



PENAL CULTURES AND FEMALE DESISTANCE

LINNÉA ÖSTERMAN

ISODR INTERNATIONAL
SERIES ON
DESISTANCE
AND REHABILITATION

ROUTLEDGE

Penal Cultures and Female Desistance

This book makes a unique contribution to the internationalisation of criminological knowledge about gender and desistance through a qualitative cross-national exploration of the female route out of crime in Sweden and England. By situating the female desistance journey in diverse penal cultures, the study addresses two major gaps in the literature: the neglect of critical explorations of gender in desistance-related processes, and the lack of internationally comparative perspectives on the lived experience of desistance.

Grounded in a feminist methodology – underpinned by a critical humanist perspective – this book draws on 24 life-story narrative interviews with female desisters across Sweden and England. The discussion covers departure points, qualitative experiences of criminal justice, as well as barriers and ‘ladders’ in the female route out. While some cross-national symmetry is detected, particularly in the areas of victimisation and issues around short custodial sentences, overall the findings indicate that diverse macro-processes and models, especially in terms of ‘inclusive’ versus ‘exclusive’ penal cultures, effectually ‘trickle down’ to the women in this study and produce different micro-experiences of desistance.

Providing new qualitative evidence of the ‘Nordic Exceptionalism thesis’, this book finds that, comparatively, the Swedish model offers a macro-context, supported and reflected in allied meso-practices, which is more conducive to the formation of female desistance narratives. This unique comparative study marks a step-change in desistance literature and will be essential reading for those engaged in the disciplines of penology, rehabilitation, gender and crime, and offender management.

Linnéa Österman is an early career researcher and lecturer at the University of Greenwich. Her research interests revolve around gender and crime, desistance, qualitative comparative criminology, Nordic criminal justice and restorative interventions. Completing her doctorate in Criminology at the University of Surrey in early 2016, Linnéa has been involved in a number of research projects focusing on women’s experiences of justice in various cultures and contexts over the last 10 years. She is a passionate criminologist and a social justice optimist, and dabbles with music-making in her spare time.

International Series on Desistance and Rehabilitation

The *International Series on Desistance and Rehabilitation* aims to provide a forum for critical debate and discussion surrounding the topics of why people stop offending and how they can be more effectively reintegrated into the communities and societies from which they came. The books published in the series will be international in outlook, but tightly focused on the unique, specific contexts and processes associated with desistance, rehabilitation and reform. Each book in the series will stand as an attempt to advance knowledge or theorising about the topics at hand, rather than being merely an extended report of a specific research project. As such, it is anticipated that some of the books included in the series will be primarily theoretical, whilst others will be more tightly focused on the sorts of initiatives which could be employed to encourage desistance. It is not our intention that books published in the series be limited to the contemporary period, as good studies of desistance, rehabilitation and reform undertaken by historians of crime are also welcome. In terms of authorship, we would welcome excellent PhD work, as well as contributions from more established academics and research teams. Most books are expected to be monographs, but edited collections are also encouraged.

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*It's really important for me to not live in exclusion.
I don't want to shut myself out anymore.
I want to be a part of Swedish history.
I want a Svensson life,
I want to have children,
I want a Volvo.
Give me a dog,
a villa,
a place where I can
wakeup at the kitchen table
and look out through the window.
Where I could just sit and sip my cup of coffee.
That's all I ever wanted.
Everything,
give me
everything normal.
That's all.*

(‘Jasmin’, 1986–2013)

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Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	x
<i>Series Editor introduction</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
1 Introducing penal cultures and female desistance	1
<i>A timely and unique comparative look from 'the inside'</i>	3
<i>Potential for homogenisation and 'policy transfers'?</i>	3
<i>Criminological contributions</i>	4
<i>Research origin and format</i>	4
<i>Chapter structure</i>	6
2 Gender, penalty and desistance in cross-national contexts	9
<i>Situating the comparative context: Swedish and English criminal justice</i>	9
<i>Feminist criminology, gender and desistance in cross-national contexts</i>	19
<i>Desistance: A gendered process?</i>	24
<i>The significance of macro-contexts</i>	28
<i>Gender, penalty and desistance in cross-national contexts: Some conclusions</i>	31
3 Researching women's journey towards desistance in diverse cultures and contexts	34
<i>Qualitative cross-national criminological research</i>	34
<i>A feminist research practice</i>	36
<i>Narrative life-story interviewing</i>	37
<i>Participation, recruitment and selection</i>	41
<i>Data organisation and management</i>	49
<i>Ethical considerations</i>	52

