

It's Back to the Future: Have the Lessons of Jika Jika Been Forgotten?

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Historically, maximum-security and supermax prisons such as Pentridge Prison's Jika Jika High-Security Unit in Victoria, Long Bay's Katingal and in recent times the controversial Goulburn High Risk Management Unit in NSW, have been designed to exert exclusive disciplinary and coercive control over the system's supposedly high-risk, 'unruly' and 'dangerous' prisoners through the application of hi-tech security devices, electronic controls and psychological strategies including sensory deprivation and solitary confinement. This paper highlights that despite the well-known brutalising and potentially lethal impacts of such regimes, as demonstrated by the Jika Jika experience, a recent string of security upgrades in Victoria's Barwon Prison suggest that supermax conditions are currently being introduced and 'normalised' in the mainstream prison system. These multi-million dollar upgrades include the installation of electronic and infra-red systems, new x-ray scanning equipment, remodelled and reinforced cells, extra video and audio technologies.¹ In drawing attention to the fact that such 'upgrades' have been introduced at the expense of out of cell hours and a range of rehabilitative and mental health services for prisoners, we argue that harsh security regimes are not only inhumane; they perpetuate a self-fulfilling prophecy of polarisation, frustration, violence and of course, *increased* security.

We have to accept that prisons exist because of crime, and the fear of crime. The state/security/police/legal/media entertainment industry that promotes the fear of

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¹ J. Silvester, 'Underworld recruiting in prisons', *Age*, 24/12/04; P. Beauchamp, 'Heat is on Barwon prisoners', *Herald-Sun*, 17/8/05; '11 million upgrade for prisons', *Herald-Sun*, 7/11/05; 'Jail locks up for longer', *Herald-Sun*, 4/12/05.

crime is far too omnipresent to be tackled. But what can be tackled are the causes of crime. This can be achieved through the improvement of social justice, education and health services for marginalised communities and individuals in order to prevent the root causes of crime: economic disadvantage, poverty, social dislocation and exclusion. It can also be achieved in prison, by teaching through the example of treating people with *humanity* and by properly providing the mental health, rehabilitative and other services to address the issues that lead the individual to offend against the community in the first instance.

Rather than teaching by the example of humanity, *inhumanity* is the guiding principle of the hi-tech ‘supermax’ and ‘management prison’. In short these ‘prisons within prisons’ are making it worse, not better. The problem for the community is not just that hi-tech supermax and management regimes are inflicting physical and psychological harm on a small number of people held in these units who will be one day be released back into the community. Such hi-tech, dehumanising modalities are also becoming the norm, therefore extending the damaging impact to those imprisoned in the mainstream prison system. This process of ‘normalisation’ of the maxi-maxi security regime, or what has been referred to as a process of ‘Marionization’², is currently underway in all areas of Melbourne’s Barwon Prison.

Supermax prisons and regimes of confinement are designed specifically to send the message that ‘might is right’ and the system has that might. Prisoner experiences and overseas research confirm that the combination of solitary confinement, hi-tech security devices, remote controls and the complete separation prisoners and guards have harmful effects on prisoners and a corrupting influence over prison officers.³ For

² ‘Marionization’ is a term that refers to events at Illinois Marion Control Unit in the United States in the early 1980s. Initially an open institution (with a control unit or maxi-maxi prison within it), Marion was permanently locked down in 1983 following a series of officially exacerbated violent episodes between prison officers and prisoners, some of which resulted in the deaths of prisoners and prison officers. The events leading to the lockdown at Marion represented an official move to convert the institution into a ‘tightly controlled, unitised’ regime composed completely of isolation units. See B. Dunne, ‘The US Prison at Marion: Illinois, an Instrument of Oppression’, in Churchill & Vanderwall (eds), *Cages of Steel: The Politics of Imprisonment in the United States*, Maissoneuve Press, Washington, 1992, pp. 38-82.

