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Punishment in Europe: A Critical Anatomy of Penal Systems V. Ruggiero and M. Ryan (Eds.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2013) 304pp. £55.00hb ISBN 978-1-137-02820-4

Comparing penal systems is a complex and messy endeavour. Collecting, collating and comparing data from different countries, some with more than one jurisdiction, is fraught with difficulty. So the editors of this collection, while recognising that some countries will share common trends, gave contributors the opportunity to ‘focus more on national *peculiarities* rather than across the broad *commonalities*’ (italics in original, p.5). This has paid rich dividends. With chapters by scholars from 12 jurisdictions examining penal systems from the Republic of Ireland in the west to Russia in the east, we learn about each jurisdiction’s penal history, prison system, alternative sanctions, juvenile justice and wider criminal justice and social systems.

Many of the peculiarities relate to the influences of the past and political culture on the development of penal policy. Examples include Italy, which in the post-war period had many former prisoners (including two who became president) building the new legal system. It had ‘amnesty after amnesty’ and the passing of the ‘penitentiary law’ in 1975 promoted ‘treatment’ over ‘punishment’. Spain emerged from Fascist rule after Franco’s death in 1975 determined to model its criminal justice system on democratic principles, abolishing capital punishment and torture, and declaring rehabilitation as the objective of punishment. The chapter on Poland explains that criminology was banned in the Eastern bloc; no need

for such a discipline, with time simply needed to end crime and get rid of those with bourgeois vices. Russia is marked out by its 'penal history, and arising from that, its penal geography' making it 'like none other in the entire world' (Piacentini, p. 159). Despite a shift towards a more punitive discourse on crime and punishment, due to its embedded welfare state model, Sweden still has one of the lowest imprisonment rates in the world.

While this book has not attempted to follow Cavadino and Dignan (2006) in creating a comparative typology, commonalities exist. Overcrowding is one of them. In the Netherlands, the principle of one person per cell was abandoned due to an increase in prison numbers, leading to more austere conditions; the French prison system is characterised by chronic overcrowding, as are, to a greater or lesser extent, prison systems in England and Wales, Italy, Poland, Russia, Republic of Ireland and Spain. This has mainly occurred due to lack of investment in the penal estate and longer sentences leading to an increased prison population.

Ruggiero (p. 289) in an interesting conclusion points out that it is now 'common practice to punish individuals who belong to specific groups because of an actuarial calculus indicating them as more likely to offend and re-offend'. The book demonstrates in stark detail the disproportionate levels of punishment of immigrant populations, the marginalised and socially excluded. In Italy, over 36 per cent of the prison population is non-Italian. In Sweden foreign prisoners comprise 28 per cent of the prison population, although it has remained relatively stable over the last decade. In Greece,

over a 12 year period, non-nationals increased from one quarter to more than one half of the prison population. In England and Wales, ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented in the prison system with almost 26 per cent of the prison population from Black, Asian and Minority (BME) groups. In Bulgaria, between a third and a half of the prison population are Roma and in the Republic of Ireland, multiple forms of socio-economic disadvantage are found among those in prison.

In his introduction Mick Ryan (p. 6) argues that it is imperative to develop ‘a more critical and accessible *public criminology* that goes beyond the academy to embrace wider social movements’. It is essential to move ‘beyond the parameters of conventional penal discourse’ to ‘build (and sustain) public support for progressive penal change’. The scholarship produced in this book will be of interest to those within and outside the academy. It enhances our understanding of contemporary penal systems in Europe and underlines the urgent need for progressive penal change.

References

Cavadino, M. & Dignan, J. (2006) *Penal Systems: A Comparative Approach*, London: Sage.

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