

Critical Criminology: Continuity and Change

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Schwartz, M. D., & Hatty, S. E. (2003). *Controversies in Critical Criminology*. Albany, NY: Anderson.

Carrington, K., & Hogg, R. (2002). *Critical Criminology: Issues, Debates and Challenges*. Cullompton, Devon, United Kingdom: Willan.

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In a weak world, it is difficult to know where to turn for clean, strong explanations.
Lemert 1995, p. 114

We want to situate our review essay in the space between two essays in social science that exemplify the distance between critical criminology's origins and its present formations. The first is an essay by Alvin Gouldner (1968/1973b) that sets the tone for the emergence of a critical criminological enterprise. The second is an essay by Michael Burawoy (2005a) that helps to define some of the contemporary problems facing any "critical" social scientific project. The two essays only tangentially address core issues in critical criminology, but nevertheless they establish important parameters within which that project has developed.

In the Spring of 1968, when Europe's major cities were besieged by radicals and revolutionaries and waves of political opposition swept the developed and developing world, when Paris was barricaded and Prague was in the calm of its socialistic experiment before the approaching communist storm, Alvin Gouldner published an essay in *The American Sociologist* titled "The Sociologist as Partisan: Sociology and the Welfare State" (Gouldner, 1968/1973b). It was a sometimes sarcastic and brutal but characteristically insightful and sharp critique of what he called the "Becker School" of sociology—especially as it related to law-breaking and norm-transgressing outsiders. Gouldner's attack came as something of a surprise to the academic world for two reasons. First, as Gouldner pointed out, only a few years earlier he had laid into the "dominant ideology of professional sociologists": the ideology of a value-free social science. This ideology, he had claimed in 1961, was

useful to those young, or not so young, men who live off sociology rather than for it, and who think of sociology as a way of getting ahead in the world by providing them with neutral techniques that may be sold on the open market to any buyer. (Gouldner 1961/1973a, p. 12)

The myth of value freedom provided sociologists with a moral escape clause and led to an abandonment of public responsibility for social ills. "If we today," Gouldner (1961/1973a, p. 25) continued in venomous prose,

concern ourselves exclusively with the technical proficiency of our students and reject all responsibility for their moral sense, or lack of it, then we may some day be compelled to accept responsibility for having trained a generation willing to serve in a future Auschwitz.

Gouldner's dismissal of the myth of value freedom seemed to place him on the side of the radicals, the critics, the new generation of engaged sociologists whose morals tended to be openly displayed rather than surreptitiously veiled, and who willingly declared their desire to take sides in matters of social injustice. Thus, the second reason why Gouldner's attack was unexpected was because the Becker School—and Becker as its systematizer in particular—had been instrumental in challenging the conventional precepts of the sociology of deviance: the assumption of a consensual moral order, the belief that deviant behavior was inevitably and immanently pathologically different from the norm, and the unexamined proposition that criminalizing behaviors decreases, rather than increases, crime. What Becker and others pointed to was that creating crime is a social accomplishment underpinned by a dominant moral paradigm that branded some segments of society as deviant in a political drama (Becker, 1974, p. 45, as cited in Sumner, 1994) in which the act of labeling held center stage.

