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Interview

From Critical Criminology to the Criminological Imagination: An Interview with Jock Young¹

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Introduction

I am sitting on the subway crossing the Manhattan Bridge on the D train, the express train from Brooklyn to Manhattan. You emerge out of the converted lofts of Dumbo, past the Watchtower building of Jehovah's Witnesses, below you is a small park with a pebbled beach, on one side the iconic view of the Brooklyn Bridge and further on the gigantic commercial towers of downtown Manhattan. On your right side the East River turns lazily past the Williamsburg and the Upper East Side glistens in the sun. It is one of the greatest sights of the world. But nobody on the subway is looking, no one is looking out of the windows: my nearest companion is asleep, people are folded into their newspapers, *America Oggi*, *Novoye Ruskoye Slovo*, *Sing Tao*, *Korea Times*, *El Nacional*, as well as *The Post* and the *Daily News*. Someone (I guess) is listening to the Grateful Dead on the headphone, somebody else (inevitably) hip hop, polka, country and western, the greatest hits of 1960s. An English-looking gentleman listens to the last week's BBC news from a podcast. A young black man, eyes closed, is swaying to rap on his leaky headphones, mouthing the lyrics. Two kids hunched over their PSPs fighting some battle light years away in another galaxy at the edge of the universe. A Jewish woman mumbles the Torah, the book grasped tightly in her lap. Someone is into a heated conversation on his cell phone ('I told him don't give me that shit'). Two girls gently dance together to Reggaeton on a joined I-pad. Everyone is elsewhere, another place, another time, another sentiment, in dream and in trance, another feeling: everyone is going to work but no one is at work apart from the grey-suited man with red suspenders, anxiously reading the Wall Street Journal. By now we are approaching China Town at a fifth floor level, the perspectives wobble and clash, the Empire State building is in the distance, the Chrysler Building to the far right, immediately Chinese graffiti dance on worn out buildings. But I am the only one looking out of the window, three years in Brooklyn and still a tourist. (Young 2007: 173)

Although living in New York for many years, Jock Young, as he claimed in the passage above, managed to persist as a tourist in that city. While fully immersed in everyday life, his intellectual detachment from the intense turmoil of the metropolis placed him as a privileged onlooker to the bustling life in the city and of the increasingly complex contemporary world. This special viewpoint gave him the possibility of theorizing late modernity and its many discontents in detail in his last works, providing insightful concepts and ideas for helping us to make sense of our predicaments and hopes in social life.

Throughout his life and vast academic contributions, his scholarship offered us a number of fundamental intuitions for thinking about crime, social control and the challenges of our times. The importance of his work for criminology was already established in the early 1970s, when his book *The Drugtakers* (1971) was first published. Emerging from the first National Deviancy Conference in 1968, which convened a generation of scholars disenchanted with the main tenets of 'orthodox positivism', he conducted an ethnographic study of the Bohemian neighborhood of Notting Hill in West London, where he lived at the time (Young 2011b). In this work, he managed to set himself as one of the most discerning analysts of urban life, rendering a vivid portrayal of urban subcultures, the periodic upsurges of moral panics and the role of police in the dynamics of social control.

A few years later, the publication of *The New Criminology* (1973) with Ian Taylor and Paul Walton decidedly shifted the ground on which criminological theory had been built so far. It also placed him as one of the most renowned scholars in the field. The integration of broader social theory and micro-sociological perspectives within a critical approach renewed the entire field of research and offered one of the most influential theoretical frameworks of the past century. The

subsequent edited collection *Critical Criminology* (Taylor et al. 1975) helped to galvanize the field of 'radical criminology' in that decade (Hayward 2010). Not only have these concepts synthesized the spirit of their times, but they also displaced a number of ingrained assumptions in the studies of crime and crime control.

In the 1980s, Jock embarked on another enterprise. The possibility of shaping governmental policies through his expertise led him to address the problems of the criminal justice system from a different perspective. The emergence of left realism signaled the engagement of critical approaches with the need to provide sound and effective ways to deal with criminality in working class neighborhoods. This rare opportunity prompted him to develop a concern with the importance of effective policies of crime control without ever missing the need for increasing social inclusion and protection of vulnerable groups. In an effort to respond to left idealism and right wing administrative criminology, left realism was an attempt to empower communities for dealing with their crimes and social problems (Lea 2015). Together with John Lea, the main aspects of this perspective came to light in *What is to be Done About Law and Order* (1984) and stirred an intense debate in the ensuing years. The importance of this tradition, as this present special issue demonstrates, remains vivid, mostly in times when progressive approaches to crime control and community participation are often sidelined.

Towards the end of the past century, though, he returned to more theoretical concerns. The publishing of *The Exclusive Society* (1999) marked the beginning of a trilogy engaging with the structural and cultural shifts of late modernity and its impact on structures of social control. The bulimic dichotomy between social inclusion and economic exclusion oriented his analysis and helped him to denounce the extreme contradictions of the contemporary social structure. *The Vertigo of Late Modernity* (2007) delved into this paradox in the aftermath of September 11, emphasizing the arrival of terrorism as a concern on the public agenda and the danger of othering in the current policies of crime control. Finally, in a moment when positivism rehearses a revival, *Criminological Imagination* (2011a) delivered an incisive critique of current statistical analysis and the lack of a truly comprehensive criminology. These three books together surely offer one of the most compelling narratives on the predicament of our contemporary world, but they also give us important directions for unlocking these dilemmas.

