

Penality at the Periphery: deficits, absences and negation¹

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Abstract

What might it mean to re-orientate the field of punishment and society so that we might be able to say it is democratising, diversifying and increasingly inclusive? If we wish to expand our knowledge of penal politics in particular, but also develop a more inclusive field of punishment and society, then we need to also examine the impact this ethnocentricity can have on skewing scholarship and debate *within* the periphery. The article contrasts two alternative readings of Irish penal politics to show how sometimes the concepts from the UK and US penality can come to inflect studies of penal politics outside the mainstream. If we are to make an attempt at democratising our knowledge, then it is as de Sousa Santos wrote, that the first struggle is often against ourselves (2014: 10). The article concludes with a brief critical discussion about who can speak for Southern and peripheralized places? Where is even a southernised place? And if we are to democratise and diversify the study of penal politics, what role is there for our existing canon? I conclude that is not *where* we study, but *how* we study it.

1. Introduction

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Photo source: Daniel Olsen https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Oakland_HERE-THERE.jpg

This article explores what it might mean to re-orientate the field of punishment and society so that we might be able to say it is democratising, diversifying and increasingly inclusive. I chose this image to orientate this discussion as it nicely sets the tone and captures something important about borders and representation. This piece of public art is from the Bay Area in California. On the left side of the grass there is a lean and imposing “HERE”, which is facing a correspondingly bold “THERE”. These statements are intended to mark the boundary between Berkeley and Oakland. Berkeley, the sophisticated elite university town is designated as *here*, and as a consequence the less affluent Oakland is always doomed to be represented – or misrepresented – as forever *over there*, essentially as other to Berkeley.²

² Ironically, the artists were not knowingly aware of the power imbalance and cultural significance of these statements, saying that they only wished to create a ‘whimsical’ welcome to people as they arrived at their destination, either Berkeley or Oakland. My use of the artwork here does not dispute their intentions. The installation made a particular impact on me after arriving in Berkeley and hearing repeated, albeit subtle, hints that the local know-how was to remain wary of Oakland. So, this sign never felt so innocuous; it seemed to have (inadvertently?) captured some deep sensibility about this border and its local significance, making concrete a

This installation is a physical reminder that our geography, and how we think of places, has an embedded hierarchy. And it raises a challenge: how might we as researchers best cross borders and traverse global boundaries, compare differences, research our own forms of punishment, and pursue conceptual generalisability without creating a 'here' and a 'there' in this same way? Put simply, how might we begin to decolonise the criminological imagination?

There is broad general agreement that to achieve this 'epistemological justice' (Santos 2014) we need to address the magnetic pull of the Anglo-Saxon nations and the West within the social sciences. We must expose the limits of mainstream theories and ideas, marginalise and provincialize them. We need to also temper this Western dominance by making space for theorists and research from outside the metropole. As such, we must democratise knowledge by elevating unsung and overlooked research from the Global South and the East (Carrington et al 2016; Liu 2009). This seems to be the only sensible way to address this imbalance. I want to add to this charge and suggest that to diversify criminology in this way (Carrington et al 2019), we may also need to decolonise knowledge within the periphery. This essay is an attempt to clarify and address the way the Global North comes to figure in the academic culture of the periphery. I investigate these matters by probing how UK and US notions of penal politics come to inflect the wider field of punishment and society scholarship.

What I want to suggest is that for those of us working and researching across places that have been peripheralized to some degree within criminology, the dominant and respected ideas of our field so often antagonise us because they exclude us. Yet, knowing this, those mainstream concepts can still fundamentally shape our own thinking in such a way as to impinge upon how we understand ourselves and our own penal histories. Thus, peripheral scholarship is not always a readymade antidote to our current knowledge imbalances. If we wish to (1) expand our knowledge of penal politics, but also (2) develop a more inclusive

dividing line that people already understood all too well.

https://www.cityofberkeley.info/City_Manager/Civic_Arts/SB_Gateway_Project_Here-There_Home_Page.aspx
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field of punishment and society, then we need to also examine the impact this ethnocentricity can have on skewing scholarship and debate *within* the periphery. This is because sometimes transplanting canonical concepts upon places outside the mainstream can lead to theorisations of punishment at the periphery that are marked by absences, negation, and deficits.

This essay is organised into five parts. The first section argues that our concepts for understanding penal politics remain stubbornly narrow because they have, by and large, been shaped by Anglo-centric politics, culture and penal problems. Thus, we need to look beyond the usual places to broaden our understandings. Following this, I highlight that this solution places special emphasis on the 'epistemic advantage' (Narayan 2004) of research produced beyond the metropole. However, there is a second problem that springs from this: that the periphery may not always be free of Northern theoretical influences, it can itself be *Northernised*. The third section teases out some of the dynamics and implications about the struggle between mainstream and periphery in the production of knowledge by looking at the contemporary history of penal politics in the Republic of Ireland during the 1970s. By outlining two contrasting readings of Irish penal history – one that Irish penal culture was exceptional for its pragmatism and apolitical character, or alternatively, that Irish penal culture was defined by pastoral penalty – helps show the importance of critically accounting for which theoretical metrics we use and why. The fourth section takes the broader point, that if we have inscribed our histories with the contours of Anglo-American thinking, then decolonising the discipline must, where appropriate, also involve a reappraisal of our theories of penalty within parts of the periphery. Finally, the conclusion emphasises the theoretical value of a reflexive, critical and equitable dialogue between mainstream ideas and empirical sites at the periphery.