	<i>Researching women's journey towards desistance in diverse cultures and contexts: Some concluding reflections</i>	53
4	Mapping the female offender's journey: Points of departure	55
	<i>Two dominant pathways</i>	56
	<i>'Acting out': A reactionary pathway</i>	57
	<i>Risk, thrill-seeking and status: An 'active' pathway</i>	64
	<i>Home environments</i>	68
	<i>Mental and physical health</i>	70
	<i>Education and school environments</i>	72
	<i>Official interventions and interactions</i>	75
	<i>Female points of departure: Some conclusions</i>	81
5	Penological landscapes and female perspectives: 'Nordic Exceptionalism' and 'Anglophone Excess'	83
	<i>Police</i>	85
	<i>Sentencing and sanctioning</i>	93
	<i>Experiences of prison</i>	94
	<i>Transitioning out of criminal justice systems in different penal cultures</i>	104
	<i>Some conclusions on penological landscapes and female perspectives</i>	106
6	The female route out: Barriers, 'ladders' and the role of relationality	110
	<i>Female barriers to change in Sweden and England</i>	111
	<i>The provision of structural ladders to tackle barriers to change</i>	122
	<i>Relationality and agency in the female desistance journey</i>	129
	<i>Barriers, 'ladders' and the role of relationality in the female route out of crime: Some conclusions</i>	137
7	The female route out: Employment, inclusion and participation	139
	<i>The role of employment</i>	140
	<i>Economic independence and work satisfaction: The importance of a 'good job'</i>	143
	<i>Access to employment</i>	149
	<i>Gendered barriers to employment</i>	159
	<i>'Generativity' in the female route out of crime</i>	163
	<i>Employment, inclusion and participation: Some conclusions</i>	165

8	Concluding thoughts on penal cultures and female desistance	168
	<i>Beyond gender?</i> 173	
	<i>Final concluding remarks: A call for a humanist criminology</i> <i>and global citizenship</i> 174	
	<i>Appendix</i>	177
	<i>Bibliography</i>	202
	<i>Index</i>	217

Illustrations

Figure

4.1 Pathway typology (with substance use indicators)	57
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Tables

3.1 Participant profile summary: English sample	44
3.2 Participant profile summary: Swedish sample	46

Series Editor introduction

The International Series on Desistance and Rehabilitation aims to provide a forum for critical debate and discussion surrounding the topics of why people stop offending and how they can be more effectively reintegrated into the communities and societies from which they came. The books published in the series will be international in outlook, but tightly focused on the unique, specific contexts and processes associated with desistance, rehabilitation and reform. Each book in the series will stand as an attempt to advance knowledge or theorising about the topics at hand, rather than being merely an extended report of a specific research project. As such, it is anticipated that some of the books included in the series will be primarily theoretical, whilst others will be more tightly focused on the sorts of initiatives which could be employed to encourage desistance. It is not our intention that books published in the series be limited to the contemporary period, as good studies of desistance, rehabilitation and reform undertaken by historians of crime are also welcome. In terms of authorship, we would welcome excellent PhD work, as well as contributions from more established academics and research teams. Most books are expected to be monographs, but edited collections are also encouraged.

It really is a delight to see Linnéa Österman's book see the light of day; I read the first draft in preparation for Linnéa's PhD examination and was struck immediately by the novelty of what she had accomplished. For some time I had mused that one of the logical 'next steps' for research into desistance would be a series of international, comparative studies, which explored the ways in which, for example, different criminal justice systems, national cultures, social and economic policies shaped processes of desistance. For some time too, we have known that national level policies can shape processes of desistance; in England and Wales for example, the peak age of conviction during the post-war period increased in line with increases in the last age of compulsory education. 'Big social science' – I am thinking of the likes of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber or Barrington Moore – manages to draw general conclusions about countries and their cultures in ways which illuminate not just the countries studied but others too. With regards to her impact on the debates surrounding and within the study of desistance from crime, Linnéa has given the field a fairly hefty nudge towards comparative studies and their powers of

illumination. The processes by which the women Linnéa interviewed desisted were not simply driven by their own desires; rather, they were shaped and moulded by forces which were initiated far from their homes, but which nevertheless had very real impacts upon their lives. In this age of austerity, the fact that the Swedish women (even against the backdrop of welfare cuts to the Swedish model) had less onerous journeys away from crime than those in England ought to give rise to some serious reflection on what has (and is) happening to our model of penal-welfarism. This book may well come to be seen as marking a 'step-change' in studies of desistance. Regardless of its potential long-term impact, however, it unquestionably represents an impressive piece of work, and I am delighted to see it amongst the growing ISODR stable.

