Left Realism: A Radical Criminology for the Current Crisis

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Abstract

The renewal of the Left realist tradition in criminology is vital for a critical understanding of crime and criminal justice in the context of a dominant neoliberalism. Left Realism presented two core components: the local democratic community control of policing and crime prevention and the analytical 'square of crime'. Two strategies for renewing the tradition are contrasted: the re-elaboration and updating of the core concepts or the incorporation of new themes – specifically critical realist philosophy – from outside the original paradigm. While these two are not mutually exclusive I argue that most of the proposed critical realist innovations are already present in the core concepts of Left Realism and that it is here, in the focus on struggles for local democracy and in the deconstructive tradition of the 'square of crime', that the future for Left Realism lies.

Keywords

Realism; democracy; deconstruction; Left Realism; neoliberalism.

Introduction

The publication of Roger Matthews' book (Matthews 2014) hopefully signifies a resurgence of interest in and development of Left realist criminology. Such an elaboration is vital: although conventional street crime has been falling for some time in most industrialised countries, it still remains at high levels while new forms of criminality (for example, terrorism, cybercrime, environmental pollution, financial fraud and money laundering) are expanding. Such expanding criminalities are the accompaniment to increasing global social inequality, social polarisation and economic crisis supervised by increasingly authoritarian neoliberal security states (Hallsworth and Lea 2012; Lea and Hallsworth 2012a). It is clear that a new consolidation of radical criminology, attuned to these developments, is a pressing task to which a reinvigorated Left Realism can make a major contribution.

Left Realism, as such, has had a chequered history since its inception in the mid-1980s. Originating as a form of political intervention and then moving to develop major innovations in theorisation of crime control, its demise has been frequently pronounced from various points of the political spectrum. From mainstream criminology:

> Left realists are former radical or critical criminologists who have recognized the reality of crime, have softened their critique of capitalist society and the criminal justice system ... The empirical validity of left realism, however, has not been established. (Akers and Sellers 2008: 260)

And from a somewhat more ironic social democratic standpoint:

> It may not be inaccurate to argue that left realism is now little more than the name taken by mainstream criminology when it appears in radical circles. (Downes and Rock 2003: 301)

Moreover, Left realist criminology features (in the UK at least) on most sociological criminology courses, including at sub-degree level and no criminology or sociology of deviance textbook is complete without a chapter on Left or 'new Left Realism'. This is despite the lack of a book-length definitive theoretical statement and the fact that some of its major early theorists shifted their emphasis away from an explicit identification with the label (see Young 2011). A resurgence of interest in Left Realism has nevertheless been underway for some time. In 2010 a special issue of the journal *Crime Law and Social Change* (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 2010) brought together a number of both theoretical and applied contributions. Meanwhile the untimely death of Jock Young has been the occasion for a number of reflections on his contribution to the development of Left Realism (for example, Brotherton and Naegler 2014; Currie 2014; Lea 2014).

The task of renewing a body of theory can be tackled from at least two standpoints. One is to re-elaborate and update the core concepts of the tradition and critically apply them to new circumstances introducing modifications and shifts in emphasis along the way. Another is to regard the original contributions as important but lacking in crucial respects and in need of a blood transfusion from a new set of concepts from outside the existing paradigm. Several writers in radical criminology have taken the latter approach, either regarding Left Realism as an antecedent to their own new theoretical synthesis (Hall 2012) or as requiring an injection of fresh ideas, notably from varieties of critical philosophy. This approach is taken to some extent by Walklate (2007) and certainly by Matthews (2014). Matthews (2014: 28) argues that 'left realism was essentially a political project aimed at providing a left social democratic response to the dominant liberal-conservative consensus within criminology', and strongly identifies the school of critical realist philosophy associated with Roy Bhaskar (2008) and others as offering

'the opportunity to develop Left realist analysis further and to place it upon a firmer epistemological and methodological foundation.'

Matthews is correct to point to the origins of Left Realism as a political project but it does not follow from this that it is epistemologically or methodologically weak. I argue in this article that, on the contrary, its political origins are one of its strengths and in particular that the politics of Left Realism already implied epistemological and methodological orientations which substantially cohered with those of Critical Realism. I will argue that the further development of its core concepts – the democratisation of crime control and the integrative framework of the 'square of crime' – is the best way in which Left Realism can contribute to the general resurgence of radical criminology.

