

THE EMERALD INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF ACTIVIST CRIMINOLOGY

EDITED BY VICTORIA CANNING GREG MARTIN STEVE TOMBS

FOREWORD BY ONWUBIKO AGOZINO



The Emerald International Handbook of Activist Criminology

EMERALD STUDIES IN ACTIVIST CRIMINOLOGY

Series Editors: Vicky Canning (University of Bristol), Greg Martin (University of Sydney) and Steve Tombs (The Open University)

Emerald Studies in Activist Criminology is a platform working to identify and address the harms of criminalisation and expansive social controls. It draws together academics, activists, progressive policy-makers, and practitioners to encourage cutting-edge engagement on topics to effect positive social change.

The historical relationships between criminology and activism are contentious. Since criminology in its administrative forms can facilitate increases in state and cultural controls, and was formed within this nexus of social order, the discipline is often complicit in acting on behalf of states and state corporate collaborators. Critical criminology and zemiology, by contrast, have nurtured conditions under which power and hierarchy can be more fully addressed from radical perspectives, specifically in challenging state-centric focuses on crimes of the powerless. It is from these positions that Emerald Studies in Activist Criminology encourages engagement with those working against the negative impacts of crime controls on the lives of intersectionally disadvantaged groups in society.

Emerald Studies in Activist Criminology seeks to examine the history of both recent and more established justice campaigns and interventions. It extends across a range of pre-existing sub-fields of criminology that engage in questions of effecting progressive change through activism, such as feminist criminology, juvenile justice, migrant rights, corporate and state crime, green/environmental criminology, sentencing and wrongful conviction, prisons, corrections and abolitionism, and justice for victim/survivors of harm and crime. Campaigns and movements – defensive and progressive – around these issues define what we mean by 'activist', while we view 'criminology' in its broadest, interdisciplinary and social science-inflected version.

Emerald Studies in Activist Criminology

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EDITED BY

VICTORIA CANNING

University of Bristol, UK

GREG MARTIN

University of Sydney, Australia

AND

STEVE TOMBS

The Open University, UK

FOREWORD BY

ONWUBIKO AGOZINO

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, USA



United Kingdom - North America - Japan - India - Malaysia - China

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The editors and contributors are to be congratulated for providing an urgent and much needed critical response to the global politics of harm and the local practices of violence that swirl around, in and through our collective psyches and our interdependent humanity. This Handbook is an indispensable criminological resource for activists, academics, policy professionals and students of justice.

-Bruce A. Arrigo, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA

This groundbreaking book sets the tone for the criminological debate, making it clear that science can no longer be understood in isolation from social change. Crime, punishment and social control shape the lives of the most vulnerable sections of society, and their voices demand to be included in any transformative project that genuinely seeks to overturn existing injustices. The book raises this demand from a decolonial and intersectional perspective that includes Indigenous, abolitionist, transfeminist and Southern perspectives that make clear that Western-centred solutions are neither epistemically nor empirically sufficient to promote real transformation.

-Valeria Vegh Weis, Researcher, Konstanz University, Germany

This Handbook constitutes a fundamental milestone and essential reading for all those in the criminological field who, beyond traditional views, claim a style of knowledge production politically committed to the current struggles for transformation and social justice.

-Máximo Sozzo, National University of Litoral, Argentina

The Emerald International Handbook of Activist Criminology is a timely collection of cutting-edge contributions by established and emerging activist researchers and advocates. These are bold and creative interventions from a range of diverse perspectives, all unified with the common objective of resisting the epistemic violence of a discipline traditionally tethered to state and increasingly corporate research agendas that continue to be implicated in and directly reproduce social injustice, violence and harm. Together, they compose a bold and comprehensive response to a frequently asked question: should criminology be abolished? This book is an important, instructional and heartening manual for the growing number of radically oriented and activist researchers struggling on the margins of the discipline to build meaningful community, solidarity and intervention that result in genuine structural change and the dismantling of injustice and social harm.

-Bree Carlton, University of Melbourne, Australia

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About the Authors

Onwubiko Agozino is a Professor of Sociology at Virginia Tech and a scholaractivist, who values inclusive excellence and diversity with critical attention focused on people of African descent and other marginalised groups around the world. He emphasises race, class, and gender issues in his contributions to learning, discovery, and community engagement beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Marcos César Alvarez is a Brazilian Sociologist, Professor at the Department of Sociology at the University of São Paulo. He develops teaching, research, and extension activities in the domains of social theory and methodologies, especially the Sociology of Punishment and Social Control, focusing on the Brazilian historical and social context. He is the Coordinator of the Center for the Study of Violence. https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5984-9082

Luke Amadi holds a PhD in Development Studies from the University of Port Harcourt. He is a Distinguished International Scholar. He is recipient of the prestigious Elsevier Open Science Research Award, 2022, to celebrate his contribution to open science research for his article 'Globalization and the Changing Liberal International Order: A Review of the Literature' linked to the UN SDGs (SDGs 10 & 13) and between 2020 and 2021, it received a total of 38,136 downloads, helping to tackle some of the world's greatest challenges. He has presented papers in international conferences across the continent including recently-the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, LDC Future Forum: 5-7 October 2021, Helsinki, Finland. His most recent edited volume, Decolonizing Colonial Development Models: A New Postcolonial Critique (with Prof. Fidellis Allen), was published in early 2022 by Rowman and Littlefield (Lexington Books) Maryland, USA. He has articles in scholarly journals. His works have been a primer for PhD, Masters, and undergraduate students of leading Universities across Europe, North America, and Asia. His research interest intersects Social Activism, Ecological Justice, Security, International Political Economy, Sustainable Development Studies, and African Politics. He is a Member of various professional bodies including the Development Studies Association of Ireland (DSAI). He is presently Guest Editor at the Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK and Deputy Director at the Educational Support and Development Initiatives for the Less Privileged, Nigeria.

