A Criminal Urbanology?

A review of the book: Atkinson, Rowland & Millington, Gareth (2019). *Urban Criminology: The City, Disorder, Harm and Social Control*. New York, NY: Routledge, 295 pages.

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The modern city and the forms of population management in its space are the most immediate and concrete evidence of capitalist exploitation and domination since its emergence with the bourgeois revolutions and the Industrial Revolution. A book on urban criminology therefore far surpasses the specialist interests of urban sociology and critical criminology. Moreover, after reading the book (of broad historical and theoretical scope), it is no exaggeration to state that it is impossible to think of the modern city without considering the forms used for controlling offences and offenders within its space.

Urban Criminology is an extensive book with excellent and detailed treatment of the intersection between themes, concepts, and key references to enhance the understanding of this comprehensive interdisciplinary field. The first sentence of the introduction states clearly, "[t]o understand crime has been in many ways to understand the city" (p. 2). The converse of this statement would be no exaggeration, in that to understand the city is also to understand better the networks of political, economic, social, and cultural relations of crime, and their association with the production of space as it is built and lived.

This book is structured around the consequent analysis of key topics for the construction of this com-

bined proposal of urban criminology. The seven chapters, plus the introduction, address: neighbour-hood and local contexts; urban economies and the criminal economy of cities; urban governance; city policing; violence; and housing; and finally reflect on all the topics to suggest some key issues in urban criminology. There will therefore be few comparable books in terms of the association between crimi-nology and urban studies, making it a unique reference for any attentive reader interested in process-es of urbanisation and the geography of crime, disorder, and social control in cities. It provides a very well-structured and in-depth study, containing dense analysis with historical reconstitutions, based on classical and contemporary sources of the socio-spatial techno-politics of urban criminology.

The originality of this study lies not just in the simple fact of associating space with crime, since that relationship has already been widely explored in studies on the role of design and the environment in generating opportunities for crime and misconduct – generally in approaches connected to strategies such as "crime prevention through environmental design" (CPTED), "situational crime prevention" (SCP), or "environmental criminology" – which in particular simplify this relationship by adopting a deterministic approach to the materiality of the built environment. Its originality, however, lies also in the understanding of urban criminology as involving various complex elements and considering space as a social construct rather than a simple stage (physical base) where social relationships take place – as is commonly (and mistakenly) considered. This has direct consequences for what is defined by law as crime, and how it is confronted, showing that behaviour that is considered criminal cannot simply be "eliminated" from the setting through the unilateral adoption of force or modifications to the architecture and urban design. Such measures fail to address (perhaps deliberately) the deep social and economic roots that shape crime and its complexities – and measures such as "secured by design" or "design out crime", largely adopted by countries like the United Kingdom and the United States, are therefore questioned as variants to be adapted in certain parts of cities in the Global South.

The book itself offers a critique of classic criminology studies that fail to consider the complexity of socio-spatial relations and accept territory simply as the terrain where so-called crimes occur. The authors also suggest conversely that there is a gap in the epistemology; that is to say, urban studies neglect crime and criminology as important aspects for understanding urban dynamics. The book thus opportunely explores socio-spatial control as a powerful parameter in explaining the urban ge-ography of crime and disorder, evidently associated with the economic, political, and cultural condi-tions that shape it. The central themes – such as gentrification, patterns of planetary urbanisation, the property market, and social housing, among others – running through the eight chapters are identi-fied as having been neglected by criminology studies.

