

ARTICLE

A FUTURE WITHOUT PRISONS: SCIENCE FICTION, ANARCHISM AND THE ABOLITION OF PRISONS IN THE NORTH OF IRELANDBY *RUARI-SANTIAGO MCBRIDE*

Abstract: In this article, I analyse the historical and contemporary use of imprisonment in the north of Ireland. Drawing on an analysis of science fiction literature, anarchist abolitionist theory, and historical events in the north of Ireland, I argue imprisonment to be an instrument of social regulation, which perpetuates individual harm and exacerbates social inequality. In pursuing the ethical imperative put forward by penal abolitionists I chart a pathway towards a utopian future without prisons in the north of Ireland.

Correspondence: *ruari.mcbride@gmail.com*

Dystopic visions

A Clockwork Orange (Burgess 1962) offers a dystopic vision of an England in which an ultraviolent consumerist youth culture menaces the citizens of a totalitarian super-state. The story is narrated by Alex DeLarge, a working-class teenager who leads a small gang on a rampage of assault, rape, and murder. Eventually Alex is imprisoned and selected as the first candidate for the 'Ludovico Technique', an experimental associative

learning 'treatment' set to revolutionise the rehabilitation of prisoners. Combining psychotropic drugs, psychological knowledge and cutting edge technology, the Ludovico Technique brainwashes Alex to associate physical violence and sexual arousal with nausea and headaches. Post-'treatment' Alex is unable to act on his carnal desires. He is considered risk free and released. Post-release, Alex is rejected by his family and subjected to retribution from his past victims. Driven mad by his lack of free will, Alex unsuccessfully attempts suicide by jumping out of a window. When he regains consciousness his violent impulses return. Yet, by the end of the novel Alex has grown tired of his senseless violence. He contemplates giving up crime and desires becoming a family man. The novel closes with his vision of conformity

being corrupted by the thought of his son being just as violent as himself.

Through the dreadfully flawed Ludovico Technique, Anthony Burgess explores the conflict between advances in science and technology on the one hand and human nature on the other (Kuhn 1990). This conflict plays out in a *Staja* (state prison), which symbolises the state's omnipresent power. The Ludovico Technique, in turn, reflects the state's desire to master human nature in order to 'turn the bad into the good' (Burgess 1962: 70). However, the state's 'Reclamation Treatment' is shown to both inhuman and flawed. So, while in the first half of the novel the reader is repulsed by Alex's dastardly acts, the harm and estrangement he experiences at the hands of the state invokes sympathy in the reader. Alex is reframed as an anti-hero. The pensive conclusion of the novel, suggests that while Alex's violence has been curbed, the next generation will be just as violent.

In reading *A Clockwork Orange* today we can identify how it reflects the anti-establishment mood of the times: Goffman published *Asylums* (1961) and Foucault *Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1961) the year prior; and, the anti-psychiatry movement would emerge later in the decade to voice discontent regarding the coercive and harmful practices of psychiatrists (see Crossley 2006 for a history of the movement). Thus, *A Clockwork Orange* can be read as a searing critique of the individualisation of 'crime' and the pathologisation of 'criminals' on the one hand; and, on the other, it reflects a counter-culture fear of state power and its desire to re-programme citizens deemed wayward. Ultimately then, the novel questions the legitimacy of biopolitical penal reform projects that seek to make imprisonment a more efficient and effective means of population regulation.

Introduction

In this article I examine the contemporary use of imprisonment in the north of Ireland from the 1960s to present. To frame this analysis I offer a historical overview of two competing penal narratives, that of penal reform and of penal abolitionism. I argue that despite its seemingly liberal intentions the narrative of penal reform legitimises the individualisation of criminality and ongoing penal expansion. In contrast, I show how the narrative of penal abolitionism critiques the state's right to punish and argues for development of alternative, nonpunitive models of justice. Following an overview of the historical use of imprisonment in the north of Ireland, I argue that imprisonment in the north has been predominately shaped by narratives of reform that uphold the logic of penalty and essentialise offending behaviour. The contemporary consequences of this is the increasing use of imprisonment to deal with social problems caused by inequality. To close the article, I draw on the tenants of penal abolitionism to propose a trajectory towards a future without prisons in the north of Ireland.

A methodological note

In this article I have adopted a bricolage approach that relies on the inclusion of many types of texts (Yardely 2008). The texts included range from science fiction novels that actively produce cultural meaning and engage the social discourse surrounding imprisonment and justice; to the writings of anarchist theorists who critique institutionalised modes of punishment that legitimise oppressive state power; to contemporary government documents that provide insight into the shifting levels of imprisonment in the north of Ireland. The article also draws implicitly upon ethnographic research carried out by the author (2011-14), which involved participant-

observation in HMP Maghaberry (see Browne and McBride 2015; McBride 2017a); as well as the author's ongoing penal abolitionism activism. In this way I offer a multi-layered inquiry into the use of imprisonment in the north of Ireland in order to make a creative leap: to imagine a future without prisons. I hope this patchwork piece stimulates deep reflection and political action in the audience.

