



## LJMU Research Online

**Scott, DG**

**Punishing the Other**

<http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/2975/>

### Article

**Citation** (please note it is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work)

**Scott, DG (2016) Punishing the Other. British Journal of Criminology: an international review of crime and society. ISSN 1464-3529**

LJMU has developed **LJMU Research Online** for users to access the research output of the University more effectively. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LJMU Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain.

The version presented here may differ from the published version or from the version of the record. Please see the repository URL above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information please contact [researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk)

<http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/>

Eriksson, A. (ed) *Punishing the Other: The Social Production of Immorality Revisited* London: Routledge, 2016, ISBN 978-1-138-77694-4 (hbk) 292 pages

*Punishing the Other: The Social Production of Immorality Revisited* is a timely collection of papers exploring the implications of Zygmunt Bauman's (1989) seminal study *Modernity and the Holocaust* for contemporary practices of criminalisation and social control. The end product is a valuable engagement with the writings of the most pre-eminent social thinker of the last three decades through a criminological lens. *Punishing the Other* will have broad appeal for criminologists, sociologists and scholars in related disciplines. It provides a helpful introduction for those encountering Bauman for the first time as well as being a welcome contribution to the growing secondary literature on Bauman's impressive oeuvre.

The central focus of *Punishing the Other* are Bauman's ideas on the social production of immorality. Drawing upon the philosophical work of Emmanuel Levinas, Bauman understands morality as responsibility for the Other. The ethical duty to care for the weak, powerless and those in need is an essential part of what is to be human and naturally arises from our being in the world with others. Emotional, physical or psychic 'proximity' with other people ensures that they are included in our moral universe. In contrast, when someone is placed at a 'social distance' from us we may feel less responsible for their wellbeing.

For Bauman, othering and social distancing are closely tied to the rise of an instrumental rationality exemplified by modern bureaucracies. The specialised division of labour, separating decision-makers from those who implement policies, inevitably results in a diffusion of responsibility. Further, through a narrow focus on specific objectives, such as key operational indicators, targets and outcomes, practitioners may fail to question or evaluate the ends of their given role or function. This clouding of the big picture can lead to social separation, negative stereotyping and dehumanising classifications that neutralise moral commitments. Bauman uses the term 'adiaphorization' to describe those practices that remove people from everyday encounters and consequently erode their membership of a shared moral community. Social distancing can generate ill-treatment and scenarios where exclusion of the Other is considered unproblematic: the Other is forgotten, invisibilised or met with cold indifference. In the twelve substantive chapters of *Punishing the Other* a number of world-leading criminologists explore how such insights from Bauman can be used to inform their own research areas.

One of the most notable achievements of the book is how the thought of Bauman is deployed to understand the policies, practices and consequences of immigration controls. Consideration is given to the difficulties facing non-citizens in achieving justice and how bureaucratic classifications and quasi-legal penal measures against documented and undocumented foreigners erode a wider sense responsibility. As Anna Aliverti puts it, the othering of non-citizens makes a "more intensive application of coercive powers against this group acceptable without seemingly offending standards of decency held dear in western societies" (p. 125). Aliverti also stresses that deportation is now being used alongside punitive sanctions to regulate non-

citizens, something raised likewise by Nicolay Johansen and Vanessa Barker. Johansen notes that current policies in Norway effectively amount to a deliberate attempt to expel the Romanian Roma population. Johansen powerfully applies Bauman's arguments about distantiation, denial of responsibility and adiaphorization to the Roma. Barker similarly identifies how legal classifications of 'foreignness' other non-citizens in Sweden, whilst Mary Bosworth, in a further important contribution, charts the presence of insidious and dehumanising discourses around securitisation and ambivalence in immigration detention.

Bauman's insights into the iatrogenic effects of detention are central to a number of other chapters. For Anna Eriksson "prisoners ... are convenient political cannon fodder. They are all too readily labelled, excluded, demonised and dehumanised" (p. 78). Drawing upon research on 230 staff and prisoners in 14 different prisons in Australia and Norway, Eriksson reiterates that prisons are bureaucratic organisations characterised by pain, need deprivation, moral condemnation and false hierarchies. In a more critical appraisal of Bauman's ideas on bureaucratic distantiation, Peter Scharff Smith notes that much penological literature points to the ideologies that underscore brutal penal practices, such as the doctrine of less eligibility. As such, Scharff Smith opens the way for a more considered application of the adiaphorization thesis.