The democratic imperative

The starting point of Left Realism was local democracy. The context in which it emerged in the UK during the early 1980s was the need for a Left social democratic response to the problem of crime control. Left realists faced two opposing perspectives. On the one hand, a conservative 'law and order' policy stressed police powers and penal repression while, on the other, a 'Left Idealism' saw the criminality of the poor as a combination of media induced 'moral panic' and criminalisation by ruling elites of what were, in effect, primitive forms of rebellion (Gilroy 1982; Hall et al. 1978). In the middle were deprived working class communities who suffered from both ineffective and racist policing *and* high rates of (intra-class) crime (on top of all the other deprivations). Social democratic politics in the form of the Labour Party had, at that time, little to say on the issue, from a fear that highlighting the problem would play into the hands of the law and order lobby.

The core insight of Left Realism comprised three interlinked propositions: that effective policing requires a flow of information about crime from local communities to police; that this flow is the result of trust of police by community; and that such trust, having broken down, can only be restored by the democratic accountability of police to the community. A community would trust its police if the latter shared its priorities in terms of focusing on the crimes that the community defined as serious and by the policing methods that it regarded as legitimate.

But police accountability is only one aspect of the 'democratic imperative'. Democracy itself was seen as a constitutive factor in the renewal of working class communities, already by the early 1980s blighted by deindustrialisation, political marginalisation and weakening social cohesion. Communities would be unable to formulate their policing – or wider social policy – needs if they lacked the necessary degree of cohesion, if they were simply isolated collections of individuals and families. Thus Left Realism was anything but a capitulation to an empiricist 'naive real' view of crime. It was understood that the 'reality' of crime could only be the outcome of a democratic debate in which all sections of the community participated: a 'critical community' (Koczanowicz 2015; see also Crick 1966). Setting up the structures for such debate was an essential part of community building.

The first step in this direction – and indeed the only one that Left realists were actually able to make in the circumstances – was the focused local crime and victimisation survey. This was intended to give the community a source of information about crime independent from the police and which could be a major resource for the construction of local policing plans. Methodologically it was far ahead of the UK government's own *British Crime Survey*, which at that time had no local focus.

Some critics of Left Realism have seen the promotion of local crime surveys as further evidence of 'a return to positivism relying uncritically on victim surveys and reasserting the primacy of the police and justice system' (Worrall 2007). Likewise Walklate (2007), for example, criticised

the focus on local crime surveys by Left realists as confusing the reality of crime in a particular locality with the sum total of individual opinions revealed in the survey data.

Walklate deploys Bhaskar's (2008) Critical Realism as the basis for a critique of the Left realist use of criminal victimisation surveys. She notes that Critical Realism sees individual actions, irrespective of their intentions, as part of 'generative mechanisms,' or social processes that individual actions reproduce irrespective of the actor's intentions. The fact, for example, that marriage reproduces the modern nuclear family is quite irrespective of the individual motives for marrying. It follows that 'in order to engage in any empirical investigation of the social world, it is necessary to go beyond the 'mere appearance' of social reality' (Walklate 2007: 67). She locates an empiricism inherent in Left realist use of criminal victimisation surveys which confuses the *reality* of crime with 'the responses made by individuals to the particular questions asked at a particular moment in time ... Surveys assume that human beings are in a position to know reality' (Walklate 2007: 68).

But these issues – which amount to little more than the starting point of the sociological method as such – were, and are, well known and Left realists obviously considered them. We understood that democracy was more than the sum of isolated opinions revealed in a social survey. That is why the one example of Left Realism as social policy in action, the *Islington Crime Survey* (Jones, MacLean and Young 1986), was careful to precede the survey with discussions and public meetings with dwellers in high crime housing estates (projects) and other community groups. These helped garner public support for the survey and a consequent high response rate as well as helping to feed in key survey questions. A similar process followed the publication of the survey results. In other words, the survey is one vital component of a process of public democrati*c debate* and opinion formation: part of an embryonic radical 'public' sociology and criminology (see Hallsworth and Lea 2012; Loader and Sparks 2010; Wacquant 2011). In the radical conception of democracy, the split between individual opinions and 'generative mechanisms' merges as policy-making becomes a *conscious* and *collective* process. The alternative is a dangerous potential for a conservative dependence on 'the expert' (the criminologist, the local bureaucrat, the police commander) as the ultimate arbiter of reality.

