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Book Review

Bjørn Hamre & Lisa Villadsen (eds)
Islands of Extreme Exclusion
Leiden: Brill
2023, 295 pp.

In H.C. Andersen's 1835 fairy tale "Thumbelina," the toad mother reflects on ensuring Thumbelina's captivity after abducting her to marry her to the toad son. She states, "We [the toad mother and the toad son] must put her on one of the broad water lily leaves out in the stream. She [Thumbelina] is so small and light that it will be just like an island to her, and she can't run away..." The fairy tale goes on: "The poor little thing [Thumbelina] woke up early the next morning, and when she saw where she was, she began to cry bitterly. There was water all around the big green leaf, and there was no way at all for her to reach the shore."

This passage illustrates not only the toad mother's strategy to confine Thumbelina but also highlights the inherent characteristics of islands and the extreme isolation they can impose. These characteristics include the denial of freedom, the element of control, subjugation, and the profound exclusion experienced when one is surrounded by an expanse and isolated from the rest of the world except for one's captors.

In this twelve-chapter edited collection, a distinguished array of junior and senior researchers delves into the phenomenon of social exclusion through various insightful theoretical lenses. The book posits that the concept of the island is strongly linked to practices of extreme exclusion. Thus, the island becomes a powerful symbol, explored both in its physical seclusion and more symbolic representations, such as the camp as a fundamental structure. The book argues that both forms of exclusion require external societal contexts to explain their existence.

Historically, numerous examples of these exclusionary practices exist. For instance, Ellis Island in New York Harbor processed millions of immigrants between 1892 and 1954, many of whom were detained (Lange, 2015). Another example is the Gulag work camps in the Soviet Union, vividly described by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in "The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956."

The editors of this book, Hamre and Villadsen, make it clear that "exclusionary processes will always be features of institutions and societies" (p. 2). They argue that islands—whether physical or symbolic—operate under the institutional logic of disciplining and monitoring, which subscribes to a spatial logic of seclusion and exclusion. This logic targets individuals perceived as dangerous, in need of improvement, or as threats to the existing social order. Consequently, the book suggests a common rationale behind states' justifications for isolating certain groups as a means of protection.

In this context, the discussions on extreme exclusions echo sociologist Loic Wacquant's concept of advanced marginalization, which highlights the state's renewed—or perhaps continuous—role as an agent of coercion and social control (Squires and Lea, 2012). Wacquant introduces the notion of the 'penal state,' which seeks to manage the

precariat through a combination of workfare and prisonfare, effectively warehousing the unwanted, often poorer, segments of society. This approach is described as "liberal at the top and paternalistic at the bottom" (Wacquant, 2010, p. 217). Borrowing from Foucault, the literature on securitization outlines this process as "a combination of warehousing and habituation or 'rehabilitation' to precarious low-wage labor, along with a general extension of surveillance justified in the name of security" (Lea and Hallsworth, 2012, p. 27). Thus, the penal state aims to incarcerate individuals perceived as threats to the prosperity and welfare of the middle and upper classes.

However, this book transcends sociological discussions about the shift from welfare state to neoliberalism, debating the nature of neoliberalism and its implications. It shares the nation-state perspective, focusing on creating categories of people and mechanisms of differentiation (Tröhler and Winkler, 2024). This introduces a biopolitical dimension dedicated to optimizing bodies and life processes.

Drawing on the works of Goffman and Foucault, editors Hamre and Villadsen distinguish between the internal logics and practices of extreme exclusion and their external justifications in relation to the state and society (p. 7). Incorporating Achille Mbembe's concepts, they effectively add the dimensions of postcolonialism, necropolitics, and deathworlds to their exploration of extreme exclusion (p. 13). A key takeaway is that contemporary governance of populations involves "the management of death and who is othered and ostracized and 'live dead lives'" (p. 14). This suggests that extreme exclusion encompasses "colonial aspects of oppression found across the oppression of slaves, aboriginal people, and refugees" (p. 15). While camps are often seen as the primary signifiers of extreme exclusion, Hamre and Villadsen argue that islands have unique characteristics due to their geography, which reinforce the dynamics of exclusion (p. 15).

