8 Movement Inside and Outside of Prison

The H-Block Protest

Denis O'Hearn[1]

The vast majority of work on social movements concerns how people 'on the streets' mobilize material and symbolic resources in order to persuade people to expend time and take abnormal risks in hopes of achieving movement goals.[2] Prisons are often regarded as places of confinement and immobility, especially cellular prisons and even more especially regimes of cellular isolation. Beginning with the H-Blocks in Northern Ireland during 1976-1981, there are many experiences of long-term cellular isolation around the world. The most notable examples are supermax prisons and security housing units (SHUs) in the United States after 1984 (now holding over 100,000 prisoners) and 'F-type' prisons of Turkey (housing 5000 mostly political prisoners). I argue here that prisons with cellular isolation are places of movement and communication, regardless of architecture and regime.

In past work on the H-Block prison movement I explored the impact of bare life on solidarity, arguing that the stripping of written media and consumer commodities freed prisoners to build a solidary community based on oral communication (O'Hearn 2009). I also explored how prison policy *and* strategies of resistance migrate across space and time (O'Hearn 2013, 2014). This chapter explores movement, in particular how prisoners may move into spaces and appropriate them for their own purposes. Moreover, they may 'move' across prison walls to connect to movements outside. Important factors in this story include attempts by prisoners to bring practices of resistance into the prison; ways in which communication and culture are achieved, although forbidden; the role of leadership/

1 Data sources, unless otherwise indicated, are provided in O'Hearn (2009: 504). A new analysis of the Irish blanketmen and other prisoners in solitary, as 'exilic communities' living on the edges of capitalism, is in Grubačić and O'Hearn (2016).

2 An excellent summary of this literature, both generally and with regard to Ireland, is provided in Bosi and De Fazio (in this volume). From a resource mobilization and political process perspective, as well as for its ethnographic and historical insights, the work of Robert White (see White and Demirel-Pegg, in this volume) is especially noteworthy.

expertise in such achievements; and the interactions between movement activists inside and outside of prison. In the H-Blocks, we shall see how movement parts that appear 'disadvantaged' and isolated from the main community of insurgents can nonetheless control movement campaigns and repertoires. The discussion ends with a review of the learning process the H-Block conflict enabled in Turkish and US prisons. This comparative history indicates that the Irish experience of imprisonment and prison struggle not only presents crucial lessons that are repeated in other places but even that isolated prisoners learn from other experiences and that of the blanketmen is among the most important.

The proposition that prisoners may mobilize significant movements may seem to contradict most of the resource mobilization and political process literature within the field of social movement studies (Morris and Herring 1987). In particular, it is assumed that social movements need both material (money, organizations) and symbolic (legitimacy, leadership, elite endorsement) resources to successfully mobilize people. In addition, they must have political opportunities that they can seize in order to challenge and exploit the vulnerabilities of a regime. Prisoners, it might appear, have few such resources: they have little money and are often indigent; they may or may not be associated with political organizations or so-called gangs but are often cut off from them by their prison isolation; leadership and formal organization may be elided by isolation; and they are usually regarded as social pariahs by most of the population.

On the other hand, and as we shall see in this chapter, prisoners are very creative at obtaining resources and they are extremely efficient at their use of what they have; they have an abundance of one particular resource, time, which enables them to organize and build new forms of communication despite physical and institutional obstacles and frequent failure; they may turn their arm's length relations with their parent organizations into a resource because they have the independence to create their own strategies and coalitions without seeking continuous approval by their 'superiors'; and the lack of access to written materials or face-to-face contact may be turned into a positive thing because the dependence on oral communication may enable much deeper relations of solidarity than is otherwise possible.