It is also through such debate that the community comes to constitute and renew itself. Different groups within the community discover common interests, learn the process of political compromise and discover the real locus of power in society. Social surveys are one aspect of this deliberative process. In the founding text of Left Realism, *What Is To Be Done About Law and Order* (1984), Jock Young and I wrote:

> Democracy ... has an educative and an integrative function in itself. It is through participation in decision-making in matters that affect our lives that we learn political responsibility, the respect for other people's right to their point of view, and the acceptance that the final decision will have to be a compromise between differing points of view. (Lea and Young 1984: 239)

In this process it is vital to ensure that all members of the community participate and to avoid a situation in which one section of the community either ignores the needs of others or mobilises against them as 'outsiders'. Left Realism, in focusing on victimisation in poor communities, was fully aware of the struggles of victim support organisations and in particular the movement by women's groups to publicise hitherto silenced discourses on sexual assault and domestic violence as well as all forms of what would today be called 'hate crime' based on ethnicity or sexual orientation.

In a similar way it is vital that those vulnerable to offending, victimisation and anti-social behaviour participate fully in the democratic structures of the community. For example, penalties for anti-social behaviour must not simply involve exclusion from certain areas or

activities but the opportunity and obligation to participate in activities that integrate the individuals concerned into forums of discussion and taking of responsibilities. Close liaison between the community and local probation services is necessary. The best UK research on desistance from crime shows that it is not a matter of offenders 'thinking skills' or technological surveillance and risk assessment but one of getting individuals back into non-criminogenic relations within the community (for example, Maruna and Farrall 2004). For Left Realism, the process of community reintegration is as much oriented to crime prevention as to criminalisation and crime control.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that in dealing with problems and harms facing the community, criminalisation is one option among others. The outcome of democratic deliberation may well be a reduction in policing – what Left realists called 'minimal policing' (Kinsey, Lea and Young 1986) – in favour of other alternative sources of conflict resolution such as restorative justice. Matthews does not dwell on these themes in detail although he includes a very brief discussion of the growing regulation of sub-criminal activities (mainly of young people) by means of injunctions such as (in the UK) Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) or similar. He argues that ASBOs are not just forms of 'get-tough' control but are designed to enlist the support of parents and family aiming to fuse the preventative and the punitive (Matthews 2014: 148). A discussion of the role of the community, as specified in classic Left Realism, as a resource for reintegration through democratic deliberation could enable such measures to be part of an integrative, rather than a punitive, repressive process or one simply focused on the family.

Resisting neoliberalism

Left Realism as a political project in the UK emerged a full decade before the New Labour governments led by Tony Blair, which in many respects continued the neoliberal tradition of the preceding Thatcher governments. The Blair governments focused on local communities as forms of social control against intra-class petty crime. Indeed, some suggested that Left Realism had a degree of influence in this respect (Walklate 2007: 78-80). However, despite new initiatives in local consultation, New Labour's strategy of 'community safety' 'tended to be built in the face of marginalised and disorderly groups rather than through their re-integration into a democratic local public sphere' (Lea 2010: 146). Earlier, Jock Young had similarly distanced himself from a policy that aimed fundamentally 'to exclude and isolate the deviant' (Young 1999: 44-5). Young also noted the contradiction involved in attempting to build community cohesion through mechanisms – such as CCTV surveillance – which rely on suspicion of others (see also Prior 2005). The police in a similar way sought to use local communities as information sources by making alliances with respectable citizens to more effectively marginalise petty crime and anti-social behaviour: the antithesis of traditional Left realist approaches to police accountability. Probation services, meanwhile, were forced to embrace the mantras of public protection and risk management and so relaxed their traditional focus on getting offenders back into viable community life (Fitzgibbon and Lea 2010).

