

Editorial Introduction: Centring Critical Indigenous Perspectives in Decolonisation

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We are pleased to present this special edition, “Decolonising Criminology and Crime Control: Critical Indigenous Perspectives,” for *The Journal of Global Indigeneity*. The articles in this edition emerged from a two-day symposium of the same name on the Wallumattagal campus, hosted by the Macquarie University Global Indigenous Futures Research Centre and the Australian Research Council, Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, held on 18 and 19 September 2024.

The focus and spirit of the Symposium can be summarised in a quote from the esteemed Nigerian criminologist, Biko Agozino (2019, p. 6):

[I]t is in the interest of humanity and of criminologists to decolonise the entire world and the discipline of criminology because it is dangerous for any discipline to evade major developments that are relevant to the core subjects of the discipline especially when we are talking about threats to humanity.

There is little question that decolonising perspectives and approaches within criminology and criminal justice have emerged as major developments within the discipline. This is despite the efforts of disciplinary gatekeepers and others who seek to silence or ignore the growth and impact of such work.

Yet while such silencing continues – as discussed by some of the authors in this special issue – the growing body of Indigenous scholarship, the persistence of Indigenous and other critical voices, and unyielding evidence of the harms produced through colonial and racialised justice systems now press too insistently against criminology’s boundaries to be contained. These analyses repeatedly expose what the discipline has too often attempted to bracket off, drawing attention to historical and present structural conditions that shape contemporary forms of harm, punishment, and inequality. What emerges, then, is not simply a parallel intellectual and social movement but a widening recognition that the discipline’s long-standing refusals are no longer

tenable — an unsettling return of what criminology has tried to forget, a *haunting* of the criminological imagination that makes evasion increasingly untenable.¹

Such evasion becomes increasingly untenable, as it can no longer be contained by a discipline rooted in colonisation. By this we refer not only to the history of colonisation but to its ongoing realities. Land remains dispossessed. Indigenous and diasporic peoples continue to be murdered by the state. Carceral systems of criminal (in)justice persistently incarcerate, police, surveil, and harass Brown, Black, and poor communities at brutally disproportionate rates.

In recognition of these realities, the Symposium was designed with several goals in mind. A primary goal was to feature the ongoing work of Indigenous scholars and activists engaged in decolonising praxis. Equally important was creating space for scholars and activists whose work understands colonisation as an ongoing system of power intersecting with patriarchy, homophobia and heteronormativity, classism, and other forms of oppression—what Patricia Hill Collins (2022) terms “matrices of domination.” A third goal was to invite Indigenous and other students interested in critical Indigenous perspectives to learn, participate, and contribute to collective discussions across a range of topics.

The first day of the Symposium centred on interactive workshops involving presenters, postgraduate students, and other participants. These discussions highlighted the need for a special issue in *The Journal of Global Indigeneity* and included an extended invitation for postgraduates to submit work. The articles gathered here therefore reflect a diverse range of topics and approaches. Yet they all echo Agozino’s call—and that of countless others—to challenge and transform the relationship between criminology, criminal (in)justice, and the modes of knowledge production that continue to legitimise the oppressive and carceral dimensions of colonisation.

This is not a new endeavour. Rather, the work represented in this special issue—and the Symposium itself—stands in a long line of historical and contemporary movements that resist colonisation and seek more equitable, humane, and *just* forms of social life. In Australia, archives and oral histories document sustained resistance to colonial violence from its outset. In 1846, Ben Lomond man Walter George Arthur—writing with fellow survivors from Ben Lomond, Bruny Island, Big River and other Tasmanian nations at Wybalenna—petitioned Queen Victoria to honour earlier agreements to be treated as free people and to remain on, or return to, their countries. In this

1 Avery Gordon (2008) uses “haunting” to describe the way suppressed histories, violences, and silenced voices persist as felt presences that disturb taken-for-granted ways of knowing. For her, haunting signals the return of what dominant institutions or disciplines have tried to forget, revealing the limits of purely empirical or administrative frameworks. When applied to criminology, this concept highlights how the discipline is continually unsettled by the colonial, racialised, and structural harms it has long marginalised or ignored.

petition, Arthur (1846) wrote: “When we left our own place we were plenty of People, we are now but a little one... He [the colonial superintendent at Wybalenna, Henry Jeanneret] put many of us into Jail... because we would not be his slaves.”