xii About the Authors

Thalia Anthony is an Activist and Academic who lives, works, and brings up her children on the sovereign lands of the Eora Nation. She is on the Board of Deadly Connections Community and Justice Services and a Professor of Law at the University of Technology Sydney where she researches systemic colonial injustices against First Nations people and imagines a world without oppressive structures.

Lynzi Armstrong is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. She is a Feminist Criminologist, and her research is broadly focused on gender, sexuality, and justice. She has a strong interest in sex workers' rights, sexual violence, anti-trafficking discourses, stigma, and the impacts of laws on marginalised populations. She is Co-editor of *Sex Work and the New Zealand Model: Decriminalisation and Social Change*, published by Bristol University Press in 2020.

Ilaria Aversa is a PhD candidate at the University of Kent. Her main interests are crimmigration and alternative urban governance of migration. They are regularly involved in bottom-up and community-led initiatives on the working-class Roman territory in Italy. She also tutors the Roma Tre Law Clinic and Co-supervise the students' work on the Statewatch Frontex Observatory, as well as undertaking further research on legal actions against Frontex at the European Court of Justice.

Cormac Behan teaches Criminology at the School of Social Sciences, Law, and Education, Technological University Dublin, Ireland. His research interests include penal history, prisoners' rights movements, comparative penology, and prison education. From 1997 to 2011, he taught politics and history in Irish prisons. He is the author of several publications on prisoners' rights movements, including "We are all convicted criminals"? Prisoners, Protest and Penal Politics in the Republic of Ireland', *Journal of Social History* (2018) and 'Putting Penal Reform on the Map: Prisoners' Rights Movements and Penal History', *Champ Pénal/Penal Field* (2020).

Joanne Belknap is Professor Emerita of Ethnic Studies at the University of Colorado-Boulder, a past President of the American Society of Criminology, and the Author of the book, *The Invisible Woman: Gender, Crime, and Justice* (currently in its 5th edition). She coined the term 'activist criminology' in her ASC Presidential address in 2014 (published in the journal *Criminology* in 2015). She has received many awards for her research, teaching, and university and community service, and taught college classes in both men's and women's prison. Her current research projects are primarily on the precarceral sexual abuse of women in prison. She is the most proud of the many undergraduate and graduate students she mentored, her community activism, and her publications with former students, activists, and practitioners.

Chloé Branders holds a PhD in Criminology and is a Lecturer at UCLouvain (Belgium) and the Catholic University of Lille (France). Her research interests focus

on penal institutions, youth support services, social intervention, activism, and art. In her PhD research, she explored ethnographic methods' use in prisons and studied theatre both as a Subversive Activity in detention settings and as an Epistemological Tool in criminology. She has led several collective theatre projects in prisons, as well as in an institution for youth offenders. She initiated Inside-Out, an educational program in criminology which allows students to approach the reality of the prison world by implementing theatre in detention settings. She is a Member of GENEPI Belgium, an Activist Organisation focused on prison issues. She also works as an Editor for *impACT*, the Theatre Action Centre journal (Belgium), which publishes critical analyses of social and political theatre practices.

Linda Briskman holds the Margaret Whitlam Chair of Social Work at Western Sydney University in Australia. Previous academic appointments include Professor of Human Rights at Swinburne University and Dr Haruhisa Handa Chair of Human Rights Education, Curtin University. Her areas of research and activism include Indigenous rights, asylum seeker rights, and challenging Islamophobia. She publishes extensively in each of these areas. Her most recent books are the co-authored *Human Rights and Social Work: Towards Rights-based Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) and the co-edited *Indigenous Health Ethics: An Appeal to Human Rights* (World Scientific, 2021).

Victoria Canning is Associate Professor of Criminology at the University of Bristol. She is currently Head of the Centre for the Study of Poverty and Social Justice, Associate Director in Border Criminologies at Oxford University, and Trustee of Statewatch. She has published and edited various books and articles, including *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System* (2017), *From Social Harm to Zemiology* (2021, with Steve Tombs), and *Stealing Time: Migration, Temporalities and State Violence* (2021, with Monish Bhatia). She is Co-creator of the Right to Remain Asylum Navigation Board (with Lisa Matthews) and acted as Academic Consultant on the BAFTA award-winning series Exodus: Our Journey to Europe.

Roxana Pessoa Cavalcanti is a British-Brazilian Principal Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Brighton, UK, where she currently also works as an Ambassador for early career researchers. Her research focuses on examining and contesting the criminalisation of poverty and dissent. She has written about violence, feminism, cities, criminology, police violence, and insecurity. Her work is centred on issues of (in)justice, human rights, and the theorising interlocking social inequalities relating to class, gender, race, and ethnicity in Latin America.