The situation today (2016) in the UK is much worse in many respects than it was when Left Realism emerged during the mid-1980s. Firstly, social conditions have deteriorated. Working class communities already undermined by decades of de-industrialisation are now being destroyed by government-imposed austerity: massive cuts to social services combined with a regime of coercive 'workfare' and precarious low wage employment for the young. Meanwhile declining public expenditure has cleared the way for privatisation of state assets, aspects of policing and probation and, importantly, large areas of public space and housing from which the poor – the young in particular – find themselves increasingly excluded in the interests of 'security' (Hatherley 2012; Minton 2009). In terms of wealth distribution, the UK has become, meanwhile, one of the most unequal societies in Western Europe (Dorling 2014).

Secondly, political marginalisation has increased. A recent report into the health of democratic politics in the UK concluded, 'almost all available indicators suggest that representative democracy is in long-term, terminal decline, but no viable alternative model of democracy currently exists' (Wilks-Heeg et al. 2012: 10). Left Realism developed in the aftermath of the 1981 riots in Brixton (London) and Liverpool and saw the latter as a response to the toxic combination of high levels of relative deprivation combined with political marginality. The riots of 2011, beginning in Tottenham (London) and spreading to most major cities in England can be seen to reflect the same phenomena on a larger scale (Lea and Hallsworth 2012b). Behind the superficial characterisation of the riots as an orgy of looting and consumption (Treadwell et al. 2013) lay real grievances by young people about cuts in social spending, being driven from public space and harassment by aggressive policing combined with a strong feeling of social and political marginality (Lewis 2012; Newburn, Lewis and Metcalf 2014). The police themselves (in London in particular), reviewing their practice immediately after the riots, clearly saw 'community engagement' as a strategy firmly under their control and mainly a source of intelligence gathering, something which had obviously failed to forewarn them of the impeding disturbance (Metropolitan Police Service 2012).

Under such circumstances it is harder for Left Realism to see itself as a social democratic project in the same way as during the early 1980s. Left realist themes need re-elaboration to meet new challenges: in particular the increasing role of privatisation. Local communities will have to re-assert control over the privatisation and securitisation of public space, to counter both the power of property (real estate) developers to engage in 'social cleansing' (driving poor families from the area by rent rises) and the role of multinational private security companies in protecting this process. As regards the latter, local communities must become the key negotiators for private security contracts so that contractors work for the community rather than the property developers. Also acceptable employment conditions and training for private security employees must be written into contracts. Obviously such localised initiatives only make sense in the context of radical central government measures against the destruction of public space, in defence of public housing and to increase the economic and legal resources at the disposal of local communities. The autonomy of local communities only makes sense in the context of a strong welfare state to guarantee resource allocation (Braithwaite 2000).

In global capitalism today, control over financial resources passes continually away from national governments to the international cabals of bankers and financiers (Mair 2013) while neoliberalism attempts to capture localism as a form of 'self-responsibilisation' shorn of any actual power over resources or institutions (Bell 2015). Today, therefore, the achievement of local democracy is integrally related to the struggle against neoliberal austerity. Finally, it must be remembered that the Left realist vision of democratic community was never actually put fully into practice and therefore debates about its dynamics remain unresolved. In order to develop further, Left Realism needs to engage with on-going debates in political theory around various conceptions of associative, deliberative and participatory democracy (see, for example, Fung and Wright 2003; Hirst 2000; Koczanowicz 2015; Taylor 2007; Westall 2011) as well as the new popular democratic movements emerging in Europe and elsewhere.

The shape of crime

The radical democratic imperative of Left Realism is not stressed by many commentators in criminology and is largely absent from Matthews' (2014) treatment. Also absent from his discussion is any sustained treatment of the subsequent theoretical elaboration of Left Realism in the form of the 'square of crime', a framework for the analysis of crime and crime control in terms of the interaction between four 'participants' in the process: offenders, victims, criminal justice agencies and communities (Lea 1992, 2002; Young 1987, 1992). It is important to understand that this framework arose directly from the political orientation to local democracy discussed above. The struggle for democratic crime control took us beyond the immediate dyad

of offender and victim (action) to its opposite: (reaction) by state and community/public. The practical intervention gave rise to theory: our practical work on the ground showed us that you can't just talk about 'crime'. As soon as you attempt to understand a *particular type* of crime you have to see it in the context of interaction with the criminal justice agencies (the police is what we had been concentrating on), the victim, the community and the offender.

