

Punishment and Parade: The Cultural Form of Penal Exile in Russia

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The theme of this edited collection, *Transnational Penal Cultures*, examines representations of culture in punishment forms. The interpretations of penal histories presented in this collection challenge conventional Foucauldian analyses of punishment that view penality as an instrumental form of power-knowledge and body regulation. The challenge presented to the contributors was to look beyond Foucault, and therefore beyond the power-knowledge dichotomy as the object of study, to a cultural account where idealisms and historical meanings are emphasised in penality's unfolding. This chapter trains attention on Russia's culture of punishment and demonstrates that this exceptional penal form is marked - indeed scarred - by a penal style involving exile and banishment.¹ I argue that Russia's culture of punishment reproduces specific cultural and penal-historical tropes that are appropriated from experiences of imprisonment that date back to the nineteenth century. The historical discourse of 'in exile imprisonment' presented in this chapter cannot be separated from present day experiences of incarceration in Russia because it plays an essential role in understanding penality today amongst the general public and the prison population in that

¹ Some of the ideas presented in this paper are drawn from the ESRC-funded study in women's imprisonment in Russia titled: *Women in the Russian Penal System: the role of distance in the theory and practice of imprisonment in late Soviet and post-Soviet Russia*, RES-062-023-0026, 2006-2010.

country. William Sewell's *cultural schema*² will form the basis of the analysis of how in Russia, a distinctive cultural knowledge of punishment (in which exile endures as a punitive response) and a particular action (the use of geographical displacement suggests that penal power continues to migrate from the centre to the margins) makes for a certain kind of 'common sense'. The cultural schema of 'in exile imprisonment' is recognisable to Russians because it allows for a common understanding of the punishment process, however so defined.

This chapter will first introduce what I understand to be a cultural understanding of penalty against a Foucauldian account of penal change before presenting a brief history of exile in Russia. I then examine how memory-making in Russia's penal spaces, and the cultural trope of exile, have created, to paraphrase Garland, *penal place*, *penal purpose* and *penal culture*.³ A point of note is that I do not set out to endorse a cultural account of punishment over a Foucauldian account. Rather, my argument is that Russian imprisonment has evolved against a cultural panorama of using the geographical peripheries of the Tsarist empire and Soviet and post-Soviet nation-state(s), and an exceptional spatial exclusion, to anchor penal and political power. Moreover, whilst the popular tropes of 'exile' and 'camps' are fashioned from remembering, creating a repertoire of penal narratives and symbolic framing that are familiar, it is also the case that contemporary penalty in Russia is highly politicised around what I call a 'moral-nationalism' that sustains these historical narratives.

² William H. Sewell, "The concept (s) of culture," in V. E. Bonell and C. Hunt (eds) *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 35-61.

³ David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 1990), 211.

As evidenced in the *Pussy Riot*, *Khodorkovsky* and the *Greenpeace* imprisonment cases, there is currently in Russia a moral and pragmatic discourse circulating in civil society about impropriety, illegality and so-called malevolence that requires the state to exercise removal as an expression of penal power.⁴ More seriously then, this chapter seeks to offer a new and more developed theorisation for understanding penalty in contemporary Russia that may helpfully move prison sociology forward towards considering two things: first, how all forms of incarceration might be experienced as exile, and second, a renewed sense of understanding how historical discourse shapes the fates of those punished.

Punishment and Culture

Foucault's contribution to the study of punishment was immense and in quite fundamental ways he has shaped consensus on how subjects come to be disciplined. It would not be an understatement to say that he has produced a new carceral imaginary; in particular his startling analyses of madness, and the birth of the prison and the clinic have reversed conventional historical understandings and, at the same time, forged new epistemological challenges on how to map power onto knowledge. His legacy on the study of history itself, and on the study of the subjects of power, is profound with notable effects on how prison and punishment have structural counterparts in other forms of social relations. In Foucault's thesis the prison rather than being seen as a remnant of pre-Enlightenment brutality, is part of

⁴ Laura Piacentini and Judith Pallot, 'In Exile Imprisonment' in Russia, *The British Journal of Criminology*, 54.1 (2014), 20-37.

a matrix of modern governmental social structures and, therefore, merely reproduces, with a little more emphasis, all the structures that are to be found in the social body.⁵

In assembling and interpreting a new social history of punishment, Foucault's reading of history, and how it intersects with the discourse of power, has been met with much opposition. Writing in 1999, Willem Frijhoff argues that historians have responded in the past somewhat uneasily to the historical validity of Foucault's work, casting him at one time as an outcast. This is partly because Foucault challenged historians to introduce the principle of power onto bodies and into hospitals, prisons, clinics, asylums in order to cultivate new constructions of social life and, moreover, a new way of recording history, which had the effect of undermining conventional historical approaches as exclusionary and limiting.⁶ Sociologists and philosophers have gone further in their criticisms. Fred Alford points out: "My criticism of Foucault is not new. It has been made by a number of criminologists, who argue that Foucault mistakes the utopian discourse of prison reform for its practice. I repeat the criticism only to emphasize that Foucault is mistaken about more than the details of prison life. He has systematically mistaken an ideology for a practice. This affects not just his view of prison, but of power'.⁷ Alford describes Foucault as missing the point insofar as his conceptualisation of the iconic, but not-realised, Panopticon, was not so much about

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977; trans. Alan Sheridan, Penguin/Peregrine Books: London, 1979).

⁶ Willem Frijhoff, "Foucault Reforms by Certeau: Historical Strategies of Discipline and Everyday Tactics of Appropriation," in John Neubauer, ed., *Cultural History After Foucault*, (New York: Walter De Gruyter, Inc., 1999), 84.