Vicki Chartrand is a mama and Associate Professor in the Sociology Department at Bishop's University, Québec, which is the traditional and unceded territory of the Abenaki people. She is also an Adjunct Professor at the University of Ottawa, Criminology Department and Director of the Centre for Justice Exchange (https://justiceexchange.ca/). Her general research includes penal and carceral politics, modern-day colonialism, community justice, and collaborative methodologies. She has over 20 years of experience collaborating for and with women and children, Indigenous communities, and people in prison. *Pm8wzowinnoak Bishop's kchi adalagakidimek aoak kzalziwi w8banakii aln8baïkik*.

Jodie M. Dewey is a Research Scientist with Chestnut Health System's Lighthouse Institute in Chicago, IL. Having worked and studied extensively in the criminal legal system, she pushes for community-led, equity-focused, and inclusive education for police and others employed by the legal system. With considerable personal and research knowledge on the challenges faced by transgender people navigating multiple points in the criminal justice process, she develops anti-racist and anti-sexist curricula and trainings, and supports institutional efforts to implement equitable policies and data instruments.

Giulia Ferranti is currently a Doctoral Researcher at the Centre for the Study of Poverty and Social Justice at the University of Bristol. She completed her undergraduate degree in Criminology at the University of Durham and her master's degree in Criminological Research at the University of Cambridge. Her doctoral project, supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK Research and Innovation), explores the politics and harms of migrant illegalisation in the Italian context. She has held the role of regional team lead at SolidariTee, and now volunteers for the Legislative Assembly, the body of democratic representation, and the Guarantor for the Rights of People Detained or Deprived of their Liberty in the Emilia Romagna region in Italy.

Tal Fitzpatrick is an Israeli born Australian Artist, Craftivist and Researcher based on the unceded lands of the Kombumerri families of the Yugambeh language region. She holds a PhD in Visual Art from the Victorian College of the Arts (2018) and a Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours from Griffith University (2010). She is best known for her work in the field of craftivism and, along with collaborators such as Kate Just and Stephanie Dunlap, has led several global craftivism projects. Her academic work has been included in various publications including *Care Ethics and Craft* (J. Milner & G. Coombs, 2022) and *Crafting Dissent: Handicraft as Protest from the American Revolution to the Pussycats* (H. Mandell, 2020). Her self-published works include a series of catalogues and a craftivism handbook titled *Craftivism: A ManifestolMethodology* (2018).

Stephanie Fohring is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Northumbria University in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, UK. Prior to this position she worked as a Criminology Lecturer at Edinburgh Napier University and completed both her PhD and a British Academy Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the University of Edinburgh. Her research is victim focused with a particular interest in psychological aspects of victimisation, victimisation surveys, victim labelling, victim experiences of reporting crime and the criminal justice system, violence against women, vicarious trauma, and post-traumatic growth.

Alejandro Forero-Cuéllar obtained PhD. in Law and Political Science from the University of Barcelona. Lecturer of Criminal Law and Criminology. Researcher

of the Observatory of the Penal System and Human Rights and Coordinator of the System of Documentation and Communication of Institutional Violence (SIRECOVI). He regularly visits and monitors prisons, and interviews people in prison, denounces institutional violence and promotes psychosocial, social, and legal support to them and their families.

Liv S. Gaborit is a Former Researcher, who left academia to work as a Clinical Psychologist and as an Activist committed to supporting the struggle of the people in Myanmar. She holds a Master of Science in Psychology from Copenhagen University, a PhD in Social Sciences from Roskilde University, and a postdoctoral fellow in Social Anthropology at Lund University. She has extensive experience with the use of ethnographic methods and participatory action research. Her research was focused on prisons in the global south and covers topics such as experiences of imprisonment and prisons as a lens through which to understand societal changes and prison reform. She was a postdoctoral researcher while the 2021 military coup took place in Myanmar. When reflecting upon her own role as a researcher in the aftermath of the coup she decided to continue her involvement with Myanmar solely as an activist. To do so, she co-founded the grassroots organisation Myanmar Action Group Denmark with a group of activists in Denmark. She now serves as a Board Member of the group and continues to support the people of Myanmar in their fight for peace and democracy.

Tim Goddard is Associate Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida International University, USA. He is Co-author of the book *Youth, Community and the Struggle for Social Justice* (with Randy Myers, Routledge, 2018), which examines 12 US-based organisations that put forward alternative youth justice interventions aimed at raising individual and community consciousness of the relationship between poverty, racism, and neoliberal carceralism.

David Rodríguez Goyes is a Colombo-Norwegian Writer and Scholar focused on crime, violence, and victimhood. He has interviewed hundreds of perpetrators, victims, and policy-makers in the more than 10 years he has worked in the field. He participated in the Colombian peace process as a rapporteur, interviewing victims of war and members of the guerrillas. In 2018, he earned his PhD degree in criminology from the University of Oslo. Currently, he is a Senior Researcher at the same institution.

Gustavo Lucas Higa is a Brazilian Sociologist, currently a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of São Paulo. He has a scholarship from the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (Fapesp) and is a Researcher at the Center for the Study of Violence. His research focuses on historical sociology, documentary research, sociology of violence, punishment, authoritarianism, human rights, discourse analysis, and moral panics.

Lily Horsfield, MSc Student, University of St Andrews, is a graduate of Northumbria University's BA in International Relations and Politics and is currently pursuing her postgraduate studies in MSc International Development Practice at University of St Andrews. Following on from her interest in inequality, marginalisation, and development, her Masters dissertation examines the ways in which Brexit has intensified the hostile environment's impacts on EU migrants in the UK.

