

# PLACE, TIME & LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT

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# Time, place and imprisonment

‘Prison’s like a stand-still in your life, isn’t it. I’m being taken out of the world, yeah, and put in here, and this is its own little world ... It’s like you’ve been stuck in time, but everyone else is still moving’. (Justin)

‘space is in its very nature temporal and time spatial’  
(Parkes and Thrift 1980, p. 12).

# Long-term imprisonment from young adulthood

- What are the key problems that long-term prisoners experience, and how do they deal with these problems?
- How do they adapt socially to the demands of the environment?
- How do they feel about the 'legitimacy' of their sentence?
  
- Interviews with 125 men and 21 women:
  - Life sentences, with tariffs of 15 years or more
  - sentenced when under 25
- Surveys from 294 men and 19 women

# The threefold dislocation of long-term imprisonment

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- *existential* – from sense of self and morality
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- *socio-spatial* – from existing life-world, including social and relational ties
  - i.e. *where I was*
- *existential* – from sense of self and morality
  - i.e. *who I am*
- *temporal* – from an anticipated future
  - i.e. *where, who and what I was going to be*

# Temporal vertigo

'I was nineteen when I got sentenced. ... Basically, all them years I've just done, growing up, I've got to do them again in prison, and it's, like, *whoa*'

*Could you get your head around it at all?*

No, not at all, no. I just didn't want to think about it, cause I knew if I thought about it a lot then it would just mess up my head' (Curtis)

My little girl's going to be like 30 by the time I even get out, and I'm thinking 'hang on a minute', I was 19 when I got my tariff, you have given me a tariff that was longer than I'd been alive. I've only just turned 22 and when I'm thinking about the last 22 years of my life and what I can remember, I'm thinking that's how long my tariff is, and it's like *whoa*' (Yvette)

# Temporal vertigo

Difficulties conceptualising time:

‘I had no concept of eighteen years of life’ (Martin)

‘it’s a bit incomprehensible, really, your sentence, kind of imagining that amount of time’ (Samuel)

‘When I first went to jail, my friend just had a kid, and I’m thinking this kid is going to be my age, what I am now, when I get out. So it’s mad, really, but you try not to think about it, you just try to take it day-by-day and crack on, really’ (Oscar)

‘the main thing I think about is my daughter ... by the time I’m eligible for parole, my daughter’ll be my age now’ (Blake)

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# Doing it 'day-by-day'

'I try not to think about the length, I don't wanna think about that. [I] just take it day by day. Cause I can't change anything, so the more I stew on it ... it's just gonna mess me head up, innit' (Alfie)

'I just take each day as it comes and I think that's the easiest way, because if you start thinking too far ahead, then it's a lot harder' (Carl)

*'How far ahead are you able to think?'*

Not very far to be honest. ... one day at a time' (Fiona)

'I take it day-by-day, take each day as it comes ... and just try not to think about the outside world' (Liz)

[The future] 'It's just not something you think about. Today's the day. If you survive it, that's another day tomorrow' (Zubair)

# *Denial of time*

‘Yes, I used to have [a watch], but I don’t have one, just don’t keep track of time, it makes it go faster. Otherwise you’re clock watching’ (Thomas)

‘you try and really not look at the calendars ... I’m covering the days with a post-it note, to be honest ... the more you focus on time, the more it drags. So if you lose track of time you get a perception that it goes much faster’ (Antone)

‘I think when you’re appealing, you’re spending so much time and energy on it, that time does kind of go quick’ (Sim)

‘I don’t think about the future [in prison] because for me I have no intention of spending that long in jail. My focus isn’t prison. It’s the world beyond prison. And mentally I make an effort to transcend my existence here’ (Dan)

## *Compression of time*

‘Half of my day is basically gone, isn’t it, through sleep, eating. I don’t count that as my sentence. Therefore my sentence has gone to nine years. And when I’m talking to my friends or watching videos or reading my books, I don’t count that because my mind is engaged, so when you start really breaking it down your sentence is only like two years or whatever’ (Haashim)

‘To me, when I go to cat D, I class that as being at home, innit’.  
(Harris)

I’ll have another 3 or 4 years here. Then there will be close to 20 left. Then I’ll be Cat B, and before you know it, you’re in D Cat.  
(Terrance)

# *Suppression of time*

The less aware you are, the easier it is to deal with, innit? ...  
Blank nothingness - that's what gets you through. And if you can put yourself in that kind of state, that's how you survive. (Neil)

The whole point of taking heroin became that I didn't [have to] think about a minute [of the sentence], really. (Phillip)

*What can you do to make time pass more quickly?*

Sleep. Constant sleep (Earl)

# ‘Fractured reflexives’ – Archer 2003, 2012

‘... they are like someone who, having learned French then finds himself in an exclusively German culture and is unable to participate, until or unless he begins to master the new language’ (2003: 298).