There is no suggestion of completeness of the 'square' as if it were some form of structural functionalist formalism or set of *a priori* concepts specifying the dynamic of all forms of crime and crime control. The interactions between the participants will vary for particular types of crime in particular types of community. The square is rather a *starting point for critical analysis of crime*. Left Realism developed a methodology somewhat akin to that expounded by Karl Marx as 'the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete'. Marx gives as an example the process of starting from an abstract category such as 'population':

> The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. These classes in turn are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest (e.g. wage labour, capital, etc.). These latter in turn presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc. … From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations. (Marx 1858/1993: 100)

Left Realism attempts something very similar with the concept of 'crime.' Rather than taking this abstraction as given and trying to theorise it at that level, seeing particular types of crime as simply emanations of this general concept as, for example, with the search for a 'general theory of crime' (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), the methodology of the square of crime is to 'take the phenomenon of crime apart' and lay bare crime control and criminalisation as a set of social relations. As Jock Young succinctly put it:

> Fundamentally, realist criminology involves an act of deconstruction. It takes the phenomenon of crime apart, breaking it down to its component pieces and sequences: … [and then] … places together these fragments of the shape of crime in their social context over time – to capture the real forces behind the one-dimensional time-frozen images of conventional accounts. (Young 1987: 337)

It should be added that the deconstruction process applies equally to the other parts of the square: victims, communities and criminal justice processes as they interact with each other and to wider forms of social structure and power relations involving class, gender, ethnicity, politics, law and the state and of course the economy. The purpose of deconstruction is to reconstruct at a more concrete and elaborate level, as a 'rich totality of many determinations and relations'. Particular types of crime vary enormously in the relations of power, trust or conflict between the particular participants to the 'square'. This process of deconstruction of 'crime' through exposing the complex dynamics of criminalisation at work in particular scenarios does not reveal crime as having 'no ontological reality' as in Louk Hulsman's famous phrase (Hulsman 1986) now adopted by the so-called 'zemiology' school (Hillyard et al. 2004), but rather shows precisely how that reality is built up out of concrete social relations (Lea 1987, 2002). As long as capitalism imposes a particular social division of labour, most useful goods will exchange as commodities and, for similar reasons, many acts of harm and violence will be dealt with as crime. This is not a question of which concepts have or lack 'ontological reality' but of the division of labour in society and the associated power relationships. These can be partially, but only partially, modified within existing structures and it may or may not be to the gain of human rights if they are.

From Critical Realism to Left Realism

Had Matthews spent more time expounding the methodology of the square of crime as a foundational core of Left Realism, he would arguably have seen less need to recruit critical realist philosophy as a device to put Left Realism on 'a firmer epistemological and methodological foundation'. Similar considerations apply to Walklate's misreading of Left Realism's attitude to social survey results. The problem with Matthews' approach is that he writes as if Left realists had not been thinking about these issues for some time (see Lea 2002) and gives the impression that Left Realism had not already emerged from the dichotomy which he sets up between the empiricist methodology of 'Naïve Realism', which takes existing definitions of crime for granted, and the critical realist understanding of crime as a 'complex social construction'. The methodology of the square of crime was *precisely this*: to see crime as a complex social construction.

A detailed debate as to whether the Critical Realism philosophy developed by Bhaskar et al. is a restatement of, or in opposition to, the Marxist materialist methodology mentioned above is best left to others (see, for example, Magill 1994). Nevertheless there are plenty of scholars in a variety of social science disciplines inspired by Critical Realism who provide formulations entirely compatible with the type of Marxist inspired deconstruction, which I have above associated with the square of crime. A particularly succinct presentation comes from the political scientist David Bailey:

> Thus as Bhaskar shows, the positivist view of causality is steeped in a Humean conception of independent entities, whereby the repeated observation of co-existence between certain entities suggests that one entity is able to 'cause' the occurrence of the other. In contrast, the critical realist approach asserts that the particular outcomes are the produce of social relations ... The critical realist scientific method consists of the attempt to identify and describe the generative mechanisms contained within particular structures of social relations in reality. (Bailey 2009: 21)