Two penal narratives

There are many penal narratives, which shift, merge, coalesce, fade and die over time (see Robinson 2008). Space limitations only allow me to focus on two particular narratives, that of penal reform and penal abolitionism. While I juxtapose these two narratives as distinct, it is important to remember that at the times they may overlap and coincide.

Penal reform

The contemporary system of imprisonment in Britain and Ireland dates to the twelfth century when King Henry II ordered his sheriffs to build prisons. However, throughout the Late Middle Ages prisons were not the primary form of punishment as even 'petty crimes' continued to be punished through public spectacles of pain, humiliation and death (Foucault 1977). The Age of Enlightenment ushered in a new social sensibility, which reduced the public's appetite for the horrors of the gallows. Enlightenment also brought with it capitalism, colonialism, industrialisation, and urbanisation. All of which dramatically transformed the economic, physical, political and social landscape (Harvey 1985). In England, peasants were displaced from a life of rural subsistence and mutual aid to urban environments where many found themselves destitute, stealing to survive, and imprisoned as a result. Thus as industry and commerce developed and towns grew, so did the number of people sentenced to prison and transported to colonies in North America and Australia (Shaw 1966).

In the 1770s John Howard, a wealthy English country gentleman, was appointed High Sheriff of Bedfordshire and given responsibility for inspection of the county gaols (Howard League for Penal League 2018). Disgusted at the conditions he found, Howard began visiting prisons across Europe. His experiences led him to advocate for penal reform, including: "the abolition of jailer fees, separation of the sexes, decent food and clothing, clean and well maintained jails, useful occupation for the inmates, and a host of other reforms that would make life in jail more humane" (Chapman 2013: 548). Some of Howard's reforms were incorporated into the 1774 Gaol Act, including suggestions for improving sanitary conditions. However, these reforms did not greatly impact prison conditions during his lifetime (West 2011). Howard also helped to draft the 1779 Penitentiary Act, which set out a policy of state-run prisons. Yet, the network of prisons envisioned never materialised. Howard's legacy is to be found more concretely in the spirit of penal reform he promulgated (1777), which argued for a state-operated prison system that provided a humanised standard of care.

In the nineteenth century the discourse of penal reform began to shape legislation in earnest: the Gaols Act of 1823 saw the first governmental attempts to impose prison standards, while the Prisons Act of 1835 led to the appointment of paid prison inspectors. The state's growing concern with setting, measuring and improving prison conditions coincided with the abolition of transportation of British and Irish convicts to the colonies in 1850s (Shaw 1966). Between 1788 and 1868 over 167,000 men, women and children had been sent to the colonies (Anderson 2016). The cessation of punishment by transportation led imprisonment with penal servitude to become the primary mode of punishment. This shift is manifest in the 90 prisons built by the Victorians across Britain and Ireland between 1842 and 1877 (Tomlinson 1978), many of which remain in

operation today (including one that was used as a set in Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange*). The Victorian prison building project established imprisonment as the primary means of punishment and reflected an unfettered degree of optimism in the capacity of prisons to rehabilitate wayward citizens. During this period, the Howard Association was established (1866) to promote 'the most efficient means of penal treatment' (Howard League for Penal Reform 2018). This was the start of a civil society movement focused on influencing and improving penal conditions, policy, and practice.

By the twentieth century the prison was established globally as an essential late modern institution required to deter crime and punish/reform individual criminals. This allowed the field of criminology to grow, which enabled criminologists to study 'crime' and 'rehabilitation' as well as use their expertise to shape penal reform debates and political decision-making (Garland 1991). This administrative strand of penology continues to dominate contemporary scholarship, with academics from across criminology, law, psychiatry, psychology, social work, sociology and more, seeking to determine the most efficient and effective means of reducing 'crime' and controlling 'criminals'. This reformist agenda is counterpoised by the critical tradition of penal abolitionism.

Penal abolitionism

Twenty years after the formation of the Howard Association, Piotr Kropotkin (1887) asked: *are prisons necessary?* Born a wealthy Russian prince, Kropotkin renounced his titles and became a leading philosopher of anarchism, self-government and mutual aid. For Kropotkin imprisonment was a tool of the ruling elite, capitalists and politicians who used prisons to control the working class and quell political dissent. He argued that 'criminal acts' are

caused by a combination of cultural, social and natural forces and that prisons do not offer a solution. In fact, he argued that prison perpetuates individual suffering and aggravates communal problems. Kropotkin concluded that prisons unnecessarily subject people to brutal cruelties and humiliations, and that the entire apparatus of prison and punishment should be brought to an end.

Kropotkin's writings influenced Emma Goldman (1911), an anarchist political activist, who labelled prisons a social crime and a failed form of social protection. Goldman argued that the large majority of 'crimes' 'could be traced, directly or indirectly, to our economic and social iniquities' and that '[s]ociety might [...] abolish all prisons at once, than to hope for protection from these [...] chambers of horrors' (90-92).