⁷ C. Fred Alford, "What would it matter if everything Foucault said about prison were wrong? *Discipline and Punish* after twenty years," *Theory and Society* 29.1 (2000), 134.

discipline or finding big meanings in the smallest of symbols. Rather, the point of punishment in modern societies is to produce, through the form of incarceration, a spectacle or performance. That punishment is about saying rather than doing; about style rather than bureaucratic or instrumentalist tendencies⁸ is picked up and given shape by Phillip Smith who in commenting on Foucault's thesis, states: 'There remains no affect or passion, no symbolism and no culturally specified imperatives other than those relating to domination'.⁹ In other words, what is missing from Foucault's analysis is punishment's capacity to express culture. Smith's position is 'radically anti-Foucauldian', instead developing a neo-Durkheimian approach to how punishment is styled and discussed in popular culture.¹⁰

Smith maps out a cultural terrain of punishment as an object of dread, of amusement and of fetishism and, importantly, marked by one important contingency - cultural

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Phillip Smith, *Punishment and Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 11.

¹⁰ Ibid., 11-16. The historical-social and cultural development of punishment in Western jurisdictions is also discussed in Dario Melossi and Massimo Pavarini, *The Prison and the Factory: The Origins of the Penitentiary* (London: Macmillan, 1981); David Garland *Punishment and Welfare: A History of Penal Strategies* (Ashgate: Gower Publishing, United Kingdom, 1987); David Downes, *Contrasts in Tolerance: Post-War Penal Policy in the Netherlands and in England and Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society*; Michael Tonry, *Punishment and Politics—Evidence and Emulation in the Making of English Penal Policy* (Cullompton: Willan 2004); John Pratt, *Punishment and Civilization: Penal Tolerance and Intolerance in Modern Society* (London: Sage Publications Limited, 2002).

accomplishment. This is a significant and fascinating sketch of punishment forms that provides clues as to how state punishment requires ridding society of the polluted in order to re-narrate to civil society how it *accomplishes* crime and civic control and, ultimately, purity. He adds: ‘the building of a penitentiary system was generally acclaimed as a sign of progress for humanity.’¹¹ This invites us to explore the role of ‘experience’ and ‘expression’ in a framework of punishment in which habits of speech, gestures and feelings come to have influence on punitive activity and its modernisation, so defined. Foucault’s modernity is one of classification, regulation, discipline and monitoring. Yet, in his concern with regulation, he overlooks the cultural representations of punishment as meaningful, styled and communicative and a response to sin, taboo, evil and profanity.

Over the last 15 years or so, Phillip Smith, David Garland and John Pratt have each separately analysed, with great depth and quality, the conditions of culture that have produced social meanings in penal spaces. Culture is not only a social product but it is integral to the social. Expressions of culture can be found in the forms punishment takes, from the guillotine, to the electric chair, to the Supermax, and each punishment form has its own symbolic logic and cultural expression. However, it must also be said that where prison sociologists have intended to show how culture can be explained, and hence interpreted, the tendency has been to isolate factors that may be co-variant with some cultural phenomenon.¹² And in this (limiting) understanding of culture - as that which is ‘embedded’ in penal control - the effect, argues Garland, has been to produce narrow terms for understanding penalty. Testing and measuring culture in carceral settings is also fraught with epistemological

¹¹ Smith, *Punishment and Culture*, 113.

¹² David Garland, “A culturalist theory of punishment?,” [Book Review of Philip Smith *Punishment and Culture*,. (2008), *Punishment and Society* 11.2 (2009), 259-268.

difficulties when the theoretical status of culture is considered. As Roger Friedland and John Mohr identify: ‘The implication is that the social is the domain of materiality, of hardness, thingness, objects and objectivity’.¹³ Indeed, the kinds of intellectual problems that excite sociologists of the prison remain of the type where human relationships and power dynamics unfold in the ‘thing’ of the prison. A resultant problem then becomes how to utilise empirical work to measure and test for the presence of culture in prisons, where the commanding power of control can be fluid and hidden but also complexly co-terminus with state discipline. Hence, there remains a quite fundamental split, a worrying ‘either/or’, in prison sociology between the social versus the cultural; as though social things are separate from interpretive cultural artefacts.¹⁴ Consequently, there is still much intellectual work to be done on how, or indeed if, a culturalist account coheres with a Foucauldian power/knowledge theorisation.

The Russian prison case study offers new ways to understand penalty and to break down the social versus cultural duopoly dominating prison sociology. As will be shown, a quite profound cultural process is happening when Russia punishes its convicted offenders and sends them to jail. The dense cultural meaning of exile does not stand in *opposition* to penal discipline but instead *combines* discipline with display, punishment with ‘parade’. I would describe today’s carceral punishment system in Russia as ‘in exile imprisonment’. In Sewell’s path-breaking thesis on culture and structure, this real cultural value and common-sense need are referred to as *cultural schema*, which can be understood as an analytical set of conventions present in a variety of institutions, spheres and discourses. Cultural schema are

¹³ Roger Friedland and John Mohr, “The cultural turn in American Sociology,” in Roger Friedland and John Mohr, eds., *Matters of Culture: Cultural Sociology in practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6.

¹⁴ Garland, “A culturalist theory,” 262.

things we take for granted and are relatively unconscious.¹⁵ Sonya Rose suggests, ‘This formulation while appealing, because it seems to suggest that particular cultural forms endure because they are deep, in the end relies on circular reasoning. If a cultural form or practice endures, it is deep. It is deep because it is part of common sense and it is pervasive. It is part of common sense and pervasive because it is structured in a particular way’.¹⁶

It is helpful to consider punishment in Russia as a cultural schema that uncovers a mentality and a wider belief system embodying two aspects of Russia-Soviet culture. First, ‘in exile imprisonment’ exists in *common sense* in the minds of Russian prisoners and the Russian publics at large. To internal appearances (at least) it is a straightforward response to crime. Second, it is *real* in the history of punishment because penal exile existed in the world of resource development (to populate Russia’s far off lands). The ways in which culture has been presented, indeed paraded, in Russian penal spaces throughout history is explored in the next part of this chapter, while part 3 seeks to analyse and reflect on memory-making through the cultural schema of exile.

