

The Future of Criminology: An Introduction

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In these days of deconstructionist sensibilities, to what extent can one speak of 'criminology' and its 'future', both in the singular? There are, indeed, many criminologies with likely as many different futures in store. To speak of the 'future of criminology',¹ then, carries with it a danger of totalising a number of different theoretical and practical enterprises which are at best loosely affiliated and at worst working at cross purposes. There is also the risk that any 'futuristic' rumination of this sort ends up being a blatant exercise for hegemonic voices to indulge in self-congratulations and pontifications.

The short answer to the question I pose is, of course, that there does not exist a single criminology with a single future, but perhaps I need to disclose my hidden agenda in organising this conference and putting together this collection of papers: I am hopeful that by opening up a space for reflexivity that those of us who have some interest in the study of crime, order and justice (whether or not we call ourselves 'criminologists') will eventually find sufficient common ground in our projects to fashion a vision for a future with some common purposes.

The papers in this volume should therefore not be read as defining the scope of our concerns nor limiting the domain of our future. Rather, this collection is meant to stimulate further reflection and dialogue about the criminological enterprise, where we came from, what we have been doing and where we are going. In other words, this is a small step towards a more 'reflexive' criminology which tries 'to understand the constraints and consequences of its own constructions of crime' (Nelken 1994:9).

One way of approaching this project is to investigate three types of predispositions² which underpin the way criminologists see the world: the 'social origins and coordinates (class, gender, ethnicity and so on) of the individual researcher', the position occupied by the researcher in the 'field' of criminology, and the 'habitus' of criminology — those taken-for-granted aspects of research practice which 'delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought'³ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:39–40). Such an exercise is reflexive in the sense that it explores and renders visible the historical, institutional and cognitive structures embedded

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1 The title of the conference (and the special issue) was, of course, borrowed from David Nelken's excellent volume *The Futures of Criminology*, in which criminological scholars from several countries 'reflect on the relationship between theoretical developments in other fields and their own thinking about crime and crime control' (1994:1). The aim of the Sydney conference was to provide an opportunity for academics and practitioners to reflect on the theoretical, political and practical directions of criminological research.

2 Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) used the word 'bias' instead of 'predispositions'; I prefer not to use 'bias' since it implies the existence or possibility of an 'unbiased' view.

3 For more details and critiques of Bourdieu's notions of 'field' and 'habitus' see Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), Jenkins (1992), Calhoun (1995) and Alexander (1995).

in our concepts, our theorising, our choice of problematics, our instruments and techniques of analysis, and our scholarly standards (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:40).

Individual biographies

Whilst none of the invited contributors to this volume have commented on their own social origins and 'coordinates' in the social world (see, for example, the explicit inclusion of authors' 'voices' in Daly and Stephens 1995), it is obvious that apart from the editor,⁴ all contributors to the special issue are male — a result of the unfortunate necessity to postpone the publication of two contributions by women on feminist criminology because of unforeseen circumstances. The extent to which the 'maleness' of our contributors has distorted their portrayal of the past and future of criminology is a matter for further reflection. Certainly the presence of feminist criminology is less than overwhelming in these articles, in spite of the critical contributions of feminism to criminology both in Australia (Alder 1995) and internationally (Rafter and Heidensohn 1995). It is of course possible to go on to speculate on the degree to which this collection is influenced by the ethnicity, age, and other characteristics of the contributors, but such speculation by the editor would not amount to an exercise in self-reflection by the authors themselves.

Location in the field of criminology

The disposition of a criminologist is linked to his or her position in the disciplinary field. However, the field of criminology is not one that is easily defined. The 'looseness of disciplinary attachment' among criminologists and the lack of clarity regarding the boundaries of criminology are features of the discipline often remarked upon (Pavarini 1994:51; see also Ericson, Hogg, O'Malley and Pratt⁵ in this volume). The multidisciplinary nature of criminology is fairly evident even among the contributors to this volume: only three have current affiliation with institutions which carry the title 'criminology' or 'criminal justice'; the rest are variously located in faculties of law, humanities and social sciences in universities.

Richard Ericson's paper provides a comprehensive survey of the rugged terrains of the criminological field: its locations within the academy and without, its interactions with institutions of crime control, legal regulation, health management, welfare provision, commercial risk assessment/loss prevention, and mass mediated communication, and its place in the 'division of expert knowledge'.

