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**Abolitionism as a philosophy of hope:
'Inside-outsiders' and the reclaiming of democracy**

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Penal abolitionism is an ethico-political approach that embraces a philosophy of liberation and human freedom and in so doing rejects legal coercion and criminal blame. Penal abolitionists are conscientious objectors to punishment and promote in its place non-punitive forms of redress for human wrongdoing, troubles, and problematic conduct. Penal abolitionists are often cast as “outsiders” when it comes to debates regarding the role and legitimacy of the penal law because they question the very existence of the penal rationale (the logic of punishment). Through their critique of the penal apparatus of the capitalist state, penal abolitionists aim to reveal the contradictions and inconsistencies within the application of the penal law, often by drawing upon evidence from people who have directly experienced its full force. By providing a platform for the often marginalized or discredited knowledge of prisoners or their families, penal abolitionists can help shine a light on the hideous realities of the prison place, thus opening it up to democratic scrutiny and public debate. But penal abolitionism is it not just about abolishing legal repression or even facilitating alternative ways of thinking about and responding to human wrongs; penal abolitionism is a *philosophy of hope* looking to promote the good society. Underscored by the principles of social justice, dignity, and a truly liberated humanity grounded in non-hierarchical, anti-oppressive, and non-exploitative human relationships, penal abolitionists aspire to build a new and thoroughly democratic society organized around human wellbeing.

The ideas of penal abolitionism should not be restricted to book shelves in university libraries or academic seminars, but rather should be infused into popular culture and be drawn upon to

influence the way that people think about “crime” and punishment. In this sense, penal abolitionists should work from the “inside;” they should perform an active role in society and contribute towards everyday cultural and ideological battles for hearts and minds. Further, many prominent penal abolitionists teach in an institution key to modern day knowledge production and dissemination: the university. The penal abolitionist is an “inside-outsider” who should be committed to further enhancing democracy and building public spaces for critical reflection. They should then be both *tactically inside* and *strategically outside* the system at the same time. Following the insights of Edward Said (1994), the penal abolitionist should deliberately *not* fully belong to a given society. It is only by sitting on the margins that they can appreciate the problems confronting the society in which they live and understand the world view of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups. This approach can help facilitate the uncovering hidden or “alternative” truths to dominant narratives, assumptions, and underlying structures of power. Being an “outsider” is also the best way to avoid co-option (Mathiesen, 2006). Yet penal abolitionists must also find the courage to both testify against oppression and engage in struggles for freedom in the here and now. They must exploit opportunities for progressive social change and attempt to implement their vision for social transformation. The penal abolitionist should explore the past and present from the point of view of the subaltern (those without a voice) and speak truth to power in the cause of freedom and social justice (Said, 1994).

As Vincenzo Ruggiero (2012) has argued, penal abolitionism is the only criminology he knows of that “has always adopted a public stance.” Like ‘public criminology’ (Loader and Sparks, 2011) more broadly, penal abolitionism aims to raise questions about common sense assumptions, generate new evidence and knowledge to debunk punitive myths and ultimately to help reframe the debate about crime and punishment. In so doing abolitionism proposes a kind

of imagination that can locate individual experiences within broader social and economic contexts and thus help transform currently neglected private troubles into public issues (Drake and Scott, 2019). Democratic engagement with the general public goes then to the very heart of abolitionist praxis, but it is an approach which differs from ‘public criminology’ in one very important way: penal abolitionism aims to deconstruct the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the logic of crime and to offer alternative ways of thinking about and responding to problematic human conduct beyond the criminal process (Scot, 2018). Drawing on grass roots emancipatory politics and praxis, penal abolitionism does not conform to the criminological doxa that knowledge is generated from value free, objective and scientific inquiry whose relevancy is shaped by government agendas and priorities. In this sense, penal abolitionism aims to foster a vision of society, political action and human relationships which is ‘against criminology’ (Cohen, 1988).