2. The Ethnocentricities of Punishment and Society

It is now widely argued that punishment and society has operated with a Western and Anglo outlook (Aas 2012; Hamilton 2014; Carrington et al 2016, 2019; Sozzo 2017). What are treated as the discipline's big ideas and urgent debates may seem broadly generalisable, but they are often drawn from and much more explicitly about metropolitan concerns, particularly within the English-speaking imperial nations of the UK and USA. As Sparks wrote of these grand texts (in this case, Garland's *Culture of Control*), 'the problem is that this seems to be an argument *about the British state without explicitly saying so*' (Sparks 2001:166, original emphasis). One need only look at how much has been written regarding the relationship of punishment to late/modernity, neoliberalism, the end of penal modernism and rise of mass incarceration to see that the problems of Anglo-US penalty have dominated the discipline. But the matter is not merely a quantitative one about the sheer volume of work that these matters generate. The huge weight of influence of these issues is even more apparent when we observe how books addressing these inter-related topics in relation to the US and England are viewed with the respectability reserved for the totems of our discipline. Work from this small region of the globe tends to be treated as the canon around which the rest of our research must be assembled. As Fraser has said, 'the pre-eminence of northern states is deeply encoded in our sensibilities' (2013: 252). The study of US and Westminster penalty sets the agenda for the field, the problems of English and US prisons become *the* problems of penalty, they are the theses that grip us and incite our passions.³

By contrast, research from nations and cultures outside the metropole tends to be overlooked and disregarded (Aas 2012; Moosavi 2019; Carrington et al 2016). And by being overlooked they are rendered peripheral to the main intellectual conversations, unlikely to be seen as relevant by an international audience, rarely treated as possessing theoretical credibility, and as a result it is felt that this work is just as unlikely to be regularly cited. Those researching penalty in marginalised nations and communities often find themselves

³ The problem may be more acute. While we speak about this canon as being US- and UK-centric, the research upon which these field defining claims are made rarely covers the entirety of the UK or USA. Rather it is a case that the sociology of punishment produced in small urban centres of Anglophone world (e.g. California or London) are spoken about as being 'the bellwether'.

implicitly siloed as area studies first, punishment and society second. Moosavi suggests that this belies 'an orientalist attitude' that views scholarship from outside west and English-speaking world as 'low quality', 'irrelevant' and inferior (Moosavi 2019: 258). As a result, the periphery is the site from which data is derived or theory is tested, and yet so rarely is seen to holding any theoretical significance (Connell 2014: 211, referencing Hountondji 1997).

This is an issue that seems to be especially pronounced in the study of penal politics. While our understanding of penal politics is dominated by a number of leading theories, as Garland himself has reflected, '[d]espite differing emphases, the historical narratives presented by these accounts overlap at many points' (2013: 480). Rather than seeing these theories as being pitched in opposition or divergent, 'their competing claims seem complementary rather than mutually exclusive, and their *inter se* differences more a matter of emphasis than of kind' (2013: 481-482). The area of penal politics is one in which there is a lively critical dialogue, but general theoretical harmony. This is partially because our theories on penal politics are so often discussing the same problems, more or less, in the same places, striving to identify some general explanatory force behind punitiveness in the UK and USA. So, while there has been a strong sense that these theories of penal politics have been dealing with global dynamics, they are in fact far more geographically constrained, tethered to a small corner of the English-speaking Global North.

This issue may be even more pronounced in punishment and society scholarship, which has a comparatively recent emergence in the 1990s (Garland and Sparks 2000), a field whose success was tied to the law-and-order swing in England and the rise of mass incarceration in the USA.

But as criminology has become sociology's boom discipline (Loader and Sparks 2009), the parameters of what, where and why we study are starting to be shook up. This feels like a moment of critical expansion for the field. While there is something is such a decolonial groundswell in the literature, in the student body, and in changing curricula, it could amount to no more than a "decolonial bandwagon" (Moosavi 2020). But there is also clearly desire to listen to and engage with research from nations that are peripheralized within the criminological knowledge economy (Carrington et al 2016; Connell 2006) and to rethink

what punishment and society might look like from these vantage points (Fonseca 2017). This is to make a suggestion that reflects a widespread intellectual tendency at the moment, to demand that our theories be decolonised or southernised by (1) exposing the western centric foundations of our theories and ideas, and (2) placing scholars from the periphery centre stage.

These concerns are not themselves entirely new (Hall 2007; Said 2003), but there is undoubtedly a new popular impetus now driving this critique. Within criminology there is now a chorus of voices calling on us to decentre the West and the Global North and 'reorient the criminological compass' so as to direct us more towards the marginalised peoples and nations who are systematically overlooked by the criminological gaze (Goyes and South 2021; see also Aas 2012; Fraser 2013; Lee and Laidler 2013; Carrington et al 2016, 2019; Moosavi 2019). For criminology to have an epistemological evolution, it is the narrowness of our canon that must be challenged and upended. As Braithwaite summarises, how can Northern theory be made more Southern (2018: 974)?

