

# PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

May 2013 No 207



# Editorial Comment

It is common to hear the modern world described as increasingly 'globalized'. Although this term is uncertain and contested, it often refers to a range of ways in which the world has become more integrated, in particular through developments in trade, information technology, the sharing of ideas and practices, and governmental co-operation.

The practices of imprisonment have themselves become the subject of globalization. It has been argued that ideas about prisons have become homogenised across nations and replicate wider aspects of modern society. In particular, it has been argued that the use of prisons has become more politicised and popularised. This has fed what has been described as 'new punitiveness'<sup>1</sup> with growing use of imprisonment, increasing use of mandatory and indeterminate sentencing and the promotion of harsher conditions. It has also been argued that 'managerialism' has been increasingly used not only as a way of making public services such as prisons more efficient, but also as a way of identifying and directing resources towards the policing and control of 'problematic' groups<sup>2</sup>. However, globalization has also been an opportunity to promote and disseminate human rights as a means of improving practice<sup>3</sup>.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that globalization is sweeping away all that has gone before or is dramatically transforming beyond recognition society generally or specific institutions, such as the prison. In many ways, prisons remain the same, with buildings that sometimes date back two centuries; practices, routines and cultures that are deeply rooted; and indeed there is nothing new about the realities of gender, race and poverty in the prison population. These local, traditional features are important and enduring<sup>4</sup>. The nature of globalization is perhaps best understood as a dynamic interaction between the global and the local, between the modern and the traditional.

This edition of *Prison Service Journal* has an international flavour, with articles from four continents. A number of the articles consider specific, local aspects of prison practices and cultures. Sacha Darke discusses the nature of staff-prisoner relationships in Brazilian prisons, which are characterised by inter-dependence and strong bonds of mutual trust and support, where prisoners take on significant responsibility for the operation of the institution. Katarzyna Celinska addresses the impact on women prisoners in USA of separation from children and family and suggests how this may be ameliorated. Francesca Vianello offers an ethnographic account of an Italian prison, drawing out the links with wider issues of power and inequality. From the review section, Steve Hall discusses a book addressing the failures of drug policy in New Zealand. Although these articles are based in specific local situations and reflect the uniqueness and distinctiveness of those contexts, the issues will

also be familiar to those working in prisons around the world. Together these articles illuminate that, although there are local variations, there is also a sense in which the prison and the problems of imprisonment are themselves globalized in as much as they are replicated and repeated across different nations.

Three articles also address the global financial crisis and its impact. Both Michael Cavadino in relation to England and Wales, and Mary Rogan in relation to Ireland describe how the respective governments responded to the crisis with policies of austerity and proposed moderation in the use of imprisonment. In England and Wales, Cavadino argues that this met with political resistance and suggests that this illustrates that such changes cannot take place for economic reasons alone. Instead, they are situated within a wider political economy, which shapes the role of the state and the nature of social power. He argues that this political economy can be detected in the close relationship between the welfare regime in different countries and their use of imprisonment. In contrast, Rogan suggests that recent court decisions in relation to financial crimes suggest a potential change in direction, shifting the attention of the criminal justice system towards the crimes of the powerful. She therefore tentatively hints at a change in the wider political economy. The third article to address the financial crisis is even more optimistic. Chris Fox, Kevin Albertson and Kevin Wong provide a critique and develop the theoretical case for 'Justice Reinvestment'. This is an approach that argues that by reducing the use of imprisonment, the resources freed up can be used to better effect addressing social problems in the areas where prisoners come from and improving services that prevent crime. This is an approach that has been gaining momentum as various governments face the realities of economic restraint. Fox, Albertson and Wong suggest that this is an approach that has significant potential and offer a way ahead to improve its theoretical basis and potential appeal to policy makers and communities.

This edition draws together a range of articles from around the world. Together they highlight that prisons face a series of similar problems, including staff-prisoner relationships, the impact on families and the importing of social problems into the prison. Although the precise contours of these issues vary from place to place, they will be familiar to people working in prisons around the globe. The articles also indicate that prisons are not insulated from wider international trends, not only economics, but also ideas and practices that can be termed as the political economy. Viewing this optimistically, the development of Justice Reinvestment illustrates that those working in and interested in prisons need not simply be subject to or observers of global change, but can be enabled by this to become agents of change.

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1. Pratt, J. Brown, D., Brown, M., Hallsworth, S., and Morrison, W. (eds) (2005) *The new punitiveness: Trends, theories, perspectives* Cullompton: Willan
  2. Feeley, M. and Simon, J. (1992) *The New Penology: Notes on the Emerging Strategy of Corrections and its Implications in Criminology* Vol.30 No.4 p.449-74
  3. For example International Centre of Prison Studies see <http://www.prisonstudies.org/>
  4. Kennedy, P. (2010) *Local lives and global transformations: Towards world society* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.