A brief history of Exile in Russian penal culture

A full appraisal of exile in Russia is beyond the scope of this chapter but suffice it to say that it is a historical postulate that the cycles of purge, exile and confinement that occurred throughout Russian-Soviet history have constituted major challenges to advancing a fuller

¹⁵ Sewell, “The concept (s) of culture,” 35-61.

¹⁶ Sonya O. Rose, “Cultural Analysis and Moral Discourse: Episodes, Continuities and Transformation’s”, in V. E. Bonnell and C. Hunt (eds) *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 1999), 226.

account of penal development up to the present day. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that criminologists and prison sociologists working in the field of Russian incarceration are few. Moreover, it remains the case that whilst social historians and area studies specialists are now reconstructing prison scholarship to include in their analysis careful attention to values, sentiments and norms, the analysis does not incorporate a discussion of punishment in Russia as either a cultural artefact or a cultural form, embodying a sensibility that is quite exceptional in the history of penal systems.¹⁷ To better understand the cultural schema of Russian prisons requires a careful understanding of how Russia comes to terms with its past, how the country internalises transformation and how things are remembered. In other words, how culture is defined and, hence, expressed. In its configuration, ideology, rules and laws, the traces of the past were targeted to move the penal system into a modern (if Western) form.¹⁸ Yet, whilst there was reform of all the parts of the criminal justice apparatus from around 1991, certain traces or echoes were left behind, namely, the practice of ‘in exile imprisonment’. The carceral punishment form of exile is not presented here solely as a legal response. Instead, it continues to produce a specific set of historical, *disciplinary mythologies and meanings* about penal ideology in twenty-first century Russia.

¹⁷ See, for example, Steven A. Barnes, *Death and Redemption: The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) and Daniel Beer, “Decembrists, Rebels and Martyrs in Siberian Exile: The “Zerentui Conspiracy” of 1828 and the Fashioning of a Revolutionary Genealogy”, *Slavic Review*, 72.3 (2013), 528-51.

¹⁸ See Bill Bowring and Valeriy Savitsky, (eds.) *Prava Cheloveka i Sudebnyy Kontrol [Human Rights and Judicial Review]*, (Moscow, Human Rights Publishers, 1996), and Laura Piacentini, *Surviving Russian prisons: Punishment, Economy and Politics in Transition* (Cullompton: Willan Publishing Ltd, 2004).

Prisoner exile has been used in Russia since the 16th century.¹⁹ In the period up to the early 18th Century, expulsion - exile (*ssylka*) and banishment (*izganie*) - were not so much punishments in and of themselves but the consequences of punishment, since the political and religious dissidents and criminals to which they were applied had already been tortured, mutilated and interned and subjected to ‘civil death’.²⁰ Administrative changes meant that exile powers were granted to serf owners and village and civilian authorities in the mid-eighteenth century and over the 90-year period from 1807 to 1917 nearly one-and-a-half million subjects were forcibly removed to Siberia.²¹ The significance of this period is the normalisation of exiling large numbers of Russian citizens. Not all of these exiles were criminals and according to Gentes’ study of vagabond culture and exile, most ‘were simply unwilling to engage in farming and therefore resorted to begging, prostitution and petty thievery to survive’.²² The exile of vagrants, *brodiagi*, accounted for the highest cohort of

¹⁹ See Beer, “Decembrists, Rebels, and Martyrs”, as above; Andrew A. Gentes, “Katorga: penal Labour and Tsarist Russia”, in *The Siberian Saga: A History of Russia’s Wild East*, ed. Eva-Maria Stolberg (Peter Lang, Oxford, 2005); Andrew A. Gentes, “Vagabond and the Tsarist Siberian exile system: power and resistance in the penal landscape system” *Central Asia Quarterly* 30, 3-4, (September-December 2011): 407-421; Solzhenitsyn 1976 – need full refs or short titles and page nos if appropriate

²⁰ See Piacentini and Pallot, *In Exile Imprisonment in Russia*.

²¹ Gentes, “Vagabond and the Tsarist Siberian exile system,” 407-421

²² *Ibid.*, 407. Gentes’ outlines how Russian vagrancy laws, like those in Western Europe and the United States, were sufficiently opaque to enable the persecution of a range of individuals who did not meet the strict criteria of homeless or deviant. The *brodiagi* – the vagrants -

exiles between the years 1827-1846 (30.4%), although this number dropped after Serf emancipation at the end of the Crimean War.²³ The vastness of Siberia as a sparsely populated but fertile land was a discourse that ran through Russian culture centuries earlier. In effect, Russia came to possess a penal colony in the form of Siberia – the country’s Far East – and it is notable that this development occurred at the same time as Western Europe and the United States were acting to eradicate vagrancy through other disciplinary mechanisms including prisons. This is significant because it is the period that marks the moment when a line can be drawn to distinguish between what we now refer to as Western penality and Eastern European penality. Russia was colonizing itself through exile and forced labour whilst Western Europe was considering using confinement with restraint.