In recent years, while finishing his trilogy, he also participated in the revitalization of criminological thought with the advent of cultural criminology (Ferrell, Hayward and Young 2008). Once more, Jock demonstrated how attuned he was to the most important contemporary developments in the field. Bringing the 'thrill of deviance' to the fore of criminological investigation, he managed to interweave the phenomenological aspects of crime with the more ingrained dilemmas of structural inequality. In a return to relative deprivation and the Mertonian critique of the social structure, the new perspective of cultural criminology also came to address the relevance of values and social mores in the emergence of conflict and criminality, creating a more complex understanding of these phenomena.

The interview presented here took place in the summer of 2011, when Jock generously received us in his office at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. We previously sent him a few questions and our conversation departed from there. In the following summer, after we transcribed the audio file, Jock also reviewed this interview, added some important remarks and filled in some gaps. In spite of this revision, we purportedly attempted to keep the colloquial tone of our exchange. Although this interview had been initially conceptualized for Latin America, where it has already been published in Spanish and Portuguese, the narrative Jock presented may also be of interest to an English-speaking audience. Many tributes have already taken place since his death but this is certainly another opportunity to pay homage to him and remember the importance of his life and scholarship. As has already been remarked, 'the more, the better' (DeKeseredy 2015: 160). After all, even though he is no longer among us, his ideas will certainly illuminate our reflection on social life for many years yet to come.

The interview

Sozzo/Fonseca: At the beginning of the 1970 you wrote, together with Ian Taylor and Paul Walton, *The New Criminology*, one of the most influential books in the field of criminology in English speaking countries and beyond. That work helped to build a critical perspective on crime and punishment. The research program this book tried to promote – explicit in the last pages of the Conclusions – was very ambitious and it was developed in different ways by many academics from those years onwards. What do you think are its main legacies for our present?

What came out of *The Drugtakers*, which I published in 1971 – the research was in the late sixties – was basically the formal parts of an explanation which we used in *The New Criminology*, so the frame we used in *The New Criminology* came from *The Drugtakers*. And it was an attempt to bring together the two strands of American deviance theory: labeling theory and subculture. If I can just go through the sequence of what happened. Actually, we were all tremendously impressed by New Deviance theory. The period of deviance theory development in American criminology and sociology between 1955 and 1965 was an amazingly creative one: Goffmann, Becker up to Matza, on one side, and Albert Cohen and Richard Cloward on the other.

There were two strands. One strand was subculture theory and the other strand was labeling theory. What was interesting about this, if I can just take one step back, is that in 1959 C Wright Mills published *Sociological Imagination*. And Mills made these terrible predictions about abstract empiricism, which has now come into realization on the most awful level. But the immediate outpouring of deviancy theory after 1959 was not abstracted empiricism whatsoever. What was very interesting about it was that it was nearly all micro stuff. If you think of Goffmann, think of all these sort of things, think of Garfinkel, think of ethnomethodology, it was all micro stuff. And there was something strange about there not being big macro stuff, apart from what remained of the Mertonian tradition, which I will come to later. So, why was that? You had the most prescient guy about this – the brightest guy – Al Cohen, who in 1977, at the American Sociological Association, talked about the ‘underdevelopment’ of American sociology and sociology of deviance in particular. And what he meant by underdevelopment was that it didn’t have any macro dimension; they hadn’t taken Merton’s lead properly and it was all very much micro stuff. And the only people who were doing macro-work were small outliers of Marxists. Not that he was a Marxist, but these were the only people talking about it.

So, then you have the transatlantic crossing. My explanation of what happened in the United States was basically the chilling effect of McCarthyism. First I thought that this was an exaggeration but the more I get into it, the more I’m sure it was true. When Paul Lazarsfeld [together with Wagner Thielens Jr] did the study of *The Academic Mind* – quite late in 1955, I think it was – he found that the FBI had interviewed one half of all American social scientists in the last twelve months period, and a third of them they had interviewed more than three times. That was an extraordinary thing. We usually think of McCarthyism in terms of theatre and the movies and all this sort of thing, but the effect on the academy was dreadful. People – like for instance in anthropology – wrote materialist theses of anthropological situations and then, when they published books, it was all taken out. People rewrote the syllabuses; a lot of people suffered fantastically badly. For example, one of the reactions was to move into hard social sciences, go into quantitative methods. And the same thing had happened before, in 1917 with the first Red Scare, when the Chicago School went scientific and broke with the women of the Hull, the radicals there, one of whom, Florence Kelley, translated Engels’ *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*. That’s extraordinary. The whole process was started by the Chicago School, who were good in terms of ethnography but politically began going scientific and

conservative. The same thing was repeated this time round and it sort of decapitated American theory. So, we get the transatlantic crossing. Of course, it arrives in Britain, and in that period in Britain, I didn't know anybody who worked in sociology who was not an Anarchist, a Trotskyist, a Marxist, a Situationist or something of that sort. Conservatives were very rare. The people furthest to the right were left-wing social-democrats. It was a totally different political context from the United States. This allowed us to really push the macro level, easily and simply, without thinking about it. For Ian, Paul and I, *The New Criminology* was not a difficult book to write; it was just our lecture notes. It was quite reflexive; just merely a reflection of the time. We never saw it as a particularly grand thing to do it. It was an expression of the culture of that time and how we thought about things. It had the macro *and* the micro in it. So what we took from deviance theory was its dyadic nature. It was the idea that you had to explain action and reaction; why people do things and why people label things. So, what we did was, we took that and we put both of them – both the actors and the reactors – into a macro situation. And that was what the formal requirements of the theory of deviance were.