In this combined view of urban and criminal studies according to the arrangements that contribute to the construction of crime and the city from a socio-spatial standpoint, value is placed on the im-portant understanding of socio-technical networks – with explicit reference to the concept of "assem-blage urbanism" (McFarlane, 2011), as a "complex mix of social and material forces that comprise urban systems" (p. 7) – and is indicative of the authors' post-structuralist approach. Their Marxist inspiration can also be seen in an important persistence in defining urban dynamics according to the capitalist production of space, in its various forms of the market-led manifestation of territory, with an emphasis on regimes of urban land tenure, their nuances, and asymmetrical consequences. The widely known works of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey are brought in to explore this important aspect of the construction of cities (and so-called crime), principally from the nineteenth century onwards. Similarly, there is an effort to understand the city as the result of an intense financialisation of land use and occupation (the virtualisation of socio-spatial relationships), which suffers the conse-quences of misuse of resources for managing these unbalanced disputes over space. Or, as the authors put it, "the city is often dominated by the interests of its finance-focused urban economies" (p. 10). This dominance of financial interests, the book suggests, has effects on social relationships and their distribution in the urban space through controls operated by policies for combatting crime.

We single out here some topics (which the authors consider as problems) from these multifaceted perspectives, as themes that are properly addressed in a focused and segmented manner in each of the eight chapters.

The need to understand space as a social construct – consisting of materialities, relations, and actions that form specific arrangements – demonstrates the importance of understanding local idiosyncrasies and contexts when looking for the reasons for, and characteristics of, crime, even with all the global connections potentially present in the territory. Understanding specificities at neighbourhood level is a fundamental element of the authors' viewpoint, based on the argument that it is one of the smallest spatial units for analysis of the urban environment. The book's historical review of the literature on criminology and approaches associated with the topic demonstrates that the neighbourhood has traditionally only been considered partially and it has been stripped of the necessary historical and socio-political context of the city.

Attention to the local scale of the neighbourhood as a territorial unit for analysis of crime is meanwhile linked to the risk of stigmatisation of places by crime. Charles Booth's pioneering work on mapping the social aspects of the London working class in the nineteenth century is recognised as some of the earliest cartographic representations of social asymmetries in how they relate information such as income, work, habits, and schooling to places of residence in the city. His surveys also form one of the earliest records of cartographic spatial stigmatisation ("dangerous classes") and were allegedly employed by hygienists and such like against "urban degeneration". Atkinson and Millington are explicit about this dual contribution of works like Charles Booth's and the characteristic duplicity of biopolitical government technologies and their necessarily urban incidences:

> Booth's maps of London constitute an urban form of urban "othering" that, in its nineteenth-century context, was related to wider notions of imperial rule and colonial exploration that extended to the dark recesses of the newly industrialised cities as much as to new nations abroad, many of which were still part of the British Empire. (p. 30)

Booth is not the only one referred to in the chapter on "neighbourhoods and crime". There are also many references to the contributions of Engels and Lefebvre to a political economy of space and characterisation of the urban phenomenon (or "urban revolution"), with industrial society and the means of capitalist production as possible sources of urban criminology. But no other line of interpretation is discussed and analysed as much as urban ecology, starting from the 1920s in the United States. The critique situates the Chicago School as a pioneer in the influence of a certain geographical determinism and neglect towards issues of class and racism, shifting the focus of criminology studies from "types of people" towards "types of places", which can be seen in later works such as Rodney Stark's *Deviant Places* (1987) and Robert Sampson's *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighbourhood Effect* (2012).

It would be unfair to the authors to attempt to resume or summarise all the debates and references about the historical importance of understanding crime based on a close look at the territorial unity of the neighbourhood. On the other hand, our attention is drawn to the exhaustive treatment of the historical construction of spatial stigmatisation in several chapters of the book, particularly Chapter Two. Special attention is given here to the formation of ghettos – and how they unfold into other territorial configurations with similar characteristics (such as the "second ghetto" or hyperghetto"). The authors look to Wacquant (1997) to construct a critique of the trivialisation of the image of the African American ghetto when the term is internationally used to describe any poor neighbourhood, when it is really a historical institution for ethno-racial (and spatial) control from the United States that would involve four elements of racial domination: categorisation, discrimination, segregation, and exclusionary violence.