The diversity of construction and production sites of criminological knowledge, however, does not imply that criminology is a 'pluralistic and level playing field' (Ericson). Far from it. The criminological field is a 'space of conflict and competition' (Bourdieu and

4 My personal biography (being Chinese and female, brought up in a post-War working-class single-parent family in the Third World, a product of colonial education, a deserter of Catholicism and Maoism, a citizen of two countries and a native of neither) and my professional history (from being an applied statistician doing research among criminologists, to being a criminologist teaching among non-criminologists, and more recently being a non-lawyer academic working among academic lawyers) obviously have an impact on the way I see the world and conduct my work. In very brief terms, this background may have accounted for some (often contradictory) tendencies in my thinking and writing: an unshakeable faith in the liberating potential of intellectual pursuits, a deep distrust of dogmatism in any form, a reckless eclecticism in theoretical orientation and a bias in favour of creativity and elegance in theoretical practice.

5 Articles in this volume are referred to by the author's name with no dates.

Wacquant 1992:17) over power and resources; winners of 'criminological jurisdiction' owe much of their success to the strength of their location in academic institutions, the dominance of their theoretical or political paradigms, the access they have to research funding, the prestige of their publishers and the power of their professional associations (Ericson). As Russell Hogg points out, Australian criminology has 'self-consciously emulated the "pragmatic" approach of British criminology, with its close ties to the legal profession and legal education, and its alignment with the correctionalist outlook and research and training needs of the criminal justice system' (Hogg; also Carson and O'Malley 1989).

Conflict and competition over resources are nothing new. However, in the present climate of public 'fiscal restraint' and an increasingly market-driven higher-education industry, the competition for research funding and student numbers has become fierce among Australian universities (see O'Malley). The growing trend by government departments to hire external consultants and to 'contract out' research is setting up a similar rivalry between university academics and private sector consultants. A 'division of expert knowledge and labour' (Ericson) is already happening, with the more established universities taking the lion's share of basic research funding and the more powerful and prestigious faculties routinely taking the cream of the crop of students produced by the secondary school system. In criminology, newer universities and less powerful faculties are busily carving out specialty niches, competing for applied research contracts, and capitalising on the current growth area of higher education, the 'policing studies' market.

Among academic scholars, conflict and competition over scientific and political paradigms have traditionally been intense. Ericson mentions the contest for dominance between interpretive and positivist theorists among scholars in law and society in the United States. In Australia, ideological and political contests were particularly vociferous in law, economics, philosophy and other disciplines during the late 1970s and early 1980s, leading to open schisms in some academic departments. However, similar conflicts in Australian criminology have been relatively civil and non-combative.

Both John Pratt and David Dixon challenge the way in which mainstream criminology has continued to marginalise one of its most outstanding areas of achievement — historical scholarship. As a result, criminological researchers who specialise in history often 'find themselves living in a curious academic hinterland, somewhere between criminology and history, but dealt with at arm's length by both: unwanted history as far as criminology is concerned; not proper history as far as history is concerned' (Pratt). However, it could be argued that the profound influence of Foucault and other social historians on criminological thinking in recent years is more than indicative of the likely importance of historical scholarship in the future of criminology.⁶

Not emphasised in the present collection, however, are the feminist challenges to traditional criminology. These challenges are simultaneously political, epistemological and theoretical (see, for example, Smart 1995). The marginalisation of feminist criminology is evidenced by its tokenistic presence in criminology textbooks and histories (Scraton 1990). Criminology's marginalisation of 'Woman' is seen as both repressive and productive of contests:

Criminology's secretion of Woman locates her in a closet. Thus, Woman can be found in criminology's ghettos, its textbook chapters on 'gender' or 'women', its acknowledgment

6 Readers may note that there was in fact a preponderance of historians among the contributors to the conference: Mark Finnane, David Dixon, Peter Grabosky, Russell Hogg, Kathy Laster and John Pratt have all engaged in historical studies in criminology.

of feminist theory as an approach (rather than a comment on its foundational authority, system of organization and structures of knowledge). The closet in which Woman has been secreted allows criminology to control any impact that feminism might have upon the self-authorization of the discipline ... The paradox of the closet is that whatever has been secreted within it will manifest itself beyond the closet's boundaries. Criminology exists in a constant state of struggle with Woman, continually returning her to the closet from where traces of her repression trickle out, demanding attention (Young 1996:47).

