

## International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy



### Book Review

**Sarah Armstrong, Jarrett Blaustein and Alistair Henry (eds.)**  
**(2017) *Reflexivity and Criminal Justice: Intersections of Policy, Practice and Research*. Palgrave: London.**

**Margaret Pereira**

Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Criminologists and other academics are increasingly opposing managerial pressures to market their work to funders and users in public, private and third sectors, and have expressed concerns about the implications of research commodification on their academic autonomy (p. 3). Research funding shapes assumptions about the research problem, the methods of investigation, and the channels for dissemination of research findings. This is largely due to the impact agenda which determines levels of research funding for academic departments and, hence, the viability of these departments (p. 8). Funding for research is becoming increasingly competitive, yet criminology as a discipline is flourishing in Australia, Europe and Northern America due at least in part to the field's strength in arguing for its relevance in order to maintain security (p. 3).

Over the past thirty years or so, crime control has become increasingly politicised, with law-and-order common sense proposing quick remedies to the problem by assigning more powers to police, and more punitive law-and-order policies (Hogg and Brown 1998). This type of criminological discourse has become influential as states reassert the myth of the sovereign state capable of providing security, law-and-order and crime control (Garland 1996). Consequently, criminological research has tended to engage with criminal justice policy and practice within a highly politicised contested sphere of public policy (p. 6).

In this book, reflexivity is presented as a tool for navigating the practical and ethical dilemmas confronting academics within changing academic research environments. With a growing need for criminologists to be cognisant of how structural and cultural conditions within the higher education sector influence research questions and methods, reflexivity is conceived not only as a way to approach research but also as a way of centring and exploring the intersection of policy, practice and research (p. 4).

The book is organised in three, crosscutting, loosely themed parts (p. 25). Authors examine reflexive approaches to criminal justice policy research; collaboration and knowledge exchange through engagement between researchers, practitioners and policy makers; and researcher positionality, power and the reflexive imperative. Within the 16 chapters, international scholars in law, criminology, sociology, psychology, and policing explore the work criminologists do, the

conditions under which they do it, the nature of the research process, and the institutions which shape it (p. 16). Collectively, they illuminate the ways in which criminological research intersects with the fields of criminal justice policy and practice (p. 16).

For the authors of this insightful collection, reflexivity is an orientation to and practice of research which unpacks how concepts of research integrity or rigour are socially and politically constructed. This reveals how neutral legal and scientific language—such as that which is embedded in positivist measures—is deeply racist and sexist and blinds us from seeing other forms of oppressive practices. In contrast, a reflexive perspective demands the clarification of the biases that are part of all research processes (p. 23). In this volume the authors ‘do’ reflexivity using a plurality of approaches, showcasing important explorations of the questions, situations and relationships that comprise contemporary criminology and criminal justice (p. 24).

In the book’s introduction, the editors point to the pluralism and mutual enrichment of criminological research with its ability to support multiple research traditions and perspectives encompassing fields of history, sociology, geography, philosophy, political science, economics, and cultural theory (p. 3). Criminologists look outward to these other disciplines for inspiration and, at the same time, critically and reflexively scrutinising their own fields and the research it produces (p. 4). Being reflexive as a researcher means being transparent, accountable and responsible throughout the process of selecting a research topic, then designing, doing, interpreting the research, and disseminating results (p. 17). A reflexive research approach emerges through the activities of researchers and other actors, and is responsive to the research process itself (p. 18). Participants and users are active collaborators in the process rather than being research subjects, and the researcher engages with them as productive elements (p. 19).

In part one—‘Reflexive Approaches to Criminal Justice Policy Research’—Harry Annison analyses reflexivity in penal policy-making in the UK by exploring the Imprisonment for Public Protection sentence of the *Criminal Justice Act 2003*. Elaine Fishwick discusses how she used reflexivity in her study of youth justice policy in New South Wales from 1990-2005. Her theoretical approach with complex dynamic interaction and qualitative iterative research, and her discovery and acceptance of the importance of relationships and emotions in the policy process, provided for a richer understanding of policy decision-making (p. 57). In his study of offenders with a mental illness in Northern Ireland, Ruari-Santiago McBride examines how researchers can reflect on positionality to empathise and show solidarity with those oppressed by the criminal justice system at local, national and international levels (p. 87). Sarah Armstrong and Anita Lam explore how Scottish penal policy categorically constructs prisoners as serious/not serious or dangerous/not dangerous according to the length of their sentence. Hence, policy constitutes people serving a particular sentence as a distinct entity with particular origins, traits and needs. This was reflected in the comments of sentenced offenders whose accounts of prison were articulated in terms of their own personal lives and backgrounds (p. 102; 114-15). Bilel Benbouzid analyses how the statistical modelling of the distributions of victimisation and the prediction of repeat victimisation in England and Wales invites a particular form of reflexivity. This sociology of quantification models one way of being reflexive about statistics in criminology (p. 123).