This chapter discusses some ways that penal abolitionists as “inside-outsiders” can challenge dominant understandings of “crime” and punishment. The chapter has three main parts. I start with a brief consideration of the current limitations of institutionalized education, knowledge production, and dissemination in the neo-liberal university (which is when an institution ostensibly designed for public education is grounded in the principles of the capitalist market place, private gain, and accumulation of profits) and the importance of considering radically alternative ways of organizing public education in the community. This is followed by an exploration of how penal abolitionists as “inside-outsiders” can help facilitate a new critical pedagogy about human conflicts, troubles, and problematic conduct as a “collective organic intellectual” (Giroux, 1988). I then discuss five interventions I adopted to illustrate how penal abolitionists can work towards reclaiming democracy through reinvigorating existing or creating

alternative forms of knowledge production and public spaces for democratic dialogue. I conclude with a brief discussion of the importance of connecting abolitionist theory with public participation in democratic debates.

Beyond the neo-liberal university

The central argument of this chapter is that penal abolitionists should position themselves both inside and outside the academy at the same time. As an ideal, the university *should* work for the public good, helping to facilitate emancipatory knowledge as well as fostering and nurturing an ethico-political commitment to social justice, human rights, and democratic accountability (Giroux, 2007). Whilst this aspiration for the University should not be abandoned, it should be located in context. One of the most enduring concerns raised against knowledge production and dissemination in the University is that it is an institution that reproduces and distributes power and cultural capital, thus performing a key part in legitimating values necessary for maintaining economically and socially unequal societies (Illich, 1970; Giroux, 1988, 2013a, 2013b). Through top down hierarchical management styles and the centralization of power, in recent times anti-democratic and authoritarian tendencies have increasingly been deployed by University management, resulting in limitations in professional autonomy and the standardization of curriculums (Walters, 2003). The demand for income and immediate results has also reduced opportunities for in-depth theoretical studies, which require several years of work.

In our time of “market-led” (Walters, 2003) criminological research, research designs and methodologies can increasingly come to reflect the interests of corporate power. As a result, research independence can be fatally undermined by the external constraints of government authorities and research funders. The basic concern is that intellectual labor and knowledge production are being used to serve corporate and technocratic priorities of neo-liberal political

economies, rather than the interests of the people (Giroux, 2007; Sudbury & Rey, 2009). Fusing knowledge production with the logic of the capitalist marketplace (i.e. privileging the pursuit of profit and an overarching business culture) leads to a market-driven enterprise that maximizes profits through the commodification of knowledge and turns this educational institution into a space focused on service-delivery (Giroux, 2014), which then redefines students as either clients or customers.

Significantly, the neo-liberal university also fails in its basic “democratic mission” to be an institution that can inculcate civic values and ethical principles and generate concern and responsibility for tackling social problems and social divisions (Giroux, 2013a, 2013b). It is not very effective at turning students into critical citizens who can recognize the importance of participating in political culture or defending the human rights of socially marginalized groups or holding those in positions of power to account (Giroux, 2013a, 2013b). Indeed, for Henry Giroux (2014, p. 27), the neo-liberal university is part of a broader “disimagination machine” that is blocking potential for future political consciousness and public engagement. The neo-liberal university undermines critical thinking and impinges upon the mental faculties required to imagine a different kind of world grounded in social justice. It can thus become a conduit for a politics and *philosophy of despair* rather than instilling a *philosophy of hope*.

Following the insights of Ivan Illich (1970), it should be recognized that institutionalized forms of schooling, including the university, sometimes hinder learning skills for democratic participation rather than facilitate them. For Illich (1970) most learning occurs *informally*, and people often learn best in direct reciprocal dialogue and engagement with others in everyday settings than through formal timetabled educational classes. Talk of engaging in informal apprenticeships in non-traditional educational settings where the goal is skill and knowledge

transfer without focus on formal educational qualifications stands in stark opposition to working in the neo-liberal university. For Illich (1970) such a scenario could be understood as a kind of “learning web” that connected people with the resources they need. The vision is for learning to be a positive, liberating, and life long experience which matches a persons’ interests and motivations with the expertise and skills of those who inspire them. Underscoring this then is a commitment to capacity building and sharing knowledge and expertise outside of the university.

