

WestminsterResearch

<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/westminsterresearch>

**Against bifurcation: why it's in the best interests of convict
criminology to be international in scope and not a collection of
individual country level organisations**

Aresti, A., Darke, S. and Ross, J.I.

This is an author's accepted manuscript of an article published in Justice, Power and Resistance DOI: 10.1332/HINO6106.

The final definitive version is available online at:

<https://doi.org/10.1332/HINO6106>

The WestminsterResearch online digital archive at the University of Westminster aims to make the research output of the University available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the authors and/or copyright owners.

Paper

**Against Bifurcation:
Why it's in the best interests of Convict Criminology to be international in scope
& not a collection of individual country level organizations**

Revised: Saturday December 24, 2022

Number of words: 7,839 words

By

Andy Aresti, Ph.D.
Sacha Darke, Ph.D. &
Jeffrey Ian Ross, Ph.D.

Abstract

Since its founding, Convict Criminology (CC) has evolved into an international approach, group, organization, and network with a relatively coherent set of objectives. Although little thought was put into CC's development beyond the United States, the original intent of CC was primarily to develop a network of individuals who were united around its core ideas. Due to both the constraints of international travel for exconvicts and the financial burden for people to travel, originally it made best sense for people interested in the CC perspective to meet at the local level. Over time, because of advances in telecommunication platforms like Facetime, SKYPE, and Zoom, members of the CC network realized that meeting face-to-face on a regular basis was not necessary. Thus, the importance of local or even national approaches to CC were not necessary. This paper briefly examines the international components of CC and the authors' views that while individual country groups of CC members may have been advantageous in the early stages of CC, it is no longer necessary, if not counterproductive.

Keywords: Convict Criminology, Critical Criminology, Corrections, Prisons, Prison Reform

I. INTRODUCTION

Convict Criminology (CC) has grown organically. There has never been a master plan. Over time new people interested in what CC could offer them came into the network and others left for one reason or another. Eventually the mission and approach slowly morphed but consolidated around its major purpose and that was to give voice to convicts and exconvicts in the academic fields of criminology and criminal justice. This work would principally be conducted by convicts and exconvicts who had a doctorate or were on their way to earning one (Ross & Richards, 2003; Aresti & Darke, 2018; Ross & Vianello, 2021).

This approach to understanding corrections, and those who were most affected by a carceral conviction deeply resonated with the Critical Criminology approach to crime, criminal justice, criminals, and corrections. So, it was natural that CC found an intellectual home with this theoretical perspective and the American Society of Criminology's Division of Critical Criminology, now Division of Critical Criminology and Social Justice.

Although the CC network had its origins in the US, it was never designed to be an American only perspective. Its main goals have always been to bring the prisoner voice to the attention of scholars and policy audiences, to mentor individuals behind bars and those who were released in order to pursue university education (primarily doctorates), and ultimately to contribute to prison activism (Ross & Richards, 2003). This is a global, international and universal goal that transcends national borders.

In this paper, we briefly review the history of CC and its international components. Specifically, we discuss the origins of the British Convict Criminology (BCC) movement as an outgrowth of American developments. We argue that BBC has outstripped its utility and draw attention to the global objectives of CC. Toward the end of the paper, we explore

the advantages and disadvantages of forming national level CC divisions and make some concluding remarks.

II. THE ORIGINS AND EXPANSION OF CONVICT CRIMINOLOGY

A. In the beginning

Although the CC network started in the US (dating to the mid 1990s) it was never completely American in its membership. At least two of the principal members (i.e., Newbold and Ross) either held foreign citizenship at the time, and CC also drew inspiration from the *Prisoners on Prison Journal*, based in Ottawa, Canada. Shortly after the CC network developed in the US, a British contingent emerged under the leadership of scholars Andy Aresti, Sacha Darke and Rod Earle. Over time this latter network presented papers and organized panels at the annual meetings of the British Society of Criminology, European Society for Criminology, and European Group for the Study of deviancy and Social Control, and published articles in scholarly journals, a well-respected newspaper for prisoners, and chapters in academic books. Similar to the American group, the British network was a loose collection of academics and brought in recently released individuals who were interested in the CC perspective and earning degrees at universities. In general, the British group engaged in similar activities to the CC network in the US.

B. The emergence of BCC

When exploring the emergence of CC in the UK, it is important to understand the context in which the idea developed. Prior to CC's initial emergence in the UK, Aresti and Darke had discussed the idea of developing a network that consisted of ex-convicts studying at university (circa 2004/2005). The idea of the network, primarily was to bring

together individuals with lived experience of the criminal justice system and to explore if and how this impacted on their university experience. The aim was to share knowledge and experiences as means of supporting each other, and facilitating academic progress. Moreover, the aim was to also develop an activist network to challenge the discriminative policies and practices within the UK Criminal Justice System. These ideas were on reflection, conducive with The New School of Convict Criminology's (Richards & Ross, 2001; Ross & Richards, 2003) philosophical and theoretical orientation. After two years into his PhD, Aresti was introduced to the CC perspective by Chris Stacey, his colleague at UNLOCK (see UNLOCK.org.uk). Similar to Ikponwosa (Silver) Ekunwe in Finland (Ekunwe, 2007), Aresti, adopted a CC perspective to accommodate his epistemological orientation and frame his doctoral dissertation. Subsequently, Aresti, Darke and Earle, established a UK based CC network.

