

POWER AND RESISTANCE IN PRISON: DOING TIME, DOING FREEDOM. By THOMAS UGELVIK (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 296, £65.00)

This insightful and eloquently-written book utilises rich ethnographic fieldwork to describe the intricacies of prison life and analyse the relationship between forms of power, practices of resistance and subjectivity of prisoners. In summary, this is a book concerned with the everyday workings of the penal institution but in particular the position of prisoners as an active component in a landscape of state power and disciplinary regime. In his conceptual framework, Ugelvik introduces the book as an exploration of “the interconnected and mutually dependent relationship between power and freedom” (p. 4). Here Ugelvik provides examples of how various methods of spatial and personal resistance contributes to the ongoing renegotiation of power between prisoner and the prison, which more widely embodies that between state and subject.

In *Power and Resistance in Prison*, Ugelvik provides an unusually-rich monograph, which draws upon his empirical work – namely extensive fieldwork in Norway’s largest prison – to explore this complex interplay between control and opposition. As the author confesses, the attention of the book is not towards acts of resistance like “tying sheets together, sawing through bars or scaling walls”, which produce “spectacular events that would fill the front pages of newspapers” (p. 12). Instead, Ugelvik illustrates encounters of power in the day-to-day lives of the prisoner. He explores how various, seemingly banal components of living – such as food, living space, the body and moral codes – play out in the physical environment and reveal wider regimes of power and resistance. The author’s aim for this book is to “make the prisoners understandable also outside the specific context of the prison” (p. 15). In my opinion, this is one of the book’s greatest successes. Herein is a wonderfully descriptive account, rich in anecdotal stories that raise empathetic reactions from the reader: stories of comfort food, good parenthood and personal relationships. The text is thick with adjectival phrasing, which allows the words to leap from the page and evoke visual imagery without the use of a single photograph or illustration throughout the book. Here you will find a stark differentiation between Ugelvik’s monograph and its counterparts. What this book is not is a thorough and measured theoretical account of power and resistance and all the great thinkers that have gone before. It does not teem with references and dissect scholarly standpoints. What it does instead is something very courageous. It is wholeheartedly an ethnography. These vivid descriptions are left to speak for themselves; to instigate (or even demand) theoretical attention of their own, of their own accord. For Ugelvik, the relationship between power and freedom (in prison and beyond) is a practical and performative issue. Similarly, his own writing is both practice and performance of the fieldwork he has conducted. He explains how by visiting prison wings (as opposed to sitting in decision-making spaces such as offices and so on) he could study how decisions *played out* in the spaces of the prison. His intensive prose forces the reader to visualise these practices, undertake their own analysis and evoke their own theoretical concerns – to consider how this evidence *plays out* in the scholarly mind. The excerpts from the field diaries are frank, and their appraisal is something academic scholars might not expect. It is honest and littered with bad language. Sometimes, then, the book borders on shocking reading. But this adds value, characterisation and atmosphere. As such, it is a fine example of an ethnographic strategy and an innovative and brave example of its data presentation.

Central to the discussion on power in prison is the recognition of the multi-faceted space of the cell. Acting as both public and private space simulating all the rooms in the home on the outside from the dining room to the bathroom, the cell is pertinent example of how resistant practices can transform space and the activities that take place within in. The chapter entitled *Taking Liberties* forms the substantive section of the book and is a wonderfully-written foray into the innovative ways in which prisoners resist the limiting practices imposed upon them. Here, everyday practices such as making ‘proper’ coffee, inviting guests in to share a meal and listening to music are marked as symbols of “creativity and self-determination” (p. 153). In the presentation of his material, Ugelvik counteracts the assumption of a prisoner population who may “look like losers ... with all sorts of

problems, the sort who own little and have to steal to survive or sustain their substance abuse” (p. 109). Instead, the activities of the individuals described are practiced on a foundation of friendship, parental instinct and a strict moral code. Food, for example, has a role in home-making, marking cultural heritage and becomes a method of traversing the prison boundary; the body changed and scarred by violence is a symbol of masculinity and respect; and behaviour that transgresses prison rules is legitimised if it ensures family connections are upheld and relationships are long-lasting despite the barrier of the prison wall. These empirical sections are fascinating – the text enlivens everything from the surface of skin riddled by bullet holes to a recipe for spiced-tuna fish concocted in a makeshift cell-kitchen. The discussion of prison food is particularly absorbing. Ugelvik’s prison *bricoleur* – a jack- or “trickster of all trades” (p.142) – creates acceptable culinary arts by procuring tools and ingredients. Surplus milk is stored and strained through t-shirts to create soft cheese; eggs fried with desk lamps; and rudimentary cell furniture rearranged discretely to create social dining occasions. Indeed, many times I was left wanting to know more about the make-shift devices and illegitimate techniques prisoners had entrepreneurially developed to undertake prohibited activities. Ugelvik does not reveal those. Although in doing so he has disappointed my curious (perhaps voyeuristic) Mr Hyde, I am reminded of the particular politics of being a prison researcher, which acknowledge problematic arguments surrounding intrusion and interpretation of such a complex arena of study. In these instances, *Power and Resistance in Prison* exemplifies the ongoing battles between rigor, creative presentation and ethical conduct for scholars undertaking research in these environments.

Beyond this, Ugelvik develops some thought-provoking lenses of analysis that extend the field of interest in contemporary criminology: notably space, place and geographical context. As a geographically-trained academic, I find these facets both interesting and important. For example, beyond its study of prison life, this book is also a cultural ethnography of a Norwegian prison. As such, it should make us appreciate more deeply the nuances of prison spaces, taking cultural compositions, heritage - and how these may intertwine, clash, and converge across realms of incarceration - to the forefront of our imagination. For example, in concluding, Ugelvik recognises the significance of resistance as a central component of facilitating rehabilitation. In order to implement a regime that may enable the reduction of reoffending, contact between prisoners and between prisoners and officers is vital despite the fact that it may result in various levels of subterfuge (p. 243). Subsequently, this book becomes an important consideration of the binary co-producer of freedom: the tensions between power and resistance encompassed by a wider distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and ‘good’ and ‘bad’. As such, there is a wider message apparent about how society functions through mutually-constructive but oppositional terms of prisoner, criminal, officer and the free. Yet, these spatial tenets are not apparently referential within this text.

For me, *Power and Resistance in Prison* marks an important potentiality for criminological scholarship to take seriously the role of spatial relationships in its research; and I hope that scholars will take lead from this intervention. In summary, scholars investigating the lived experiences of prison space, those concerned with society and governance, and those hoping to master the difficult art of good ethnography will all find sections particularly useful in this wide-ranging yet thorough and genuinely readable book.

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