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Sarah Pickard (ed.) Anti-Social Behaviour in Britain: Victorian and Contemporary Perspectives, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 375 pp. £64.00 (hbk). ISBN 9781137399304

Reviewed by: **Niamh M. Hourigan**

Sarah Pickard's wide-ranging edited collection on anti-social behaviour in Britain analyses Victorian and contemporary perspectives on this theme. The first section of the book explores the role of anti-social behaviour in shaping policy related to the urban environment and public space. Short chapters that examine ruffianism and rowdyism in Victorian England are followed by Pickard's own research on contemporary student protests and Christian Morgner's analysis of the London riots. The second and largest section of the book explores how government policy on anti-social behaviour has impacted on the vulnerable and the marginalised. Again, historical chapters on reformatory schools and truancy are followed by analyses of contemporary policy relating to 'troubled families', Travellers and the homeless. The final section of the book explores the link between anti-social behaviour and recreational activities. The centrality of alcohol-related problems to anti-social behaviour is highlighted, though drugs and football hooliganism are also considered as key themes.

Given the importance of the theme of anti-social behaviour to the criminal justice and social policies of the New Labour governments (1997–2010) and the more recent Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition, a collection of this depth is long overdue. Pickard certainly succeeds in bringing a wide range of expertise together, drawing on the work of scholars predominantly from criminology, sociology and legal studies backgrounds. However, there are some gaps. A number of contributors highlight the tendency of successive UK governments to create vague and general definitions of anti-social behaviour which then

provide a catch-all umbrella to stigmatise the behaviour of the young and vulnerable. Given this tendency, it is strange that more attention was not devoted to developing a more fine-grained definition of anti-social behaviour and a detailed categorisation of different types of anti-social behaviours. The problems created by the absence of this categorisation become particularly visible in the chapter by Stuart Waiton for instance. He criticises the increasing portrayal of the British public as sensitive and vulnerable and complains that within antisocial behaviour policy

> previously defined 'nuisance' behaviour that was seen as relatively trivial and not serious enough to be dealt with by the law or conduct that it is believed can create any level of insecurity, is transformed into a profoundly significant thing, something that undermines both individuals and communities. (p. 205)

Such a position is completely justified if one is discussing random stigmatisation of those who wear hoodies, daub graffiti or use bad language. However, in his chapter, Craig Johnstone highlights it is not just these random nuisance behaviours that come under the remit of anti-social behaviour policy. He mentions the case of Fiona Pilkington who in 2007 killed herself and her severely disabled daughter

> following a long period where they had been the targets of constant verbal harassment and abuse and had objects thrown at their home by local youth. Despite 30 reports about their victimization to the authorities over a 10-year period, including 13 in the year prior to their deaths, no significant steps were taken to deal with the situation. (p. 41)

As well as the perspectives of victims, the insights of psychologists on the sensory impact of being involved in anti-social behaviours from the perpetrators' perspective would also have added an important additional dimension to the project. Jamie Harding and Adele Irving's chapter on 'Anti-Social Behaviour among Homeless People' marks a particularly strong contribution to the collection precisely because it includes the voices of the homeless who reflect on their own experience.

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The jump in each section between the Victorian chapters and the contemporary material can be disconcerting and begs the question whether Pickard might have done better to develop this project as a book series rather than a single volume. A number of the historical chapters for instance highlight the role of the churches in responding to anti-social behaviour during the 19th century. Yet, in the contemporary chapters, the churches have disappeared from this role without any discussion of the intervening process of secularisation.

Overall, this is a very valuable text which marks a big step forward in scholarly analysis of anti-social behaviour. However, the very breadth highlights the need to move away from anti-social behaviour as a catch-all term which seems to serve increasingly as a stick to beat the vulnerable and move towards a more nuanced form of categorisation which can inform contemporary social policy.