The formal and the substantive: I think what was interesting about the formal aspect is that it takes C Wright Mills and it fuses it with new deviancy theory. C Wright Mills talked about this in *The Sociological Imagination*, about putting individuals within the social structure and both of these things in history in the context of transformative politics. But with the notion of the dyadic nature of the sociology of deviance, we did both. We did the police and the ruling class etcetera on one side, and the same with deviance, on the other. In that way it fitted like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

We were very influenced by Gouldner at that time, when he moved to Amsterdam. What is interesting about Mills and Gouldner – who were at that time Merton's sort of strongest acolytes – is that they had got very much into European thought, and this was a similar attempt to tackle the macro aspects of capitalist societies.

As for the immediate legacies, if you want to look at something which reproduced that structure, it was *Policing the Crisis* [Hall et al. 1978]. Its analysis went all the way up to the state, all down to the individual act, and all the way up to, you know, to the conditions of working class blacks. It had everything; it had the whole – the action-reaction, micro-macro – set up like a big U.

Fonseca: What about *Learning to Labor* [Willis 1977]?

There is a tendency to think of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies as some sort of a monolith and of course it wasn't anything of the sort. The Pyrrhic thing was characteristic of Willis. What Paul Willis [1977] was very strong about was how working class kids saw through the situation and then created a culture which trapped them in the situation: a Pyrrhic analysis, which was more recently carried on by Philippe Bourgois in *In Search of Respect* [2003].

Sozzo/Fonseca: From your widely read essay *Working Class Criminology* of 1975, there was an explicit attempt to avoid 'Left Idealism' as a perspective that, in your view, pushed critical criminology in a wrong direction, both in political and theoretical terms. 'Left Realism' was the antidote that you and other like-minded authors developed to overcome this risk for critical thinking about crime and punishment. This approach was characterized theoretically by many themes and arguments. Three very important ones stand out: 'taking crime seriously' or a critique of the excesses of social constructivism; 'relative deprivation'; and the 'square of crime'. What are today your positions about each of these theoretical issues?

Maybe it's because I want some continuity of narrative in my life, but I really don't think of my work in discontinuities. I think there are times – and I think also in terms of context of critical criminology in general – when we forget things and we have to go back and pick them up again. Two things: in terms of my personal work, I feel there is continuity; and in terms of critical criminology this is much more important. I think there is progress and that we should think of the progress [that has been made] and we should not just think of people reinventing the wheel every five years or so or something like that. So, I think it's very interesting that, whereas critical criminology seems to evolve, orthodox criminology is now back into the 1950s, in the case of life-course theory, or back into the nineteenth century, with rational choice theory. It's going backwards; it's not a forward-looking thing at all.

Left realism – taking crime seriously – is simply part of an awareness of people who live in the inner city, of working-class life, of the problems of crime in working-class life, and a slight irritation with people who lived on isolated campuses somewhere, romanticizing about how nice it would be to have prostitutes and drug dealers all over you.

There was this very strong feminist influence. Remember the big movement of our time? American macro theory had disappeared in sociology and re-established itself in feminism; it developed massively and was the most extraordinary influence. Radical feminism was a big influence to parties, to public intellectuals, etcetera. And an influence, for instance, not just in terms of talk about taking crime seriously but also of anti-social behavior. The zero tolerance campaign, for instance, came out of radical feminism; it didn't come out of somebody in New York City. So we were influenced by feminist studies and feminist studies were all around us on that sort of level. So, that's taking crime seriously.

Then the left idealism thing. What I find slightly irritating is people think that the criticism of left idealism is something to do with the criticism of utopianism. You know, that it's idealism in that sense when, of course, it is philosophical idealism, it is about social constructionism. It is about the idea of imagining that the only problem of crime is the construction of crime when, in fact, the person hits you in the street as he hits you, or whatever you want to call it; he materially hits you.

Sozzo: One could see also a continuity between that idea and something that is widely said in *The New Criminology* also, and repeated in very different ways and also in the conclusions of *The New Criminology*, when you, in a way, try to put in the middle of the scenario of thinking the social costs of the deviant act, you know, that was also present already there. That's why it was quite strange that for many people your critique of left idealism was some sort of discontinuity, because it was already there.

And of course it was very strong in Gouldner. I mean, it really was strong in his criticism of Becker.

Sozzo: That was the debate between Gouldner and Becker.

Yes, that's right, that's right. So, it was there and, if you know, that was the strand. What was the other thing about?

Sozzo: The second thing was about the relative deprivation that appeared in a way in that moment in *What is to be Done About Law and Order?*.

