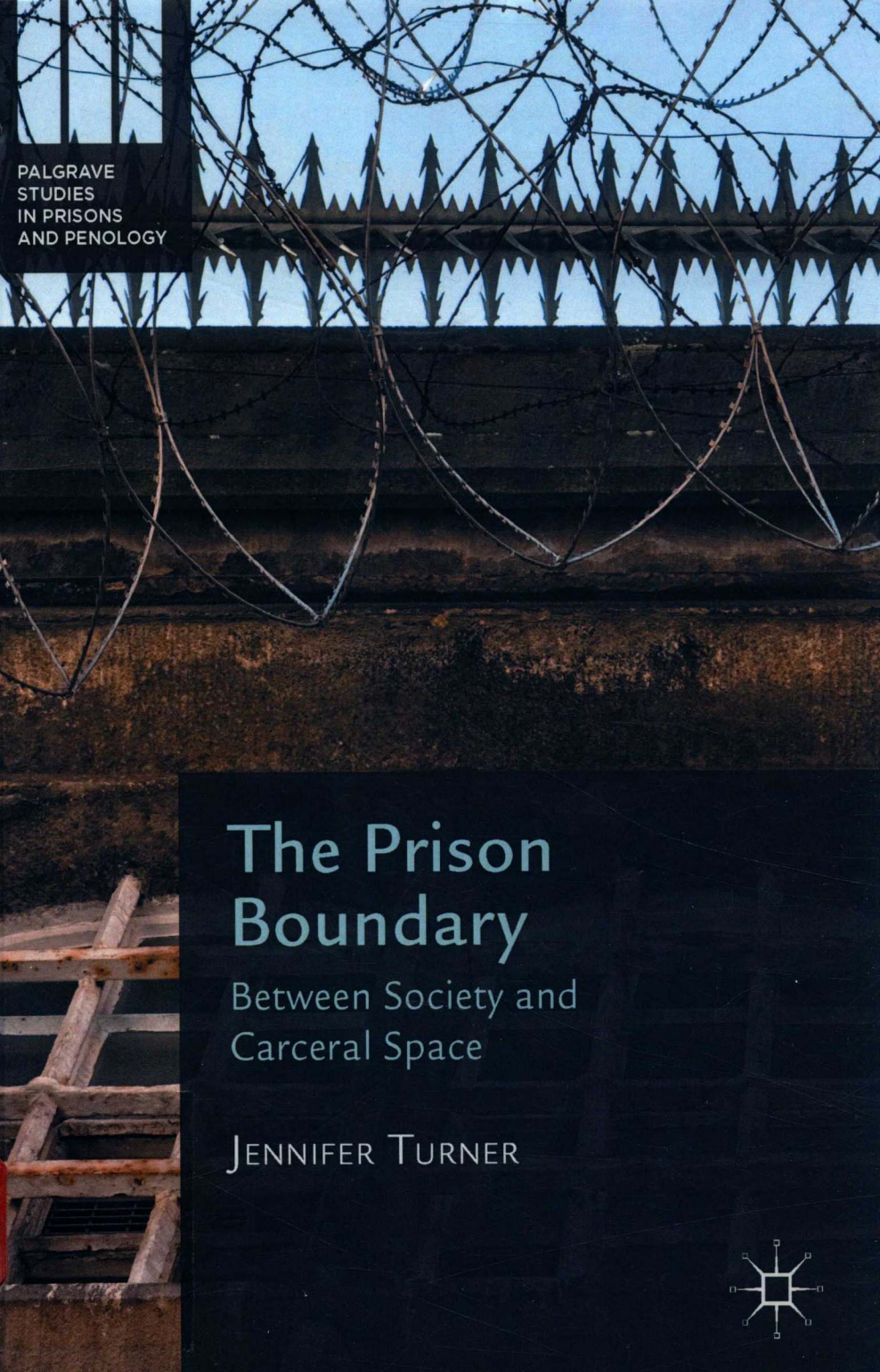

The Prison Boundary

Between Society and Carceral Space

Jennifer Turner

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palgrave
macmillan

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Leicester, United Kingdom

Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology
ISBN 978-1-137-53241-1 ISBN 978-1-137-53242-8 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-53242-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016940634

Cover illustration: © Alex Ramsay / Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd. London

Acknowledgements

Without the unwavering support and inspiration of my friends, family, and colleagues, this collection of words would never have made it into a book. My thanks for all parts of this monograph belong to each of you.