But Gouldner's (1961/1973a) essay was nothing if not prescient. In attacking the failure of the skeptical deviancy theory of the Becker School to confront the wider structural sources of power and authority, its seeming inability to address gross social divisions of wealth and status, and its lack of attention to the larger political and economic interests that were embedded in departments of state and industrial and financial corporations alike, Gouldner pinpointed with some accuracy the radical motivations of a soon-to-emerge "new criminology." In the same year in which Gouldner launched his assault on Becker, a group of disaffected young social scientists established the National Deviancy Conference (NDC) as a direct challenge to conservative, mainstream British criminology. Equally dissatisfied with the positivist and "correctionalist" bent of the mainstream and the antipolitics of labeling theory, the NDC embarked on the ambitious intellectual project of connecting the creation of deviance to the social and political contours of postwar capitalism. In search of a fully social theory of deviance, rather than merely a just-so story of societal reaction, a generation of social scientists sought to shift the criminological lens away from the character and situation of the deviant person and his or her behavior and toward the social and historical patterns that produced "deviance" as an object of state and social intervention. With a nod to Gouldner's original critique, Ian Taylor, Paul Walton, and Jock Young (1975) cut the scar of "left idealism" into subsequent criminology by accusing "the 'sceptical' deviancy theory of the late 1960s of developing a criminology that is rarely interested in crime" and deflecting attention away from the "wider processes of the social system" (pp. 16, 17). Thus, skeptical deviancy theory's "potential contribution to a radical critique of society lay in its ambiguous commitment to cultural diversity, but that potential was marred by a failure to evolve a theory of the State and the total society" (pp. 16, 17). In this failure, the idealistic position of skeptical deviancy theory was unable to "explain the continuance, the innovation or the abolition of legal and social norms in terms of the interests they support, the functions they serve to particular material arrangements, or production in propertied societies" (p. 56).

Two important things were happening simultaneously here. First, there was a clear attempt to develop an "anti-utilitarian" criminology that was able to conceptualize, theorize, and research crime and deviance from outside the state's agenda of crime control, one

that included the controlling institutions and their networks of supporting agencies within an overall theory of deviance creation and management. Second, there was a direct politicization of academic criminology in order to open up a critical space between the control talk of state-sponsored utilitarianism and a more engaged, socially aware, and, to use Gouldner's (1968/1973b, p. 59) phrase, "personally authentic" construction of the deviance process. The NDC and its emerging new criminology wanted to sever the ties that bound the study of crime and deviance to the organs of social control whose own operations were to be subjected to intense, politicized scrutiny. Much more than a new theory or perspective, the NDC sought to create a new public identity for criminology: a new mission that would embed criminology in the pursuit of progressive social change. Criminology's task, concluded Taylor, Walton, and Young (1973/1985, p. 282),

[is] not merely to question the stereotypes, or to act as carriers of "alternative phenomenological realities." The task is to create a society in which the facts of human diversity, whether personal, organic or social, are not subject to the power to criminalize.

The liberation of criminology from its utilitarian shackles and its hard-headed, materialist commitment to social transformation implied breaking down the insulating walls that separated the study of crime and deviance from the sociological study of social development and social change. Henceforth, the new criminology would, and did, become dependent on a sociological imagination, and the fortunes of critical criminology generally became tied to developments in sociology. Where sociology in general, and social theory in particular, has led, critical criminology has invariably followed.

Thus, in 2005, in the aftermath of devastating attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, England's and Spain's transport systems, nightclubs in tourist resorts, and a civil war in Iraq, Michael Burawoy inaugurated a debate in *Critical Sociology* about how a critical social science might (re)connect with a wider series of public interests and agendas in the 21st century. Burawoy (2005a) begins his essay with a retrospective summary of the discipline's postwar critical turn by suggesting that the radical sociology of the 1970s had adopted an "unrepentant academic character." "Our theoretical obsessions," he continues, "came not from the lived experience or common sense of subaltern classes but from the contradictions and anomalies of our abstract research programmes" (p. 313). The unremittingly Marxist character of this radical sociology had been clothed in "what Althusser enthroned as 'theoretical practice'" (p. 315) and its task "was not to produce a concrete vision that would seize the imagination and galvanize the will of some subordinate class, but rather it was to convince intellectuals, and especially academics, of the power of Marxist thinking" (p. 314). The affinity between this academician's sociology and the emerging criminology predictably incensed some establishment figures. The then-director of the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge, Nigel Walker, accused the Marxist-sociology-dependent new criminologists of behaving like "glamorous partisans" (cf. Gouldner's [1968/1973b] comments above) eagerly dressing up their so-called "radicalism" in "scholastic metaphysics" (Walker, 1974, pp. 47, 62) and refusing to engage practically with the real public and private circumstances of criminal activity. It is a judgment with which Burawoy might well agree—even if he is eager to put the metaphysics and scholasticism in some social and political context.

