

**Conversations in a Crowded Room: An Assessment of the Contribution of  
Historical Research to Criminology**

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### An Assessment of the Contribution of Historical Research to Criminology

#### Introduction

Criminology has long manifested an interest in the past. Postwar British criminology was marked by the historical scholarship of Leon Radzinowicz, and the radical 'new criminology' of the 1970s made connections with developments in the social history of crime (see Lawrence 2012). A concern for the past is also visible in the theoretical bedrock of criminology which, for all the expansion and diversification of the subject area in the last fifty years, remains grounded in classical sociological thinkers (Karl Marx, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim) who sought to comprehend the historical transition to industrialism as a route to 'a larger understanding of social process, of history, in general' (Abrams 1982, p.4). Notions of class struggle, rationalisation and anomie still provide criminologists with theoretical vocabularies for discussing change and continuity through time. Furthermore, a few historical studies, such as Geoffrey Pearson's *Hooligan* (1983) or David Garland's *Culture of Control* (2001), have attained canonical status within British criminology. Several other prominent criminologists have undertaken substantial archival research projects, including Lucia Zedner, Paul Rock, Mary Bosworth, Tim Newburn, Paul Knepper and Mariana Valverde (to name but a few). Though criminology makes the analysis of contemporary society its fundamental mission, it nevertheless has recurrent encounters with the past.

However, the extent to which these encounters with the past have produced genuine historical *understanding* has been questioned. Garland's *Culture of Control* – to take an especially prominent example – has been criticised for offering a highly selective

historical account, which ignores spheres of deviance and regulation that do not fit easily into its central thesis (Braithwaite 2003; Loader and Sparks 2004). Indeed, Garland has been accused of 'doing violence to the past' (Loader and Sparks 2004, pp.14-15). Similar criticisms have been levelled at another historical study in the criminological canon: Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (2001; see Knepper 2016, pp.145-172). Such criticism reflects wider misgivings about how social scientists treat the past. Historians have repeatedly attacked social scientists for either ignoring or misusing the past, while social scientists have critiqued historians' tendency to eschew claims regarding the general relevance of their studies (e.g. Abrams 1982; Burke 1992; Sewell 2005). Regarding history and criminology specifically, Peter King observed some twenty years ago: 'Historians still tend to raid criminological texts without fully embracing or understanding the deeper theoretical foundations of the ideas or research they are using. Criminologists often genuflect only momentarily towards historical research and thus fail to properly contextualise the structures and recent patterns of change they are analysing.' (King 1999, pp.161-162). Criminology appears to share with other social sciences an awkward relationship with both the past itself and the academic discipline of history. Historians and criminologists have had encounters without rich understanding, exchange without effective communication, echoing the famous description of history's relation with social science as a 'dialogue of the deaf' (Burke 1992, p.2).

A cursory look at academic citations only partly supports this characterisation. Ellen Cohn and Amaia Iratzoqui's (2016) study of citations in five major international criminology journals between 2006 and 2010 revealed the 50 most-cited authors in each journal: they include criminologists, sociologists, legal scholars and psychologists, but no academic historians (Cohn and Iratzoqui 2016). The rankings

are dominated by researchers specialising in life-course or developmental criminology. Yet the top fifty authors in *The British Journal of Criminology* (BJC) include several researchers known partly or primarily for research that uses the past to make sense of the present: David Garland was the most cited author, while Michel Foucault, John Braithwaite, Pat O'Malley, Nikolas Rose and Stephen Farrall also featured in the top fifteen (Cohn and Iratzoqui 2016, p.609). Again, historical research exercises major influence over some parts of the field, though what this means for history and criminology more broadly remains unclear.