The vision presented by Illich (1970) is clearly appealing, yet we should not necessarily throw the baby out with the bath water. There have been times (such as in the 1960s and 1970s) when universities have been at the forefront of developing radical and emancipatory thought and a key player in generating student protest, resistance, and dissent. This radical history also reminds us that the university is an arena for struggle rather than an inherently conservative institution. There should be attempts to transform the neo-liberal university so that it can once again be a vibrant resource in the struggles to address injustices, oppression, and exploitation. As “inside-outsiders,” penal abolitionists should look to work within the academy to help reclaim the university as public spheres. Following the insights of Illich (1970), penal abolitionists should also step outside of the university and participate in a broader revitalization of public engagement in emancipatory politics, being prepared to engage in non-traditional educational settings. This suggests that penal abolitionists should transcend the boundaries between formal and informal education and between the University and the community.

Penal abolitionism therefore looks to challenge the generation scientific knowledges in the neo-liberal university that serve the interests of the powerful and whose research agendas are shaped by governmental policy priorities. Instead, penal abolitionists aim to incorporate emancipatory politics in the education process (both formal and informal) that can challenge

social and economic inequalities. Rather than just working within the existing spaces for knowledge generation and exchange which are set apart from the community (i.e. the University), as is often the case with public criminology, penal abolition presents a new challenge that demands new forms of genuinely democratic engagement which are explicitly directed at facilitating emancipatory knowledge and praxis which can aid the liberation of subjugated and oppressed groups.

Organic collective intellectuals

As an “inside-outsider,” the penal abolitionist should aim to abolish categories, barriers, boundaries, and walls regarding educational theory and practice. This includes abolishing widely held distinctions between intellectuals and non-intellectuals. Thinking, acting, interpreting, and giving meaning to life are all intimately related and we all undertake mental labor in our ongoing everyday experiences (Mayo, 1999). For the great Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1971), all people were intellectuals, but not all people in society had the role of intellectuals (i.e. academics). For Gramsci (1971), every human relationship is educative and has an influence on the kinds of political debates that develops in civil society. Education, then, is not restricted to formal educational settings, but can take place informally in the community and in ordinary human interactions and conversations. Nor for Gramsci (1971) is there an obvious distinction between the teacher and the learner. Learning can and should be a two-way process. Gramsci (1971) did, however, identify a person who offered moral leadership and facilitated informal education through direct engagement in a social movement as an “organic intellectual.” Through the organization of people and dissemination of knowledge, the organic intellectual was an “insider” to a social movement who became an integral part of the local community, rather than

someone from the outside simply bringing knowledge to the masses. Their overall objective of the organic intellectual is not just political engagement on a specific topic, but the transformation of an entire way of thinking about the world. Building on the insights of Gramsci (1971), Giroux (1988) talks about the importance of learning collectively and the cultivation of a collective social awareness and consciousness raising operating along “horizontal lines” (i.e. non-hierarchical relationships). For Giroux (1988), the end result of this collective learning process, where groups of people rather than individuals worked together collectively to build capacity among all of its members, is the creation of an “organic collective intellectual.”

To become an organic collective intellectual means participating in and facilitating the emergence of a collective voice that can contribute towards the deepening of democracy. The penal abolitionist should work collectively, cooperatively, and in a spirit of solidarity with oppressed communities in an attempt to help find common ground for alliances and the promotion of a collective vision of a non-punitive and inclusive society (Giroux, 1988). The penal abolitionist should provide moral leadership in terms of raising ethico-political awareness and consciousness of social injustice and the harms of the penal law. This means witnessing and engaging in struggles for social justice and facilitating attempts to imagine a different kind of world through creating a coalition of progressive forces. As an insider-outsider, the abolitionist should use their privileged position (be that their educational background, networks, communication skills, knowledge, or organizational experience) to build capacity through informal ties and learning networks in the community (Illich, 1970). This sharing and building of collective power and capacity can be achieved through helping to build self-esteem, skills, and confidence of individuals or through historical recollections of past struggles and radical cultural heritage that shows another way of living and dealing with human and social troubles is possible.