Now, in contrast, contemporary radical sociology, Burawoy (2005a) suggests, has found a new object. No longer obsessed by the possibility of capitalism's self-destruction and the role of the sociologist in unmaking the dominance of ruling ideas, radical sociology is but a branch on the tree of mainstream sociology whose overall project is defined as "inextricably connected to civil society" and its prospects and possibilities. Critical sociologists, he continues, "should focus less on radicalising professional sociology . . . and more on fostering public sociologies to bolster the organs of civil society" (p. 319):

We are in the business of fostering such publics as the poor, the delinquent, the incarcerated, women with breast cancer, people with AIDS, single women, gays and so on not to control them but to expand their powers of self-determination. (Burawoy, 2005a, p. 323)

Notwithstanding that some single women may be gay and some with breast cancer may be "delinquent," incarcerated and gay as well, what is striking about this passage is the embedded claim that these differently categorized people do not sum to a single public. Instead, they make up different publics whose self-determination is not a matter of incorporation into a political or social project of shared human development, but a matter of differentially articulating needs, desires, and goals: a veritable marketplace of bartered means and ends. We think Burawoy's essay is exemplary because in it can be discerned something of the intellectual shift that has occurred in social science generally since the publication of Gouldner's (1968/1973b) essay, the formation of the NDC, and the emergence of the new criminology. The political terrain and the moral project of sociology have changed profoundly in this time. Gone, or at least submerged, is the search for totality and the language of class antagonism; all but gone are modes and relations of production. In their place are "reflexivity" and "real utopias" (Burawoy, 2005a, pp. 321, 325), "multivalent" forms and "normative dialogues" (Burawoy, 2005b, p. 380). The theoretical ambition of sociology has been reigned in as its practitioners seek to negotiate a disparate series of critical accommodations with a variety of (sometimes politically antithetical) social movements and struggles.

In spite of this profound change in the intellectual architecture of sociology, there remain significant critical anchors that connect past and present. For example, in a rejoinder to his critics, Burawoy (2005b) extols a truly Gouldnerian theme—one that is definitive of any social science that purports to be critical. With specific reference to sociology's public agenda, he writes,

The only way to sustain a flourishing public sociology is by subsuming both professional sociology and its publics under a higher interest—a higher interest that is revealed when we situate both sides of the antagonism [between "professional" and "public" sociology] in their determining environment. (Burawoy, 2005b, p. 289)

We suggest that Gouldner would applaud this erudite and forthright declamation of what is the critical essence of social science: Beyond the specificity of any particular situation, struggle, or instance of social action and social participation, there are moral and ethical goals and precepts toward which social scientists can choose to strive in articulating the contours of present society. Neither Gouldner nor Burawoy provide instruction manuals for how critical social scientists should go about their moral business. What both do is raise uncomfortable questions about self-styled "radical" and "critical" social scientists—of whatever

discipline. Both express a similar fundamental ambition for social science: that of developing and sustaining a “*deliberate discourse*” that expresses a “*critical understanding* of both the larger society and the broadest social theory; it is not simply the study of some marginal or esoteric group” but is “the occasion for the exhibition of the broadest sociological and philosophical concerns” (Gouldner, 1985, pp. ix, x).

We have chosen these two intellectual bookends to enfold our discussion of the three texts on critical criminology for two reasons: First, because it is meaningless to consider critical criminology outside of its sociologically constrained disciplinary parameters—what has transpired in sociology is of the utmost relevance to critical criminology’s own development—and second, these two moments in the self-definition of critical social science capture perfectly what is critical about the connection between that social science and the world in which it is developed. The task of a critical social science is not merely to describe the world or bear witness to its flaws and failings; its task is to imagine and account for the connections between the most intimate and intricate characteristics of personal life and the broadest scale of institutional organization, the grandest sweep of historical change. Its task, in short, is to be a part of the world that it describes—to be a subject of social transformation rather than an object of philosophical contemplation. A criminology that is critical, then, is a criminology driven by a sense of possibility; a sense that criminal “justice” is not a finished project—a solid and immutable system whose defects are merely technical glitches awaiting expert repair—but a social contrivance that sustains, and is sustained by, vested political, economic, and cultural interests that can be challenged, subverted, or overturned.

