

Book review

Punishment & Society

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Dominique Moran, *Carceral geography: Spaces and practices of incarceration*. Ashgate: Surrey, UK, 2015; 185 pp. (including index) ISBN: 9781409452348, \$109.95 (hbk)

The practice of banishment – evicting or transporting dishonoured and criminal bodies as a form of punishment – is sometimes thought of as a premodern mode of punishment that faded with the Industrial Revolution or as an atavistic holdout preserved within some illiberal pockets of the non-Western world. With the advent of modernity, so the story goes, convicts would no longer be transported across continents (as they had been to parts of the New World for centuries), criminal offenders would no longer be exiled from urban centres (as they had been in the medieval period across Europe's city-states). That modern deviation, the Soviet Union, with its millions in the Siberian Gulag, was merely the expected outcome of an absence of liberal democracy.

In recent years, this rather self-contented sociodicy of Western modernity has started to look increasingly strained. Understanding punitive discipline, surveillance and confinement now requires a properly spatial perspective. Beckett and Herbert (2009) have showed that the enclosure of the urban commons through restrictive policing orders is now a regular feature of the aggressive day-to-day management of dispossessed and ethnoracially stigmatized dwellers of the American metropolis. The phenomenon of US hyperincarceration is itself a form of spatially targeted warehousing, disproportionately aimed at ethnoracial minorities and (sub)proletarians, as Wacquant (2009) argues, which can only be understood by way of reference to the spatial targeting of police surveillance on the poorest, most derelict sections of the American cityscape.

Carceral Geography is the study of how spatiality intersects with punishment. Moran's study offers a comprehensive overview of recent work and defends the view that studying the spatial dimensions of penalty is crucial. It raises a number of pertinent questions: How do spatially targeted policing strategies lead to ethno-racial and socioeconomic disparities in prisoner populations? Why is prison construction sometimes the subject of Nimbyism and at other times welcomed as a valuable source of revenue and job creation in faltering communities? Are prisons really impermeable 'total' institutions or can their boundaries be porous? How does the decentralized 'archipelago' of penal institutions, differentiated along degrees of internal control ('categories' in England and Wales, 'levels' in California, and 'open' vs. 'closed' prisons in Scandinavia), contribute to the production of docile bodies? Can architecture and interior design play a role in the construction of 'humane' prisons – or should such a notion be rejected as oxymoronic?

There is much that is of value in this book. It is divided into three sections. The first section proposes a phenomenological analysis of punishment at the level of individual agents and explores the embodied nature of the experience of imprisonment. One concept that is developed in this section is the idea of ‘carceral TimeSpace’ that attempts to focus on the differential experience of time under incarceration. Problematising time has some interesting implications. Time is the fundamental metric of incarceration – the common currency, if you will, of criminal sentencing around the world. And yet time remains totally relative: it slows down, speeds up, taking on a different ‘feeling’ between persons, places and institutional practices. Manipulating the sense of time is one of the fundamental strategies for manufacturing discipline. Our understanding of punishment remains incomplete without attending to the experiential relativity of time. After all, if time is experienced differentially, two equally long sentences cannot be said to be equivalent; this fact alone should have serious consequences for the moral status of punishment.

The second section analyses the geographic interconnections between institutions within the prison system, assessing issues such as prison siting, the permeability of boundaries between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ and issues of mobility within and beyond the penal system. This section seems to suggest that we are entering a renewed era of banishment, transportation, eviction, and exclusion, brought about by the strong arm of the penal state. Increasing numbers of people are being shipped across borders, crisscrossing continents and being extracted from familiar surroundings and denied the support of familial or fraternal networks. The far-flung US state of Hawaii regularly transports inmates to prisons on the continental mainland thousands of miles away. In California, thousands are dislocated from their home communities to serve time in one of the dozens of correctional facilities spread out across the state’s vast terrain. In Europe, Belgium began conveying hundreds of inmates to the Netherlands in 2009 to relieve an overcrowded prison system, perhaps signalling the beginning of a European common market for punishment; after having attempted to lease prison space in neighbouring Sweden and finding itself rebuffed, Norway transported more than a hundred prisoners to a prison in the Netherlands in 2015. Viewed as a whole, Europe’s penitentiaries increasingly serve as the holding pens of dispossessed and dislocated migrant labourers from the post-Soviet sphere and postcolonial exiles from the war-torn Middle East.

One might even study the infamous ‘extraordinary renditions’ during the hyper-punitive spectacle of the ‘war on terror’ through a similar optic. More than one hundred cases have been documented of persons being held in ‘black sites’ across the globe, subjected to chillingly euphemised ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ amounting to torture and the suspension of the most basic legal rights, in a worldwide movement orchestrated by the US government and involving the complicity of some 54 countries that has been described as the ‘globalization of torture’ by respected observers (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2013).

The third section sets its sight on the political economy of punishment. The account draws on Wacquant’s neoliberalism-punitiveness thesis and concept

of the ‘penal state’, and while registering the considerable discussion that Wacquant’s work has elicited, Moran is generally supportive of Wacquant’s theoretical position. While neoliberalism in the UK has not resulted in a gargantuan penal complex, it has fed an individualising discourse that revels in the social suffering of the postindustrial working class, Moran suggests; it has mobilised the welfare state as a preeminent tool of social discipline, so that ‘government welfare policy, income maintenance, housing, education, immigration, health and social services’ are now among the ‘pre-eminent means deployed to control, regulate and remake welfare-dependent “problem populations”’ (p. 108). Honing in on the relationship between the big-s State and the state of prisons, Moran’s analysis alludes to the fact that particular sorts of internal arrangements in prison seem to owe their existence to particular kinds of states: the supermaxes of California seem as inconceivable in Scandinavia as the much-lauded Norwegian prison in Halden, with its walls covered in the work of the graffiti artist Banksy and its sleek IKEA furniture, would seem a phantasmal impossibility on American shores.

One might ask whether science needs yet another subdiscipline. The burden of proof should lie with those who would add more matter to a scientific lexicon already bursting with neologisms. It is not immediately evident that adding another branch to the crowded tree of social science is desirable. Ours should be a search for convergence on what Immanuel Wallerstein has termed *historical social science*, a unitary approach that rejects needless subdisciplinary partitioning. The questions this volume would have us tackle should be incorporated into the mainstream discourse of sociology and geography so as to keep them from being marginalised in more obscure quarters.

Punishment in its manifold guises is bound to remain somewhat obtuse so long as one does not attend to its spatial dimensions. By zeroing in on how spatiality overlays and transmutes practices of punishment, Dominique Moran’s book provides an admirable appraisal of a research problematic that is worthy of further attention and engagement.

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