Background: Movement from Open to Cellular Prisons

In the early 1970s, Northern Irish prisoners found guilty of politically motivated offences were given 'Special Category' (political prisoner) status. The

state also interned thousands without trial, mostly young Catholic men. Convicted and interned prisoners were kept in 'cages' with Quonset huts and rudimentary wooden buildings in the hastily built Long Kesh prison. They self-managed their lives on a communal basis and organized revolutionary education, including history, Irish language, guerrilla warfare, and arms training. In time, they re-organized and radicalized the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Sinn Féin from within prison walls.[3]

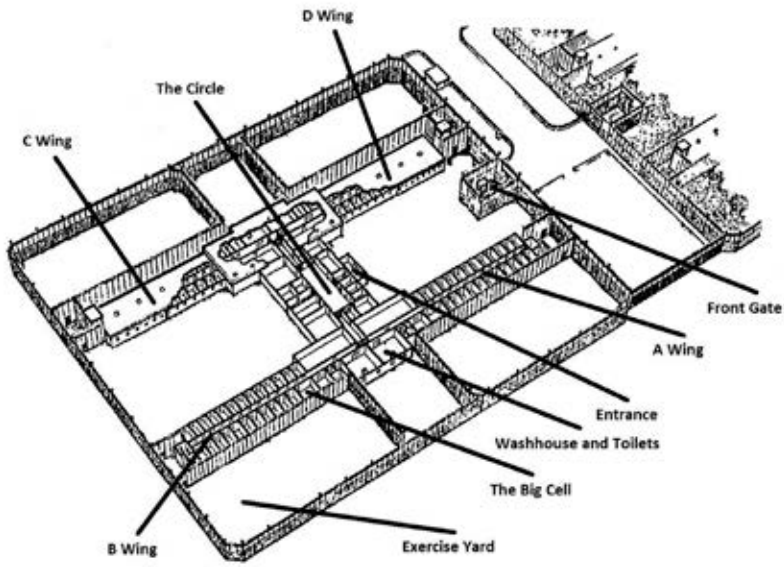
The British government soon realized that self-organization in a prison camp was not in their interests. In November 1975, it announced that anyone found guilty of an offence related to the conflict after 1 March 1976 would serve their time in a new cellular prison, HM Prison The Maze, in 'H-Blocks' built in the same complex as the 'cages'. By changing the prison's name the British hoped the controversy of internment would go away. Instead, prisoners refused to go silently into the new cellular regime and a new controversy emerged about long-term cellular isolation.

The new regime was simple. Prisoners were brought into the administration area of an H-Block (see figure 8.1) and told that they were criminals and would have to wear prison uniforms and perform prison work. Prison guards were 'Sir!' and prisoners were known by a number. Each prisoner was stripped and offered a prison uniform.

According to popular narrative, when the first IRA prisoner (Kieran Nugent) was offered a uniform, he said 'if you want me to wear that you'll have to nail it to my back'. The guards put him in a cell alone, without clothing or reading or writing materials, some rudimentary furniture, a towel, and blankets. From then, hundreds of men who refused to wear prison uniforms or do work were left naked in H-block cells. They draped

3 A short explanation is useful. The 'Republican Movement' that led the 1916 Easter Rising split after the partition of Ireland and creation of Northern Ireland in 1920/21. One side went into (Southern Irish) government and the other remained primarily committed to Irish unity, retaining the clandestine Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its associated political party Sinn Féin. This movement split again in 1969, into 'Official' and 'Provisional' wings. By the time covered in this article, the Official IRA had declared a ceasefire and the 'Provisional' republican movement could be accurately called *the* IRA, associated with *the* Sinn Féin. In this article, I refer to these two groups together as the *republican movement* or, simply, the *movement*. Although certain people identified with either the IRA or Sinn Féin, dual membership was common. In prison matters, people often acted as Sinn Féin representatives even though they came under the discipline and orders of the IRA. To complicate matters, an armed organization split from the Official republican movement in 1974 after the ceasefire: the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), associated with the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP). INLA blanketmen protested alongside IRA blanketmen, although in fewer numbers.

Figure 8.1 Layout of an H-Block in Long Kesh prison



blankets around their waists and shoulders and thus became known as 'blanketmen'.

The blanketmen communicated by talking out of cell windows and shouting out the doors. Those on the inside of the 'H' could shout to prisoners on the opposite leg. At night, they shouted from block to block. They developed creative ways of communicating like tying items onto a string unravelled from their blankets, tying the other end to a button, and 'shooting the button' across the corridor under cell doors. Their only outside communication was with priests, through whom they passed messages and received supplies including cigarette papers, ballpoint refills, and tobacco.