This critique places high value on ethnographic studies about the conditions of stigmatised territories (such as ghettos) by offering an understanding of (and support for) the survival and resistance tactics of vulnerable populations. Several studies provide examples that offer a significant understanding of the nuances of social adaptation and transformation in dealing with the economic and cultural issues of survival (and in some cases the formation of resistance), and to explain different conditions in which the ghetto can be interpreted as integrated into other rationales of the city while also producing its own dynamics. The consequences of stigmatisation of territories (defamation of places) have repercussions for the public policies (or lack of them) for these areas, police violence, and focused/

directed surveillance, along with loss of opportunity connected to education, health, and employment.

One of the authors' strategies in describing the various layers of urban dynamics and their relationship with the understanding of crime involves discussion of the political economy of the production of space, with one chapter (3) being entirely concerned with the urban economy. This approach explores the relationship between criminology and the (formal and informal) economy, the imposed conditions in terms of opportunity (for work and consumption), and the decline in economic activities in some areas of the city. Cities are historically the focal point of exchange, subverting their own existence through the rationale of the marketplace in various different periods, with intensification of these commercial relationships dating from the Renaissance and their complete submission since industrialisation and the emergence of capitalist societies. These relationships are reflected on different scales of space, from global to intra-urban. There is an important attempt to recognise a wide variety of crimes related to the rationales that comprise cities and city networks. Here the authors again point to a critique of traditional studies of criminality, questioning the fact that corporate crime and white-collar crime are not recognised as urban crimes. One reason for this is the redistributive effects of this type of crime, which reduce its perception and visibility. The lack of a direct relationship with perceptions of fear (which there is with crimes of rape, robbery, and murder, for example) is recognised as another possible reason.

The book allows the city to be understood as the quintessential place of neoliberal rationalism. It provides a perfect spatial (and capital) concentration for the promotion of economic growth for the consumption practices of the elite at the cost of exploitation of the labour force of the marginalised population, which is kept under control and order and unprecedented levels of violence and institutionalised surveillance. Profound asymmetries between urban economic circuits are illustrated through important references to the work of Jock Young in *The Vertigo of Late Modernity* (2007), demystifying the ideal of a dual city:

> In grasping this dynamic, Young favours the notion of the "bulimic city" over the "dual city", suggesting a metropolitan environment that absorbs the poor but which systemically rejects them, denying them access to the housing, education, employment, and health care that would allow them to flourish in the city. (p. 95)

Financial crimes and predatory economic circuits do not arise in isolation from the practices of planning and urban management. Urban life is guided by symbols of authority and demonstration of power, normally channelled through state institutions for imposition of civic order and legal compliance. The built environment (architecture and urban design) reflects such demonstrations of authority. Chapter Four discusses how power and social control are materialised spatially and operationalised through the administration of this space according to neoliberal reasoning. Understanding the asymmetries of power in the city is argued as being essential for identifying the conflict and problems connected to territorial management. The focus on suspect territories and populations has historical roots in which the urban elites advocate values of order against incivility. The use of (political and economic) authority to impose "quality of life" (USA) or prevent "antisocial behaviour" (UK) has become the focus of the "sanitisation of cities" and exaggerated attention to socially excluded populations.

The authors show how a long and profound movement towards "urban entrepreneurship" has led to a type of urban management driven excessively (or exclusively) by market interests, which has direct consequences for how the city is governed and how social control is exercised. Added to this is the fact that several services traditionally provided by the state have undergone a wave of privatisations, with substantial loss of public control over elements essential to the functioning of cities and urban dynamics. There is a clear relationship here with the way in which urban space is managed by urban planning mechanisms oriented towards the construction of "clean and safe" (gentrified) spaces that can be consumed and desired in a neoliberal rationale of the marketisation of space and its components. Furthermore, it would be no exaggeration to state that, based on what is revealed in Chapter Four and according to references in the Anglo-Saxon world, neoliberal reasoning fosters a reconfiguration of the urban space based on the rationale of entrepreneurship, and the way of reinventing control of the dangerous classes is a criminal ecology handed down from the Chicago School that promotes

surveillance and violent control of urban enclaves inhabited by populations considered as vulnerable, making them the target for both care and control.

