Discourse, governmentality and translation:

Towards a social theory of imprisonment

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Abstract

The central claim of this article is that microsociological accounts of prison life should not be divorced from questions that relate to the macrosociological roles that the institution performs in society. The argument developed in the article provides a way of thinking that brings the sociology of the prison into a more theoretically comprehensive account of strategies of domination and transformation, without falling victim to limited understandings of how imprisonment is experienced in time and place. To this end, the literature associated with 'translation' and 'governmentality' is described to indicate the key elements that enable an analysis of how power operates. The diverse forces, techniques and rationalities that comprise penal systems are deployed through the various discourses identified in the article. These discourses are discussed in relation to the dominant alignments present in an English prison from 1965 to 1990, the construction of gendered conduct and contemporary strategies of exclusion in the West to illustrate some elements in a move towards a social theory of imprisonment.

Introduction

The sociology of imprisonment can be characterized as a field of inquiry marked by a range of disparate and largely unconnected studies of particular aspects of imprisonment, and more generally punishment. The sense of disconnection emanates, in part, from the diverse array of intellectual traditions drawn upon and is indicative of the inherent complexity of imprisonment as a social phenomenon. In order to make sense of this literature it is instructive to distinguish two fairly discrete and discontinuous research traditions. One body of inquiry is microsociological in orientation with a focus on the internal dynamics of a particular institution and reveals what the experiences of imprisonment are *like* for the keepers and the kept. In contrast the other tradition is more macrosociological and describes the external functions of imprisonment, and thereby illustrating what punishment is *for*.

Many of the classic monographs in the former microsociological field (e.g. Clemmer, 1958; Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Mathiessen, 1965; Cohen and Taylor, 1981) have concentrated on particular prisons and, with varying degrees of success, have illuminated the day-to-day routines, struggles and accommodations within institutions. Recent accounts of this nature in England include those studies by Genders and Player (1995), King and McDermott (1995), Sparks *et al.* (1996) and Bosworth (1999).

Alternatively, penal practices, in the latter macrosociological literature, are related to broader social processes, economic relations, political structures, historical formations and cultural sensibilities (e.g. Rusche and Kirchheimer, 1968; Foucault, 1977; Pashukanis, 1978; Durkheim, 1983). While the central contributors in this trajectory of thought differ widely in their interpretations, they each shed light on the different roles that punishment performs in society. For example, while Durkheim emphasizes the sentiment-based, morality affirming and solidarity producing functions of punishment, Foucault depicts the disciplinary principles of incarceration implicated in processes of domination and subjectification that stretch far beyond prison walls.

Sparks *et al.* (1996) provide a wide-ranging account of the sociology of imprisonment where they discuss the literature on the microsociology of prison life, the macrosociology of penal change and Foucault's examination of the technologies of disciplinary power to understand how order is achieved under conditions of confinement. The authors seem implicitly to accept that there is a worrying division of labour in prison sociology as they turn to Giddens's (1976, 1979, 1984) structuration theory to make sense of the structural and systemic dimensions of order and disorder in prisons 'and their contingent, local occurrence in specific times and places between real people' (Sparks *et al.*, 1996: 69). While their work attempts to situate the study of prisons in relation to broader concerns in social theory and thereby refresh the tradition, it fails to acknowledge that there are a number of failings in structuration theory. In particular while Giddens can

yield sophisticated understandings of agency (which is acknowledged below) Sparks *et al.* (1996) seem to pass over the fact that a conceptual apparatus to deal with more macrosociological issues, such as already existing objective relations of domination and subordination, is absent in structuration theory. For, in Giddens, these relations are characterized as a practical accomplishment instantiated by actors and, consequently, they cannot possess any enduring structure. In his opposition to deterministic approaches that marginalize human agency, Giddens has succeeded in marginalizing serious considerations of objective power relations.

In this article I want to advance a conceptual framework that can account for the diversity of micro-levels of action and how these practices relate to broader modes of regulation and transformation at the global level. To this end, the literature associated with 'translation' and 'governmentality' is first described to draw out the key elements that enable an understanding of how power operates. There then follows a discussion of how various discourses enable the powerful to act in prison. My argument is that discourses structure action, belief and conduct. The discussion turns to an analysis of the particular discursive alignments in an English prison from 1965 to 1990, which straddles a significant era in the strategies of regulation practised in the West.

An ungendered social theory is, to say the least, asymmetrical if not antisocial. Consequently, I will demonstrate how penal discourses construct masculinities and femininities. It is one of the strengths of feminist prison sociology that the concern has been to indicate how prisons for women are intimately connected with discourses on feminine conduct in and beyond prison walls (see, *inter alia*, Carlen, 1983; Howe, 1994; Bosworth, 1999). It is not only crucial that such an understanding is extended to prisons for men, as I argue below, but also that a way of thinking is developed to indicate how such discourses are translated into the practices operating in male and female prisons.

Yet, it is also the case that a social theory of imprisonment that restricts itself to the action within an institution is unlikely to make sense of what the prison is for, in any meaningful social, political or cultural sense. I will conclude with indications of how the arguments in this article can shed light, more generally, on contemporary strategies of managing the dangerous, strange and unwanted. The most developed understanding of contemporary penality is contained in Feeley and Simon's (1992, 1994) analysis of strategies of social control in the administration of exclusion. I will finish with some remarks on how their characterization needs to be understood not as a substitution of one form of control with another, but rather as the extension and intensification of bureaucratic means of regulation to manage unwanted populations and polluting strangers.