3. The Peripheral Perspective

Our understandings of how penal power is developed and deployed will be improved by 'harnessing and expanding the experiences, biographies and knowledges of the Global South' (Carrington et al 2019: 181). In this formulation, the agenda to decolonise 'the toolbox of available criminological concepts, theories, and methods' (Carrington et al. 2016: 1) relies upon peripheral scholars' special 'epistemic advantage' (Narayan 2004). That being their standpoint as both outsiders, 'systematically ignored or misrepresented by mainstream discourses' (ibid.:213) while being fluent in canon. The marginalised scholar has a dual aspect view of the field, what Narayan calls a 'double vision'. In terms of punishment and society, this means that they understand their own penal cultures as well as penalty within the metropole. The peripheral perspective can provide empirical challenge to the limits of the status quo, expose the theoretical biases of the taken for granted, and bring fresh new insights to bear on our studies.

This highlights for me a less spoken about problem about how the sociology of punishment is sometimes conducted at the periphery. Specifically, how those of us outside the mainstream can begin to think about our own penal systems in metropolitan terms. This matter is often raised, albeit fleetingly (Connell 2014; Carrington and Hogg 2017; Carrington et al 2019: 20; Moosavi 2019). As Lee and Laidler write, 'scholars working outside the metropolitan centres have struggled to break away from the established ethnocentric frameworks of knowledge production, disparities in research capacities and power relations' (2013: 141). Hence, parts of the periphery may also need to be southernised, for it can be, so-to-speak, *northernised*.

Northernising criminology – and in this case, specifically the study of penal politics – happens when we theorise our own peripheral places 'from the centre' (Connell 2006), relying on UK and US conceptual tools and classification systems to describe our penal cultures. To paraphrase Tuhiwai Smith, imperialism frames the peripheral perspective (2021: 20). This view tends to rest on an assumption that the sheer extremity of UK and US punitiveness reveals universal dynamics of penalty, thus these become the categories and indicators that shape the methodologies beyond the centres of the North Atlantic (Brangan 2020). Problematically, these 'calls for alternative discourses... require critical assessment' because the alternative discourses we desire have not consistently become mainstream in the periphery (Alatas 2003).

This is not to say that peripheral scholars are dupes or slaves to theoretical fads. To be published, to make a contribution to knowledge, we enter into existing conversations and debates, our research is a dialogue, swept up in the contemporary currents of criminological concern. Less benignly, of course, there are power dynamics that undergird this production of knowledge. There are undoubtedly institutional and structural biases that nudge peripheral researchers towards producing work that fits with mainstream discourses and Western perceptions of academic credibility (Lee and Laidler 2013: 150; Moosavi 2019: 260). And that is to say nothing of those who also have to fit by writing in English. In practice, this means the importing of inappropriate northern frameworks into southern research

contexts and producing what the critics see as partial and at times clunky results (Wilenmann 2019; Carrington 2017; Lee and Laidler 2013: 143)

While that is true, these instances of importation and conformity are not the problem being addressed here. I want to highlight the matter of how central claims within peripheral penal scholarship can itself display ethnocentric tendencies. Western knowledge can also be upheld as superior within the periphery, it can 'come to structure our own ways of knowing' (Smith 2021: 62). Therefore, focusing on the intellectual patterns and ways of knowing by non-Western criminologists is as critical to our epistemological evolution as targeting the limits of the mainstream (Moosavi 2019: 260). If we wish to refine and expand our understanding of penal politics, then we need to also examine the impact this ethnocentricity can have on skewing scholarship and debate *within* the periphery.

4. The Case of Ireland

To explore how mainstream ideas inflect theorisations within the periphery, I examine the Republic of Ireland and claims that its contemporary penal history (especially the 1970s, which is considered the critical decade of Anglophone penal change) is exceptional and explore how this reflects the demands and challenges of democratising our theories.⁴

It may seem outlandish to suggest Ireland is a peripheralized or marginalised place within criminology. Ireland is a predominantly white, western, European, Christian nation and it has the major benefit of being English-speaking. All that being true makes Ireland's instance as a peripheralized state within the criminological imagination all the more interesting and particularly instructive as a national case (Brangan 2022). Ireland is part of the Atlantic Isles, yet we see this time and again in accounts of English-speaking penal patterns that do not include reference to Ireland, as well as in numerous characterisations of European penalty

⁴ I focus on the past as opposed to the present because one can sometimes detect that there is a sense that recent history is extensively covered and thus well known. However, by reapproaching our penal pasts not only challenges the mainstream, but can recover and preserve local knowledge 'and techniques that were part of the former way of life before they are lost not only to practice but even to memory' (Narayan 2004: 214).

that bear no resemblance to how people are punished in Ireland. In Ireland, it often feels like we continuously read about exciting conceptualisations in English-speaking penality and hear about new theories of Anglophone penal transformation, yet Ireland is omitted from these studies, despite the fact that there are no language barriers that would preclude an English-speaking scholar from studying Irish penality.