This seems an opportune moment to re-appraise the contribution that historical research has made to criminology. King examined the relationship of history and criminology in 1999 and concluded that, although it had ceased to be a 'dialogue of the deaf', it was still a conversation being conducting in 'discreet whispers' (1999, p.161). Since then, though, there has been an 'explosion' of research and undergraduate teaching in crime history (Godfrey *et al* 2008, p.18; also Flaatten and Ystehede 2014; Yeomans 2014). In recent years, 'historical criminology' working groups and networks have been formed within the European Society of Criminology, British Society of Criminology and Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology, while the North American Historical Criminology Network was created in 2019. Newer cohorts of historical researchers investigating crime and criminal justice are perhaps increasingly accustomed to cross-disciplinary engagement: they attend events spanning history and criminology, they contribute to journals across disciplines, and increasing numbers of crime historians are working within criminology departments or research groups. Collaborative, inter-disciplinary research projects, such as the 'Digital Panopticon',<sup>1</sup> are an increasingly regular feature of the research landscape, and there is a growing output of theoretical

scholarship on the value of historical research and associated methodologies to criminological research (for recent contributions, see Churchill 2019; Lawrence 2019; Yeomans 2019; Guiney 2018). Indeed, the level of interaction between criminology and history is now rather greater than it was just over ten years ago, when three leading scholars prophesied a creeping 'convergence' (Godfrey *et al* 2008, p.19) of the two fields.

All this begs the question of how best to characterise the relationship between criminology and history today. With this in mind, this article reflects on the impact of historical research on criminology. It argues that the influence of historical research on criminology is no longer best thought of in terms of dialogues between two discrete disciplines – whether in a 'dialogue of the deaf' or through 'discreet whispers'. Instead, we see more fluid, often meaningful yet sometimes fleeting connections and exchanges progressively taking shape, within a more diverse and heavily populated scholarly field. Sticking with dialogic metaphors, we suggest that the place of historical research in criminology today is better understood as 'conversations in a crowded room'. Given the tight space available here, only a provisional and somewhat cursory assessment is possible. Thus, rather than detailing the specific contributions of discrete historical studies to a long (and inevitably incomplete) itinerary of criminological topics, this article is instead structured around the fundamental substantive concerns of criminology. Edwin Sutherland and Donald Cressey once asserted that law-making, law-breaking and social responses to law-breaking constitute the core of the enterprise of criminology (see Sutherland *et al* 1992; also Cohen 1988). Sticking to these basic parameters, but pivoting away from the rather legalistic terminology in which they are expressed, we will orient our assessment of history's impact to three over-arching questions

around which criminology broadly coheres: i) what is crime? ii) Why does crime happen? iii) What do we do about it, and what should we do about it? The article assesses in turn the contribution that historical research has made to answering each of these questions.

For the purposes of this article, we define 'historical research' somewhat narrowly as research which focuses solely or primarily on the non-immediate past. Such a definition is fraught with conceptual difficulties, and some emerging work on historical criminology aims to challenge the commonplace identification of 'the historical' with 'the past' (Churchill 2018).<sup>2</sup> Yet, given the purpose of this special issue to examine the role of history and historians in contributing to crime and justice policy, this article assesses the record of mutual exchange, comprehension and enlightenment across disciplinary divides that (fruitfully or otherwise) are usually drawn upon the border between past and present.<sup>3</sup> To capture something of the various ways in which historical research has exercised influence in criminology, we touch upon both original historical research conducted within criminology and how criminologists have drawn upon and diffused the work of historians. We substantiate claims regarding influence partly through counts of citations of historical research within criminology. Of course, simple counts of citations are a hazardous index of scholarly influence: a citation can denote deep learning and vital influence, yet it can also act as a token gesture, or even a ritualistic invocation.<sup>4</sup> Yet counting citations does at least provide a starting point for quantifying the impact of historical research. They are used, alongside more interpretive assessments of impact, to think further about the transmission of scholarship across this disciplinary divide between history and criminology.

It is also worth noting at the outset that ours is principally an assessment of British criminology. We recognise that criminology is an 'eclectic' (Garland 2012, p.302) and culturally heterogeneous subject area. Cohn and Iratzoqui's (2016) citation study exposes striking international variance in which authors are highly cited, and alludes to differences in the degree to which various national criminologies engage with specific disciplines. Most importantly for present purposes, the prominence of historical researchers amongst the most cited scholars in the *BJC* was not replicated in the other four international journals.<sup>5</sup> Recognising that the configuration of criminology varies internationally – and that historical research enjoys perhaps especially high regard in Britain – we focus in what follows primarily on British criminology.