The three books reviewed here enter 21st-century criminology in this context: the transformation of sociology from intellectual to public engagement; the redefinition of *critical* to mean not a denunciation or elimination of mainstream social science but a healthy and vigorous adjunct of it; and the “disturbing” recognition, as Lemert (1995, p. 201) has put it, that the “imaginary of universal Humanity” has been replaced by the reality of differences. Each text, in its own way, remains critical of many aspects of the status quo and attempts to carry the torch for social justice, albeit from very different angles. Yet each also concedes that critical criminology is today a very different enterprise from that dreamed up in the heady days of the late 1960s United Kingdom and United States. A sense of this difference is inscribed at the very beginning of the collection edited by Carrington and Hogg. The title of the book is *Critical Criminology*, in the singular. The title of Carrington and Hogg’s introduction is *Critical Criminologies*, in the plural. A similar concession is made in Schwartz and Hatty’s introduction to the *Controversies in Critical Criminology* collection, aimed at undergraduate students, in which they summarize “*some types* [italics added] of critical criminology.” Even Milanovic, whose intention is to propound the paradox of “one holistic approach” in a “postmodern analysis,” nonetheless samples a veritable smorgasbord of competing analytical frameworks. The unavoidable first impression conveyed by these pluralizations is that of a supermarket in which consumers may exercise free choice in what kind of critical criminologist they would like to be today.

Obviously, this sense of consumer choice is strongest of all in the *Controversies* collection, which is aimed (in Bruce Arrigo’s words) at “the average undergraduate reader” and is “designed to introduce students to the complex and influential field of critical criminology”—of which “there are as many types ... as there are writers and teachers in the area.” Oddly, Schwarz and Hatty’s introduction goes on to suggest that in spite of being important,

influential, and popular, critical criminology is too often neglected, and in spite of boasting a genealogy containing Ian Taylor and Jock Young, Stan Cohen, and Stuart Hall, its scholarship “has become much more sophisticated” (pp. ix, xvii)! Such hyperbole invites the obvious retort that some self-proclaimed critical criminology may deserve to be neglected, and it is an error of judgment to confuse abstraction and complexity with sophistication (see below). Of the following 12 chapters commissioned for the book, 8 focus on theories or, better, styles of critical criminology and the remaining 4 address “issues.” To emphasize their student-friendliness, each chapter ends with some discussion questions, which range from the very straightforward (“List and explain three critiques raised against feminist criminology”) to the ultimately unanswerable (“What role does language play in relation to social structure and ultimately crime?”). In general, the chapters are well written, although the undergraduate focus has encouraged a degree of oversimplification. It is a strange, although not humorless, experience reading Henry and Milanovic, for example, trying to explain to the target audience how “energized human actions” continuously co-produce harmful relations “through society’s structure and culture.”

Overall, there is a dearth of dialogue between the different chapters so that each appears to be making a pitch for one or another brand of critical criminology. The absence of a conclusion is keenly apparent and, we suspect, will be sorely missed by undergraduates looking to make sense of the collection as a whole. The clear danger of the disconnected presentation is that students will feel that picking and choosing, rejecting and ignoring, is a valid approach to critical scholarship and that debates between the different outlooks are irrelevant. True, each theory chapter includes a section on critiques of the selected approach, but because the authors see themselves as their champions and defenders, there is a tendency to skim over very real theoretical and analytical problems. So, for example, in responding to the charge that postmodernism is nihilistic and fatalistic, Arrigo (pp. 50-51) writes that “non-linear dynamics confirms the postmodernist conviction that there is an appreciable degree of uncertainty underpinning the manner in which reality is constructed and lived” and that “alternative truth claims are possible, provided that they are understood as positional, relational and provisional.” There are so many problematic issues enveloped in these statements that it would take an entire book to sort them out, but briefly, it can be noted that neither nonlinear dynamics nor postmodernist convictions are necessary to grasp the uncertainty of lived reality, and, indeed, the former’s analytical utility is *precisely* debatable rather than given. Moreover, the relationships between “reality” (uncertain or otherwise) and “truth claims” are rooted in philosophical commitments, not empirical features of the extant world. Any reader with even a superficial understanding of logic is bound to question the status of the positional, provisional, and relational alternative truth claim that positional, provisional, and relational alternative truth claims are possible.