Kropotkin and Goldman both critiqued the prison as part of the machinery of government that sought to 'harmonize' antagonistic elements of society; and called for their elimination as part of a broader revolutionary agenda aimed at removing all forms of social hierarchy – the church, the state and capital – and replacing prevailing values of competition, private ownership and national sovereignty with solidarity, syndicalism and mutualism. Within an anarchist society, they dreamed, prisons would not only be irrelevant, but antithetical to such a society's existence.

The twentieth century failed to produce the anarchist utopia envisioned and fought for by Kropotkin, Goldman and millions of others. Instead, in a world ravaged by war, nation states of different political persuasions embraced a penal reform agenda that considered prisons to be vital for controlling crime, suppressing 'terrorists' and ensuring national security. In the 1970s, the US introduced a neoliberal reform agenda that paved the way for the privatisation of prisons. The marketization of imprisonment and the

commodification of prisoners coincided with the US prison population quadrupling between 1972 and 1990 (Caplow and Simon 1994). Today, the US imprisons over 2 million people on any given day, with a further four and half million on probation (World Prison Brief 2017). One of the many effects of mass incarceration in the US has been the resurgence of penal abolitionism.

A hundred and twenty years after Kropotkin, Angela Davis (2003) asked *are prisons obsolete?* Like Kropotkin and Goldman, Davis was imprisoned as a result of political activism. Through personal experience, Davis came to understand the US prison system to be 'an apparatus of racist and political repression' (Davis 2012: 37). Imprisoned people in the US are disproportionately poor, of colour and from inner city communities whose historic marginalisation has been compounded by neoliberal policies of deindustrialisation and the erosion of welfare provisions (Wacquant 2009). Davis and her comrades in Critical Resistance (an abolitionist movement established in the US during the late 1990s) argue that the penal reform agenda is inherently flawed as it legitimises imprisonment, enables the expansion of the prison system and thus contributes to mass incarceration. Gilmore (2007), a member of Critical Resistance, points to the difference between 'reformist reforms', defined as changes in policy and practice that sustain and extend the use of incarceration as a social sanction; and, 'non-reformist reforms' that seek to transform the fundamental assumptions of justice and rationales guiding social responses to conflict. For example, there are a disproportionately high number of imprisoned people who experience mental distress. Reformist reforms seek to improve mental health care in prisons through investment in new prison mental health facilities and staff (McBride 2017b); nonreformist reforms would call for the development of nonpunitive, therapeutic alternatives (Scott and Gosling 2016). The

challenge facing contemporary abolitionists is how to develop non-reformist reforms that erode the legitimacy of the criminal justice system, while simultaneously challenging capitalism and other social hierarchies.

Penal abolitionists across the world have taken this challenge forward and sought to disrupt 'the ideological limitations placed upon what is considered appropriate and feasible' (Cohen 1990: 90). Such theorists critique the state's power to punish and deliberately inflict pain on citizens through criminal justice processes, which reinforce, rather than ameliorate, social inequalities (Scott 2013). A number of abolitionist strategies have been advanced in relation to: a) diversion (community interventions that acknowledge wrong-doing, address harms and involve restorative action, but do not result in criminal conviction and imprisonment); b) decriminalisation (removal of criminal penalties from currently prohibited acts); c) decarceration (releasing currently imprisoned people); and, d) divestment (redirecting prison funding to health, education, social and welfare services). This points to the way contemporary penal abolitionism lacks a single authoritative approach (Meima 2016) as well as the complexity of the task at hand. This latter point is underscored by the fact contemporary abolitionists, like their anarchist forbearers, recognise that for prisons to be abolished we must build new realities outside and beyond the capitalist state (Scott 2013). Thus, penal abolition is not simply about preventing further prison expansion and changing how justice is practised, it is about radically transforming social relations.

A contemporary history penal reform in the north of Ireland

Given the history of conflict in the region, and the role imprisonment played in this conflict, much has been written about prisons in the north of Ireland. Here I provide a summary of the key historical moments and the way in

which penal reform narratives have shaped penal developments.

Internment and militarisation (1960s-80s)

The same year that *A Clock Work Orange* was published the Irish Republican Army (IRA) ceased Operation Harvest, a campaign of guerrilla warfare aimed at overthrowing British Rule and creating a united Ireland (Donnelly 2010). Operation Harvest was the third military campaign undertaken by Irish Republicans in the twentieth century and the first to be focused on the six counties north of the border created in 1921 (Flynn 2009). Beginning in 1956, Operation Harvest targeted symbols of British rule: the BBC, courts, police and military. In response, the Unionist government used the draconian 1922 Special Powers Act to intern over 100 men without trial. The following year, the Fianna Fail government of the Republic of Ireland, also introduced internment for suspected IRA members. Within a year there over 500 men were jailed or interned north and south of the border, including much of the IRA's hierarchy (Donnelly 2010). Internment across the island of Ireland nullified Operation Harvest and the campaign was called off, with 18 people having lost their lives (Flynn 2009). One legacy of Operation Harvest was the split of the IRA into the Official IRA (who pursued a political agenda) and the Provisional IRA (who pursued a military agenda). Another was a belief among the British and Irish governments that internment was an effective means to nullify Republican guerrilla warfare.