The drawing of moral boundaries within the context of a neo-liberal 'post-solidarity project' is the focus of John Pratt's well-argued discussion of the deployment of penal symbolism against 'unwanted others' like sex offenders. In a similar vein, Anders Bruhn, Per-Åke Nylander and Odd Lindberg identify a number of factors leading to a weakening of 'Nordic exceptionalism'. These authors point to a growing social authoritarianism grounded in the logic of safety, security and protection permeating penal practices. For Bruhn, Nylander and Lindberg, distantiation and a systematic downplaying of human relationships occurs through a combination of increasingly specialised division of penal labour, the priorities of New Public Management, and the othering of offenders through rehabilitative discourses.

Jonathan Simon is equally pessimistic about current penal trends, describing prisons in the USA as a "human rights disaster" (p. 30). Simon, however, focuses on potential ways of combatting penal excess and hyper-incarceration through the human dignity principle. He calls this the 'legal civilising process' and argues its promotion may provide "legal sources of counter-power and resistance to degradation that take the form of litigation, public investigation and shaming, and norm-shaping within the penal and police bureaucracies" (p. 47). Recognition of dignity and the re-humanisation of Others are also key to the arguments of David Green, who calls for greater "emotional proximity" (p. 59) and de-bureaucratisation through the expansion of restorative, community and participatory justice. The significance of emotional proximity is further explored by Debra Smith in her rich ethnographic study of violent political activists operating in Northern Ireland during 'the Troubles', whilst Harry Blagg locates colonial violence against indigenous populations in the Global South in the context of 'liquid modernity'. Here Blagg carefully challenges Bauman's assertions regarding an intimate connection between genocide and the workings of modern bureaucratic machinery.

Overall, the level of engagement and critical dialogue with Bauman in the chapters of *Punishing the Other* is uneven. Whilst discontinuities are inevitable in an edited book, readers may feel that there could have been more critical dialogue between the authors regarding their contrasting interpretations of Bauman. The focus also shifts away from *Modernity and the Holocaust* at times. Different authors engage with different periods and aspects of Bauman's work rather than focusing exclusively on his writings on the social production of immorality. Whilst discussions of 'liquid modernity', for example, are accomplished, the differing foci give the book a slightly imbalanced feel.

One further difficulty when engaging with a hugely influential text such as *Modernity and the Holocaust* more than 25 years after publication is that there already exists a considerable body of secondary literature. Whilst *Punishing the Other* does break new ground, it misses the opportunity to establish links with the existing critical scholarship on the penalisation of the Other. The Bauman-inspired writings of Jock Young (1999) and Rene Van Swaaningen (1997) are rarely cited, as indeed is much of the work Bauman himself wrote on criminological concerns (see, for example, Bauman, 1993, 1995, and 1997). Whilst there is some reflection on the work of Nils Christie, discussion of his influential study *Crime Control as Industry: Towards Gulags Western Style?* is also absent. This is a shame given that Bauman himself describes Christie on more than one occasion as "the Great Criminologist" (Bauman, 1998: 75).

*Punishing the Other* is undoubtedly a significant contribution to the literature and a testament to the continued significance of Bauman's ethical thought to contemporary critical analysis. As well as bringing together new case studies, *Punishing the Other* will stimulate wider debate and highlight the importance of questioning the moral legitimacy of othering and its penal implications.

David Scott

Liverpool John Moores University

## References

- Bauman, Z. (1989) *Modernity and the Holocaust* Cambridge: Polity Press
- Bauman, Z. (1993) *Postmodern Ethics* Cambridge: Polity Press
- Bauman, Z. (1995) *Life in Fragments* Cambridge: Polity Press
- Bauman, Z. (1997) *Postmodernity and its Discontents* Cambridge: Polity Press
- Bauman, Z. (1998) *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* Buckingham: Open University Press
- Christie, N. (1993) *Crime Control as Industry: Towards Gulags Western Style?* London: Routledge

Swaaningen, R. van (1997) *Critical Criminology* London: Sage

Young, J. (1999) *The Exclusive Society* London: Sage