It is not our intention to single out for criticism any particular chapter or perspective in Schwarz and Hatty’s collection, but to observe that an undergraduate tome in critical criminology produced in textbook style may generate more pedagogical problems than it solves. Each of the perspectives and issues addressed in the collection is already well covered in uncountable books and journal articles that are not constrained by the need to serve up tidy tidbits to consuming undergraduates. Although the “issues” chapters make some analytical and theoretical connections between critical paradigms, and do so with some aplomb, there is no systematic exploration of the tensions between them. The antitheses between, for

example, left realism and postmodernism or Marxist and constitutive criminology, do not disappear simply because they are ignored. In fact, these antitheses are probably the most controversial dimensions of contemporary critical criminology and, its popularity notwithstanding, represent the clearest intellectual challenge to its future.

Whereas Schwartz and Hatty's collection is aimed squarely at average undergraduate students of critical criminology, Carrington and Hogg's is oriented toward an intellectually more sophisticated reader. The contributors are mostly long-term, experienced critical criminologists from Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and New Zealand. The book emerged from a conference held at the University of Western Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, in February 2001 in which the prospects for critical criminology as an intellectual paradigm were debated. As Elliot Currie writes in his preface, the contributions in this collection "stand as a record of how far 'critical criminology' has come in roughly three decades since its beginnings" and the sense of critical criminology as a series of intellectual and political journeys, rather than as a collection of disparate approaches, is conveyed strongly throughout the book. The longevity of the contributors' engagement with critical scholarship and active campaigning has resulted in a set of reflective chapters in which the current condition and future prospects for critical intellectual engagement are considered through retrospective discussion of the relationship between political struggle and theoretical innovation and development. This is particularly the case in the first part of the collection in which chapters by Phil Scraton, Herman and Juliet Schwendinger and Michael Lynch, David Brown, and Kerry Carrington highlight the radicalism that permeated western Europe, the United States, and the Antipodes 30 to 40 years ago and discuss its current potential. In these reflections, there is a constant weaving together of critical criminology's past and present: Becker, Gouldner, Horowitz, Matza, and Mills; Cain, Carlen, Smart, Stanley, and Wilson are merged into deliberations on the contemporary character of critical scholarship. A sense of lessons learned, mistakes made, trajectories followed (and abandoned) permeates all of the chapters. Their titles often hint at the major (if generally implicit) challenge facing critical criminology today—poststructuralism and the insistence on the relationship between power and knowledge. Here, the difficulty of holding together a project as multivalent as critical criminology is openly stated—David Brown's (p. 103) embracing of eclecticism and flexibility; the acknowledgement of a fundamental incompatibility between postmodern and political economy theoretical trajectories in criminological analysis (Schwendinger, Schwendinger, & Lynch, p. 56); Carrington's (p. 130) statement of the fundamental tensions that feminism introduces into criminology. In short, the chapters in the first part of the book give a real sense of the debates and difficulties faced by critical criminology today.

The second part of the book explores key debates in contemporary social science: subjectivity and identity (Tony Jefferson); social control in conditions of reflexive modernity (John Pratt); globalization and human rights (Russell Hogg); critical social science as praxis and project (Judith Bessant, Pat Carlen); and "critique" in a late modern context (Jock Young). Once again, the outstanding characteristic of the chapters is the sense that critical scholarship is very far from being a settled paradigm, ready to be installed like a new and useful appliance in the mansion of criminology. Instead, it is a testing and application of ideas, methods, and moral and political commitments to the "relationships between social and criminal justice" (Carlen, p. 249). Some of the sociological problems that today stimulate criminological reflection and analytic development will undoubtedly

disappear off the critical radar. Others will become embedded in critical discourse as the coagulants of wider beliefs and standpoints. Others again will continue to challenge and unsettle any sense that critical criminology is a completed project, for critique in social science, as Jock Young concludes the collection, is “always unfinished” (pp. 251-271).