Although the emergence of BCC has been outlined elsewhere (see, e.g., Ross et al., 2014; Aresti & Darke, 2018; Earle, 2018), it is worth repeating that the network was a product of the coming together of three academics in 2011: Aresti and Darke (both University of Westminster) and Earle (The Open University). Aresti, Darke and Earle began testing the waters to see if a CC collective in the UK, that was independent but connected to the existing US network, was a viable option. Two key things were considered: 1. Was there a need for a separate CC network in the UK? 2. If so, was there sufficient numbers of people who were interested in participating? Specifically, were there enough scholars with lived experience of incarceration (i.e., PhD educated convicts and ex-convicts, or those on the way to gaining a PhD) in the UK to make such a nation-based network viable? Aresti, Darke and Earle, however, did not discuss three items. First, could

the benefits of having a nation-bound network with a distinct identity wane once the perspective had gained an established presence in the British as well as the American academy. Second, might the formation of a British based CC organization impede the growth and adoption of a CC perspective attracting interest from other parts of the world, especially in the global South. Finally, could the establishment of the BCC eventually lead to internal stagnation as differences in opinion among group members inevitably surfaced.

Announcements were placed about BCC in the British Society of Criminology (BSC) newsletter and in the newsletters of other organisations working within the criminal justice system. Specifically, Aresti, Darke, and Earle prepared a document, *Convict Criminology in Britain? Background Proposal and Invitation* (<https://fliphtml5.com/cove/ilfb/basic>), providing an outline of the groups' intentions, aims and objectives. The document (Aresti et al., 2012) stated that the group would be 'loosely' modelled on the New School of Convict Criminology, in the USA (Richards & Ross, 2001; Ross & Richards, 2003). Even at this point there were some disagreements about the extent to which the UK CC group should be connected to the US network. However, there was little disagreement that the BCC movement was an outgrowth of the developments in CC in America.

In keeping with the original CC model, BCC shared the same underlying philosophy and critical orientation as the US network. However, given the significant differences between the US and UK in relation to localised understandings and experiences of crime, prisons, resettlement/corrections and other criminal justice related issues, BCC members knew they needed to be more flexible than the US, in terms of

their constitution and approach. Not only because of the differences in the way that both criminal justice systems operate and the implications this has for the prisoner's experience, but also because it was unlikely that BCC could match the membership/affiliation of the US network (Aresti et al., 2012). Similar to the American CC network, BCC included members with non-custodial convictions and other members with no declared criminal convictions at all.

Nevertheless, despite the difference in size between the US and UK CC networks, BCC has achieved much over the last decade or so, evident in the plethora of scholarly publications,¹ conference presentations and other projects (i.e., mentoring scheme, prisoner to university pipeline projects etc.). There is no doubt that CC has benefited from the work BCC has produced and the projects it has generated, however, on reflection over the last decade or so, the authors now question whether having a separate country-based organization is useful.

Despite BCC's success, like the US network a decade or so ago, BCC seems to have arrived at a crossroads (see, e.g., Newbold & Ross, 2012). Mirroring the US network's experience back then, BCC appears to have encountered some internal tensions and challenges, including theoretical diversification, epistemological contradictions, and diversity in terms of directional orientation (Newbold & Ross, 2012). Moreover, internal criticisms from within the academy, both explicitly (Warr, 2021) and implicitly (personal communications) have further prompted some in the group to reflect on BCC and question its purpose. We consider this both locally in terms of the issues outlined above (in-group differences) and globally in terms of the current climate, and the shift in academia, and specifically criminology, where questions are increasingly raised

regarding the ethnocentric nature of criminology and Western, especially American, and British dominance in knowledge production and understandings of crime, prisons, and corrections.²

The authors argue that BCC has outgrown its utility, thus CC's global objectives. Whilst BCC was necessary initially, it has in our view served its purpose, and as the differences in the network widen, we argue that it is more important that the CC collective come together and focus on the internationalisation of CC rather than try to develop a collection of national level organisations or silos that operate differently from other CC networks. This, in our view, is counterproductive to the theoretical development of the perspective and is detrimental to the development of CC as a global movement. First and foremost is the danger that CC networks in other parts of the world are unduly influenced by the "founding" epistemological and ontological approaches taken by the American and British movements. Second, we are concerned that some members of these individual networks are likely to feel restrained by the particular approaches to CC prioritised by their national group, as has been our experience in the UK.

Why do we believe this? Three interrelated developments are paramount. These include: the growing internationalisation of CC, theoretical and methodological diversification, and directional changes.

C. Internationalisation

To become an authentic academic movement, it is imperative that CC challenges international hierarchies of knowledge, especially between the Global North and Global South. As far as we are aware, the CC perspective has not yet been adopted by any

scholars in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and with the exception of Brazilian criminal anthropologist Karina Biondi, whose work we briefly mention below, Latin America.

Indeed, one of the most significant challenges CC has experienced was to develop the CC network beyond its North American borders (Ross et al., 2014; Ross & Vianello, 2021). Yet despite the initial challenges, the last decade has seen some significant developments in this instance. Importantly, as with the US network, when BCC started in 2011, one of its key aims was to develop CC internationally (Aresti et al., 2012). Whilst the US network did have ties to Europe, given the UK's geographical location and proximity to mainland Europe, some, including Aresti and Darke, saw BCC's work as forming a 'bridge' between the US and Europe.

