

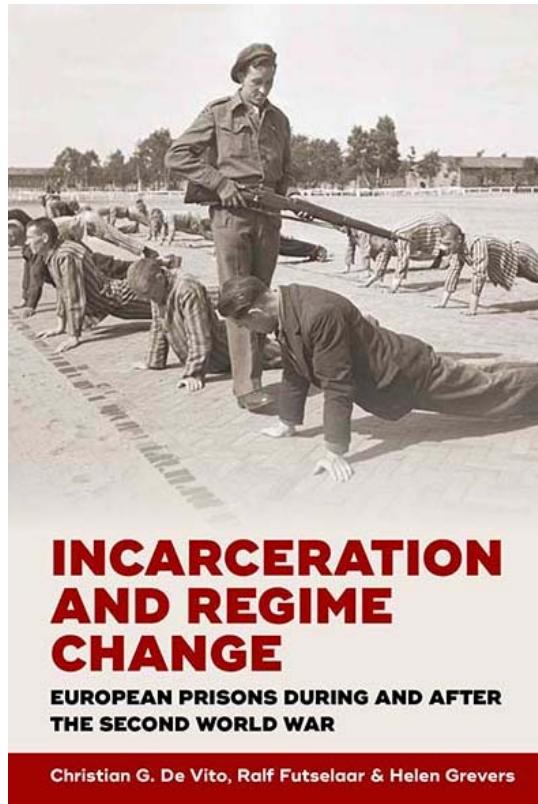
Christian G. DE VITO, Ralf FUTSELAAR, Helen GREVERS (eds.): *Incarceration and Regime Change: European Prisons during and after the Second World War*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2017, 178 pp., ISBN 978-1-78533-265-4.

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Prisons of the European postwar

This book gathers very diverse works on European penitentiary systems in the context of regime change at the end of World War II. It encompasses geography from Spain to Italy, from France to Germany, and from Belgium to the Dutch colonies in times of peace, war, and post-war; from prisons to concentration camps and work camps that interned political prisoners, POWs, collaborators, minors, and colonial soldiers; with dimensions ranging from dozens to hundreds of thousands of inmates. It studies processes of varying magnitudes, chronologies and geographies, united by the central idea that detention facilities constitute excellent laboratories for studying regime changes. This work is also united by a common methodology that rejects philosophical and sociological macronarrative regarding prisons and instead aims for a contingent perspective. While many studies have been done based on philosophy or sociology, there are significantly fewer historiographical examinations of European prisons and concentration camps. This imbalance has been diminishing in the past twenty-five years with works such as *Incarceration and Regime Change: European Prisons during and after the Second World War*. This publication contributes to overcoming the deficit, with the additional merit of having included rather young authors.

This is not surprising considering that one of the editors, De Vito, along with Alex Lichtenstein, has written one of the most important works available on the debates and historiographies relating to the global history of forced labour.¹ PHe may also be responsible for reviving comparative analysis of the diverse European penal systems (alongside historians such as Nikolaus Wachsmann, cited as an inspiration in the introduction). The editors and contributing authors represent an interpretative renewal in



¹ Christian G. De Vito y Alex Lichtenstein: "Writing a Global History of Convict Labour", *IRSH*, 58 (2013), pp. 285-325.

the intricate field of research on detention centres in Europe, where complexity abounds in the forms and systems of detention, imprisonment, and internment: be they legal, alegal, or illegal; involving prisons, concentration camps, or forced labour; for convicts or POWs; for men, women, or minors; normative or anomic; in peacetime or wartime, including interstate or civil war; open or simmering civil war... The current historiography tends to respond to this incredibly ample casuistry by studying empiric realities, mainly from the perspective of the perpetrators and institutions, as well as of the victims. Here we find the first great merit of this study: from the start, it relies on historic reconstruction rather than imposing a pre-conceived and rigid theoretical position on the texts.

This does not imply that the authors, and especially the editors, renounce all theorizing. Their main interest lies in studying if and how political regime changes (and in most cases, legal regime changes also) may have affected prison, concentration camp, and/or penitentiary systems in the extremely variable context of the final years of World War II and the early phases of de-fascistization in Europe. From a perspective that regime changes facilitate the emergence of social, political, and legal conditions that alter forms of punishment and control as well as the perceptions and legal status of the defeated and, logically, those of the victors/neo-legislators, here the editors sustain that these processes exhibited few similarities in the various national contexts. Evidently, regime changes often implied the implementation of mechanisms for political purging, persecution, and subsequent penitentiary policies based on emergent and often supra-individual internee typologies. In contrast with the extensive conceptual abuse that accompanies studies of the sociological and philosophical dimensions of prisons and their geographies, this volume utilizes historiographical tools from the outset.

De Vito sees the predominance of continuity versus discontinuity of penal and punitive forms during regime change as an apparent paradox. Perhaps it is not so paradoxical after all, since from a contingent perspective it is impossible to speak of homogeneous types of regime changes. The concept that has given me greatest cause for reflection in the book, and which is central to this book review, concerns multiple transitions and dynamic, discontinuous, and diachronic regime changes. Apart from the legal anomie that defined many concentration camp systems, it is important to recognize that the timing of legal procedures did not always match that of political or military processes. Penal, penitentiary, or concentration camp systems often diverged in their status and depended on their specific legal contexts, an aspect this book might have treated more fully. Despite the enormous successive contextual upheavals in Italy from fascism to wartime fascism, civil war, the Italian Social Republic, Liberazione, occupation by the Germans and the Allies, and finally the birth of a post-war regime, penal and punitive forms remained curiously consistent. This can be seen in the domestic war, multiple sovereignty, gradual territorial conquest, and double occupation of Italy from 1943-54 (from the beginning of the civil war to approximately the extension of the Togliatti amnesty in 1947, which was expanded to include clemency towards collaborators in 1953).

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The substantial differences among countries also involve the application of amnesty. Italy extended amnesty in June 1946, but France and Belgium waited until 1948. The exponential increase in variables makes it unwise to define continuity mechanisms or apply analytical homogeneity, especially if we add to political, legal, chronological or normative differences the conceptualization of subjects-victims and subjects-victimizers, which discuss in substantially different ways minors, women, 'asocial' political detainees, POWs, common prisoners, etc. This book does not seek to address all possible cases or countries. Rather, from specific cases (such as the German prison of Berlin-Rummelsburg), it manages to incorporate first-magnitude elements of comparative reflection to the study of penitentiary systems and regime changes. Some chapters are rather short, while others seem excessively specific. It might have been helpful to clarify why some chapters discuss only prisons and others cover concentration camps, work camps, and penitentiaries. It would also have been interesting to extend case comparison beyond the introduction and

into the chapters, which are difficult to theorize due to their brevity. However, as mentioned, this is not a theoretical book; rather, it applies a complex approach to delve into the punitive space of post-war Europe in a historical manner, in which conceptualization results from analysis rather than preceding it.