It doesn't totally relate intellectually, but part of the problem was that obviously the crime rate had been going up for an awfully long time in a lot of countries – a lot of first world

countries – and to explain this in terms of economic deprivation *per se* was quite silly. Some of the poorest people in Harlem were richer than most people had ever been in history. That misses the fact of the matter. So, you can't talk about absolute deprivation in a sense, you know; obesity was a problem, not people starving to death. It was not what was happening. So, relative deprivation. Relative deprivation, we partially got out of Merton, partially out of Runciman who was very influential in British sociology, of course, although not very well known here in the USA.

The square of crime was basically ... so, that was trying to explain ...

Sozzo: Sorry, Jock. Another thing about relative deprivation. You think today there was some sort of discontinuity in the way you treat Merton as a cautious rebel. There was some sort of discontinuity in that moment in your relationship with the work of Merton between *The New Criminology* and this?

That's jumping a bit; it doesn't matter, let's do that.

Al Gouldner was kind enough to write the introduction to *The New Criminology*. In it, Al said that, in fact, Merton was very Marxist influenced and I thought, basically, Gouldner was a very maverick Marxist, that this was a bit of wishful thinking. But the fact is that Merton and Gouldner were very, very close indeed. They had corresponded all through their lives about all sorts of things, including Marxism. This was not somebody who did not know Merton very well. And then, when I went back, when I had to write more recently a biography of Merton, the early Merton called himself a socialist. He was a working-class kid; he learned his socialism from the cobbler on the street corner. His copy of *Capital Volume 1* had a hundred pages of personal index. This was not somebody who did not know anything about Marx, but he was very worried on two levels: worried about it not being a good idea to be too left wing in the United States; and on the other hand, it was certainly not a good idea to be a Jew in the United States. So he changed his name, you know ...

Fonseca: Skolnick to Merton, right? I think that's it.

That's a lovely story, with Jerry Skolnick taking him to Ellis Island. Do you know that? The story goes, Jerry Skolnick took Merton to Ellis Island on the 50th birthday, I think it was, and they were looking through all the stuff, and Jerry turns to Merton and says 'You never talk about your Jewishness very much, do you, Bob?' and Bob said 'I will tell you something: my name is Skolnick!'. It is lovely!

But, you know, what one has to understand is [the difficulties] if you're a working-class Jew. Merton had problems with anti-Semitism and anti-socialism and Al Cohen, Al Cohen had some of the problems of Merton, a generation later. You know, there was a quota system right through the universities; all the Ivy Leagues had quota systems. It was an extraordinary sort of situation in the academics where you're only allowed a certain number of Jews to enter into the bloody department. You know, you changed your name, you're worried like mad. During the Second World War, Sue Merton and Bob Merton followed the Battle of Britain in great detail on short wave radio. They were worried that at least Europe would go and God knows what might happen here. Certainly on the cards would have been a deal with Nazi Germany and on top of this there were all sorts of anti-Semitic currents. So, you've got to understand. And then, if you think of Merton later on, when the FBI file showed that he was suspected of running a communist cell at Columbia, the *Daily News* exposed him as a lefty. This is a world where you learn caution, which comes back to my chilling effect of McCarthyism and all these sorts of things. So, Merton. But then, if you read *Social Structure and Anomie*, there you are, you've got this very

peculiar situation; I find it absolutely fascinating. It is probably the best read thing in criminology – or the best quoted – and maybe in sociology, right? Yet hardly anybody reads it and all the interpretations are off the wall. Strain theory. Strain theory seems to suggest something like a torn ligament in the system, not an endemic disease. But if you read the 1938 article, it talks about the American Dream being a sop to stop Adaptation V, which is revolution; that the American Dream is an ideology, in Manheim's sense. It quite spells it out what he thinks about it, that it's a maladaptive system, all this sort of business. There is a bit of a legitimation crisis at the end of the 1938, at the end of the Great Depression. That's what Merton is actually saying at that time. Now, what interests me is, why does this article fascinate even though it's totally against the current of American sociology of its day? It is rather like – similar things have been written about – Eric Goode writing about *The Sociological Imagination*. Everybody, every sociology text starts off saying how wonderful *The Sociological Imagination* is, having taken no notice whatsoever of what C Wright Mills wrote; certainly not about his politics.

So you had that sort of situation. I'm very interested in those early days and the classic meeting, January 1949, between Lazarsfeld, Merton and Mills, when they tried, they successfully wooed, Mills into their project, right? Because I've never read all that stuff on the mass communication; the stuff I learned about Lazarsfeld was all about two-step flow and all this sort of business. At that point, Merton was to the left of Mills, right? Mills was a liberal. Merton got more cautious and Mills got more left wing, right? At that point, both Merton and Lazarsfeld were working for the government in terms of government propaganda. They were pretty much particularly committed working social scientists. Mills was not. Mills was trying to make sure he was not getting caught up. It's a funny old world. I'm just so fascinated by how these things changed. And then, what actually happened is that these people rewrote Merton and Merton rewrote himself. So, that's what happened. And so, going back to early Merton, I think, is quite useful.