Turning Immobility to Movement

At first, a macho regime of total non-cooperation prevailed. The blanketmen stayed in their cells for two years, assuming that the British would eventually reinstate political status. This was a miscalculation. The authorities had no moral quandaries about keeping prisoners in bare conditions and, if asked, trotted out a standard explanation: the Maze was the most modern prison in Europe, if the men wanted to take advantage of its facilities all they

had to do was to put on a uniform like any other criminal. It was difficult for prisoners to get word about their conditions to the public. A few family members organized small protests with little impact.

The blanketmen only came out of their cells to shower and, on Sundays, for mass. To attend mass they had to wear uniform trousers so 'harder' prisoners did not even come out then. Hardly anyone took their allotted monthly visit because they would have to wear a uniform to do so. That was considered capitulation to British oppression.

Two things changed passive protest to movement. First, key prisoners arrived and advocated coming out of cells. Then, the prisoners coordinated a protest campaign with outside supporters. As a result, by the time of the 1980-1981 hunger strikes in which ten blanketmen died, there was massive support for their campaign not only in Ireland but around the world.

In early 1978, Brendan Hughes, legendary IRA commander and close confidant of Gerry Adams, was transferred from the cages to the H-Blocks when found guilty of a minor infraction. Hughes became Officer Commanding (OC) of the IRA blanketmen. Bobby Sands was already 'on the blanket', convicted of charges related to a bombing mission. Hughes and Sands led a remarkable prison campaign from adjacent cells over the next four years. Instead of staying in their cells, they told blanketmen to take visits. Not only would it ease their lives and get information to the outside world, they could smuggle ballpoint refills, cigarette papers, tobacco, and communications (comms).[4]

Moving out of cells had consequences on relations between prisoners and guards. When blanketmen moved through 'their' spaces – corridors, dining halls, visiting areas – the authorities punished them, provoking further actions by the blanketmen, further punishments, and so on in an escalating pattern. Sunday masses became organizing meetings and smuggling zones; even the priests moved messages and material supplies for prisoners. But visits became the main source of supply and communication with the movement and public.

The second challenge was to build a support campaign outside of prison. Unfortunately, the republican movement did not support the prisoners much, apart from sending money to their families. Early support came from relatives of prisoners who formed a group called Relatives for Justice. Support by the IRA and the broader republican movement had to be built, by pressure from inside the prison.

4 Comms were messages written in tiny handwriting on cigarette papers or toilet paper. They were folded tightly into a small package and wrapped in cling film so that they could be smuggled internally in the body.

Appropriating Prison Spaces

For years, the public knew little about conditions in the H-Blocks. Without visits, even the prisoners' families were unaware of their full degradation. Soon after he arrived in the H-Blocks in late 1977, Bobby Sands began smuggling articles through visits. His first article in the Sinn Féin newspaper *Republican News* gave readers their first description of life 'on the blanket'. 'Everyone with the exception of the latest arrivals has a beard of sorts. When I first arrived here I noticed that a lot of the men's eyes seemed to be sunk into the pits of their eyes, and everyone's face was a pale yellowish complexion' (O'Hearn 2006: 173). Another article starkly revealed the harsh winter conditions in the H-Blocks:

> It is so cold that we are unable to walk upon the concrete cell floor in our bare feet; the water in the drinking container has frozen and my filthy foam mattress upon the ground is wet with the snow that came in through the window during the night.
> I had no sleep again last night, my three flimsy blankets being no match for the biting bitter cold. I spent last night huddled up in a corner listening to many of my comrades coughing and groaning, whilst scores of men lay shivering from flu, fighting against high temperatures and severe pain. (O'Hearn 2006: 176)

Sands continued taking his monthly visits. His mother, Rosaleen, was such a magnificent smuggler that the prisoners called her 'old faithful'. If Sands had a visit, they knew they would have a smoke that night. This taught them that visits were not just a source of communications but also luxuries.

By himself, Sands could do little but when Hughes arrived in the H-Blocks and more blanketmen began taking visits things changed. They opened new lines of communications and got pens and other materials. 'It was quite tough at the time to go out of your cell and put on that prison uniform', said Hughes, yet taking visits lightened the protest. Prisoners saw loved ones *and* moved the protest forward.

