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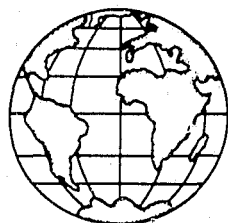
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From The Netherlands

In Dynamic Balance: Criminal Subcultures of Three Dutch Prisons

A close study of inmates suggests that the ideology of prison officials does most to determine nature of subcultures within different prisons.

By M. Grapendaal

Introduction

This 1985 study sought to determine whether a subculture existed among long-term inmates of three Dutch prisons. It continued a 1982 study in which resocialization *after* imprisonment was shown to be affected by socialization *during* imprisonment. This study first questions whether subcultures exist. It then asks how they differ from each other, and finally, which of the accepted three theories of prison subculture these particular Dutch prisons exemplify.

The first step was to learn whether the inmates themselves thought subcultures existed; second, to determine the subcultures' components; finally, to study the relationship between officials and inmates in prison management; and to define the subcultures.

The three theories of prison subculture are: the deprivational or indigenous origins model, based on the existing prison situation itself; the import model, sug-

gesting that the inmate brings his own subculture into the prison; and third, a combination of the two.

Much of the background for this study was gathered from researchers in the United States and England such as Clemmer (*The Prison Community*, Reinhardt 1940) and Sykes (*The Society of Captives*, Princeton University Press 1958). But little of this background led to *direct* benefit in this study because of significant differences that appeared between the English-speaking and Dutch systems.

Prison choice. To choose subject prisons for the study, we considered (1) stability of prison culture (as defined by the Dutch scholars DeJager and Mok 1983); (2) the forming of relationships within the prison; (3) official weariness of previous investigations; and (4) disputes and accommodation among the officials. Four prisons survived these considerations, and one asked to be dropped. Pseudonyms were adopted for the remaining three: Woudhage, 160 cells; Bolder, 128 cells; and Kogelaar, 75 cells.

Operational concepts. The dependent variable in the investigation was prison culture as expressed by the continuity of prison values, norms, thoughts, and attitudes. Four independent variables were considered, defining how inmates associ-

ated with each other: (1) opposition to authority, (2) solidarity with other inmates, (3) manipulation of officials, and (4) exploitation of other inmates. Four *officer* attitude variables were examined: (1) inmate trust, (2) feeling of safety, (3) rule relaxation, and (4) interpersonal relationships with inmates.

To determine which theoretical model applied in the Dutch system, the study gathered information from inmates on (1) perceived problems such as drugs, sex, or isolation; (2) association with other inmates; (3) contentment with the system (evaluated on a 5-point scale); and (4) contacts outside the prison (in relation to the import model).

Five other factors were also considered with regard to the import model: (1) criminal record, (2) future expectations, (3) education, (4) civilian status, and (5) work history.

Sample population. The sample of Woudhage inmates was selective so that the population might more closely match that of the other two more "specialized" prisons, Kogelaar and Bolder, where the samples were random. Participants were stratified according to sentence: 1 to 6 months (26 percent of total population), 6 months to a year (38 percent), and longer than a year (36 percent).

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Any participant who left the prison during the study was dropped; and also 10 participants at Woudhage were dropped by official request. The final numbers were 43 participants out of 67 possibles at Kogelaar, 67 out of 122 at Bolder, and 76 of 140 at Woudhage.

In addition, a questionnaire was sent to the homes of a 60 percent random sample of officers. It included a return envelope and a request to return within 10 days. Actual mailings per total officer population were 35 of 60 at Kogelaar, 49 of 79 at Bolder, and 30 of 43 at Woudhage. Response rate to the mailing was extremely low.

Data collection

Before the study began, each participant (inmates, officers, and officials) was advised orally and in writing of the scope of the study. Actual data collection lasted about 2 months and included three questionnaires, two for the inmates and one for the officers. Each group was asked to individually fill out the first questionnaire and was permitted to ask questions.

Inmates. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered. Inmates were interviewed by at least two interviewers in groups of four to seven. Each inmate was interviewed individually using the second questionnaire. Medical history, court records, and general prison records were also reviewed. Short, informal discussions were held with the inmates during worktimes and mealtimes.

Actual inmate responses were 52 percent at Kogelaar, 57 percent at Bolder, and 70 percent at Woudhage. The response rate at Kogelaar was low because there had just been an escape attempt, leading to tightened security and harsh inmate-officer feelings. The Bolder response was low because of inmate fear of retaliation by officers. In contrast, inmates at Woudhage saw the study as an opportunity to "clear the air."