### **What is Crime?**

It is often noted that surprisingly few attempts have been made to directly answer the question of 'what is crime?' (Reiner 2016). For a subject area that coalesces around the study of crime, criminology provides little sustained empirical or theoretical enquiry into how this central object of study should be understood. Of course, most introductory criminology texts include a chapter that gives an overview of legal, moral, zemiological and social constructionist arguments. These introductory chapters typically include examples of historic 'crimes' that seem perplexing or trivial by contemporary Western standards, such as offences created by the USA's prohibition of alcohol 1919-1933 (e.g. Muncie 2002, p.14; Newburn 2017, pp.8-10), or examples of past injustices that appear grave today but were not regarded as criminal for long spans of time, such as the transatlantic slave trade (see Morrison

2013). Such examples are used to de-familiarise the present, to de-centre or dislodge contemporary assumptions by confronting readers with striking alternatives. Does something have to be illegal in order to be criminal? Can something be considered criminal if it was not illegal at the time it occurred? The past provides a reservoir of useful props to support exploration of these critical questions.

Interestingly, however, these introductory discussions tend to feature few references to actual historical research. Only 9% (48 of 511) of the bibliographic references in Reiner's *Crime* (2016), and just 8% (2 of 25) references in Morrison's chapter (2013), are to studies focused on the non-immediate past. The relevant chapter in Case *et al's* (2017) recent textbook contains no such references. While the past provides a helpful abundance of case studies, actual research on the history of crime seems rather under-used in this context.

Of course, historical research does more than afford us access to a given set of case studies. Crucially, it also offers opportunities to examine how and why conceptions of criminality change through time. The historical studies of this issue best known to criminologists are perhaps those conducted in the 1960s and 1970s by a small group of Marxist social historians, focused on the criminalisation of customary rights and its relation to class rule in eighteenth-century England (e.g. Thompson 1977; Hay 1977). Such scholarship yielded insights into wider phenomena pertinent to definitions of crime, including connections between crime, political power and class struggle, which resonated with Marxist perspectives within criminology (see Taylor 1976). Furthermore, some of their conceptual innovations have attained a criminological currency. Eric Hobsbawm's notion of 'social crime' has inspired criminological discussion (Lea 1999), while Thompson's 'moral economy' has taken on a life of its own within criminology (as elsewhere), sometimes in direct



engagement with Thompson's work (e.g. Karstedt and Farrell 2006) and sometimes not (Loader *et al* 2014). These historians have thus had a substantial impact upon criminology. Indeed, of the four entries in McLaughlin and Muncie's *Dictionary of Criminology* (2019) that have arisen from historical research, two come from this small but influential group ('moral economy' and 'primitive rebellion').

Such historical scholarship has the effect of laying bare the manner in which crime is constructed and reconstructed through time. Implicitly, at least, awareness of the historical instability – or relativity - of crime leads away from an analytical strategy to define crime as a general phenomenon and toward sustained engagement with events and processes that underpin change and continuity in how specific crimes or classes of crime are understood. Making sense of the temporal process of criminalisation thus seems more important than identifying any intrinsic property or essential characteristic that actions deemed to be criminal must share. Many classic criminological studies – including, for example, *Policing the Crisis* (Hall *et al* 1978), on the social construction of 'mugging' and the criminalisation of black youth – adopt this broadly historical approach. Of course, criminalisation has several dimensions; it can refer to criminalisation 'on paper' or 'in practice', as well as to the criminalisation of certain actions or groups (see Lacey and Zedner 2017). In these various senses, a wide range of more recent historical studies might contribute to criminological understandings of criminalisation, including research on fraud (Wilson 2014), embezzlement (Locker and Godfrey 2006), domestic violence (Wiener 2004, pp.170-239; Rowbotham 2000), homicide (Spierenburg 2008), drugs (Seddon 2010; Berridge 2013), sex work (Self, 2004; Laite, 2012), political activism (Channing 2015), juveniles (Shore 1999; King 2006, pp.73-142) the poor (Welshman 2013) and ethnic minorities (e.g. Swift 1997). This diverse corpus of research highlights that, in