‘so preoccupied by the traumatic events in question that they focus on the immediate needs of survival’ (2012: 249)

‘passive agents’ (2003: 299): ‘people to whom things happen rather than people who exercise some governance over their lives by making things happen’ (2003: 343)

‘adrift’ (2003: 312), ‘passively going with the tide’ (2003: 312), ‘taking each day as it comes’ (2003: 314)

# Time and control

‘I’m not in charge of my own liberty, so ... **anything can happen**, one day the officers can come to me and say ‘you’re going to the block’. **[So I] live every day as if it’s the last**, because you don’t know when you’re going to die’  
(Cary)

‘I deal with things day by day in here, so it’s not like I plan for the ... **anything in prison you just deal with day by day ... it’s an environment where anything can happen ...** It’s an unpredictable environment. One minute you could be here, the next minute you’re in the block’ (Bruce)

# Prison time as slow but fast

‘It seems like it drags but then when you look back it’s flew because it’s **repetitive**, it’s the same, so there’s nothing major that stands out ... it’s gone so fast, because nothing’s happened’ (Scott)

‘It’s the same shit every day, man. Like **the same routine**, so you know what to expect every day.

*And does time go quickly or slowly?*

Time? To be honest, time flies, man’ (Zaid)

‘In prison, your day-to-day is so similar. It’s **monotonous**. The same old routine, different day. And you know, it just blends into one ... [but] it’s frighteningly quick, how fast time goes’ (Campbell)

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# Time and death

'I'm just doing anything to kill the time, to be honest' (Andre)

It's just like you're wasting away, really' (Sean)

'You're not really living, really, are you. ... It's like I'm just here ... You're just existing' (Sean)

'Jail's not exactly hard, it's just a time killer. It just kills you' (Christopher)

'It just seems like a bit of dead time I'm doing' (Jared)

'Time-killing, basically' (Jeremiah)

'It's just a lot of wasted years. It's like a grave yard, a grave yard for time' (Gibson)

# Prison as a 'non-place' (Augé 1995)

'life just stops when you are behind these doors, like. Like it's frozen the time' (Johnnie)

[It's] 'like you're just frozen, died' (Jackie)

'The life that I was living, or the life that I wanted to live on the outside, is on pause.' (Carl)

'you are in a constant hiatus. Your life is on hold in that period ... I felt like time stopped the day I was put in prison' (Dan)

'It's like a time capsule, and frozen' (Terrance)

it's like you're in hibernation, until you come out' (Cary)

# Adapting to the sentence

It doesn't matter where you're living, you're still living a life. Life is just the environment you're in ... and if I was on the outside, I would probably, I'd still be doing the same things: learning academically [...] forming friendships. (Carl)

I've got me appeal going, but in my mind I'm settled doing 30 years. I'm not gonna sit here and cry. I've gotta carry on me life, so in my mind, ... this is home now, innit. It's just home. This is life now. Get used to it. Which I have. (Zubair)

- 'persons living in prison rather than offenders doing time' (Zamble 1992: 423-4)

# Managing time - mid/late stage prisoners

- Taming: via segmentation & targets ('time anchors' – O'Donnell 2015)
- Transcending, managing and manipulating time: reading, spirituality etc

'for those two hours or three hours that you choose to read, you're somewhere else, you're not in prison, you're in the story, and you're somewhere else. It helps a lot in terms of not only expanding your imagination and vocabulary. It just helps in terms of the time' (Carl)

'With a video game or a book, you go into a sort of universe it ... You're part of the story, so it gets you involved, it's sort of escapism' (Antone)

- Time as something to be *used* rather than filled, 'killed' or expended:

'One of our [religious] scholars said, yeah, that, "Time's like a sword. If you don't grab hold of it, it'll split you in two." And that's exactly what happens in prison. [...] We've been given time. Prison is about time. [...] It's very important to use time well'. (Mohammed)

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'I don't think you can fully mature. Like I almost feel I'm stuck in time, like I'm still 22. Cause you've got no real new experiences to sculpt you into a more mature person' (Casper)

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