This all points towards the importance of cultivating an abolitionist “critical pedagogy” beyond the (neo-liberal) university setting. Paulo Freire (1970) highlights the importance of connecting politics, culture, and education together and raising the critical consciousness of individuals so they can understand their own oppression and subsequently undertake emancipatory transformative action. The liberation philosophy of Freire (1970), like that of Gramsci (1971), is intended to give hope and disrupt current understandings by looking beneath surface meanings to try and uncover the root causes of social problems. It is crucial that penal abolitionist interventions promote experiences and help transform feelings of subjugation into concrete action (Freire, 1970). This means highlighting the dialectical relationship between critical consciousness and the social action in penal abolitionist critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). Listening, learning, and reflecting are all essential for the project of radical social transformation. For Said (1994), the aim of public engagement is to redraw the narrative—to cut against the grain, question received and “common sense” ideas and engage in a critical encounter through dialogical transformation. This means for the penal abolitionist changing the way of seeing the world and ultimately awakening a new cultural consciousness among the masses. This can, but does not need to, take place in the university. Different sites of social practice, such as the workplace, can be transformed into sites of informal learning.

For Freire (1970), however, the community is required to be an active participant in the process of their own learning. Those engaged in critical pedagogy should actively participate in reciprocal dialogue, whereby every teacher is also a student, and look to promote critique and political engagement. Education itself was an inherently political act and its ultimate goal should be the emancipation from subjugation through the “awakening of a critical consciousness.” Friere (1970) referred to this process as *conscientization* (the deepening of the coming of

consciousness). Following Gramsci (1971), the “educator,” whose role is almost interchangeable with that of the “learner” (Mayo, 1999), should engage in reciprocal learning—learning the unique language and culture of a given community or group of people—so to be able to convert common sense into good sense. But this is more than just critique of the prison place. It is also about trying to deepen understandings and develop the possibilities for deliberative democracy (that is informed discussion about the key issues of the day). Democracy is a constant struggle that is always unfinished. It needs to be constantly reproduced on a daily basis and this requires skills and knowledge among the people. Democracy can only survive if it is constantly reconstituted in the here and now (Giroux, 2013a, 2013b).

For the penal abolitionist, then, hierarchical forms of public engagement – that is vertical relationships between a knower (i.e. a bearer of knowledge) and a learner - can never be enough. The distinction between knower/educator and learner is false construction which individualizes knowledge production and dissemination. Public engagement for the penal abolitionist should be conceived as part of a collective and organic process which can raise the consciousness of the populace through the principles of critical pedagogy. Through working cooperatively and collectively with marginalized groups, and engaging in the process of dialogical transformation, hidden or “alternative” truths, assumptions, and underlying structures of power, can be uncovered. Placing themselves both inside and outside the formal educational system, the penal abolitionist should aspire to be an ‘organic collective intellectual’ speaking truth to power in the cause of freedom and social justice (Said, 1994). In so doing, public engagement can be a way of helping to facilitate the reclaiming of democracy from below.

Reclaiming democracy

To culturally embed the ideas of penal abolitionism requires the existence of appropriate public spheres through which new non-punitive meanings and understandings can be formed and popularized through a democratic and reciprocal dialogue. A meaningful understanding of democracy can only arise when it is instituted in concrete spaces that allow people to come together to discuss, think, and reflect upon social issues and their values, beliefs, and responsibility for the existence of such circumstances. These public democratic spaces, what Bauman (1999) refers to as an agora, can allow for debate and scrutiny of hegemonic ideas around “crime” and punishment and facilitate opportunities for the public to encourage decision makers to justify their actions. Democratic debate should always engage with a diverse range of dialogical encounters firmly grounded in day-to-day struggles around the meaning and interpretations of harms, troubles, and conflicts which shape contemporary society. What is also crucial is the development of a critical vernacular that is understandable to the masses; “criminological / penological illiteracy” must be eliminated by developing accessible language so that oppressions and penal injustices can be named, shamed, and eventually tackled. Effective communication is essential on the path to direct action.