³ See for example, N. Funnel, ‘Where the Norm is Not the Norm: Goulburn Correctional Centre and the Harm-U’, Perth Independent Media Centre, 15 December 2004, <http://perthimc.asn.au/?action=newswire&parentview=7550&PHPSESSID=364e9657e6d6d391b7f4dd7b1a41db3e>, accessed 31/1/06; L. Rhodes, *Total Confinement: Madness and Reason in the Maximum Security Prison*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004; C. Shaylor, “‘It’s like living in a black

prisoners the injurious impacts of such conditions are extreme in that they can produce severe psychological pain and potentially long-term damage. In this sense it has been argued that such methods of confinement amount to nothing short of torture.⁴

The increasing emphasis on security in ‘modern’ prison design, and trends toward the use of psychologically geared management strategies such as total isolation and sensory deprivation were purported to signal a shift away from the physical excesses of punishment and brutal intractable regimes in ‘H’ Division and Grafton. Father Brosnan, the longest serving prison chaplain in Victorian history, said of the torturous regime in ‘H’ Division, that it turned ‘bicycle thieves into murderers’. The counter-productive outcomes that stem from harsh punishment regimes have been known since the mid-1700s when public torture and executions caused riots and became ‘centres of illegality’.⁵ The same is true of the harsh regimes concealed behind prison walls today, their secrecy breeds illegality and an abuse of power that only endangers the community further while exacerbating a self-fulfilling ‘security’ prophecy of still harsher regimes to address the problems caused by the previous regime.⁶ Moreover, the lack of outside scrutiny and particularly the separation of prisoners and prison officers inevitably contribute to an internal culture of polarisation, confrontation and ultimately outbreaks of violence.⁷ There is much research and evidence to support this, yet the authorities continue to implement tighter security and construct repressive hi-tech models based on the failed architectural and management models attempted over 30 years ago.

hole”: women of colour and solitary confinement in the prison industrial complex’, *New England Journal of Criminal and Civil Confinement*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer, 1998, pp. 385-416. W. Churchill & J.J. Vanderwall (eds.), *Cages of Steel: The Politics of Imprisonment in the United States*, Maisonneuve Press, Washington, 1992, pp. 83-109. J. Fellner, & J. Mariner, ‘Human rights violations in the United States: cold-storage: super-maximum security confinement in Indiana’, Human Rights Watch, New York, 1997.

⁴ See Craig Haney, ‘Mental Health Issues in Long-Term Solitary and ‘Supermax’ Confinement’, *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 49, No., 1, January 2003, pp. 124-156.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Penguin Books, London, 1979, pp. 62-63.

⁶ Richard Edney argues that the harsh and dehumanising prison regimes, coupled with a lack of accountability and secrecy under the guise of security leads to human rights abuses and crimes being perpetrated against prisoners by prison staff. See, ‘Judicial deference to the expertise of correctional administrators: the implications for prisoners rights’, *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2001, pp. 91-133.

⁷ For examples of this see Lorna Rhodes, *Total Confinement: Madness and Reason in the Maximum Security Prison*, 2004; See also J. Fellner, & J. Mariner, ‘Human rights violations in the United States: cold-storage: super-maximum security confinement in Indiana’, Human Rights Watch, New York, 1997.

Pentridge Prison's Jika Jika in Victoria and Long Bay's Katingal in NSW, were two of the first hi-tech models of this kind implemented as part of Australian penal policy in the 1970s. The Jika Jika Security Unit provides a striking example of how models of confinement that prioritise security can only fail. Moreover, as an inhumane and lethal experiment, it produced a range of critical, yet evidently unlearned lessons.

Jika Jika opened in 1980. Built of concrete and steel, the hi-tech 54-man prison complex was a discrete high-security unit designed to secure the Victorian prison systems' most violent, dangerous, high risk and troublesome long-term prisoners. At the time of its conception the multi-million dollar complex was celebrated as an impressive technological first. As an 'escape-proof', 'anti-terrorist' and humanely modern facility for high-risk prisoners, Jika was geared towards total containment and security. From the outside, the complex resembled a spider-like futuristic space station. Groups of twelve prisoners were housed in detached 'Units' and segregated into 'Sides' in groups of six. The complex was completely sealed, providing no openings for fresh air. The units were connected via corridor spines that led to a central administration area and the entire facility was suspended on stilts to complete the total disconnection with the reality of having one's feet on the ground. Prison officers and prisoners were physically divided by bulletproof glass to enable detached supervision, and prisoners were subjected to constant video camera surveillance. Electronic consoles allowed prison officers to remotely control power, heating and prisoner access through the pneumatic glass and steel doors within each Unit, thus deliberately limiting the need for physical contact with prisoners. Outside prisoner recreation took place within the exercise yards enclosed by angular 'escape-proof' cages and the perimeter of the complex was protected by advanced microwave technology and alarm systems.

Jika Jika represents an indisputable example of the self-fulfilling prophecy mentioned above. Despite the emphasis on security, technology and efficiency, the supposedly modern and 'humane' Jika complex was plagued with violent incidents and fraught with entrenched management problems from the time that it opened. The complex initially opened with the provision of garden areas, programs, and limited freedoms for prisoners, to compensate for the harshness of the high-security environment.