Ironically, the contest of feminist criminology against its marginalisation is in part being won by market forces in terms of its popularity among students. As Carol Smart suggests, those traditional criminologists who find her claim that 'criminology needs feminism more than the converse' preposterous had better 'look to who their students are, and who their students are reading' (Smart 1995:47). However, it is too early to speculate on the security of the gains made by feminist criminology and subsequent postmodern critiques which opened up the possibilities of a more 'multicultural' criminology. In Australia at least, with the end of thirteen years of federal Labor rule (which had facilitated the growth of research on gender, Aboriginal and multicultural issues), funding for such research may well be seen as catering to 'interest groups' by the new conservative government which claims to govern 'for all of Australia'.

The logic of criminological practice

The practice of criminology can be analysed by uncovering taken-for-granted, institutionalised ways of seeing, thinking, and reasoning generated by the habitus of criminology.⁷ This is not to deny the importance of conscious, calculated strategies of individual criminologists in shaping its practice.⁸ However, as Brubaker (1993) observes, workers skilled in a particular craft rarely carry out their activities in a series of calculated or deliberate moves; more likely, they develop certain dispositions (a 'feel' for the game). For example, the practice of sociology may be structured by:

the disposition to uncover the mechanisms that are responsible for producing an observed order, to treat as problematic what others would take for granted, to attend to clues that others would miss, to think relationally and comparatively, to perceive structured patterns amidst apparently disorderly variation, and so on (Brubaker 1993:215).

It is doubtful, however, that there exists a single homogeneous habitus in criminology. The practices of criminologists working from different disciplinary bases or institutions ('fields') are likely to be structured by different sets of dispositions.⁹ If we can treat 'theoretical traditions' as habituses (cf Brubaker 1993), then it is arguable that criminologists working under a predominantly positivist tradition make different assumptions, employ different methods of data collection and analysis, and abide by different criteria of validity from those working under a social constructionist or feminist tradition. Such variations may also be found among different disciplines: for example, historians, psychologists, economists and lawyers are likely to develop research practices that overlap only minimally.

7 The validity of this exercise is not dependent on the existence of a homogeneous criminology; see later arguments.

8 Mouzelis (1995) suggests that Bourdieu's theory is incomplete unless it takes into account conscious strategies and rational decision making by agents.

9 Brubaker (1993) suggests that we in fact need a stratified account of the sociological (or criminological in our case) habitus, which takes into account the 'overlying' of professional habitus on earlier ('familial' and 'scholastic') habituses.

Similarly, the habituses of university academics are not likely to share many common features with those of policy analysts in government agencies.

The heterogeneity of habitus in criminology is not regarded as a cause for concern (Ericson and Carriere 1994). However, without some sort of shared dispositions, 'science as a social institution would be unthinkable' (Brubaker 1993:224). There are three elements of the habitus of criminology which can be seen as shared by its practitioners: a tendency to draw on contemporary mainstream social theories, a bias towards the generation of policy-relevant knowledge, and a proclivity towards reflections on its own failure. This list is of course not exhaustive and, like this introduction, is meant to be no more than a first step towards reflecting on these issues.

Tendency to draw on mainstream social theories

Criminology has had a tendency to draw on developments in mainstream social theories rather than pursue its own theoretical project. The adaptations of structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, Marxism, feminism, and post-structuralism in theories of deviance have followed an almost predictable path (Downes and Rock 1988). Similar adaptations of mainstream theories can be found in theories of punishment (Garland 1990) and feminist criminology¹⁰ (Smart 1995). The influence of Foucault, for example, is conspicuous among this collection, as is the influence of Bourdieu in this introduction. Indeed, as Shearing (1989) has pointed out, studying crime issues 'sooner or later leads [criminologists] away from crime'. To a certain extent, such importation of ideas is inevitable; yet, for criminology to develop and grow as a discipline, it may need to stop looking 'elsewhere for inspiration' (Nelken 1994:12).