In 1969, widespread sectarian violence broke out in the north following the violent suppression by Loyalist paramilitaries and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) of a peaceful Civil Rights campaign, which was protesting for: universal suffrage in local government elections; an end to discrimination against Irish Catholics in housing and employment; and, the cessation of sectarian policing (Hanley 2010). This led the Provisional IRA to engage in a

fourth phase of 'armed struggle'. In 1970 26 people died in conflict related incidents, this rose to 171 people died in 1971 (Sutton 2001). The escalation in violence led the Unionist government to once more call on the Special Powers Act and implement Operation Demetrius, a policy of mass arrest and internment without trial in August 1971. This resulted in the arrest of over 340 Irish Catholics in three days (Rolston 2011). The partisan and heavy-handed nature in which Operation Demetrius was implemented stoked civil unrest, rather than nullify it. The year after internment without trial began, 1972, proved to be the bloodiest of the conflict with 480 deaths (Sutton 2001). Operation Demetrius was discontinued in 1975 following civil disobedience, strikes, protests and international condemnation. Operation Demetrius greatly contributed to the swelling of the prison population, which rose from 600 in 1969 to 3,000 in 1979; a startling 400% increase (McEvoy 2001; Tomlinson 1986).

Prisoners aligned with Republican or Loyalist paramilitaries were afforded special category status and given a range of privileges in prisons, such as freedom of association. This allowed military structures to be established in the prison, which authorities interpreted as legitimising Republican militarism. Consequently, the British government, which had assumed direct rule in 1972, removed politically-affiliated prisoners' special category status in an attempt to criminalise and delegitimise the Republican movement (see Gardiner 1975). As a result, Republican prisoners went on a protest that escalated from refusing to wear prison clothes (1976), to refusing to wash (1978), to going on hunger strike (1980 and 1981). Ultimately, ten Republican prisoners died while on hunger strike (Wahidin *et al.* 2012). During this period prison officers were targeted by paramilitaries, six were killed between 1976 and 1977 and a total of 24 were murdered during the years of conflict (Criminal Justice Review Group 2000;

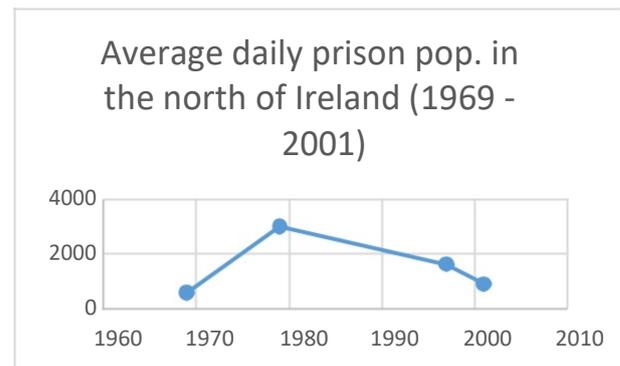
Sutton 2001). Within this febrile context, penal conditions denigrated to a state of heightened deprivation and penal practices descended into psychological and physical violence (Feldman 1991).

As suggest by anarchist theory, imprisonment was used in the north of Ireland to quell political dissent. However, with no attempt to directly or indirectly resolve the economic and social iniquities at the core of the conflict, mass imprisonment served to aggravate inter-communal discord.

Normalisation and modernisation (1990s-present)

During the 1980s the British government began implementing a reform agenda in an attempt to strip prisons of their political potency and 'normalise' prison conditions (McEvoy 2001). This saw the prison population reduce steadily over the 1980s and 1990s. With the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998 came a concerted push to 'normalise' the north's prison system (Gormally 2001; Shirlow *et al.* 2005). Subsequently, the enactment of the Northern Ireland (Sentence) Act 1998 put in place a programme of conditional release for politically-affiliated prisoners, which led the prison population to decrease from 1,625 in 1997 to 910 in 2001 (Wahidin *et al.* 2012). The decarceration of politically-affiliated prisoners resulted in a 44% reduction in the prison population, yet there was still 51% more people in prison compared to 1968 when the conflict began (largely due to those serving conflict related sentences) (see Table 1).

In 2010, the signing of the Hillsborough Agreement resulted in the devolution of justice powers and the appointment of a locally elected politician as Justice Minister for the first time since 1972. One of the first announcements of the new Justice Minister, David Ford, was the establishment of an



independent review team to assess the conditions within and the management of prisons. The Prison Review Team (PRT 2011) found longstanding 'legacy' problems in relation to the culture, staffing and governance of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and recommended the implementation of the Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness (SEE) programme, a five year reform programme aimed at 'modernising' the NIPS.