Visits turned to *confrontation* when guards discovered the smuggling. They started strip-searching prisoners, probing their hair, mouths, and rectums. Forced squatting, bending, and probing became common; beatings increased (the issue of strip-searching would become even more controversial for women prisoners in Armagh jail).

Hughes and Sands were intensifying the protest. They wanted to increase publicity about their conditions and were aware that this would

provoke further repression. Yet, they hardly predicted the escalation that followed.

Action and reaction combined in a creative process of confrontation. Both sides strategized and improvised. Familiar tactics from open prisons were adapted to new conditions in the H-Blocks; there was no predictability about the outcome. Despite brutal searches, smuggling raised prisoner morale by providing resources. And by taking risks for each other, the blanketmen became a tight, solidary community.

The authorities tested their solidarity at the weakest link: young prisoners (YPs). On the pretext that the H-Blocks were becoming overcrowded, the guards refused to let YPs out of their cells to wash. They boasted openly about how many YPs they could drive off the protest. The blanketmen decided if the YPs couldn't wash, no one would. On 20 March 1978, they refused to wash, shower, or clean their cells, beginning a long 'no-wash' protest (the authorities and media would it call a 'dirty' protest). Says Brendan Hughes, 'We basically slid into it. It wasn't a conscious decision [...] It was because of the situation, people getting brutalized going to the shower and so forth.'

Every Monday the prisoners introduced a new protest; in return, the guards introduced new punishments. After the prisoners refused to wash, the guards took away all soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and combs. When the authorities stopped supplying clean sheets, the prisoners threw their dirty sheets onto the landing. When the guards came to take away the few bits of furniture, the prisoners smashed it first.

Eventually, the authorities took away everything except food and human waste. When the prisoners tried to get rid of these, the guards gave them back. They refused to take leftover food so the prisoners had to throw it into the corner of the cell, where it piled up and bred mould and maggots. When they began slopping their urine under the doors, the guards squeegeed it back, leaving their foam mattresses sopping wet. When the prisoners threw their excrement out the window the guards threw it back. Eventually, they had to spread it on the cell walls.

Hughes and Sands recognized potential in all this. In Hughes's words, a series of unplanned events 'soon became a tactic'. If the mess escalated far enough, the authorities would have to grant them political status to bring order back into their 'modern' prison.

The prisoners interpreted each new punishment as a sign that they were winning. Says one ex-blanketman, 'Morale was sky high. We felt that we were winning and for a change that we, not the screws, had control over our lives because we dictated the pace of events' (O'Hearn 2009: 509).

As morale improved, the community bonded tightly together. They invented new entertainments like the 'book at bedtime', where storytellers recited books from memory after the screws left the wing at night. Days were filled with lessons and debates. The number of prisoners fluent in Irish rose from a few to hundreds. A full-fledged solidary community developed.[5]

Building Support

To build a campaign, however, the movements inside and outside of prison had to be brought onto the same wavelength. When Hughes arrived in the H-Blocks he had been directing the IRA's armed campaign in Belfast. He knew how weak the IRA was after years of arrests and was among a handful of leaders who began restructuring the IRA from its old brigade system towards a secretive cell structure. 'We had an issue here that could give some help to the leadership on the outside. I knew that was the situation, and that's what we were doing' (Hughes, quoted in O'Hearn 2006, p. 182). Hughes also knew that movement leaders wanted to create a dynamic political party to agitate around social and economic issues. It would take years for the new structures to mature, if they even survived the onslaught by British security. In the meantime, Hughes thought the prison protest could provide a popular platform, allowing the movement to mobilize support while the IRA regrouped.

Yet, prisoners' rights were low on the movement's agenda. Gerry Adams thought that 'prisoners should always take second place'. Apart from diverting resources, this was a time of extreme repression:

> People were being shot in the streets. People were being arrested on sight [...] These areas were under very heavy occupation and people were living underground. So there was enough to be getting on with and those of us who wanted to try and build some sort of a popular movement, it was very difficult to do. (Adams, quoted in O'Hearn 2006, p. 235)

Once the 'no-wash protest' began, a public campaign was more important than ever. Hughes and Sands knew that it was important to feed information to outside supporters. The first move was to create a communications infrastructure by smuggling messages through visits, to give supporters information on which to build a campaign.

