

Dear Mad Reading Folk,

I hope those of you in Melbourne are bearing up in the wake of today's announcements about restrictions. In Flick's words, "more than ever, as "mental health" plummets, we need Mad ideas and Mad community." In that spirit, I hope we see you at September's RMIT Mad Studies Network Reading Group. We have a mix of articles and blog posts for you to sink your teeth into – details below!

**Date and time:** Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September, 6-7.30pm AEST

**Zoom link:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88927716316?pwd=aDR1TFRiYUhUTzdBTGtLb3lRQ1JFdz09>

Meeting ID: 889 2771 6316

Passcode: 908154

**Facilitator:** Pan

**Topic:** Madness and prisons: are prisons the 'new asylums'?

**Readings:**

[\*Disablement, prison and historical segregation\*](#) by Jean Stewart and Marta Russell in 'Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine' (2001)

*Why prisons are not "The New Asylums"* by Liat Ben-Moshe in 'Punishment and Society, Vol. 19(3)' (2017) (pdf attached)

[\*Abolition must include psychiatry\*](#) by Stella Akua Mensah and Stefanie Lyn Kaufman-Mthimkhulu for 'Disability Visibility Project' (2020)

**Further info:**

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and its offshoots in Australia, has highlighted and raised to the fore the racist violence inherent in policing and prisons. In reaction to the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the spotlight in Australia has been on our large Black Lives Matter rallies, hosted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activists and on behalf of families and loved ones of those who have died at the hands of police and in prisons. All across the world there have been increasing calls for radical changes such as the defunding (or abolishing) of police and prisons. Anti-prison activists and prison abolitionists argue that prisons (and police) are a violent response to what are deeply social and systemic problems, such as poverty, homelessness and violence.

What relationship does Mad Studies have to this movement, this current political moment and set of demands? We know that on the inside of Australia's prisons, many experience distress (or have a diagnosis of a 'mental illness'). Many also have disabilities such as cognitive disabilities and health conditions. Many are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, an issue highlighted by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Prisons are also maddening places. Some people say prisons are like the "new asylums". This idea says that in many societies today, prisons act as a new system for managing those constructed as the "dangerously mentally ill", a system which has replaced the asylum. It is a timely moment to explore these ideas and contemplate the relationship between Mad Studies and anti-incarceration philosophy, politics, and ideas.

**Possible discussion questions:**

- Is the number of people in Australia's prisons with mental illness labels an issue for Mad Studies?
- How does (or should) Mad Studies approach and understand this problem?
- How did it become this way?

- Have you come across the idea that prisons act as 'the new asylums'? What do you think of it?

Hope to see you there!

Antonia