This is exactly the deconstructive methodology adopted by Left Realism. The exploration of the 'shape of crime' as a set of social relations described by the 'square of crime' is an example of the 'generative mechanisms' which Critical Realism specifies as a necessary stage in the process of explanation. Matthews himself gives a good example of this. Criticising rational choice theories in criminology, he argues that the choice to commit crime is only understandable in the context of a more complex totality involving the norms of social control and learning, which affects motivation and emotions (see Matthews 2014: 72-75). This is in fact the strategy of the square of crime: to locate the offender and their motivations within a complex of social relations or 'generative mechanisms'. The complexity of social relations have to be traced through all dimensions of the square of crime and, through the extended process of deconstruction, to the wider society, political economy, social class and the state. This is, on the face of it, entirely compatible with Critical Realism's notion of the specification of generative mechanisms. The point is simply that Left Realism had already made the key move and thus does not stand in need of a 'firmer epistemological and methodological foundation'.

Criminalisation and power

On other issues, however, Matthews (2014) is right. He correctly laments the current state of criminology as polarised between a managerialist 'administrative' criminology on the one hand and, on the other, a liberal criminology, which is 'light on policy formation' (Matthews 2014: 26). He is also correct when he points out in an earlier contribution (Matthews 2009) that Left Realism has produced rather little in the way of concrete analysis deploying the square of crime methodology. He noted that, while there are studies analysing crime by reference to two or three of the components of the square, 'it is extremely rare to find an approach that examines

the changing nature of crime by incorporating all four dimensions into the analysis' (Matthews 2009: 346). Partly, this may be due to the fact that when the main preoccupation of the criminal justice agencies is with such consensual forms of street crime as burglary, robbery and theft, the main relationship could be seen as that of the criminal justice system (primary the police) and the offender, and other aspects of the 'square' (the willingness of the victim to report the crime, of the community to give evidence etc.) could be taken for granted.

But once we move to other forms of crime this is not the case. Crimes such as sexual assault, domestic violence and child abuse more clearly problematise the relations of trust between the victim and the criminal justice agencies and between victims and the community as well as possible collusion between offenders and their communities. Other varieties of powerful offender such as fraudulent business or organised crime raise complex issues of lack of victim knowledge of the crime, intimidation of communities by the offender and collusion between criminal justice agencies and the offender. In the analysis of powerful offenders the importance of a concrete analysis of all aspects of the square of crime is more obvious.

At the present time in most industrialised countries traditional street crime has been slowly falling for some years. But several developments herald new opportunities for the type of analysis offered by the square of crime. Firstly, the fall in street crime (often portrayed as a 'fall in crime') is to a considerable extent one side of the coin of a shift to forms of crime associated with powerful and sophisticated offenders (see Fitzgerald 2014). Those types of crime on the increase – cybercrime, organised crime, massive corporate fraud reaching to the heart of the banking system, organised child sexual abuse networks, illegal intrusions into personal privacy by both state and private organisations, environmental pollution by large corporations – call for a methodology which goes beyond the one-dimensional analysis of the relationship between crime and the police to unpack the complex social relations and forms of power involving all participants in the square and which can afford to be sanguine about the limitations of criminalisation without facing a 'crisis of criminology'.

Thus the most effective ways of dealing with some types of crime may lie with the community rather than the criminal justice agencies. This is not simply 'crime prevention' in the conventional sense but direct community participation in reducing the power of criminals. In Italy, for example, forms of civil society mobilisation such as mass refusal to pay protection money have played a direct role in combatting Mafia power (Becucci 2011; Forno and Gunnarson 2009). Community action may be especially important where the criminal justice agencies are themselves heavily compromised through collusion with powerful offenders.

A similar methodology can be applied to the expanding areas of green criminology and the study of corporate crime. Global corporations wield massive power to avoid control whether by criminal justice agencies or forms of informal regulation without in anyway constituting themselves as part of a deviant or marginalised subculture (Ruggiero 2015). For example, since the global crisis of 2008, in the area of financial crime only marginal deviants such as Harry Madoff have been prosecuted while far greater criminality in the banking system as a whole has been ignored (Monaghan and O'Flynn 2012; Rakoff 2014). Similar considerations apply to large industrial corporations engaged in environmental pollution causing global warming. Political power and corruption enable the negation of almost any effective criminalisation (see Klein 2014; White 2011). For Left Realism the important emphasis is action at all points of the square of crime. To the extent that criminalisation is seen as a viable strategy it must involve struggle to recast corporations as criminal offenders, to get those who suffer harm to clearly identify as victims, to develop new criminal law and enforcement methods against recalcitrant corporations and to enhance the power of communities against corporations. An example of the latter component in relation to environmental damage would be the placing of community and trade union representatives – with veto powers – on the boards of polluting corporations (McQueen 1992). Many examples can be given and of course many criminologists, other social

scientists and political activists are involved in such struggles. The advantage claimed for the square of crime is that it facilitates an integrated perspective.

