

In the 1960s and 1970s it became commonplace to assert that the end of criminology was imminent. A century of searching for the causes of crime and of devising methods for its control had seemingly come to a dead end. We were no nearer establishing causation than we were in effecting any reduction in crime rates. Nothing seemed to work. So the emergent wisdom of the 1960s urged us to concern ourselves more with processes of criminalisation and with new developments in social, political and legal theory, rather than being burdened with inconclusive empirical projects. Yet this foundational critique appeared not to signal criminology's demise, but its resuscitation in a myriad of reactionary, realist and reformist guises. As law and order politics swept through the political landscape of the 1980s, criminology was rejuvenated: focusing once more on untangling causes and formulating effective measures of crime management.

cost effectiveness (what works cheaply) have become its defining principles.

Simultaneously, a left realism was convinced that the problem of crime was growing out of control and that once more its causes needed to be established and theorised. In tandem a social justice programme needed to be initiated to tackle social and economic inequalities under the rubric of 'inclusive citizenship'. In these ways criminology's historic project to find cause and cure has once more achieved an ascendancy that is reflected in a host of new criminology departments in higher education, a succession of academic/practitioner conferences and a burgeoning academic press. At the end of the century criminology has never seemed so vital and flourishing. But where does this leave the radical critique of the 1960s and 1970s: as an historical anomaly in the history of the discipline or as a vital point of resistance and theoretical renewal?

currently make up the 'crime problem'. In the 1970s radical criminologists had already begun to advocate a deepening of the criminological agenda to include racism, sexism and economic exploitation. In many respects this important debate was foreclosed by the growing hegemony of realist approaches. But it is a debate that remains unfinished. Indeed it has taken to the 1990s for questions of state crime and human rights to begin to be accepted as legitimate issues for criminological inquiry: not simply through extending conceptions of 'what is crime?' but by recognising the legal transgressions routinely employed by those wielding political and economic power. In a similar vein it has taken some twenty years of feminist enquiry to have it acknowledged that danger and risk lie not just on the streets or in the corridors of power, but in the sanctity of the home. Recognising male violence and opening up the vexed question of violent masculinities, also carry with them the potential to split asunder the narrow and myopic concerns of much of what currently is understood to be the 'crime problem'.

Deconstructing criminology

John Muncie argues for a reforming of the discipline, as the millennium approaches.

Criminological discourse

A resurgent radical right revived a neoclassical vision of criminality as voluntaristic - a course of action willingly chosen by wicked calculating individuals, lacking in self control. In policy circles a burgeoning administrative criminology argued that all that could be realistically hoped for was to implement pragmatic means of crime opportunity reduction and to manage crime through situational preventative measures. Efficiency (what works at some times in some places) and

Breaking the mould (again)

Contrary to many a criminological mentality, theoretical development has far from come to a standstill. There remains an important body of deconstructionist knowledge - originating in no small measure from a European school of abolitionism - which continues to move beyond the essentialist signifiers of crime, criminality and criminology in order to facilitate the production of new and revised critical insights. Nowhere is this most clearly seen than in the telling reminder that realist and administrative criminologies are trapped within a state and legally defined notion of 'crime'. As abolitionists had established in the 1980s, if our concern with crime is driven by fears for social stability, personal safety and social justice, then we may be well advised to look beyond crime to discover where the most dangerous threats and risks to our person and property lie.

Poverty, malnutrition, pollution, medical negligence, domestic violence, corporate corruption, state violence, genocide, human rights violations and so on all carry with them more widespread and damaging consequences than most of the behaviours and incidents that

New agendas: social harm and social justice

In the early 1990s a criminological postmodern imagination - emanating to no small degree from feminism - had warned that criminology would remain forever narrow and self justifying unless it began to deconstruct its key referents (crime, criminality, deviance and so on). Postmodernism opened up a vital space in which reflexive knowledge of the entire criminological enterprise could be excavated. For some this meant not only the abandonment of 'crime', but a rejection of all grand theory and the prioritization of a wide variety of disparate and subjective positions. Such positions may smack of an unbridled relativism but they do allow the sensitising concepts of difference, diversity and localism to enter the criminological domain. And it is through such deconstructionism that the possibility of subjugating the concept of crime to that of social harm has once more been raised.

"Criminology's historic project to find cause and cure has once more achieved an ascendancy."



Crime and power

In a harm-based discourse the concept of 'crime' remains important only in so far as it alerts us to relations of power embedded in social orders which generate a whole series of social problems for their populations, but of which only a selected few are considered worthy of criminal sanction. A conception of crime without a conception of power is meaningless. The power to render certain harmful acts visible and define them as 'crime', whilst maintaining the invisibility of others (or defining them as beyond criminal sanction) lies at the heart of the problem of working within notions of 'the problem of crime'. Notions of 'crime' offer a peculiarly blinkered vision of the range of misfortunes, dangers, harms, risks and injuries that are a

routine part of everyday life. If the criminological intent is to reveal such misfortunes, risks and harms then it must reject the concept of 'crime', as its sole justification and object of inquiry. 'Crime' itself has no ontological reality. It exists only as a descriptor of those incidents and behaviours that the state has decided to criminalise. Moreover many of these incidents (such as petty theft, shoplifting, recreational drug use, vandalism, brawls, anti-social behaviour) would not seem to score particularly high on a scale of serious harm. And yet it is often these 'minor' events that take up much of the time and preoccupation of law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system. Conversely the risk of many of those crimes defined by the state as 'serious' would seem negligible compared to such

everyday risks as workplace injury and avoidable disease.

In parallel, the redefining of crime as harm opens up the possibility of dealing with pain, suffering and injury as conflicts and troubles deserving negotiation, mediation and arbitration, rather than as criminal events deserving guilt, punishment and exclusion. Within such a discourse we would be less concerned with controlling, preventing and punishing and more with enabling and empowering. Questions of crime control would be subordinated to those of a wider social justice agenda in which governments and the wider community recognise disadvantage, difference and diversity and acknowledge that they have a responsibility for enhancing personal and social development. A concept of harm might

encourage conceptions of injury as ubiquitous but it would be better placed to pick out its most damaging forms beyond those which are currently recognised by the state. Moreover it would enable injury to be addressed by a wide variety of social responses and without necessarily evoking or extending the penetration of the criminal justice system.

A replacement discourse

To do justice to such visions the discipline may well need (yet again) to reconsider its connection to those self fulfilling and self justifying versions of criminology (or should it be criminal justice studies?) that currently occupy the political and policy mainstream. It remains the case that important work will probably always need to be done in exposing the ways that 'crime', criminal justice and criminological knowledges are built and activated. The danger will also persist that just as social policy is being increasingly incorporated into criminal justice then the goal

of decriminalising criminology may be lost through the incorporation of (or indeed the criminalisation of) competing concepts by the criminological and criminal justice mainstream. To date, criminology's greatest limitation is that it has always allowed dominant and state defined conceptions of crime to run its agenda. And this remains perhaps the biggest hurdle to be faced in the search for a more comprehensive and self reflexive replacement discourse in which harm might be reduced without recourse to criminalisation and social justice achieved without recourse to criminal law.

Yet such reconceptualisations and reframings remain important because they alone allow for a re-imagining of criminology which would enable it to break free of its obsession with negativities and to prioritise such alternative goals as trust, redress, dialogue, empowerment and reconciliation. Working with such concepts may be a source of unease and discomfort but surely it remains the case that it is only here where the reconstruction of an unfettered and unblinkered criminology can begin.

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