Stephen Farrall,
Sheffield,
July 2017.

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Thank you to everyone who believed in me, who questioned me, who supported me, who shared a drink with me when I was fed up with typing, who celebrated with me in moments of triumphs, and who told me to just bloody get on with it when I was stuck sighing. Adored friends, cherished family, beloved partner and inspirational academic colleagues – You know who you are, and know that I could not have done this without you. So thank you for sharing your worlds with me. I am also in unbounded gratitude to the women who so generously shared their life-stories with me for this work, as well as the staff and practitioners across Sweden and England who so liberally lent me their time and attention to support this project.

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1 Introducing penal cultures and female desistance

The area of desistance has of late become a growing interest within criminology (Bottoms et al, 2004), with the field recently having matured to the point of enabling global perspectives (Shapland et al, 2016a). As in so many other areas of criminology, however, a critical exploration of gender is fundamentally lacking in the vast majority of this work. In turn, this is reflective of the mainstream marginalisation and distortion of female experiences of crime and criminal justice in what has traditionally been a quintessentially male criminological world. As noted by Naffine (1996: 1); criminology has been, and very much remains, to be about ‘academic men studying criminal men’. Despite meeting great resistance, the past few decades have nevertheless witnessed the emergence of challenges to ‘malestream’ criminology from feminist vantage points. Feminists working in the field have accordingly made significant contributions to the development and establishment of new perspectives. Consequently, the extent to which crime and offending is gendered has been firmly placed on the criminological agenda (Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey, 2008) and the invisibility of women in the field is gradually beginning to be rectified (Barberet, 2014).

In a globalised world, cross-national research is taking on an ever more important role within the realm of knowledge production. Being a practical method for exploring particular phenomena in different socio-cultural settings, cross-cultural analysis extends knowledge of alternatives, allows for a greater understanding of similarity and difference, and can ultimately be a highly useful tool for increasing the likelihood of reform (Bryman, 2008). It can also be a useful aid to understand outcomes of diverse strategies of addressing crime (Kim and Merlo, 2014). Recognising the importance of this type of research, criminology has recently begun to move beyond its traditional parochial confines inside the nation state (Hardie-Bick et al, 2005). This spread is not, however, evenly distributed across the globe. Specifically, while the criminological enterprise has witnessed a rather spectacular growth within English-speaking nations (*ibid.*), global developments have overall been given very limited attention. In addition, due to the field’s traditional focus on the extreme, research has predominantly been centred on countries with high crime rates (Barker, 2013). Much less is, as a result, known about

2 *Introducing penal cultures and female desistance*

countries with lower crime rates, as well as those with milder forms of sanctioning (Pratt, 2008b).

This is also true for the more marginal section of criminological work that deals with women. Research on gender and crime is largely produced in the Anglo-American world, with studies predominantly applying monocultural perspectives (Barberet, 2014). What we know about female offenders thus remains very limited cross-nationally. Moreover, macro-level variables are commonly missing from the analysis. As pointed out by Hudson (2002), research on women too often lack explorations of different penal contexts and their particular consequences for the female experience of criminal justice. This represents a major limitation within the area of research on female offenders. Barberet (2014: 31) argues that macro-level analyses of gender and crime can *“help to contextualise global trends in crime and criminal justice, help us understand global economic forces as causes of crime and injustice and stretch our discipline’s narrow definition of crime”*. In recognition of the potential value of such research, the Division on Women and Crime at the American Society of Criminology has recently called for the importance of promoting and actively encouraging cross-national research on women and crime (Burgess-Proctor and Sharp, 2014; Kim and Merlo, 2014).