The events of the conflict had produced a highly securitised and insular operational culture within the NIPS, toxic penal environments, and a bloated, over-paid workforce that was unionised and resistant to reform (Tomlinson 2012; Wahidin *et al.* 2012). The SEE programme aimed to engender cultural reform by rolling out a lucrative retirement scheme. This offered expensive, jaded, yet experienced 'prison officers' the chance to retire and the possibility to recruit new, enthusiastic, yet inexperienced 'custody officers' (on a lower paid grade). However, four years after the launch of the SEE programme, HMP Maghaberry, (the north's largest prison) was described as the 'most dangerous prison in the UK'. The Chief Inspector of Prisons (2015) at the time said: 'It's not safe for the prisoners' health, it's not safe for the staff who care for them and it's not safe for the communities into which these men will be returned.' These words were tragically predictive, as in 2016 six people took their own life in Maghaberry, three in one month. The redundancy package was nevertheless successful in reducing the NIPS's operating

budget, which fell from £120m in 2010 to £93m in 2016 (-22.5%).

The ongoing failings of the NIPS were blamed on another 'legacy' issue identified by the PRT, namely the inadequacies of the prison estate (PRT 2011). HMP Maghaberry, for instance, opened in 1986 when the NIPS was primarily concerned with detaining politically-affiliated prisoners. The securitised architecture of HMP Maghaberry is said to perpetuate a securitised mentality among staff. In 2015, the NIPS launched its estate strategy *Building for the Future*, which outlines plans to invest an estimated £250million to upgrade, replace, and build new prison buildings. One aim of this strategy is to transform HMP Maghaberry into three interlinked mini prisons by building a new 360 'Cell Accommodation Block' (at a cost £55million) and developing a new 'High Secure Facility' (NIPS 2015). This redevelopment is said to be essential due to historic under investment that has left the prison estate 'outdated, inefficient and no longer fit for purpose' (NIPS 2015: 3). Like the SEE programme it also has an economic rationale as it is claimed that this redevelopment will save £8.3 million a year by 2022. Yet, the estate strategy also aims to increase prison estate's capacity: with HMP Maghaberry's capacity rising from 1,014 to 1,300 (28% increase) and HMP Magilligan's (a medium security prison) capacity increasing from 598 (CJINI 2017) to 1020 (70% increase) (NIPS 2015).

The SEE programme and Estate Strategy are a continuation of the reformist strategy that begun in 1980s, which seeks to depoliticise imprisonment and improve prisons conditions through technical solutions. Recent reforms also reflect the political shift towards neoliberal austerity. As such the SEE programme aimed to: improve penal policy, practice and conditions while simultaneously cutting budgets, making efficient savings, and decreasing the amount spent on imprisonment; b) reduce the size of the

workforce, create labour divisions and erode the industrial strength of the prison officers union; and, c); use public resources to generate market activity and generate private profit (e.g. in prison construction). The liberal and humanist narrative of reform employed by the NIPS frames these reforms as both necessary to protect society and desirable to improve the care of prisoners. The liberal virtuosity of this narrative masks its ultimately intention, to cut cost while expanding penal capacity.

Charting an abolitionist trajectory in the north of Ireland

The amnesty afforded to people with conflict-related convictions provides a concrete example of how, with popular support and political will, abolitionist strategies can be implemented to reduce the prison population. However, the decarceration programme of politically-affiliated prisoners was part of a reformist reform strategy that sustained the use of incarceration as a legitimate and necessary social sanction. This is evident in prison population statistics post-1998 (see Table 2). In 2000, the average daily population was 1,000. This rose by 63% in 2008 and was up to 1,830 prisoners in 2014 (Allen and Watson 2017). By the end of 2017 the average daily population was 1,416 (NIPS 2018), 42% higher than in 2000, but 29% lower than 2014. The reasons underlying these changes include shifts in the number of people processed through courts as well as changes in the use of short sentences (less than two years), remand (detention awaiting trial), and recall (re-imprisoned for breaches of parole licence conditions) (Carr 2017).



Of those imprisoned, 96% are male and 40% are aged 21-29 (Crone 2016). The young men who disproportionately end up in prison predominately come from economically disadvantaged urban areas of Belfast and Derry (PRT 2011), which experienced the highest concentration of violence during the conflict. Today these communities have the highest levels of 'multiple deprivation', the highest proportion of people using prescribed medication for mood and anxiety disorders, the highest percentage of disability benefit recipients and the lowest level of educational attainment (Russell 2012). Of those released from prison in the north 37% will 'reoffend' within a year of release (Duncan and Damkat 2017). Like elsewhere then, prisons in the north of Ireland are today being used to 'disappear' socially and economically excluded young men, intensify their personal precarity and perpetuate their community's social and economic disadvantage (Davis 2003; Social Exclusion Unit 2002). This underscores the unjust nature of the criminal justice system in the north, which disproportionately targets marginalised members of society, and its limited social value, since it reproduces community level inequality.

It is therefore essential to identify segments of the prison population that could be targeted for decarceration in order to prevent unnecessary individual harm and community degradation.