addition to class conflict, a wide range of other factors have contributed towards shifting understandings of crime through time, including changing gender relations, fluctuating constructions of ethnicity, dynamic campaigns of moral entrepreneurship, varying social mores, reforms to criminal law and criminal justice, and developments in scientific knowledge (to name but a few). In turn, these studies of specific forms of criminalisation interact with wider historical research on the changing construction or representation of crime and criminals through time (Wiener 1990; Rowbotham *et al* 2013). Finally, Lindsay Farmer's (2016) rich historical survey of criminalisation extends beyond particular case studies to consider the historical specificity of modern criminal law itself. On this account, the idea of criminalisation presupposes a certain conception of criminal law as a distinctive whole, a conception that emerged at a particular historical moment, and which set the stage for subsequent, characteristically modern debates concerning its proper scope and limits.

Historical research has, therefore, clearly made meaningful contributions to attempts to address the question 'what is crime?'. The most obvious example of interchange between historical research and criminology in this area comes from the substantive, critical and conceptual contributions of British Marxist historians in the 1960s and 1970s. While their rhetorical flair and theoretical imagination is impressive, Terrence McDonald suggests that these scholars garnered such influence because their work coincided with historical developments – such as the rise of counter-culture and various radical political causes (e.g. civil rights, anti-war movements) – which had already stimulated discourses of social critique and nurtured cultural sensitivity to oppression and control (McDonald 1996). The limited size and scope of British criminology in this era probably intensified engagement with social history, as it forced criminologists to seek 'fellow travelers' outside of their immediate field.

Perhaps these connections became 'locked in' during this crucial phase in the formation of British criminology, and have simply been reproduced since. It also seems likely that the overt, radical political purpose of these historians has helped to secure their continuing influence. There is perhaps a parallel with literature on sex work, in which the work of feminist historians is widely cited within criminology and social science. Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (1980) is a very prominent example; equally, 62% of citations (81 of 130 citations recorded on Google Scholar) of Helen Self's more recent *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of Law* (2004) come from criminological sources.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding the initial impact of historical context on their positive reception, it seems that the continuing resonance of certain forms of politics has helped safeguard the ongoing appeal of leftist and feminist historical scholarship. Whatever the reasons for their disproportionate influence, there is clearly potential to incorporate a more diverse range of historical research into criminological discussions of how we should make sense of crime.

### **What Causes Crime?**

This broad criminological trope encompasses voluminous research on various topics and issues that are constituent or pertinent to the wider theme of crime causation. Much of this research falls into what Garland termed the 'Lombrosian tradition' (2002, p.8) in which studies seek to ascertain specific influences that lead some people to commit crimes, and to identify reasons why offenders eventually desist from crime. The most prominent studies today adopt a life course or developmental perspective; yet scholars in this tradition rarely refer to historical research. Robert Sampson is the most cited author in Cohn and Iratzoqui's study and his highly-cited

article 'Neighborhoods and Violent Crime' (1997) contains no references to historical research; David Farrington is the second most-cited author and his most-cited piece (Piquero *et al* 2003) similarly cites no historical research.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps historical research jars with the positivistic slant of much literature on crime causation – not just in developmental criminology, but also in other prominent frameworks, such as rational choice theory (e.g. Cornish and Clarke 2014) or biological criminology (e.g. Raine 2013). The specific nineteenth-century idea of the 'criminal class' – a sort of folk positivism which constructed criminality as the specific property of a small and marginalised subgroup of the poor – has certainly been roundly critiqued by crime historians (e.g. Bailey 1993; Philips 2003; Boritch 2005; Nijhar 2007; Emsley 2010). Moreover, in laying bare the manner in which crime is constructed and reconstructed through time, historical research militates against the very sense that a core set of factors are general causes of crime, or that a demarcated set of characteristics distinguishes criminals as a group from non-criminals.

