

Jeffrey Ian Ross and Francesca Vianello, *Convict Criminology for the Future*, Routledge: London and New York, 2021, 217 pp.: 9780367860172, £96 (hbk), 9780367860158, £31.99 (pbk)

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The landscape of criminological inquiry is ever evolving – and the birth and growth of differing perspectives have added depth to the development of criminology. Convict Criminology (CC) is one such collective, a community of current and ex-convict academics and associated critical and radical scholars, able to develop critical perspectives on crime and prison, and harness collective knowledge, experiences, and expertise, with the ability to influence policy.

This book is a welcome arrival at a critical juncture in the development of both CC and how the perspectives of those amongst its number have responded to recent criminological enquiry. CC is still in its infancy, having been founded in 1977 as an academic collective in the United States by ex-convict criminology professors and graduate students following a series of informal meetings at the American Society of Criminology annual meetings. In 2011 the British Convict Criminology Group was started at the British Society of Criminology (BSC) annual conference. Before the inception and formation of Convict Criminology as a collective, there were few ex-convict social scientists (Richards, 2018). Now its growing membership and impact means that it is increasingly deserving of a prominent platform within criminology and beyond. This new contribution from the collective delivers fresh and insightful perspectives through the lens of lived experience.

The introductory chapter provides a contemporary outline of the principles underpinning CC and Ross' ensuing chapter complements this by grounding CC in its historical context and charting its rise in popularity. The structure of the book is guided by the exploration of seven primary themes that cover key debates in the field of Convict Criminology including prisoner adaptations, challenges for prisoners and formerly imprisoned people; higher education from behind the prison walls; the expansion of convict criminology in international contexts; and the future direction in Convict Criminology.

Prearity is an issue of contemporary relevance, producing complex and dynamic effects at multiple levels, and a staple of educational institutions. For Pembroke (2018: 4), 'precarious work leads to precarious lives where people are trapped in uncertainty, floating and on stand-by, with all aspects of their lives on hold'. In their chapter, Tietjen and Cavish offer an amplifying dimension to the notion of precarity through the social-structural impediment of status fragility. They argue that whilst the benefits of disseminating and practicing a CC perspective are often emphasised, those identifying as a CC working in uncertain circumstances are also exposed to the threats of bias, marginalization and delegitimization

Bozkurt and Merico's chapter – with Aresti and Darke - provides engaging auto-ethnographic accounts of the interaction between the experience of imprisonment and motherhood. This is particularly welcome in a field in which much knowledge on the experience of imprisonment is male dominated, including within CC. The underlying theme of the chapter is the recognition of absent voices within Convict Criminology, especially those of criminalized woman and criminalized ethnic minorities, and such an account emphasizes the need for greater focus on providing a voice for more marginalized groups. This theme is further expounded by Cox who also highlights the often neglected emotional and exclusionary experiences of prisoner families.

Earle explores the importance of autoethnography to this field, employing vignettes as a vital medium to capture and convey experience. Here, the role of personal narratives provides a key apparatus for moving beyond voyeuristic insights, into illuminating the lived experience of imprisonment within the personal and wider cultural contexts. Earle establishes the virtues of such an approach as having a crossover from

the autobiographical to the sociological. Sbracia further explores this, considering how descriptive narratives of prison life and forms of socialization can be applied across differing contexts to progress the study of penal radicalization.

Sterchele provides a reflective account of the methodological and epistemological issues arising from their fieldwork experience, thoughtfully recognizing the value of an ethnographic approach to research. In doing so, he considers how prison staff de-legitimize prisoner claims and experiences, and in the process reconstruct institutional hierarchies of credibility as well as evidencing the intersectionality between criminalization's, racialization, and disablement amongst prisoner populations. In relation to prison research, Gacek and Ricciardelli critique what they term as the "coerciveness of an overzealous ethics structure" (p.203), with this oversight prohibiting the researcher's quest to give agency and a platform to those imprisoned.

Higher education opportunities that bring university and prison students together as part of a learning community are explored by Borghini and Pastore, who provide a critical lens to explore higher education in prison and ponder the level of equivalence between prison and society, whilst considering the transformative value of education upon the prisoner. In their chapter, Pellegrino et al., provide an illustrative case study using The Penitentiary University Campus (PUP) programme (akin to the Inside Out and Learning Together initiatives prominent in the United Kingdom), demonstrating the positive impact of collective learning on learner identity. Drawing on desistance narratives, it evidences a form of community restoration through positive engagement and interaction with external actors, it also challenges individuals to be critical to explore whether convict perspectives can become a more prominent discourse.

Kalica's chapter provides a considered exploration of the age-old entanglement of media and crime, and the sensationalized vernacular employed in the quest to entice a paying audience. It introduces the notion of counter-information, which allows those imprisoned or formerly imprisoned to push back against these dominant narratives of news that is constructed with technical errors and mystification, through collective workshops with both current and ex-prisoners and journalists to raise awareness of these issues through development of ethical principles.

Whilst steeped in its North American roots and subsequent developments in the UK, the book embraces an international perspective of CC. Vianello considers the establishment of a CC approach in Italy and the limitations, especially in relation to the use of education in prison as a reward, precluding access. The chapter maps out a path to redress the balance of interaction between university and prison to one weighted in the favour of those imprisoned, through establishing proper conditions for them to realise their right to study and gain from it. Torrente also identifies challenges faced within the Italian prison context from prison administration in the development and enactment of a CC identity. The chapter argues, that in doing so, the institution exacerbates the violence of incarceration, with the prisoner subject being labelled as 'problematic' and met with obstruction and sanction in response to their efforts to rehabilitate themselves. In a similar vein, Weis considers the challenges of expanding Convict Criminology into South American countries with language, spatial distances and the lack of resources constraining such development.

The concluding chapter synthesizes the major emergent ideas within the book and assembles a scaffold for the future development of this vibrant field. Vianello and Ross present a refreshingly honest account of the work still to be done. This includes strengthening active involvement in prisoner education; forging ties with the non-profit sector and prisoner support groups; better organization of dissemination to accommodate the growing interest in Convict Criminology, including making offerings accessible to wider

global audiences; and encompassing a wider range of Scholars and Activists from a global pool. Given the current focus on lived experience in criminological inquiry, this book is a welcome addition to a paucity of literature surrounding how those with such experiences interact with the field both from a theoretical and applied standpoint. It is theoretically robust whilst maintaining a humanistic touch, allowing the reader insight into the emotive aspect of the lived experience of imprisonment. It effectively demonstrates the value brought to criminological enquiry via the input of people with lived experience of the penal system.

Convict Criminologists, critical criminologists, academics teaching in the lecture theatre, and criminology and sociology students will find this book of particular interest, due to its clear and accessible nature. This book inspires engagement with new approaches and ensures that convict criminology has a significant role in the future of criminology.

References

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