Becka Hudson is a Doctoral Student and Associate Lecturer at Birkbeck College and University College London. Her research looks at the use of psychiatric assessment tools in British prisons, and how these tools affect things like release, treatment in prison, and ideas about 'risk'. Prior to undertaking research, she worked in community and political campaigning for many years, addressing issues ranging from housing to policing to gendered violence. She occasionally writes and appears in popular media to discuss criminal justice issues.

Imoh Imoh-Ita holds a PhD in Public Administration from the University of Uyo and another in Development Studies from the University of Port Harcourt both in Nigeria. He is currently Dean Students Affairs and Head of Department of Public Administration at the Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria. He has published in reputable journals, contributed book chapters, and presented papers in local and international conferences. He is a Member of several professional bodies including American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), and National, Association of Nigeria Public Administration and development studies, focusing on how the politics of administration and governance has historically shaped development. He is married to his darling wife with three lovely kids. He is a Fitness Enthusiast with International Sports Science Association (ISSA) certification. He is a Devout Christian and Social Influencer.

Keir Irwin-Rogers is a Senior Lecturer at The Open University. His research centres on the health and wellbeing of children and young people. He has given evidence to numerous Parliamentary Committees and was the lead Criminologist to the cross-party parliamentary Youth Violence Commission, co-authoring its final report. He has recently co-authored *Against Youth Violence: A Social Harm Perspective*, which explores various social harms in children's lives and critiques current responses to these pressing social problems.

Will Jackson is Senior Lecturer in Criminology in the School of Justice Studies and a Member of the Centre for the Study of Crime, Criminalisation and Social Exclusion (CCSE) at Liverpool John Moores University, UK. His research is focused on the nature and regulation of political activism. His recent work has two strands: firstly, examining the policing of protest in the UK since 2013, and secondly, exploring the potential of arts-based activism for criminological inquiry. He is Coeditor of Destroy Build Secure: Readings on Pacification (Red Quill Books, 2017).

Amy M. Magnus is Assistant Professor of Political Science and Criminal Justice at California State University, Chico, CA, USA. She is the Author/Co-author of recent works related to the intersection of rural vulnerability and activism, including but not limited to, 'Saviors and Services: The Interface of Neoliberal Deprivation, Hegemonic Christianity, Social Exclusion, and Rural Church Resource Provision' (with Alyse Sherrick, Rural Sociology, 2022) and 'Reimagining Access to Justice Through the Eyes of Rural Domestic Violence Survivors' (with Frank Donohue, Theoretical Criminology, 2021).

Hanna Maria Malik, Dr Iur, LLM. (Frankfurt am Main), Msc., PostDoc researcher at the University of Turku, Finland, has studied social harms generated at the state–corporate technology nexus and regulatory responses to these harms, through comparative legal and qualitative empirical methodologies. In her doctoral research Malik critically analysed corporate criminal liability laws in Poland and Germany. In her postdoctoral research she has focused on harms resulting from Europeanisation and flexibilisation processes such as labour exploitation as well as social harms associated with AI-transformation and digitalisation of public and private domains.

Greg Martin is Associate Professor of Criminology, Law and Society in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Sydney, Australia. He has published widely in criminology, law, and sociology, and is author of *Understanding Social Movements* (Routledge, 2015), *Crime, Media and Culture* (Routledge, 2019), and Co-editor of *Secrecy, Law and Society* (Routledge, 2015). He is Founding Co-editor of the book series, *Emerald Studies in Activist Criminology*, an Associate Editor of *Crime Media Culture*, and a Member of the Editorial Boards of *Social Movement Studies* and *The Sociological Review*.

Lisa Matthews is Coordinator at Right to Remain. She has worked at Right to Remain since 2011. Her previous experience is in providing psychosocial support to refugees in Cairo, mental health community outreach with London's Somali and Bangladeshi communities, asylum and immigration legal casework, integration case management with refugees, and asylum advice.

Dave McDonald is a Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He lives and works on the land of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation. A cultural criminologist, he researches social and legal responses to child sexual abuse, with a particular interest in non-legal forms of justice. His current research explores unofficial forms of acknowledgment, and how these function as counter-archives of institutional violence against children.

Alyce McGovern is an Associate Professor of Criminology in the School, of Law, Society and Criminology, Faculty of Law and Justice at UNSW Sydney. She lives and works on unceded Bidjigal land. Her research explores intersecting themes of crime, media and culture, including police public relations work and police use of social media, and knitting graffiti and craftivism. She is the Author of *Craftivism and Yarn Bombing: A Criminological Exploration* (2019, Palgrave), and Co-author of *Policing and Media: Public Relations, Simulations and Communications* (2013, Routledge) and *Sexting and Young People* (2015, Palgrave).

xviii About the Authors

Will McGowan is a Lecturer in the School of Justice Studies and Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Crime, Criminalisation and Social Exclusion (CCSE) at Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK. His current research interests span two areas: violence, death, and bereavement; and, relatedly, social theory, social science methodology, and the sociology of the social sciences. Working within the CCSE as a creative and participatory research centre, he is interested in furthering an engagement with theory and method between academics, activists, practitioners, and public beyond the university. One strand of this work concerned with affecting social change is Criminological Artivism, which he is working on with CCSE colleagues Will Jackson and Emma Murray.