I have written elsewhere about the need to ensure Irish criminology advances its own focus beyond preoccupations with Anglophone penology (Brangan 2020; Brangan 2022). There isn't sufficient space to go into it here, but I remain cautious of earnestly aligning Ireland with other post-colonial nations that are peripheralized in the global economic order, as this might feed into an uncritical disposition where Ireland has a post-colonial memory but a Global North outlook. However, within criminology Ireland is rarely included, it is treated as an outlier, at best, reduced to a footnote, at worst, erased from the accounts that wish to define English-speaking penal culture.

This exclusion and erasure (Connell 2006) are partially because Ireland is different to other Anglophone nations.⁵ When we think about the collection of nations that we describe as western and Anglophone, what we are also discussing are mature urban nations, with modernist sensibilities supported by liberal democracies. And across the twentieth-century Ireland was not that kind of place. The Irish Free State formed in 1922 after a long rule by Britain, making Ireland a post-colonial place within the Atlantic Isles.

There are other pertinent differences. There had been no industrial revolution in Ireland, instead, across the twentieth-century, Ireland was primarily agrarian with a communitarian class structure (Coakley 1999). Importantly, the government and Catholic Church shared power in an informal manner but with a distinctly authoritarian edge (Inglis 1998). Unlike the US and UK, the Republic of Ireland was traditional rather than modern, collective rather

⁵ Though we should not forget that the UK and US also differ significantly culturally and politically (Barker 2009), yet their broad commonalities define the area.

individualistic, politically conservative rather than liberal, and was verging on the theocratic.

Another unusual dynamic that helps explain Ireland's criminological exclusion is that across the twentieth-century criminology was Ireland's "absentee discipline" (Kilcommins et al 2004). Ireland's first criminology post was established in 2000. Shortly thereafter a small field of scholarship emerged, producing ground-breaking and field defining works. Given criminology's emergence as a 21st century discipline, there was understandably a pronounced historical orientation to much of this work. What happened? How did our penal system get here? When looking at critical decades of 1970s-1990s the term that has now defines Irish penalty is Hibernian exceptionalism (Brangan 2020, 2022).

Hibernian Exceptionalism

The term Hibernian Exceptionalism is intended to express that Ireland, like other small nations perceived to be exceptional, has not followed the punitive path of the USA and England and Wales in those critical latter decades of the twentieth-century.⁶

This is not then just a statement about Ireland's prevailing penal culture. As a set of claims about contemporary Irish penal history, it establishes that Ireland was different. So, while Anglophone criminology has been rightly challenged for its universal overtures (Carrington et al 2016; Carrington and Hogg 2017; Aas 2012), the value of Hibernian Exceptionalism is that it challenges the generalisability of prevailing penal theory even within the English-speaking North Atlantic (Hamilton 2016; Healy 2020). Scholars at the periphery feel alienated, frustrated by being continuously side-lined in important debates on punishment, penal culture and carceral transformation. Hibernian exceptionalism captures some of this exasperated energy within the field. As an epistemological act, it is a peripheral standpoint,

⁶ The work upon which the Hibernian Exceptionalism thesis is based is detailed, significant and among the majors works in Irish criminology, a body of scholarship that rightly continues to animate Irish criminological research. For a fuller account of the foundations of Hibernian Exceptionalism see Brangan 2022.

its wider contribution is to demonstrate in the strongest terms the limits of mainstream theory, even within the Atlantic Isles.

Yet Ireland is an exception among exceptions, because unlike other cases of exceptionalism, like the Scandinavian nations, Hibernian Exceptionalism is distinguished not by its apparent *penal parsimony*, but by its *penal absences*.

An absence of penal welfarism: unlike UK and USA, in Ireland during the 1970s there was no engagement with experts, certainly no criminologists, and as a result, there was no research (Kilcommins et al 2004), no policy documents guiding the Irish penal system (Rogan 2011). And without the liberal outlook of these 'benevolent experts' (O'Donnell 2021), it is argued that in late twentieth-century Ireland there was no rehabilitative ideal, no attempt to design the prison so that it could transform prisoners.

An absence of punitiveness: conversely, Irish prison policy lacked a demonstrative punitive rhetoric. So, while prisoner numbers went up from 1970s and the prison estate was expanded, in Ireland, it is argued, there was no law-and-order ideology motivating these increases, no express desire for increased punishment (O'Donnell 2008; Rogan 2011).

In light of this, it has been suggested that foremost among the characteristics that marks Ireland's penalty out as exceptional is that it operated in a 'vacuum' and penal policy 'stagnated', showing only signs of 'inertia', 'neglect', and 'calcification' (Rogan 2011; Behan, 2018; Griffin and O'Donnell 2012; Kilcommins et al., 2004; O'Donnell, 2008). What made Ireland exceptional is the belief that while the UK and USA were veering into a period of punitiveness from 1968, at the same time in Ireland, punishment seemed to drift along in an entirely pragmatic way, unimpregnable by larger ideational forces.