In general, there were five reasons for nonresponse by inmates at the three prisons: (1) some felt a few questions were misleading, (2) some feared retribution, (3) there was deep-seated mistrust of the system, (4) some mistrusted the study's purpose, and (5) there was no personal benefit to be gained by participation.

Because much additional information was available on each inmate, the response/nonresponse rate was considered acceptable. The most important variables among prisoners appeared to be type of offense, sentence length, time remaining on sentence, ethnic background, age, leave, interruption of sentence, age of first offense, and type of first offense. For example, 67 percent of the Surinamese inmates at Kogelaar refused to take part. In Bolder, Dutch inmates with one offense of violence or property crime and 6 to 10 other offenses usually would not respond. And at Woudhage, only those with as little as 1 to 6 months remaining to serve refused to respond.

Officers. No generalizations could be made regarding how officers would react to the study nor what their attitudes were toward the inmates. Response rates from Kogelaar, Bolder, and Woudhage were 49 percent, 45 percent, and 37 percent respectively. Some of the low response can be blamed on the method, mail versus personal, although a personal introduction was given at a later date.

In general there were five reasons given for the low response: (1) belief that studies "never actually" result in anything, (2) disbelief in anonymity of the study, (3) belief that the study would cause inmates to think (falsely) that the officers were to benefit, (4) length of questionnaire, and (5) mistrust of justice-system studies that "usually lead" to cost-cutting measures.

The prisons

The study includes detailed drawings and descriptions of the layout of the three prisons. In general, there were three major differences between the prisons under study: (1) the quality of life among inmates, (2) physical layout, and (3) security precautions.

Kogelaar. This 100-year-old prison had undergone many uses, but is now restricted to use for adult males serving long terms. As a result of renovation in 1975, the entrance was turned into a modern area that included offices and visiting areas. The three levels of cells were to the rear in two wings perpendicular to the entrance way, with a work area, a gymnasium, yard, and garden.

Construction materials were acoustically poor so that it was extremely noisy at all times. Lighting was mainly artificial, with some natural lighting through skylights in the roof. Each of the 75 cells measured about 6-1/2 by 11-1/2 feet (Dutch text said 2 x 3.5 meters) and had a window in the door. There were no facilities for running water in the cells, each of which contained only a bed, chair, table, and a cabinet in addition to such personal belongings as pictures or a lamp. Walls and cells were primarily dark blues, reds, and greens.

In general, Kogelaar's atmosphere was that of a breeding ground for inmate problems.

Bolder. Bolder was also a prison for long-term adult males. It held 128 inmates and was last renovated in 1906. Like Kogelaar's, its entrance housed offices, a visitor area, and an officer station. Unlike Kogelaar, Bolder had a large inner court area with various facilities located along the edges. It had a tennis court and swimming pool in the courtyard near the group cells, which were located in five areas on the second floor.

The messhall and lounge area were all located on the same side of the courtyard; other facilities were on the opposite side. Rather than individual cells, dormitories were divided into two rooms with 12 men occupying each. Each room had cold running water. The entire prison was surrounded by a moat with watchtowers at strategic locations.

Woudhage. Although Woudhage was not restricted to one type of inmate, it did house a number of long-term adult males. Not located in just one building, it spread out in an area of almost a thousand feet by 500 (300 x 150 meters) with its many small buildings surrounded by thick woods on three sides. Because of its less severe surroundings, landscaped with flowers, trees, and even statues, it was called "The Camp."

Woudhage was completed in the 1970's. Near the rear of the grounds in two groups of four were inmate buildings, each housing 20 inmates, with separate control stations. Each dining room and lounge, with television and billiards, was on the ground floor. Ten inmates slept downstairs, ten up. Each cell had a regu-

lar wooden door for which the inmate had a key.

In general Woudhage was the most modern and comfortable of the three—roomy and sanitary, with friendly building materials. Kogelaar was the most restrictive with its single building style and few open spaces. Kogelaar was also the most security conscious of the three, its closed system contrasting with the openness at Woudhage.

Demographics

The population of the three prisons was analyzed through such sociodemographic factors as age, nationality, ethnic background, drug use, marital status, criminal sentence, and prison record.