This gap in cross-national gendered knowledge is arguably nowhere as evident as in the particular field of desistance. There is to date minimal international comparative work on desistance, with no known work on women specifically. Recognising the value of exploring desistance in a global perspective, Professor Farrall (2016: 202) recently argued that *“cross-cultural studies of desistance are the ‘next move’ which this field needs to take, for in doing so we learn more about how to structure our criminal justice systems in such a way that they might better facilitate desistance from crime”*. This is a global call, with scholars from across Europe expressing the value of developing desistance scholarship through a comparison of different systems (Cid and Martí, 2016; Bottoms and Shapland, 2016; Healy, 2016). As research is increasingly showing that societal processes and structural contexts are influential in desistance-related processes, it is not unlikely that the experience of desistance differs from country to country. Acknowledging a fluidity in pathways towards a crime-free life (Shapland et al, 2016b), there should, however, be no illusions of the existence of a universal theory of desistance. That said, by learning about contrasting paths across cultures and contexts, some valuable lessons may be learnt. The point is – arguably rightly so – repeatedly made in criminology that it is ethically challenging to use randomised control groups for different criminal justice interventions and strategies (Lum and Yang, 2005). However, cross-national qualitative research offers us the chance to do just that; the opportunity to explore the lived experiences of individuals in different penal cultures and contexts in an ethically sound way, allowing us to extract perspectives and comparisons that monocultural research by its very nature cannot do.

A timely and unique comparative look from ‘the inside’

Penal policy in the Nordic countries¹ has recently been given increasing attention in the literature. Sweden, suggested by some to occupy a special place in the European consciousness, is often internationally portrayed as a form of ‘utopia’ (Andersson, 2009), or a ‘success story’ (Pratt, 2008a). Andersson (2009: 237) suggests that the recently renewed interest in the Swedish model in the European context is in part an *“effect of a growing shift in European politics from Neo-liberalism to a renewed interest in social organisation and a social model [...] In this European search for new social solutions [...] Sweden has again emerged as something of a utopia in European politics, at the top of welfare leagues and benchmarking”*. This resonates with Reiner (2012) who argues that, in the context of the 2008 financial crash and an associated ‘fracturing’ of the neoliberal hegemony, it is an ideal time for a revival of social democratic criminological thinking in the UK. Situated in this contemporary socio-economic climate, this book offers a timely comparative exploration of different European penal cultures.

However, although the Nordic countries are receiving more international attention, much less is known about these countries ‘from the inside’. Things can undoubtedly *“look different from the inside than the outside”* (Lappi-Seppälä, 2012: 106). There is a huge gap in qualitative research focusing on the *lived* experience of criminal justice in cross-national settings. Some argue that this has led to unhelpful re-productions of official discourses of crime and criminal justice across countries; consequently thwarting alternative micro-perspectives from within (Jefferson, 2012). As highlighted by Nelken (2010: 69), comparative criminology is an area overwhelmingly dominated by quantitative methods. However, qualitative and interpretative approaches can provide a vital additional source of information to the claims made by more mainstream work in the field. Moreover, it can also address quantitative methods’ limited ability to deal with the complexity of social processes and ‘messy realities’ (Matthews, 2014: 52). Thus, to grasp the more qualitative sides of crime and criminal justice, we must move beyond large-scale quantitative measures and also explore the lived experience. As argued by Young (2011), it is the study of culture and context, through theory and critical conceptualisations, which give numbers relevance and utility.

Potential for homogenisation and ‘policy transfers’?

Criminal justice is reflective of wider social and cultural values and norms in a society, and therefore learning from elsewhere is never a straight-forward endeavour. While it is clear from both research and practice that some levels of ‘policy transfer’ do occur between some nation-states (Newburn and Sparks, 2004), it is likewise apparent that globalisation has not led to international homogenisation of penal policy and practice (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006).

4 *Introducing penal cultures and female desistance*

Cavadino and Dignan argue that “*while we may well see an acceleration of penal convergence, in many ways, we are still a long way from global homogenization of punishment, which may never occur*” (2006: 438). This is inevitably linked to penalty being rooted in, and reflective of, particular social arrangements.

The heavy influence of American criminology in the European context has received critique from European criminologists (Tham, 2001), and has led to growing calls for a European criminology (Schneider, 2001; Junger-Tas, 2001). A key part of the development of such a criminological enterprise includes the promotion and realisation of comparative European research projects (Schneider, 2001; Junger-Tas, 2001; Tham, 2001). Tham (2001) notes that European countries represent enough similarity and variance to offer for interesting and valuable comparisons. In turn, some suggest that this context offers especially great potential for ‘policy transfer’ developments (Junger-Tas, 2001). It is argued that Sweden and England represent important differences in penalty but yet, they share enough commonalities to make for a worthwhile comparison.