The Crown’s response was deliberately brutal. Instead of honouring these agreements, the British abandoned Wybalenna. The small number of surviving Ben Lomond, Bruny Island, Big River and others were sent to a condemned penal station at Oyster Cove (Cameron, 2019).

Some 180 years later, the Crown’s response to its own injustices against Indigenous Peoples remains brutal. As each of the articles in this special issue reminds us, colonisation remains an ongoing structure through which the state maintains its dispossession of land and place, withholds sovereignty, and continues systems of violence and oppression. There is a clear line from the early resistance to colonisation—epitomised by Arthur and other Indigenous Peoples in Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and globally—to resistance against present-day criminology and criminal injustices. This is a history, as Agozino (2003) reminds us, that was borne out of the eugenic principles of colonial violence and only later exported back to the metropole as a purported “science” to be deployed against the non-white and the poor.

Even today, the discipline of criminology continues to mask this history, and those who point to the empirical realities of present-day colonisation—let alone lived experiences—are often marginalised or silenced within criminology and affiliated disciplines. The article by Juan Tauri (2025) in this edition addresses this problem directly, confronting the marginalisation of Indigenous scholars and the silencing or dismissal of their critiques of criminological epistemes that inflict harm on Indigenous Peoples. Tauri traces the growing rift between criminology in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand and the work of Indigenous scholars who have distanced themselves from the Australia and New Zealand Society of Criminology (ANZOC) and similar forums in favour of Indigenous-focused spaces that more effectively support research aimed at improving the lives of Indigenous Peoples and promoting self-determination and sovereignty.

The silencing and marginalisation of Black and Brown scholars was itself foundational to criminology. Over a century ago, sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois (1903/1994, p. v) observed that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.” For Du Bois, the “color line” was not merely racial prejudice but a structuring feature of modern society that organised economic opportunity, political power, and cultural values around white supremacy. Its operations were visible to those forced to live within its boundaries yet rendered unseen—or seen as natural—by those it privileged, enclosing Black life behind what he termed “the veil,” a psychic and material separation through which one could see, but never be fully seen, by the white world.

Du Bois's earlier work, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), was the first sustained sociological study to demonstrate that crime and social disorder among Black urban communities were not products of individual moral failings or cultural differences, but the predictable outcomes of what we now call systemic racism—manifested through exclusion from employment, housing, unions, and civic life that structured inequality into the fabric of urban modernity.

Many of Du Bois' findings—and his use of innovative methodologies—anticipated what would become the “Chicago School” of social disorganisation some two decades later. Instead of drawing from or building on his prescient contributions, however, the Chicago School and most of criminology ignored his work for much of the twentieth century. Rather, as C. W. Mills (1943) documented, the textbooks and theories of crime canonised in these formative years of the discipline were written by white male criminologists from largely rural or suburban communities—those for whom “social organisation” reflected white, rural or suburban norms and corresponding ideas of “appropriate” social life. For a newly emerging discipline embedded with such assumptions, Du Bois' work was too radical. Where the Chicago school preferred to focus on the impact of recent immigrants in the social ecology of “disorganization” – largely sidestepping systemic anti-Black racism in America – Du Bois was too insistent on racism as a primary factor in the “disorganisation” of urban communities.

These patterns of erasure and appropriation are not merely historical; as the contributions to this issue demonstrate, they remain embedded in contemporary criminological discourses and practices. Similar assumptions persist today within criminology and its responses to crime and social harm, where race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity are often ignored or reduced to decontextualised demographic variables. In their article “Restorative Justice or Colonial Compromise? Rethinking Responses to Family Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities,” Bronwyn Carlson, Terri Farrelly, and Margaret Jordan examine the role of restorative justice (RJ) in cases of family violence involving Indigenous Peoples and communities. They highlight the significant lack of research and practice in this area and emphasise the ontological mismatch between RJ—as a Western, state-based mechanism—and Indigenous contexts in which family violence is inseparable from the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Consequently, they caution that “restorative justice, when embedded within colonial institutions, risks becoming a reformist compromise that reproduces rather than dismantles carceral control,” disproportionately affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Carlson et al., 2025, p. 1). This view echoes arguments made by all the authors in this special issue: that state justice practices and mechanisms routinely resist reforms necessary for the wellbeing, and indeed the survival, of Indigenous Peoples and communities. In the context of RJ, Carlson *et al.* (2025, p. 15) argue that meaningful

decolonisation requires “shifting power, investing in long-term community-led infrastructure, and moving beyond assimilationist reforms toward genuine Indigenous self-governance in matters of justice and healing.”