The various categories of exile created a ladder of punishments that were applied inconsistently in Tsarist Russia due to a lack of sentencing guidelines, and which contributed, in part, to a later characterisation of exile as ‘unreasonable and an anomaly’.²⁴ The *brogdiagi* were not alone in this exile persecution. The exile of the Decembrists (army officers who revolted against the Tsarist regime in the nineteenth century and who were sent to Siberia for ‘exile- resettlement’) in the early 19th century was also an iconic example of exile. Some Decembrists were imprisoned as well as exiled and once *katorga* (penal servitude/labour) was introduced, exiles were imprisoned. We see here Russia moving, in part, towards Western penal methods such as imprisonment. The Decembrist uprising illustrates how, through exile, the state responded to challenges to its sovereign power, and the role of the autocrat in

would be assigned to public works and labour when previously, they would have been assigned to military service?

²³ Gentes, “Vagabondage and the Tsarist Siberian exile system,” 409.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 411

promoting an extreme punitive response. In Tsarist Russia it was the aristocratic elite who faced expulsion and who brought with them to Siberia reform plans and a commonly-held rights discourse. Hence, libraries, schools, hospitals and settlements, alongside hard labour, came to be established as a consequence of exile. Families joined the exiled Decembrists and their introduction of innovative agricultural techniques to Siberia earned them an iconic status that was shared by the wives of the exiled (the *Dekrabistki*). Today in Russia the archetypal good wife model is still the *Dekrabistki*.²⁵ It would appear that by the late 19th century, a cultural practice of follow-the-exile had been established. Exile volunteers, the *dobrovol'nye* were the wives and families who 'voluntarily' followed their male convict relatives into exile.²⁶

Furthermore, exile as a state response to so-called malevolence also produced additional complex responses from resistance to engagement, thus creating a kind of cultural spectacle of othering and an embedded social and penal response to criminality. In a fascinating ethnographic analysis of the pseudonyms used by exiles in the late nineteenth century, Sergei V. Maksimov claimed that exiles would adopt boastful names reflecting the Siberian landscape such as *Dubrovin* (Oak), *Brilliantov* (Gemstone) *Sokolov* (Falcon) and *Koronev* (Root).²⁷ Deeply institutionalised through this punishment form in one sense, the

²⁵ See David Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform, 1801–1881* (Routledge: Longman Publishing, 1992); Piacentini and Pallot 'In Exile Imprisonment' in *Russia*, 30-33.

²⁶ Gentes, "Vagabondage and the Tsarist Siberian exile system," 423.

²⁷ Maksimov cited in Vladimir Doroshevich, *Russia's penal colony in the Far East: a Translation of Vlad Doroshevich's 'Sakhalin'* (Trans. Andrew A. Gentes, New York: Anthem Press, 2009), 446.

exile system can be simultaneously understood here as being almost culturally romantic and profound.

The Soviet era marked a turning point in Russia's penal culture. Cleansing the metropolitan centres of 'undesirable elements' was intended to assist the early Soviet regime in mobilising its power, funnelling resources to Siberia, and promoting cultural expansion of the Soviet utopia. Exile *as* punishment was used most notoriously in the mass deportations for the whole period from 1930 to Stalin's death in May 1953, including the deportation of kulaks during the collectivization drive, the 'mass operations' in 1937-38, and the deportation of ethnic groups and 'criminals' in the 1930s and 1940s.²⁸ In Tsarist Russia, penal exile occurred primarily as a by-product of a badly administered and chaotic penal system, but in Soviet Russia exile was a mainstream - indeed primary - mode of punishment. The distinction between exile and imprisonment in the USSR also flows through Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*; the introduction of *katorga*, for Solzhenitsyn, degraded the Imperial Russian system of exile. The best of the recent scholarship has gone a long way toward deconstructing the boundary between exile and imprisonment. We now understand that camp inmates who earned non-convoy status could spend long periods outside the confines of the camp, whilst the degree of power-and-control exercised over their lives meant exiles shared many of the experiences of the camps.³¹ In his analysis of the Gulag in Kazakhstan, Steven Barnes treats

²⁸ Andrew A. Gentes, "Katorga: penal Labour and Tsarist Russia", in *The Siberian Saga: A History of Russia's Wild East*, ed. Eva-Maria Stolberg (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), Beer, "Decembrists, Revels and Martyrs," 528-51.

³¹ For an excellent review of research on special settlements, see O. Klimkova, *Special Settlements in Soviet Russia in the 1930s-50s*, *Kritika*, 8/1 (2007): 105-139. For a discussion of non-convoy prisoners, see W. T. Bell, 'Was the gulag an archipelago? An examination of

camps, colonies, prisons and internal exile as a single punishment system, whilst for Kate Brown evidence in gulag histories of the merging of camps and special settlements reinforces her view of the USSR as made up of a spectrum of incarcerated space.³² All these works make clear that the treatment of people expelled to the peripheries did not necessarily map neatly onto their legal status, and vice versa.

By the 1950s, exile had become normalised as a legal category of imprisonment. When fused with the mythic landscape of Russia, particularly during Stalinism, it was revealed as iconic and dominant. According to Gentes (2011) embodying the exile experience is the modification of the self into new places. Yet, there is staticity in exile in that once the destination is reached the prospect of return seems overwhelming and improbable. Exile, is, therefore, a liminal space of leaving and becoming. Or more precisely, ‘in exile imprisonment’ marks a rebirth of one’s identity as s/he develops a sense of connectedness to a new land following fluid, fractured and frail coerced mobilisation. As a cultural schema, ‘in exile imprisonment’ articulates the boundaries of tolerance of deviancy and produces an exceptional cultural memory ingrained in the national psyche. In Gulag testimonies, there are thick descriptions of ‘night blindness’ in prison ships, and how the ‘purplish hills’ called to

de-convoyed prisoners in Western Siberia’, Paper presented at the Conference on the History and Legacy of the Gulag, Harvard University, 2–5 November 2006.