Emma Murray is a Senior Lecturer in Criminal Justice at the School of Justice Studies and Member of the Centre for the Study of Crime, Criminalisation and Social Exclusion (CCSE) at Liverpool John Moores University . Her work has been dedicated to reimagining the military veteran in public, political, and criminological discourse. As Criminologist in Residence at FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology), she is responsible for aligning critical social science with participatory art practices to empower participants and engage audiences in new ways. Concerned with how artworks can influence change, she explores the potential of Criminological Artivism through knowledge exchange activities which bring social scientists, artists, artistic producers, public campaigners, criminal justice staff, and armed forces communities in the criminal justice system, together.

Marília de Nardin Budó, PhD, Brazilian, full-time Assistant Professor (tenured) at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), Brazil, Lecturer in Criminology and Criminal Law in the Law Department, Visiting Professor and Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Barcelona, Spain (2016, 2018), and Visiting Scholar at the Catolique University of Leuven (2022). Research has been featured in the *Journal of White Collar and Corporate Crime, European Journal of Criminology*, and *Brazilian Journal of Criminal Sciences*. Book publications include *Mass Media and Discourses of Power* Revan (2018) [original: Mídias e discursos do poder] and *Media and Social Control* Revan (2013) [original: Mídia e controle social] as an author, and *Introduction to Green Criminology: Critical, Southern, and Decolonial Perspectives* [original: Introdução à criminologia verde: Perspectivas críticas, decoloniais e do Sul] Tirant Brasil (2022), Co-edited with Lorenzo Natali, D. Rodriguez Goyes, R. Sollund, and A. Brisman.

Lorenzo Natali is currently an Associate Professor of Criminology at the School of Law, University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy. His research focuses on violent crime, symbolic and radical interactionism, green criminology, narrative criminology, and qualitative and interdisciplinary approaches, including visual methodologies. He is the Author of *A Visual Approach for Green Criminology. Exploring the Social Perception of Environmental Harm* (Palgrave, 2016), *Cosmologías Violentas. Itinerarios Criminológicos* (with Adolfo Ceretti) (Marcial Pons, 2016), and *Green Criminology: Prospettive Emergenti sui Crimini Ambientali* (Giappichelli, 2015). Co-edited with M. de Nardin Budó, D. Rodriguez Goyes, R. Sollund, and A. Brisman, *Introdução à Criminologia Verde: Perspectivas Críticas, Descoloniais e do Sul*, Tirant Brasil (2022).

Aidan O'Sullivan is a Lecturer in Criminology at Birmingham City University. He gained his PhD in Sociology from the University of Liverpool. His research interests include social movements and state repression and surveillance.

Jessica C. Oldfield is a PhD candidate in Criminology at the University of Melbourne, Australia. She lives and works on the land of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation. Her research is concerned with the experiences of survivors of sexual assault in the post-#MeToo era, with a focus on survivors' relationships with anonymity and public speech.

Alejandra Portillos is a doctoral candidate at the University of Colorado-Boulder in the Ethnic Studies Department. They are active in the broader Colorado community through volunteering with various immigration and human rights organisations. Their current research projects focus on the intersections around immigration and migration enforcement, Latinx/Chicanx studies, and queer and BIPoC trans critique. Their research advocates for radical changes of deportation and detainment procedures that negatively affect queer and trans-Latinx communities.

Iñaki Rivera-Beiras, PhD in Law from the University of Barcelona, Professor of Criminal Law and Criminology and Director of the Observatory of the Criminal System and Human Rights of the University of Barcelona. He has been Visiting Professor at several European and Latin American universities and Recipient of the National Human Rights Award granted by the *Asociación pro Derechos Humanos de España* (Human Rights Association of Spain) (2020). He has dedicated more than 30-year fighting for decarceration and promoting inmates' human rights, and has visited many prisons around the world advocating for the respect of human rights and measures to reduce the prison population, especially those vulnerable.

Ayse Sargin is an interdisciplinary researcher and activist. Her recent work focuses on the contestations surrounding renewable energy development and the politics of just transition. She received her PhD in Sociology from the University of Essex and previously held teaching appointments at the University of Essex and SOAS University of London.

Rachel Seoighe is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Kent. Her work is collaborative, community-focused, and invested in transformative social change. Working from an abolitionist, feminist, and decolonial perspective, and using creative, innovative, and reflexive methodologies, her academic work examines memory practices, state violence, and resistance.

xx About the Authors

Anna Berti Suman is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow at the European Commission Joint Research Centre, Ispra, Italy. She is the Principal Researcher of the project 'Sensing for Justice' aimed at exploring the potential of civic monitoring as a source of evidence for environmental litigation and as a tool to foster environmental mediation. She is Qualified Barrister under the Bar of Rome, affiliated with 'Systasis – Study Centre for the Management of Environmental Conflicts', Milan. She obtained her PhD from the Tilburg Institute for Law, Technology, and Society, The Netherlands. Her PhD project aimed at investigating how civic monitoring influences the governance of environmental health risk. She has work and research experience in environmental litigation and water conflicts in Europe, the USA, and Latin America. She authored 'The Policy Uptake of Citizen Sensing' (Edward Elgar 2021) and 'The Right to Water in Latin America' (Brill 2018).