Colonial injustices extend far beyond the criminal justice system, shaping the political and economic structures of modern settler-colonial states. In this issue, “Mutual Aid as Decolonial Praxis: A Reflection on Practice and a Call for Action” by Vasiliki Yemayah Franco-Klothos, Mia Topen, Romey Porcu, and Huda Naraco continues ongoing critical examination of state- and NGO-based “assistance” for Indigenous and diasporic peoples. Franco-Klothos and colleagues expose the disempowering nature of client-based models of social and financial support, which impose conditional funding, professionalised provider–client relationships, and hierarchies of “deserving” and “undeserving” recipients, often reinforced through racialised categories. More broadly, they show how these state and non-profit systems may function as tools of surveillance and control—not only over solidarity movements, but also over everyday forms of care, community organising, and resistance. In contrast, they highlight mutual aid as a liberatory praxis that restores dignity and autonomy by redistributing resources through reciprocal, community-led networks that operate independently of the state, support self-determination, and challenge the material conditions and social relations of colonialism.

This focus on critical praxis is central to Natalie Ironfield’s examination of the recent “decolonial” turn within Australian criminology. In her article “Decolonisation as Departure: Interrogating the Reconstructivist Tendencies of Australian Criminology,” Ironfield (2025) is rightly wary of the growing popularity of “decolonising” approaches in the discipline. She highlights the contradiction between the rising uptake of decolonisation—now “spearheaded by non-Indigenous, and overwhelmingly White criminologists”—and these scholars’ ongoing failure to interrogate their relationship to the colonial project or to consider how their work might better support Indigenous liberation or community organising (Ironfield, 2025, p. 2). Echoing Tauri’s (2025) critiques discussed above, Ironfield emphasises the continued marginalisation of Indigenous scholars and identifies the dangers of a decolonising rhetoric increasingly detached from decolonising praxis.

However, Ironfield’s concerns extend beyond the marginalisation of Indigenous scholars to a critique of the hegemonic dimensions of decolonising “discourses” themselves. Drawing on Rodríguez (2021), Cohen (1987), and others, she argues these discourses often operate as mechanisms of “White Reconstruction,” enabling criminology to recast itself as aligned with Indigenous Peoples while leaving its colonial foundations intact. In practice, such moves do little to unsettle criminology’s ongoing role as a colonial apparatus or the academy’s function as a site of privilege for non-

Indigenous scholars. Following Cohen's (1987) critique of "critical" scholars who benefit from the very systems they denounce, Ironfield (2025, p. 12) contends that without a praxis directed toward abolishing carceral systems of imprisonment, surveillance, and control that continue colonial violence against Indigenous Peoples, decolonising "discourses" merely "disavow oppressive systems of power whilst simultaneously operating to sustain and extend these power relationships."

Returning to the "haunting" of the criminological imagination, Ironfield's article exposes one of several discursive strategies used to "reclaim" and legitimise contemporary criminology despite its colonial foundations. Each contribution in this special issue, in different ways, forces these present-day "ghosts" into view—unsettling, disruptive, and inconvenient truths for a discipline deeply tied to the institutional and ideological structures of settler-colonial states and their carceral logics. In Carlson et al. (2025), this appears in their critique of the state's embrace of restorative justice, particularly where such approaches exclude Indigenous Peoples or fail to acknowledge how family violence is inseparable from colonisation. In Franco-Klothos et al. (2025), it emerges through their analysis of client-based welfare systems that reproduce or reinforce systemic racism under the guise of social "assistance." And in both Tauri (2025) and Ironfield (2025), it is evident in their insistence that criminology—and criminologists—must be held accountable for their ongoing investments in, and rewards from, the legitimisation of carceral power and colonial violence.

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