



## Book Review

**Harry Blagg and Thalia Anthony (2019) *Decolonising Criminology: Imagining Justice in a Postcolonial World*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan\***

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As an Aboriginal scholar, I endured a distinct feeling of distaste and unease when I first saw the book by Harry Blagg and Thalia Anthony (2019), entitled *Decolonising Criminology—Imagining Justice in a Postcolonial World*. The title itself is colonised. As people who want to unlearn the findings of colonised research or people who are not colonisers, justice in a postcolonial world is not a concept that can be easily understood. Moreover, who ever said we were postcolonial? Colonisation is not an event nor are we past colonisation. It is a structure as it forms part of almost every structure, particularly at universities. It is my belief that the criminal justice system cannot be decolonised, as it represents the epitome of colonisation, especially for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

The acknowledgement section of this book is impressive; many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are thanked for their work on previous collaborations and their engagement in 'shared rich discussions' (Blagg & Anthony 2019, p. xi). This very statement raises a number of concerns that are related to other issues. Throughout the entirety of the book, this statement of appreciation represents the only page on which many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people mentioned and this is but a mere mention in the acknowledgement section. Neither their work nor research, which many of them have conducted and which has contributed to certain areas of criminology, are mentioned again. Certain researchers are frequently cited, others are mentioned once or twice and sometimes a quotation from a coroner's report is cited.

There is a western authoritarian stench present that comes from using Aboriginal knowledge to drive career progression forward in historical white institutions. The tokenistic gesture of thanking Aboriginal people for their knowledge and then failing to step aside to provide a platform for Aboriginal people who have lived experiences with criminology represents a missed opportunity for the authors of this book. This book is about decolonising the study of crime. So, who better to place at the centre of this argument than scholars who are not the colonisers?

The book is well written in parts, which convey the impact that colonisation has had on Aboriginal people. This is not a book about the decolonisation of research methodologies. Indeed, it only briefly mentions the Indigenous scholars who have identified the different types of research that need to be undertaken to change the dominant paradigm regarding scholarly works. The chapter entitled 'Who speaks for place' represents yet another opportunity in which a 'place' could have been used to make

Aboriginal scholars visible. At best, seven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars were cited in this chapter. It is obvious that in a colonised world, it is the coloniser who continues to speak for place on behalf of Indigenous people. Similarly, the chapter on treaties fails to mention some of Australia's most renowned Aboriginal scholars, including Professor Megan Davis, Lynda-June Coe and Lidia Thorpe. Despite some conflicting views on treaties being presented, the voices of these scholars are silenced. Instances similar to this pervade the book and there are too many examples to unpack.

If criminology, through this book, were serious about decolonising and providing alternative perspectives to understand the criminal justice system, then the research should have focused on the system. The system that, historically and continually, places the blame of overrepresentation on the Aboriginal communities by labelling them as disadvantaged, criminal etc. Any research, learning and teaching must come from an examination of the system and an identification of what needs changing, researching and studying, otherwise the cycle will continue and the only voices that will ever be heard are those of the settler colonials who steal the experiences of Aboriginal people in an effort to further their own agendas. This book represents a missed opportunity. However, the research that is presented should not be concealed.

It has taken quite some time for me to write this review. For some unknown reason, I was not enthusiastic about the prospect of reading a book on decolonising criminology, written by two non-Indigenous academics. It speaks volumes about partnership, so lacking within this book, that the text was not written by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. It would be remiss of me, as an activist, not to cite the following quotation, which is quite typical of a white male perspective:

Prison can be a place for acquiring some of the contemporary 'rations' of white society: food and medical services; various kinds of medications; meeting with kin; conducting family business; taking a break; respite from community conflict; drying out. For some Indigenous women it can be a refuge from family violence (Blagg et al. 2018 in Blagg & Anthony 2019, p.187).

The issue here is not whether Blagg et al. (2018) are wrong or right in making this statement; rather, it is that this particular statement fails to engage in any refined consideration as to why prison might be viewed as a refuge. Further unpacking is needed to explore the reasons why this is the case. No mention is made of the impact that colonisation has had on violence in communities. The alcohol, the drugs, the violent behaviour were all introduced through colonisation. As was the loss of culture, language and connection to country, Stolen Generations and so on are not considered in this statement. It is almost as if Blagg et al. (2018) are seeking to portray that all the Aboriginal women in prison are only there to escape family violence and benefit from the white man's rations. The continued and perpetual stereotyping of Aboriginal people as inherently criminal is first and foremost offensive. To even suggest that prison is needed to 'take a break' or to have a good feed of the white man's food is offensive. There is little substance in this statement and further explanations should be provided as to the reasons why women view prison as a refuge, especially given that over 430 Aboriginal people have died in custody since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991.

For non-Aboriginal scholars who have built their careers on the backs of Aboriginal people, the time has come to make space for Indigenous scholars and focus the research on where the problem actually lies, which is not with Indigenous people but with the system that seeks to marginalise, oppress and dispossess. These are issues on which this book should have centred its ways of knowing, being and doing in relation to criminology. However, the authors instead focused their attention on the Indigenous people as if it were they and not the criminal justice system that needs to be 'fixed'.

This paper is not only a review of Blagg and Anthony's book, it is a reminder that non-Aboriginal academics and researchers who have previously and who currently conduct their research on Aboriginal affairs should not be benefitting from the knowledge, the conversations, the corridor chats and any other forms of informal discussions between themselves and Aboriginal people. The authentic

language of decolonisation has been co-opted; however, this simply disguises the continued marginalisation and oppression of Aboriginal people and their voices. Such language not only denotes the authenticity of decolonising criminology and relationships with Aboriginal communities, but also continues the perception of authority through western ways of education. A closer examination of whose voices are the dominant feature, throughout the book reveals an area that is yet to be decolonised, which is centring the experience and knowledge of Indigenous scholars above that of non-Indigenous scholars, particular when the topic is centred around Indigenous peoples.

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\*This is a corrected version of the book review *Decolonising Criminology: Imagining Justice in a Postcolonial World* by Harry Blagg and Thalia Anthony reviewed by Robyn Oxley and published on August 5, 2020. One sentence is changed to correct an error in the number of scholars cited. This correction notice can be found at <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.2923>

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