Any such democratic interventions cannot be technical or merely reformist, but must also aspire to a form of human living that enshrines human dignity. These new public spaces must allow for both oppositional knowledge that can challenge state-corporate and penal power and promote more utopian aspirations. In this sense, public spaces must also be both an “oppositional space” for highlighting problems and penal controversies and a “dream space” that can cultivate a radical imagination and inspiration for the transformative potential of human agency and the fulfilment of a philosophy of hope. It is essential in such a “real utopian” vision to link critical

scholarship to broader forms of oppositional and idealist knowledge. Doing so allows prison abolitionists to accomplish three things: 1) facilitate concrete and pragmatic transformations; 2) expose and uncover how domination and oppression are produced and reproduced; and 3) ensure that in the long-term commitment to the penal rationale can be broken (Scott, 2013).

Below are five examples of how the abolitionist as an “inside-outsider” can help reclaim democracy regarding debates on “crime” and punishment. Whilst the suggestions below are by no means comprehensive (indeed they draw upon examples from my own public interventions) they collectively illustrate that it is possible and desirable for penal abolitionists to make immediate and direct interventions in the public sphere.

We should hear diverse voices and write what we like

The place to start with reclaiming democracy is the contested space of the neo-liberal university. Abolitionists with tenure in a university are in a privileged position. They should use this to help generate moment for the creation of organic collective intellectuals. Penal abolitionists should write not for their institution or for state sanctioned research exercises, but for the broader goals of human rights, social justice, and democratic accountability. They should write about what they consider to be the most ethically and politically important issues of the day and focus should be on movement building and local community organizing. There should be an attempt to integrate organizing into their everyday life rather engage in organizing for “impact” or as a career vocation. The political commitment of the penal abolitionist should be to support all those, both as formal students and activists in the wider community, who are engaged in democratic struggles. The first step is to make strong connections with local abolitionist networks and directly participate in the everyday organizing of community activists. This includes organizing,

publicizing (such as through leafleting and the creation of pamphlets), participating in public meetings; and direct community engagement through both informal dialogue with activists and members of the public (Scott, 2019). ‘Joining in’ and doing the ‘behind the scenes’ work required for the building of public meetings are essential for building trust and also strong relationships with community activists.

Despite the commodification of education, there remain opportunities to *deploy* university resources to support community activism (Sudbury, 2009). Working in collaboration with local activists, the abolitionist as an inside-outsider can create spaces for critical inquiry and the sharing of wisdom through collective organizing by promoting social justice and emancipatory knowledge (Scott, 2018). To subvert the logic of the neo-liberal university it is important to avoid drawing any boundaries of exclusion and having forms of solidarity based on difference rather than sameness. This approach also requires working with a diverse group of people outside of the academy. Bringing the community into the university can add a level of commitment against penal injustice that can send a powerful message and provide inspiration for all who are prepared to listen. One example would be the London *International Conference for Penal Abolition* [ICOPA] (June 15-18, 2018), which was organized by two Universities (The Open University and Birkbeck University London) but which reached out to local and national abolitionist campaign groups, activist networks and pressure groups. Here academics worked closely in a University setting with more than 40 activists to deliver an activist centered conference that was attended by more than 300 delegates. Characterized by horizontal (non-hierarchical) relationships, the aim of the organizers was to provide an opportunity of abolitionist activists to come together in solidarity and hopefully build new networks to help the UK abolitionist movement move forward.

As inside-outsiders in the academy, penal abolitionist should then reach out the hand of assistance to those working for liberation and freedom in the community. Whilst it is important to recognize the limits of the university and how they currently devalue activism, the academy can also offer legitimacy to community organizing. By engaging the university as part of a pedagogy of the oppressed, new spaces can be opened up for critical pedagogy. This should entail drawing strength and inspiration from social movements to challenging elite institutions and privilege sites of expert knowledge and utilizing activism within the curriculum.

Researching and platforming subjugated and marginalized voices

The penal abolitionist should also aim to facilitate a platform for subaltern (marginalized and currently unheard) voices. As discussed above, widening participation in democratic dialogue is a key aim of the inside-outsider. Enhancing the diversity of voices heard in penal debates should also involve providing a platform for prisoners, ex-prisoners, and the families of prisoners, but it can also include doing research with prisoners. This means challenging the silencing of people in prison (Sudbury, 2009). Given the nature of the prison place, it is almost inevitable that the prisoner will be structurally prevented from participation in conversations with members of the general public and there may be no or only limited access to spaces for dialogue with debating partners within the prison place. Further, given the social backgrounds of prisoners and their broader social exclusion, many of those behind bars have found it difficult to perform the language games of normal society. Prisons are places of civil and social death and are powerful determinant of an individual's location within the knowledge economy. Engaging with prisoners establishes a new social relationship and transcends social death (Scott, forthcoming).