³² Steven A. Barnes, *Death and Redemption: The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Kate Brown, “Out of solitary confinement: history of the gulag”, *Kritika*, 8/1 (2007): 67-103. Nick Baron also emphasises the gulag’s spatiality in his exploration of the gulag, see Nick Baron, *Soviet Karelia* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

mind the giant roofless prison of penal exile.²⁹ Soviet dissidents' from the 1980s talk about exile across Russia as 'moving with the breeze', the 'brilliance of the stars' seen through transportation to colonies and re-creating traffic noises in their heads to make associations with home. Solzhenitsyn writes of how he came to loathe forests.³⁰

As exile became one of the main repertoires of penal discipline in Russia, so too is it the case that the place of exile becomes an environment of torment and we see this in today's testimonials from women prisoners, which are discussed towards the end of the chapter. Coupled with resource development, which was insistently pursued in the criminal justice sphere, 'in exile imprisonment' was not only a particular style of punishment, but also, a particular style of *moral-nationalism*. Criminals were wreckers and contaminators of the Soviet utopia. If imprisonment served the purpose of political correction, ultimately ideological perfection would follow. Penalty, therefore, did not solely function to promote discipline. In expanding the ideological parameters of what constituted criminality, the regime could create the capacity for resource expansion and economic development by exiling so-called criminals to the frontiers not yet reached. The evolution and trajectory of penal norms was cyclical but the framework remained the same: exile linked to a particular theory of the social and geographical structure of Russia and, therefore, social change that linked cultural ideals to penal institutional development in a sometimes systematic way and placed, at the centre, a very distinctive tradition of social thought that was sometimes Tsarist, sometimes Marxist and later Stalinist. Gentes posits that in perpetuating the Tsarist penal exile system, '[the] Bolsheviks merely perfected the teachings of their predecessors for their

²⁹ Nataliya Ginzburg, *Into the Whirlwind* (Harcourt: San Diego, California, 1967).

³⁰ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, Vols I-III* (Glasgow: Harvill Collins, 1974).

own ends. Contemporary Russia's treatment of its convicts suggests the lingering influence of this ancient and destructive catechism'.³¹ Thus, through metaphors of territorial border and periphery, a prisoner's identity, as an offender of Soviet ideals, came to be formed as they were absorbed fully into new sites and lands.³²

'In exile imprisonment' became embedded in the conventional penal apparatus that remained after the dismantling of the Gulag despite periods of reform such as under Nikita Khrushchev.³³ Prisoners in Russia lived and worked (and indeed many died) under a giant universe of ideas about culture, crime and political expansion so that by the 1980s rehabilitation (political correction) and repression co-existed as the inevitable outcomes of Russia's culture of punishment. Exile was another cultural category that ran through all of Soviet-Russian life in its entirety.³⁴ So in the 1930s, we see the criminologist F. P. Miliutin

³¹ Gentes, *The Siberian Saga*, 84.

³² See Edith W. Clowes, *Russia on the Edge: Imagined Geographies and Post-Soviet Identity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011).

³³ Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009); Jeffrey S. Hardy, "A camp is not a resort: The campaign against privileges in the Soviet Gulag", *Kritika*, 13/1 (2012): 89-122.

³⁴ One of the more celebrated exiles was Nobel Prize winner, Andrei Sakharov, who was sent into internal exile in Gorky, 250 miles East of Moscow, for his opposition to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Another exile, but this time abroad, was Alexander Solzhenitsyn, expelled from the USSR in 1974. Apart from such high profile political oppositionists, criminal offenders could be excluded from major cities after their release or debarred from large metropolitan centres as punishment.

establish the principle that serious offenders should not be confined in the ‘home provinces’ or those with a clement climate, but should be shipped East where the climate itself ‘will assist in hastening re-education’.³⁵ This principle was reasserted in 1961 when strict regime colonies were statutorily required to be located far from population centres.³⁶ And the same is true today with the exemption of prisoners sentenced to special and strict regimes colonies (and of women also) from the provision in the criminal correction code that convicted offenders should be imprisoned in their own region (*oblast*).³⁷ By the 1990s, prisoners were still corralled onto trains and prison trucks (*avotzeki*) so that once exiled, they became the relentless symbols of how the ‘imprisoned body’ generated more socialism, more economic advancements through forced labour, better alignment to culture, stronger political allegiance - all of which contributed to a cultural, political and economic utopia.³⁸

In summary, Russia has used an elaborate and complex system of exile for centuries to create a unique and exceptional penal landscape that extended across the country. Exile of prisoners in Russia had a communicative power, and was folded into a structural design that ensured that the Soviet regime’s message was unequivocal: that at the centre of the Soviet Union’s ideology was an? incontestable collective conscience and national identity. From urban centres, to the peripheries, regardless of climate and extremity, the regime created penal place, penal culture and penal purpose.

³⁵ See Piacentini and Pallot ‘*In Exile Imprisonment*’ in *Russia*, 28.

³⁶ Jeffrey S. Hardy, “‘The Camp is not a Resort’ – The (re)imposition of Order in the Soviet Gulag’, 1957-1961, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* – is this a different article from the one above?

³⁷ Piacentini and Pallot, 2014.

³⁸ See Barnes, *Death and Redemption*.

