

A CRITIQUE OF SECURITY. TOWARDS A POSITIVE TURN IN CRIMINOLOGY

Marc Schuilenburg, Ronald van Steden and Brenda Oude Breuil

INTRODUCTION

Every academic discipline, with criminology no exception, is governed by certain images of thought that define the general content of scholarly work at a particular time and place. Images of thought precede academic practice and, in a sense, guide thinking in individual disciplines. Acting as a kind of presupposition, an image of thought underlies the logic of a scholarly field (Hayward and Schuilenburg 2014), with various expressions and content, but often taking the form of 'everybody knows this [...] everybody recognizes this [...] nobody can deny it' (Deleuze 1994: 129-131). An image of thought constructs the common sense of a field among its scholars and practitioners. However, it would be a mistake to assume that dominant presuppositions are essentially conscious or outspoken. On the contrary, they operate on the level of the unconscious and 'function all the more effectively in silence' (Deleuze 1994: 167). There is simply little if any debate about this common sense.

The concept of a dominant image of thought relates to Michel Foucault's notion of discourse, defined as 'a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation' (1972: 117), and 'controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures' (1981: 52). Like images of thought, discourses define the ways in which the reasonable has been demarcated from the unreasonable, the true from the false, and the intelligible from the unintelligible. By way of example, Foucault refers in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France to Gregor Mendel, the father of genetics, who spoke the 'truth' with respect to the process of inheritance, but did not fit 'within the "true" of the biological discourse' (1981: 61) of the 19th century.

Certain images of thought therefore gain dominance over other presuppositions, and this becomes apparent when we consider the rise of a 'security complex' in contemporary Western nations. This security complex entails a set of practices and discourses, implicating hybrid connections between governmental and non-governmental parties, and is underpinned by a repertoire of techniques and knowledges, which adds new layers to a longer established 'punitive turn' (see: Bottoms 1995; Garland 2001; Pratt et al. 2005; Tonry 2007) through a focus on the prevention and reduction of risk for one another and for society as a whole. In the post 9/11 landscape, this new way of thinking has increasingly shaped government policies and organizational practices in Western countries.

Well-known examples are the development of 'post-panoptic' forms of control, new technology surveillance of electronic communication (emails, mobile phone calls, social media), practices of risk management of criminals as well as 'pre-crime' risk management of non-criminals, the security-centred design of public and private space, not to mention the growth of private transnational security companies offering all kinds of 'outsourced' policing, security, design, bureaucratic, risk-management and military functions.

The obsession with security has also trickled down the academic discipline of criminology. While criminology is a field marked by a variety of theoretical viewpoints and assumptions, many of its current debates revolve around the promises of security policies – a tendency at its most visible in dominant criminological theories, such as 'routine activity' theory (Cohen and Felson 1979) and 'broken windows' theory (Kelling and Coles 1996; Wilson and Kelling 1982).¹ We might even posit that criminology as an academic discipline has been taken hostage by those who call for a greater number of earlier and more decisive interventions, justified by a 'tough on crime' rhetoric peppered with negative terms like 'fighting', 'combating', 'tackling', 'controlling', 'punishing' and 'preventing'. As such, criminology finds itself acting as the handmaiden of an unquestioned, technical, administrative narrative that takes the pervasiveness of risk, danger and insecurity for granted.

MISSING OUT ON FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

Criminology, we argue in this book, has fallen under the spell of thinking negatively about safety and security. It is bewitched by policy that tackles crime and disorder through merely preventive and repressive actions. Other, more positive, constitutive discourses about safety and security have generally gone out of fashion. As Ian Loader and Richard Sparks note, the bare fact that criminology is a booming business

'has coincided with, may even been an effect of, the rising prominence of crime within the mundane culture and political programmes of a number of western societies, and the increasing drift towards more punitive solutions to crime and more intrusive approaches to security issues' (2011: 11).

Different explanations are offered about why such intrusive responses to danger, risk, crime and insecurity have gained ground in contemporary society. In his seminal book *The Culture of Control* David Garland speaks of a 'crime complex' (and, more broadly speaking, a 'security complex'), which has replaced the penal welfare complex. Garland relates this complex to wider socio-political processes of late modernity and strategies of adaptation, denial and acting out. The latter strategy resonates with retribution and denunciation and has emerged as a salient feature of political measures, which engage in 'an expressive mode of action and which are constructed in ways that privilege public opinion over the views of criminal justice experts' (2001: 142). In other words:

over the past three decades, 'thinking about safety and security' has been put in the hands of the proponents of 'neo-conservatism' and 'right realism' (Lea and Young 1994), who advocate tougher, enforcement and punishment-oriented solutions for crime and disorder.

