



[features:
PUBLIC CRIMINOLOGY]
**Critical Reflections on ‘Public
Criminology’: An Introduction**

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Currently, there are a number of disciplines in the social sciences where a “public turn” (Nickel 2010, 698) is being advocated. When one calls upon other scholars to ‘go public’ they are usually asking their colleagues to move beyond what is imagined to be their comfort zones, to do what is allegedly unusual, and engage publics beyond their university classrooms and other academic forums to impact social change concerning the substantive topics addressed in their research. These clarion calls are often set against a contextual backdrop where the world is thought to have just recently gone to shit due to populist politics, mass ignorance and lack of exposure to, or adherence to the lessons found within, academic studies. The proposed antidote offered by proponents of public social sciences often comes in the form of cold, hard ‘truths’ that scholars are claimed to be well-positioned to provide, but too often fail to effectively communicate because of the narrow scope of publics they normally engage.

In criminology, engagement with extra-academic publics has been the focus of a number of recent works published in academic venues including, but not limited to, scholarly journal issues (e.g. Chancer and McLaughlin 2007; Gies and Mawby

2009; Clear 2010; Loader and Sparks 2011a) and books (e.g. Loader and Sparks 2011b). A common starting point of contemporary calls for a 'public criminology' is the observation that the discipline is a "successful failure", which is gaining more clout in the academic world as evidenced by such things as the creation of new criminology programs in universities, while its agenda setting influence in other spheres is diminishing (ibid, 11). This gripe is long-standing and has animated previous calls for criminologists to get more involved in debates about 'crime' and its repression beyond the academy (e.g. Carabine *et al.* 2000; Garland and Sparks 2000).

Proponents of 'public criminology' (e.g. Currie 2007; Uggen and Inderbitzin 2010), or what Carlen (2012, 17) calls "doing politics" in criminology, generally focus on three issues. A primary thrust of their deliberations is focused on the objectives of 'public criminology', which are primarily the pursuit of relevance beyond the academy to ensure the discipline's survival going forward and to have an impact on public opinion, as well as policy and practice concerning 'crime-control'. A second aspect of the debate aims to identify the extra-academic publics of criminology, who tend to be politicians, policy makers and the general public. A third issue addressed in these exchanges is the matter of practice, which most often takes the form of policy work (e.g. Stanko 2007), newsmaking criminology (e.g. Barak 2007) and public education (e.g. Currie 2007), or a combination of the three (e.g. Piché forthcoming). Critical reflections on the objectives, publics and practices of 'public criminology' have also emerged raising questions such as whether the pursuit of relevance corrupts academic independence and undermines the possibility for critical research (e.g. Carlen, 2012). Others are sceptical of the idea that engaging powerful actors on their turf can operate as a form of trickle-down criminology, which benefits the marginalized by generating initiatives that concretely reduce the repression they experience and effectively address their material needs (e.g. Ruggiero, 2012).

While the literature on 'public criminology' continues to grow, with few exceptions (e.g. Mopas and Moore, 2012) Canadian scholars have remained on the margins of this discussion. It is with this in mind that a stream of sessions featuring papers on 'public criminology' in Canada were organized as

part of the *Critical Perspectives: Criminology and Social Justice—Third National Conference* (CP3) held in May 2013. Since 2011, this annual conference, which takes place at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University on a rotating basis, brings together criminologists from across the country and elsewhere in the world to share research that critically examines domination in all of its guises. This special issue of *Radical Criminology* includes selected papers from the conference that push and/or challenge the boundaries of what is considered to be ‘public criminology’.

The collection begins with an auto-ethnographic account by Andrew Woolford and Bryan Hogeveen, entitled “Public Criminology in the Cold City: Engagement and Possibility”, that critically reflects on their past involvement in non-profit organizations who work with criminalized persons. Their article, which includes examples of incidents where the imperatives of organizational survival were put before all else, raises questions about the limits of social justice work within entities that are integral to, and/or subject to the demands of, increasingly repressive states under neo-liberalism.

Shifting the conversation from beyond the realm of the academy to the machinations of the university, “The Public Would Rather Watch Hockey! The Promises and Institutional Challenges of ‘Doing’ Public Criminology within the Academy” by Carrie B. Sanders and Lauren Eisler explores the structural forces they encountered during the development of a course designed to expose students and residents of their community to criminological research. Their experience, particularly as it relates to the search for funding to support their initiative, highlights both the opportunities and constraints shaping ‘public criminology’ initiatives within increasingly corporate and managerial universities.

To date, it is curious to see the work of radical criminologists rarely mentioned in the discussion on ‘public criminology’. Among them are the contributions of feminist criminologists involved in struggles to fight gender, sexual and other forms of inequality. In “Troubling Publics: A Feminist Analysis of Public Criminology”, Amanda Nelund discusses how feminism can address key limitations of ‘public criminology’ as it relates to its approach to the production and dissem-

ination of knowledge, which she argues currently limits its ability to affect fundamental social change.

This issue concludes with an article by Nicolas Carrier entitled “On Some Limits and Paradoxes of Academic Orations of Public Criminology”. In this piece, the author identifies numerous pitfalls with the kinds of ‘public criminology’ championed in the literature and, similarly to Ruggiero (2012), proposes that civic engagement amongst criminologists on matters of (in)justice should be based on solidarity with others, rather than the ‘truths’ constructed in academic work.

To conclude, I would like to thank those who contributed to this project and made it possible, beginning with the presenters and participants who attended the sessions on ‘public criminology’ at CP3. Your remarks and questions pushed the discussion on public engagement in criminology in novel directions, which is reflected in the articles included in this issue. I would also like to thank the reviewers, who took the time to comment on the submissions considered for this collection, for their thorough and thoughtful feedback. Lastly, I wish to acknowledge the efforts of the editorial team at *Radical Criminology* who supported this project throughout the process, and continue the work required to maintain a quality peer-reviewed and open journal that is accessible to all with Internet access. This journal is an example of ‘public criminology’ in action and the articles in this collection offer important insights that will inform how intellectuals think about and engage with publics within and beyond the academia to fight for social justice in our world going forward.

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