Movements towards privatisation and control of space or reconfiguration of territory as a form of control have a direct relationship with aspects of neoliberal governance that impose mechanisms of surveillance on the (physical and legal) maintenance of urban spaces. Here there is a similarity with Wakefield's (2004, p. 530) analysis of the distribution of responsibilities over control of security, in which private and state police forces work together in what she termed "surveillance as a responsibilization strategy". Firmino and Duarte (2015) associate the same idea with the state's tacit consent to the operation of private companies in monitoring public spaces in Latin American cities. So urban criminology formulated in the cradle of neoliberalism, the Chicago School, manages to operationalise the form of authoritarianism in the twenty-first century that combines financial speculation, urban despoliation, and strict criminal control. This allows for the imprisonment of large contingents of the population and/or their confinement and regulation in large urban enclaves, be they ghettos in the US, immigrant neighbourhoods in Europe, or the slums of the Global South – all this without the need for a formal authoritarian regime like the dictatorships of the twentieth century, simply because this control occurs at the immediate local level of the city and the neighbourhood, which is why Augusto and Wilke (2019) have called these institutional formations of twenty-first century neoliberalism "security democracies".

One of the historical precedents for cities "functioning without disorder" is considered to be the nineteenth century modernisation of urban structures and city reforms, of which Haussmann's Paris is always the outstanding example. To this we might add the always forgotten reform of Barcelona (not mentioned in the book) of the same decade, but with the important addition of the introduction of the 1861 *General Theory of Urbanization* by the same project designer, Ildefons Cerdà, with the principles of transforming cities into more "dynamic and hygienic environments". Another difference between the two plans is obviously the fact that Paris was effectively reshaped, while Barcelona consisted of an expansion plan (both with the same principles of modernisation of the urban form). These nineteenth century historical examples demonstrate how the book's analytical focus on the city and the neighbourhood is important for understanding not just city transformations but also how these reflect profound changes and adaptations in the forms of governing populations and in capitalist production and exploitation.

The physical transformation of urban spaces is therefore seen as an important mode of governance of the population, which the authors term "Haussmannisation", and identify as a practice that has been kept alive into the present, even under different modes of operation ("neo-Haussmannisation"). Almost every authoritarian mechanism has one or more rebellious responses. There can be no power relationship without resistance, after all. The important role of protest and rebellion in the shaping of urban space and policies in the city can be singled out. The authors use the example of the Paris Commune to explain how Haussmannian modifications were not enough to contain the uprising of those excluded from the centre of Paris, and associate this with other more recent cases, such as the London "riots" of 2011, to which we can add all the urban riots that have sprung up intermittently since 2008, from Ferguson to Rio de Janeiro, from Paris to Santiago, from Quito to Athens. It is no coincidence that, despite the specific issues of each of these "riots", their immediate targets always end up being the security forces, from shock troops to the integrated circuits of security cameras in the urban space.

Chapter Five inverts the critique onto neglected topics. Atkinson and Millington believe that urban studies have paid little attention to police and policing (despite being a central area of criminology). As Foucault noted in one of his 1978 lectures, "to police and to urbanise is the same thing". Discussion of this is once again accompanied by historical and contextual material, mainly from London's Metropolitan Police, whose creation was motivated by the maintenance of "social order" in a rapidly urbanising society, amidst the equally rapid processes of industrialisation and accumulation of capital in the nineteenth century.