Criminological contributions

This study stands at the junction of these highlighted gaps in knowledge across the criminological landscape; where the neglect of the female journey towards desistance meets the lack of international qualitative comparative work on routes out of crime and criminal justice. The book accordingly aims to make a unique contribution to the internationalisation of criminological knowledge-production across a number of disciplinary subfields. In particular, the work aims to make a contribution to feminist criminology and the growing understanding of gendered experiences of crime and criminal justice; to cross-national comparative frameworks and the adding of qualitative perspectives to cross-national studies; and last but not least, to the specific field of desistance, through an expressed focus on women’s lived experiences of desistance in different penal cultures.

Research origin and format

This book is a re-worked product of my doctoral thesis, in which I set out to qualitatively compare female ex-offenders’ journey through crime and criminal justice in Sweden and England and Wales.² While the study looked at pathways into offending, experiences within the system, as well as routes out, it was the aspect of desistance which developed into the dominant end product. However, it was also clear throughout the work that the women’s ‘departure points’ mattered to their desistance process, and so did the experiences they had along the way. The study exclusively focused on subjective experiences and understandings of crime and criminal justice from female ex-offenders’ viewpoints. When dealing with complex human behaviour,

Young (2011: 198) notes that *“to be faithful to reality means that we must of necessity take notice of subjectivity”*. Situating women’s subjective experiences at the centre of the study is a key feminist endeavour within criminology (Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1988). Moreover, from a feminist perspective, the qualitative approach is deemed to make most justice to the complexity of female lives (Barberet, 2014), while still allowing for a contextualisation of such lived experience in broader structural settings (Segrave and Carlton, 2010–2011; Holsinger, 2000). This approach is also more sensitive to people, and allows for both agentic powers and structural influences to be incorporated (Vaughan, 2007). Forming part of a wider feminist methodological framework, the interview data was co-produced via life-story narrative interviews with 24 female ex-offenders with repeated offending histories and interactions with criminal justice across Sweden and England. While recognising the typical limitations of any small-scale qualitative study of this kind (Mason, 2002), narratives are deemed to provide a highly valuable lens through which to explore desistance. As noted by Leverentz (2014:176), while acknowledging that narratives *“do not reflect an uncomplicated or unproblematic view of desistance or re-entry”*, they allow us to see *“desistance through the eyes of those experiencing the process”*.

Informed by voluminous and rich narrative data, there are many different stories that could have been told in this book. The findings presented are, inevitably, fragmented and simplified compounds of 24 unique and complex life-stories. I have endeavoured to make as fair compromises as possible, and dedicate adequate space to the stories shared, with the wish to do justice to each woman’s individual narrative. However, some of the women feature more prominently than others in some areas. This is a common trade-off in qualitative work of this kind (Leverentz, 2014), as the extended use of rich data dealing with a particular woman’s experience allows for more in-depth illustrative understandings. Moreover, it should also be noted that the ‘offender story’ is not commonly the most significant one in the women’s lives. Young (2011: 188) helpfully reminds us of the common criminological fallacy of applying the ‘offender’ label as a form of master status to those we observe, understood to provide a ‘clue to the very essence’ of the individual, and accordingly the person is defined by his or her involvement in crime and criminal justice. This, Young (2011) suggests, frequently leads to a distortion and elimination of the majority of people’s lives and actions, with an uneven concentration on the negative and the predatory. This is an important point. As researchers and scholars we need to remain vigilant, as well as critical, of our own power in positioning and portraying the people we represent in our research. This includes misconstruing and over-accentuating the role of offending in what is typically a complex and wide-ranging life-narrative, in which offending will merely be one of numerous other markers. Thus, while maintaining focus on the unmistakable criminological perspective of this book, my aim has also been to allow space for a broader lens on lived experience, with the intention to limit distortion of the women’s life-stories

6 *Introducing penal cultures and female desistance*

with the application of a 'master status' as offender. By doing this, I hope to highlight the complexity of lived experience and the importance of situating a woman's offending behaviour in the totality of her life (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004).

