

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

**Jenna M. Loyd, Matt Mitchelson and Andrew Burridge (eds)**, *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-8203-4411-9 (cloth); ISBN: 978-0-8203-4412-6 (paper); ISBN: 978-0-8203-4492-8 (ebook)

**Dominique Moran, Nick Gill and Deirdre Conlon (eds)**, *Carceral Spaces: Mobility and Agency in Imprisonment and Migrant Detention*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2013. ISBN: 978-1-4094-4268-4 (cloth); ISBN: 978-1-4094-4269-1 (ebook)

Since the 1980s, a series of tough-on-crime reforms have swelled the US federal prison population by nearly 790% to 219,000 inmates (Flatow 2013). Meanwhile, intensified border and immigration enforcement efforts throughout the country have expanded the number of individuals detained in immigration detention facilities from 70,000 annually in 1996 to nearly 400,000 annually in 2012 (Detention Watch Network 2013). While the United States has the highest rates of incarceration and immigrant detention and deportation globally, the number of people held behind bars is increasing throughout the world.

Despite the fact that critical geographers and others have long examined the economic, cultural, and political processes driving imprisonment and immigration enforcement, as well as the experiences of those who are confined within these systems, it is only recently that explicit attention has focused on bringing these two fields of research into conversation. Two new edited volumes, *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis* and *Carceral Spaces: Mobility and Agency in Imprisonment and Migrant Detention*, are recent examples of the intellectual and political benefits of merging these two fields. In what follows, I briefly highlight the central differences between the two edited volumes and review the key contributions they

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

make, before concluding with a discussion of potential research directions for this field of scholarship.

While the collections have the same general goal of merging research on imprisonment and immigrant detention, they approach the issues from somewhat different perspectives and have different geographic scopes. The contributions to *Beyond Walls and Cages* are linked by an abolitionist framework—an explicitly political approach that aims to end forced imprisonment and detention practices globally in favor of more socially just and reparative processes for dealing with conflict, and which links contemporary practices of forced detention with historical legacies of colonialism and slavery. The explicitly political focus of *Beyond Walls and Cages* is reflected in the diverse voices that are represented in the volume—contributions by abolitionist activists, artists, and those who have been forcibly confined are intermingled with more traditional scholarly analyses by academic researchers from disciplines including geography, criminology, sociology, and cultural and women’s studies. This diversity of voices and perspectives is one of the strengths of the volume: taken collectively the reader is given a complex and multifaceted picture of imprisonment and detention. For example, throughout the second half of the volume, activists and scholars from throughout the US reflect on local struggles against immigration detention and imprisonment; from Montana to Arizona, and New York to Los Angeles, contributors illustrate both the particularity of place-based struggles and the political economies and cultural ideologies that link them.

While *Beyond Walls and Cages* is in many ways a book by and for activists, *Carceral Spaces* is a more traditional scholarly text that aims to define carceral geography as a new field of research that explores the overlaps and (dis)continuities between practices of forced confinement. The editors argue for an expansive definition of carceral space that includes “the forms of confinement that burst internment structures and deliver carceral effects without

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

physical immobilization, such as electronic monitoring, surveillance and securitized public spaces” (p.240). As a number of pieces in the collection illustrate, widespread processes of criminalization and securitization have turned seemingly benign public spaces into spaces of surveillance and policing, disrupting simplistic binaries of confinement/freedom.

In exploring the complexities of carceral geographies, this volume takes a wider geographic scope than *Beyond Walls and Cages*. While *Beyond Walls and Cages* focuses almost exclusively on the North American context (notable exceptions are the comparative pieces by Joseph Nevins, who looks at US border and immigration policies in relation to the South African apartheid regime, and Cynthia Bejarano and colleagues, who discuss the concept of border sexual conquest in the US/Mexico and Spain/Morocco border regions), the contributions that compose *Carceral Spaces* include case studies from a wider variety of contexts, including the EU (for example, the UK, Romania and France), Russia and Colombia. Furthermore, pieces such as that by Nancy Hiemstra transcend nation-state borders by tracing the ‘chaotic geographies’ of detention and deportation as they reverberate between the US and sending communities in Ecuador. While inherently incomplete, this diversity of cases is one of the important strengths of *Carceral Spaces* for it provides an interesting framework to think through how practices of imprisonment and detention vary (or don’t) across geographic, political, cultural, and economic context.

Taken together, *Beyond Walls and Cages* and *Carceral Spaces* make a number of important contributions to the existing critical geographic scholarship on imprisonment and migrant detention. Firstly, and most importantly, these texts highlight the analytic potential and political possibilities inherent in thinking through the complex political economies and ideological frameworks that link various systems of forced confinement. While scholars and activists have long examined the political economy driving the ever expanding prison industrial

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

complex, contributors to these volumes link this expansion and its effects to the proliferation of immigrant detention centers and criminalization of unauthorized migration. In doing so, both books help to draw what Cindi Katz (2001) has referred to as counter topographical lines of connection and understanding that are important for countering hegemonic power relations and creating more just social relations.