It should be clear that this is a provisional project and represents a move towards a social theory of imprisonment. I am not sure whether a 'fully social theory' is possible, or even desirable, not least because it is very hard to see how an analysis can hope to do everything at once. Consequently, it

is entirely sensible and analytically defensible to select particular themes or objects for critical scrutiny, as there is much to be gained from specifty rather than totality. Nevertheless, accounts of prison life should not be divorced from questions that relate to the role the institution performs in society, seeing them as somehow irrelevant, or as purely matters for public policy. My intention is to offer a way of thinking that brings the sociology of the prison into a more theoretically comprehensive account of strategies of domination and regulation, without falling victim to limited under-standings of how imprisonment is experienced at particular times and places.

Translation and governmentality

In order to develop an analytical framework that reveals what power *does*, the literature that has developed in the sociology of science and technology as well as recent, Foucauldian inspired analyses of 'governmentality', will be applied to imprisonment. The former literature tends to focus on technological innovations and scientific controversies, and has developed an approach known as a 'sociology of translation' or, as it is sometimes referred to, 'actor-network theory' (some key statements would include Callon and Latour, 1981; Callon, 1986; Callon *et al*., 1986; Latour, 1986, 1994; Law, 1994). My own preference is for the term translation, as it implies transformations, deformations and dislocations, whereas an actor-network suggests a system that is static, transparent and unmediated.[1] Nevertheless, the importance of this perspective is that it explicitly ad-dresses the macro–micro issue and articulates the fundamental problem involved in analytical bracketing, for we 'should miss the point completely, if we distinguish between "individuals" and "institutions" if we supposed that the first fell within the sphere of psychology, and the second of economic history' (Callon and Latour, 1981: 279). The approach does not imply that there are no powerful actors, but rather that the focus must be on how power relations are constructed and maintained.

The argument is based on the crucial principle of symmetry—both the macro and micro should be approached from the same analytical per-spective, rather than switching between 'psychology' and 'economic his-tory' depending on the level of analysis as size is the consequence of struggle. The importance of the principle of symmetry is that it 'suggests that we might treat size as a product or an effect, rather than something given in the nature of things' (Law, 1994: 11). The alternative to this approach is to assume that the macro and micro are fundamentally different, which raises two significant problems. First, it prevents the analyst from examining how macro phenomena *become* macro and are able to *be* dominant. It hides, in other words, the fact that domination is a condition that is permanently worked at. Second, this division ultimately

serves to denigrate micro situations of interactions as they do not address the 'big' questions relating to macro structures.

Such problems may be avoided only if it is accepted that size, inequality, domination and so forth are continually produced. This production is captured by the notion of 'translation', which is defined as the way 'we understand all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force' (Callon and Latour, 1981: 279). As a result the relationship between power and structure is conceptualized and constituted in terms of networks, alliances, points of resistance, instability and relative durability. These are important propositions and they have far-reaching implications. For example, the microsociology of prison life is profoundly *asymmetrical*. In practically every account the analytical gaze is skewed towards prisoners. While this can illuminate the pains, degradations and so forth experienced by the confined, it tells us little about how the powerful are able to *be* powerful (see also Liebling, this issue, pp. 333–357). I take this to be a fundamental issue raised by this body of work on science and technology, which has been summarized in the following terms:

> Without taking sides, without reducing all action to the manifestation of some agencies' putative intentions or interests, or making it the outcrop of some structure, the approach provides an empirical sociology of power, rather than a moral philosophy. By attending to politically engaged agents seeking to constitute agencies, to constitute interests, to constitute structures, the method seeks to map how agents do 'translate' phenomena into resources, and resources into organization networks of control, of alliance, of coalition, of antagonism of interest and of structure.
>
> (Clegg, 1989: 204)

It is my intention to demonstrate how the practice of imprisonment can be usefully understood through the translation of such networks, which constitute both agency and structure. In order to offer a more symmetrical analysis I will concentrate on the powerful as actors in a penal institution in the following section.

The emergent 'governmentality' literature is also useful as it can inform an understanding of imprisonment at both the micro- and macro-levels of analysis. I first describe the reasons why Foucault turned to this domain of inquiry. I then discuss Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller's examination of 'political rationalities' and 'governmental technologies' since they provide the conceptual vocabulary to make sense of the widely divergent ways of thinking on what imprisonment is for and how it is experienced in particular institutional sites. This last point will then be considered in light of historical research I conducted at a male prison in the north-west of England.

Foucault's (1991) reflections on governmentality have been read as a response to criticisms from the Left that his (1977) attentiveness to the

micro-physics of power failed to address such matters as the relations between society and the state, and that his ideas about the production of 'docile bodies' left no space for meaningful agency in the disciplinary project, as described in *Discipline and Punish*. In reply to such objections Foucault (1979, 1982, 1991) subsequently clarified his position in two crucial ways.