Social. Almost 80 percent of the population from all three prisons were Dutch nationals, either born in The Netherlands or in the former colonies of Surinam and the Antilles. The median age ranged from 30.6 years at Kogelaar to 33.4 at Bolder and 30.5 at Woudhage.

Data on drug use before and after imprisonment showed that prison reduced the use of hard drugs the most. Other drug use declined slightly (except at Kogelaar, which showed a slight increase—or perhaps simply showed that Kogelaar's inmates were more willing to admit to it). Sixty-four percent were married, with the highest percentage at Woudhage. Bolder had the most educated inmates. And in contrast to a prison in Rotterdam where 56 percent of inmates said they had been unemployed, only 14 percent in this study claimed unemployment.

Criminal sentence. Crimes for which prisoners had been sentenced were measured in five categories: violence, morals, property crimes, opium use, other. In Kogelaar and Bolder, violence, property crimes, and opium use ran almost equal in the top percentage, while at Woudhage 60 percent of sentences were for property crimes.

At Kogelaar and Bolder, it was no surprise that no inmate had a sentence of less than 6 months. But 70 percent of Woudhage inmates had long-term sentences—a surprise when so many inmates were serving time for property

crimes. Woudhage also had the longest sentences remaining to be served.

Criminal record. Bolder had the largest number of first offenders, 31.3 percent, but also the largest number of foreign nationals with no previous record in The Netherlands. At Kogelaar, almost 60 percent had committed at least five offenses, contrasting with only 26.8 percent at Bolder and 41 percent at Woudhage. Woudhage inmates were the most often imprisoned, while at Bolder, almost half were in prison for the first time.

At Bolder, 55 percent were older than 21 at the time of their first offenses compared with 34.9 percent at Kogelaar and 30.1 percent in Woudhage. However, 37.2 percent at Kogelaar and 32.9 at Woudhage committed their first crimes before reaching 16.

(Most of the data were gathered from inmate questionnaires. Data from court records were available only for those inmates with Dutch histories. Thus, the records of 11 inmates, all of them at Bolder, could not be verified by court records.)

Prison descriptions

Descriptions of life at each prison were based on observations and discussions with inmates and officers. They did not claim to be complete, but represented merely a glance at a complex existence.

Kogelaar. Units of prison culture at Kogelaar numbered from 3 to 10 inmates. For new inmates (1 week to 1 month) cell location or neighbors determined their initial group membership. Later, the most important reasons for group formation and leadership were nationality or ethnicity and the objectives of the group's leadership.

For non-Dutch inmates, ethnicity was of prime importance, while the group's objectives were the main incentive for the Dutch majority at Kogelaar. Leaders at Kogelaar were chosen for status, for physical abilities such as might be demonstrated by the crime committed, or for outside contacts, reputation, money, intelligence, or other functional reasons—but rarely for physical reasons alone.

The prison's structure separated its culture by cell level. The top level was most desired and most dependent on leadership abilities, wealth, seniority, or personal connections. New inmates were seldom assigned to this area.

Leadership was two-sided: the other inmates put a leader on a pedestal, but officers used leaders to set examples, as in punishment. The contest between inmates and officers was often a game of wits, power, or strength, with the officers usually winning. Inmates played the game to obtain forbidden goods, such as drugs or drink, and to trick the officers. Officers used the game to maintain control, sometimes by turning their heads to avoid the game.

In addition to noise, this game playing often led to violence and aggression, the biggest Kogelaar problem.

Bolder was difficult to study because of the physical layout and the restrictions placed on the study by prison officials. Here too, cultural background (even by region among white Dutchmen) was the prison group determinant. Drug use was the next leading cause—leading to development of drug masters, who provided the drugs, and drug slaves who served them.

Not everyone was a member of a group, either by personal or group choice. No inmates admitted to being group leaders for fear of official retribution. All acknowledged, however, that leaders existed, determined by formal prison function, informal reputation, intellect, and possibly economic reasons. Strict official control prevented any physical leaders from arising.

Prison culture groups were closed, living in uninspired friendliness: once an inmate was in a group it was impossible to leave. Nor was there any desire to do so. Groups tended to look down on one another, especially a few white groups toward the black groups. Yet at first glance, Bolder might have impressed one as a calm, restful, even sluggish setting where officers and inmates existed in harmony.

Punishment was on a "no-fault" basis; everyone involved was punished. This seemed to encourage calm, leading to

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relative independence and responsibility for Bolder inmates.

