**Anti-social Behaviour in Britain. Victorian and Contemporary Perspectives**

Sarah Pickard (ed)

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While, as one of the contributors to this book suggests, the high point of recent anti-social behaviour policy in the UK may have been in 2005, some 10 years ago, the issue has not entirely moved off the political agenda. Indeed the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 is just in the process of being brought into force, with a raft of new legal measures replacing those familiar from the New Labour government. It seems therefore an appropriate time to return to and reflect on the subject. *Anti-social behaviour in Britain* provides just such a volume. As its subtitle – *Victorian and Contemporary Perspectives –* suggests, it does this through examining anti-social behaviour in these two periods, ‘in its diverse settings and populations, in order to establish whether there are parallels regarding anti-social behaviour and governmental responses’ (p. xvii). Adding this historical perspective does much to place contemporary academic concerns about the current governance of anti-social behaviour in a broader context and to ask questions about it that we can miss when we fail to place it in that longer perspective.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, ‘Anti-social Behaviour, the Urban Environment and Public Spaces,’ focuses, as the title suggests, on behaviour in towns and cities and, in particular, their public spaces. Secondly, ‘Anti-social Behaviour, the Vulnerable and the Marginalised,’ ‘examines how the social control of anti-social behaviour has been centred on certain types of people, especially the young’ (p. xviii). Finally, part three is entitled ‘Anti-social Behaviour, Recreation and Leisure,’ and focuses more than the other sections on the Victorian aspects (of drunkenness in particular), while still containing Chapters on contemporary issues around drug use and football crowd disorder.

There is a lot in this book: an Introduction, 25 chapters and a conclusion, all contained within fewer than 400 pages (including the references and index). This means that none of the chapters are overlong and I did not find their relative brevity a problem. In the most part, each provided a short, sharp read which held the attention. It does mean, however, that there are quite a lot of overlaps between chapters – with some repetition in particular of the development of New Labour policy – but on the whole this makes for a book that can easily be dipped in and out of.

The approaches to each chapter are varied as would be expected from a multi-disciplinary approach. For a reader this means that you move between, for example, the typical historical approach of detailed archival analysis and sociological explanations drawing on theoretical insights of those such as Norbert Elias or Pierre Bourdieu. For me the chapters which worked best were those which contained within them a comparison between the Victorian and the recent past. These brought home best both the continuities and discontinuities. Both John Flint and Ryan Powell, and Craig Johnston in their Chapters in the first part of the book point to the moralising tendencies in both eras. Colin Clark and Becky Taylor’s chapter on gypsies and travellers show how the work of the nineteenth century ‘gyspsiologists,’ with their ideas of ‘true’ gypsies, still permeates modern debates. Jamie Harding and Adele Irving use data they have collected from homeless people to highlight ‘a number of reasons for questioning historical assumptions, prevalent since the Victorian period and even earlier, that homeless people have inherent lazy and anti-social tendencies’ (p. 164).

The most challenging chapter for me was Stuart Waiton’s, which uses Ramsay’s (2012) concept of ‘vulnerable autonomy.’ Waiton places the blame for a move towards a universalizing of victimhood, which paved the way for anti-social behaviour legislation of the New Labour government, on left realist criminologists such as Jock Young and, in particular, feminist criminologists of the 1980s. There is a debate to be had about whether the notion of the vulnerable subject as opposed to the liberal autonomous subject provides the basis, as Waiton claims, for an asocial society. Others would claim that vulnerability is not the equivalent of victimhood but provides a way of building a stronger civil society (see most recently Fineman and Grear, 2013).

For readers of *Housing Studies,* one of the disappointments of the book may be the lack of focus on social housing. Although Sarah Pickard says in her conclusion (p. 308) that ‘[c]ontemporary political concern for anti-social behaviour stemmed primarily from behaviour in public spaces especially social housing’, this seems to me to elide two very different issues. Defining ‘social’ housing as a public space, makes no more sense than defining ‘private’ housing as one, although the more ‘public’ provision of social housing opens it to greater forms of legal control. The book is full of detail about Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), but very little on ASBIs (the injunctions available against those living in social housing) or evictions of social housing tenants for their anti-social behaviour or that by other members of their household. Indeed the only chapter in the volume which addresses questions of tenure and how this may impact on the governance of anti-social behaviour is (perhaps unsurprisingly given their research focus) that by Flint and Powell. Interestingly, rather than focusing on social housing, they point (pp. 45-46) to the growing concerns of government in managing private landlords as having parallels with Victorian concerns with slum landlordism.

Another criticism, which is almost inevitable now in books concerning themselves with ‘Britain,’ is the failure to deal with the diversity of contemporary policy and experience in the divergent parts of the United Kingdom. Although there is a specific chapter looking at the particular complexities of Northern Ireland, other chapters make no differentiation between the different legal structures in England (and for these purposes usually Wales too) and Scotland. There is a growing recognition in most literature on housing policy of the differences in Scotland (see e.g. Pawson and Davidson, 2008) and it is important to acknowledge the differences that are emerging in a post-devolutionary Britain.

Despite these oversights, there is nonetheless much that is of interest to be found in this volume.

**References:**

Fineman, M. A. and Grear, A. (eds) (2013*) Vulnerability: Reflections on a New Ethical Foundation for Law and Politics* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate).

Pawson, H. and Davidson, E. (2008) Radically Divergent? Homelessness Policy and Practice in Post-devolution Scotland *International Journal of Housing Policy*  8(1), pp. 39-60.

Ramsay, P. *The Insecurity State: Vulnerable Autonomy and the Right to Security in the Criminal Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

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