

## Book review

Paddy Hillyard, Christina Pantazis, Steve Tombs and Dave Gordon (eds.,) *Beyond Criminology: Taking Harm Seriously* (London, Pluto; Nova Scotia, Fernwood, 2004) ISBN (Pluto) 0-7453-1904-1 (hbk), ISBN (Pluto) 0-7453-1903-3 (pbk), ISBN (Fernwood) 1-55266-148-2 (pbk), 332 pp.

The central issue raised by this edited collection is whether the discipline of criminology is the most appropriate vehicle to look beyond legal and state sponsored definitions of ‘crime’ to discover where the most dangerous harms, threats and risks to our person and property lie. Poverty, malnutrition, pollution, medical negligence, breaches of workplace health and safety laws, 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 currently make up orthodox conceptions of the ‘problem of crime’ and thereby the subject matter of most traditional criminological enquiry.

Such argument of course was initially made in the 1970s by abolitionists and critical criminologists advocating a deepening of the criminological agenda to include racism, sexism and economic exploitation. But in the following decades this vital debate over the proper constitution of criminology appeared to have been submerged under the onslaught of mainstream administrative, realist and crime science approaches. This book is a welcome reminder that these debates remain unfinished. The ability of criminology, given its current institutional baggage, to reconstitute itself as a broader political economy of harm is rightly once more placed at the forefront of the critical imagination.

The book is explicitly designed to take us beyond the traditional criminological gaze. Its origins lie in a series of papers delivered at a conference on zemiology (the study of harm) in Bristol in 1999. Through 14 substantive chapters various aspects of harm are discussed predominantly in the context of the ‘social wreckage of neo-liberal globalisation’. These include chapters on state harm (Tony Ward), workplace injury (Steve Tombs), miscarriages of justice (Michael Naughton), poverty (Dave Gordon), the production of moral indifference (Simon Pemberton), the violence of state agencies and agents (Joe Sim) and deaths caused by exclusionary immigration and asylum policies (Frances Webber). We do indeed need to be continually reminded

that notions of 'crime' offer a peculiarly blinkered vision of the range of misfortunes, injustices, 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 these authors are surely correct in arguing that the concept of 'crime' has to be rejected as its sole justification and object of inquiry. The key theoretical issue raised by this collection is whether this necessarily means the abandonment of criminology. Certainly campaigns to extend the criminal label to include all forms of injury, continually run the risk of reinforcing the concept of crime even when it is seemingly being attacked. It should be noted, too, that whilst the concept of harm is clearly capable of broadening criminology's horizons and radically unsettling its traditional agenda, it continues to operate within a discursive frame of the negative. When we acknowledge that harm is not only a source of fear, but also a source of *fascination, pleasure* and *entertainment* we are faced with a quite different set of possibilities. The redefining of crime as harm also 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. However it is also possible to imagine that prioritising *injustice* rather than harm (or crime) might be as just as an appropriate means to organise this collection and allow the editors to reach similar conclusions.

By the 21st century numerous injustices have indeed begun to circulate on the margins of criminological inquiry. Questions of human rights denial entered the agenda, not simply through extending conceptions of 'what is crime?' but by recognising the legal transgressions routinely employed by those wielding political and economic power and their ability to deny or conceal the harms they unleash under the protection of the law. In a similar vein feminist enquiry has now firmly established that violence, danger and risk lie not just on the streets or in the corridors of power, but in the sanctity of the home. In other areas too we can witness a partial emergence of 'hidden crime' onto a mainstream agenda. State crime in the form of illegal arms dealings, genocide and torture has been consistent front page news following successive wars in the Balkans and Iraq and the establishment of the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague. A long campaign against the transportation of live animals from Britain to Europe has drawn the issue of animal rights into a crime discourse, as has a recognition of the culpable negligence of tobacco and food companies in knowingly marketing unsafe and life threatening substances. It has also become increasingly likely to find numerous aspects of environmental policy (in particular road building and pollution) and economic policy (in particular third world debt, the arms trade and corporate greed) being described within discourses of crime. In themselves these deepening of the criminological

agenda have already begun to force a re-conceptualization of the constitution of 'crime' and thereby a reconsideration of the parameters of criminology. We can query whether criminology – despite its obvious failures – is necessarily incapable of broadening its own horizons.

This book takes us beyond the traditional criminological gaze. But does it take us beyond criminology? Over 100 years of criminological inquiry have ushered in less social justice and more criminalisation and an expansion of criminal justice systems. It is difficult to disagree with the editors of this volume that the construction of an alternative discipline based on social harm could barely be less successful (p. 29). But harm is far from a unitary and uncontested concept. Harm signifies a host of material and emotive negativities – from notions of pain to fear, insecurity, violation, grief, powerlessness, dispute and transgression – as well as the prevailing discourse of crime. The task now is arguably also one of subjecting each of these signifiers to their own series of deconstructions. But the abandonment of 'crime' in favour of 'harm' is ultimately a political project. Whenever we read the latest crime news or are bombarded with remonstrations against the 'anti-social', we would be well advised to remember this book's powerful message that the systematic production of inequalities, poverty, destitution, exploitation (and governmental denials of any complicity in their production) introduce far more violence, suffering and death into this world than anything currently subject to criminal law sanction. This is a message that should be a defining component of any criminological research programme.

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