Pastoral Penalty

These have come to be the terms in which we now discuss Ireland's contemporary penal history, for which Hibernian exceptionalism is quickly becoming a shorthand. Yet, when we reapproach the historical material (in this case using oral history interviews with

policymakers, documentary analysis and archives, for more see Brangan 2021) with a grounded sensibility, allowing the sum of the findings, argument and conceptualisations to be ‘discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection’ (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 23) a different view of penal politics emerges. Instead, what emerges is that the Irish imprisonment regime evolved significantly during the 1970s, and what is more, Irish civil servants charged with managing prisons had been pursuing humane penal regimes.

The prison population rose during the 1970s and (see table 1) the number of adult prisons doubled from three prisons to six, with a seventh site opened inside the campus of Mountjoy, Ireland’s largest prison. This is an alarming pattern, one that gives the appearance of a familiar story of post 1970s punitive descent. But when we look to describe *how* people were imprisoned, and for what reasons, a more complex history emerges.

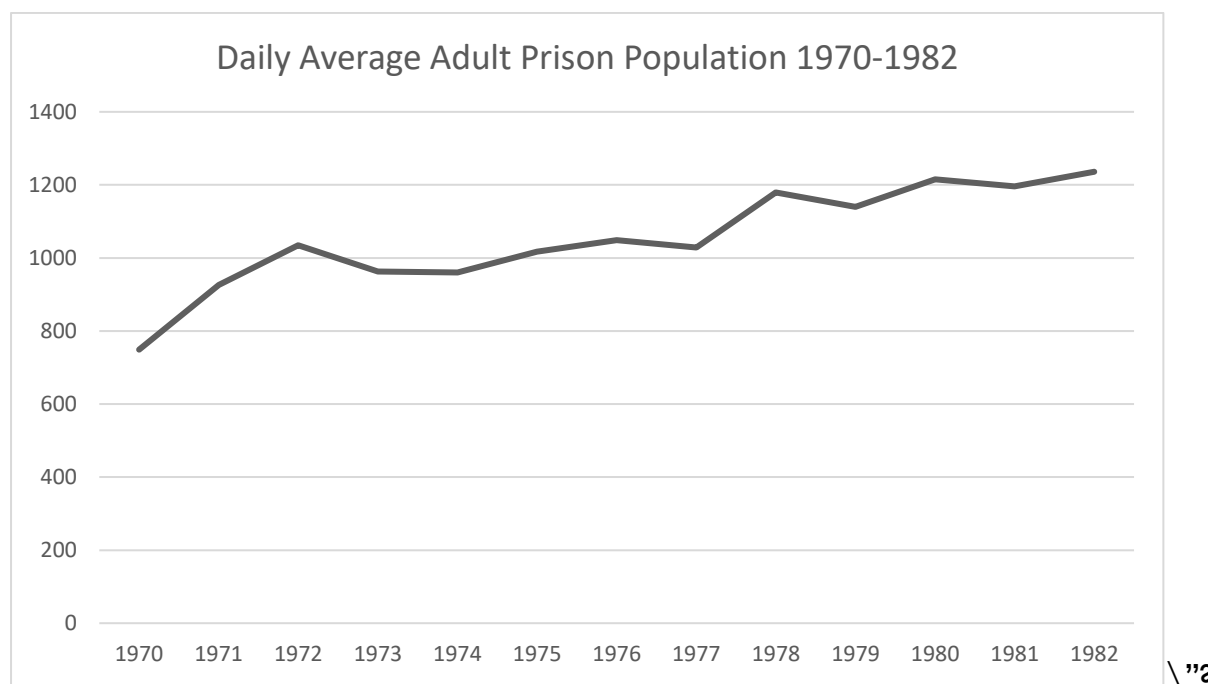


Table 1 (source Brangan 2021)

Of these new prisons Arbour Hill in Dublin and Cork Prison were closed institutions, both of which were former military detention barracks adapted to hold a modest 90 prisoners each. While these two closed prisons were conversions, the Division also embarked on much

more ambitious expansions. The Training Unit, housing between 90-96 prisoners, was a first of its kind prison, with a bold and ambitious regime that was new to Ireland. The newly built Unit was a semi-open prison and orientated towards training and employment. This is all the more significant because it was Ireland's first purpose-built prison. What distinguishes this as a period of development is that in addition to the Training Unit Ireland's first open prison, Shelton Abbey, also came into operation.

There was also the creation and expansion of probation, prison psychology and education services (Healy and Kennefick 2019). These prison professionals were not at all interested in reducing reoffending, or rehabilitation as we tend to think of it (ibid.). The word that came up time and again was "coping". For example, education's objectives included: 'helping prisoners cope with their sentences...[as] one element which might compensate for, or modify the deprivations of prison life' (Department of Justice 1984: 5 original emphasis). These services were often aimed at counselling prisoners as they endured incarceration, it was about easing the pains of imprisonment.