Fonseca: So, it's more than getting back to Merton in that sense; it's about going back to early Merton. It's the Merton that we find there in *Social Structure and Anomie*, right? Not the Merton of the late functionalism, reference groups, not that perspective that he develops later in life.

Although it bubbles up every now and then. He is very, very concerned about how poor people are, very concerned about scientific discovery, and rich people aren't [concerned]. The sociology of science has got lots of parallels and, you know, it doesn't matter ... It's early Merton.

And Cohen realizes that completely, as Al Cohen was by far the most distinguished student of Merton. He was there in the room when *Social Structure and Anomie* was lectured, right?

Sozzo: What about Richard Cloward in that sense?

Cloward? I don't know. Dick Cloward should've been the real political descendant of Merton, he should've been, right? And he was the person who actually tried to take the American Dream seriously and, of course, his office ended up being raided by the FBI because the *Daily News* declared him communist and all that sort of business ... So, a long time before, the same happened with his wife Frances Fox Piven. I'm trying to work out why Merton and Cloward wouldn't talk to each other. Something went wrong, and it may have been Merton getting more and more straight. And he did. I mean, eventually people disliked him, actually, from what I can make out. As Frieda Adler said to me: 'I'm sorry to say this Jock, but he sounded more and more English eventually'.

Sozzo: And what about, coming back to the origin of left realist criminology, what about the square of crime?

The square of crime, I think, was just taking on board the victimization, which at that time was an influence. First of all, it was a triangle of offender, victim and state. And then [the state] split into the informal system and the formal system, that sort of realism. It is something which really appeals to me and interests me and I don't totally understand it, but it's got something about formal sociology in it. It's Simmel, right? It's saying that there are some things – it doesn't matter what culture setting you are in – which you still have to explain. There were formal problems of explanation. And, then you've got four vertices, not just a dyadic thing. You put the whole thing into a macro system. I think this is quite a gain.

Sozzo: In that sense, you think of yourself today as someone who endorses these kinds of, let's say, most important ideas of left realism in the 1980s and 1990s?

I think there was a danger. One of the dangers was that they forgot the level from which social statistics were constructed. There were all these sorts of problems occurring in it. It bounces off in that way and part of going back into cultural criminology again was to try to re-balance but not to lose left realism. Left realism started in Islington in London, when politicians that we knew came to John Lea and me and said: 'Well, comrades, we're all in power now, what are you gonna do about crime?' And it was a very interesting period, because it was the period when Thatcher was Prime Minister and the central government was neoliberal, but there were red flags over the town halls of most of London and certainly Birmingham and Liverpool. There was a very strong move to the left in the cities. And it was the sort of thing that, 'Well, you call yourselves criminologists, what are you going to do about this?', you know, which propelled us into it. It was very policy driven and politically pushed.

Sozzo/Fonseca: Is it possible to be 'realist' in crime control policies after the emergence of the New Labour or the New Democrats and their support of many conservative initiatives? What proposals does this kind of approach imply in our present? Is it still possible – in the context of politicization of crime control in societies like the US or the UK – to influence policy decision-making from within academic circles?

We were very, very disturbed by what happened with New Labour; everybody was. I think probably the same thing is gonna happen with Obama, unfortunately the same thing seems to be happening. I mean, Tony Blair used to write about a socialist approach to crime, and he never used the word socialist after he got in.

Fonseca: Just get tougher ...

Yeah, that's right, just get tougher. I don't know. I mean, the Labour Party, in general, in every manifesto on prison, said they wanted to reduce the prison population but they did the opposite. So, all sorts of dreadful things happened. And even things like social exclusion, which I think is a very, very interesting idea – its possibility as an idea is tremendous, right? – was re-interpreted in the most right-wing way you could think of. For instance, if you think of the debate in the moment in the United States about re-entry, where they are talking about how you get prisoners to re-enter the system, into the community, while the community has been smashed by the system, right? It is much more important to think about how you include the community before thinking about what is happening in terms of returning people to it because [the community] doesn't exist. So, you know, it was a very progressive idea and, actually, the interpretation in Scotland was more progressive than in England and in France. It was supposed to be good but it didn't

work out very well. You know, there obviously were very, very strong and interesting ideas there, which we were very much into and very much shaped our thinking on that sort of level.

What was really strange for us, sort of coming back a little bit, was a positivist revanchism, because there was a period of time when we were almost utterly sure that we had hammered them; we had done them; that it would not return again. It was silly. There was a time when it'd never ever seem to emerge. And there was an interesting thing which comes back to the transatlantic crossing, which if you look at American and look at British criminology is very, very, very different and this is very strange because these are the two countries with the largest proportion of infrastructure of research, teaching and all that sort of thing and they come out with different results, and that doesn't happen with astrophysics or anything like that. And if you look at the level of cross-referencing between, say, *The British Journal of Criminology* and *Criminology*, it's about two per cent. You can't imagine a journal of cardiology having this problem, right? So it suggests a question about science and the possibility of a scientific study of crime. This strange positivism has taken over here on a massive scale. It would be wrong to suggest that it had anything like the purchase of the Open University, which is probably the largest distance-learning university in the world, which is totally and utterly to the left. If you look at most of the major departments of criminology, apart from Cambridge – which always was a government department anyway, so you don't expect much from it – critical criminology is still a very, very strong current. Here, in the United States, it's not at all; it's a little ghetto. It is a tolerated ghetto within the American Society of Criminology.