Over the next decade there were considerable opportunities for the internationalization of CC including: The Tampere and KROM conferences, Ross and Darke's work in South America, and the Padua meeting.

The Tampere Conference

In June 2010 a conference titled, "An International Scientific Conference on Global Perspectives on Re-Entry," was held in Tampere, Finland. It was organized by Ikponwosa (Silver) Ekunwe (University of Tampere) and Richard S. Jones (Marquette University), both of whom had a long-time association with the CC group. In addition to Ekunwe and Jones, members of the CC network in the US including Richards, Ross, Annette Kuhlmann, Mike Lenza, and Barbara Zaitzow attended and presented papers. Over the course of three days, attendees discussed the challenges of reentry both in the US and in Finland. The meeting also included a visit to Vilppulan Vankila open prison (a Finnish correctional facility where the prisoners are permitted to leave the facility during the day

for work and return at night). The conference proceedings were eventually turned into an edited book *Global Perspectives on Re-Entry* (Ekunwe & Jones, 2011).

The KROM and European Group annual conferences (2014)

In the late 1960s, Norwegian Criminologist Thomas Mathiesen (1933 – 2021) helped to establish KROM, a grass-roots movement where critical scholars, prisoners, former prisoners and practitioners collaborated on radical criminal justice reform. Through its annual conference, it aims to create a public space for critics of the penal system to air their voices and to learn from each-others' perspectives. Beginning in 2014, Aresti and Darke presented papers on BCC at three of KROM's annual conferences in sessions dedicated to exploring parallels between the two groups. At the 2014 annual conference of the European Group of the Study of Deviance and Social Control in Liverpool, a number of KROM members joined BCC and Italian colleagues working within the CC perspective on a panel entitled, "Developing Insider Perspectives in Research Activism." KROM's delegation included Mathiesen and one former prisoner activist. The Italian delegation included Francesca Vianello (a professor at the University of Padua) and Elton Kalica (a former prisoner who was studying under Francesca Vianello for a PhD.). Mathiesen and Kalica were not physically present at the conference, but were able to present their papers via Skype.

Ross and Darke's separate CC work in South America

Starting in 2013, Ross made a series of trips to Argentina, Chile, and Ecuador where he made connections with local Criminologists and Criminal Justice practitioners, specifically in Buenos Aires, Quito, and Santiago, presented papers on CC and visited correctional facilities. Meanwhile Darke conducted research in Brazilian prisons (see

Darke, 2018) and made connections with prisoners and former prisoners studying social science degrees in Brazil and Argentina (see Darke et al. 2020). In 2016, 2017 and 2020, Darke along with Aresti, followed a similar path of giving lectures about CC in Brazil and (in 2019) Argentina. In 2016, Ross and Darke attempted to organize a CC Conference in São Paulo or Santiago. Although this did not materialize, it did result in an article arguing for the expansion of CC in that region (Ross & Darke, 2018; see also, Vegh Weiss, 2021). In 2019, Aresti and Darke assisted Biondi and former prisoner Francisco Lopes de Magalhães Filho in their efforts to establish the first CC education initiative in South America, at a prison in the north of Brazil.³ In 2021, Darke was invited to write the foreword to a book by a former prisoner who had started studying undergraduate social science from open prison conditions and had recently gained a master's degree at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (Lourenço, 2022).

Padua Conference (2021)

In the fall of 2018, Ross contacted Vianello about organizing a conference entitled “Convict Criminology for the Future” at the University of Padua. There were a handful of reasons why a project of this nature made sense. To begin with, this type of event was long overdue. The interest in CC in continental Europe and Italy, in particular (e.g., Vianello, 2021), was growing, and many of these scholars had not come to the US or UK, and recognized that a conference and new book on CC could continue to shape the field. Along with the assistance of Kalica, who by then had earned his Ph.D., the conference was held May 31-June 1, 2019. Over two days approximately 15 papers were delivered. Scholars who could not attend gave presentations via SKYPE. Those in attendance exchanged ideas, got to know each other better, and some of them visited Casa di

reclusion, a nearby correctional facility, where a handful of the scholars who were present gave lectures and interacted with people who were incarcerated there. After the conference most of the papers that were presented were edited and included in *Convict Criminology for The Future* (Ross & Vianello, 2021).

D. Divergences in Orientations?

As with the US network, BCC also experienced, and still does experience, differences in opinions on some issues, and like the Americans, 'the group is highly diverse, and it has no single perspective' (Newbold & Ross, 2012, p. 4). In other words, we agree on some principles and on others we disagree.

There are a variety of different perceptions regarding CC in the US and in the UK. Although some people have expressed a belief that CC in the US is dominated by aging middle class white males (e.g., Belknap, 2015), empirical evidence demonstrates, however, that since its origins the network is a loose collection of individuals of different genders, races and ethnicities and it is fluid and dynamic (Ross et al., 2016). Likewise, although some UK scholars viewed BCC as being unified, tight knit and consistent in their theoretical and methodological orientation (i.e., they share the same perceptions and attitudes), there is considerable diversity in theoretical orientation. The perceptions of unanimity may be related to assumptions connected to size, and more specifically it is likely to exist because the BCC group is much smaller in magnitude and is in its infancy in terms of scholarly publications in comparison to their American counterparts.