5 For an extended analysis, see O'Hearn (2009).

They were helped by fortuitous incidents. After visiting the H-Blocks, Irish Archbishop (later Cardinal) Tomas Ó Fiaich made a highly publicized speech in which he compared the conditions of the blanketmen to the 'sewers of Calcutta'. In October 1978, the blanketmen hit international headlines when US syndicated columnist Jack Anderson compared the H-Blocks to 'the most barbarous regimes of Communist commissars or tinhorn Latin American dictators' (Clark 1987: 96). Then, Frank Maguire, an independent member of British parliament from Fermanagh-Tyrone, visited the H-Blocks and spoke out against conditions there. Activists in the United States and Europe heard about the blanketmen and organized support among trade unionists, politicians, and intellectuals.

Mostly, the blanketmen required mass publicity in Ireland and Britain. For this, the movement had to get on board. Bobby Sands wrote a letter to the IRA leadership. 'As you know', he wrote, 'we have failed to reach a broader base of support, therefore we have failed to engage any active support outside of our immediate hardcore, friends, relatives, etc.'. He called on the movement for more support, saying that they could not survive unless the prisoners won their struggle. Using the analogy of the 'breaker's yard' where prisoners were once consigned to break stones day after day, he said, 'We cannot allow the Brits to turn the H-Blocks into the breaker's yard for the Republican struggle.'

Movement attitudes began to change after Gerry Adams was charged with IRA membership and held in the H-Blocks until he was released due to lack of evidence. He observed the horrid conditions in the H-Blocks and, on his release, he lobbied Sinn Féin to give a higher profile to the prison campaign. According to Adams, the movement then,

> started to handle [the prison protest] better, motivated I think by two concerns; one was a genuine concern for the plight of the people in there and the other one was to illustrate to the world and to our own people that here was a manifestation of British rule. (Adams, quoted in O'Hearn 2006, p. 235)

Sands and Hughes were not long in testing the movement. Sands led a discussion in his H-Block about mobilizing publicity. He sent a series of comms to the republican leadership in which he outlined an ambitious plan[6]: 'The idea to reach people is to pass a simple message to them [...] "Smash H-Block" [...] We want to get this message to everyone, we want to

6 The comm from which the following quotes are taken was from 'Marcella' to the 'Republican Leadership', see O'Hearn (2006: 237-241).

make it impossible for people to forget it, no matter who they are or where they are, they shall see it, hear it. Sands said that, 'we must create our own mass media' through direct action.

> In one weekend we move and distribute one million posters [...] [W]e stick them everywhere on roads, bridges, walls, trees, windows [...] [W]e must work on people to get them to put them up, we must put them on everything that moves to carry them for us, at traffic lights we stick them on vehicles, they'll be carried into towns [...] By doing this we create our own mass media.

Sands was certain they could win mass support if they kept hammering away at people. Supporters should

> give our material and put our case, emotionally breaking people down into giving a commitment, put them on the spot there and then, offer them ways in which they can help [...] By continuing pushing 'Smash H-Block' we believe we are pushing a small message and making people aware through their wee jobs and those who they reach will learn something if it's only that H-Block exists. They will help and support. We'll pick up as we progress!!

Sands summarized his campaign in four simple steps:

1 Organize the people that we have already got.
2 Attack through mass media propaganda, through an army of propagandists, you out there and we in here [...]
3 Make our message simple – 'Smash H-Block', some details, a call for action, plenty of emotion.
4 Broaden our battlefield, locally, nationally, and internationally, the field is limitless.

But the blanketmen needed resources.

> We need a list of names, a who's who, what's what in Ireland, all those who have influence, here's a few to start with, trade unions [...] social conscious groups, left wing groups, churchmen Catholic and Prod, with influence, newspaper and tv and media list of people who write or produce political or social programmes and articles, etc. Anybody who's anybody [...] The idea is this, one of us in here can write to one of those above or whoever, in a very emotional and distressing letter.

To create 'an atmosphere of mass emotion' Sands suggested a

> Poster with a child on it, emotional The Year of the Child 'Don't Let my Daddy Die in H-Block' [...] Get those 'Smash H-Block' posters up everywhere [...] Paint 'Smash H-Block' all over the major motorways in Britain [...] We want H-Block more common than Shamrock and we can do it.