Chapter structure

The book is structured in eight chapters, with an appendix that presents short 'pen portraits' of the women who contributed to the study. These 'portraits' offer largely descriptive windows into each woman's life-story, which readers are invited to visit either when general curiosity arises, or when they wish to locate a particular quote within a broader life-story. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 will go on to situate the study in its relevant criminological literature contexts, starting with an overview of Swedish and English criminal justice and the female offender's position within these, followed by a comprehensive exploration of what is known about the female journey towards desistance. The third chapter will outline the methods and approaches applied in the research, including comments on the particular challenges of conducting research in multiple countries and languages. A summary of the data will also be provided. While many research monographs relegate the methodology section to the appendix, the suggestion that this part of the work is simply an 'add-on' reading for especially interested audiences is rejected. The study is firmly located within the contours of qualitative interpretative research; specifically underpinned by a critical humanist perspective, and governed by a feminist research agenda. Reflexivity and transparency is therefore a core part of the research, and to give meaning to the findings, I believe it is vital that the reader has a clear understanding of the processes that produced them.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 go on to present the main findings. Recognising the importance of linking pathways and desistance in research with women in criminal justice (Leverentz, 2014), Chapter 4 will start by exploring the women's departure points. Two dominant pathway groupings; a 'reactionary/acting out' and an 'active/seeking out' will be outlined, and the concept of 'pathway luggage' will also be introduced. It is argued that the volume and nature of 'pathway luggage' will inevitably have an impact on the overall journey through crime and criminal justice, and towards desistance. Moving on from pathways and into criminal justice system interactions, Chapter 5 offers an in-depth exploration of the subjective female experience of moving through the criminal justice system in Sweden and England. The dominant area in the sanction section is the comparative experience of spending time in prison. A core argument running through the chapter is how diverse meso-practices overall produce different lived experiences of legitimacy and trust.

Chapters 6 and 7 give more exclusive focus to the processes of desistance. The sixth chapter focuses on the comparative female experience of the earlier stages of her route out, looking specifically at barriers, structural 'ladders' and

the role of relationality. Both ‘internal’ and ‘external’ barriers are highlighted, including areas such as housing, access to a liveable income, and mental and emotional well-being. The chapter goes on to detail how these barriers are, from the perspective of the women, tackled within the comparative penological contexts of Sweden and England. The concept of structural ‘ladders’, aiding the women to overcome barriers and enable positive change, is introduced here; a major example being contrasting ‘ladders’ in the area of substance and/or alcohol treatment provision. The final findings chapter – Chapter 7 – will concentrate on the end destination of the female journey towards desistance, namely inclusion and participation in what could be described as ‘mainstream’ society. The role of employment in the female desistance process will be the major focus of this chapter. Firstly, the significance of employment is explored through the data, presenting an argument for a multifactorial value of legitimate labour market participation. Secondly, the subjective female experience of accessing employment in the two countries is comparatively explored, revealing major differences across the sample groups. Overall, the core argument presented in this chapter is that the Swedish female ex-offenders experience their opportunities for inclusion and participation as more accessible, tangible and attractive than their English counterparts. In turn, it is suggested that experiencing these opportunities as more accessible, feeding into a subjective sense of a well-supported route overall, carries meaning for the women’s willingness to participate, via a lived sense of inclusion and self-worth.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, will weave together the core arguments presented, highlight the implications of the comparative findings, and bring the book to a conclusion. Providing new qualitative evidence of the ‘Nordic Exceptionalism’ thesis, the findings indicate that, comparatively, the Swedish model offers a macro-context, supported and reflected in allied meso-practices, which is more conducive to the formation of lasting female routes out of crime and *into* active participation in ‘mainstream’ society. The principal qualitative mechanisms that underpin this argument, identified as distinctive to the Swedish model through the cross-national thematic analysis, include: (1) a more robust infrastructure supporting individual change, exemplified in high-quality drugs and alcohol provisions; (2) lived experiences of legitimacy and trust in criminal justice interactions, encouraging less conflictual relations between the individual and authorities; (3) the impact of *normalisation* ideals and practices within criminal justice processes, ultimately enabling a smoother transition out from the system, and lastly; (4) subjective experiences of more accessible and attractive routes into participation and inclusion, including structured and holistic investments in quality employment support.

Notes

- 1 Much of the international comparative literature uses various ‘clusters’ for comparisons and thus, Sweden is commonly collapsed into the broader category of

8 *Introducing penal cultures and female desistance*

'Nordic countries'. In contrast, England and Wales often fall under the heading of 'Anglophone' countries.