This lens offers powerful and intriguing analytical potential for exploring the dimensions of extreme exclusion. However, as is often the case in edited volumes, the chapters—despite being unique, nuanced, and multi-perspectival—do not fully connect and utilize the analytical framework consistently. This unevenness leaves much of the interpretive work to the reader, requiring them to connect the dots across the book. A comprehensive index could have mitigated this issue by better integrating the diverse contributions and enhancing the book's overall coherence.

Nevertheless, the book is well-structured into three parts, providing some guidance to the reader. Part one, consisting of four chapters, examines extreme exclusion used for disciplinary and punitive purposes related to contagious diseases, political and racial violence, and the placement of refugees. The five chapters in Part part two focus on Scandinavia, exploring the role of isolation practices in the development of the Nordic welfare state model. Part three comprises three chapters, each offering intriguing insights into contemporary responses to exclusionary practices and situations. The book concludes with remarks by Hamre and Villadsen, an essay by Glen Stasiuk, and an afterword by Michael Apple.

Chapter 1, written by Fred Jenga, critically examines the long history of social

exclusion in Uganda, focusing on the island of witches and leprosy camps, with a particular in-depth study of the latter. Drawing on primary sources and the theoretical concept of the "state of exception," the chapter explores the treatment of leprosy patients in colonial Uganda. It highlights how the historical segregation of Ugandan leprosy patients on the island of Bwama in Lake Bunyonyi in Kigezi connects with broader discourses about the exclusion of individuals deemed a danger to society. While the chapter operates on a strictly social constructivist level, it does not address the medical justifiability of the exclusion, an aspect that would have enriched and strengthened the analysis and contributed significantly to the history of medicine.

In Chapter 2, Anders Høg Hansen explores the analytical power of a 'histories of the moment' approach as constructed in letters and diaries by political prisoners Ahmed Kathrada and Fatima Meer, both Indian South African anti-apartheid activists who wrote extensively during their captivity in South Africa. The letters are seen as symbols of resilience and resistance to exclusion through their ability to connect people. The chapter concludes with the intriguing observation that Robben Island today serves as an icon for human rights and hope, illustrating the transforming potential of islands as symbols.

Chapter 3 examines the practices of rejected asylum seekers (sans-papier) challenging isolation on the French island of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean. Drawing on her ethnographic fieldwork, Elena Iwanski (2023) sheds light on the exclusionary practices associated with 'administrative battles for regularization, the constant risk of police arrests and detention, the inaccessibility to formal employment or public services, etc.' (p. 66). Iwanski convincingly demonstrates how exclusion operates based on distinct notions of the 'true' deserving asylum seeker versus the 'false' undeserving ones, leaving the 'non-deportable' to live within the island's restricted boundaries as outcasts and socially excluded individuals.

In the final chapter of Part one, Dimitris Serafis and Stavros Assimakopoulos employ critical discourse analysis and argumentation theory to examine right-wing populist rhetoric and hatred against migrants in Greece. They draw on Greek political history to interpret how right-wing politicians use the imagery of desert islands as symbols of exclusion against political adversaries. This rhetoric invokes an 'us-identity,' strengthened by constructions of national, regional, religious, and ethnic belonging. The analysis convincingly elucidates the mechanisms through which discriminatory hatred is produced.

Part two begins with a chapter by Thomas Barow (2023), which examines the planning and eventual abandonment of island institutions for "degenerate feeble-minded (asocial imbeciles)" in 1920s Sweden, inspired by Danish practices. Drawing on primary source material, Barow unpacks the various facets of social exclusion in the nascent Swedish welfare state, exploring the categorization and taxonomy of terms such as educable, ineducable, degeneration, feeble-minded, moral imbeciles, idiots, and the influence of heredity and eugenics prevalent in interwar Sweden. He also highlights the critical reflections and reservations of psychiatrists, particularly concerning the categoriza-

tion of children. Ultimately, the planned island institutions were abandoned due to economic considerations and the lack of a suitable island.