First, it is important to recognize that Foucault's move from a micro- to a macro-physical study of power did not entail a move to state theory as practised by some of his Marxist critics. He insisted that his 'ascending' (or bottom-up) method of analysis was superior to his critics' 'descending' (or top-down) mode of deduction, where he argued that:

> anything can be deduced from the general phenomenon of the domination of the bourgeois class. What needs to be done is something quite different. One needs to investigate historically, and beginning from the lowest level, how mechanisms of power have been able to function.
>
> (Foucault, 1980: 100)

His point is that the same methods used to study local arenas could be used to analyse the techniques and practices for governing populations in the territories of nation-states (a point of view that anticipates the above work). This argument appears in an early form in the final chapter of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, where Foucault introduced the term 'biopower' to refer to the administration of populations—a distinctly modern phenomenon. For as he put it:

> Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital.
>
> (Foucault, 1979: 137)

Here we see how nations seek to manage life, race and death, since 'wars were never as bloody as they have been since the nineteenth century, and all things being equal, never before did regimes visit such holocausts on their own populations' (Foucault, 1979: 136–7).

This concern with the management of populations is developed in his 1978 and 1979 lecture courses in which he defined a fresh area of research inquiry around 'governmentality' in a further effort to distance his work from what he considered to be the reductionist tendencies of Marxist state theory (see Gordon, 1991, for further details). In this new work he argued that it is the 'governmentalization' of the state, or changes in the practice of government that are of prime significance in the project of modernity (Foucault, 1991: 103). Government possesses a general meaning, loosely defined as 'the conduct of conduct'—an activity aimed at shaping, guiding or effecting the conduct of an individual or populations. Likewise, the rationality of government refers to a system of thinking about the practice of government, for instance who can govern, what is governing, and who is governed.

Second, Foucault's (1982) essay 'The Subject and Power' offers significant qualifications to his association of disciplinary power with an ability to tame, suppress and reduce individuals to 'docile bodies', through stressing the importance of active subjects in the processes of their own government of conduct. Power offers technologies of the self, which can be adopted by individuals who choose to become involved in the programme of 'subjectification' or who contest governmental practice through 'counter-conducts'. For example, the constitution of a range of discourses on 'deviant' sexualities in the 18th and 19th centuries served to inspire social regulation in the realm of 'perversity' and legitimate notions of 'normal' heterosexuality. Yet these discourses created the conditions for subsequent dissent, since 'homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturality" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified' (Foucault, 1979: 101).

Foucault's later work has generated a range of research on a variety of topics (see, for example, Burchell *et al.*, 1991; Barry *et al.*, 1996; and the journal *Economy and Society*). The intention here is to demonstrate how elements of this literature can reconcile micro- and macro-levels of analysis. In this respect Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller's deliberations on problematics of government are particularly instructive (Miller and Rose, 1990a, 1990b, 1995; Rose and Miller, 1992; Rose, 1996).

For Rose and Miller there are two fields of analysis. The first concerns *political rationalities*, which attend to:

> the changing discursive fields within which the exercise of power is conceptualised, the moral justifications for particular ways of exercising power by diverse authorities, notions of the appropriate forms, objects and limits of politics, and conceptions of the proper distribution of such tasks among secular, spiritual, military and familial sectors.
>
> (1992: 175–6)

Rationalities relating to welfarism and neo-liberalism are articulated and elaborated in this field. The second refers to *governmental technologies*, which are 'the complex of mundane programmes, calculations, techniques, apparatuses, documents and procedures through which authorities seek to embody and give effect to governmental ambitions.' As Garland summarizes it, with allusions to the translation perspective outlined above, the:

> framework argues that power should be viewed as a matter of networks and alliances through which 'centres of calculation' exercise 'government-at-a-distance'. Power is not a matter of imposing a sovereign will, but instead a process of enlisting the cooperation of chains of actors who 'translate' power from one locale to another. This process always entails activity on the part of the 'subjects of power' and it therefore has built into it the

probability that outcomes will be shaped by the resistance or private
objectives of those acting 'down the line'.

(Garland, 1997: 182)

The point is not so much the power of the centralized state, but rather how
various local arenas are able to act. The penal system can be regarded as a
composite of diverse forces, techniques, rationalities and devices which
seek to regulate the actions and decisions of individuals and groups in
relation to certain authoritative criteria. These criteria and the ability to *act*
are performed through discourse.

An important text that recognizes the significance of discourse is Adler
and Longhurst's (1994) examination of the Scottish prison system, where
they illustrate how it 'is the site of struggles between different social actors
mobilising, constructing and reinterpreting particular discourses' (Adler
and Longhurst, 1994: 47). Nevertheless, their analysis can be strengthened
through an application of the ideas under development in this article. They
recognize, in a postscript, that their work may be of use to 'those working
on the comparative study of organisations and the nature of the state'
(Adler and Longhurst, 1994: 247). It is one of my intentions to demon-
strate how this is not only possible but also essential. For, crucially, they
lack a conceptual apparatus to explain how the general systems of thought
they identify are translated by various actors into the practices operating in
specific prisons in the Scottish penal estate.

I first outline the structure of various discourses that are instrumental to
the machinery of imprisonment and there then follows an examination of
how they are translated in a particular locale—to link the textures of lived
reality to the seemingly abstract, impersonal macro-processes of domina-
tion and transformation. I then turn to a discussion of how these various
discourses impact on the constitution of gender practices, and how a
particular discourse is now the dominant strategy of social control in many
western societies, to indicate a move towards a social theory of impris-
onment.