Finally, Sands suggested chain letters, pirate radio stations, school boycotts, industrial strikes, demos at sporting events, an H-Block flag, and an International Committee headed up by a team of sympathetic priests.

Over the following months many of these suggestions were enacted. A National H-Block/Armagh Committee *was* launched with its campaign centred on the simple message, 'Smash H-Block'. Within months that slogan appeared on walls, bridges, and hoardings across Ireland. Posters *did* appear with the slogan 'Don't Let My Daddy Die in H-Block'. And Sands organized a 'factory' where the blanketmen wrote hundreds of letters each week to practically anyone with any kind of influence.

This factory required raw materials: writing supplies, addresses, and other information. Sands organized the prison side while women from Sinn Féin coordinated a team of young women who visited the prison twice a day, smuggling messages and supplies. Sands could send out messages in the morning and receive replies from the movement that afternoon.

Smuggling involved kissing prisoners who were filthy, had not brushed their teeth for years, to get communications that had been in all parts of their bodies. The women did things that went against much they had been taught about the purity of their bodies. They had to secrete comms, supplies, and even miniature radios and cameras in their own bodies. Despite the ordeal, day after day, month after month, they kept up their visits.

Comms going out of the prison described conditions in the H-blocks. A designated prisoner on each wing of each H-Block gave his blanketmen lists of names and addresses. They each wrote four or five letters a day, based on sample letters that explained the conditions in the H-Blocks and why they had been forced into the no-wash protest. Each letter contained a personalized message. As time went on, templates were customized for different readers. One prisoner wrote a US journalist about how his founding fathers had fought the British for independence and the Irish had as much right to fight. Then he wrote to a 'comrade' in Pravda about the working-class struggle against imperialism. Personalized letters from blanketmen went to celebrities such as Muhammad Ali and Jean-Paul Sartre.

While communication was important, prisoners also used *'mis'*communication to invert movement power structures to their advantage. One incident happened after guards told the prisoners that they would begin washing them forcibly. They would start the forced washings among YPs, knowing that if they could break YPs, others would follow. Hughes and Sands thought the forced washings could involve violent scrubbing and prisoners could be injured. They decided to order the YPs to 'resist'. Sands shouted the order to the block that contained most YPs. The OC of that block, however, feared that resisting would be bloody and disastrous. Moreover, the young men were afraid and might refuse to resist. That would hurt morale and might even endanger the whole blanket protest. So the OC 'did not hear' Sands' order and the YPs went peacefully to the washings without losing face.

Another incident occurred between the first (1980) and second (1981) hunger strikes. During this period the IRA leadership ordered blanketmen in two H-Blocks to abandon their protest, to see if the prison authorities would deliver their own clothes to them. On a Friday, families arrived at Long Kesh with packages of clothes. On Sunday, Sands informed the movement that if they did not have their clothes by Tuesday night they would smash their furniture. The IRA frantically sent comms to Sands through a priest, instructing him to call off the action. Sands got the comms but he did not call off the protest.

'The sagart [priest] didn't appear', he wrote the movement as an excuse after the prisoners smashed their furniture.

Sands wanted to send a clear signal to his own superiors that he 'meant business'. He also wanted to put them into a clear frame of action for a new hunger strike. The movement thought smashing furniture would start a transition back into the no-wash protest, but the prisoners meant it as a prelude to a new hunger strike. The IRA was so opposed to the second hunger strike that they did not realize how far into that strategy the prisoners had already moved. On Tuesday the blanketmen trashed their cells. A month later they were on a hunger strike in which ten men including Bobby Sands would die. Control of communications allowed subservient prisoner leaders to 'not hear' their IRA superiors, just as the OC in the YP's block 'did not hear' Sands' order to resist forced washings.

Discussion

Prison, even cellular isolation, is about movement: through spaces and movement in the sense of organized action aimed at achieving change.

Effective movement requires solidary purpose, clear goals, and strategies to strengthen collective identity (Gamson 1992). The *bare life* conditions in the H-Blocks, where the community shared resistance *and* a daily experience of intersubjective communication and collective joy, strengthened them against oppressive actions of authorities (O'Hearn 2009).