Each page was made possible by colleagues at the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University, and the Department of Criminology, University of Leicester, who provided inspiration and relief in equal measure. I am grateful to have experienced such supportive and vibrant environments throughout my career. My sincerest thanks go to Julia Willan, Dominic Walker, and the whole Palgrave Macmillan team for seeing this project through with such professionalism. My thanks go also to the editors Ben Crewe, Yvonne Jewkes and Thomas Ugelvik for finding a space for my work amongst such prestigious others in the Palgrave Studies in Prisons and Penology book series.

A whole chapter of thanks goes to my wonderful friend and generous colleague Sarah Mills. Your confidence in my work helped me to plough through the most difficult of paragraphs; and your shrewd editing corrected them once I had managed that. Another chapter, as it were, is for Dominique Moran, who has been a constant source of inspiration, paving the way for emerging carceral scholars like me and acting as a point of reference for every sensible decision I ever made.

I am hugely indebted to my parents, Jackie and Simon and my sister, Naomi. You have all been there from cover to cover reminding me that hard work is rarely unrewarded.

And to Kimberley Peters, who has been the spine holding this whole thing (and me) together for the last two years. Not everyone is lucky enough to find a partner who is such a talented and selfless colleague and I cannot express how grateful I am for all you have done to push me further, make me think harder, and write something of which I can be truly proud.

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Introduction

On Tuesday 24 April 2012, an online newspaper headline caught my attention. It read: *Clink clip every trip for prison van barber.* The article told the story of a mobile barber, Stewart Vine, who set up shop in the back of a decommissioned prison van. Vine, a former delivery driver, was reportedly inspired by the many similar vehicles he had seen on the roads during his travels. The van was acquired from a firm in Dorset, following the decommissioning of fleets of prison vehicles in January 2012, when new contracts were awarded to private firms GEOAmey and Serco for the provision of security services across the UK. Prior to the privatisation of prison transport services, decommissioned security vehicles had been destroyed. The conversion of the van into a barber shop cost Vine between £8000 and £10,000. Today, the secure compartments formerly housing four prisoners in transit have been replaced with two barber's chairs, a waiting area and a television. Vine regularly parks up his business at a service station in County Durham and also frequents farmers' markets to give people living in remote areas or those with limited transport facilities the opportunity for a haircut. Vine commented that, '[t]he van attracts a lot of attention and gets a lot of smiles when people see

J. Turner, *The Prison Boundary,*
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-53242-8_1

it and things are going well' (Fay 2012, no page). The article, however, reported that the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) was 'concerned' about the selling-off of these vehicles in case they could be used be used to facilitate an escape from prison (Fay 2012, no page).

Mr. Vine's prison van leads us to the first significant aspect of this book: the prison boundary. Vine's van acts as a material manifestation of the multitude of physical and symbolic connections that make up the contested, fluid border between being either 'inside' or 'outside' prison and general society (n.b., from here on I will use the terms 'inside' and 'outside' without quotations to avoid confusion; however, any such references should be taken to imply the fraught nature of inside/outside distinctions vis-a-vis the prison boundary. The terms are further developed at the beginning of Chap. 2). Despite the often peripheral locations of prisons, the inter-linkages between society and spaces of incarceration are numerous and complex - involving, for example, a range of goods, services and people to facilitate the running of the prison; or the development of media representations acutely related to contemporary societal perceptions of crime and punishment (Turner 2013a, b, 2014) - and it is that complexity which I endeavour to address here. Throughout the course of this book, I address both the physical and metaphorical experiences that arise in and around the penal context through a series of case studies. Specifically, I examine the interactions between the prisoners on the 'inside' of the system and the people 'outside' of it: interactions which are themselves generated by the conceptual and physical prison boundary.

Vine's van encapsulates how prisons have come to be seen not as separate, peripheral sites, but as windows onto (or even organising principles of) modern social, political, and even economic orders. Much literature has sought to overturn the presumption of a closed-off prison world, illustrating how the policies and practices that animate prisons go beyond the physical boundary of the prison wall (Baer and Ravneberg 2008; Gilmore 2007; Loyd et al. 2009; Pallot 2005; Vergara 1995; Wacquant 2000, 2001, 2009). Substantive literature exists on asylum seekers and political prisoners, on detainment per se, and on the reification and permeability of boundaries (within, for example, geography [see Conlon and Gill 2013; Gill 2009; Moran et al. 2011, 2012] and other disciplines such as criminology [see Pickering 2014; Pickering and Weber 2006]). In particu-

lar, recent scholarship has placed detention centres within a geographical imaginary that extends well beyond their physical location and the practices therein, particularly due to the transfer of detainees across national boundaries. What is more, it has been argued, naturalising or ignoring this symbiotic relationship serves to hide the crucial role of the penal system in contemporary society. Indeed, Peck (2003) and Gilmore (1999, 2007) recognise that the prison system has become a key component of a state-based strategy of regulating a potentially unruly urban poor, whilst others have argued for the instrumental role of prisons as a recession-proof economy (Bonds 2006, 2013; Dyer 2000; Lemke 2001; Venn 2009).