Discourse and imprisonment

It is important to recognize that I am using the term discourse to designate
a system of thought that informs practice. It refers to both a framework of
belief and as a guide for appropriate conduct. As such, the various
discourses serve to 'incorporate' the agencies of the powerful within the
project of imprisonment—that is civil servants, governors, staff and so
forth articulate these ideas and practices. Few prisoners readily submit to
such rationalities, and neither the metaphors of consent nor coercion
manage to convey adequately the 'dull compulsion' that the routines of
prison life represent for most of the incarcerated,[2] in which existence is
made bearable through, to use Goffman's (1961: 187) memorable phrase,
'make-do's'. Nevertheless, the extent to which the experience of imprison-

ment is felt as psychologically damaging, or otherwise, by prisoners is conditioned in significant ways by the discursive practices prevalent in a particular prison. For instance, certain rights, privileges, material standards and obligations are made possible or withheld according to the discursive principles in operation.

Despite its limitations that I mentioned earlier, Giddens's theory of structuration provides a useful repertoire of concepts to understand how such discursive formations are mobilized by human agency. The assertion that human subjects have 'as an inherent aspect of what they do, the capacity to understand what they do while they do it' (Giddens, 1984: xxii) is a central contention. While I would maintain that the actor is not to be understood as the centred author of social practice, the distinction that Giddens (1984: xxiii) draws between 'practical' and 'discursive' conscious-ness is highly suggestive. Practical consciousness 'consists of all the things which actors know tacitly about how to "go on" in the contexts of social life without being able to give them direct discursive expression' (Giddens, 1984: xxiii). The importance of this distinction is vital to understand the connections between discursive power and agency, for while I would emphasize that actors do not possess a fully mapped out conception of the structure of each discourse, they nevertheless mobilize and interpret the discursive understandings of imprisonment that I now describe.

Six discourses that are of some significance in structuring the experience of imprisonment will be outlined for the purpose of identifying their conceptual structure.[3] Three discourses that relate to the *ends* of imprison-ment (rehabilitation, normalization and control) and three *means* dis-courses (bureaucracy, professionalism and authoritarianism) can be identified. I want to argue that means discourses should be regarded as governmental technologies—methods of running prisons, whereas ends discourses correspond to political rationalities—the appropriate mentalities justifying what prisons are for. My claim is that there are dominant alignments operating within institutions and across societies at any given moment and that these alignments are continually produced and are open to contestation by actors in the penal system. Such a characterization enables the analysis to comprehend what the prison is *for*, in a macrosocio-logical sense, and reveals what the experience of imprisonment is *like*, in a microsociological sense, without promoting one level at the expense of the other.

As concerns the three ends discourses, the discourse of rehabilitation focuses on the 'deviant' individual, suffering from some form of maladjust-ment that can be treated though the correct programme in an institutional setting. Normalization, in many ways, marks a point of departure from rehabilitation, since it seeks to prevent the 'worse' effects of imprisonment. It has its roots in the justice model critique of indeterminate sentencing, a central feature of rehabilitation. Consequently it contrasts sharply with rehabilitation, which maintains that a prisoner can get 'better' in prison, considering instead the prisoner to be a 'normal' individual who has

committed a crime, and the prison sentence represents the punishment. This reflects the dictum that prisoners are sent to prison *as* punishment, rather than *for* punishment, or rehabilitation, but that opportunities should be available to facilitate change if this is the prisoner's wish. The normalization discourse also advocates that prisoners should enjoy, as far as practicable, the same standards as individuals in the community—to make prison life as 'normal' as possible.

In contrast, control discourse stresses the importance of maintaining good order and discipline in the prison, and is not concerned with the rehabilitation of the individual nor the normalization of the prison. Instead, it places paramount importance on the conformity of the prisoner to whatever measures are considered to be appropriate for the smooth functioning of the institution. Consequently, it takes as its main focus the 'disruptive' individual prisoner who challenges the stability of the regime. In a similar vein to the rehabilitation discourse, it views such behaviour as pathological.

These three ends discourses are concerned with what prisons are for, and in this sense are political rationalities. Means discourses are concerned with how prisons should be run, and are in turn explicitly concerned with technologies of governance and regulation. In a corresponding fashion, three discourses concerned with the means of imprisonment (bureaucracy, professionalism and authoritarianism) can be identified. The bureaucratic discourse is that which is most frequently associated with civil servants and tends to focus on the prison system as a whole. It seeks to achieve fairness, impartiality, uniformity and consistency in the application of rules and procedures, whereas the professional discourse primarily finds expression in the sentiments of governors and tends to concentrate on an individual establishment. It emphasizes 'leadership, experience and judgement as means of enhancing the institutional ethos' (Adler and Longhurst, 1994: 45). The discourse of professionalism obtains its legitimacy from governors' knowledge claims that they understand prisons and prisoners through their experience, because they see them on a routine basis and as a result of their responsibility for running prisons, which demands skills grounded in practice (see again Liebling, this issue, pp. 333–357). Authoritarianism is a third form of means discourse. A characteristic feature of the discourse is that it is based on militaristic lines of regulation and the source of its legitimacy is firmly rooted in the traditions of the prison service. As concerns relations with prisoners this does not necessarily entail coercive and divisive 'us versus them' rationalities but can be manifest in 'firm but fair' codes of conduct.