For instance, as with the US, there has been some tension around the idea of the 'convicts voice' and its validity in relation to non-convict contributors' work (Newbold & Ross, 2013), something two of the current authors have conceptualised as the 'ex-con

VS non-con' dichotomy (Aresti & Darke, 2016). Some might argue that those who have never been prisoners do not have the requisite experience to research within the CC perspective or their voice and contribution is somehow less valid.⁴ Arguably, there are two opposing positions with regards to the ex-con/non-con dichotomy. We take the position that it is an epistemological fallacy to make such a clear distinction between those who have been incarcerated, for however long or short a period, and those who have not. One of the main objectives of CC as a critical and insider perspective is to move criminological teaching and research on prisons beyond the traditional distinctions made in the discipline between teacher and learner, researcher, and research participant. Nevertheless, although we believe that the experience of prison is best interpreted and articulated by those who have lived it, we depart from some of them by maintaining that even the most educated prisoners often benefit from exploring the validity and implications of their first-hand knowledge and standpoints with others. From this position, excluding non-convicts from the CC perspective – or from identifying as convict criminologists – creates an unnecessary distinction between convicts and non-convicts that is counterproductive to its broader stances on challenging hierarchies of knowledge and promoting collaborative, co-produced research and writing.⁵ This tension within the CC perspective was picked up by Belknap (2015) in her presidential address, where she took the side of those who were critical of the depth of non-con involvement in the network. This generated a response from both sides of the Atlantic (see, e.g., Aresti & Darke, 2016; Ross et al., 2016), yet despite this, the current authors remained concerned Belknap's critique had particular implications for the UK, given that BCC was relatively small in magnitude. At the time, although the BCC network included numerous individuals

who were working on their bachelors and master's degrees, it still included only three former prisoner academics and two former prisoner PhD students. A fourth former prisoner had presented a paper from his PhD on an earlier BCC conference panel, but had not decided to formally join the network or to identify as a convict criminologist.

Unfortunately, given its size, anyone writing under the auspice of BCC could be perceived to be writing on behalf of all its members. Consequently, others will more than likely believe that this is the typical view amongst the BCC collective, which of course can have implications for how the group is perceived. Yet like the US network (Newbold & Ross, 2012), BCC is diverse and has no single perspective. Given this, it is imperative that in their writings they are reflexive and acknowledge their position, to avoid others misperceiving what is said, and believing that such views are typical to the CC network. Regrettably, such misperceptions have alienated some individuals that were interested in joining BCC. Arguably, a group that alienates the very people it aims to serve, is a contradiction.

Importantly, these tensions regarding who is best positioned to produce knowledge has presented itself in other fields too, most notably within the realms of feminist thought and activism. This perspective amongst other important things, is premised on knowledge and understandings of women's experiences, with three key objectives being to privilege women's voices, perspectives, and interests (Crowe, 2011: 2). Like the CC network, as the feminist perspective developed and evolved, it also experienced tensions around the authenticity and validity of its contributors.

In the 1970's and 1980's the feminist network appeared to be more unified with respect to the knowledge generated about the experiences and lives of women, yet by

the 1990's this collective began to diversify, as essentialist notions were being challenged by poststructuralist feminists, who argued that much of the knowledge produced, privileged a sub-group of women (white, middle class, heterosexual women). This was construed as being both politically 'dangerous and methodologically naïve' (Kruks, 2014, p. 75; McIntosh & Wright, 2019).

Drawing parallels here with CC, and as argued elsewhere (see Aresti & Darke, 2016; Ross, Jones, Lenza, & Richards, 2016), diversity within the CC network is key and provides a valuable resource to authentic knowledge production on the lived realities of prison life. Diversity within the network comes in many forms including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and experiences of prison and/or imprisonment (as prisoner, as researcher or as someone that has worked in prison). All of these contribute to developing more broader and more authentic understandings of prison and prison life. However, importantly, acknowledging one's subject position as argued above, is critical for the authenticity and validity of the knowledge we produce, and to avoid the tensions experienced by the feminist movement decades earlier.

E. Diversity in goals

Like the US CC network, the UK group engages in a variety of activities, ranging from writing scholarly articles, mentoring prisoners/former prisoners, activism and educational projects.

However, over the last decade or so, regardless of the location, some of CC's objectives have remained significant, whilst others have appeared to be less important to some people who are associated with this perspective, illustrating the diversity in interests within the entire network. Specifically, the authors here are primarily concerned with the

internationalisation of CC, and less concerned with developing a national level CC group. In the early days, the aim was to develop the membership and profile of the group through the organisation of seminars, guest lectures or panels at mainstream UK based conferences. However, overtime this objective became obsolete for some of the group and interest in a CC group, with a national identity has drastically waned. Evidently, whilst individuals within the group actively speak about CC at conferences, seminars, and guest lectures, these are delivered independently of the group. The last conference with a strong BCC presence was the British Society of Criminology conference in Liverpool in 2014. Moreover, apart from the odd symposium – the last one being in November 2017 – there has been little active engagement as a group, and less sharing of experiences and developing ideas that draw from the convergence of academic study of prison and experience of it as a prisoner. There have been collaborations within the group, but typically these have not involved the core collective, illustrating the division and futility of the group.