Certainly, the leaning of the press reporting towards the economic viability of Vine's van as a business venture parallels the emphasis given to the economic and political dimensions of the prison within geographical and sociological inquiry. More specifically, it alludes to the increasing privatisation of the prison service as an outsourced public service. In this example, the increase in privitisation has direct consequences, such as the selling-off of former prison vehicles as a cost-saving exercise for prison management, which raises tensions around the practice of penal services as a profit-making business, and the techniques of management for efficiency and productivity that such business necessarily entails. Further, Stewart Vine's prison van becomes contentious in regard to its potential availability for criminal uses. In selling off these vehicles, the Ministry of Justice has itself recognised that '[w]hile the sale of such vehicles is lawful, it does give cause for concern. Criminal appropriation of such vehicles could pose a threat to prison security' (Fay 2012, no page). Such sentiments play upon the concerns of the 'law-abiding' reader: i.e., these vans may aid inmates to escape from prison, resulting in the untimely release of those individuals whom society has deemed undesirable and threatening. But, more than that, the potential compromise in security unveils a chink in the armour of the penal system itself—an institution that has become central to the regulatory fabric of contemporary society. In highlighting a fragile point of the physical infrastructure of the prison, the wider ideology of the penal system is also weakened. Therefore, a regime that has become the crucial means of disciplining and controlling a population becomes more precarious as we are made to envision a way in which the 'outsiders' it is

supposed to contain might escape into a life alongside the 'good' citizens they are excluded from. The boundary of the prison becomes altogether much closer to home than we would like to think.

Philosophers, historians, and sociologists have also been central to the discussion of the boundary between prison and society (Foucault 1977; Franke 1992; Garland 1990; McConville 1981; Morris and Rothman 1995; Radzinowicz 1948; Radzinowicz and Hood 1986; Sharpe 1990, 1998). Here, implicit geographies can be discerned, with work exploring the activism around (to give only one category of many) political prisoners. For instance, the activism around the imprisonment of American Indian Movement leader Leonard Peltier (Mathiessen 1991) or IRA militants (Clarke 1987), calls into question the active boundary between political opposition and crime. Moreover, innovative political art, such as the Million Dollar Blocks project (2006) based at the Justice Mapping Centre at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia University, places prisons in the context of housing policy in particular and state budgetary priorities more generally.

Even outside the specific realm of political activism, the popular and scholarly discussion of the porous boundary between prison and society proliferates at a rapid clip. Media reports on gang activity point to strong links between incarcerated gang members and those on the outside, and suggest that prisons are instrumental as recruiting stations (Spergel 1990). Prisons arguably reproduce and often exacerbate social problems, like the spread of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis (Buntman 2009, 407). For example, as Stern (1998) suggests, certain sectors of society expect to spend time in prison to one degree or another, more so if their relatives were incarcerated at some point. In a different register, religious groups, as well, may find rich sources of converts within prison walls (Johnson 2004; Johnson et al. 1997). Ethnographers Marchetti (2002) and Comfort (2002) explore factors such as the forced transfer of prisoners and the performance of certain 'outside' behaviours such as kinship gatherings and family celebrations behind bars, respectively. Combessie (2002), also an ethnographer, examines notions of good and evil exhibited in the labelling of officers and inmates, and the stigma of 'evil' that can be attached to ex-convicts on the 'outside'.

Whilst previous scholarship has focused attention on the prison boundary, and relations between 'inside' and 'outside', it has not yet interrogated the work of the boundary as a process in creating and stabilising these categories. Nor have the meanings, practices, articulations, materialities, and embodied performances that are in turn produced by that stabilisation been sufficiently examined. The second key aspect of this book takes up this gap in contemporary scholarship, addressing the boundary-as-process: the everyday cultural practices and performances entangled within and between the penal system, at the boundary itself. This book acts as both a manifesto and an implementation of my encounters with both of these key themes. As a geographer-criminologist having worked in both disciplinary departments, I sit on the border between two disciplines, concerning myself with not only prison and its spatial manifestations, but also, and more importantly, with the cultural practices that may permeate these spatial relationships.