In Chapter 6, Bjørn Hamre and Jesper Vaczy Kragh investigate the historical internment of female patients with intellectual disabilities in Denmark between 1923 and 1961. Drawing on oral interviews and patient records, Hamre and Kragh significantly and with great nuance contribute to the historiography of Denmark's infamous gender-segregated island institutions. These institutions, where exclusion and isolation were seen by leading scientists and decision-makers as solutions to problems associated with so-called degenerate types, represented both extreme exclusion and, paradoxically, care and potential reintegration for different inmates.

The following chapter, written by Inger Marie Lid (2023), significantly enhances our understanding of a work farm for deaf men in southern Norway, operational from 1898 to the late 1980s. The chapter elucidates how extreme exclusion was perpetuated through a combination of disability categories, gender, and Christian theology, supported by religious, medical, and government authorities. This exclusion occurred in a camp described as a "total institution" in Goffman's terms, where "the inhabitants slept, worked, and conducted cultural activities in the same place following a daily schedule and being treated as a group rather than as individuals" (p. 139). The case is treated as part of a welfare-state ideology, epitomizing negative eugenics, which viewed people with disabilities as a societal burden and as the "embodied inferior" (p. 142). Another significant finding of the chapter is that language, specifically sign language, becomes a justification for exclusion, perpetuated by neighboring citizens of the camp. However, overcoming the linguistic divide can also pave the way for improved social inclusion.

In Chapter 8, Turid Nolsøe provides an innovative and refreshing analysis of the intersection of disability and colonialism as depicted in the Faroese play 'Lykkenborg' from 2022. This chapter takes an inverted approach to island exclusions compared to the rest of the book, as exclusion here entails expulsion from one's home island. The play offers "a decolonial critique of Danish institutional policies through the export of Faroese people with disabilities (…)" (p. 157). In this case, exclusion is driven by mainland norms.

Chapter 9, by Karen E. Andreasen (2023), delves into the dynamics of education and information activities within post-World War II Danish refugee camps, treated as total institutions. This chapter specifically investigates the soft governance strategies employed by Danish authorities towards German residents, aiming to promote democratic ideas. It sheds light on the key actors involved in this strategy and the emergence of various ideas and agendas within the educational and informational activities in the camps. Thus, the chapter exemplifies resocialization efforts as part of the denazification process following World War II.

In the first chapter of Part three, Julie Allen and Francesca Peruzzo explore extreme exclusion in England during the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilizing a biopower lens, the authors examine the UK government's decision-making and advice to schools, parents, and students,

reflecting on "the extreme nature of the educational exclusion generated by the pandemic within the island of England and its consequences for young people, parents, and teachers (…)" (p. 204). The chapter resonates with what Gomez-Caride (2023) describes as 'the disconnected student' and focuses on the grammar of schooling and the emphasis on 'missing learning' as students returned to school, key sites where exclusionary practices originated. The chapter provides well-documented and theoretically grounded insights into why inclusion is so challenging to achieve when it is framed in terms of the ability of children and their families to cope, adapt, and be resilient.

Chapter 11, authored by Lisa Villadsen (2023), explores the aftermath of exclusion and delves into official apologies as a means of re-inclusion and breaking with past injustices. Specifically, the chapter analyzes the official apology of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal Australians and the apology of Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen for the mistreatment of Greenlanders by Danish authorities in the 1950s. This well-theorized chapter offers a glimmer of optimism, suggesting that official apologies have the potential to initiate change if they successfully engage the wider civic audience.