Despite its marginalisation from the dominant theoretical frameworks of crime causation, historical research sheds valuable light on how economic, social, cultural and political change can impact upon the occurrence of crime. The link between economic necessity and crime is a feature of much historical scholarship; indeed, critiques of the notion of a 'criminal class' work by demonstrating the overlap between the 'criminal poor' and the 'working poor'. From such crimes of necessity, George Rudé (1985) rendered the concept of 'survival crime' as part of his typology of offending in the early nineteenth century (1985). Generally, the importance of material circumstances in understanding law-breaking resonates with functionalist, feminist and left realist criminologies that similarly emphasise the structural causes of crime. Yet historical research can also play a more generative role by disrupting

contemporary criminological orthodoxies. Based on a life-course study of persistent offenders in Crewe, 1880-1940, Stephen Farrall *et al* (2009) found that marriage and parenthood had little impact on desistance, in stark contrast to the findings of desistance studies conducted from the late twentieth century onwards. By arguing that the desistance effect of marriage and fatherhood is historically relative – tied, the authors hypothesise, to the degree of gender equality at in the given time – this study illuminates how the same generic experiences can have different outcomes in different historical contexts. Thus, historical research on social causes of crime can both reinforce and disrupt established criminological understandings.

There is a further body of historical research which approaches this question via aggregate changes in crime and their connection to deeper societal transformations. Specifically, there is a well-known body of historical research that mobilises Norbert Elias' concept of the 'civilizing process' (1994) to explore how structural changes, such as state formation and the rise of capitalism in Western societies, produced systemic effects on individual behavior, which in turn led to long-term decline in levels of violence (e.g. Gurr 1981; Eisner 2001; Spierenburg 2001). Randolph Roth's work on US homicide rates across modern history emphasises the causal salience of several social factors, such as perceived stability of government, perceived legitimacy of social hierarchies and strength of feelings of solidarity (Roth 2011). In a similar vein, studies of reductions in crime in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries highlight the significance of living standards, education, policing, penalty and wider social controls (Gatrell 1980; Knepper 2015). Plainly, historical research has important things to say about crime causation.

However, take up of historical research on causation within criminology is variable. Some studies, such as those by Eisner, Spierenburg and Knepper, are well-cited,

but this is not the case across the board. To explore this matter further, we looked at citations to several notable pieces of historical research on crime causation. The monograph arising from the Crewe desistance study (Godfrey *et al* 2007), and Feeley and Little's (1991) study of decline in female offending have both been well cited by criminologists. As recorded by Google Scholar, 46% (37 of 80) of Godfrey *et al*'s citations and 44% (67 of 153) of Feeley and Little's citations come from criminological sources. These authors would likely all identify as criminologists, sociologists or legal scholars, rather than as historians, and each study was published in a criminology journal or book series. By contrast, Peter King's studies of homicide and urbanisation in England and Scotland (King 2010; King 2011) have been less well noted (23% and 17% of citations respectively from criminological sources). King taps into a rich seam of criminological discussion, where key sociological concepts such as *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, anomie and strain, continue to be mined. Yet King is an historian, publishing in history journals. The contrast in fortunes reveals the importance of scholarly positioning – both of publications and of individuals – in maximising the impact of historical research on criminology.<sup>8</sup>

In summary, historical research has had a partial and uneven impact on criminological understandings of crime causation. A small number of studies are well cited within criminology, but other high quality and highly relevant research is not. There are doubtless multiple factors at work here, but the positioning of the research (the audience to which publications are addressed) seems significant.