Much of the academic discourse on the subject, however, explores the connections between prison and society chiefly at the abstract level of social, political, or economic *function*, arguing that prisons have a different, less constructive, more important, or more central functional place in society than is commonly assumed. Criminological analysis of the prison has largely focused on objective data collation and statistical outputs—reducing those involved with the penal system to inhuman objects, with serious moral as well as analytical consequences. As Bosworth et al. note:

> This tendency to downplay the emotional components of their research projects goes hand in hand with a more general failure to discuss the way that most prisoners conceal a tumult of unplumbed anger, frustration, fear, and outrage at their imprisonment. Without acknowledging their own emotions and the feelings of their contributors, criminologists too may disguise the waste of existence most prisoners experience year after year. This may, in turn, weaken their analysis and their ability to critique the penal system. (2005, 259)

As a geographer, I am interested in the prison/non-prison divide as an inside/outside boundary constituted *as a set of connections* that work

to construct, reinforce, and transgress that boundary. However, as a cultural scholar I am also intrigued by the personal attachments created by these connections. In order for prisons to have the functions ascribed to them, there must be various kinds of flows and exchanges across prison borders—flows of human bodies, funds, goods, family members, documents, oral communications, and contraband (Valentine and Longstaff 1998). Indeed, the points at which these flows and exchanges are scrutinised and regulated constitute 'the boundary' through the act of contravening it. This regulation includes mechanisms *within* the prison, such as the material apparatus of separation during visits, prison supply and waste procedures, protocols of conduct between inmates and guards, etc., and mechanisms *beyond* the prison, such as tagging and curfew practices, or requests for parole. The politics and practices of this boundary traffic bring with them associated meanings and attachments, all contributing to a unique interaction with the prison boundary. For example, inmates often retain meaningful friendships developed inside prison; or remain associated with the stigma of prison, once outside prison walls.

For many academics, the most timely sets of connections to consider are those that relate to prisoner reoffending and rehabilitation, based on the premise that developing stronger links between prisoners and the communities into which they will be released helps to reduce levels of recidivism. The impact that a positive family relationship, in particular, can have upon the reduction of recidivism is widely attended to by both scholars across a variety of disciplines (Comfort 2002, 2008; McGarrell and Hipple 2007; Mills and Codd 2008) and official reports (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons and Probation (HMIPP) 2001; Home Office 2004, 2006). In the following section I focus more specifically on these types of connections, which explicitly conceptualise a relationship between culture and prison.

1.1 The Culture of Prison

Scholars of the political economy concern themselves with the study of the relationship between economic and political processes (Stern and Reve 1980). Attention to this relationship has encompassed a long his-

tory of flux, largely precipitated by various versions of Marxist dialectical and analytical articulations. In its early guises, ontological attention to culture has involved the abstract delimitation of the 'cultural' from the 'economic'. However, following this, scholarship has made significant efforts to subsequently assert their entanglement. The cultural turn now stresses the importance of the diverse social relations between economics and state-shaping behaviour. As such, everyday behaviours—or cultural processes—are negotiated. This notion situates this book in a clear position: not ignoring political-economic factors that (re)produce the prison boundary, but rather foregrounding their entanglement with cultural facets. As Mitchell explains, culture is not in opposition, or separate from economics, politics, and social life. Indeed, 'none of these realms is really independent of one another', and further, 'the reason for defining culture … is that it allows us to see how the different realms interact with each other' (Mitchell 2000, 13–14).

In what follows, I understand culture in respect of shifts central to the so-called 'new' cultural geography: culture as ideology and meaning, culture as embodied practice and performance, and culture as material/informed by materiality (see Crang 1998; Horton and Kraftl 2013; Jackson 2000a; Mitchell 2000). Culture is also taken to refer to 'everyday' routines, rituals and activities, rather than seemingly exceptional or even sensational manifestations of culture (Crang 1998). Very recent work amongst carceral geographers[1] acknowledges an interest in the culture of prison as described in this way. For example, the everyday cultural practices enacted within prison are ripe for critique. Cohen (2011), among others, considers such everyday practices when he dwells on the importance of acknowledging an embodied, penal experience. These avenues are also being explored by McWatters (2010) and Mitchelson (2010), who emphasise the narrativisation of prisoners, while Moran (2013a), draws together recent work on emotion and affect as a means of understanding the personal experience of carceral space—that is, the experi-

[1] Throughout this book, I shall be referring to a geographical sub-discipline that has come to be known as carceral geography. The term was coined to describe the new and vibrant field of geographical research into practices of incarceration (Moran et al. 2011, 2012, 2013).