To summarize then, my argument is that the power of a state apparatus (in this instance, the penal system) to regulate (as in normalization or control discourses) or transform (the discourse of rehabilitation) the confined results from the composition of actors, devices and strategies, in relatively durable associations through discursive alignments to achieve particular ends. The mobilization of relatively durable associations, or

networks, is achieved through the *translation* of thought and action from 'centres of calculation'. Translation refers both to movement across time and space, and the enrolment of agency within particular projects. The composition of networks enables calculated action upon conduct into a diversity of locales.

Thus the penal system can be envisaged as an effect of such networks, with each member actively involved in the translation of thought and action. This necessarily entails understanding it in terms of competing actors engaged in struggles, accommodations, alliances and separations. For example, as Adler and Longhurst (1994: 27) observe, prisoners develop forms of culture that are relatively separate and autonomous from prison officers and administrators. Alliances may develop, for example, where prison officers collude with certain prisoners to ensure the brutalization of sex offenders in prison. Governors may form alliances with particular officers who share their interpretations of the 'correct' way to run the prison, which is informed by and performed through a discursive understanding of the situation. It is important to recognize that such associations, as the translation approach emphasizes, only possess a relative durability. The pattern of alliances, accommodations and separations is always liable to shift and rupture since struggles over, and resistance to, power are permanent features of social life, as the following will illustrate.

A discursive portrait of Strangeways, 1965–90

I now turn to the ways in which these discourses were translated in the practices operating in a specific institution over an extended period of time at HM Prison Manchester. The prison is more commonly known as Strangeways, which is the name of the inner-city district in the north-west of England where the institution is located. The period 1965 to 1990 covers an important period in the techniques of regulation practised in many countries in the West. On both sides of the Atlantic, the corporate-liberal consensus gave way to more coercive and repressive strategies of control directed towards controlling marginal populations. From the late 1970s the 'Great Moving Right Show' (see Hall and Jacques, 1983) was in full swing and in opposition to the more concessionary and integrative tactics of corporate-liberalism. The relentless expansion of the prison system, and the criminal justice system more generally, has been understood as a project of 'regressive modernization' (Hall, 1988). For some commentators prison building programmes, privatization, electronic tagging, increasingly repressive changes to sentencing and parole policies are taken as evidence of the intensifying punitive obsession and as the orchestration of consent in civil society through authoritarian programmes that have broad symbolic appeal in the popular consciousness (see Scraton *et al.*, 1991: 158–9; Ryan and Sim, 1998: 202).

This is the broad social and political context of the era. Figure 1 provides a discourse matrix for Strangeways[4] prison from 1965 to 1990. The reader unfamiliar with the experience of imprisonment in Britain may be surprised to find that the discourse of rehabilitation has not been particularly strong at the prison, since it was a central feature of the corporate-liberal consensus's approach to imprisonment. There are a number of reasons for this, not least because the institutional function of being a 'local' prison, in the penal vernacular, means that such prisons have some of the worse conditions that the system can offer in England and Wales. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Strangeways routinely held more than 1600 male prisoners, in conditions of severe overcrowding, with two and not infrequently three prisoners confined in a cell designed for one. This arises from clear policy preferences, as the Chief Inspector of Prisons remarked in 1981:

> Overcrowding is almost entirely restricted to local prisons. This is not a matter of coincidence but rather a result of deliberate Prison Department policy to optimise the regime in training prisons and make best use of the facilities available there.
>
> (cited in Stern, 1993: 27–8)

The local prison population is excluded from the 'treatment and training' mission, for two reasons. First, for those prisoners serving short sentences there is the assumption that there is too little time to achieve results. Second, a number of the local prisons act as 'sin bins' for disruptive prisoners from dispersal prisons (see Morgan, 1994: 917–18, for further clarification).

As can be seen from Figure 1, the constellation of authoritarianism with the discourse of control had been particularly pronounced at Strangeways up to the mid-1980s. The institution had traditionally been regarded as a 'POA Prison' by some probation officers and reform groups, or a 'Screws' Nick' (see Jameson and Allison, 1995, for the latter interpretation). This argot signifies an institution run on strict militaristic lines, which rigidly enforced a minimum and basic regime with hardly any out-of-cell activities,

Means \ Ends	Rehabilitation	Normalization	Control
Bureaucracy			1972–7
Professionalism		1986–90	
Authoritarianism			1965–72 1977–86

Figure 1 Strangeways discourse matrix (1965–90)

such as education, work or recreation and instilled an 'us versus them' mentality between the keepers and the kept.

The view that Strangeways operated a strict, authoritarian regime at this time is not just restricted to former prisoners, it is suggested by a former governor [04], who recalled that:

> There was a very high camaraderie there among officers who liked a formal, disciplined regime. They found it very satisfying, even down to the Night Patrols. They didn't like people who took the side of prisoners, but equally they didn't like officers who were viciously manipulative. They did love their work and they did run it very strictly. There wasn't any training. There was no pretence of training at all, but they managed to make it work. And they got people to work. There was a routine which gave prisoners very little joy, but the prisoners by and large respected it.