A further advantage is that the square of crime framework goes beyond a purely criminological analysis to embrace a wider spectrum of strategies to deal with harmful practices. Criminalisation remains an important strategy for dealing with some harms but its viability has to be plotted in terms of the relations of power and trust between the participants in the square. The reality of crime is the process of criminalisation articulated through the social relations of the square of crime. Problems can shift in both directions. Thus there are struggles for decriminalisation as, for example, with the growing movement for the decriminalisation of drugs trading as well as struggles for the more effective criminalisation of, for example, the violation of environmental regulations or sexual or racial assault. These movements can be usefully studied through the square of crime, which can provide a framework in which the insights of other disciplines (such as the sociology of social movements) can be incorporated.

Finally, the social relations of crime control analysed by the square of crime may break down, be displaced or blur with other relations of conflict in a number of ways. Community action against offenders which dispenses entirely with and substitutes itself for the criminal justice agencies – due to the absence, corruption or politicisation of the latter – may lead to vigilantism or 'frontier justice' (Steinert 2003). This poses an issue of high contemporary relevance: the relationship between crime and warfare, not so much the classic warfare between states but the 'new wars' (Kaldor 1999) or civil wars characteristic of state breakup particularly – but not exclusively – in the global south. In recent decades there have been consistent efforts by the international community to criminalise especially the latter variety of armed conflict through special tribunals and the International Criminal Court (ICC). The problems facing the ICC in bringing 'offenders' to justice as well as attempting to replace armed conflict by conventional criminal justice systems in post-conflict territories are of course substantial. The square of crime approach again emphasises that action is required at all points of the square. It is not just a question of the resources available to police forces – usually external forces acting under United Nations or NATO mandates – but also their legitimacy in the eyes of local communities as a whole as well as victims. The communities themselves, particularly if until recently divided by civil war may lack agreement over the general identities of victims and offenders. It may well be that in the early post-conflict stages criminal justice solutions are not viable and that strategies aimed at community reconciliation are more useful (Lea 2010, 2015).

Conclusion

The above are simply examples of the type of creative thinking about crime control which may be encouraged – though not of course restricted to – the square of crime approach. Equipped with such an approach, Left Realism is able to investigate a diversity of situations, embracing crime, other forms of harm, warfare and armed conflict, starting out from a single comparative framework. The stress on the necessity in any situation for action and policy embracing all points of the 'square' preserves the democratic impulse of Left Realism.

The point is not that the square of crime analysis provides a total explanation of all these dynamics; that is the job of sociology, political science and political economy. But criminology is a rendezvous discipline. The square, rather, helps to maintain *in this fluid and fast changing world* a distinct criminological standpoint – that of the study of criminalisation and crime – and can take a pragmatic view on how far situations can be analysed as interactions of offenders and victims: that is, how far criminalisation is possible or desirable as a distinct way of resolving conflicts in different types of situations. Other possibilities are always available – from warfare at one end to restorative justice at the other – and whether these are better or reluctantly inevitable depends on the situation.

Conversely the operation of the square of crime where it is secure and unproblematic illustrates the presuppositions of the criminalisation process: that it works effectively where the offender is weak; the definition of crime is consensual; where the community recognises the victim, condemns the offender and supports the criminal justice agencies; and where the latter support the victim and prosecute the offender. By making clear these relations of power and trust which lie at the heart of a successful criminal justice process Left Realism lays the basis for a radical critique of the distortions of those relations in actually existing criminal justice processes. Left Realism's orientation to 'taking crime seriously' was a programme for a mobilisation of working class communities around criminal justice issues *as part of* a radical programme for social justice. Such an approach is now more relevant than ever.

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