Secondly, these collections do important analytic work in complicating overly simplistic binaries that limit our ability to understand the complexities of imprisonment and immigrant detention as both distinct and deeply interrelated. For example, the first half of *Carceral Spaces* explores the issue of mobility in order to challenge the simplistic linking of mobility with freedom. Rather, the contributions by Nick Gill and others (Bénédicte Michalon; Dominique Moran *et al.*) examine the ways in which mobility is manipulated to limit individual access to legal counsel and to serve as a form of punishment (see also Alison Mountz's essay in *Beyond Walls and Cages*). While critical geographers and criminologists have long discussed how limitations on mobility function in a punitive fashion and serve to reproduce hierarchical power relations, these authors illustrate the 'dark side' of mobility as it is mobilized punitively within prisons and detention centers.

Third, these volumes draw attention to the various and complicated ways in which those who are forcibly confined enact agency. Be it through hunger strikes (Deirdre Conlon in *Carceral Spaces*), creative communication strategies (Julie de Dardel), or coalition organizing that bridges the blurry inside/outside divide of forced confinement (Joshua Price in *Beyond Walls and Cages*; Bob Libal *et al.*), stories presented throughout these volumes don't paint those incarcerated or detained as simply helpless victims of the system. Rather, we see repeatedly how individuals organize for change using a variety of creative strategies and multifaceted approaches.

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

Fourth, *Beyond Walls and Cages* in particular offers an important self-reflexive critical analysis of the immigrant rights and prison abolition movements from those inside the movements. For example, Mariana Viturro's examination of the immigrant rights movement illustrates the inherent limitations of failing to link the struggles of working-class people of color and migrants. As she insightfully writes, "Unemployment and underemployment will continue to rise, divisions between poor communities will deepen, and anti-immigrant sentiments and attacks will increase unless key grassroots forces seek to build alliances and advance a united antiracist agenda that will benefit all working-class people and people of color" (p.283). As the pieces by Price, Laura McTighe, Rashad Shabazz, and Subhash Kateel go on to illustrate, the struggle against imprisonment and detention must be a struggle against all forms of division and boundary making upon which hierarchical social relations are built—including racism, patriarchy and heteronormativity. This glimpse inside the conflicts and tensions among activists and movement factions provides useful insight into the messy realities of social movements and their constant process of becoming.

While these volumes do important work of connecting issues of imprisonment and immigrant detention, they also expose a number of gaps in existing research and analysis and point to directions for future research. I will highlight two here. Firstly, more attention could be paid to exploring the methodological practices and analytic limitations within much existing research on forced confinement. While much research included in these volumes draws on interviews with those detained or incarcerated and participant observation with various activist organizations, the voices of those who work in prisons and detention centers are rarely discussed. As those who work on issues of imprisonment and immigrant detention know well, these are systems that are defined by a high degree of variability and individual discretion. Decisions regarding if an individual is moved between detention centers, denied medical treatment or

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

access to legal counsel, or put into solitary confinement most often fail to abide by official protocols and policies. Thus, a more comprehensive understanding of the practices and processes of forced confinement necessitates examining not only the experiences of those who are confined and those who advocate on their behalf, but also those who work within and for (and sometimes against) the system. While there are many institutional obstacles to doing research inside prisons and immigration detention centers, I fear that it is often more the ideological and ethical positions we take as activists and scholars that make us avoid talking to those so often assumed to be on the ‘wrong’ side (or, in this case, the inside). However, it seems that activists and scholars alike could gain much from a more grounded understanding of the beliefs and values that propel individuals to work in the belly of the beast and structure their interactions with those forcibly detained. This type of knowledge may help us to better advocate for changes within the system (be they in practice or policy) while also working for its demise (see Gusterson 1998 and Mountz 2010 for examples of ethnographies that skillfully negotiate similar institutional and ideological complexities).

Secondly, while contributors to both volumes implicitly or explicitly critique practices of forced confinement, we are given few examples of alternatives. It would be useful to see more work that grapples with what a world without prisons or borders and immigration enforcement would look like *in practice*. How would conflict be dealt with? How might rights and entitlements be guaranteed outside of the framework of the nation-state and citizenship? These are difficult questions, but ones that we could learn much from directly addressing.

In conclusion, *Beyond Walls and Cages* and *Carceral Spaces* are important contributions to the existing critical geographic scholarship on imprisonment and immigrant detention. In bringing individuals working on both issues into conversation, these volumes broaden our understanding of the political, economic, and cultural processes that result in ever increasing

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

numbers of people throughout the world being forcibly confined. Taken together, these volumes provide readers with both situated, embodied accounts of experiences of and struggles against forced confinement and intellectually provocative theoretical analyses of the socio-spatial processes that drive them.

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# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

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