Bias towards policy relevance

Criminological practice has consistently displayed a bias towards the generation of policy-relevant knowledge. This is in spite of the demarcation between so-called 'administrative' and 'academic' criminology. Academic criminology prides itself on its independence from government, sees its role as theoretical and critical, and lives in fear of 'either being intellectually and politically sidelined or, in courting policy relevance, of surrendering criminology's critical edge and perhaps worse becoming one of the new "zoo keepers of deviance"' (Hogg). Administrative criminology is seen as beholden to power, atheoretical, opportunistic in its pursuit of short-term expedient solutions, or, at the very least, devoted to the search for 'scientific' solutions to the problem of crime. Yet, this distinction may have been somewhat overdrawn (Grabosky) or become largely irrelevant (O'Malley). Academic criminologists are not solely interested in pure or basic research; many hope that their work will exert some influence on criminal justice policy (Ericson). Similarly, criminologists who work in governmental agencies seldom find themselves as mere 'faceless bureaucrats' producing knowledge to service the status quo; instead the possibilities of critique, reform and innovation are often remarkable in the interstices of economic rationalism and political expediency. The problem is less one of political co-optation and compromise than one of incompatibility between the cycle and nature of demand for criminological knowledge in academic and governmental institutions. Criminological knowledge is

10 The influence here is predominantly from mainstream feminist theories.

rarely directly translatable into government programs and not routinely sought or utilised by makers of government policy (Hogg; also Brereton; Chan 1995).

Proclivity to reflect on failure

More than other scientific disciplines, criminology has developed a generally pessimistic and self-critical view of its own achievements. Russell Hogg's article in this volume examines the recurrent motif of 'failure' in the history of criminology — failure in terms of its 'theoretical, policy and institutional ideals'. As John Braithwaite (1989:134) noted almost a decade ago, criminologists have become 'professional debunkers and cynics' and not much else. Ironically, as Hogg points out, in spite of the 'abject failure' of criminology and the continual attacks by its critics (usually from within), criminology is alive and well. Failure has not stopped 'the flow of research funds, the development of tertiary courses of study, the establishment of institutes, the demand for expert policy advice and critical commentary'. In fact, being critical is not necessarily an obstacle to being 'rewarded' by the system. Hogg concludes that perhaps the failure of criminology should be seen as '*intrinsic* to the criminological project and studied as such; not as a condition to be transcended by a general theory, or in some higher theoretical synthesis, let alone moment of political emancipation'.

Post-social criminology?

The contributors to this volume offer somewhat different visions of the future of criminology. One controversy concerns the advent of 'post-social criminologies'. Pat O'Malley argues that significant changes in core areas of criminology can be linked to a major shift in governmental rationalities. The emergence and dominance of *social* explanations of crime in the 20th century is seen as 'clearly linked to the expansion of the social as *a virtually hegemonic category of governance*' (O'Malley). During the past two decades, however, the social has been substantially 'refigured': 'in place of society are individuals, families, "the market" and voluntary associations ...; in place of social forces are individual enterprise and community initiatives; in place of social services and security there are individual practices of prudence, foresight, competence, responsibility and enterprise'. The emergence of a 'post-social' political rationality is reflected in a number of developments in criminology: for example, the salience of the victim, the 'responsibilising' of offenders and the 'discovery' of the community.

In his comment on O'Malley's analysis, Mark Finnane questions the cogency of O'Malley's account 'as a historical description of our present condition'. Finnane argues that the 'social' modes of governing were in fact 'less coherent and collectivist' than suggested. Using recent examples of criminal justice policy in Australia, he demonstrates the 'persistence of the state as expression of the social' even under current conditions. Recent events which saw an unprecedented consensus among State and federal governments to impose strict gun control measures appear to lend support to Finnane's observation that the state 'still operates in an atmosphere of expectation of the government delivering services for the collective good'. Russell Hogg advocates a more cautious and empirical approach to understanding the linkages between the science of criminology and political rationality. While recognising some of the trends in criminological research practice O'Malley refers to as 'post social', Hogg prefers to study the 'practical historical and contingent relationship and linkages' between the two spheres which he regards as relatively autonomous.

The heterogeneity of criminology, as demonstrated in my previous discussion of its field and habitus, points to a future variously described as 'secure' and expanding (Ericson), one characterised by 'unfamiliar alignments and fissures' (O'Malley), with new challenges produced by changing social, technological and political environments (Grabosky), but

still limited in its capacity to influence policy (Brereton). The resilience of criminology in spite of its self-confessed 'failures' (Hogg) is a sign that the future of criminology is likely to be 'assured, because crime will continue to be central to struggles over institutional and professional jurisdiction' (Ericson).

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