Sozzo/Fonseca: Your 1999 book, *The Exclusive Society*, has been interpreted as a milestone that marked a shift away from left realist themes and arguments in your work. What do you think about this appraisal? What was the issue there? What brought you to revise some of the perspectives that you had before?

One of the initial things was the fact that, as practice seemed to be diminishing in terms of possibility, as policy intervention, I tended to go back into theory and it was a theory based on disillusionment with New Labour. So, [*The*] *Exclusive Society* was basically based on the whole idea of the fact of social exclusion, which, as I say, it is quite an important idea. The trouble is, in terms of the trilogy, the three books, I muddle up *The Exclusive Society* and *Vertigo* [*The Vertigo of Late Modernity*] an awful lot; I can't really distinguish between them ... They're very similar books, and I don't really know if there is anything particularly different about them. *Vertigo*, of course, has a very strong attack on New Labour, social exclusionism, and then the whole idea of the bulimic society, the idea of a society which absorbs people and then ejects them in this sort of way, not just in terms of deportation, but in terms of ideas. So, it takes Mertonian ideas of people taking up the culture, the American Dream, or the First World Dream, and then finding they couldn't make it. In a much more globalized sense, it goes from America to the First World; it goes across the world through globalized media. And you have this situation where people, you know, absorb ideas and find they can't achieve them or are rejected by something of this sort.

Sozzo/Fonseca: How can the recent drop in officially registered crime in the US – and especially in New York City – be related to the idea of a 'bulimic society' that was presented in *The Exclusive Society*? Is late modernity necessarily related to high levels of crime? To what extent are the economic, social and cultural transformations you described in *The Exclusive Society* for societies like UK and US also present in other national contexts? Do you think they are 'global' in their reach? In that sense, aren't there different ways of becoming 'late modern' in the globe – that is, center and periphery? Do you think that this could also be said about what happens with both 'crime' and 'crime control'?

One of the things that all the media studies show is that, far from just watching the action movies, people in the Third World are looking at the refrigerators, at the swimming pools and at the consumer goods. Part of the globalized cultural thing is that it becomes tremendously apparent to people of the injustice of it all, for geographical location is just luck. It is not anything to do with anything other than just absolute luck. So, a globalized Merton suggests that you're gonna get the tensions that you originally just had in America, then in the First World, across the globe; that people are disturbed by, you know, the extraordinary disparities in income occurring across the world.

Fonseca: Although you might also say that these disparities of income, they have also been, in a sense, globalized, right? We might have the inner city and the super-rich in the US.

For your societies, you know, Argentina and Brazil, you've got the First World and the Third World. You've got both there, haven't you? You've got so many things occurring, but for Palestinians, or Chinese, or people in Indian subcontinent, you're gonna get extreme relative deprivation. Imagine the sort of joy of being a highly educated Indian answering people's grumble about their refrigerators from Detroit or somewhere like that whilst working in a call center. It is bound to get up your nose.

Sozzo: One important issue in *The Exclusive Society* without doubt is the idea this kind of bulimic society, late modern society, produces high levels of crime. But today in some countries, in some national contexts, we are seeing decreases of crime, as in the US, in a way, especially here in New York City. What do you think about this kind of ...

It is not that bulimia doesn't occur, nor was it ever really suggested that relative deprivation would lead necessarily to crime, for example. It could lead to politics, it could lead into religious rapture, it could end up in the Tea Party, it could end up all over the bloody place. It is not like that. It depends on the structure and the culture. So, it comes down to this attempt to try to explain the crime drop. And here, it's very interesting, but what interested me was the level of American ethnocentrism about the drop, which started off for me, from the American Society of Criminology in San Francisco when Al Blumstein first did his report about the American crime drop and he went through all this intricate explanations of why it was going down. And then this Canadian lady put her hand up and said: 'Actually, we don't have mass incarceration, we don't have the crack epidemics that have gone down, we don't have zero tolerance and our crime rate has gone down. In fact, the curve is absolutely and utterly symmetrical between Canada and the US'. And he looked incredibly pissed off. He really did. What he wanted was something to simply finesse the figures, right? I think you actually add to this the fact, and it wasn't true. And the ethnocentrism of it is quite mad, because not only did it happen in a lot of countries but, obviously, the ethnocentrism of New York is quite extraordinary. This was happening in San Diego and in Boston, it was happening with all sorts of different policing. There were fights over who did it, and the crime rate was going down before Commissioner Bratton was in place and zero-tolerance and COMPSTAT. And of course it was also going down in Britain. It makes you think. Actually, what really gets me about the positivists is that, though they pretend to be scientists, they are not even on the technical level very good at it. They don't really exert themselves ... I mean, there you've got the English statistics at hand on the computer, you can just download, all the figures are there, it is not even remotely difficult to do, right? And they didn't take it on board. They didn't take on board what was happening, as well. It happened quite dramatically at that sort of level. You have to think in terms of something in common that has happened, certainly in First World countries. Frank Zimring, of course, in *The Great American Crime Decline*, actually admits he can't explain it, that he can't do it. And now he has decided that he can't

do it, but he will instead focus on explaining the New York drop, which is a little bit strange, to say the least.

