

Sowing the seeds of change:

Dissenting Voices, Subversive Knowledges and an
Abolitionist Imagination for Our Time

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Introduction

1. Penological Amnesia and Abolitionist Imagination

2. Thinking Beyond Penal Reform

3. Questioning Penal Legitimacy From Within

4. Dissenting Irish Voices

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Penological Amnesia and Abolitionist Imagination

Problem of penological amnesia:trapped in immediatism; revolving on the 'penal-merry-go-round'; and no historical context.

Abolitionist imagination – understanding of historical continuities; cultivates 'subversive knowledge' challenging penal logic; situates prison within socio-economic contexts; importance of hearing the voice of experience from within that contest power; evolves organically in each nation

Thinking Beyond Penal Reform

- My understanding of penal abolition arose as a prison researcher
- Prisons are places of violence and death (especially around self-harm and self-inflicted deaths)
- Problem of 'institutionally structured violence'
- Rejecting 'penal utopian thinking'
- Exploiting contradictions for progressive change
- Disseminating subversive knowledges

Questioning Penal Legitimacy from Within

- Hearing the voice of the prisoner (but this voice can be disqualified by penal authorities)
- Hearing the voice of prison staff and penal administrators when they challenge power
- Examples of prison officers, prison chaplains, prison governors, medical officers and senior civil servants speaking out against imprisonment
- Question of prisons as places of rehabilitation and calls for non-punitive detention – numerous historical examples

Dissenting Irish Voices

- Abolition in Ireland must evolve organically (you cannot just transfer abolitionist thought from the outside)
- Finding abolitionist sentiments in Irish traditions, folk stories, philosophies, theologies, counter-colonial struggles, political activism
- Non-penal Irish approaches to wrongdoing prior to colonialism
- Hearing voice of Irish rebels imprisoned in England

Towards An Irish Penal Abolitionism for Our Times

- Historical continuities and abject failure of prison
- Questioning penal legitimacy
- Hearing and learning from voices on the inside
- Having the courage to generate and disseminate subversive knowledge
- Organically developing penal abolitionist imagination that is unique to Ireland and its politics, history and indigenous non-penal responses to wrongdoing

Thank you