Finally, there was the expansion of temporary release. This was a permissive and liberal use of parole. While the use of parole expanded it was operated without published guidelines. It was reported that an individualized approach was adopted: 'there was no set pattern in the granting of TR as each case was considered on its own merits' (*Annual Report 1979:46*). The reasoning offered for this liberal use of release was to allow prisoners to return to work, but especially to attend to family matters, such as tend to ill relatives, and go to funerals and communions, for example. Release was justified therefore, according to the Minister for Justice, because it undermined the prison:

[it] obviates the need for rehabilitation programmes and lengthy schemes, which sometimes have low enough success rates for reintegrating prisoners into the community, because here the people are not in prison in the first place. They live at home' (Dáil Debates, 11 June 1985).

So, even the closed prisons were being made more permeable, a prisoner's confinement was less total, decarceration was being made a mainstream feature of the Irish imprisonment regime. And it was a feature of the Irish imprisonment regime of which prison administrators were quite proud (Brangan 2021: 46).

These new regime developments were justified not because they reformed people, but because they supported them. The prisoner was seen as misfortunate rather than as a dysfunctional client to be treated (Garland 1985), a victim of Ireland's austerity, high unemployment, and economic hardship. Ireland had largely been a traditional communitarian society, government officials often knew all too well the precariousness of adult life in Ireland, some expressed the view that they were lucky to have secured permanent employment as civil servants (Brangan 2021: 51). This afforded them an empathy that seemed to operate as a bar against creating a penal regime that treated criminality as a result of poor decision-making, as it often was in the UK and US.

Such supportive and decarcerative techniques were favoured also because those in charge exhibited a scepticism of the prison's positive claims and they were concerned by its damaging effects. The Minister for Justice proclaimed the prison environment was 'basically unsuitable for encouraging individuals to become adequate and responsible members of normal society' (Dáil Debates, 26 May 1970). As the Minister announced when temporary release was first introduced at the end of the 1960s, it would prevent 'the institutionalisation, psychological deterioration and disruption to family and individual life consequent on imprisonment', better to have the prisoner 'in his own milieu' (quoted in Rogan 2011: 109).

These statements are also a good example of the strong conservative political ethos that was in ascendance, whereby the Irish government was motivated by a desire to inculcate 'membership of traditional collectives such as the family, the community, or the nation' above all else (O'Malley 1999: 186). And in line with these conservative views, Irish government administrators during this period were aware that this was a place where the government was not the central axle through which social life was ordered. Social problems and the capacity to chastise and control deviant Irish populations were felt to be better

addressed by traditional social units and institutions, such as communities, families and the Church (Inglis 1998).

Yes, there was nothing really in way of big political declarations, policy statements or research. There was an absence of 'policy products' (Souhami 2014), but there was not an absence of vision or ambition. There was a dubious view of formal policy, quite literally the on paper commitments and plans with which we understand government work: policy documents, mission statements, strategic reviews, reports, etc. One interviewee reflected on the absence of such materials, recalling that 'you need to have some plan, but it's very difficult to have missions and values, it seems like a load of baloney half the time' (Liam). Instead, information was gathered 'informally', through talk, using the 'human stories' of the prisoners to guide choices (Seamus). And as a result, it was felt that there was 'a humanity about the system' (Liam). Similarly, such informal discretion was favoured over scientific certainty, with 'penology' seen as 'an area where folly abounds' (AOG/2014/23/1103). However, it would clearly be a mistake to describe this disinterest in criminology as a disinterest in how and why people are imprisoned.

That is a thumbnail sketch, but what it establishes is that the 1970s was an important period of penal development, perhaps one of the first such periods in the history of the Irish state. These findings chime with others outlined above, the politics of punishment in 1970s Ireland were neither punitive nor penal welfarist. But they were something, and it was humane, rooted in a distinct social outlook and political sensibility.

I have defined this as being a *pastoral penal culture*. What pastoral penal culture highlights is that rather than having operated in an ideational vacuum, the decisions that informed the 1970s Irish prison system were based on moral reasoning rather than scientific reasoning, and within a conservative political context, and within this penal culture the prisoner was viewed as a member of a collective rather than as an individual. A penal system forged in a pastoral cultural context seeks to return people to the flock, first and foremost (for a discussion and overview see Brangan 2021 chapter 3). Even though the prisoner numbers

were rising, the problem of the growing prison population was being met with new penal techniques that were supportive and decarcerative, rather than attempting to produce a control crime effect.

5. Exceptionalism as Ethnocentric

Knowing about Ireland's pastoral penal culture, why might we want to critically review Hibernian Exceptionalism? Hibernian Exceptionalism certainly seems to be following a democratising agenda: it is an act of resistance, a statement about the limits of Anglophone criminological theory, and it reflects the frustrations of the peripheralized perspective. Yet, how do these divergences in historical analysis emerge between pastoral penality – that there was a pronounced humane, modernising and moral set of penal sensibilities shaping Irish penal practices – and Hibernian Exceptionalism – that historically Irish penal politics were devoid of sensibilities and ideology? And why might this disparity in Irish penal historiography matter to wider arguments about decolonising and southernising criminology as more than a case of divergent readings of Irish penal history? Because, fundamentally, this concerns differences in the assumptions about what constitutes penality, and from where those assumptions derived.