For example, a little under a third of people imprisoned are on 'short sentences', of two years or under (NIPS 2018). Yet, short sentences are recognised by the British Ministry of Justice as being ineffective and to have higher reoffending rates compared to community-based alternatives (Mews et al. 2015). If everyone currently serving a sentence of two years and under were to be released the average daily prison population would drop by almost a third. Furthermore, if in the future everyone who would today be sent to prison for two years or under was diverted into a non-punitive alternative the number of people sent to prison on annual basis would fall by 70%.

People on remand are those imprisoned awaiting trial who have not been found guilty of a crime. Remand prisoners currently make up 27% of the prison population. People can spend a few days or a few months on remand (the average in 2017 was 4.3 months [NIPS 2017]). Being unsentenced means remand prisoners are typically denied access to education and employment, preventing them from engaging in meaningful activity and thus requiring them to spend significant amounts of time in their cell. Many remand prisoners are released immediately after trials because they were acquitted or else not given a custodial sentence and so are released without appropriate preparation or planning. Consequently, remand prisoners are at disproportionate risk of taking their own lives during and following imprisonment (Shaw et al. 2004). Currently, the number of people sent to prison awaiting trial is triple that of sentenced committals (3,093 vs. 1,019) (NIPS 2018). Abolishing the imprisonment of those awaiting trial would therefore cut the average daily prison population by a quarter and dramatically reduce the number of people sent to prison annually.

In 2003 there were just 22 women imprisoned, in 2014 there were 67 (+204%) (Crone 2016). This fell to 56 in 2017, a reduction of 16% on 2014, but still 154% more than 2003 (NIPS

2018). Currently, women make up 4% of the prison population. Of these women 40% are on remand and 44% of those women sentenced are on a short sentence (NIPS 2018). A disproportionate number of women are imprisoned for non-payment of a fine (Crone 2016) and many have experienced extreme social disadvantage: 57% ran away from home as a child, 71% have no qualifications, and 70% meet the criteria for two or more mental disorders (CJINI 2011). Consequently, women are particularly vulnerable to the pressures of imprisonment, which is reflected in a disproportionate levels of self-harm and suicide (PRT 2017). Therefore although decarcerating and diverting women out of prison would have a minimal impact on the prison population it is of vital importance given the extreme disadvantage the majority of imprisoned women experience.

Reducing the use of short sentences and remand as well as the number of women imprisoned would enable public divestment from imprisonment. The resources recuperated would then be available to reinvest in nonpunitive alternatives that attend to the economic and social inequities experienced in poor, urban communities where the majority of prisoners come from. This may include improving the accessibility and quality of existing housing, education and employment programmes, health and welfare services as well as developing innovative social justice alternatives (see Scott 2013). As with elsewhere the challenge facing this abolitionist agenda is the need to transform contemporary assumptions about what justice is as well as current rationales guiding social responses to interpersonal conflict, while simultaneously challenging capitalism; and, there is the added challenge of the ethno-sectarian divisions that characterise politics in the north of Ireland.

Conclusion

The prison is an institution that enacts individual harms and humiliation and

exacerbates socio-economic injustices at a community level. In the north of Ireland, political conflict led prisons to become militarised 'chambers of horrors'. Various reform initiatives have been undertaken in an attempt to normalise their function and modernise their operations. Reform initiatives have been undertaken with the promise of improving conditions within prisons and increasing the effectiveness of imprisonment. I have argued that this virtuous narrative further legitimises the use of prison and penal expansion despite prisons being iatrogenic institutions that exacerbate individual exclusion and communal disadvantage. As such, I have called for the narrative of penal reform to be replaced with one of penal abolition. This entails recognition of the inherent flaws of penal logic and the need to develop novel conceptualisations of what justice could be. For it is only through the development of non-violent, anti-capitalist, and community-based alternatives that the abolition of imprisonment becomes a realisable goal.

Epilogue: Utopian Abolitionism

The Dispossessed (Le Guin 1974) offers a parallel universe in which a group of anarchists have fled Urras (a planet similar to contemporary Earth in terms of its biodiversity, inequality, gender relations, capitalist economy and system of nation states) to establish a society based around principles of self-government, syndicalism, mutual aid, feminism and non-violence on Annarres (a nearby moon much like our own). The novel is set almost two centuries after the anarchist colonialization and plantation of Annarres. The narrative focuses on Shevek: a renegade male physicist from Annarres who is on the verge of developing a novel theory of time that has the potential to revolutionise intergalactic communication and space travel. Shevek's theoretical work frightens the Annarres' anarcho-syndicalist administration,

which has grown increasingly bureaucratic and conservative. He leaves for Urras in the hope of completing his theory only to find himself increasingly disaffected by the social and economic inequalities he witnesses. Shevek learns that the Urras' government, which financed his visit, intends to profit from his theory and use the technological advances that accrue to dominate neighbouring planets. Horrified, Shevek escapes Urras, shares his theory with all known civilisations and returns home to Annarres.