In line with other parts of the book, it is important to understand the police in the context of the institutions and structures that provide support to a capitalist society and a bourgeois city. The authors

suggest that the myth of a fair and balanced police in pursuit of social order is a construct, offering arguments that demonstrate how police actions and strategies are directed at specific groups opposed to bourgeois social order. The important reference to Rancière's (1999) definition of the police according to activities responsible for ensuring a certain notion of order of distribution in places, names, and functions seems to have a clear relationship (not explicitly mentioned here) with Michel Foucault's (2008) concepts of biopolitics, biopower, and governmentality, especially the confinement of bodies and actions to certain demarcations of space.

Here we see a construction of the development of increasingly militarised police forces (in contrast to consent and greater personal contact with communities), in which hostility, authoritarianism, and differentiation by class or social condition become the guiding forces for police operations. The most recent stage of this development is marked by the increased value placed on sectors of police intelligence, with the growing use of predictive and surveillance technologies. It is interesting to note how the actions of contemporary police are influenced by a statistical culture of risk anticipation, which increases concentration on surveillance and communications techniques and devices. This also relates to the use of police in so-called "crime hot spots" and deeper stigmatisation of territories in the city, which, the authors' analysis suggests, could mean that if the city produced by "Haussmannisation" depended on statistical knowledge (a quintessential biopolitical knowledge), the neo-Haussmannisation of the city of today depends on the customary statistical calculations of risk and algorithmic projections of neoliberal governance.

Chapter Six, on urban violence, retains a balance between its parts, and yet is one of the most striking chapters of the book, dealing with the origins of urban violence and their economic and social conditioning, focusing on some aspects of the relationship between the configuration of space and different amounts and types of violence according to the arrangement of these elements. The feeling of denial of the city, stimulated by fear of violence, and its effects on organisation of the urban space, is one of the most striking analyses of the topic, recalling that this "demonisation" of the city as a space of danger and moral degradation is a classic theme of conservative liberalism and was strongly readopted by the neoconservatism of neoliberal times.

In several cities of the world the extreme cases of avoiding violence go considerably further than diverting routes from certain areas and neighbourhoods and become concrete actions for avoiding the city itself, through enclosed fortifications and all kinds of intramural urban facilities. Important associations are included here between fear and violence and the physical manifestations in the built environment – that is to say, architecture and urban design as a reflex and response to the fear of violence, represented above all by fear of the "other" and the "different".

This chapter does not just stand out for its detailed analysis of urban violence and its material and sensory affects, together with the countermeasures put into practice by the property market, the police, and the state. Here for the first time we find more explicit references to cities in the Global South. It is interesting to note that references to conditions in the Global South become more apparent when the book addresses the amount and types of urban violence. While not denying that these statistics are alarming in Latin America, for example, singling out these cities almost exclusively in the light of this subject seems to reinforce a kind of stigmatisation of these places in the world, which is something the authors clearly avoid at other levels. This seems to be the most pressing contradiction in this book: a perspective from the Global South is absent throughout the text, and the chapter on violence conveys an indirect sense of stigmatisation. Even in texts from critical standpoints, the Global South seems to be the most dangerous neighbourhood to be avoided in the world city.[1]

This omission is not exclusive to Chapter Six. Discussions about the police and forms of policing are

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1   For an interesting account on the connections between criminology studies and the Global South, please see the review of *Southern Criminology* (Kerry Carrington, Russell Hogg, John Scott, and Máximo Sozzo; Routledge, 2018) by Daniela Watson, published in this very journal (*Criminological Encounters*, *2*(1), 2019), and the book itself.

guided by a view clearly centred on countries in the Global North. There is, for example, no mention of the fact that there are probably no success stories of community policing in the Global South that do not reinforce the differences between rich and poor. Affluent neighbourhoods receive community-policing programmes linked normally to the interests of major property or commercial enterprises, for protection against the "other" or "intruder". But this practice has never "humanised" police actions in poor communities or slums in cities like São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, or Mexico City. Police operations in those places continue to occur through a logic of militarisation and confrontation. The only explanation that readers like us from the Global South might draw is that this absence demonstrates how means of control have been tested in these regions since colonisation and then return to the North in a "softened" form, which Graham (2011) termed "Foucault's boomerang".

