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Environmental Criminology and Crime Analysis

Richard Wortley and Lorraine Mazerolle (eds.); Devon; Willan Publishing; 2008; 320 pages (incl. index); £22 pbk; ISBN 978-1-84392-280-3

In 1990, I attended the seminar on Environmental Criminology that was delivered by Professor Anthony Bottoms, the then Director of the Cambridge Institute of Criminology. My initial enthusiasm soon wore off and I stopped attending after it became clear that Environmental Criminology had nothing to do with the dumping of toxic waste and environmental pollution by multinational companies in the Third World. It was all about the cartographic tradition of the Chicago School or the use of modern techniques to map crime and try to design out crime with modern architecture while relying on modern surveillance equipments to detect criminals and hopefully deter them. What I took from Bottoms was his welcome critique of the tendency in the Chicago School to be prejudiced against immigrants as the group supposedly most likely to be deviant for, according to him, most criminals are home-grown.

Reading the editorial by Wortley and Mazerolle was disappointing because I was expecting that in the 21st century, a fat book on environmental criminology would have something significant to say about crimes against the environment. Stan Cohen raised a similar problem in his 1993 *British Journal of Criminology* review of the *Oxford Handbook of British Criminology*: Why should British Criminology be different from criminology in general to the extent that the gravest kinds of crime – genocide and human rights crimes – did not deserve any mention in a book that was a lot bigger than the bible? For environmental criminologists, the lame excuse for indulging in what Cohen aptly dubbed the culture of silence is that in their case, crimes against the environment are conveniently outside their field of focus but belong to a ghetto called 'Green Criminology' which is not even mentioned in this pretentiously titled book.

The book started with an introductory chapter by the editors followed by three sections: 1) understanding the crime event with four chapters on the rational choice perspective, situational precipitators of crime, routine activity approach and crime pattern theory; 2) Analysing Crime Patterns with three chapters on crime mapping and hot spots analysis, repeat victimization, and geographic profiling; and 3) Preventing and Controlling Crime with six chapters on crime prevention through environmental design, situational crime prevention, designing products against crime, problem-oriented and environmental criminology, broken windows and intelligence-led policing. This makes the book read more like a text book for teaching undergraduate students well known concepts from right-wing perspectives but without any engagement with critical, peacemaking, postmodern and feminist criminological perspectives that may tell students something new about local and global environmental criminological analysis.

The bogusness of the chapters is reflected in claims like that of Cornish and Clarke that 'The rational choice perspective was one outcome of a general shift in British criminology that took place during the 1970s' (p.22). This is bogus because rational choice was revived by the Nobel Prize winning economist, Gary Becker of the University of Chicago, in the 1960s but he was hardly mentioned in this context nor was his rehashing of the free-will perspective of classical criminology critiqued. The claim of a 'general shift in British criminology' is even more bogus because it refers to an era when there was a clear rupture in British criminology with the emergence of the *New Criminology* of Taylor, Walton and Young; the moral panics perspective of Cohen, the Marxist criminology of Hall *et al*, and the feminist perspective of Carol Smart and others. To be fair to rational choice theory, most of these critical perspectives are about social control-freak problems than about crime causation but they are part of criminology nevertheless and cannot be ignored in any generalizations about British Criminology.

The major short-coming of the book is that it focuses almost exclusively on designing-out crime and failing that, relying on surveillance to detect crime in hot spots. The irony is that the private spaces that the authors presume to be more defensible, such as the home environment, is precisely where women and children tend to be most vulnerable as Betsy Stanko has convincingly argued. Similarly, public spaces like schools happen to be some of the safest environments around the world not because of the design or the surveillance installed but because investing in the education of the youth is always more effective in promoting good behavior than the threat of problem-oriented policing or excessive construction of designer prison industrial complexes.

The only reference to education in the book is when there was a brief discussion of educational materials with which to offer problem-oriented policing training (p.231). Even while focusing on crime mapping exclusively, the book did not attempt to map or explain why school shootings tend to happen in suburban schools than in the inner city schools where theories of broken windows would lead us to expect the most trouble. The fact that surveillance is generally targeted at certain kinds of crime and certain kinds of environment while turning a blind eye towards others, makes the kind of 'crime science' offered in this book wanting.

In a world struggling with massive frauds in the corporate world or financial environment, endless genocidal crimes, terrorism and war crimes, misguided war on drugs, violence against women and children, social exclusion and institutional racism, excessive incarceration of racial minorities, environmental racism and classism, this book treats us to an analysis of the very important problem of bicycle theft while keeping mum on these other gigantic criminological problems for ideological reasons. Come on, environmental criminologists, you could do a lot better than this.

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