So when one looks at what has happened, I think one of the things you have to look at is the big structural changes that occurred. One of the changes that occurred in the First World was the move between manufacturing to service; I mean, America doesn't have much manufacturing apart from arms, even. God knows what they make. Nothing. Financial products, perhaps?

So, you see a change in masculinity. I think you've now got male jobs, which are not of the confrontationalist relationship of the factory, of the construction work, hard-factory work, all of which builds up a macho culture. Instead, the good male now is a flexible male. I don't like saying this, but I think it's true. The masculine role has gone, you know, apart from the police, prison guards and the military. The new man works in a service industry: he is fragile, subservient, trained to please.

The second thing, I think, is the feminization of the public sphere, which is the long term effect of so many women entering the labour market. So, restaurants and bars and everything like that are now full of women. This is a deflecting kind of the thing, the influence of feminization that has occurred. I think those two things are really big things.

I also think – I can't get my head round it – there is something ... my interest is about what you think in terms, particularly in Brazil, of this whole thing of hyper-pluralism. You know, New York has always been a very, very odd place and has always had one of the highest levels of immigrants in the world; 40 per cent usually, you know, and still has 40, so same as in 1900. But they are now from every conceivable continent, there are no majorities, and there probably isn't a majority in New York of any ethnic group, unless you want to call whites an ethnic group, which is a bit crazy.

So there is something strange happening, I think, in terms of othering. I haven't got my head round it, but something has happened, which is totally different from the binaries of the past, of black, white, all these sorts of things, I think it's gone. People – the Chinese or Asians, as they call them here – are being reclassified as white. You know, there are all sorts of really peculiar things occurring. So, I think in terms of social antagonism, there is something new happening. But there have been big things. Frank Zimring, of course, thinks nothing has happened at all, that there have been no changes in the last 15 years. This can't be, actually; just look out the window. It is not like it used to be. If you look at any pictures of the subway in New York in the 1950s to now, just look at the pictures and the people on them. My God, it's changed.

Sozzo/Fonseca: We observe significant differences in penal policies between contexts like US and Finland, for example. How can we explain them? Some authors wrote in the last years about the 'embeddedness' of crime control strategies, recognizing some level of dependence of this field on peculiar past and present circumstances of each context. What do you think about it?

Obviously, it's true. If you think of the Scandinavian and read the work of Dario Melossi, when he talks about the cultural embeddedness of punishment ... I mean, in terms of Britain and the US, there are obviously tremendous differences. I'm quite critical of David Garland's stuff which lumps the UK and the US together. Culturally in the States, you have an African-American population who have had generations of suffering. It is quite extraordinary, I mean, isn't it an extraordinary thing? The level of segregation is not reproduced. I mean, I've always said the only place in the UK you will find that level of segregation is somewhere like Bradford, where you get Muslims settlements, Sunni Muslims in the valleys and Whites in the highlands or something like that. And in Belfast,

where you have very strong levels of segregation between Protestant and Catholics. But it's not in London or Birmingham; none of the big cities have segregations which are remotely like the US ones. And take guns and notions of violence: just watch American television with its tremendous sort of adulation of physical combat and the military. This doesn't happen in Britain on that level. People, for example, are much more cynical, less patriotic. Having lost an Empire, of course, you tend to have a degree of sarcasm about things.

There are very strong cultural differences between the UK and the US, but there are also similarities. One of the arguments in *Vertigo*, certainly, is that ontological insecurity and economic insecurity combine to create a level of punitiveness and vindictiveness which is shared, yet which is played out differently in different countries. I don't know if you saw in *The New York Times* recently the Charles Blow's article, where he talks about remarks by Republican politicians in the previous few months. One suggested the 'threat of illegal immigrants was comparable to Adolf Hitler in World War II'; and 'border guards should be allowed to shoot to kill'; one compared 'pregnant illegal immigrants to multiplying rats'; another that 'funds to HIV victims should be cut off because they're living a perverted life style'; while another recriminated the details compared the 'black unemployed to dogs'.

Fonseca: How do you relate this perspective to what Roger Matthews is talking about punitiveness? Do you go along?

I think he is wrong. One: because he can't get the idea of contradictory responses. Why should anybody be worried about the fact that contradiction occurs within society? I cannot work this out at all. Do you want to think everything is punitive? Why should it be? There are all sorts of contradictions going on. Two: he takes figures like the graph of alternatives to prison and compares it to the graph of imprisonment, and the graph of alternatives goes up faster than the graph of imprisonment, which we've known for a long, long time. But, you know, that could be easily seen as spreading the net. I mean, the level of concern about anti-social behavior in Britain is quite extraordinary. It's as if a crime shadow wave has been conjured up to replace the drop in real crime.

Sozzo: And also the policy response is quite, you know, unusual and ... compared with other First World nations. You won't find this kind of anti-social behavior orders as ...

If you try to explain it to people, they find it slightly so bizarre. So, I don't.

The other thing which comes into the more recent stuff is being interested in emotion and vindictiveness and, you know, the existential psycho-dynamics of these things.

Sozzo: Merton with energy...

