

PREFACE FROM THE MANAGING EDITORS

Starting with Prisoners' Standpoints, Following with Action

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The *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (JPP) was created three decades ago to serve as a scholarly platform for prisoners to share their experiences and analyses of incarceration, as well as to affect social change (Gaucher, 2002). For over two decades, *Convict Criminology* (CC) has also sought to privilege the accounts and insights of prisoners toward this end, which is why the journal has (Larsen and Piché, 2012) and continues to support the work they engage in today.

What the papers in this special issue edited by Andreas Aresti and Sacha Darke affirm is the power of starting with the standpoints of criminalized persons, which are not static or singular. Beginning with these standpoints forges a path toward an alternative criminology that shifts away from the dominant modes of conceptualizing and responding to acts that are criminalized and punished, which result in far too many human beings being confined to cages and subject to violent controls (Ross and Richards, 2003). Even some of the more critical and radical perspectives in the academic world often fail to fully grasp the value of such work (see Brich, 2008).

As CC forges ahead, we are encouraged that they have taken on the task of ensuring that the voices of criminalized women are at the forefront of the prisoner ethnography enterprise, which is rarely the case (for exceptions, see Elliott and Horii, 1994; Kilty, 2011; Shook et al, 2017). The pieces by Safak Bozhurt and Paula Harriott clearly illustrate how markers of difference, including gender, race, and class, shape imprisonment and vice-versa.

We are also supportive of CC's internationalization efforts, which have translated into several pieces in this issue from emerging scholars with links to the British *Convict Criminology* group such as Mark Alexander from the United Kingdom and Elton Kalica from Italy. As evident in the work by Sacha Darke and Jeffrey Ian Ross, there are on-going efforts to develop CC in the global south. By extending the work of facilitating contributions by current and former prisoners to criminological thought and praxis, such transnational connections have the potential to challenge, and lead to establishment of more alternatives to, the deprivation of liberty as a means of responding to criminalized conflicts and harms.

The papers that follow also show that access to education for criminalized persons and prisoners is a form of access to justice. The authors in this issue repeatedly illustrate that the facilitation, teaching, reading groups, and correspondence undertaken by multiple Convict Criminology groups and others (e.g. Inside-Out, Walls-to-Bridges) help bridge the divide between the inside and outside in ways that reaffirm the humanity and commitment learners share with one another. The contribution by the HMP Grendon and University of Westminster group in particular makes this evident. As they demonstrate, education fosters the formation of positive identities, exchange and knowledge development that has important reverberations for the communities we wish to build.

The authors in this collection also reveal that access to education inside is not enough. Once engaged in education there is a responsibility to do something with it. There is an obligation to advocate, to organize, and to challenge forms of power and oppression. In this sense, prisoner education and solidarity are crucial for transforming one's sense of self, but also for keeping people alive and building community across barriers imposed by prison walls. This is evident in the work of Thomas Mathiesen and the Norwegian Association for Penal Reform (KROM) has been involved with for several decades, which inspires CC as it continues to move forward.

As all the contributors in this issue demonstrate by example, when walls are erected to separate us from one another, we must actively commit to tearing down such barriers, both material and symbolic. Only through such efforts can life-affirming connections be built in place of penal control and torment.

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