The themes of justice and imprisonment run deep throughout Le Guin's ambiguous utopia. On Annarres there is no private property, no criminal law, no police, no prisons, no religion and no state. Order is maintained through a social contract founded on the necessity of communitarianism, egalitarianism, and solidarity for survival. In contrast on Urras competition, profiteering and aggression are the primary social values and order is maintained through coercion and violence. The inhabitants of Annarres consider themselves to be a free people and the entire population of Urras to be caged by mistrust, sexual repression and materialism. Actual imprisonment is abhorrent to the people of Annarres. This is revealed in a scene from Shevek's youth when he and his friends detain a friend and keep him locked in a makeshift prison overnight. The experience is so disturbing that Shevek vomits and is left shaky and exhausted. Yet, as the novel proceeds we see that the people of Annarres are themselves increasingly subjugated by administrative authoritarianism. The creeping authoritarianism is symbolised in the 'asylum', an institution established as a refuge for people fearing popular retribution due to their own violence (e.g. committing murder/rape), but which is now used to detain political dissidents. When Shevek learns that an old friend has been sent to the asylum as punishment he is propelled to undertake his rebellious journey in an attempt to revitalise the spirit of utopian anarchism.

Le Guin thus imagines that a future without the prison is achievable. Yet, she also highlights the challenges in achieving and maintaining such a utopia. For the novel suggests that if prisons are to be abolished there needs to be a radical transformation in individual freedoms, interpersonal relations, community organisation, social values, modes of justice, economic principles and forms of governance. Such a revolution may appear a bittersweet pipe dream in our contemporary era of neoliberal austerity and authoritarianism. Yet, as Shevek shows us, if we establish the limits of our present, pursue knowledge outside the confines of what is considered acceptable, and act to break restrictions placed on individuals and collectives we can facilitate emancipatory change.

