



**Editorial: Liverpool**

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## ***Editorial***

**Vickie Cooper<sup>1</sup>**

What does social control look like in the aftermath of the global financial crisis 2007/08? What form does punishment take in this current climate of austerity? How can radical communities resist the assault on social and legal justice? These were some of the questions underpinning the theme of the European Group Conference, held in Liverpool, 2014: 'Resisting the Demonisation of the Other - State Nationalism and Social Control in a Time of Crisis'. This issue collates some of the arguments presented at this conference.

The current fiscal crisis bears all the same hallmarks of the fiscal crisis of the late 70s and early 80s, but it is also markedly different. After 40 years of neo-liberal economic policy, we have seen the Welfare State attacked across Europe under conditions of austerity. Private investors are accorded greater credence and invited, actively encouraged, to purchase public sector institutions and make a profit. Governments are unravelling various aspects of public life and violating rights that were once deemed untouchable. Vulnerable, precarious and insecure, these conditions pave the way for a more harmful, albeit antiquated, mode of capitalism that emerges in the form of 'credit consumerism', 'debt', 'risk' and 'interest'. In lieu of living wages and adequate welfare, people must capitulate and are subjected to the most aggressive form of capitalism: debt.

Our first author Daniel Jiménez Franco posits a materialist critique of recent penal transformations in the current context of the Spanish 'debtfare'. Debtfare refers to a form of governing 'through debt' where governments are not necessarily concerned with lowering debt, but governing in ways that further subjects people to the logics of market capitalism. Daniel proposes an interesting argument: that we are entering a new political economy of punishment where austerity is reversing the three-decade rise in imprisonment. In this new political economy of punishment we are seeing a general

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administration of punishment that leads to widespread exclusion and expulsion, where public policy targets the dispossessed in harmful ways, producing a new type of 'painfare'.

Given the colossal scale of dispossession, exclusion and expulsion unfolding under austerity-led regimes, levels of social conflict have intensified. In our second article, Alejandro Forero argues that any resistance and radical alternative to this economic restructuring is being met with the enduring techniques of State repression and exceptionalism. The opponents of austerity are the new targets of this repression. Alejandro provides a reappraisal of positivist criminology and draws interesting parallels between the 19th Century constructions of 'anarchists' with present day State discourses and practices that lead to the criminalisation of people organising radical alternatives and participating in radical communities.

But radical communities must also confront violence and conflict arising from within the community, as well as the violence coming from outside, from the State. In our third article, Julia Downes argues that sexual violence, misogyny and sexism - a violence that is so pervasive in the very social institutions that radical communities are resisting - is also widespread within radical communities. Julia reveals interesting and original data about survivors' experience of speaking out about sexual violence within the community; and the silencing strategies they were subject to. Challenged and discredited at every turn, Julia not only highlights the risks involved for people speaking out, but also inverts the gaze and asks what can the community do in providing a valuable space for survivors to transform society as part of a process of recovery and healing?

These questions are broadly echoed in our fourth article by Lisa White, who highlights the virtues of 'Testimonio' as a form of resistance that can mobilize social change. A Latin American term, Testimonio refers to spoken or written accounts, which give voice to the experiences of oppressed and subjugated peoples. In the context of Northern Ireland conflict, Lisa demonstrates how Testimonio can involve different forms of expression to give voice to people's direct and vicarious accounts of violence and oppression, e.g. memoirs, oral histories, qualitative vignettes, prose, song lyrics, or spoken word performance. Lisa highlights the various risks for those speaking out, testimonialistas, and explores the role of the audience in bringing about regime change and facilitating transitional justice.

This brings us to the fifth article, presented by Becky Clarke, Kathryn Chadwick and Patrick Williams. Becky, Kathryn and Patrick begin by engaging us

in an interesting and reflective dialogue about the role of 'the academic' in supporting communities, ordinarily 'othered' by the very positivist and administrative criminology discourses that inform policy and practice. Reflecting on their ongoing relationships with community groups, presently resisting social injustice (Hillsborough and JENGBA), they ask how they can 're-humanise the other' by focusing on 'voices from below'.

Each article reveals an interesting narrative about 'the community': the criminalisation and victimisation of communities, 'othered' communities and communities of solidarity. But these accounts are not straightforward or unambiguous. Authors elucidate the multiple contradictions, paradoxes and internal politics that we must recognise, negotiate and reconcile. In our final journal article, Mary Corcoran provides a critical assessment of 'the community' and its political function under the current post-crash, post welfare climate. Mary's principal argument is that tropes of 'community' have offered a convenient template for facilitating neoliberal political agendas about the essentially private and individualistic nature of volunteering, citizenship or rights of participation. This agenda is mirrored in the accelerated scale and pace of privatisation, deregulation and outsourcing to charitable and for-profit consortia to run prisons, prisoner educational and employment programmes, housing, court duties, probation and resettlement services. But rather than succeed in conforming citizens to the current doctrine of market hegemony, governments have provoked a politics yearning and urgency for identity and place - in both left and right political circles.

A further three short pieces from activist groups are also collated in this issue. Articles from Reclaim Justice; Northern Policing Monitoring Project; and Reclaim Holloway have been compiled to provide the audience with crucial insight into the everyday injustices affecting people at the local level and as a means of illustrating how these community groups and coalitions are organizing to raise awareness and bring about social change.