Yeah, the energy. It is to try to get the energy, the feeling of dislike and anger, which occurs, right? Of resentment which occurs ...

Sozzo: In that sense ... we could see in different national contexts today, the same kind of process, let's say, structural processes of ontological insecurity, economic insecurity, but we could also find different kinds of reactions in that level of how the individual reacts to the different kind of others. So it's not the same, let's say, what happens here in the US and what happens in Brazil or what happens in Finland. And, in that sense, we could think that these kinds of reactions of the individuals are politically and culturally constructed in these kinds of scenarios. Do you agree with this kind of idea?

Yeah, what I'm toying with once again is the idea that one has to talk about a formal sociology, of whether there are formal similarities, which have a logic of their own, yet which are, inevitably, totally interpreted culturally. So, you are neither a nomothetic, nor are you an idiographic. You're not one or the other, right? And that's what you need, for you can't have a total idiographic thing where all you can say is all about a particular culture, for there are too many parallels going on. And it's to tease out these differences ... I mean, the arguments, at the moment, about the head of the IMF and French compared to American attitudes to sexual transgression. Let's not talk about the particulars of the case, but the idea that you actually handcuff people who are not, definitely not, going to run away, couldn't run away, and parade them publicly ... You can see from a French perspective how this looks like brutality, it looks like barbarism, doesn't it? There is obviously something vindictive going on coupled with the triumphalism of it all.

Sozzo/Fonseca: Criminology moved from a very progressive perspective in the 60s and 70s to an increasing conservative take in recent decades. However, there has been a revival of interest in critical perspectives, noticeably in the development of cultural criminology. What do you think are the positive points of this contemporary line of work? How do you relate it with your own previous work? What do you believe are the most important connections between cultural criminology and the development of critical criminology from the 1970s onwards? What are the challenges for a critical perspective in criminology nowadays? In a way, this connection of your work with cultural criminology in the last 10 years has something of a return to *The Drugtakers*?

I remember saying to Mike Presdee that I hope you don't think I was parachuting into all of this and he said, nice and kindly, as he was, he said: 'No, we just think you're returning home'.

Sozzo: Well, in a way, it is.

It is very much of that sort, and, you know, I think in *The Drugtakers* and stuff, the way I interpreted the biological effects of drugs was a cultural swing on that story. But ... Yeah, sure, I think there is a continuity in it.

Sozzo: And there is no risk in the literature of cultural criminology to avoid, let's say, this more macro-level engagement with social theory, No? Going back also to something that you already said about the 1960s and the dilemmas in that moment for ...

I mean, there is a problem. Actually, Keith Hayward and I have to do a rewrite of the thing for the *Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, and I've just been making notes about what sorts of things we ought to be bringing into it. First is to develop the psycho-dynamic aspect, which is not developed. If we can get a cultural criminology and an existential psychodynamics, we have achieved something. We don't need all the bloody baggage of psychoanalytic theory and all that sort of stuff. Additionally, policy is a problem, and the analysis of the macro level is a problem. Policy is definitely a problem. Romanticism has always been a problem.

Sozzo: In a way, it is coming back to some of the, let's say, the risks of left idealism.

No doubt about that, but I don't think we are unaware of these. That's what the criticism of Katz [1988] was about, because *Seductions of Crime* is a wonderful book, but it really is a completely phenomenological enterprise, so totally against materialism of any sort of explanation, even though he actually, strangely enough, does bring in several things in the book which have got all these sort of qualities. I don't know, I think in some attempt to do something about macro theory, the romanticism is a really important thing to confront. Obviously, people do stuff on the far right: say, Nazi skinheads. You might think that they

are romanticizing that a bit too. I try to keep this in mind. Certainly in *Criminological Imagination*, I do a strong thing against romanticism and develop a typology of othering. So I talk about conservative othering, liberal othering, which is a very important thing, I think, and romantic othering, right? Three types of othering.

Sozzo/Fonseca: In *The Vertigo of Late Modernity* you revise some of your earlier theses from *The Exclusive Society*, mostly in what concerned replacing a binary division for a bulimic inclusion/exclusion dynamics. Do you also present important reviews of your work in your latest book, *Criminological Imagination*?

The *Criminological Imagination* develops the notion of liberal othering and takes it forward into a critique of quantitative methods. Liberal othering involves seeing deviants as deficient in our abilities and virtues and you combine such a deficit with a social distancing. Numerical othering involves measuring this deficit and distancing oneself from the subjects being studied. This quantified distancing is seen as the basis of scientific objectivity. So you don't meet deviants, you buy data about them from survey firms and encounter them as a series of numbers in a regression analysis on a computer screen. So it extends the notion of social exclusion from society into social research itself. And it ends by suggesting that there are two criminologies: one which attempts to see all human behavior in social and historical contexts, in the fashion depicted in C Wright Mills' *Sociological Imagination* and which views social action as the generation of narratives out of the 'facts' of existence; and a second which seeks nomothetic generalizations with determined actors irrespective of time, place and culture. The first is the province of critical and more recently cultural criminology; the second that of positivism which is particularly prevalent in the United States. In a sense all this critique is a continuation of the project we started forty years ago with the publication of *The New Criminology*.

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