Woudhage. Ethnicity was not a factor here. The first 2 days of initial contacts with other new inmates seemed to have the greatest effect. Once the inmate was accepted into prison life, informal groups of three to four formed, first by sentence time (short-timers with only 1 to 4 months often did not even join a group), then by regional background or by hobbies.

Groups were most often formed among building dwellers, leading to competition between buildings. Functional building leaders, formally appointed by prison officials, were often the informal leaders as well, trusted by other inmates. Informally, Woudhage had information leaders and financial-economic leaders, who often collected fines for misbehavior. Missing from Woudhage were physical and reputation leaders, most probably because of the strong controls that informally existed within each building. Contact between inmates and officers was minimal, so relationships formed based on building assignment.

In two out of three Dutch prisons, ethnicity played a major role in group formation. In Woudhage, prison layout was more important. In all three prisons, the study found informal leaders arose through reputation, financial acumen, or functional importance, but seldom by physical prowess. Three forms of inmate-officer relations appeared: (1) "game playing" at Kogelaar, (2) neutrality, not unfriendliness, at Bolder, and (3) minimal contact at Woudhage.

Conclusions

The study concluded that there is indeed a prison subculture in Dutch prisons, maintained primarily by inmates of Dutch cultural background who are sentenced for property crimes regardless of drug use. Its continued existence depends on three factors: (1) continuity of inmate attitudes, (2) distinguishably different attitudes, and (3) distance from prison officials.

Continuity of prison thoughts and attitudes is instilled in each inmate by fellow inmates through an initiation process when he first enters prison. Three domi-

nant attitudes characterize these norms and values: (1) opposition to officials, (2) exploitation of fellow inmates, and (3) isolationism and aloofness. Two factors, mutual solidarity and official personal manipulation, appear to play no role in Dutch prisons.

Because of the small response, the inmate-officer relationship is hard to characterize. Officer attitudes toward inmates seem to depend on the officers' positive or negative assessment of those inmates. Officers in Kogelaar felt greater inmate deception than at the other two prisons, but all officers seemed to feel deceived.

When asked what was the greatest problem, officers in Woudhage cited the inmates; officers in Kogelaar and Bolder said prison organization. Most officers felt that the prison had little or no positive influence on inmates and that from 40 to 80 percent of them would be back after completing their sentences.

Perhaps most interesting, however, was the discovery of three distinct types of officers: (1) those who emphasized officer-inmate relations, (2) those who emphasized prison security, and (3) those who were indifferent. A similar breakdown was found between prison officials and inmates, especially in Kogelaar. But perhaps more important, many officers did not feel that anyone, officials or colleagues, backed up their actions.

Brief consideration was given to the effects of prison size and population on prison culture development. Prison size or number of cells appeared to matter little here, although building layout and construction materials made big differences. The oldest prison, Kogelaar, had many more problems.

Based on this study, drug use appeared to have no statistically significant influence on the culture. But those inmates who committed their first crime at an earlier age appeared to be the most exploitative and least isolationist.

This study appears to have disproved the popular belief that prison culture is dependent solely on inmate attitudes, population demographics, and physical buildings, while unrelated to official ideology. Here, official prison organiza-

tion and structural adaptation appear to have had a major influence. A multiple regression analysis of the numerous variables found here, similar to the analyses of Thomas (1977) and Zingraff (1980), helped determine whether the deprivation model or the import model best fit the Dutch system. The results indicated that although most inmates enter prison with tendencies toward both exploitation and official opposition, the exploitative takes control once the inmate settles in.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy results was discovery of the mental and material need by inmates and officers alike to be independent from one another. The data indicated that opposition develops from the deprivation model variables, isolationism from the more situational model, and exploitation from a combination of both.

Although there were differences between officials and inmates, there were also similarities. Prison relations seemed to be in a dynamic balance as demonstrated by the relative calm at all three prisons. Self-interest on both sides was a determining factor of this balance, but especially the "superordinate goal" of the inmates as explained by Sherif (1966). In 2 months, only four incidents were registered at the three prisons, and all four were among inmates themselves, not between inmates and officers or officials.

Perhaps the most striking result of this study was that the two least similar prisons, Kogelaar and Woudhage, exhibited common inmate subcultures. These results confirmed the author's belief that due to the decentralized control of Dutch prisons, each is run according to the rules established by its own local officials. This would confirm that a direct relationship exists between the inmate subculture and the ideology of the officials of that prison.

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