Steve Tombs is Emeritus Professor of Criminology at the Open University. He has a long-standing interest in the incidence, nature, and regulation of corporate and state crime and harm. His most recent books are *From Social Harm to Zemiol*ogy (with Victoria Canning, 2021), *Revisiting Crimes of the Powerful. Marxism, Crime and Deviance* (with Steven Bittle, Laureen Snider and David Whyte, 2018), *Social Protection After the Crisis* (2016), and *The Corporate Criminal: Why Corporations Must Be Abolished* (with David Whyte, 2015). He has long collaborated with Hazards and The Institute of Employment Rights, and is a Trustee and Deputy Chair of the Board of INQUEST.

Foreword

By Onwubiko Agozino Virginia Tech

Abstract

This Foreword looks at the book, *The Emerald International Handbook of Activist Criminology*, and sees the formulation of innovative theories, their application, and the contributions of critical scholar-activism in transforming society in pursuit of a decolonised world with a counter-colonial future. The Foreword appreciates the radical critiques of mainstream criminology by critical activist thinkers who contribute to an understanding of the relationship between colonial experience and criminology. The Foreword considers the relevance of Africana, abolitionist, Indigenous knowledge systems to activist criminology. The Foreword prescribes the 'committed objectivity' approach to race–class–gender criminology investigations to come to terms with imperialistic and neo-colonialist criminologists who are even more activists in service to the state. The Foreword concludes that *The Emerald International Handbook of Activist Criminology* should be required reading for all criminologists.

Keywords: Africana; Abolitionism; reparative; classroom; decolonisation; Indigenous

Introduction

From the perspective of colonised Indigenous peoples, women and the poor worldwide, activist criminology has always been a paradigm in the field, though it was marginalised by control-freak conventional criminology (Agozino, 2010). It is welcome to see efforts by eminent colleagues to excavate and or renew the history of the ideas and practices that constitute the scholar-activist paradigm in criminology. It is a huge honour for me to be invited to write a Foreword for a book like this. Without spoiling the contents for those yet to read the book, I will offer an introduction to activism in criminology, show the similarities with scholar-activism in Africana Studies, highlight activist contributions from scholars outside criminology, and conclude with the practical implications of activist

scholarship as a necessity in a conservative field like criminology dominated by right-wing activists.

The Emerald International Handbook of Activist Criminology (henceforth, Activist Criminology) has chapters by eminent scholars specifying the Activist Criminology Methods, 'artivism' or collaborations between artists and scholaractivists, the role of cultural criminology in activism, defense of human rights by violence scholars in Brazil, the criminalisation of civil rights activism in Nigeria, and the deadly consequences of the militarisation of borders. Other chapters focus on the use of sports intervention among the youth in Italy, the history of the British Prisoners Strike of 1972, and one on why some critical criminologists resolve the contradiction between working as an agent paid by the state and critiquing the state at the same time, by quitting their day job as Frantz Fanon did in colonised Algeria, to have more time for activism and to preserve their 'integrity'.

Earlier abolitionist struggles against slavery, the movement for universal suffrage, the decolonisation movement, revolutionary struggles for social justice, the civil rights revolution, the anti-apartheid movement, the right to reproductive health care, the recognition of marriage equality, the Black Lives Matter, Bring Back Our Girls, the legalisation of marijuana, and the #EndSARS movements by people of African descent, Indigenous peoples, women and the poor, and their allies worldwide, represent centuries of successful track-records in activist criminology that all criminologists should be required to study to deepen their knowledge of the politics of deviance and social control. Abolitionism has won far too many struggles to be ignored by criminology which still obsesses with the penal turn (Garland, 1990). Even when the harms done are not always recognised as crimes under the imperialist reason of conventional criminologists for the possibility of harm reduction and for a more humane world (Canning & Tombs, 2021).

Activism Relevant to Criminology

Angela Davis (1981, 2003, 2005) theorised that prisons are obsolete and called for a more humane world to be imagined and struggled for by intellectual activists in alliance with progressive forces around the world. Given that militarised policing and the prison industrial complex never existed in Africa and in most Indigenous communities until they were imposed as part of the race–class–gender discriminatory repressive fetishes of European conquest and domination, the example of how people of African descent and Indigenous peoples resisted these institutions can be seen as paradigmatic for activist criminology (Agozino, 2020; Blagg & Anthony, 2019; Cunneen & Tauri, 2016). Scholar-activism is the preferred paradigm in Africana Studies (Agozino, 2016; Asante, 2007; Christian, 2007; Kershaw, 2007) and criminologists can learn from the suitability of this paradigm for the study of all systems of oppression and to change the world for the better.

Activist criminology encourages scholars to take up the challenge of Angela Davis and imagine a more humane world without prisons, without the police, without racism, without sexism, without imperialism, without poverty, without homophobia, and without genocide and ecocide. These ideologies were recent impositions by the capitalismocene ruling classes and they can be abolished along with racist-imperialist patriarchy for the benefit of humanity. Unfortunately, sociologists and criminologists who are fond of citing *The Sociological Imagination* by C. W. Mills (2000) tend to find it difficult to imagine an end to racism, sexism, and imperialism. This is, perhaps, because Mills himself ignored racism and sexism while focusing only on poverty in his imaginary sociology of white men with the emphasis on what he called the *Power Elites*, who apparently determined every social change while the poor are supposedly always manipulated and exploited, but not a word about the civil rights revolution raging while he was writing about the sociological imagination of elite white men.

