

accountability norm is an important intervention into transitional justice scholarship and practice.

Both authors recognize and confirm the central role of law in response to mass atrocity. Rowen concludes: “Truth commissions are now understood as a complement to prosecutions, if not a precursor, and mobilizing around one further contributes to the anti-impunity agenda, for better or worse” (150). For Aboueldahab, limited judicial capacity and weak laws contribute to ineffective or nonexistent prosecutions in all four of her cases, which leads her to call for capacity building for judiciaries prior to any transitional justice efforts. As these volumes demonstrate, legal and quasi-legal responses to mass violence and human rights violation are increasingly treated as necessary and expected, even if certain exceptions apply, but responses in the name of transitional justice are ultimately insufficient. Transitional justice can be viewed as a continuously constituted idea or as a narrow, well-established theory; yet, it is mostly a series of experiments none of which fully meets the anguished needs that prompted it and none of which adequately protects against extraordinary harms in the future.

\* \* \*

*Being and Becoming an Ex-Prisoner*, by Diana F. Johns. London: Routledge, 2018.

Reviewed by Alessandro De Giorgi, Department of Justice Studies,  
San Jose State University

“I don’t see it as re-integration because I wasn’t integrated to begin with” (139). This powerful statement, shared by an Australian former prisoner with author Diana F. Johns and included in her book *Being and Becoming an Ex-Prisoner*, effectively summarizes the paradoxical nature of so-called “prisoner reentry.” Coined in the United States in the early 2000s, when the catastrophic social costs of mass imprisonment finally started to draw the attention of some reform-oriented politicians and policy makers, the term describes the difficult process of returning to free society after incarceration. The emerging reality of prisoner reentry has inspired a growing body of literature, focused on documenting the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated people as they navigate their way back to a society that—even before it warehoused them in prison—had often already confined them at the bottom of the racial and class

hierarchy, denying them access to education, employment, housing, health care, and a dignified existence. Given the extent to which public neglect, economic marginalization, social abandonment, and civic exclusion are constitutive features in the lives of most prisoners before they even enter the prison system, to define prisoner reentry as a process of “reintegration” sounds indeed like a misleading statement.

Although Australia has not experienced a punitive turn comparable to the penal experiment that has swept the United States since the mid-1970s—with the consequence that its prisoner reentry phenomenon is much more limited than the one currently unfolding in the land of mass incarceration—nonetheless the painful narratives gathered from formerly incarcerated people by Diana F. Johns in *Being and Becoming an Ex-Prisoner* describe realities of isolation, abandonment, and social suffering similar to those experienced by their U.S. counterparts, and likely by released prisoners anywhere in the world. In her work, based on in-depth interviews with a sample of 12 male ex-prisoners and 14 reentry workers in the state of Victoria, Johns offers vivid snapshots of the traumatic experience of returning to society after more or less prolonged periods of confinement. The former prisoners interviewed by Johns share stories of hope and desperation, anticipation and disillusionment, and striving and frustration. They struggle to find suitable housing (particularly when they do not have family members or other relatives waiting for them at the prison gates); they face extensive periods of joblessness or—in what often represents a best-case scenario, at least in the eyes of reentry workers—insecure employment in minimum-wage and precarious occupations. Furthermore, these structural obstacles are often compounded by a range of subjective conditions that render the path to social integration even more impervious: from chronic health problems to untreated mental illnesses and from long-term drug and alcohol addictions to personal and social isolation.

In this context, it is certainly tragic, although not surprising, that in the perception of some reentry workers—but, one would think, also in the experience of many former prisoners—freedom from confinement comes ridden with ambivalent meanings. This is what Johns defines in her book as the paradox of freedom, whereby “prisoners leave the safety and security of prison life and return to instability and uncertainty” (153). This is not to say, of course, that prison life should be considered as in any way better or more desirable than life outside, but simply—as one of the interviewees puts it in one of the many gripping narratives included in the book—that “when you get out, you think the sun’s gonna shine every day, and you’re gonna have a thousand dollars in your pocket every day, and

everything's gonna be good and, you know, you're gonna be able to buy whatever you want. But you gotta pay bills and methadone, medication, and you find out you've got no money to live and . . . you're doing this [interview] to get a twenty dollar food voucher, just so I'm not going out committing violence" (132).