When individuals speak, they thus engage in a political process that not only starts a conversation, but which may also *ultimately lead to a* new way of conceiving the world being fostered. Hearing the voice of families, ex-prisoners, and sometimes the voice of researchers and those who have worked in the prison place can provide powerful testimony of the damage prison creates both for prisoners and the wider community. It is essential that society hears and listens to the voice of experience when it comes to prison realities. To address the potential silence, use qualitative research methodology to gather testimonies of people in prison place, such as carrying out collaborative research with people in prison, so that the testimonies of prisoners are at the forefront of current debates. There are abolitionist prisoner voices, and it is important that the voice of the “abolitionist on the inside” is given due prominence in collections of abolitionist writings (Coyle and Scott, forthcoming) and also at abolitionist gatherings, such as at ICOPA annual conferences. At ICOPA in London, abolitionists activists created and published a special prisoner voice zine, allowed ex-prisoners and prisoner families to speak at the event, and included the reading of testimonies of currently serving prisoners.

It is also crucial that this “view from below” is given a platform in any public spaces dedicated to debating “crime” and punishment, whether this be in the media or, most importantly, at public events and community meetings, the most effective way to generate connections and understandings. Readings from classic prisoner autobiographies, interviews, and collaboratively published work with activists are all important here for the wider struggle for justice (Scott, forthcoming).

Contesting state-corporate power

Since the early 1990s, the private and voluntary sectors in England and Wales have had increasing influence on the workings of the criminal process. Yet the private companies running prisons are not and cannot be held directly to account by the general public. This deficit in accountability is significant and should be addressed. *Democratic accountability* requires a public forum where the managers of corporations can be directly questioned and confronted by members of the public. In general, such opportunities are denied to citizens in relation to private companies. However, it is possible for shareholders—those with a vested interest in a private company—to challenge and question the way a private company conducts its business. This can, generally, be done through the forum of the company’s Annual General Meeting [AGM]. Whilst “shareholder scrutiny” is in no way a satisfactory alternative to “public scrutiny,” it is one means by which a privately-run corporation can be asked to account for their actions. Of course, the problem is that the AGM is a private space with access restricted to shareholders only (including activist shareholders aiming to tell truth to power) as opposed to an open and public space for all citizens. Yet possibilities remain; over the last four years, members of the *Reclaim Justice Network* have been activist shareholders at the G4S AGM (Drake and Scott, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, questions have been raised about whether the AGM could ever provide a forum for genuine accountability. Though much evidence points to how actual levels of transparency are low and not openly available to shareholders, there have been some small, but significant victories for accountability through *Reclaim Justice Network* shareholder activism at the G4S AGM. For four years, shareholder activists requested data on self-harm of prisoners published in the Annual Reports. In 2017, for the first time, G4S published details of all the prisoners who had died in their prisons in England and Wales (G4S, 2017). G4S has also

continued to talk about having a policy of “zero harm” (G4S, 2017) for all of their services, although under questioning they were unable to provide specific policies in which this was being implement in their custodial services.

Following concerted protests from a range of activist groups at the G4S AGM’s from 2014-2016, the company withdrew from its controversial delivery of child detention in Israel. Ironically, whilst this one decision clearly indicates the real potential of the AGM to respond to the calls of shareholders, it now means that the only protest group still attending the G4S AGM is the *Reclaim Justice Network*. Though it is not without its limitations, shareholder activism can provide a means of creating a limited version of a 21st Century agora that can be part of the wider struggle to challenge the dehumanizing and sometimes deadly pursuit of profit.