The penultimate chapter contains another of the book's important contributions to the understanding of urban criminology. This analysis would not be complete without a discussion of the housing market, tenure regimes, and the role of social housing in the economic and socio-spatial organisation of cities. As the authors themselves explain,

> [p]rivate housing markets and public housing systems play a key role in influencing the social geography of cities as they intersect with material inequalities. As earlier analyses, such as by Baldwin et al. (1976) and Morris (1957), have suggested, areas of public housing (estates and projects) have long been seen as criminal areas. (p. 228)

The merit of this approach lies in a demonstration of the importance of understanding the mechanisms of the housing market, giving substance to an understanding of the surroundings as a neighbourhood spatial unit for socio-spatial analysis related to criminological studies. That is to say, the spatial arrangement of social difference is singled out in material/territorial terms. Three processes can be highlighted here: stigmatisation of social housing complexes and their use as strategies for social control; gentrification of areas through pressure from the property market; and spatial segregation through fortified complexes in the form of gated communities.

Although much of the chapter focuses on social housing complexes as resulting from a variety of processes of expulsion, gated communities are considered as the resultant form of the market-driven construction of areas for living in the contemporary city, the other side of the segregation produced by social housing. In these enclaves, the control and sovereignty of classes with greater economic power is demonstrated in a movement of total contempt for the traditional forms of construction of the urban space and its management by the state (through the use of private systems and rejection of the outside space and relationships with the "other").

The chapters and issues approached under various aspects in which questions of urban spatial arrangement are analysed alongside elements of criminal studies comprise a reading of the political economy of urban criminology, with a range of attention to the contexts and nuances of each aspect. The exception is the imbalance caused by a view excessively centred on the Global North, as we have mentioned. The gap identified in this study also tasks us with considering, researching, and theorising about the differences and resonances of this urban criminology in the Global South, to the extent that they are inserted in a globalised rationale of capitalism and governmental control of populations in different urban enclaves.

The book concludes with an intriguing proposal for four areas of attention in the intersection between urban and criminal studies: (1) new forms of urban control, with special attention to the use of sophisticated technologies and regimes for attention and surveillance for the production of preventive actions by the state and the police, and the use of containment tactics in spaces, together with the growing participation of private actors; (2) new forms of containment and socio-spatial separation, with different types of manifestation between rich and poor, increasingly fragile conditions of vulnerable social groups, leading to more visible and constant protests and rebellions; (3) socio-spatial arrangements linked to gender, race, and sexual identity, in which attention to the urban form, economy, and governance of cities associated with identity aspects opens new fronts for urban criminology, driven by the need for less patriarchal and less masculine cities; and (4) consideration of the relationships

between urban life and the pressures imposed on the ecological base of the planet by a global urban system, and understanding of the tensions that economic and industrial imbalance imposes on forms of socio-spatial organisation and the consequent development of more injustice, crime, and violence.

Rowland Atkinson and Gareth Millington have successfully, and with an astonishing level of detail and depth, developed their principal thesis of presenting an understanding of the categories of crime and criminal studies from an urban perspective and based on consideration of their various social structures and political and economic asymmetries. This perspective positions the production of space in cities and their territorialities as central components in the construction of different manifestations of crime, from the global scale (inter-cities, city networks, and regions) to the local scale (intra-urban, neighbourhoods, and districts).

Therefore, due to its thorough attention to the relevance of developing a science of the urban intertwined with a science of the crime, we believe the book also concludes by offering a "criminal urbanology", as might be suggested by its inverted title. Which brings us back to the start of this extensive review with an important addition: to understand crime and the forms of controlling it is a way to understand the city; but also, to understand the contemporary forms of urban control on their most basic level of the neighbourhood is a way to understand how capitalist exploitation and population management occur in the neoliberal world of today.

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