### **How do we Respond to Crime and how should we Respond to Crime?**

The question of responses to crime is probably the most highly populated area of criminology, encompassing research on the formation and operation of criminal law, the processes and agencies of criminal justice, as well as alternative and informal responses to crime. It entails both empirical enquiry into actual responses and normative reflection on how things might be done in a fairer, more effective or otherwise better way. Both legal history and criminal justice history are well-developed fields, and so there is an abundance of historical research in this broad area. The history of prisons, for instance, has been explored in classic studies by Foucault (1991), Ignatieff (1978) and Zedner (1991), though gaps in this literature continue to be filled (e.g. Johnston 2019). There are major studies of capital punishment (Gatrell 1994; Seal 2014), criminal law and the courts, especially for the eighteenth century (King 2000; Langbein 2003), and cultural or ideological bases of criminal justice policy (Garland 1985; Wiener 1990). The topics identified and studies mentioned here are just a handful of examples; the main point is that there is considerable depth and breadth to the historical literature on social responses to crime.

Moreover, much of this rich body of research has had a tangible impact within criminology. Citation evidence bears this out: to take a prominent example, Clive's Emsley *The English Police* (1991), the leading general history of English policing, is very widely cited, with 39% of citations on Google Scholar (241 of 623) coming from criminological sources. Emsley's book seems to have become the 'go to' text for police scholars to contextualise their work historically. But this is not an isolated example: for Barbara Weinberger's (1995) oral history of mid-twentieth-century policing, 47% of citations (45 of 95) come from criminological sources. Both Emsley and Weinberger are historians, and so, given their disciplinary positioning, their

reach into criminology is impressive. Admittedly, some more focused studies have garnered somewhat less attention: a still notable 28% of citations (57 of 207) of Carolyn Steedman's *Policing the Victorian Community* (1984) come from criminological sources, but only 16% (22 of 134) of Stefan Petrow's *Policing Morals* (1994). Nevertheless, there has clearly been a fairly heavy flow of traffic between scholarship concerned principally with policing's past and that primarily oriented towards its present.

This point is reinforced by closer examination of some major debates within contemporary policing scholarship, which are meaningfully informed by historical perspectives. A key reference point here has been Robert Reiner's highly influential *The Politics of the Police* (1985), which grounded analysis of police legitimacy in an analysis of the historical development of the English police. Several of the debates following from Reiner's (and others') work have retained an historical hue. One such case is scholarship on police culture, where much attention has focused on continuity and change in the 'core characteristics' of 'traditional' police culture amidst more recent reforms and social change (see Loftus 2010). Another case concerns public sentiments towards the police – whether the post-war era witnessed a steady erosion of police-public relations, or whether contemporary perceptions of the police are instead modulated by diverse constellations of collective memory, formed along specific social and generational lines (see Loader and Mulcahy 2003). Not only have police scholars engaged meaningfully with police history, they have also (at least in the early days of police history) contributed materially to historiographical analysis, helping to expose the ideological fault lines which structured both traditional (approbatory) and revisionist (critical) histories of policing (Robinson 1979; Reiner 1985). Such fruitful exchange between police history and police studies doubtless



owes something to the intervention of particular, historically-attuned police scholars at crucial moments in the development of the field. It may also, though, owe something to the diffuse sense that police institutions are deeply rooted in history, including in the sense that they seem resistant to reform and thus 'stuck in the past'.

Besides framing contemporary debates in historical perspective, historical research on responses to crime has been a fruitful source of theoretical and conceptual development for criminology. The most famous example is Michel Foucault's seminal work, *Discipline and Punish* (1991). Through analysis of primary historical sources relating to penal theory and administration, Foucault recovered and elaborated a series of concepts ('discipline', 'panopticism', 'carceral archipelago', etc.) which have been widely applied and developed within criminology and beyond. Foucault's major contribution was in formulating tools for a critique of present penalty, rather than in offering a conventional history of the prison; yet the historical mode of his enquiry seems to have shaped his contribution and the extent of its uptake by others.

Though unparalleled in influence, Foucault's contributions are not alone in using the past as a site for conceptual innovation. More recently, scholarship on historic discourses of 'police science' has elaborated a conception of police power as a pervasive yet obscure mode of rule, which illuminates central issues in policing and criminal law scholarship (Dubber 2005; Dubber and Valverde 2006). Though the conceptual novelty of this 'new police science' has been challenged (Reiner 2010), it provides a further example of the conceptual fertility of historical research on responses to crime.