In the early days, when the founders were pushing BCC forward, there appeared to be much more unity and collaboration, and much more energy and enthusiasm. They were frequently attending the BSC and 'advertising' BCC, held a day-long symposium, established a steering group, and coordinated an academic mentoring scheme that at its peak provided support to more than 20 prisoners studying in higher education, two of whom completed PhDs. However, as time went by and the founders engaged in different projects, their goals appeared to diversify as did the group. Aresti and Darke soon lost interest in developing BCC's presence in the UK academy and invested their energies in developing prisoner to university pipeline projects and connections with grass-roots

research activist groups like KROM in Norway, Ristretti Orizzonti in Italy and the Reclaim Justice Network in the UK.

Whilst they had a shared interest in transforming criminological knowledge, they took the radical position that the discipline – and its position within the British academy – was shaped by structural and institutional power relations that silenced dissenting voices by excluding the (in this instance) the lived experience of prisoners (see Aresti et al., 2016). Moreover, the theoretical and methodological differences within BCC were becoming more apparent, tensions emerged, and the group started to fracture. BCC produced only three newsletters, the steering group met only once, and the unified BCC presence at the BSC conferences waned within three years. The last one, where the group positioned themselves as a unified group, as noted, was at the University of Liverpool in 2014. Since then, some of the group, have been more focused on other CC related projects and the internationalisation of CC. While most of the core BCC collective attended the “Convict Criminology For the Future” CC conference in Padua (2019), there was again little in the way of a unified BCC presence.

F. Brexit, diversification and leaving BCC

Most groups experience tensions and differences of opinion, which can be healthy and lead to positive change, and further development of the group. As argued by Newbold and Ross (2012):

‘...ideas seldom survive long without amendment, review or challenge. In an ideal world, the best ideas are accepted and incorporated, while bad ones are consigned to the scrapheap of history’ (p. 3).

Whilst the development of a CC group in the UK was a good idea at the time, and in the early days served its purpose, it has, in our view lost momentum, is fractured and lacks unity. There has been little explicit discussion of the issues and tensions experienced by the group, amongst its members, and this has led to stagnation. Although such tensions and differences in viewpoints, ideas, values and goals are inevitable in any group, they can be detrimental to the group's performance and development, especially when confounded by interpersonal incompatibilities (Jehn, 1995; Williams, 2011). This appears to be the case with BCC, with such irreconcilable differences being particularly salient due to the small numbers in the group. Contrastingly, whilst the US CC group have experienced similar tensions, the size of the group has enabled these differences and tensions to be less noticeable in comparison.

Regardless, as a result, two loose groups have emerged, with those that still identify as being part of BCC, and those that have cut ties with BCC, and are working within the wider CC framework (i.e., CC at Westminster). Moreover, putting aside these tensions and differences, the Westminster initiative's strategic direction is more aligned to CC's wider objectives, which are to develop CC globally, and therefore focusing on the development of BCC is of little use in the grand scheme of things. Importantly, part of BCC's initial strategy was to develop stronger links with Europe, and more recently to develop links with South America. To this end we have had some success.

However, what has become increasingly apparent in this instance, is the fewer scholars working within the CC rubric in these continents in comparison to the US and UK. Those that do, identify with the wider CC network, rather than localised CC networks. As stated earlier, CC's original intention was to develop a network of individuals who were

united around its core ideas. National level CC networks were not in the remit, and on reflection, based on our experience, such networks can be detrimental to the wider CC framework. Specifically, localized networks might unwittingly misrepresent core ideas of CC. A silo mentality can develop. And that the more bounded movements are the greater the likelihood they can stagnate. This kind of development has been present not only in CC, but in other prosocial movements (e.g., feminist).

G. Divergence

There are advantages and disadvantages of divergence within a main body of work and thought. Undoubtedly, people will have different understandings, values and expressions in comparison to the majority, in the mainstream group. This approach, however, can also have a variety of adverse implications, including tensions between the mainstream group and 'splinter group', public misunderstandings and confusion of the mainstream network's ideology, and critically, the public's negative attitude to the mainstream network or group, as they believe they share the same views, as the splinter group (Sanders, 2012; Gleditsch & Polo, 2016). Given this, and for the reasons outlined earlier, it seems more progressive to work together as a unified network, rather than within diverse national level CC silos. Critically, the silo mentality can negatively impact the effectiveness of an organisation, movement, or network, and the more bounded and internally focused they become, the greater the risks. This is evident in a variety of domains (health, business, medical), but most importantly in this instance, the criminal justice system, where the silo mentality has had devastating consequences (Kelty, Julian & Ross, 2013).

