

Freya Anderson

Grace Gordon

Robert Webb¹

Critical Conversations on Decolonising Criminology in Aotearoa New Zealand

This article explores some of the themes and ideas that arose with Biko Agozino's visit to the University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand in June of 2018. The visit was marked with research workshops that brought together academics, postgraduates and community members for discussions and critical conversations on his work and the theme of 'Decolonising criminology and the law'. This included a hui (meeting) hosted on Waipapa Marae, and a postgraduate workshop with critical criminology scholars. In this article we reflect upon these conversations, the significant thoughts from these events, including the global experiences of colonial dispossession and control of indigenous peoples. We explore the ways the crime control agenda—that has progressed through the colonial to neo-colonial contemporary times — has produced ongoing marginalisation and intergenerational social harm that disproportionately impacts upon Māori as indigenous people. We also discuss the collective challenges and aspirations of a critical research approach to pursuing a social justice and Indigenous criminology agenda, with the aim of transforming criminological knowledge both here in Aotearoa New Zealand and abroad.

¹ The authors are from Sociology and Criminology, School of Social Sciences in the University of Auckland. Freya Anderson is a Graduate Teaching Assistant and completing a Master of Arts in Criminology, Grace Gordon is a Professional Teaching Fellow enrolled in a PhD in Criminology, and Robert Webb is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology.

Biko Agozino spoke of the research on counter-colonial criminology and the experiences of black women in the criminal justice system, and the challenges of a critical criminology approach to decolonising criminology (see Agozino 1997, 2003, 2018). Likewise other speakers discussed the fundamental structural questions on how state and policy practices within New Zealand remain underpinned by mechanisms of neo-colonial colonial power. One of the most well-known social facts and human rights issue within New Zealand, is the disproportionate criminal justice interventions, rates of incarceration and the related social impact on Māori, representing 15% of the general population and 50% of those imprisoned. The growth of the incarcerated culture over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries shares similarities to Indigenous peoples' experiences in other countries such as Australia and Canada. Tracey McIntosh highlighted that Māori histories of 'Once we were gardeners', were lost through appropriation of land and the absolute dispossession of Māori communities that was foundational to the colonial process. Today, the neo-colonial realities continue within a culture of incarceration.

Tracey spoke of alternatives for an inclusive future for all in Aotearoa, and the hope through the notion of mokopunatanga, or to have an intergenerational gaze when considering changes that will influence the lives of future grandchildren. Thus, while the prison is our dominant form of punishment, McIntosh noted that we need to imagine a world without a place for prison. She encouraged us to be heartened by the idea that any previous major social change has been seen as utopian and unimaginable (see McIntosh and Workman 2017, McIntosh 2018).

While there is vast amounts of criminological research and knowledge being produced that looks to individual deviance, the threshold of state policies and roots of social and economic

dispossession in New Zealand needs to be fully untangled. Juan Tauri encouraged us to be critical of what he would term ‘criminological elitism’, which refers to the overvaluation of certain ‘truths’ or forms of knowledge within the criminology academy. Here, Tauri challenged the administrative criminology claims of truth in empiricism, and the ways it fetishizes certain types of data. He asked the audience to consider the over-reliance within the academy to value non-indigenous perspectives on indigenous peoples and issues (see Tauri 2012, 2017). Through this over-reliance of certain forms of knowledge, indigenous voices and experiences become silenced. William Wood discussed how criminology is a discipline that serves the states focus on social control, and the administrative approach dominates criminological knowledge. He posed the issue for critical scholars to look beyond limited criminological and state definitions of risk, criminalisation and victimhood.

In considering decolonising criminology, Tracey McIntosh asked, what could decolonisation look like and what are the issues of indigenous sovereignty and rights? The decolonisation of New Zealand society is an ongoing struggle for justice, and like other indigenous peoples this demands support for self-determination and enduring equality. New Zealand as a small country has the opportunity to show international leadership in a broader decolonising project. Through collaborative efforts and uniting of allies which recognise that *we all suffer* as a result of colonisation is one of the first steps that needs to be taken in moving forward. We need to acknowledge our own individual histories, indigeneity, and identities to decolonise practices, knowledge as well as the cultural and social structural landscape. Our collaboration as authors in writing this reflection, takes a deliberate approach in which indigenous and non-indigenous (Pākehā) scholars work together, aiming to challenge systems of oppression.

We recognise that movements towards decolonisation need to be a collective and international fight against oppression, as Biko Agozino noted. Rather than in isolation, it must challenge the ideologies of racism, sexism, and capitalism that divides us, in order to focus on reducing social harm. There is also a need to ensure that criminologists alongside other scholars engage with indigenous peoples and experiences. The challenge to criminology is to build an inclusive paradigm that supports indigenous experience, knowledge and practices, and to consider how Indigenous justice can be transformative.

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