In part two—‘Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange in Practice’—Lesley McAra uses the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime to explore the politics of engaging in a research agenda aimed at maximising the impact of criminological knowledge on policy and practice. She concludes that academics need to act as policy entrepreneurs if they are to successfully influence policy. There is a risk that the allure of impact in terms of grants and career kudos can compromise research integrity by sidestepping robust and critical engagement; hence, reflexivity must be at the heart of all that academics do (p. 149). Alistair Henry explores police-academic collaborations in Scotland, concluding that opportunities for learning and improvement arise when boundaries between the academy and the world of practices are recognised and respected

(p. 169). Similarly, Karen Lumsden investigates the value of reflexivity in developing research-practitioner collaborations in England (p. 191). Dominic Wood and Emma Williams examine how reflexivity can facilitate academic involvement in professional education of police in England (p. 2015). Mary Bosworth and Blerina Kallezi look at reflexivity in working with the Home Office and Immigration Removal Centre staff to research the experiences of detained migrants in the UK (p. 237).

In part three—'Positionality, Power and the Reflexive Imperative'—Christopher Harding reflects on the researcher's constitution and construction of the subject, in the context of a study of anti-cartel regulation across Europe (p. 265). Graham Ellison discusses his experiences of conducting research on commercial sex in Belfast. Sex work research has important implications for reflexivity due to significant disagreement about the actual object of study. There is also a problem of how the narratives of sex workers are positioned in research to reflect their diverse experiences and voices, particularly in relation to how this positioning interacts with feminist versions of reflexivity (p. 289). Kelly Stockdale explores reflexivity and the fluidity of researcher identity, particularly in relation to the insider/outsider dichotomy in qualitative research (p. 315). Andrew M Jefferson considers tensions in a Danish anti-torture organisation, based on a study of campaigners within the anti-torture movement (p. 335). In the final chapter, Jarrett Blaustein analyses the ethics of engagement in being a 'Northern' researcher in the Global South. Drawing on Carrington et al. (2015) and Connell (2007), Blaustein describes the hegemonic relationship between the 'Global North' and the 'Southern' 'subaltern' or peripheral regions, characterised by an uneven distribution of economic, political, social and intellectual capital. This has implications for an increasingly globalised higher education sector, with universities located in the Global North enjoying better reputations than those in the Global South. Blaustein concludes that, while Northern criminologists may not be empowered to change this structural dynamic, they should not be complicit in it: resistance—by challenging these issues—is both necessary and possible.

This collection makes a valuable contribution to informing reflexive practice in criminology and understanding how academics might approach research under increasing pressures to 'sell' their research to funding bodies as 'value for money'. The contributions to this book provide insightful and diverse Australian and international perspectives on doing reflexive research within the field of criminology, while meeting the challenges of the impact agenda, and the production and dissemination of criminological knowledge.

*Correspondence:* Dr Margaret Pereira, School of Justice, Faculty of Law, Queensland University of Technology, 2 George Street, Brisbane 40000 QLD, Australia. Email: m.pereira@qut.edu.au

## References

- Carrington K, Hogg R and Sozzo M (2015) South criminology. *British Journal of Criminology* 56(1): 1-20. DOI: 10.1093/bjc/azw086.
- Connell R (2007) *Southern Theory: Social Science and the Global Dynamics of Knowledge*. London: Polity Press.
- Garland D (1996) The limits of the sovereign state. *British Journal of Criminology* (36)4: 445-471. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjc.a014105.
- Hogg R and Brown D (1998) *Rethinking Law and Order*. Sydney, New South Wales: Pluto Press.