative voices and perspectives than academic texts.

Cecil essential posits that there is a symbiotic relationship between popular culture and American mass imprisonment, that these institutions are deeply entangled. In the media as in American society, the dominant images are those that support and legitimise the use of imprisonment, while critical voices maintain a more marginal space.

A very different approach is taken in the second book discussed here, *Carceral Fantasies* by Alison Griffiths, professor of film and media studies at New York Graduate Centre. Griffiths has a long standing interest in representations of prisons in early cinema. Here she again uncovers long forgotten but essential illustrations of the power of the media. In particular, Thomas Edison's use of film to legitimise the use of electrocution as a means of execution. His dramatised short, *The execution of Czogosz, with panorama of Auburn prison* (1901) used the still relatively novel medium of film in order to reassure audiences about the humanity and effectiveness of the electric chair.

The main concern of this book is to examine how prison and film directly intersected. This includes prisons as a subject of film, but also as a location of screening and viewing. The consumption of media in prisons has become an area of greater research interest with greater access to in-cell television,³ but Griffiths shows that this is not a new phenomenon.

The screening of films in prisons expanded during the first two decades of the 20th century. There were a variety of reasons for this. Griffiths argues that although it is often assumed that this was used as a means of control, through incentivising, occupying and observing prisoners, there were other motivations that were more pressing at the time. The first was that getting men out of their cells in prisons such as Sing Sing, improved their health by giving them time away from damp and insanitary cells. Films also had a moral ambition. In prisons and out, early cinema played a role in promoting a hegemonic set of values, 'instilling in its captives the national myths of rugged individualism, consumerism, and the American dream' (p.284). In addition, it was considered by some prison managers that films offered prisoners an education in sentiment, feeling and emotion. There were therefore some progressive reasons for the development of film screenings in prisons. Of course, this was not universally welcomed by all, and then, just as now, some criticised this as pampering prisoners.

Films were often provided by distributors and film production companies as part of a commercial exchange, where they were given access to prisons in order to make films, both fiction and non-fiction. These film could, as with Edison's film mentioned above, be used to justify current practices but others also humanised prisoners, and promoted rehabilitative ideals. Griffiths rightly points out that this access, and the filming of prisoners, was not only a prurient act of voyeurism, but that this could be a disconcerting exchange between subject and viewer: '...the

2. Bennett, J. (2017) *Documentaries about crime and criminal justice* in *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia on Crime, media and popular culture* available at <http://criminology.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264079-e-52?rskey=iRr1U2&result=1> accessed on 09 October, 2017
3. Jewkes, Y. (2002) *Captive audience: Media, Masculinity and Power in Prisons* Cullompton: Willan; Knight, K. (2016) *Remote control: Television in prisons* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

prisoner returning our gaze reminds us that witnessing is never just about seeing, but is bound up with questions of power, access, accountability, pleasure and guilt' (p. 107).

Griffiths's work uncovers hidden and rarely considered aspects of penal practice, media consumption and film history. It reveals the contested values that are at play in penal practice and how the media is both a reflection of this and a means through which the institution is understood and made acceptable.

The intersection of the media and prisons is a contested and lively field. These two books offer very different approaches, focussing on different eras. Cecil offers an overview of the contemporary media landscape. Her book is an excellent primer but also offers some novel arguments, emphasis and takes some provocative positions. This all makes it a good read. Griffiths's work has less broad appeal, but for those with an interest in prisons and the media, it is a significant contribution. It opens up an under-researched area, takes

an innovative methodological and analytical approach, and all together is a dazzling achievement. Together these publications show the breadth and depth of this field. They also reinforce that our media choices are not simply meaningless entertainment, but are both the outcome and one of the constituents of the social world we inhabit: we are what we watch.

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OBITUARY

William (Bill) Arthur Francis Brister CB, Prison Governor and Deputy Director General of Prisons

From the end of the Second World War to 1985, the Prison Service in England and Wales faced exceptional challenges and pressures. The population rose from around 15,000 to 50,000 causing serious overcrowding of cells and deplorable conditions for both prisoners and staff. During the 1960s, high profile escapes especially that of the spy, George Blake, from Wormwood Scrubs Prison, forced the Government to set up the Mountbatten inquiry — the resulting critical report requiring major changes to the service. From 1969, destructive riots by prisoners and industrial action by the Prison Officers Association added to the miseries within prisons.

Against this challenging background, Bill — as he was known across the Prison Service — Brister built an exceptional career first as an operational Prison Governor and then in senior posts within Prisons Headquarters. Brister was a person of great integrity, a practicing Roman Catholic throughout his life. He demonstrated a determination to achieve improvements for staff and prisoners whether working in establishments or as part of the Headquarters team. He was exceptionally good at working with a very wide range of people — from prisoners and prison staff — including specialists such as doctors and chaplains — to politicians and civil servants. His briefings on complex issues were accurate and balanced; his judgements on what action was required was grounded on his considerable experience of prison operations,

Ashford Remand Centre, West London, an establishment with acute industrial relationships problems, was probably his most challenging post as an operational Governor. Brister showed great skill in confronting unreasonable demands from staff while at the same time doing all he could to improve both the living conditions for prisoners and the working conditions of staff.

He attracted loyalty from staff at many levels because of his integrity, his genuine interest in them and their families and his readiness to support those facing

severe difficulties. His commitment to the Prison Dog Service continued long after his retirement through his support for the annual Dog Trials, including awarding a Trophy.

In 1969, Brister was one of the first Governors to be brought into Headquarters to apply operational experience to designing and building new establishments. This rather tentative experimental move became a normal part of the career of many Governors because of the success Brister and his other pioneering colleagues achieved at Headquarters.

The 'troubles' in Northern Ireland required a Governor to be seconded to advise Ministers on how to manage extremely difficult and challenging prison problems. Brister was selected and his ability to balance operational experience and the different and wider demands at Headquarters enabled him to provide effective support and leadership to the Northern Ireland Prison Service for two very difficult years.

On returning to Prisons Headquarters in London, Brister headed up the Security and Control Division, charged with reducing escapes and more effectively handling disturbances and hostage incidents. He brought order and proper training to meet these challenges, gradually achieving improvements.

In some ways, the next phase of his career was the most challenging. It began early in 1979 when he was promoted to Chief Inspector with a place on the Prison Board. But Mr Justice May's Inquiry, set up by the Government in response to growing industrial disputes with the Prison Service, published its report in October 1979 — recommending many changes. This included the setting up of a new independent Inspectorate, effectively abolishing Brister's post.

After great controversy within the Home Office during 1980 about the wisdom and practicality of setting up an independent inspectorate able to publicly criticise the service, the Home Secretary, Willie Whitelaw, took the bold decision to implement. From 1981 a new