References

- Allen, G. and Watson, C., 2017. UK Prison Population Statistics (Briefing Paper Number SN/SG/04334). London: House of Commons Library.
- Anderson, C. 2016. "Transnational histories of penal transportation: Punishment, Labour and Governance in the British Imperial World, 1788-1939", *Australian Historical Studies*, 47(3), 381-397.
- Browne, B., and McBride, R.-S., 2015. "Politically sensitive encounters: Ethnography, access and the benefits of "hanging out"", *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 11(1), 34-50.
- Burgess, A., 1962. *A Clockwork Orange*. London: William Heinemann.
- Caplow, T., and Simon, J., 1994. "Understanding Prison Policy and Population Trends", *Crime and Justice*, 26, 63-120.
- Carr, N., 2017. "The criminal justice system in Northern Ireland", in S. Case, P. Johnson, D. Manlow, R. Smith, and K. Williams (Eds.) *Criminology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Chapman, D. W., 2013. "The Legendary John Howard and Prison Reform in the Eighteenth Century", *The Eighteenth Century*, 54(4), 545-550.
- CJINI, 2011. *An Inspection of Prisoner Resettlement by the Northern Ireland Prison Service*. Belfast: Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland.
- Cohen, S., 1990. "Intellectual Scepticism and Political Commitment: The Case of Radical Criminology", in P. Walton and J. Young (eds.), *The New Criminology Revisited*. London: Macmillan Press. 98–129.
- Criminal Justice Review Group, 2000. *Review of the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: HMSO.
- Crone, E., 2016. *The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2015 and 2015/16 (Research and Statistical Bulletin 24/2016)*. Belfast: Department of Justice.
- Crossley, N., 2006. *Contesting Psychiatry: Social Movements in Mental Health*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Davis, A., 2003. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Davis, A., 2012. *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues*. San Francisco: City Lights Book.
- DH, 2003. *Personality Disorder: No Longer a Diagnosis of Exclusion – Policy Implementation Guidance for the Development of Services for People with Personality Disorder*. London: National Institute of Mental Health England.
- Donnelly, D., 2010. *Prisoner 1082: Escape from Crumlin Road, Europe's Alcatraz*. Cork: Collins Press.
- Duncan, L. and Damkat, I., 2017. *Adult and Youth Reoffending in Northern Ireland (2014/15 Cohort)*. Belfast: Department of Justice.
- Feldman, A., 1991. *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Flynn, B., 2009. *Soldiers of Folly: The IRA Border Campaign 1956*. Cork: The Collins Press.
- Foucault, M., 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London and New York: Penguin.
- Gardiner, L., 1975. *Report of a Committee to Consider, in the Context of Civil Liberties and Human Rights, Measures to Deal with Terrorism in Northern Ireland*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Garland, D., 2001. *Mass Imprisonment: Social Causes and Consequences*. London: Sage.
- Gilmore, R.W., 2007. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goldman, E. 1911. *Anarchism and Other Essays*. New York & London: Mother Earth Publishing Association.
- Gormally, B., 2001. *Conversion from War to Peace: Reintegration of Ex-Prisoners in Northern Ireland*. Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion.
- Hanley, B. 2010. *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party*. London: Penguin.
- Harvey, D., 1985. *Money, Space, Time and the City*. Cambridge: Granta Editions.
- Howard League for Penal Reform, 2018. *The Life and Work of John Howard*. Available at: <https://howardleague.org/john-howard/> (accessed 10/01/2018).
- House of Commons, 2016. *Prison Population Statistics: Briefing Paper (SN/SG/04334)*. London: House of Commons Library.
- Kropotkin, P., 2002 [1887]. *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Le Guin, U.K., 1974. *The Dispossessed*. New York: Harper Voyager.
- McBride, R.-S., 2017a. "Towards hope, solidarity and re-humanisation", in S. Armstrong, J. Blaustein, & A. Henry (Eds.) *Reflexivity and Criminal Justice: Intersections of Policy, Practice and Research*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- McBride, R.-S., 2017b. "On the Advancement of Therapeutic Penalty: Therapeutic Authority, Personality Science and the Therapeutic Community". *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 39(7): 1258-1272.
- McEvoy, K., 2001. *Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Ireland: Resistance, Management and Release*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meima, M., 2016. "Sexual Violence, Criminal Law and Abolitionism", in J.M. Moore, B. Rolston, D. Scott, and M. Tomlinson (eds.) *Beyond Criminal Justice*. London: EG Press. 193-206.
- Mews, A., Hillier, J., and McHugh, M., 2015. *The Impact of Short Custodial Sentences, Community Orders and Suspended Sentence Orders on Re-offending (Ministry of Justice Analytical Series)*. London: Ministry of Justice.
- NIPS, 2015. *Building for the Future: Northern Ireland Prison Service Estate Strategy*. Belfast: Department of Justice.
- Prison Review Team, 2011. *Review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service: Conditions, Management and Oversight of All Prisons: Final Report October 2011*. Belfast: DOJ.
- PRT, 2017. *Prison: The Facts (Bromley Briefings Summer 2017)*. London: Prison Reform Trust.
- Robinson, G. (2008) "Late-Modern Rehabilitation: The Evolution of a Penal Strategy", in *Punishment & Society*, 10(4), 429-445.
- Rolston, B., 2011. *Review of Literature on Republican and Loyalist Ex-Prisoners*. Belfast: OFMDFM.
- Russell, R. 2012., *Health Inequalities in Northern Ireland by Constituency*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly.
- Scott, D., 2013. "Visualising an Abolitionist Real Utopia: Principles, Policy and Praxis" in M. Malloch & B. Munro (eds.), *Crime, Critique and Utopia: Themes for a Critical Criminology* London: Palgrave.
- Scott, D. and Gosling, H. (2016) "Before Prison, Instead of Prison, Better Than Prison: Therapeutic Communities as an Abolitionist Real Utopia?" in *IJCJ&SD*, 5(1), 52-66.
- Shaw, A.G.L. (1966) *Convicts and the colonies: A study of penal transportation from Great Britain and Ireland to Australia and other parts of the British Empire*. London: Faber.
- Shaw, J., Baker, D., Hunt, I.M., Moloney, A., and Appleby, L., 2004. "Suicide by Prisoners", *BJPsych*, 184(3): 263-267.
- Shirlow, P., Graham, B., McEvoy, K., Ó hAdhmaill, F. and Purvis, D., 2005. *Politically Motivated Former Prisoner Groups: Community Activism and Conflict Transformation*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.
- Social Exclusion Unit, 2002. *Reducing Re-offending by Ex-prisoners*. London: Social Exclusion Unit.
- Sutton, M., 2001. *An Index of Deaths From Conflict in Ireland*. Derry: CAIN Web Service.
- Tomlinson, H.M., 1978. "'Prison palaces': a re-appraisal of early Victorian prisons, 1835-77". *Historical Research*, 51(123), 60-71.
- Tomlinson, M., 1986. "Long term imprisonment in Northern Ireland: psychological or political survival?", in M. Tomlinson and W.J. Rolston (eds.), *The Expansion of European Prison Systems*. Belfast: European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control. 162-183.
- Tomlinson, M., (2012). "From Counter-terrorism to Criminal Justice: Transformation or Business as Usual?". *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 51(5), 442-457.
- Wacquant, L. (2009). *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Wahidin, A., Moore, L., & Convery, U., 2012. "Unlocking a Locked-down Regime: The Role of Penal Policy and Administration in Northern Ireland and the Challenges of Change". *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 51(5), 458-473.
- West, T. (2011) *The Curious Mr Howard: Legendary Prison Reformer*. Hook: Waterside Press.
- World Prison Brief. (2017). *United States of America*. London: Birkbeck University.

- Yardely, A. (2008) Piecing Together—A Methodological Bricolage, *FQS*, 9(2): Art. 31, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0802315>.
- Young, D. (2015). "One of the Worst I Have Seen: Prison Inspector's Verdict on Ulster's Top Jail HMP Maghaberry". *Belfast Telegraph*, 06/11/2015. Available at: <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/one-of-the-worst-i-have-seen-prison-inspectors-verdict-on-ulsters-top-jail-hmp-maghaberry-34174031.html> [Accessed on 19/01/2018]