However, each of these small freedoms was gradually eroded as a variety of incidents and security breaches occurred, thus vindicating calls for increased security and disciplinary crackdowns. Between 1980 and 1987 there were multiple escapes, escape attempts, assaults, two murders, prisoner campaigns, protest actions, barricades, fires, hunger strikes, acts of self harm, attempted suicides and emerging prisoner allegations of misconduct and brutality by prison staff.⁸ Above all, the impact of the harsh high-security atmosphere and environment on both staff and prisoners produced polarised relationships and an ever-increasing spiral of tension. The pressure and strain that stemmed from such conditions exacerbated an intense sense of fear and paranoia, while giving rise to a predatory culture of psychological and physical violence between prisoners and between staff and prisoners.

The deaths of five prisoners, Robert Wright, Arthur Gallagher, Jimmy Loughnan, Ricky Morris and David McGauley, in the 1987 Jika October fire triggered the temporary closure of the Jika Jika High-Security Unit. The inquest hearings reflected the acute sense of institutional polarisation and crisis in Jika pre-empted by harsh conditions, gross mismanagement and the infliction of psychological and physical terror by staff. Within his lengthy findings Coroner Hallenstein stated that the Victorian Office of Corrections contributed to the deaths of the men. In particular he criticised the remote controlled doors and recommended their removal.

The Victorian Attorney-General at the time Jim Kennan subsequently announced the closure of Jika in its present form. Kennan echoed Justice Nagle's condemnation of Katingal during the 1978 Royal Commission into NSW Prisons, when he publicly referred to the Jika complex as an 'electronic zoo'. Despite the extensive injustices, deaths and suffering that was brought about by Jika, no officer or official were ever brought to account. After the closure of the unit the electronic doors and controls were removed, a fresh coat of paint went on and the unit was reopened to house prisoners once again. During 1987, the seven deaths occurring in Jika represented 38.8% of the

⁸ *Jika Jika Revisited*, first edition of *The Doing Time Magazine*, Prison Reform Group, Melbourne, 1988. See also, Courtesy PROV, Unpublished transcript of proceedings at Coroner's investigation into the death of Sean Fitzgerald Downie, VPRS 24/P7, Units 64-67; and Unpublished transcript of proceedings at Coroner's investigation into the deaths of James Loughnan, David McGauley, Arthur Gallagher, Robert Wright and Richard Morris, 5 December 1988-1989, VPRS 24/P7, Units 68-79.

total number of deaths in the Victorian prison system for that year.⁹ This is an excessive figure for a division that on average represented 1.4% of the entire Victorian prison population.¹⁰ If the Jika Jika High-Security Unit achieved one thing it served as testimony to the fact that regimes of confinement wholly preoccupied with security are not only ineffective, they are lethal. However, despite this fact, the electronic and staffing modalities that went so very wrong there, and in other places like Katingal, are now being imported to the mainstream maximum-security prison system as a whole – *it's the 'Marionization' of the entire system.*

In the headlong rush towards increasing security and control the important element of *justice* has been lost. This trend has been reflected internationally. In the UK, Lord Justice Woolf who inquired into a series of prison riots in 1990 made the point that the prison service had lost its way in relation to maintaining a healthy balance between security, control and justice, stating:

Security' refers to the obligation of the Prison Service to prevent escaping. 'Control' deals with the obligation of the Prison Service to prevent prisoners being disruptive. 'Justice' refers to the obligation of the Prison Service to treat prisoners with humanity and fairness and to prepare them for their return to the community in a way, which makes it less likely they will re-offend.¹¹

Of course, treating prisoners with humanity and fairness would probably lead to a reduction in the need for hi-tech dehumanising security and control gadgets costing millions of dollars.

In early 2005 the Government of Victoria announced an extra 11 million dollars for a hi-tech 'security upgrade' in Barwon Prison, allegedly in response to the new threat posed by men on remand in relation to a series of underworld murders in Melbourne.

⁹ From 1987 to 1988 there was a total of 18 deaths in custody occurring within the Victorian prison system as a whole. VDJRC, Office of Corrections, *Annual Report, 1987-1988.*

¹⁰ The total daily average prison population in Victoria from 1987 to 1988 was 2017. The daily average for Jika Jika during this time was 28. It should be noted that from July to October in 1987, Jika averages fluctuated between 39 and 42 total prisoners. Courtesy VDJRC, Office of Corrections, *Annual Report, 1987-1988.*

¹¹ Lord Justice Woolf, *Prison Disturbances, April 1990*, (The Woolf Report), HMSO London, 1990, para 9:20.