Relative to this, we need to consider internationalisation in the wider context of what is happening politically in the UK, and specifically with Brexit. For many of us, Brexit was, and still is a poor decision, that will have long lasting implications for many. The psychological impact of Brexit on members of the public has been devastating, with many struggling with a range of mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, and reduced life satisfaction (Vos et al., 2020). In addition to these, European UK residents, also experience life uncertainty, identity issues, discrimination, and a reduced sense of belonging (Ibid.). Considering this in relation to BCC's original objective and drive to extend CC's existing links with CC colleagues in Europe, it seems somewhat unsavoury and exclusionary, to maintain a BCC network that functions independently of the global CC network. Solidarity is imperative in these uncertain times, especially when considering the rise of penal populism in the UK, as a direct consequence of Brexit, and its adverse implications for prisoners and the penal system (Garland, 2021; Greer & McLaughlin, 2018). Moreover, and as predicted by Pettifor (2016), Brexit has energized the far right in Britain, and this appears to have extended to both Europe and the US. Given this, and the implications for the penal systems (and the prisoners) across these continents, it is instrumental that the CC network comes together, as a collective, and stands up to, and challenges the rise of punitive political and public sentiments. In short, similar to the failed Brexit, if we focus too much on protecting and fighting local/national penal issues, things will only get worse. Like climate change, mass incarceration worldwide is an international problem that requires the coming together of the CC network and those that share similar views. Here our efforts to support colleagues who are interested in developing CC in Brazil and other parts of South America is poignant. While the world average prison rate

has remained stable since the start of the 21st Century (at around 145 per 100,000 national population), and prison rates have increased by less than 10 percent in the UK and dropped by approximately 5 percent in the USA, prison populations increased in every Latin American country from 2000 to 2018 and more than doubled in the Latin American region overall (Walmsley, 2018). Among the South American countries we have worked in on developing the CC perspective, the Argentinean prison rate increased from 151 per 100,000 national population in 2002 to 207 in 2017. Brazil's prison rate increased from 132 in 2000 to 354 in 2018. Over the same period, Ecuador's prison rate increased from 64 to 222. Chile's prison rate rose from 215 to 320 between 2000 and 2010, although it dropped back to 228 by 2018. Most Latin American prison systems are also significantly more crowded than the prison systems of the UK and USA. In 2017, Argentinean prison authorities recorded a prison population 22 percent over official capacity. In 2019, Brazilian prison authorities recorded a prison occupancy level of 171 percent. (All figures taken from The World Prison Brief (<https://www.prisonstudies.org/world-prison-brief-data>)).

Of course, this is not to say that we should not engage in work that challenges local/national penal issues, rather we argue that making this our **principal or sole concern** is contrary to our global aims and objectives. From the time we established a CC presence here in the UK, we have worked alongside colleagues in the NGO sector and activist groups, for example, The Prison Reform Trust, and UNLOCK, fighting for prison reform and policy change in penal affairs. We have published articles and conducted research on local/national penal issues and have continued this work, whilst more recently working collaboratively with our international colleagues. In this instance,

we have shifted from solely focusing on the UK, to knowledge dissemination and the sharing of ideas, experiences, and penal issues. Detailing and comparing local/national penal issues and challenges, as well the educational projects we deliver (prisoner to university pipeline projects) have proved fruitful and facilitated our global objectives.⁶

H. Changing the label from British Convict Criminology to something more palatable is not helpful.

Although the name British Convict Criminology made sense a decade ago, it is probably no longer a good idea, because on its surface the name British implies that it ignores CC that develops in Northern Ireland. Although we know this is not the case, simply changing the name to something like Convict Criminology in the UK is also fraught with problems.

V. SUMMARY IDEAS

In sum having a national orientation can have advantages and disadvantages. Although it can coalesce people on a similar topic, it can also be unnecessarily myopic and protectionist. With the first option, members fail to consider (or minimize) new ideas, and in the latter members are saying to others don't play in my sandbox.

A. In general, bifurcation often begets further bifurcation.

We have seen this in the academic field of criminology in general, and with different subsets or fields. In Critical Criminology for example, over the years we have seen the growth of cultural criminology, green criminology, feminist criminology, queer criminology, and now CC. Whether the members that produce scholarship in the sub discipline choose to remain in the larger group or strike out on their own depends on numerous factors (e.g.,

the quality and ambitions of the leadership, the perceptions of how well their interests are being served by the larger organization, etc.).

B. Advantages of country level CC units

One of the reasons for country-level CC units was that it was difficult for people who have criminal records to travel beyond their country of origins. However, starting in and around 2019 with advances in computer technology, an increasing number of conferences enabled participants to present their papers virtually. With the advent of COVID-19 in 2019 many conferences have opted for zoom like meetings.

There may be some good reasons for national CC organizations. If there was a very large number of people who were interested in CC then perhaps this is a way of channeling their energies, but CC is relatively small and we don't want to dissipate our resources.

C. Drawbacks of country level CC Units

There are a number of shortcomings to country level CC units. To begin with bifurcation has the possibility of unnecessarily creating little fiefdoms, where power struggles over leadership and direction prevail. This is antithetical to the CC ethos, which prides itself on community, inclusiveness, etc. Moreover, CC was never set up to have individual country CC divisions. How would we go about that? Would we have individual charters or franchises? Finally, CC is a hybrid intellectual movement. Most strands of intellectual endeavors don't have governing bodies. Rather, they grow in an organic manner.