But the collective also required connections to outside networks for material needs and public support. This was difficult since their 'natural' allies (their movement) were initially unwilling to help build a sustained campaign. The degree to which prisoners swayed the minds of key leaders in the movement was remarkable, as was their ability to provide information (propaganda) for the campaign and even direct its tactics (down to slogans and poster content).

De Vito's model connecting inside-outside movement relations to prisoner *radicalization*[7] is of limited use here. He relates the 'peak' of European prison radicalization in the early 1970s to heightened awareness of the connections between the social function of prisons and inequality in society – what Wacquant (2009) would later call 'punishing the poor'. This enabled Marxist prisoners to see others as oppressed proletarians rather than *lumpen*proletarians and thus make common cause with them (De Vito 2012: 78). This model does not really apply well to national liberation movements, a fact De Vito later admits when discussing political prisoners in the later 1970s.

IRA prisoners brought their movement practices *into* prison by resisting 'British/Protestant rule' there and by prefiguratively building a sort of utopian society in the cages and H-Blocks. The need to restructure relations with the movement arose in the H-Blocks because of the special needs of the blanketmen. Prisoners won their case to get more resources on the grounds that an active public campaign around prison issues could revitalize the movement. If there was radicalization of prisoners, it was primarily about deepening their consciousness about why they were in struggle, a process that was enabled less by inside-outside relations than by the prisoners' intense close proximity to each other, without the usual distractions of consumerist life. In the case of the IRA, the movement was largely rebuilt *from within the prison* in 1974-1976, again in 1978-1981, and yet again in the late 1980s-1990s (McKeown 2001). Political prisoners brought into prison

7 De Vito defines radicalization as 'a shift in the contents and/or forms of contention that, in relation to previous contents and/or forms of contention, is perceived as an escalation by (some) historical agents and/or by external observers' (2012: 72). It is mainly informed by prisoners/movements in a European context.

an experience of active resistance and brought back out a spirit of intense community-building, horizontal/participative practice, and communal risk-taking. Such community-building was necessary if 'radicalization', in De Vito's sense of escalated activity, was to be attained.

The actual logistics of escalation raises issues of leadership and space. Some distinguish between 'task-oriented' and 'people-oriented' leadership, between bureaucrats and charismatics. The former 'get things done' while the latter 'reshape their followers' interpretations of the world and emotional responses to it' (Aminzade, Goldstone, and Perry 2001: 130; also Nepstad and Bob 2006). The H-Block protest indicates that such distinctions may be limited. As O'Hearn (2009: 502) proposes, '[i]n intense episodes of contention, it may be precisely the charismatic ability to motivate people into action that "gets things done"'. Certain leaders are particularly sensitive to the needs and potentialities of collective change in a changing environment. They are good at what Goldstone (1991) calls 'process tracing', the ability to guide rapidly changing processes towards desired outcomes.

Process tracing happens in and through space; not simple Cartesian spaces (like football fields upon which the game of contention is played) but socially constructed spaces that have contested and constantly changing uses and meanings (Harvey 1969, 1973; Massey 1994). Spaces are appropriated and mobilized by insurgents as material and symbolic resources, and defended by the powers-that-be as spaces of authority to be kept out of the hands of insurgents. Sewell (2001: 55) refers to spatial agency as the ability of groups to transform and restructure meanings, uses, and the strategic value of space through struggle. Even if, as Sewell contends, insurgents are resource poor in traditional senses, the H-Block struggle shows that prisoners may have an abundance of generally unrecognized resources like solidarity and transformative vision that enable them to use spaces in new and creative ways. In the H-Blocks, while authorities imposed massive mechanisms of physical control, blanketmen changed meanings and uses of prison spaces to gain material needs and change symbolic perceptions of what prison *was*, including a massive publicity campaign that moulded the public perception of practices like strip-searches as oppression rather than control.

A key advantage of authorities is their capacity to manage the problem of 'time-distance': getting messages from one place to another. They manage what Scott (2009) calls the 'friction of space'. Although the prison authorities had tremendous advantages in time-distance technologies, the blanketmen built rival communications networks that overcame them.