If the two edited collections present readers with rather different senses of the variegated character of critical criminology, Dragan Milanovic's book promises to establish a holistic paradigm for critical scholarship by fusing together discourse analysis (defined, questionably, as psychoanalytic semiotics), chaos theory, catastrophe theory, and edgework. At least in this it cannot be said that Milanovic lacks intellectual ambition. Although the title of the book is *Critical Criminology at the Edge*, its immediate aim is to use these disparate frameworks to demonstrate the value of *constitutive* criminology so that there is an immediate elision between “critical” and “constitutive”—an elision that is not really addressed in the subsequent exegesis. The book is monumentally difficult to read not only because of the inherent complexity of the frameworks being explored but also because it is packed with abstruse (and unexplained) metaphors and similes: bottles, strips, folds, sets, knots, saddles, basins, butterflies, trousers, doves, hawks, and pockets. These, and many more, are sprinkled liberally throughout the text. Some derive from the particular frameworks Milanovic uses as instances of postmodern science (chaos and catastrophe theory), but others are plucked from popular political discourse or everyday conversation. So although some refer to very specific dimensions of scientific measurement methods, others are purely conventional and have no fixed referents at all. Added to the confusions that this pick-‘n’-mix approach creates is the incredible level of abstraction at which sociological and criminological issues are presented. For example, in the chapter “Psychoanalytic Semiotics, Chaos, and Rebellious Lawyering,” Milanovic suggests that “simultaneous differential equations” can be used to plot movement along three axes of a bifurcation diagram to explore “regnant forms of lawyering” (pp. 187-188). Well, one of the reviewers trained initially in engineering and can grasp how differential equations might be used to plot movement in three-dimensional space. But neither of us, both trained in sociology and criminology, has the slightest idea what Milanovic is actually talking about. Take another example. In an appendix to the chapter “Catastrophe Theory in Criminology and Social Justice,” Milanovic attempts to clarify what is involved in generating postmodern research hypotheses. Here he writes,

Let's assume in each instance similar escalating postmodern effects ($a > 0$) along with moments of attack on moral self-worth ($b > 0$) (thus a and b will remain constant). Next, let's look at the likely behavioural occurrences as the bias factor (c) and butterfly factor (b) [sic] vary. (p. 227)

There then follow six hypotheses relating to the relative sizes of factors a , b , c , and d . Apart from the obvious paradox of a postmodern research hypothesis and the intrinsic confusion regarding the meaning of “escalating postmodern effects,” the inclusion of the ratios and factors adds nothing at all to the preceding discussion to which it ostensibly applies—the most (advisedly used) interesting features of which consist of personal anecdotes about things that Milanovic has himself done. There are also, surprisingly in a book that uses topography as a guide to clarifying theory, some confusing representations of spatial relationships. For example, on page 11 Milanovic claims that a line that zigzags is nonlinear simply because it is not straight, but the error here is to confuse the representation of the line in two-dimensional space with the trajectory that it provides in the real world. The

stairs in our house, for instance, “zigzag” from one floor to the next, but when we climb them we follow a linear trajectory between floors: When we ascend from below we find ourselves always on the same upper floor; when we descend from above we find ourselves always on the same lower floor. Sometimes we might stop halfway up or down the stairs for a while, or go part way up and come back down again, or take two stairs at a time instead of one, but none of this alters the fundamental linearity of our trajectory on a set of zigzagging stairs. When we use them, we always follow such a linear path: If we did not, it would be an extremely disturbing experience that would require a total overhaul of our grasp of all physical relationships. Basic presentational muddles and fudges of this kind characterize the entire text so that the reader, rather than the author, is required to do all of the work of interpretation and understanding while Milanovic merely suggests and hypothesizes what might or (rarely) might not ensue from his complex theoretical algorithms.