This transformation is fuelled by the development of populist sentiments making us continuously aware of how unsafe we are and how insecure we feel. There are two diverging consequences that may nonetheless coexist. Either punitive/exclusionary measures serve a utopian desire to create a 'safe new world' (Boutellier 2013: 65), or we are conditioned to feel we live in a 'risk society' (Beck 1986) attended by a constant sense of danger and the need to be on our guard. As a result, it can be discerned that strategies of 'governing behaviour through the power to punish' (Simon 2007: 73) have drawn the penal system into the realm of everyday life. Citing examples like policies on domestic violence and governing crime in schools, Jonathan Simon argues that social areas like housing, health, education and employment/workfare are being reconfigured according to the logic of security thinking. Not only is the image of insecurity used to motivate a wide range of punitive and restrictive measures that have different disciplinary intentions, but also the 'technologies, discourses, and metaphors of crime and criminal justice' (2007: 4) are more manifest and topical in diverse fields of life than ever before.

Understanding the security complex as a way of managing the poor in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and ghettos in big cities, Loïc Wacquant sees risk management and penal powers emerging under the auspices of a 'neoliberal project that can be indifferently embraced by politicians of the Right or the Left' (2010: 209). By describing neoliberalism as a quintessentially political project going beyond ideological demarcations, he stresses that freedom is expanded for those with high incomes, privileges and wealth, while at the other end

'an intrusive and omnipresent punitive apparatus is anchored by a *carceral-assistential complex* which carries out its mission to surveil, train and neutralise the populations recalcitrant or superfluous to the new economic and racial regime' (2001: 97).

Against this backdrop, a basic question arises. In spite of David Garland's and Richard Sparks' (2000) argument that traditional divisions between policy-oriented research and fundamental research are no longer tenable, we believe that, as far as the academic debate on security is concerned, criminology is strongly influenced by the former approach at the expense of fundamental, critical and inventive ways of exploring and questioning the concept of security. What are the consequences of relying solely on an applied criminology geared towards regulation and control policies, rather than on a critical and reflexive perspective?

An obvious answer is both theoretical and practical: in refraining from asking far-reaching questions about the current state of affairs, including the consequences of crime and disorder policy, the problem arises of constructing security practices founded on the wrong presumptions. What is more, applied criminological research generally ignores current hegemonic power relations

in the discourses and tasks of security, whether public or private. Such practices and power distributions are often taken for granted, while criminological analysis only addresses the diverging opinions, perspectives and realities to a limited degree.

THE NEED FOR CRITIQUE

If a negative image of security haunts contemporary criminology, this book takes up the challenge of critically questioning its discourses and practices. The following starting point informs our basic arguments: commonly understood negative approaches to safety and security are in need of a thoroughgoing rethink. Regardless of how obvious it may seem, academics seem to have forgotten that the idea of security not only refers to 'crime', 'punishment' and 'control', but is also determined by notions of 'trust', 'care' and 'belonging' (Boers et al. 2008; Schuilenburg 2015: ch. 10; Van Steden et al. 2010). These notions are not dependent on a rationale for harsher punishment and defensive measures. On the contrary, they appear in more positively inflected debates, which, for example, stress the importance of collective feelings of solidarity and active citizen involvement in neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, we hasten to say that the definition of security as the protection of citizens against crime and disorder must not be rejected out of hand. Without a minimum level of security, life might indeed be 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short' (Hobbes 2008).² It is not without reason that in Abraham Maslow's famous 'hierarchy of needs' (1943), security – and, more broadly, safety – directly follows after basic human needs such as breathing, food and sleep.

At the same time, however, we feel increasingly uncomfortable about the dominance of current negative – control and risk-oriented – approaches to (in)security and crime. Such negative narratives have been associated with increasing segregation, poverty and isolation in Western cities (e.g. Low 2003; Wacquant 2009; Young 1999), and the intensification of surveillance in our everyday lives. And even if there are legitimate reasons to arrest and sanction offenders, Jonathan Simon quite rightly states that the current hegemonic logic of security thinking 'is exhausting our social capital and repressing our capacity for innovation' (2007: 6). Governing through crime (or, being more precise, governing through risk and danger) cannot make us more secure. Rather, it fuels a negative culture of fear and control and leads to dismissal of important ethical facets of security in community, civil and democratic practices.

Harvey Molotch is critical of the way our anxieties about public safety and security have been translated into command-and-control procedures in the absence of hard evidence that such practices are really effective. He emphasises that 'we need a massive bias away from remedies of control and punishment' (2012: 194) and instead towards a greater reliance on our human capacity to help one another. Despite such inspiring contributions to debates arising from 'tough on crime' rhetoric, there is little clarity among critics on what shape future analyses in the field of criminology should take. It appears curiously difficult to provide

alternative images of thought, which open up our thinking about crime and disorder by offering a fresh set of values and practices surrounding security.³ This observation brings us to the goal of our book. Although a fair amount of ambiguity exists about how to define the concepts 'criticism' and 'critique' – the difference between these concepts has never become firmly established in English usage – the term 'criticism' is normally regarded as a negative attitude towards the object being criticised. A telling example is the recently published book *Anti-Security* in which Mark Neocleous and George Rigakos argue that we need to 'stand against the securitisation of discourse and challenge the authoritarian and reactionary nature of security' (2011: 21). Although the dialectics of 'anti-security' do serve as a welcome signal that other and better worlds are still possible, the crucial point is that such criticism fails to create new lines of flight in criminology. It leaves open the question of how we can overcome today's common sense that security is all about warding off danger, dealing with risk, or fighting crime.