Exile today

There are numerous traces of exile that have passed down through Russian culture, including the prison chansons which equate imprisonment to exile linguistically, and the use of the vocabulary of exile to refer to contemporary prison infrastructure: *etap* (or group of prisoners being transported) and *etapirovanie* (or the process of being transported) were the names given in the 17th century to the marching of prisoners to exile and the overnight stopping points. Transit prisons in Russia are also described today as *peressylnie tyurmi* ('prisons on the exile route') and the phrase '*mesta ne stol' ordalennie*' – a place not so very far away – is used in its literal translation to describe anything with a lock on it from the lavatory to a prison (the actual phrase was used in law to distinguish places of exile in West Siberia (not for far away) from those in East Siberia and the Far East). Furthermore, whilst popular poems are sung, like *Milenka ty moi*, about a Siberian exile leaving his Siberian lover for his wife in European Russia, the Decembrist trope – *Dekabristki* - is also used to describe the relatives of prisoners from the 19th century right up to the present day.

The geography of modern Russian exile imprisonment provides a further example of how the traces of the country's exile history resonate in the present. As was the case in the Soviet period, the *donor* regions, characterised by substantial urban metropolitan populations, hold the majority of remand prisons and the fewest penal colonies, while the *recipient* regions to the East and North, where the general population is more sparsely populated, contain the most prisoners.³⁹ Prisoners are exported from Russia's European centre to the east and to the north. Moscow exports prisoners to other parts of Russia from its 10 remand prisons

³⁹ See Judith Pallot and Laura Piacentini *Gender, Geography and Punishment: The Experience of Women in Carceral Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 57.

(Moscow city has just one small correctional colony located on the city's edge which is 'reserved' for prisoners 'with connections'). Komi Republic, on the other hand, is in the far north and is one of the original islands of the Gulag. It has 33 correctional colonies and 3 remand prisons. The consequence of this for prisoners is the realistic probability of transportation to a remote place with the probability increasing with severity of sentence.

The prison service does not publish statistics on the distances that prisoners are sent from their place of arrest or home when they are incarcerated in their home oblast but what is known is that just 15-20 percent of prisoners of all categories serve their sentences in their home *raion* (or county).⁴⁰ Even if imprisoned in their home region, the distances that prisoners are transported can be considerable, especially in the Urals, the North and Siberia where regions can be equivalent in area to a whole country in Europe. There are other factors that distinguish certain groups of prisoners and it is important to note that these differences do have a determining effect on where prisoners are sent. For example, there is a critical difference in where sentences are served between male and female prisons. The law in Russia states that prisoners should serve their sentences in their home region, which suggests that, officially, there is an awareness that sending prisoners 'out of region' can produce many different types of exclusions. Yet, there are exceptions for women and juveniles as well as

⁴⁰ These figures are extracted from the census of prisoners conducted under the auspices of the Federal Penal Service and are taken from Valerii. I. Seliverstov, ed. *Osuzhdennye po materialam spetsial'noi perepisi osuzhdennykh i lits, sodержashchikhsia pod strazhei 12–19th noiabria 2009 g [Prisoners According to the Special Census of People under Detention on 12–19th November 2009]*, Vols 1–9. (Moscow, Russia: Iurisprudentsiia, ?date). For the distribution of different categories of penal facilities, see: www.gulagmaps.org, specifically series 5 and 6.

men serving life sentences in prisons, and those suffering from infectious diseases like tuberculosis. This reflects the fact that there are fewer colonies for each of these groups.

Moreover, such categorisation of minority groups, and the then impact on sentencing to the peripheries, reveals Russian penalty's communicative power: that in being 'sent away', the distance travelled is read as exile for prisoners. The following is a statement from a prisoner's relative returning from a visit to the large penal complex that houses 14,000 prisoners in the heart of the Mordovian forest in 2004 and is a further example of the traces of Russia's exile past:⁴¹

...to get to Leplei is another 25 'taiga' [that is through the coniferous forest] kilometres...There is nothing but colonies. If you are going there for the first time, I advise you to prepare yourself; the place is, of course, creepy. Have a read of Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago. It's just the same today. Nothing has changed.⁴²

Prisoners' talk today contains many, mostly unconscious, references to exile. The following is from a woman serving a 12-year sentence when interviewed in 2010, responding to a question about distance:

It's just that it's emotionally easier if you are in prison in a familiar place. You know, they bring transports with women who don't even know where [this town] is. We

⁴¹ This was posted on a now defunct ARESTANT website that supported prisoners' relatives.

This site and various examples of the postings are discussed in Judith Pallot, "'Gde muzh, tam zheni' ['Where the Husband Is, So Is the Wife'], Space and Gender in Post-Soviet Patterns of Penalty", *Environment and Planning, A*, 2007, 39: 570–89.

⁴² The research is drawn from the ESRC study referred to in footnote 2. The research included 119 interviews conducted by 3 different research teams between 2006 and 2010. In addition, 30 interviews with juvenile young women offenders were conducted in 2007.

have women here from A--- and B----. They can't even imagine where they are and what sort of place this is. They know it's somewhere way up in the north, but they have no idea of where precisely. Yes, for them, it is very difficult, they don't understand anything, and it's as if they've arrived in a foreign country ... they think they are in a strange land'⁴³.

Interviews with prisoners conducted for an earlier ESRC project confirm that sending them 'out of region' has historical and penological meanings. Some interviewees, without prompting, translated their imprisonment as exile. The time taken on the transportations (*etap*) that can take circuitous routes and involve the suspension of all communication with home creates in prisoners a sense of estrangement that underlines their physical separation from all that is familiar. It also creates an impaired sense of geography. Prisoners talk about arriving at the 'edge of the world'.⁴⁴ As was the case during the Stalinist period, a large number of penal colonies are simply inaccessible. In her work on prisoners in India who were expelled by the British Empire to the Andamans, Clare Anderson outlines the fear, confusion and isolation that were acutely felt in the process of exile.⁴⁵ The attribute of expulsion was particularly evident from the Russian interviews conducted in 2010. One prisoner told us:

I don't know how to explain it; it's just that you are taken out of society and transplanted to who-knows-where. I deserve it, though three years would be enough. Throughout my sentence I've had one foot here and the other – there. In other words, I don't

⁴³ Interviewee who participated in the ESRC study cited in fn 2 and fn 41.[fuller details needed here of the source referred to].