Having labored through the entire book—our copy is filled with exclamation points and question marks, mostly signaling our astonishment at some of the claims being made—our conclusion is that it is a kind of criminological *Da Vinci Code*, a symbolological leap of imagination intended to read crime and society through the arcane meanings buried in its various behavioral iterations. It purports to offer a “holographic metaphor” (p. 253) of the coproduction of person and society that captures the part–whole relationship between crime and societal context but really buries this relationship under the most abstract and complex prose imaginable.

Critical criminology has never represented a unified theoretical system any more than it has pursued a single political agenda. It has, rather, always attempted to hold together an array of ideological, political, and intellectual commitments. It has attempted, with more or less success, “not to close off debate,” as Pat Carlen (p. 249) suggests in *Controversies in Critical Criminology*, and to remain open to ideas, standpoints, experiences, or ways of seeing the world that are buried or foreclosed by the grinding routines of normal criminal justice. Nor should this be surprising. Beginning life in an intellectual and political conflict between a concern with the microdynamics of power, deviance, and inequality stemming from phenomenological and ethnomethodological perspectives and Marxist-inspired analyses of the social-structural dimensions of unequal power relations, there has never been much chance of a theoretical rapprochement between these opposing worldviews, even if the political struggles and rebellions of the 1950s and 1960s occurred in a context of optimism, a belief that it was possible to shape a better, fairer world for all peoples. With the swift emergence of new social movements in the aftermath of struggles against patriarchal oppression and colonial domination came increasing recognition of the differential dynamics and experiences of inequality that characterize social life so that identifying a common enemy became problematic, if not impossible.

The outlooks and concerns of these different “publics-in-struggle” (Fraser, 1997) shaped and continue to shape both the character of sociological theory and its incorporation into critical criminology. The idea of a singular social order, a common humanity struggling toward goals held in common, became hard to sustain, both in theory and in political practice. As some were lamenting this apparent fragmentation of intellectual and political agenda, the poststructuralist writings of Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and Baudrillard entered the English-speaking intellectual world. Together, these authors’ writings appeared to dismantle the epistemological edifice of structuralist thought, and with it any possibility of unitary subjects, unilinear historical trajectories, or automatic social “progress.” “Difference” became the leitmotif of late

modernity, prompting not only Burawoy's (2005a) plea for a reconnection with disparate publics but Charles Lemert's (1995) earlier tribute to Gouldner, *Sociology After the Crisis*, with its eloquent discussion of the loss of classical sociology's "mystifying convictions that there was, all too simply, one true world of which the modern 'West' was the historically progressive embodiment" (Lemert, 1995, p. xv). It has become progressively clear that difference is not simply diversity within an overarching, common, moral framework. In the current historical context, difference manifests itself in many guises, often in bitter and violent struggles, wars, terror, exploitation, poverty, and despair. Young people in the West in the first decade of the 21st century have not experienced any of the golden moments of optimism and social hope that inspired many of the early critical sociologists and criminologists.

With this context in mind, what emerges from our review of the three texts in critical criminology is precisely the essence of the quote from Lemert (1995, p. 114) with which we opened our essay: Where are the "clean, strong explanations" that might enable critical social scientists—in criminology or otherwise—to connect the intricate and intimate details of people's lived realities with the large-scale global patterns and forces that solidify the structures of production, consumption, and exchange and the gross inequalities of access, opportunity, and engagement that these signal? If the social world encompasses a disparate disconnection of dissonant realities, how is it possible to say anything at all critical about crime, justice, and social order? The challenge facing "those who accept responsibility to tell the truth of the world in order to imagine a better one" (Lemert, 1995, p. 198) is how to nurture the kernel of social hope "in the rocky ground of social differences" (p. 201).

Perhaps what we ultimately learn from the three books reviewed here is that clean, strong explanations are not to be found in critical criminology's intellectual outputs alone but in the political intersections between its scholarship and its engagement with the diverse publics on the receiving end of criminal justice. In short, critical criminology remains vibrant to the extent that it does not bind itself to totalizing theoretical projects but remains an open field of moral imperatives directed toward unmasking and resisting the role of law and crime in the reproduction of social and economic inequality.

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