

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S INTRODUCTION

Bob Gaucher

This edition of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* differs from our usual publications in two important ways. This is the first volume of the journal that focuses upon a non-Western society, and thus, extends the scope of our consideration of the carceral to include its expression in post-colonial Africa. The ethnographic form of presentation also differs. The composition of this volume takes the form of a narrative of discovery of the contributing editor. Viviane Saleh-Hanna provides an organizing framework of interpretation and a macro-sociological contextualization in which to locate the voices and stories of Nigerian prisoners. The prisoners' narratives elucidate the arbitrary justice and brutality of the carceral conditions they endure.

Immersion in a foreign culture can produce a healthy sense of dislocation and initiate a reflexive process of reinterpretation of the relations of self and other. Reading this text evoked my similar reordering experiences as a doctoral student in Sheffield (the socialist republic of South Yorkshire) in the mid-1970s. The myriad constant encounters that force us to notice and take into account, and often call into question, our own taken-for-granted interpretative understanding of social relations, when coupled with "sociological imagination" (Mills 1964) provide the spark for intellectual growth and insight (Mannheim 1936). The auto hermeneutics of this process demands that we (re)locate ourselves within our new understanding of the relations of self, society, and culture. Who am I? What are my responsibilities?

As editor and contributing author of this volume, Viviane Saleh-Hanna poignantly relates such a life-changing encounter with Nigerian culture(s) and the penal practices and carceral institutions of post-colonial Nigeria. The unfolding of the author's developing understanding of this society and the role of justice and imprisonment within it is grounded and elaborated by the written and oral contributions of Nigerian prisoners. Together they create a vivid portrait of contemporary penal practices and their function in the (re)production of social order in that society. Saleh-Hanna identifies the relations of penal power in contemporary urban life. From her varied encounters and engagements with Nigerian prisoners and the penal system, we gain valuable insight into the workings of this post-colonial state and the utility of penal systems of control at this point in its development. The

integration of stories, impressions, encounters, and dilemmas serves to enliven the narrative and reach across cultures. This is the first ethnographic account of the Nigerian penal system I have encountered and its revelations awaken us to the brutal realities of incarceration in that society. The analysis also broadens our understanding of the contemporary (Western) prison industrial complex, revealing the roots and continuities of the hegemonic “master pattern of surveillance and control” that Cohen (1985) identified. Where do we locate this contemporary Nigerian expression of penal control within that expanding, intensifying Western master pattern of state control?

In excavating the carceral tentacles of Western colonial governance in Nigeria, the text reveals a society in the early stages of transformation into a bourgeois social structure. This includes the development of the capitalist nation–state and its institutions of state control and discipline. Similar rudimentary stages of development of European capitalist societies were characterized by massive socio-economic and cultural dislocation, extreme poverty, and civil disorder. During this age of social upheaval and revolution (1789–1917), organized challenges to authority and mass uprisings resulted in the general establishment and eventual elaboration of state institutions of control. This necessity was addressed reluctantly by those in power, who were unwilling to expend the finances and were wary of establishing limits on their own predations. Within the general cultural specificity of Nigerian society, the same chaos producing conjunctures of capitalist transformation and development are apparent today. The response of Nigeria’s post-colonial elites also mirrors that of their European bourgeois predecessors.

This volume accomplishes more than this through its recognition of the universals of carceral control and penal custom, and by identifying their reflections in the prison industrial complexes of the control cultures of post-industrial societies like the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. Though at different stages of capitalist development, the essential dominating characteristics of carceral control and discipline are shared across cultural time and place. The “Deadly Symbiosis” (Wacquant 2001) of modern American institutionalized racism reappears as a moment in a long history of repression, the strange fruit of the deadly tree of slavery and penal servitude. In her reflections Saleh-Hanna reveals the extent of the capability of modern capitalist states and civil societies to mask and obfuscate the actual operations of criminal “just us” and the lasting brutalities that characterize it. Whether it’s a converted slave holding pen in West Africa or