⁴⁴ Pallot, "'Gde muzh, tam zhena'," 576.

⁴⁵ Clare Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean: Transportation from South Asia to Mauritius 1815-53* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

actually ‘live’ here. Further evidence of the normalization of understanding imprisonment as exile is the self- and societal representations of prisoners’ relatives as *Dekabristki*, the symbol of the good wife, but also a potent and enduring symbol of penal culture. In the 21st century, the Decembrist trope has crossed the class and family status divide, so that it is used as an appellation by anyone who has a relative in prison:

It seems to me there is no difference [between us and the Decembrist wives] ... it’s possible to say that because the wives of the Decembrists – they followed them to Siberia, into the cold wastes. And we, in essence, are tied by the same chains ... we can be compared yes.⁴⁶

I will do what I want, let them say what they want ... We are indeed wives – Dekabristki – where the husband goes so does the wife.⁴⁷

There is some truth in it [the Decembrist appellation]. Yes, many leave everything behind but I will say of myself, I won’t go.⁴⁸

These excerpts from the families of prisoners in the 21st century echo the observation made by Evgenia Ginzburg nearly eighty years earlier when she was sent as a prisoner to Kolyma in the 1930s: “I always thought the Decembrists endured the most frightful sufferings, but

⁴⁶ Interview with a prisoner’s wife, 2010, Mordovia Russia.

⁴⁷ For “[Всё о жизни в тюрьме \(Everything you need to know about life in prisons\)](http://forumtyurem.net/lofiversion/index.php/t86-100.html),” see: <http://forumtyurem.net/lofiversion/index.php/t86-100.html>, [accessed 25 July 2013]

⁴⁸ Interview with Olga, prisoner’s daughter, Mordovia, 2010.

listen to? this: “of the wondrous built so firm, so fast the carriage” ... they ought to have tried one of Stolypin’s coaches’.⁴⁹

In all the extracts above, the point is not how the historical stereotype is being used, but that it is used at all to describe 21st century imprisonment. Olga Romanova, the wife of a financier held in Butyrka in St. Petersburg, affirms that the need to travel great distances as a demonstration of wifely duty, defines the modern-day Decembrist wife:

And when you without thinking fill bags with food and trudge through the snow field to prison or camp – is that not a Dekabristka, and is it not a heroic feat? And here I think; for me to get to the prison is ten minutes on the metro but women come from the auls, leave children at stations, almost don’t speak Russian, know nothing and don’t understand but make their way to this Devil’s prison and try there, by hook or by crook, to find out anything about husbands but all of them are interrogated, humiliated – go and talk to them about extraordinary love and a high sense of duty.⁵⁰

When prisoners talk about being sent ‘to another country’ or to *katorga*, or that women from the Far North are ‘in exile’ in colonies to the south, or when prisoners’ relatives compare their experiences with those of the *Dekabristki*, they are translating punishment as exile through historicising penal processes. Indeed one of the members of *Pussy Riot*, Maria Alyekhina, says of her period of imprisonment in a Perm penal colony in the Urals region:

The transit was difficult. I got to see several cities before I got here. But this prison...Shalamov was exiled here. It’s as if this place keeps some kind of

⁴⁹ Ginzburg, *Into the Whirlwind*, 205.

⁵⁰ See Novaya Gazeta Newspaper at:

www.novayagazeta.ru/data/2011/044/00.html?print=201103070927 [accessed 25 July 2012]

memories... But I dislike the methods. I don't like that human rights here are a phrase used on a par with something like "toilet mop". That's what I don't like.⁵¹

In summary, in Russia, there is a sense of abject displacement inscribed in the penal experience because, like the exile, many prisoners simply do not know where they are going. Returning to Sewell's *cultural schema*, remembrances are incomplete but do, nonetheless, produce 'fictions' that enable memories to survive, endure and, importantly, to have an everlasting presence. For prisoners, because these remembrances are memories of historical events that they did not experience, but learnt about, they form a circular reasoning. The memories are still alive and are therefore contemporary traces of a distant past that have continued significance amongst ordinary people. In online forums, prisoner families discussed being sent thousands of miles 'as not so far away'. Indeed one visitor to the online prisoner web-sites stated in response to a question about where a prisoner was going: 'it's best not to find out where'⁵².

In conclusion, the theorisation of penal culture in Russia as rooted in exile reveals something else about Russia's cultural attachment to punishment. In recent years, the Russian government has shown inertia on the issue of penal exile, which has thrived as an institutional form, and as a cultural practice, because it articulates a specific political and

⁵¹ Varlam Shalamov was the famous Russian writer, poet and Gulag survivor whose *Kolyma Tales* of life in Soviet forced labour camps is considered to be one of the great Russian collections of short stories of the twentieth century. For the Official Free Pussy Riot Online Campaigning website, see <http://freepussyriot.org/content/-interviews-masha-and-nadia-january-2013> (accessed November 2013).