First, what is punishment: the dominant idea of what counts as progressive punishment remains rooted in a conception of penal welfarism. While it is often treated as such, penal welfarism is not actually a catch-all concept for humane penality. It is tightly associated with early to mid-twentieth century US and British practices of reforming criminals and reducing crime through focused interventions on offenders' criminal proclivities and their failings in earlier socialisation (Garland 1985). This stands in contrast to the subsequent penal excesses of the punitive turn of the late twentieth century (Garland 2001). Rising prisoner numbers and the expansion of the prison estate mark what was felt to be a rupture with mainstream patterns of welfarist penality. Penality's twentieth century imagination then is categorised

into two unambiguous binary epochs, the progressive and the punitive (Goodman et al. 2017).

Second, this case highlights divergences in conceptualisations of penal politics: from looking at the mainstay of punishment and society scholarship – directly concerned as so much of it was with late twentieth century – we feel we know that penal policy must be shaped by government work that produces reviews, White Papers, policy documents, mission statements, research reports, vociferous political slogans like “three strikes and you’re out”, and “prison works”. Penal politics is discussed and understood to be a largely public output based on materials and declarations, and this activity occurs in concert with research expertise. But what we have here are the trappings of a mature liberal democracy rooted in scientific modernism. The whole range of tumultuous penal politics experienced in the US and England since 1970 or so has come to define the way we conceive of punishment and penal politics, influencing our sense of which metrics, events, objects, and meanings matters, and which do not.

What I suggest is that the lack of these features and practices that characterised British and US penalty at end of the twentieth century have come to be theorised as Ireland’s distinguishing exceptional characteristic, namely: absence. This is a deficit theorisation, Ireland comes to be defined through negation, by what it is not.

This should not surprise us. This reflects the hierarchy of ideas regarding penal politics within criminology and serves as a good example of how Northern theory can potentially direct our analyses of penalty beyond the metropole. Ireland is part of the English-speaking North Atlantic, but is excluded time and again within its own Anglophone world. However, when it comes to theorising contemporary Irish penal history, there has been a tendency to attempt to understand what is distinct about Ireland while still using traditional metropolitan concepts.

Using these discourses, a more ‘sympathetic evaluation’ of Irish penalty is not possible (Narayan 2004: 216). Simply put, by reading Irish penal history ‘from the centre’ (Connell

2006), using the vanguard lenses of punitiveness or penal welfarism, and without reflecting on the appropriateness of their attendant conceptions of punishment and penal politics, can point towards inappropriate metrics and cultural practices from which to conduct our analyses. Our 'academic dependence' on mainstream concepts has led to policy practices in our own contexts seeming 'irrelevant' (Alatas 2003) As I have written elsewhere, 'if the theory has limited explanatory power here, the theory is lacking in this particular context, not that the context itself is lacking in activity, culture, values and ideas' (Brangan 2022). The problem of Irish penal history then is not one of absence, but one of *invisibility* (ibid.).

I am certainly not suggesting that the tendency to read one's own national penal history from the centre is common across peripheralized places. My argument is situated in the Irish criminological milieu, so makes no claims to the histories, material realities and experiences of people working on these issues everywhere that is outside the metropole. The periphery is not a homogenous space, and is marked by deep cultural and social divergences, wherein schools of criminology are at very different stages of maturity and display differing *modus operandi*. So, heeding Mohatny's warning (1984:335), I do want to inadvertently 'appropriate and "colonize" the fundamental complexities and conflicts' that characterise experiences of marginalisation everywhere through "Western eyes". While not asserting this deficit theorising is universal, the Irish case is surely not the only one where narrow Anglocentric academic values, normative aspirations and policy concerns have at times dominated the discourse, as others have suggested (Wilenmann 2019; Carrington and Hogg 2017).

There is then perhaps a wider lesson from the Irish case. In writing against the mainstream, we are at times still identifying *with*, and *in relation* to, those prevailing dominant narratives, which can become internalised as an integral part of the national criminological image. In this way, the 'binary analytical' (Mohatny 1984) that presents contemporary Irish penal history as inert and mainstream UK and US penal politics as the dynamic normality to which it should strive, was produced within Irish criminology. It is not that peripheral researchers import Anglocentric ideas upon which to hang their projects. It is that our understandings of penal politics, and hence aspects of national penal histories, can come to

be read almost entirely via mainstream metrics. This tendency can result in only partial readings of places beyond the mainstream. And unchecked deficit-based theorisations of penalty at the periphery may stymie the theoretical development necessary to develop sociology of punishment, and will bar against decentering punishment and society's narrow focus.

This is why seeing Western ideas direct the discourse and knowledge far beyond its borders is not simply modish, it reflects the intellectual imperialistic trajectory of many Western/Anglo/European criminological concepts, whose theories have come to colonise the subject area (Alatas 2003). This 'academic dependency' on the theories generated in the Anglo-Saxon and European nations 'is a crucial structural dimension of the problem of the domination of Western ideas in the social sciences' (ibid.) The Irish case is thus a candid demonstration of how contemporary academic imperialism is continuously reproduced, and as an example it reveals the power of these ideas to rewrite history elsewhere. Hence, it is not simply that criminology's current knowledge imbalances are perpetuated by a mainstream that operates with only a 'sketchy acquaintance' (Narayan 2004: 221) of the periphery – though this is certainly a large part of the problem (Goyes 2019: 46–47). It is also those of us in parts of the periphery are, at times, inadvertently reproducing the dominance of Western knowledge as we articulate our research through these concepts – even with those utterances that are stating that theories from the Global North don't fit our own places.