the sterile world of marionized prisons and Death Row in the United States, the shared characteristics are apparent, such as the naked force and brutality that underlies the dominating disciplinary power of the carceral; the political and ideological utility and functionality of penal control within capitalist social formations; the role of the carceral in the management of class relations of their civil societies. The targeting of surplus labour populations and their social exclusion and disenfranchisement via criminalization are also shown to extend across time and place. They were as clearly evident in the prison hulks and penal colonies of 19th-century European societies as they are in Nigerian awaiting trial gulags. They are also well represented in the new dangerous classes: the social junk and social dynamite that clutters the landscape of “progress and development” of post-industrial capitalist societies (Taylor 1995). In this scenario, the disenfranchised are most functional as carceral commodities for the expanding international crime control industry. Most universal of all is the human misery that is created, which is palatable in these prisoners’ narratives, and the plight of those forgotten souls awaiting trial. These narratives and stories of Nigerian prisoners echo the pain and suffering that flow through centuries of prison writing (Brock 2004; Gaucher 2002; Davies 1990; Franklin 1989). Must this be the case? The author’s review of the International Conference on Penal Abolition X, held in Lagos, Nigeria in 2002, suggests otherwise. Apparent in the discourse of Nigerian conference participants was their openness to the abolitionist critique of Western criminal justice practices and to a return to traditional non-carceral approaches to social conflict.

RESPONSE

The “Response” in this issue is a tribute to the identity, resistance, and survival struggles of James V. Allridge III, who was executed by the state of Texas on August 26, 2004. James spent 17 years on Death Row during which time his brother Ronald (June 8, 1995) and many friends were executed. Despite the solitude and constraints of Death Row, and the constantly impending threat of execution, James was able to develop and establish himself as an artist and writer, and a campaigner against the death penalty. His artwork was exhibited in Europe and across North America. The international support he garnered for his petition for clemency attested to the recognition he received. James contributed four articles and three cover art

drawings to the *JPP*. Through his art, resistance, and social relations, James embodied the universal spirit and dignity of those struggling for survival in the face of penal brutality and oppression. He touched many of us, and the strength of his character and spirit reached over the wall and barbed wire to illuminate life and death in the antiseptic slaughterhouses of the U.S. prison industrial complex. His pointless execution stands as a testament to the uncompromising power and brutality inherent in state carceral control. The torment and victimization of his family and friends over two decades attests to its acquired insensitivity.

CHANGES

Volume 14:1 also represents a “coming out party” for a new member of our editorial group, **Viviane Saleh-Hanna**. Currently a doctoral student (ABD) at the University of Indiana, Bloomington, Viviane has been active in the penal abolition movement and a supporter of the *JPP* since her undergraduate years at the University of Ottawa. Viviane played a major role in the organization and the hosting of the International Conference on Penal Abolition X (ICOPA) in Lagos, Nigeria (2002) and is currently supporting ICOPA XI, which will be held February 9–11, 2006 in Tasmania, Australia (see http://www.justiceaction.org.au/ICOPA/ndx_icopa.html). We are pleased to add such a kindred spirit, keen mind, and boundless energy to our collective endeavours.

Howard Davidson has retired as managing editor and we would like to thank him for his many efforts for the cause. He has handled many complicated transition issues and continues on the editorial board. Our latest transition has been a new affiliation with the **University of Ottawa Press (UOP)**. We look forward to working with the **Director, Ruth Bradley-St-Cyr**. Ruth is a fellow traveller in the critique of penal justice and in her support for penal abolition and radical alternatives. In the past she worked closely with **Ruth Morris** on the production of several of her books, including *Stories of Transformative Justice* (2000), and *The Case for Penal Abolition* (2000, edited with Gordon West). Ruth Morris was a founder of ICOPA and the penal abolition movement, and an original and long-time member of the *JPP* editorial board. When it became clear that Ruth Morris was unable to complete her last work, *Transcending Trauma* (2005), she asked Ruth Bradley-St-Cyr to complete it for her. Ruth Bradley-St-Cyr also

published the book under her own imprint, Winding Trail Press. The spirit of co-operation Ruth brings to her work will significantly benefit the needed reorganization of production and distribution of the journal. She becomes, *de facto*, managing editor of the journal as all correspondence, submissions, and subscriptions will now be funnelled through the University of Ottawa Press. The first decision was to return to the biannual format. We ask all our readers and contributors to help out with our new subscription drive (note the LOWERED subscription prices!) and note our change of address. Course orders and back issues can be requested directly from University of Toronto Press Distribution. See page ii for the new addresses.

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