One approach to minimize this sort of thing is for groups to get some sort of endorsement from the individual level country learned societies (e.g. Australian and New

Zealand Society of Criminology, British Society of Criminology, etc.). This approach is labor intensive and acts in a manner to dampen desires to of scholars to create or be part of a CC group.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to review not just the history of BCC, but challenges to internationalization. It argued that BCC outlived its original purpose. In conclusion CC is best interpreted as a network that has an international orientation, and not one that has branch chapters off doing their own thing. Much like many social movements, including the environmental, feminist, and LGBTQ ones, there can be times when it is important and necessary for local, regional, and national organizations to organize and promote the wishes of the collective. By the same token it is also wise and more importantly to recognize when this kind of strategy has outlived its utility. In this respect CC should be working together, with an eye to internationalization, and avoid localized national chapters.

Another way of putting it is that although the desire to have national level branches may have been wise in the past, due to technological advances, and further theoretical work, attempts to maintain or create national level CC groups is both a dated concept and practice.

Although, like many US based initiatives, there was a real fear that a CC perspective emanating from the US would attempt to impose it's perspectives on other countries (e.g., The old US plus differences argument), but this never materialized. Despite the practice of academic criminology being slightly different in the US, and the number of people who are interested in CC is larger in America, it does not necessarily

mean ipso facto that a separate country level group would be a better direction. It is time to move beyond a national BBC and put our efforts into an international approach.

Conflict of interest statement: The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the writing of this paper.

Acknowledgements: We thank the editor and anonymous reviewers for helpful feedback on this paper.

References

- Aliverti, A., Carvalho, H., Chamberlen, A. & Sozzo, M. (2021). Decolonizing the criminal question, *Punishment & Society*, 23(3), 297–316.
- Aresti, A., & Darke, S. (2016). Practicing Convict Criminology: Lessons Learned from British Academic Activism, *Critical Criminology*, 24(4), 533-547.
- Aresti, A., & Darke, S. (Eds.) (2018). Twenty years of Convict Criminology, *Journal of Prisoners on Prison*, 27(2), 3-16.
- Aresti, A., Darke, S. & Earle, R. (2012). *Convict Criminology in Britain? Background, Proposal and Invitation*. Unpublished.
- Aresti, A., Darke, S. & Manlow, D. (2016). Bridging the Gap: Giving public voice to prisoners and former prisoners through research activism, *Prison Service Journal*, 224, 3-13.
- Belknap, J. (2015). Activist Criminology: Criminologists responsibility to advocate for social and legal justice, the 2014 American Society of Criminology Presidential Address, *Criminology*, 53(1), 1-22.
- Biondi, K., & Madeira, T. de J. (2021) Outra visão: Novas perspectivas sobre o (e a partir do) sistema prisional, *Revista de Extensão da UNIVASF, Petrolina*, 1(3), 151–170.
- Biondi, K., Darke, S., Aresti, A. et al. (under review) “Mas ainda é prisão”: Notas iniciais de pesquisa na APAC São Luís.
- Black, L., Seal, L., Seemungal, F., Malkani, B. & Ball, R. (2021). Legacies of empire, *Punishment & Society*, 23(5), 609–612.
- Crowe, J. (2011). Can men be feminists? Adapted from Men and feminism: Some challenges and a partial response, *Social Alternatives*, 30(1), 49–53.

- Darke, S. & Aresti, A. (2016). Connecting prisons and universities through higher education, *Prison Service Journal*, 225, 26-32.
- Darke, S. (2018). *Conviviality and Survival: Co-producing Brazilian Prison Order*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Darke, S., Aresti, A., bint Faisal, A. & Ellis, N. (2020). Prisoner university partnerships at Westminster, in Shecaira, S.S. et al. (Eds.) *Criminologia: Estudos em Homenagem ao Alvaro Augusto de Sá* (pp.475-498), Belo Horizonte: D'Placido.
- Earle, R. (2016). *Convict Criminology: Inside and Out*. Bristol, England: Policy Press.
- Earle, R. (2018). Convict Criminology in England: Developments and dilemmas. *British Journal of Criminology*, 58(6), 1499-1516.
- Earle, R., & Davies, B. (2020). Glimpses across 50 years of prison life from members of British Convict Criminology. *Prison Service Journal*, 250, 13–19.
- Ekunwe, I. O. (2007). *Gentle Justice: Analysis of Open Prison Systems in Finland. A Way to the Future?* University of Tampere, Doctoral Dissertation.
- Ekunwe, I. O. & Jones, R. S. (Eds.) (2011). *Global Perspectives on Re-Entry*. Tampere, FI, University of Tampere Press.
- Garland, D. (2021). What's Wrong with Penal Populism? Politics, the Public, and Criminological Expertise. *Asian Journal of Criminology*, 16, 257–277.
- Goyes, D., South, N., Sollund, R. & Carvalho, S. (Eds.) (2021). Southern criminologies: Methods, theories and indigenous issues, *Critical Criminology*, 29(3), 423–429.
- Greer, C., & McLaughlin, E. (2018). Breaking Bad News: Penal Populism, Tabloid Adversarialism and Brexit. *The Political Quarterly*, 89(2), 206-216.
- Gleditsch, K. S., & Polo, S. M. T. (2016). Ethnic inclusion, democracy, and terrorism. *Public Choice*, 169, 207-229.
- Honeywell, D. (2021). *The Ambiguities of Desistance: Ex-offenders, Higher Education and the Desistance Journey*. Bingley, Emerald Group Publishing.
- Jehn, K. A. (1995). A multimethod examination of the benefits and detriments of intragroup conflict. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40, 256-282.
- Jones, R. S., Ross, J. I., Richards, S. C. & Murphy, D.S. (2009). The First Dime: A Decade of Convict Criminology, *The Prison Journal*, 89(2), 151-171.