One final form of movement should be explored: movement of experiences across time and space. On the policy side, a clear thread runs from

the H-Blocks (1976-1981), to US Security Housing Units (SHUs) and supermax prisons (1983-today), to Turkish F-type prisons (2000-today) and Guantanamo. In Turkey we even have a 'smoking gun': Gordon Lakes, Britain's top prison securocrat, advised the Turkish government about avoiding the mistakes of the H-Blocks and publicly intervened in support of introducing F-type isolation (O'Hearn 2013).

Prisoners also learn from each other. While the Irish hunger strikes of 1980/81 were going on, prisoners in Robben Island, Diyarbakir (Kurdistan), and Chiapas (Mexico) followed the Irish hunger strike example. Political prisoners in Turkey and the Basque Country followed. More profound was the movement of the blanketmen's strategies of community-building and resistance, even to accused 'gang leaders' in US prisons. In Ohio, California, and Illinois movements of solidarity leading to hunger strikes were heavily influenced by studying the blanket protest. In Pelican Bay SHU, Latinos, African-Americans, and white prisoners joined together to form a 'Short Corridor Collective'. They shared experiences and discussed texts on left politics, Mayan culture and Irish blanketmen (Ashker 2013). The collective built shared, orally based practices that crossed racial barriers; constructed networks to other prisons and outside supporters, trying to overcome time-distance disadvantages; began using the media to publicize the nature of solitary confinement in California and the United States; organized a hunger strike with more than 30,000 prisoner participants; and eventually forced the California legislature and the prison authorities to change their isolation policies.

As IRA prisoners changed the republican movement from inside the prison, the Short Corridor Collective launched a successful initiative to stop racially motivated prisoner-on-prisoner violence by gangs in California jails *and* to stop gangbanging by youth gangs in California's urban ghettos. The bare life experience of the SHU, combined with knowledge gained from the H-Blocks and perceptive leadership by a small group of prisoners placed in close proximity, produced a movement for change that was unthinkable a few years before, in one of the most tightly controlled prisons in world history.[8]

Yet a little learning can also be a harmful thing. Leftist prisoners used the blanketmen's experience as guidance for their own hunger strike against the Turkish state's forcible move from open ward-style prisons to cellular isolation in new F-type prisons. On the surface, it looked the same as the British move from the cages to the H-Blocks. From 2000 to 2007, more

8 On the Pelican Bay prisoner movement, see Grubačić and O'Hearn (2016).

than 120 prisoners and their supporters died on hunger strike. Unlike prisoners in California, however, the Turkish prisoners missed a series of key lessons of the blanket campaign. First, the blanketmen built a strong solidary culture and a powerful support movement, along with a widespread publicity campaign *before* undertaking the ultimate step of hunger strike. They were assured of mass public support. Turkish prisoners began with hunger strike as a first tactic and never mobilized such support. Second, the blanketmen practiced high participation; no one would be forced to go or stay on hunger strike. The Turkish movement, however, used force and intimidation against its own hunger strikers. Perhaps most crucially, the blanketmen were masters of 'process tracing'; in the no-wash protest as well as the hunger strike they changed tactics as conditions changed. After a few months and ten deaths, the blanketmen stopped their strike and went into new tactics, where they achieved their objectives of regaining control of prison spaces. Turkish prisoners stayed on for seven years, without public support, and even today have no creative strategies for fighting the isolation of the F-type prisons.

Conclusions

The example of the blanketmen in Long Kesh prison continues to influence policymakers and prisoners across space and time. It also has important implications for the study of social movements. It demonstrated that state policies that are meant to isolate prisoners from each other, short of extreme measures of dungeons and wells, are likely to fail. The more prisoners are stripped the more they build a solidary culture. An equally important finding is how difficult it is for authorities to turn prisons into regimes of total confinement. Prisoners always find ways to move. The more they achieve solidarity and begin taking risks for each other, the more ways they find to appropriate spaces for new purposes and to overcome frictions of space that are imposed by authorities. Eventually, they cross prison walls and build networks with movements and supporters. Significantly, not only the H-Blocks but also US supermaxes like Pelican Bay show how prisoners can use moral authority as well as creative strategies to control their interactions with seemingly more 'powerful' outside movements and activists. Prisoners, whether 'political' or not, are not captives of an all-encompassing 'gaze' that turns them into their own jailers. They are potential actors with astonishing flexibility and power of movement.

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