The editors of *Activist Criminology* introduce the book by calling for criminologists to shun the pretense of value-neutrality and boldly push for a

politically engaged research aiming to remedy not only the absence of meaningful state intervention in crime and harm but also expose the role of corporations and the state itself in prosecuting and perpetuating crime and harm.

This approach is widespread across the world because of the interconnected challenges and crises that imperialism created and sustains. But criminologists tend to wrongly see the imperialist state and powerful corporations as the police officers and judges of the world, when they are active participants in harm causation, calling for activist intellectuals to hold such abuses of powers accountable. Criminological knowledge is vulnerable to abuse unless criminologists go beyond explaining the facts of crime and punishment to also oppose the absolute abuse of absolute power. Surely, criminologists should not abandon the task of mobilising, organising, and speaking truth to power exclusively to investigative journalists, creative writers, musicians, and historians?

I completely endorse the warning of contributors to Activist Criminology that researchers should be wary of the seductions of value-free mythologies that do not exist in reality contrary to the misapplications of Max Weber to suggest neutrality as the criterion for objectivity when Weber (1949, p. 42) explicitly rejected by observing that topics chosen and writing priorities are always the ones the authors find to be 'value-relevant' given that social scientists have vested interests in the societies they study. I am pleased to note that the authors cite my view on this (Agozino, 2020) to remind activist intellectuals that the discoveries we make in our research cannot be dismissed as Left Idealism by Left Realism given that racism-sexism-imperialism exist as articulated systems of power that beg for further decolonisation through scholar-activism. In other words, intellectual activism has shown that existing systems of injustice have been successfully challenged and sometimes ended by scholars, communities, and activists working together as Frantz Fanon (1963), Nelson Mandela (1994), Chinua Achebe (2012), and Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe (2019) exemplified, but mainly from outside the field of criminology. The book, Activist Criminology, demonstrates that there is a rich tradition of activism for social justice within the field of criminology and I concur without any need to rehash the evidence the authors marshalled.

Committed Objectivity

The fact that activists are committed against injustice does not mean that they are biased, and the fact that conventional researchers are committed to maintaining the status quo does not mean that they lack commitment either. I call this approach 'committed objectivity' to encourage all intellectuals to be open about what their commitments are and what their objectivity refers to so that the society can hold all intellectuals accountable. To me, objectivity does not mean the absence of positionality but the exploration of positions taken without obfuscation, obscuring, or distorting opposition (Agozino, 2003; 2018).

As Assata Zerai (2002) demonstrated outside criminology, intellectual activism can be practiced in the classroom by designing the class policy to be inclusive with respect for diversity and equity, for example. For many different reasons, students tend to request for extensions to assignment deadlines. To be fair to those who submitted on time and to mentor all on the values of the prompt meeting of deadlines, some instructors impose penalties for late submissions. Activist criminology indirectly invites us to reconsider the practice of punishment in our classes and consider abolishing deadlines which can be replaced with lifelines to the mutual satisfaction of both instructors and students. Penal Abolitionism should be extended to the classroom though many school districts still allow corporal punishment in the USA and Africa (Agu & Ibe, 2020). Even banks give up to seven days of grace before interests are charged on late payments; but students need to learn that there are firm deadlines for the submission of applications and conference proposals, the semester does come to an end eventually and the game clock stops. Perhaps those who meet the deadline can be given the choice to resubmit. Since corporal punishment has been abolished in most schools and the powerful corporations and abusive state powers are rarely punished for the harms they cause, criminologists should be activists for reparative justice, especially in the classroom and also beyond the boundaries of the classroom, to embrace the demand for 'reparative justice' by people of African descent for the harms of hundreds of years of enslavement and colonisation to be addressed through reparative rather than through punitive justice (Agozino, 2001a and 2021b).

Scholar-activism can also be incorporated into course designs by requiring students to volunteer with relevant organisations and report back what they learned beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Students may opt to help organisations that advocate on behalf of prisoners to raise funds by organising a hunger-strike simulation 24-hour fasting with water and donating the money saved on food to such organisations; while learning what it might feel like to go on hunger-strike in prison, and also understanding their own bodies better.

In research, activist criminology is found in methodologies that allow scholars to advocate and participate in movements designed to achieve a more humane world. Even at the risk of losing 'credibility', a few scholars have defied the moral panic and openly advocated for the legalisation of marijuana for medical uses and recreation without being criminalised (Agozino, 2003, 2018). This is slowly becoming the law of the land around the world just as the abolition of the death penalty is associated by some with reducing the brutalisation of the conscience

of society by the murderous punitive state that spares the rich and kills the poor, especially the poor people of colour (Greenberg & Agozino, 2013; King, 1978). Stan Cohen (1988) rejected such made-for-export criminology and called for more activist scholarship especially in the face of a system of oppression like apartheid that he witnessed and loathed as a child. The struggle to make the world a better place continues and criminologists have a role to play in this raging global struggle.