- 2 While the study covered England and Wales, no interview data was collected in Wales for the final sample. For simplicity, 'England' is henceforward used to refer to the England and Wales section of the sample.

2 Gender, penalty and desistance in cross-national contexts

Crossing the fields of desistance, feminist criminology, gender and crime, and cross-national criminological research, the literatures that could be charted for this study are vast. Thus, some compromises have had to be made. While recognising the likely scholarly critique of lacking depth in exploration in each of these criminological arenas, what follows is a summary of the evidence and knowledge that is deemed the most pertinent, across these fields, for the reader to situate the findings in the wider body of criminological knowledge. To begin with, the particular comparative context must be explored. Drawing on Melossi's (2001) conceptualisation of penalty as intrinsically linked to culture, the research is underpinned by an understanding of crime and punishment as *embedded* in broader socio-economic, political and societal processes and norms. The comparative national and cultural contexts are therefore essential to the interpretation of the arguments presented throughout this book, and we start this chapter with a brief overview of the differing penal, and societal, settings and cultures that frame the study. Secondly, the chapter will move on to highlight what is known about the female route out of crime. Major desistance theories will be outlined, and critiqued, via a feminist criminological lens. The few studies to date that have included a female perspective will then be explored in more detail. Lastly, the gap in cross-national research of macro-contexts in the area of desistance generally, and in female desistance specifically, will be highlighted.

Situating the comparative context: Swedish and English criminal justice¹

"Both the origins of crime and the responses to it are shaped by the cultures from which they emerge."

(Young, 2011:129)

Different cultures produce different ways of thinking about crime and punishments. As well as being *embedded* in societal structures, Cavadino and Dignan (2006) suggest penalty is also *embodied* in the political economy of a country. In recent criminological writing, Sweden has been described as a key

example of ‘Nordic Exceptionalism’, operating low rates of imprisonment and humane penal conditions (Pratt, 2008a). Beyond imprisonment, the Nordic countries also have overall fewer offenders on supervision and fewer annual entries into probation (Lappi-Seppälä, 2012). This is contrasted to a suggested growing ‘punitiveness’ in the Anglophone setting, with an unprecedented expansion of criminal justice in recent history (Pratt *et al*, 2005). Evidence suggests that this trend is particularly marked for women (Gels-thorpe, 2003; Corcoran, 2010–2011). Following a period of expansion also in Swedish penalty (Jerre, 2013), more recent trends have witnessed a reversal of this development, with a decrease in imprisonment leading to, for example, the closure of four prisons in 2013 (Sveriges Radio, 2013). Given the difference in these overall trends in penalty, Pratt (2008a: 135) suggests that the Scandinavian model should “*in the contemporary era of penal excess*” be given “*the opportunity to act as a focal point of difference and opposition*”.

Historical underpinnings and the function of punishment

The underpinning reasons for these ‘exceptional’ penal practices in the Nordic countries are complex and multifaceted. Core factors are suggested to be found in the socio-economic, political and cultural structures and traditions in these societies. Explanations include strong welfare investments, high levels of trust and solidarity, and ‘inclusive’ penal policies (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006). These have derived from a culture of equality and are supported by a universal welfare state, a consensual orientated political culture and an educationally-responsible press (Lappi-Seppälä, 2012; Pratt and Eriksson, 2013). Moreover, these arrangements are rooted in, and have developed alongside, particular historical processes. Relevant historical developments for example include a relatively flat class structure and more local and democratic forms of self-governance in the Nordic setting (Pratt, 2008a). This is contrasted to a history of a very well-defined class systems in the English setting, originating in feudal societal structures and a cultural emphasis on land ownership and individual success (Pratt and Eriksson, 2013).

In these different historical contexts, punishment came to fill diverse societal functions. For example, suggested to help secure social order in less cohesive societies, public punishment played a much larger role in the development of English criminal justice compared to the Swedish (Pratt and Eriksson, 2013). In Sweden, with more stable political structures and egalitarian values, there was less need to use spectacular forms of punishment to assure stability or affirm class structures. These particular Swedish settings laid the foundations for the development of the so called ‘Folkhemmet’, or ‘The People’s Home’, in the 1920s, which forms a core part of Swedish history (Trägårdh and Berggren, 2006). ‘Folkhemmet’ thinking was built on security, well-being and anti-elitism (Barker, 2013), and was supposed to represent more than a safety net and signal a special form of togetherness. Within this framework, the