Selective engagement with the existing media and creating new forms of media

A further form of state-corporate power shaping our understandings of democracy is the media. Despite its limitations, penal abolitionists should have a direct and concerted engagement with the media so as to question the current forms of penological illiteracy and open the debate to a more nuanced and informed debate about penal realities. The exposures of inhumane prisons in the media in the UK in recent years is significant politically because the message that the public are receiving about the prison estate is one of chaos, harm, and inefficiency. The public then are slowly being educated about what prison is today through such representations of a prison system in crisis. To create the appropriate public environment for downsizing the criminal process requires an informed and rationale debate about the strengths and weaknesses of punishment.

Penal abolitionists should selectively engage with both the local and national media and also independent media—such as radio, TV, newspapers, podcasts, documentaries, and internet blogs. This can also mean building and using their own media. *EG Press* is a good example here. Established by three academics (J.M. Moore, Emma Bell and myself) as the publisher of the *European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control* in July 2015, this radical and independent publisher utilizes existing technologies on a voluntary basis to publish radical books by critical scholars and activists as well as the journal *Justice, Power and Resistance*. The other intervention that is of great significance is the short film/documentary. These may range from a few minutes to perhaps 60-90 minutes in length, depending on the time required. With mobile phone technologies and the ease of uploading to YouTube, the short films at least are now within the production capabilities of activists. Some medium of getting the message out is essential, but we must not become mere technicians of the state and the powerful and must be aware of pitfalls. Whilst the media is important, it must always be secondary to the main tasks of the organic collective intellectual: building relationships and understandings within the community.

The media, then, can be utilized most effectively to publicize activism on the community and to project the event to a wider audience. Engagement with media can also help to place abolitionist arguments on the agenda and can open up abolitionist ideas to a wider audience, but interviews with the mainstream media (especially TV and radio) alone can never be enough.

Building communities and the production of insurgent knowledge

Penal abolitionists need to engage with activists inside and outside prison to create counter-carceral knowledge (Sudbury 2009). It is important that democracy grows from the grass roots upwards, and that any organizing against the prison is thoroughly democratic in philosophy and

practice. Abolitionists should build towards creating their own autonomous power bases that can foster visions of emancipation and liberation beyond the academy. This should be self-reflexive as there can be no social change without also transforming ourselves. Education of the masses should be the core goal of penal abolitionism, and for that to be achieved education about “crime” and punishment should become part of everyday life (Scott, 2018). It should not be exclusively institutionalized within specialized places of learning. Therefore, penal abolitionists envision a very different kind of educational and political participation in the community that should exist alongside the university. This starts, as discussed earlier, by helping community-based actors build political and intellectual capital. It means sharing know-how, skills and resources with ordinary people so that we see the creation of organic collective intellectuals. But this educational approach is not just about knowledge production, but about building solidarity movements that can lead to liberation. It means engaging in organizing and activism that do not have formal ties to the Capitalist State, but rather are part of a given community.

This vision of the penal abolitionism in terms of reclaiming democracy requires the building of learning communities where people can teach each other, and where people can make resources available for such intervention. This leads us back to the ideas of Ivan Illich (1970) and his notion of the “learning web.” Rather than focusing on formal qualifications and a formal teacher-learner model, the learning web is predicated on self-motivated learning and on giving individuals opportunities to links with people, places, and ideas that can help them grow at their own pace. This is a kind of apprenticeship in the community, where people learn about prisons and punishment through workshops and talking face-to-face with people who have been incarcerated. This approach would also encompass what Illich (1970) called “skill exchanges” and capacity building where abolitionists can identify their skills, the conditions under which

they are willing to serve as models for others who want to learn these skills, and through “peer matching” communications networking how this can be achieved. In short, it means collectively learning together and engaging in reciprocal dialogue as organic collective intellectuals.