Later in the year, the 11 million dollar security upgrade was repackaged in relation to the custody of men on remand for terrorist offences.

Barwon Prison is Victoria's main maximum-security prison. It has a supermax unit Acacia, a management unit Banksia, protection units Grevillea and Hoya and 240 mainstream cells. The men on remand for terrorist offences are held in the supermax unit Acacia.

The 11 million dollars is being spent at Barwon on range of security technologies, surveillance cameras, remotely controlled doors and gates, and glass boxes for staff to be stationed in with consoles of buttons to push. Sound familiar? It should, because Corrections in Victoria, like many parts of the carceral world, are making the same mistakes all over again.

A slow creep back to the 'electronic zoos' of Jika and Katingal is well underway, but they have been repackaged, made more sophisticated and couched in the absolutist 'security/terrorism' language of the times that is used to disguise state crime, and to stifle any critical scrutiny or debate, while promoting a '*you are either with us or against us*' mentality.

What happened in Jika is relevant today because of what is happening at Barwon prison. It is back to the future. It is not only the hi-tech approach that is being repeated, the reduction of staff is also underway. It turns out that the 11 million dollars is not an 'extra'. Rather it has been taken from the operating budget of the prison and as a result there have to be cutbacks:

- First, the number of hours prisoners are let out of the cells have been reduced from twelve hours to less than eight, just like it was two decades ago.
- Second, psychological and clinical services such as counselling have been cut to a shoestring leaving the reactive crisis service only. Yes, just like it was two decades ago.

- Third, all the substance abuse programs are *gone*; anger *fucking* management is *gone*; lives in transition *gone*; alternatives to violence *gone*; cognitive skills *gone*; Koori programs (what very little there is except what you can do locked in the cell) *gone*; and on and on it goes.
- Fourth, the number of staff is being reduced by a third, one whole shift has been abolished because the prisoners are going to be locked up longer with fewer services, and the hi-tech equipment is replacing many of them.
- Fifth, a reactive goon squad, The Security and Emergency Management Group (SESG), has been expanded so they can patrol the prison in numbers with attack dogs, and be ready to race in when violence is detected on the surveillance system.¹² The goon squad is maintained out of a different budget than the one that ‘provides services’ to prisoners, so it’s politically palatable to spend the money there. The goons are funded by special arrangements for controlling the prisoners because they are acting up in response to inadequate support services. Yes, it is the mistakes of Jika Jika all over again.

Perhaps if the 11 million being spent at Barwon was spent on providing adequate resources for desperately needed psychiatric and psychological services and drug treatment programs there would not be the need for so much ‘security’ to keep the lid on and react to outbreaks of frustration and violence.

The management of Corrections Victoria, is looking to Pentridge as the model for how Barwon should be run as the State’s main maximum-security prison. Pentridge was built in the 1850s and operated on mid-to-late nineteenth century penal policy until it was closed in the mid 1990s. Since Pentridge closed, the recidivism rate in

¹² The goons or the Security and Emergency Management Group (SESG), are trained by the Special Operations (SWAT) Police who are in turn trained by the military. The SESG contract out their services to prison systems in other Australian states and carry on other commercial arrangements. They refer to this as the ‘outsourcing of their security expertise’. The nexus between prison modalities of control and the application of military force are exemplified through the abuses taking place in occupied Iraq’s Abu Grhaib Prison. See C. W.J. Minogue, ‘The use of a military level of force on civilian prisoners: strip searching, urine testing, cell extractions and DNA sampling in Victoria’, *Alternative Law Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 4, August 2005, pp. 170-173.

Victoria has fallen to 30%, the lowest level in the history of the State.¹³ However, with the current ‘security upgrade’, and the back to the future policy direction to the proven mistakes of the past, that trend will most certainly be reversed.

Prisoners at Barwon now receive their three meals every 120 minutes and then they are locked in the cell. To fill the void, the ‘recreation’ staff have ordered more mindless Hollywood videos to be played on the in-house system. These are mainly cop, crime or vigilante movies. The staff like to watch these on night shift.

Of course, all this will prepare people for release into the community. As stated above, it’s Jika Jika and back to the future with the same mistakes being made all over again, mistakes that are harming and killing individual prisoners as well as endangering the community by making the situation worse, not better.

¹³ Corrective Services Commissioner, 2002.