Significantly this observation highlights the close connection between the local occupational culture, the regime of the prison and the deployment of discursive rationalities. Similarly, a probation officer [10] remarked that the:

> method of dealing with prisoners was based on a military one. This meant that the prison was very strong on discipline. It was noticeable, and the prisoners knew exactly where they stood. The Governor was almost held in awe and the officers themselves were always military preoccupied. Let me explain, I can remember in the sixties and seventies there was a parade every morning—a whistle and stick parade, and they had to show their truncheons and whistles. Now over the years, I left in 1973 and didn't come back until 1986, officers seemed to be more relaxed, they weren't quite as hung up on having neatly pressed uniforms. I think they made an attempt to communicate more effectively, there were also other things I noticed, such as, formerly you never saw an inmate wandering around the prison, I don't mean between buildings, but inmates tended to wander from wing to wing, whereas at one time that would have been highly unusual—they would have been down the block for that. Now I did notice when I went back that inmates were wandering around, and even as a probation officer, I wasn't sure whether that was to the inmates' advantage.

From 1986 there was a shift to systems of regulation based on professionalism and normalization to create an 'active' regime for prisoners. An evolutionary history would perhaps characterize this as a liberalizing of the institution from a harsh, repressive regime (for a classic early account on the effects of managerialism on US prison life see Jacobs, 1977). However, that would obscure not only the struggles and oppositions between the actors engaged in the industry of prison control but would also suggest that this shift is to be understood as purely benign and progressive.[5] Instead, this shift must also be understood in terms of a wider project of *new managerialism*, which was an attempt by the Conservative government to

instil some of the private sector ethos into public policy concerns, in the interests of increased efficiency, less 'big government' in a bid to foster an enterprise culture. With specific reference to imprisonment, this has meant such things as privatization, agency status, key performance indicators and so forth.

There was not a smooth transition in the rationalities of penal regulation and there is considerable evidence demonstrating that discursive struggles over the ends and means of imprisonment in the institution were routine. One former assistant governor [02], who had been involved in a 1989 inspection of the prison remarked that a new governor from 1986, who subscribed to the discourses of professionalism and normalization:

> had tried to get more people out doing activities, but he was finding it hard work because of the very strong culture which the more strict Governors had set in place by saying, 'If they are in their cells then there won't be any trouble.' I can't say that it was in any way markedly different, but I think [the new governor] had brought a number of improvements. There were some people saying, 'OK it is a different place and we like it'. There was more tension between the old school and the new school. When I was there [1971–3] it was a very mechanistic regime, but everybody went to work—so they all trooped over to the workshops.

That certain members of the 'old school' were finding difficulties with the changes in the regime is captured in the following prison officer's evidence to the Woolf Inquiry:

> *Q*   Now, throughout your evidence you have been referred to as perhaps an old style officer. There have always been young officers coming into the service?
> *A*   Yes.
> *Q*   Is there anything you wish to identify changing the recent status?
> *A*   You see I was a young officer once. I was 25 when I joined my job and I was taught at the officers' training school that once we got to my first job, I should find an older officer, an experienced officer and to maybe latch on to him and find out how he works and handles situations, which I did and it did me no harm at all. You know, I can do my job. I am quite good at my job, but these days the officers seem to come from the OTS with 10 years' experience. I don't know whether that is a personal opinion or speculation at all. You know, that's my feeling. They are taught body language, space, no eye contact. I mean, me, if I was to deal with a situation I would look the inmate in the eye—whether you call that eye contact, intimidation, whatever you want to call it—I would look him in the eye and tell him: 'No'. Now they seem to have to keep it out of the vocabulary, the word 'No' out of the OTS vocabulary. They can't use the word 'No'. I think it's 'maybe' or 'perhaps', but not 'no' and they daren't look at them when they say it.

> (HO 370/3: 165–6)

This passage also illustrates the preference for a firm, rigid, almost provocative style of interaction among this group of officers with prisoners, which was at some odds to that practised by the newer recruits to the service.

The contention that power is translated is particularly important in making sense of the conflicts between the 'old' and 'new' school of prison officers. The 'old' school officers formed an alliance that was discursively grounded in their knowledgeability of how to interact with prisoners. They were not amenable to the changes, as they represented a 'softening' of approach, which did not correspond with their interpretation of how a prison should be run. Such interpretations gained legitimacy from the fact that the constellation of authoritarian and control discourse had been the dominant alignment in the prison. This slice of discursive action demonstrates how governmental rationalities are deployed in practice, and illustrates how general systems of domination and transformation are translated in and through discursively structured local arenas of action. Moreover, this illuminates just how the powerful are able to *act*.

My argument is that the discourse matrix (see Figure 1) enables a symmetrical understanding of imprisonment, which means that the micro and macro should not be treated as two different, discontinuous levels of reality. But this is not to suggest that a particular prison embodies the penal system in its totality of relations and representations. Since, to paraphrase Geertz (1973), neither heaven nor hell are to be found in a grain of sand, nevertheless 'small facts' do speak to 'large issues'. The discourse matrix bears some resemblance to Foucault's (1979: 100) notion of a 'strategic envelope'. That is it provides the horizons of thought and action that make certain governmental ambitions possible, while denying others.