Thus, to a greater degree than with the other two foci of criminology, discussions of social responses of crime are meaningfully informed by classic works of historical research, and historical perspectives and insights remain fruitful and productive in

this broad field. Future additions to the historical literature in these areas will build upon a robust foundation and an existing platform of cross-disciplinary exchange, which has hitherto enabled historical research to be audible to sizeable constituencies of criminologists.

### **Discussion**

This article set out to assess the impact that historical research has made on criminology. Our brief review of its contributions to the three central questions of criminology suggests that the extent of exchange between these two fields is patchy. There is considerable historical research directed towards social responses to crime and a relatively good level of criminological engagement with this research. In scholarship on causes of crime, some major historical studies are well-cited within criminology, but others attract little attention; furthermore, the most high-profile criminological studies in this area make no reference to historical research. Though historical research has manifestly influenced discussions of the nature of crime and criminalisation, perhaps the greatest impression was made by the Marxist social historians of the 1960s and 1970s; references beyond this group are somewhat scarce. We have suggested that an individual's positioning – publication location, disciplinary affiliation, etc. – affects the degree to which historical research is taken up in criminological scholarship, as does the political tenor and historical context of particular scholarly interventions.

The current relationship between history and criminology is perhaps no longer best characterised as a 'dialogue of the deaf' or as 'discreet whispers'. Instead, we have multiple dialogues simultaneously and intermittently occurring. Rather than

postulating a dialogue between whole disciplines, it might be better to think of a crowded room (criminology as 'rendez-vous' discipline), in which groups of people (established sub-groups and disciplines) noisily converse, each on their own terms. A few distinctive, articulate voices carry across the hall – but most are soon lost in the noise. Amid the cacophony of dissonant dialogues, the challenge is to create new spaces of meaningful conversation, linking usually separate groups. Such interdisciplinary exchange occurs as individuals peel off from their familiar group to join another, as they communicate something overheard from a group nearby, or as a temporary hush forces a group to notice the other conversations taking place.

The inconsistent extent to which historical research has impacted on criminology is perhaps cause for concern. While the emergence of 'historical criminology' (outlined earlier) is a promising development, the fortunes of historical sociology demonstrate that promising beginnings do not necessarily lead to bright futures. In the 1980s, historical sociology was an emerging sub-field touted as having the potential to rejuvenate and transform mainstream sociology (Abrams 1982). But, by the 1990s, it was described as 'domesticated' (Calhoun 1996; Abbott 2001b, 91-120) within that mainstream: marginalised and insular, somewhat adrift from the discipline of history and without real influence over sociology. To avoid this fate, historical criminology might seek to develop a stronger profile within criminology, while maintaining and deepening relations with history as well as other disciplines (most obviously law and sociology). The challenge is to manage meaningful communication in such cacophonous surroundings; to turn stray comments into conversations, or overheard remarks into symbiotic exchange.

Based on our discussion here, it is possible to identify at least two things that might help to accomplish these ends. Firstly, the temporal breadth of criminological

engagement with historical research could usefully be extended. It is notable that much of the historical literature referred to above focuses on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This temporal skew reflects the field of crime and criminal justice history, but perhaps also the sort of historical research that criminologists are more likely to engage with. Paul Lawrence suggests that criminologists tend to think of historic data becoming increasingly useful the closer it approaches to the present (Lawrence 2019). Such presumptions discount the relevance the earlier periods of time, a point that resonates with the significance of some of the historical scholarship on violence discussed above. According to Eisner (2001), for example, societal transformations in the late medieval period have decisively shaped the level of violence that many Western societies experience today. As Andrew Abbott has argued more generally, lineal preoccupation with the recent past may constrain our capacity to recognise the causal or explanatory significance of earlier periods of time (Abbott 2001a, 161-182). On this basis, criminologists may have rather more to learn than from a chronologically expansive engagement with historical research than is usually imagined.