Liberation, hope, and praxis

Prisons devour the public resources necessary to restore communities devastated by racialized gendered violence and discrimination economic restructuring criminalization. The goal of the penal abolitionist is to challenge the deadly harms of incarceration and to help build the mechanisms that can be put in place to create freedom, liberation, and, most of all, human vitality and wellbeing. They cannot do this alone. There needs to be agents of change who can work together to transform communities. This work becomes increasingly necessary as the struggle from below is essential not just for democracy, but also for recapturing resources for communities in terms of promoting the paradigms of life; it is not just about dismantling the prison; it is about building communities and building hope, social justice, and a commitment to common humanity. The philosophy of hope requires collective knowledge, trust, solidarity, and listening. It cannot be driven from afar or centralized forms of control, but must grow and be locally based, drawing upon intellectual solidarities that work against broader forms of inequitable social relations. If any form of abolitionist democracy is to work, it is of crucial importance to build the cultural capital of activists.

Penal abolitionists should be prepared to take intellectual risks. The promotion of (non-penal) alternatives to prison that have demonstrated their effectiveness in addressing human conflicts troubles and illegal behaviors should be a top priority (Scott, 2013). Prisons do not create safer communities, but there are many different avenues that can be pursued to help build

safer communities. This means investing in community projects and investing in the lives of people so that they have a better future. Given the widespread knowledge of the humanitarian crisis confronting prisons, it is likely that if some of the myths surrounding the idea that “prison works” were cleared away there would be public support for fiscally prudent non-punitive interventions. Any effort to reduce incarceration must begin with an investment in community welfare service, but it must also recognize the many deep wounds and traumas created from prison life, as well as the previous trauma that many of the people who are sent to prison have experienced.

Penal abolitionism is a philosophy of hope engaged in a wider struggle for social justice, freedom, and the recognition of the human dignity of all. But it also a form of praxis, and as such abolitionists must reflect and act in the world in order to transform it in a progressive direction. It is also necessary that penal abolitionists work with people where they are at; whilst it may well have a utopian element, abolitionism is profoundly realistic in terms of what it can (indeed must) achieve in this historical conjuncture. One of the tasks of the abolitionist is to identify what is possible and how. Through understanding present conditions, it may become possible to highlight pathways for the democracy that is still yet to come (Said, 1994).

Reclaiming democratic spaces so that genuine dialogue and reflection can take places is a key starting point. We can only collectively move away from our current reliance on punishment and prisons once these issues have been debated and exposed for their true nature. This requires the formulation of a counter-hegemonic collective imagination and the building of alliances and relationships so that new agents of change can promote transformative political programs. The oppressed individual must perform the central role in their liberation. The penal abolitionist as inside-outsider and conduit for the formation of organic collective intellectuals can help to raise

consciousness and offer some ideas that could be developed further through democratic dialogue and participation (Freire, 1970).

Penal abolitionists must continue to engage in the battle for hearts and minds in the academy and beyond its walls. Penal abolitionists should provide scholarly and nuanced accounts of the problems we face today and do the groundwork to help communities work together to find ways to address them as best we can. Critical analysis remains intellectually powerful: understanding its implications can change people's lives and influence government policies. Critical criminological writings in the past have predicted, with somewhat disturbing accuracy at times, many of the problems we face today (Hall et al, 1978). Critical criminological and penal abolitionist scholarship will continue to be acknowledged and have impact in the real world and we should face the future not with trepidation, but with confidence that our arguments are strong and that collectively we can start to challenge problematic policies and practices of the corporate university. But it is also essential that as a society we put human need and inclusion before reciprocal dialogue. The very first priority is to make sure that people have the right access to the democratic process. This is part of our collective responsibility of the struggle for democracy and the creation of socially just society. Just talking about democracy, dialogue, and voice can never be enough; the material conditions must be met first for all so that people can engage in reciprocal dialogue. A firm political commitment to social justice and meeting human need is the only way to ensure that voice is heard, and that democracy is genuinely reclaimed for all (Dussel, 2013).

To achieve these ambitions aspirations, penal abolitionists must work collectively and collaboratively with the community and help to generate an organic abolitionist social movement which can operate as a genuine agent for transformative social change. Abolitionists must be

both legislators (offering ideas and helping to shape organic abolitionist social movements) but also interpreters (providing a way of translating the ideas of abolitionist activists into different public idioms) as well as using their position as ‘insider-outsiders’ to provide a platform for prisoners, ex-prisoners and anti-prison community activists. This requires political commitment, hard work, and above all, the recognition that abolitionism is a future orientated *philosophy of hope*.

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