Garland (1997: 174) has recently argued that criminological theory and analysis can benefit from an engagement with the governmentality literature as it 'offers a powerful framework for analyzing how crime is problematized and controlled'. However, I share his conviction that while one of the strengths of this literature is to focus on the conceptual structure of various governmental rationalities, this tends to be 'at the expense of an analysis of the pragmatics use' (Garland, 1997: 199). The above account addresses this absence through an examination of the ways in which rationalities were put to use, and the fresh meanings they acquired in their contexts of translation from systems of thought to specific ways of acting in a particular locale. Among the points I want to emphasize is that not only is there a corruption in practice but also that there are considerable struggles over the appropriate ways to govern the confined. As stressed earlier, the principle of symmetry provides not only solid ground for examining these activities, but it also offers a sensitizing metaphor for understanding imprisonment. I now turn to a brief indication of how these discursive formations impact on the construction and deployment of gender practices.

Gender and discourse

If gender is ever considered in male prisons it tends to be only discussed in relation to prisoners (see, for example, Newton, 1994; Sim, 1995). This analytical focus on prisoners misses the important point that gender relations are embedded in institutional settings and are enacted through the translation of discursive definitions of conduct. In charting the discursive history of Strangeways, it is clear that the shift from authoritarianism to professionalism was neither smooth nor complete, as there were some quite significant struggles over the appropriate way to govern the prison (see also Carrabine and Longhurst, 1998). In some respects the practices associated with both the new governors and staff represented the antithesis of the hitherto hegemonic form of masculinity practised in the institution by the keepers. On one level the oppositions mounted by the 'old' school could be understood as a rejection or dismissal of a feminized Other. For instance, one probation officer [11] tellingly remarked that prison officers who became friendly with prisoners were regarded as 'care-bears or sissies', by other staff, in the sense that such action was considered unmanly or effeminate.

Yet it would be quite mistaken to view professionalism and bureaucratic means of governance as discourses that constitute feminine practice, as they both elaborate rituals that are defined through the suppression of others, which can be gay men, women and ethnic groups. For example, the discourse of bureaucracy is explicitly concerned with instrumental reason, objective knowledge and solid impartiality. Such qualities are not un-problematic, for as Seidler puts it: 'Ever since the Enlightenment men have sought to silence the voice of others in the name of reason' (1989: 14). Consequently, women, children and animals have been associated with a lack of reason and a greater proximity to nature. Likewise, the notion of civilization is closely identified with reason and colonialism is a force that works through the assumed superiority over 'lesser breeds'.

Similarly, the discourse of professionalism is one grounded in knowledge claims that prioritize experience, skill and responsibility in the business of administration. The assumption is that such virtues can only be acquired through an engagement with the public domain over a sustained period of time. This is not to suggest that the public sphere is exclusively male and the private purely female. Rather it is to argue that gender divisions are organized along such understandings. Even when the notion of separate spheres was approaching its height in Victorian England, Tosh (1991) has pointed out that there were important connections between manliness and domesticity, as the wielding of authority over dependants in the home provided a firm basis for men's public life. The point is that the public and private should not be regarded as separate, but should rather be understood in relational terms.

The discourse of professionalism, in the prison, places an emphasis on face-to-face encounters, a celebration of charisma, and elevates intellectual

expertise. My overall argument is that while it might be fairly straightforward to equate a particular kind of aggressive, domineering and rugged masculinity with the discourse of authoritarianism, the other means of governance also articulate different and contradictory forms of masculinity. My claim is that not only are there competing definitions of hegemonic masculinity but also that gender is constructed in and performed through discourse.

This last point has long been recognized by feminist scholarship on female prisons. For how women experience imprisonment is conditioned in significant ways by discourses on femininity, which are structured on traditional ideals of domesticity, passivity and motherhood. As Bosworth (1999) demonstrates, and as I emphasized earlier, prisoners do not meekly acquiesce to such definitions of conduct, although particular discursive alignments do have profound implications for prisoners. Likewise Hannah-Moffat's (1995) critique of the 1990 report *Creating Choices* by the Canadian Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (in which an attempt to develop women-centred prisons is advanced), could prove a valuable starting point for a consideration of the issues presented in this article and applied to female prisons. The Task Force's intervention was widely hailed as a radical, progressive, innovative attempt to develop an operational model to restructure women's prisons. It relied, in part, on contemporary feminist criticisms of the male-based models of punishment governing prison regimes for women.

One element of Hannah-Moffat's (1995) critique of the Task Force is its unquestioning reliance on the problematic category of 'woman' as a unified, homogenous entity. An example of this is the Task Force's insistence that 'women in prison have more in common with other women than they do with male inmates' (Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, 1990: 68, cited in Hannah-Moffat, 1995: 144). This emphasizes the shared experience of women as a disempowered and marginalized category of being. Hannah-Moffat (1995: 144) is correct in asserting that while 'this assumption of common disempowerment illustrates some of the undeniable experiential and demographic similarities between women prisoners and "free" women, it fails to articulate the heterogeneity that exists among women'. As a consequence it underplays difference, and trivializes the experience of women as prisoners. For an 'emphasis on gender-based oppression minimizes and obscures other forms of oppression such as race and class' (Hannah-Moffat, 1995: 145).

I would argue that the woman-centred approach represents a discourse structured around notions of benevolence, care and therapy. As Hannah-Moffat clearly recognizes it is based on white middle-class sensibilities, which accounts for some of the limitations in the approach. Yet, in some respects it does mark an alternative way of thinking from the traditional regimes of femininity practised in prisons, which deploy rigid surveillance, domestic work programmes and brutal isolation. Consequently, the Canadian penal system could be analysed in terms of the arguments developed in

this article, without losing sight of the question of what prisons are for. Specifically, as Carlen (1983: 115) and others have argued, prisons are 'only obliquely connected with the punishment of crime'—a point to which I now turn.