In contrast to negative criminological terminology of *de-*, *anti-*, *against* and *non-*, we advance the importance of critique, a term derived from the Greek *krinein*. This concept goes well beyond a negative – critical – judgment of security by seeking unorthodox practices of thought:

'it transforms the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible crossing-over [*franchissement*]' (Foucault 1997: 315; see also: Butler 2002).

Critique can thus be taken as a positive and creative process, a way of challenging obviousness and common sense. It reminds us that things do not have to stay the way they are. Following from this, we pose the question of what alternatives to contemporary processes of securitisation and criminalisation can be imagined when starting from a constitutive critique of security. In other words: which theoretical and empirical resources support and inspire more positive notions of security?

A POSITIVE TURN

Picking up from Jock Young's (2011) plea for a 'criminological imagination' – modelled after C. Wright Mills's (1959) call for a 'sociological imagination' half a century earlier – we endeavour to think beyond the hegemonic academic and public security discourse, not so much by totally refuting this discourse but rather by imagining alternative images and interpretations of security, not often heard, or even silenced for the sake of a consistent (and, for many institutional actors, profitable) worldview. Imagination and the act of imagining new images of thought – here attuned to the concept of 'security' – can be transgressive and renewing in itself. Social imaginaries, Charles Taylor (2004) writes, allow for shared perspectives and can invite shared courses of action. This is ever more the case in late modernity, with communication and transport technologies that

allow us to share our imaginations far beyond the borders of traditional face-to-face communities.

The act of imagining and re-imagining security, and sharing such imaginations widely can be democratising, engaging, and might even, eventually, turn out to be liberating. Howard Becker's (1963) plea for criminologists to add the voices of the less powerful to the academic debate is valid here – ever more so as those less powerful actors may be those most affected by security policies. We therefore return to our earlier assertion that subtle but important positive aspects regarding the usage of the figure 'security' are commonly left out of negatively imbued criminological deliberations and reflections. We are, so to speak, in need of a 'positive turn' towards security.

With this in mind, we would propose a promising transgression, which nonetheless has a long criminological tradition, in the search beyond 'classical' criminology for alternative notions as proposed in other academic disciplines. If we begin by looking at the etymology of the word 'security', for example, we find that a negative interpretation of the concept is limited at least. The Dutch word for security [*veiligheid*] is etymologically closely linked to the word *velich* in Old German and *felig* in Old Frisian, words that have connotations with what is now called 'trust', 'being beloved' and 'friendliness' (Van Zuijlen 2008). In addition, we may think of a range of concepts that can further colour connotations as love, friendship and liberty. This is all the more clear when we look at cultural-anthropological notions like 'home', 'belonging', and (transnational) 'community-building' as a way to resist hegemonic and negative meanings of security.

Making a plea for a 'positive turn' in criminology, this book consists of two parts. The first part is inspired by theoretical imaginations of security. It transgresses the limits of the current security debate by exploring positive notions of security that are partly 'borrowed' from other disciplines (such as ecology, philosophy, architecture, sociology and political science) and adapted to criminological reality. The second part of the book proposes alternative imaginaries of security by working 'bottom-up', from the sticky reality of ordinary people's everyday lives and experiences. The studies presented in this part are based on empirical and ethnographic research, and should be regarded as attempts to make the idea of a 'positive criminology' more concrete. With this we hope to show, in the words of Niklas Luhmann, 'what one can construct and how far sensitivities let themselves unfold when one starts from here and not there' (1997: 1095).

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NOTES

- 1 There are, of course, exceptions to this observation. Social disorganisation theorists, for example, have placed much emphasis on neighbourhood ecological and community structural characteristics as critical causal factors of crime and fear of crime among citizens (Sampson and Raudenbusch 1999; Sampson et al. 1997). The policy imperative, in their view, must therefore focus on rebuilding communities instead of unleashing zero-tolerance interventions to remove high levels of crime and disorder in an urban area.
- 2 The ambivalences haunting today's desire for protection and reassurance highlight the fact that 'being safe' and 'taking risks' are closely intertwined. Securing safety and taking risks are two sides of the same coin. Aaron Wildavsky (1991) has captured this insight in what he terms the 'joggers dilemma'. On the one hand, the risk of a heart attack is greater during the time devoted to the exercise. On the other hand, at all other times the body is safer. Put differently, 'you cannot have the one – a safer organism – without the other – expanding resilience by allowing to face risks' (1991:14).
- 3 The work of the Dutch scholar Louk Hulsman and his associates (Hulsman and Bernat de Célis 1982) is the best example in the history of criminology that presented a radical new image of thought about the issue of safety and security. Hulsman was one of the founding fathers of 'abolitionism', a movement based on the belief that an important way to overcome the serious failures and drawbacks of the criminal justice system is to abolish the language of crime.