The second means of avoiding 'domestication' is through further efforts to generate, sustain and enhance mutually-enriching exchanges between disciplines. While we have concentrated on the contribution of historical research to criminology, the manner and extent to which historians engage with criminological research has previously been questioned too (see King, 1999). Clearly, constructive inter-disciplinary dialogues must be two-way. There are reasons to be optimistic about the prospects for fuller exchange between criminology and history. One is that the emergence of historical research on crime and justice in the twentieth century, and especially on the post-war period (see Emsley 2011), is bringing historians into

closer contact with criminological scholarship as primary source material, which might in turn prompt closer engagement with the concerns of contemporary criminology. Furthermore, growing attention to the long-term fallout from historic offences and injustices in contemporary society might prompt new partnerships between historians and criminologists; recent work on historic child abuse in England provides an apt example of such opportunities (see Jarman *et al* 2018). The legal, moral and emotional reverberations of historic offences, as well as the mounting temporal overlap of periods of interest to criminology and history, create strong practical stimuli for inter-disciplinary dialogue. As noted above, the growth of teaching courses, collaborative projects and networks oriented to 'historical criminology' may also provide the underpinnings for the further development of genuinely reciprocal exchanges.

The potential of historical research to impact criminology derives from its pertinence to the three main puzzles that lie at criminology's core. As we have shown, historical awareness supplements abstract, theoretical answers to the question 'what is crime?' with a prompt to empirically examine temporal processes that construct and reconstruct crime. It undermines positivistic attempts to identify root causes of crime amongst individual offenders and illuminates the extent to which social structures and social relations shape the propensity of particular groups to offend in different historical contexts. It reveals the origins of current responses to crime and provides an 'inventory of alternatives' (Tosh and Laing 2006, p.32) to how we currently respond to crime. Historical research, therefore, has the capacity to re-make mainstream criminology. As we have shown, the nature and extent of its impact to date is variable. There appears to have been a strong flow of traffic from history to criminology in the 1960s and 1970s, which has left a lasting impression upon

criminology. A more gradual growth in exchange seems to have occurred over the last two decades although, as we have shown, it has left an uneven footprint on the criminological field. Nevertheless, the promise of historical research to criminology is such that this loose direction of travel should be embraced as a positive step towards a more historically-informed criminology. Collaborative research projects, cross-disciplinary events and regular forums, and co-produced courses are obvious means through which to make further progress towards this goal. Such initiatives should guard against the danger of domestication, while consolidating and extending historical criminology's position as an outward-looking, cross-pollinating platform with the potential to reshape mainstream criminology.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/>

<sup>2</sup> In collaboration, the authors are currently developing a more expansive conception of 'historical criminology'.

<sup>3</sup> The article thus contributes less directly to the developing literature in historical criminology than to established work on the relation between history and criminology as disciplines (see especially King 1999; Godfrey *et al* 2008, ch. 1; Lawrence 2012).

<sup>4</sup> The merits of citation analysis within British criminology specifically have been debated previously, though in a rather different context from that presented by the present article: see Levi (1995); Cohn and Farrington (1995).

<sup>5</sup> Closest to British criminology in this respect is Canadian criminology, at least judging from most-cited authors in the *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*.

<sup>6</sup> Consistent with the interpretation of historical research already laid out, we defined 'criminological' sources here as those concerned principally with crime and social responses in the present. Beyond studies published in criminological journals, this

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included studies from various cognate disciplines which either addressed crime or social responses to crime directly, or dealt with related contemporary topics such as deviance, transgression, security, rights, regulation, governance or control. Studies dealing with these themes in delineated and non-immediate past periods were excluded. Where ambiguities arose, we relied upon the disciplinary position of the journal/publication, the disciplinary position of the author, and/or our subjective interpretation of the abstract to establish whether to count a source as criminological.

<sup>7</sup> The reference list in Sampson et al (1997) includes titles for books but not journal articles. Hence, in this case, we made the assessment of whether a journal article constituted historical research based on the journal in which it was published.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Rudé's (1985) typology of crime is well-known in criminology despite its basis firmly in the discipline of history. It seems likely that his affiliation with the British Marxist historians has helped garner attention to this study.

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