

Dr. Rolando Ochoa¹

Love in Choleric Times: Articulating Race, Class and Gender in the Decolonisation of Criminology

The need to de-colonise many areas of knowledge is becoming more evident by the hour. More often than not, academics of every background - although often female academics and/or academics of colour (AOCs?) – raise their voices in individual or collective efforts to remove the veil of colonialism, including racism, misogyny and other forms of oppression from the social sciences and humanities. These efforts are reminiscent of the “bumping back” of Ralph Ellison’s invisible man. Bumping back against invisibility, against a narrative of knowledge creation which has for too long refused to *see* diversity in its midst, which has at times treated said diversity as a problem to be solved and not an inescapable fact of life to be embraced. Thus, the invisible have created networks, norms and narratives, which, in the end as Ellison argues, are integral as well to those of the designated oppressors. This struggle – like all struggles - is not without its internal dissenters, contradictions and fissures.

The 21st Century has brought us the increasing recognition of intersectional struggles of liberation and empowerment. These exist at the crossroads of gender, race, sexual identity, class and other dimensions of the human experience. The very diverse nature of these groups also means that it is possible to find bitter divisions among those who wish to decolonise. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. famously disagreed on the means to carry out the civil

¹ Lecturer, Department of Security Studies and Criminology, Macquarie University, Sydney.

rights struggle in the United States. Transgender women have faced criticism and backlash from some corners of feminism and vice versa. In Latin America, we refer to “the Left” with the plural *las Izquierdas* (literally the Lefts), as a response to the many different shapes this political inclination takes, which go from the Leninist to the almost-neoliberal. This does not make things easy.

Social media, globalisation and increasing recognition of social complexity – quintessential double-edged swords - have amplified the effects and knowledge of centuries of colonialism and decades of neoliberal exploitation and inequality. Carlson, Jones et. al. (2017) refer to this phenomenon in the context of Australian Indigenous peoples as “shared recognition”. They have also amplified the notoriety of centuries-long struggles for acknowledgement, justice and liberation and become a tool for resistance. This has given us an awesome consequence: an epoch of anger (perhaps also known as the Anthropocene). Anger expressed everywhere and anywhere. Road rage, race baiting, bullying, domestic violence, one-hit punches, Twitter. For the purposes of this article however, this does not refer to well documented and historically justified anger between the colonisers and the de-colonisers, but rather to differences between and among those who seek to defeat colonial, neoliberal, patriarchal structures of power.

It is no surprise that there is no united de-colonising front. The incredibly rich and intersectional nature of humanity’s conundrums makes strategising to tackle them very difficult indeed. This presents challenges for all involved in the process, namely based on the need to find some common ground on which to carry out decolonisation.

Uniting the Decolonising Front, an Analytical Sociology Approach.

I contend that for this to happen our criminological understanding of class, gender and race must be articulated in such a way as to facilitate decolonisation. Analytical sociology (AS) can provide a suitable framework in this exercise. This branch of analytical thought is concerned with explaining social facts beyond simple correlations. It posits that social change is the product of individuals’ “...actions, properties and relation to one another” (Hedström & Bearman 2009, p. 7). AS looks for the mechanisms through which humans affect change, and in this way can really explain how this change comes about. It promotes the use of middle-range theories to explain social facts and as such it is sceptical of overarching general social theories. Its basis on the analysis of individuals, while not completely discounting the role of structures can accommodate the rich diversity of views and experiences within modern social sciences.

The world is more unequal by the day. The developed world increasingly becomes more so as welfare states (interestingly, one mechanism through which they became developed in the first place) are slowly dismantled by those who most benefitted from them. In the developing world nations already suffer from obscene levels of inequality, a product of the wanton application of the neoliberal model for many decades. The current liberal-capitalist system’s promise of money and status produces apathy and fear; in the words of Hall and Winslow (2017) a “pseudo-pacification” whereby over-securitisation stunts the capacity of many to affect change. This affects Universities as well. The rise of precarity in employment impairs the capacity of many academics to voice resistance to what is an increasingly corporate educational model (lest your 9-month contract not be renewed).

Thus we find societies divided into those who have money, those who do not, and an increasingly evaporating middle which is desperately clinging to whatever gains they have made (for proof of this just look at Australia's skyrocketing household debt as an indicator of the middle class' desperate attempts to maintain their living standards). Criminology must focus its energy on this divide, on further understanding it. It must work on lifting the veil of neoliberal and – again, in the words of Hall and Winslow (2017) – ‘administrative’ criminology to reveal how changing class structures uphold current colonial models, and how individual action can change or perpetuate this, and how we, as social scientists, can use class as a unifying tool in decolonisation. This is not however, a simple call to some superficial take on Marxism. It is borne of a desire to find this unifying mechanism, one which can accommodate many different groups and opinions, linking global and local dynamics while maintaining and encouraging diversity. For example, Jenkins and Keane (2014) identify (along with Raewyn Connell) the need for feminist scholars to approach local Australian issues such as indigenous women's land rights. An analytical sociology, mechanisms-based approach can help us understand exactly *why* it is that indigenous women's rights are routinely violated, beyond the well-known correlations between gender, ethnicity and land rights.

Finding True Love

Biko Agozino ask us to decolonise through love, to teach love and learn love. How do we do this in this choleric age? We can, for example, by *seeing* that most inmates in any given prison are likely poor, that poor educational outcomes are linked to social class, and by understanding that these are compounded by gender and race, not on a hierarchical level, but as a dynamic constellation of colonial leftovers which serve to oppress – and control – those who are not male, rich, and white. Critical criminology makes similar calls. More recently ultra-realist criminologists argue for a paradigm shift based on deep ethnographic knowledge. Analytical

sociology also provides the realism necessary to do this by focussing on the macro-changes individual action can bring about, unfiltered. I cannot claim to have the answer to decolonisation in criminology or indeed the social sciences, however, through mechanisms approaches, ultra-realist ethnographies and critical stances we begin to see a possible way.

References

Carlson, B., Jones, L., Harris, M., Quezada, N. & Frazer, R. 2017. Trauma, Shared Recognition and Indigenous Resistance on Social Media, *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*, 21.

Hall, S. & Winlow, S. 2015. *Revitalising Criminological Theory*. London: Routledge.

Hedstrom, P. & Bearman, P. 2009. What is Analytical Sociology all About? An Introductory Essay, *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*, pp. 3-24.

Jenkins, F. & Keane, H. 2014. Gender and Feminism in the Social Sciences: Equity, Excellence and Knowledge in the Disciplines, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 29(80), pp.107-114.