Conclusion

The article began by discussing the sociology of imprisonment in terms of an analytical division between the internal dynamics of a particular prison and the more general, external functions that the penal sanction performs in society. The main thrust of the argument has been to advance a particular kind of discourse analysis as a means of connecting these two approaches. If the penal system is understood in this analytical frame of reference it allows the discussion to operate both at the macro- and micro-level. The argument is that the theoretical vocabulary of 'translation', 'governmentality' and 'discourse' goes someway towards a symmetrical understanding of the complex phenomenon of punishment. I have briefly intimated how the principle of symmetry has meant a much broader examination of gender and imprisonment, than is conventionally the case, and here I want to conclude with another area where this approach can be tellingly applied in future research.

   The influential account by Feeley and Simon (1992, 1994) of the recent contours of penality in the West could be extended through a consideration of the issues raised in this article. Their argument is that a 'New Penology' has risen at the expense of an 'Old Penology'. The 'Old Penology' is 'preoccupied with such concepts as guilt, responsibility and obligation, as well as diagnosis, intervention and treatment of the individual offender' (Feeley and Simon, 1994: 173). Such concepts correspond with the ends discourses of normalization and rehabilitation outlined earlier. Whereas, they claim the 'New Penology' is radically different as it is 'concerned with techniques for identifying, classifying and managing groups assorted by levels of dangerousness' (Feeley and Simon, 1994: 173). The aim is not to intervene in people's lives for the purposes of ascertaining responsibility or rehabilitating them. It is instead a strategy of managing dangerousness.

   In effect, I would argue that this strategy represents both an intensification and extension of bureaucratic *means* of governance to the extent that they have now become a vital component in overclass social defence, and an *end* to be pursued in the management of unwanted populations and polluting strangers. However, it is mistaken to view this as a replacement or substitution of older rationalities, for as the discourse matrix illustrates and as Garland argues 'they represent two *adjacent* positions in a common field of instrumental penality' (1997: 203, emphasis in original). I would suggest that the analytical approach under development here is able to make sense of these strategies as mobilized in diverse settings.

It needs to be stressed that this analytical focus on the rationalities and discourses of imprisonment is not to deny the communicative and symbolic aspects of the institution, as in the ways in which the emotive components of punishment have a deep resonance with significant sectors of the public. These, in turn, can be mobilized into the overtly political arena of 'law and order' and, more often than not, an intensification of the punitive sanction. Nor does it deny that there is a political economy of punishment that has seen a remarkable expansion of prison populations in the West over the last 30 years, which Christie (1993) has characterized as a product of the 'crime control industry'. The point of the article has been to advance a conceptual vocabulary that can connect the diversity of interactions within prisons to such strategies of domination. If such a dialogue is absent we are left with partial and incomplete depictions that fail to do justice to either human agency or how strategies of domination are constituted, imposed and maintained.

Notes

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 1998 American Society of Criminology conference in Washington, and I would like to offer my thanks to all those who offered comment. In addition the article was improved by the suggestions provided by Mary Bosworth, Rob Flynn, Alison Liebling, Brian Longhurst and Richard Sparks and an anonymous reviewer.

1. It is clear that many of the key authors now express reservations over the term 'actor-network theory' (see Law and Hassard, 1998). But this demonstrates the analytical purchase of the concept of translation—one does not have the power to control meaning—or to put it simply, something is either lost or gained in translation. It is also the case that the Internet has changed, probably for ever, our understanding of what a network is, since it now implies a smooth, instant, transportation of information. This is almost certainly not what was meant by the term in the original formulations.
2. This is an extension of the central arguments in Abercrombie *et al.*'s (1980) critique of the dominant ideology thesis—it is not the subordinate classes who are incorporated by the dominant ideology, but rather the dominant classes. Moreover, I would suggest that this characterization of discourse is able to connect to materialist analyses of power.
3. This discussion develops and modifies Adler and Longhurst's (1994: 34–45) account, see also Carrabine (1998) for further clarification.
4. The sources for this history are 18 semi-structured interviews with former prisoners, staff and governors conducted between 1994 to 1996 in Carrabine's (1998) Ph.D. research. A transcript number, [n] is put in brackets and reference to the individual's relationship with the prison is given in the text. These interviews were intended to supplement the analysis of the oral evidence given at the Woolf inquiry into the 25-day occupation of Strangeways by prisoners in April 1990. The transcripts are archived at the Public

Records Office (PRO) under the listings from HO 370/2 to HO 370/16. In total 64 individuals gave evidence to the inquiry from 11 June 1990 to 29 June (see Carrabine, 1998, for further details). Additional sources include HM Prison Inspectorate reports and a BBC documentary series on the prison filmed in 1980. Taken together this material permits detailed insights into the culture of the prison and the discursive understandings that informed decisions and actions.

5. Readers familiar with the prison sociology literature will recognize certain affinities with Jacobs's (1977) *Stateville* in my charting of organizational change. There is not the room to do justice to our differences in time, space and theoretical vocabulary in this article. The distance between our positions is detailed in Carrabine (1998).

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