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Book review

Fergus McNeil and Gwen Robinson (eds), *Community Punishment: European Perspectives*, Routledge: London, 2016; 272 pp.: 9781138783782, £85.00 (hbk), 9781138818644, £35.00 (pbk)

Reviewed by: Katrina Morrison, *University of Napier, Edinburgh, UK*

Community Punishment: European Perspectives, edited by Fergus McNeill and Gwen Robinson, goes beyond simply charting patterns of community punishment across Europe to also explore how they are underpinned by social, political, historical and cultural factors. It considers how and why community punishment has been legitimized and evolved across Europe in response to differing local context and offers an engaging account of the contributions and limitations (methodological and theoretical) of comparative criminological research. For all of these achievements, it forms a very welcome addition to the study of both community supervision and comparative criminology.

This is the second edited collection to emerge from the COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Action ‘Offender Supervision in Europe’ funded from 2012 to 2016. This Action addresses the omission of mass community supervision in both contemporary penology and comparative research by bringing together a network of scholars working in the field. Imprisonment has dominated penology and comparative criminological research to date, and the focus on this ‘neglected penal sub-field’ (p. 231) is therefore all the more important; not only because more people are under some form of community supervision than are in prison in many parts of the western world (Beyens and McNeill, 2013), but also because community supervision has its own story to tell and a comparative analysis of this phenomenon can contribute towards theories of penology in late modernity and penal variation in its own right.

The substantive part of this book is accounts of the evolution of community punishment from 11 European jurisdictions. Some of these will be familiar to many, others certainly less so. Included are four chapters from the United Kingdom as well as contributions from Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Romania and Catalonia and Spain. The selection of case studies was informed through involvement in the COST Action and includes those whom the editors felt could best contribute their ‘knowledge, interests and talents’ [AQ1] to the study. As such, this collection contributes towards theory building rather than providing a representative picture across Europe.

There is a tension and a fine balance to strike between allowing contributors to tell their story using concepts and theory which are relevant for them, and suggesting the use of shared analytical tools and topics of exploration in order to shape accounts that allow for comparison. Authors were therefore asked to provide accounts of community punishment in their jurisdiction with reference to four 'adaptations' (managerial, punitive, rehabilitative, reparative) and to respond to questions relating to legitimacy and evolution, in order to provide contributions which would facilitate a degree of 'horizontal comparison' between them. Interestingly, despite the suggested use of shared conceptual tools and topics, the contributing chapters are nonetheless remarkably heterogeneous. This allows each author to tell their story with their own frames of references, and to share an account of community punishment evolving in response to the particular conditions in which they exist. Indeed, on occasion authors need to stray beyond the four conceptual tools suggested by the editors; for example, to discuss the effects on community punishment of political transition (Romania and Northern Ireland), or of multi-level governance structures (Scotland and Catalonia).

However, most of the chapters are directed towards the broad suggested topics from the editors, albeit adhered to with varying degrees. There are accounts of managerial reforms (e.g. contracting out and partnership working; the growth of supervision as a means of attempting to reduce to prison population, a motivational impetus which has in fact only expanded the net of penal control; the centrality of risk calculation; the growth of electronic monitoring in the context of overcrowding and austerity); reforms underpinned by punitive appeal (e.g. 'payback' involving unpleasant work; the expansion of conditions attached to suspended sentences and orders); rehabilitation continues as a legitimizing narrative in many jurisdictions, albeit entwined with other often contradictory rationales and frequently viewed as 'correction' rather than as a 'right'. The reparative narrative was least in evidence throughout Europe.

Each chapter's own voice and style allows the story it tells to stand alone as illuminating accounts in their own right, and avoid being bound by what the editors later admit may have been particularly Anglo-centric conceptual tools (p. 234). Yet the heterogeneity of accounts does also make extrapolating 'grand narratives' about variation and change in community punishment across Europe more difficult than in other more tightly directed comparative projects (e.g. Cavadino and Dignan's *Penal Systems: A Comparative Approach* (2006)). The editors nonetheless begin to draw broader conclusions from across the chapters with reference primarily to the theoretical hooks of Garland's (2013) 'penal state', but with space to also acknowledge action within the 'penal field' (Page, 2013) and 'happenstance' (Brangan, 2013). However, the construction of an overarching theory of variation and evolution of community punishment was not the intention of this collection, and indeed, as the editors argue 'a model which can fit everywhere may not tell us too much about anywhere' (p. 239). Instead, what this volume has done is to begin to explore this topic and to suggest the sorts of concepts and approaches which would be useful in future endeavours (and it would be interesting to see this study expanded over the coming years to include jurisdictions which may have equally interesting stories to tell, but which did not have the individuals in the requisite academic networks to enable contributions at this time). Such rich and theoretically informed accounts of penal variation and change are essential if we are to understand, and ultimately reimagine, community punishment.

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