⁵² For "Колонии России ГУФСИН Пермского края (Penal Colonies of Russia: Perm Region)," see: www.uznik.info/guin-perm.php (accessed November 2013).

social message and is associated with the exclusion of dissent. 'In exile imprisonment' reinforces a moral nationalism that intensifies a disciplinary myth that dissent requires expulsion. In the Putin era, there are on-going political struggles between activists, human rights groups and international monitors; thus, the power of the prison to affirm state values has never been as potent as it is now. To internal audiences, the disproportionate sentences handed down in recent high-profile cases in Russia (*Mikhael Khodorkovsky* (2004, 2008), *Pussy Riot* (2012) and the *Arctic 30 Greenpeace Group* (2013)) are presented as the cultural accomplishments of a regime insistently pursuing re-invigorated nationalism.⁵³ That this *parading of punishment* is now at its most visible in Russia is particularly ironic when one considers that for centuries Russia's culture of carceralism was hidden and excessive. Yet, imprisonment in Russia has always served the purpose of connecting 'the people' with the advancing interests of the state. Hence, in translating Russian's penal culture, it is in exile where we find the gestures and meanings and also the cultural, historical and criminological associations and experiences. The ways in which 'in exile imprisonment' is read today are contingent and problematic, and leave traces on today's penal culture where it continues to be conventionally understood as a normal penal practice even though it is no longer a legal sanction.

Where the subject of exile makes a contribution to the prison sociology field more generally is in how exile and imprisonment share common features (rupture, connection, estrangement, a necessary othering and a connection to power and social capital). Yet both

⁵³ In December 2013 all of the above individuals listed were released from prison penal colonies under a Christmas Amnesty.

are studied as two concepts that have distinguishable characteristics.⁵⁴ Exile is a mobile exclusion, a process of moving backwards and forwards, whilst imprisonment is a fixed exclusion. Thus, both imprisonment and exile share dialectical forms, yet they continue to be understood, as Foucault asserts in *A History of Madness* (2006), as moving apart.⁵⁵ So too can imprisonment seem like an endless journey towards a form of intended purification.⁵⁶ Exclusion is one way of distinguishing between the pure and the contaminated and of symbolically performing a cleansing function and simultaneously reassuring the (allegedly) righteous.

In *The Culture of Control* Garland argues that imprisonment as a subject of sociological inquiry is full of historical ironies.⁵⁷ Pain, pleasure, vengeance and reform have become both normalised discourse and mobilised into prisons with effects on social values about crime and appropriate punishments, but, importantly, mediated by the political classes. Whilst Gready likens exile to a prison without borders, exile *to* a prison, redefines the

⁵⁴ F. Egon Kinz, "Exile and Re-settlement: refugee theory," *International Migration Review* 15. No. 1/2 (Spring – Summer, 1981): 42-51; Jorge Barudy, "A programme of mental health for political refugees: Dealing with the invisible pain of political exile," *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 28, Issue 7, (1989): 715–727; Stephen Castles and Alistair Davidson, *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Sofia A. McClennen, *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2004).

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *A History of Madness* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 12.

⁵⁶ See Smith *Punishment and Culture*.

⁵⁷ David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

contours of confinement to include dimensions of landscape and place.⁵⁸ The prison, to paraphrase Crewe, becomes a distinctive social destination and punishment place when exile is considered.⁵⁹ A further point is that prison sociology scholarship reveals that imprisonment is acutely painful, its ‘innards obscured’ but with specific non-obscured public effects.⁶⁰ If a society of prisoner exiles is then considered the practice of exile as a political or cultural corrective, a territorial strategy of social control and a technique of political power, it can be understood as a distinctive pain of imprisonment. Thus, if exiles become the subject of a distinctive form of politics, then the imprisoned exile may require a new terminology or conceptual framework to understand more fully the interconnections between exile, culture and confinement. If such a framework were to be considered in the context of Russia, Foucault’s disciplined bodies of punishment meet and mesh with historical cultural tropes to create the *disciplinary mythologies and meanings* referred to in the introduction. There is disciplinary intervention but there are also embodied traditions.

Does ‘in exile imprisonment’ imply there can be no return? Or does it imply that where there is physical return, a former prisoner’s identity is bound up in geographical displacement and so-called civil death? In that case exile has something in common with an indeterminate sentence or life without parole. Indeed very long sentences may be experienced as permanent exile by some prisoners as the date of release is so far into the future as to be unimaginable, while the revolving door of short sentence recidivists may be experienced as a

⁵⁸ Paul Gready, *Writing as Resistance: Life Stories of Imprisonment, Exile and Home coming from Apartheid South Africa* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003).

⁵⁹ Ben Crewe, *The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation and Social Life in an English Prison* (Oxford: Clarendon Studies in Criminology, Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶⁰ Crewe, *The Prisoner Society*, 1.

different form of exclusion. The obvious question for the study of imprisonment in Russia, where prisoner exile really embodies a whole history, culture and political sensibility, is what are its effects on today's culture of punishment? It is instructive to respond to this question with a comment on the *Pussy Riot* case. The unfolding internal and external debate about the jailed artists being 'sent to labour camps'⁶¹ and 'shipped off to faraway prison camps'⁶² has pushed Russia's still-hidden penal system on to a world stage where a specific pre-Soviet and Soviet penal norm and practice is shown to have a distinctively modern face: the prison exile. The treatment of the women of *Pussy Riot* was not unusual for Russia - since exile remained in the criminal justice code as a category of punishment until as recently as 1993 – yet, the influence of this cultural practice of exile lingers and remains a problematic term and concept for penal policy makers in Russia today.

⁶¹ See Amnesty International's Summer Action Campaign 2013, at:

<http://action.amnesty.org.uk/ea->

[action/action?ea.client.id=1194&ea.campaign.id=16482&utm_source=aiuk&utm_medium=Homepage&utm_campaign=IAR&utm_content=PR_nib](http://action.amnesty.org.uk/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1194&ea.campaign.id=16482&utm_source=aiuk&utm_medium=Homepage&utm_campaign=IAR&utm_content=PR_nib), (Accessed June 2013).

⁶² See <http://www.the-dailybeast.com/articles/2012/11/30/pussy-riot-s-yekaterina-samutsevich>. (Accessed 12 May 2013).