- Kelty, S. F., Julian, R., & Ross, A. (2013). Dismantling the Justice Silos: Avoiding the pitfalls and reaping the benefits of information-sharing between forensic science, medicine and law. *Forensic Science International*, 230, 8-15.
- Kruks, S. (2014), 'Women's 'lived experience': feminism and phenomenology from Simone de Beauvoir to the present', in Evans, M., Hemmings, C., Johnstone, H., Madhok, S., Plomien, A. and Wearing, S. (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Feminist Theory*, (pp. 75-92) London: Sage Publications.
- Larsen, M. & Piché, J. (2012). A Challenge from and challenge to Convict Criminology, *Journal of Prisoners on Prison*, 21(1 & 2), 199-202.
- Lopes de Magalhães, F.L. (2020). *Projeto Outra Visão: O documentário*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRz3M-LuSBE>.
- Lourenço, S. (2022) *Ressocializado na Cidade de Caos*, Rio de Janeiro: Multifoco.
- McIntosh, I., & Wright, S. (2019). Exploring what the Notion of 'Lived Experience' Offers for Social Policy Analysis. *Journal of Social Policy*, 48(3), 449-467.
- Newbold, G. & Ross, J. I. (2013). Convict Criminology at the Crossroads, *The Prison Journal*, 93(1), 3 - 10.
- Petifor, A. (2016). Brexit and its Consequences. *Globalizations*, 14(1), 127-132.
- Richards, S. C. & Ross, J. I. (2001). Introducing the New School of Convict Criminology, *Social Justice*, 28(1), 177-190.
- Ross, J. I. & Darke, S. (2018). Interpreting the development and growth of Convict Criminology in South America, *Journal of Prisoners on Prison*, 27(2), 108-117.
- Ross, J. I., Darke, S., Aresti, A., Newbold, G., & Earle, R. (2014). Developing convict criminology beyond North America. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 24(2), 121-133.
- Ross, J. I., Jones, R. S., Lenza, M., & Richards, S. C. (2016). Convict Criminology and the struggle for Inclusion, *Critical Criminology: An International Journal*, 24(4), 489-501.
- Ross, J. I. & Richards, S. C. (Eds.). (2003). *Convict Criminology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Ross, J. I. & Vianello, F. (2021). (Eds.) *Convict Criminology for the Future*. New York, NY: Routledge Publishers.

- Sanders, A. (2012). *Inside The IRA: Dissident Republicans and the War for Legitimacy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press.
- Vegh Weiss, V. (2021). It's time! Towards a Southern Convict Criminology, Ross, J.I. & Vianello, F. (Eds.). *Convict Criminology for the Future*, (pp. 112-126). New York: Routledge Publishers.
- Vianello, F. (2021). "Developing Convict Criminology: notes for Italy, in Ross, J. I. & Vianello, F. (Eds.) *Convict Criminology for the Future*, (pp. 98-111). New York, NY: Routledge Publishers.
- Vos, J., Tantam, D. & van Deurzan, E. (2020). A Brexistential Crisis? *The Psychologist*, 33, 10-20.
- Warr, J. D. (2021). Many Rivers to Cross: Why I'm not a Convict Criminologist, *Criminology with Conviction*, (pp. 16-19) <http://concrim.asc41.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021-spring-newsletter.pdf>
- Walmsley, R. (2018). *World prison population list (12th edition)*. London: International Centre for Prison Studies.
- Williams, F. (2011). Interpersonal Conflict: The Importance of Clarifying Manifest Conflict Behavior. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology*, 1(3), 148-160.

Notes

¹ This includes, but is not limited to peer reviewed articles (e.g., Aresti & Darke, 2016; 2018; Earle 2018; Earle & Davies, 2020), an edited journal volume celebrating the 20th anniversary of CC (i.e., Aresti & Darke. 2018) and two single authored books (i.e., Earle, 2016; Honeywell, 2021).

² For recent journal special editions in English, see e.g., Aliverti et al. (2021); Black et al. (2021); Goyes et al., (2021).

³ For details on the project and its framing within the CC perspective, see Biondi & Madeira (2021), Biondi et al. (2022), and Lopes de Magalhães (2020).

⁴ This debate has been periodically articulated directly in face-to-face meetings, on the public stage in terms of conferences or symposiums, it appears to have emerged through other public avenues: the diverse scholarly activity within the group.

⁵ Co-produced knowledge has been central to the approach to CC taken by Aresti and Darke. Their publications under the CC perspective include contributions by 'non-con' undergraduate and postgraduate students who have arguably gained depth of knowledge and understanding of prison from the dozens, in some cases hundreds of hours spent studying with prison-based social science students at HMP Pentonville, HMP Grendon and HMP Coldingley and former prisoners at University of Westminster (for detail, see Darke et al., 2020).

⁶ We are not arguing that local/national issues should not be considered, rather we question the need of a national level group i.e., BCC, which by default, given its local/national identity and focus, has little concern for wider international penal issues and our global objectives. Logically speaking, if BCC was to prioritize international/global penal issues, then this is contrary to its very nature of being a local/national network.

DRAFT