Activist criminologists may be relatively few but there is indeed a lot of criminological activism that criminologists should pay attention to out there. Musicians have produced lyrics that sound like criminological texts and Stephen Pfohl (1994) cited such lyrics at the top of his chapters in *Images of Deviance and Social Control* in a way similar to the prefacing of chapters in *The Souls of Black Folk* by Du Bois (1903). The work of Paul Robeson, Fela Kuti, Nina Simone, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Miriam Makeba, Mighty Sparrow, Victor Jara, Stevie Wonder, Tupac Shakur, Alpha Blondy, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mzwakhe Mbuli, Hugh Masekela, Sonny Okosun, Thomas Mapfumo, Bob Dylan, Mutabaruka, and countless others, should be required listening for all criminologists especially the activist criminologists who should not be shy to cite such work among their sources (Hall & Jefferson, 1989).

Activist criminology is also noticeable in the field of policy formulation by challenging repressive policies but also by formulating policies that the people themselves could implement. By running free medical clinics and providing free breakfast for children in poor communities, the Black Panther Party innovated the school meal program (Brown, 1992). They also indirectly taught the people the importance of being armed with breakfast to help reduce the violence in the community since a hungry person tends to be an angry person. Criminology is yet to recognise these kinds of activism as contributions to the field itself, contrary to the advocacy of Belknap (2015) or the demand by Feagin, Vera, and Ducey (2015) that we should go beyond Public Sociology and aim for *Liberation Sociology* and by extension, liberation criminology (Agozino, 2020; Agozino & Ducey, 2020). There is no reason why all the recommendations from researchers should be directed at the state and powerful corporations when citizen intellectuals and community organisers have proven that we can help to deepen democracy by also making recommendations beyond the state forces (Agozino, 2003, 2018).

Conclusion

Students ask and are entitled to know what the job potentials of interest in activist criminology would look like. This is required in the UK and elsewhere under the guise of 'employability', aiming to embed skills and abilities sought by 'employers' and to ensure that students are exposed to all the potential jobs relevant to their education. This raises the question, given the perpetual crises of the economy and precarious job conditions, would students not be disadvantaged in the job market if they subscribe to activist criminology? This question can be answered by inviting students to say if they know many unemployed activist criminologists, an oxymoron. All the chapters in *Activist Criminology* are written

by colleagues whose jobs are relatively secure, including a still very young Emeritus Professor, among the editors.

The question of the Uses of Literacy (Hoggart, 1957) and Learning to Labour (Willis, 1981) or why working-class kids get working-class jobs, and everyone lets them, are old questions that remain relevant. Jude the Obscure, stonemason of Thomas Hardy and Macbeth-Raeburn (2014), who only dreamt the 'unrealistic' dream of university education, can now afford to gain admission to universities and graduate at huge costs in terms of scary loans for fees and all of that, but without an attractive job prospect. The pressure is to apply university courses more than the theoretical one, even though theoretical contributions tend to be more influential in every field of study than applied job training. However, conventional criminologists are also activists but in service to the dominant interests of racist, imperialist, and patriarchy. It is not only activist criminologists that practice activism. There are right-wing activists and left-wing activists in every discipline.

Since most criminologists are conservative activists, being a progressive activist criminologist may carve a niche in academia for some enough to be in demand, often with initiative from students and colleagues to bring in more critical contributions. This was the way students successfully demanded the creation of Black Studies programs in elite institutions in the United States with the support of community allies (Asante, 2007). However, activist criminology is not about job training. Graduates tend to change jobs every so often and what the universities can provide are generalisable skills like critical thinking and theoretical rigour. No matter what work scholars and activists do, this book suggests that the question of how the work could contribute to the making of a more humane world should be a prerequisite. This is especially so in a field like criminology that contributes to the education of future law enforcement officers who could use their discretion and awareness of activist criminology to refuse discriminatory enforcement of the law. Others could become journalists or creative writers specialising in crime stories. It is 'weird', as Stephen Pfohl put in in his wonderful foreword to Agozino, 2003) when criminologists start questioning activism against injustice when they should join in the activism against injustice. Activist Criminology should be a required text and course in criminology for the benefit of all students. It should not be optional, in keeping with the Baker clause.

Above all, activism against injustice is not full of threats, woes, and troubles for scholars and intellectuals who choose this path. It is often fulfilling work that is done with the feeling of the 'thrilling' tale of Moses walking down to old Pharaoh and telling him to let my people go, as Martin Luther King Jr. (1986) observed in his Nobel Peace Prize lecture and as the first man on the moon, Louis Armstrong, Paul Robeson, Sweet Honey From the Rock, among many others, baritoned with big smiles. Any glance at photographs and videos of protest marches will show lots of gumboot dancing, singing, smiling, posing, despite the ever-present threat and experience of violence from the authorities or opposing right-wing activists. Yes, critical scholars do get picked on and sometimes are jailed, maimed, or killed but some conservative scholars also face cliques that turn against them and whenever European masses were mobilised to fight for unjust causes, millions of

them paid with their lives, especially during the two imperialist tribal world wars over which imperialist power would have more colonies in Africa (Du Bois, et al, 1951; Luxemburg, 2016).

The activist attitude to the job is to understand that most criminologists, including activist criminologists, are privileged members of the petit bourgeoisie. We are not the oppressed illiterate peasants of Paulo Freire (2007) who dreamt of becoming landlords to get a chance to oppress other peasants. Most criminologists enjoy the work of contributing, no matter how modest, towards ideas and activism that advance freedom and humanity. Such progressive achievements would be a thing of joy to anyone who is not a mean sado-masochist with the knowledge and power to do otherwise.

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