But academia is not a monolithic entity that cannot be challenged. If we are to embark on the journey of reorientating, internationalising, diversifying, and democratising punishment and society so that the English-American experience is decentred, then as scholars outwith the mainstream we also need to be reflexive in how *we see, we think and we conceive* of punishment. We also need to bend our critical southernising lens back upon our own 'social and intellectual unconscious' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 36) and inhabit our own context as critically as the mainstream (Narayan 2004: 222). Ireland's position as a nation within the Anglophone and European contexts, but often outwith Anglophone criminology, makes the case that this is a demanding task that belongs to all of us, no matter where we

are situated in the hierarchy of knowledge production. Perhaps it is impossible, as Moosavi worries (2020). But as he has also said, those of us who 'endorse intellectual decolonisation' must:

'make more deliberate efforts at self-scrutinising the ethnocentrism and other limitations within our own scholarship to the same extent that we routinely call for from others so as to avoid reinscribing coloniality and so as to better realise our decolonial quest for justice and inclusivity' (ibid.:334)

This is the basis for renewed social analysis of penal politics. We need to be willing to think through those limitations if we hope to recover, reappraise and reconstruct our own contemporary carceral histories, as well as generate the appropriate conceptual language to describe them. If we are to make an attempt at democratising our knowledge, then it is as de Sousa Santos wrote, that the first struggle is often against ourselves (2014: 10).

Some may balk at the use of Ireland as a springboard for a wider consideration of global/periphery knowledge dynamics. There is some simmering disagreement and discord surrounding discussions of where exactly can be regarded as peripheral or Southern, which at times looks set to become one of this area's hot debates (along with who should speak about these matters, see Moosavi 2019; Puwar 2020).

This is an important conversation, of course. However, it seems unlikely that these debates will lead to a firm and conclusive sense of where is the North and where is the South.⁷ This lack of clarity seems to me to be a good thing. An ongoing discussion that unsettles borders and blurs boundaries is the antithesis of that imperial desire to demarcate, separate, legitimise and delegitimise, and ultimately to colonise ideas, create categories, and concretise the terms of debate. This inability to finalise the borders of where definitively is,

⁷ Which seems to overlook Carrington et al's (2016) clear and explicit statement that they were using the south as a metaphor not as a geographical designation, and therefore not literally about places above and below the equator.

and is not, can only be a boon for the decolonial agenda. As such, as I have tried to demonstrate in this essay, the point is not *where* we study, but *how* we study it.⁸

CONCLUSION

By definition, something can only become the mainstream intellectual pattern once it is adopted by the majority of academics. That those ideas become the convention means they no longer describe what is happening ‘here’ but are also deployed to illuminate what we are doing over ‘there’. We have a canon, but its Anglo-American biases means that our understanding of penal politics has been shaped by surprisingly partial and restricted conceptual frameworks. And so in criminology, like much else, our knowledge is divided along simplistic divisions, a binary that exalts the theories and conceptualisations derived from the Anglo-Saxon nations. We cannot like all things equally of course, our taste distinguishes, but our academic tastes are significantly conditioned by this metropole/periphery knowledge economy. This has consequences for our scholarship.

In this article I have argued that in beginning to challenge the dominance of mainstream ideas, we may also find that research at the periphery is also in need of being deconstructed and decolonised. Carrying out this ground-clearing work opens up more space for us to reorientate the discipline and refine our theories and take real advantage of our peripheral perspective.

I hope that this example, small as it is, gives another hint of what a democratised criminological field could look like, and provides a response to the question ‘What does it mean to “do” southern criminology’ (Brown 2021: 451)? It is not, as it can sometime seem, about trouncing and denouncing our knowledge, therefore reversing, hence reinscribing, the dualism of North/South (Bhambra 2007; Carrington et al 2016). There remains a vital place for the generative impulse of canon, there is still ample scope to apply conventional research ideas in new ways (Steinberg 2016). The problem is not that we have poor mainstream ideas

⁸ I am grateful to Ignacio González Sánchez for raising this point with me.

about penal politics, but that these are often too limited and too concretised, thus incapable of meeting the demands for theoretical inclusivity. Throughout, I have sought to establish that we (both the metropole and the periphery) are all hemmed in by a canon that is too narrow and insufficiently diversified.

Over time, with the emergence of new perspectives, we will develop a 'contested canon', made from a 'plurality of voices', drawn from a greater wealth of nations and cultures. Our mainstream ideas will therefore be 'fortified and reconstructed through conversations with each other. Out of the conversations there tentatively emerge new criteria that [will] become foundational to our discipline' (Burawaoy 2021: 551), allowing it to forge ahead into new territory.

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