The final chapter by Linda Steele analyzes reparations for past injustices involving the segregation of disabled people through a case study of former disability institutions in Australia. One key finding is how these secluded institutions have been transformed into desirable, exclusive destinations repurposed for residential, recreational, and tourist uses, erasing the histories of exclusion and violence against disabled individuals. This chapter is a significant contribution to the literature on deinstitutionalization, echoing themes from Chapter 7. Steele emphasizes the importance of disability institutions as metaphorical and geographical islands of exclusion, highlighting the role of geographies, materialities, histories, and memories in reckoning with and repairing the historical and contemporary extreme exclusion of disabled people.

In their two-and-a-half-page conclusion, Hamre and Villadsen argue that exclusion is an essential feature of modernity and that societal crises and state emergencies often promote exclusionary practices. The key takeaway is that modernity relies on the construction of normality and deviance, as well as the dichotomy between colonizer and colonized. This conclusion resonates with Bauman's writings on the "modern gardening state," which views society as an object to be designed, cultivated, and weeded out (Bauman 2008, p. 13).

The highly thought-provoking essay by Glen Stasiuk elegantly discusses the dual nature of Wadjemup/Rottnest Island in Australia, highlighting the denial of the island's past as a prison for over 3,600 Aboriginal men and boys. Today, the island is an attractive holiday resort, seemingly oblivious to the atrocities that occurred there, remembered in Aboriginal history as Wadjemup. Through key quotes and insights from literature on the island's history and its role in Australian nation-building, Stasiuk convincingly navigates the role of history and its implications for competing narratives.

In the afterword, Michael Apple connects some of the main themes of

the book's contributions and offers additional reflections. He identifies 'separate from' and 'absent presences' as the uniting elements of the book's diverse contributions and highlights the book's powerful role in addressing historical amnesia. A key takeaway is that ostensibly progressive initiatives aimed at alleviating societal problems may sometimes have contradictory results. In other words, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Apple calls for the creation of a more responsive "we," urging critical reflection on the minoritizing implications of even constructing a "we" in the first place.

The book, as an edited volume containing an impressive compilation of well-researched yet diverse contributions, offers the reader substantial food for critical thought. It particularly hones in on the securitization dimension of extreme exclusion, highlighting how the safety of the privileged is often cloaked in narratives of serving the public good. This process constructs a 'we' versus 'them' dichotomy, which can have hideous consequences for those excluded. Hamre and Villadsen identify three purposes or forms of exclusion: pure exclusion, disciplinary civilization of the other, and the other as an object of humanitarian efforts (p. 266).

Additionally, the book elegantly unpacks the Janus-faced nature of 'the island' or 'the camp,' revealing how they can be sites of both potential inclusion and extreme exclusion. The exclusionary nature of islands and camps is well documented. However, islands can also have inclusionary roles, as seen with quarantines during medieval plague epidemics. In Venice, plague-stricken individuals spent 40 days in isolation on the island now known as Lazzaretto Nuovo, re-entering society once they were deemed healthy. Similarly, islands like Lampedusa and Lesbos are viewed by contemporary immigrants as gateways to a potentially better life or safe haven, despite the grave risks involved in reaching them, such as the aggressive patrols by Italian and Greek border authorities.

Given its interdisciplinary content, the book makes significant contributions to multiple scholarly fields, including postcolonial studies, history of education, political history, political science, and the history of ideas. One particularly impactful aspect is how many chapters explore the role of eugenics in establishing practices of extreme exclusion. This exploration inevitably prompts reflections on the impending neuro-affective turn in education, which is poised to become the dominant paradigm for addressing social issues (Yliniva, Bryan, and Brunila, 2024). This resurgence of biological explanations—akin to historical precedents—naturalizes differences between groups, constructs a specific "we," and absolves capitalist-induced social inequalities as the explanatory model. In this sense, the book serves as a rich reservoir of historical developments and trajectories, allowing readers to gain perspective and reflect on contemporary developments in society in general and in education in particular.

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