Yet, the narrative richness of the interview excerpts included in *Being and Becoming an Ex-Prisoner* is only one of the many strengths of this valuable contribution to the literature on prisoner reentry. Another clear merit of Johns' excellent work is the sophisticated theoretical framework the author develops in order to produce a nuanced understanding of the complex and often contradictory dimensions of (re)integration after imprisonment. In particular, Johns' analysis of her research subjects' experiences effectively deconstructs the dominant individualistic, risk-based approaches to the issue of prisoner reentry, in order to offer a much richer exploration of the post-prison landscape drawing from phenomenology, semiotics, and post-structuralism. In this direction, three main conceptual tools—*assemblage*, *culture*, and *liminality*—are deployed by the author in the attempt to explore the conditions of ambivalence, displacement, and “in-betweenness” often characterizing the experience of release from prison. Thus, the concept of assemblage allows Johns to conceive the postrelease terrain “as a complex, multilayered social phenomenon comprising varied perspectives and understandings” (67); the author's choice to adopt a capacious notion of culture as “culture-in-action,” conversely sheds light on prison-inspired constructions of hegemonic masculinity, which bring the gendered nature of imprisonment and reentry to the core of her analysis; finally, the concept of liminality emerges from the interviewees' narratives “as a defining characteristic of prisoners' experience of getting out—a state of being in-between, neither inside nor yet fully part of the outside world” (67).

At the end of a sobering journey through the difficult landscapes of prisoner reentry, having provided her readers with an invaluable in-depth portrayal of the many forms of social suffering endured by former prisoners—what perhaps could be termed as “the pains of post-imprisonment,” to paraphrase Gresham M. Sykes' famous definition—Johns also offers some policy-oriented insights on possible reforms and interventions that could reshape the field of prisoner reentry. One of these is worth mentioning for its largely unexplored potential: the idea of developing rituals of reintegration aimed at reversing the many ceremonies of degradation to which criminalized populations are subjected at every step of their trajectory within the criminal justice system. In the end, however, it may be the very existence of the prison that should be questioned, because as Johns writes in the very last

pages of her book (210–11), “It doesn’t work. Prison *does* work to reproduce the harms that perpetuate offending: social and economic marginalisation; mental illness; homelessness and housing insecurity; exaggerated models of masculinity; substance abuse and addiction; family disruption and trauma; intergenerational violence and criminality; and punitive, retributive norms.” *Being and Becoming an Ex-Prisoner* will be an invaluable resource for scholars and students of the criminal justice system as well as for activists and policy makers committed to reforming it.

\* \* \*

*Nordic Nationalism and Penal Order: Walling the Welfare State.* By Vanessa Barker. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018, Abingdon, Oxon.

Reviewed by Ron Levi, Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy and Department of Sociology, University of Toronto

In his Collège de France lectures *On the State*, Pierre Bourdieu reflects on analyses of the state that do not attend to the often simultaneous strategies that are part of the official accumulation of power. “This is the ambiguity,” Bourdieu argues, “of all those state structures involved in the ‘welfare state,’ about which you never know whether they are institutions of control or of service; in fact, they are both at the same time, they control all the better by serving” (2015: 142).

Bourdieu’s concern is similarly reflected in the sociologies of law and crime. Here, the welfare state has generally been understood in the benevolent terms in which it presents itself. Some, of course, would periodically remind us that Keynesian state agencies could also widen the net of social control—yet, this came to be understood as an unintended consequence of benevolent policies and institutions. With the emergence of the neoliberal era, the image of the Keynesian welfare state would gain ever more purchase as the benevolent social imaginary against which the policies of the neoliberal era would be juxtaposed and assessed.

Vanessa Barker’s new book on *Nordic Nationalism and Penal Order: Walling the Welfare State* offers a brilliant rejoinder and corrective to this literature. Through a deep dive into how Swedish state agencies control migrants, mobility, and the border, Barker demonstrates that strong welfare states—of which Sweden is, of course, a paradigmatic example—do not necessarily provide a