

**Developing convict criminology beyond North America**

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## **Developing Convict Criminology beyond North America**

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### **Abstract**

Despite its original vision of a community of ex-convict criminological and criminal justice experts, Convict Criminology has had difficulty with international expansion and has remained largely a North American movement. There are many reasons why this has occurred. This paper reviews the efforts that have been made to internationalize Convict Criminology in Europe and discusses some of the barriers it has faced. It also suggests prospects for moving the field forward in a truly international manner and the problems that this entails.

## INTRODUCTION

Convict Criminology (CC) emerged in the United States during the late 1990s and has since garnered a respectable audience among scholars, students, activists, and practitioners in the fields of criminology, criminal justice and penology. Its growth has been largely attributable to the quality of its arguments, which offer an alternative epistemology on crime, criminality and punishment, to the energy of its founders, to the numerous presentations it has made at mainstream criminological conferences, and to the articles, chapters and books its members have published.

The group is not a unified school as such; rather it consists of a collection of PhD-trained former prisoners, prison workers and others who share a belief that in order to be a fully-rounded discipline, mainstream criminology needs to be informed by input from those with personal experience of life in correctional institutions. Contributions from academics who are aware of the day-to-day realities of incarceration, the hidden politics that infuse prison administration, and the details and the nuances of prison language and culture, have the potential significantly to enrich scholarly understanding of the corrections system. In addition, Convict Criminologists have been active in various aspects of correctional reform advocacy, particularly where prisoner education is concerned.

As an expanding and dynamic movement, Convict Criminology has been subject to the vagaries of the times, and has experienced its share of growing pains (see Jones, et al., 2009; Newbold & Ross, 2013). One of the important challenges facing CC involves moving beyond its North American roots. Convict Criminology has remained mostly a North American initiative, concerned primarily with corrections-related issues relevant to that region and shaped by the

exceptional carceral conditions applying to the USA. The purpose of this paper is to describe some of the ways in which Convict Criminology is developing a wider international profile and gathering momentum in Europe, specifically in Britain. It also reviews the significant difficulties inherent in extending a perspective that is intrinsically diverse and anchored on local penal conditions.

## BACKGROUND

Without attempting to recount the entire history of criminology (see, e.g., Taylor, Walton & Young, 1973; Rock, 1994), we note that the origins of this scholarly field lie in Europe, with the work of Cesare Beccaria (1764), followed over a century later by Cesare Lombroso (1878). Both were Italians - one a philosopher, the other a physician -and both were writing at a time when criminology was also emerging as a discrete discipline in England, with the contributions of Jeremy Bentham in 1764 and John Howard in 1777. This scholarship was later followed by work at the University of Chicago in the United States during the 1920s. Since then, there has been a steady expansion of the criminological enterprise, particularly in the US bolstered by numerous factors, including the establishment of the American Society of Criminology in 1941 (Sumner, 1994).

As in other academic disciplines, this growth has been accompanied by the proliferation of groups of scholars bonding together to form institutional bodies to further develop their individual and collective interests. Some have developed programs of study or established departments and schools dedicated to the development of particular perspectives, and others have formed country or region -based academic organizations such as the Asian Criminological Society, the South Asian Society of Criminology, the European Society of Criminology, the

British Society of Criminology and the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology.

Inevitably, national and region- based organizations eventually developed specific emphases based on their unique histories, circumstances and locations (Marshall, 2001). Factors such as globalization, the existence of the World Wide Web, and improvement in transatlantic transportation, have also contributed to the increased cross pollination of research.

Although a handful of publications have traced the dissemination of criminal justice policy or selected aspects of it throughout the world (see, e.g., Fields & Moore, 2005; Jones & Newburn 2006, 2007; Plywaczewski, 2009; 2012; Herzog-Evans, 2010; Kalunta-Crumpton, 2010; Ekunwe & Jones, 2011; Ross, 2013), less work has been done on the transfer of criminological theories. Newburn and Jones (2007), for example, provide empirical evidence of the complex process of migration in ideas, policies and cultural symbolism in the field of criminal justice and criminology. Wacquant (2008, 2009, 2014, forthcoming) traces how such movements across the north Atlantic are folded into the broader political currents of a globally ascendant neoliberalism. Wacquant's theses have animated European and North American critical scholarship (see, e.g., Squires & Lea, 2012). Van Swaaningen (1997), for instance, has reviewed the uneven growth of criminology and traces the origins and lasting influence of its critical currents. Less frequent are more reflexive discussions tracing the internal movement of subdisciplines within the field of criminology from one geographical setting to another.

When Convict Criminology was first established in 1997 by Jeffrey Ian Ross and Stephen C. Richards, it was conceived of as an intellectual enterprise as well as a means for mentorship and activism (Ross & Richards, 2003). Theoretically, since much of the work of Convict Criminology involves a critique of the current criminal justice system and modern corrections, it

is aligned with 'critical criminology' (Van Swaaningen, 1997, DeKeseredy, 2010). As Larsen & Piche (2013:1) observe, CC is an attempt at "privileging the voices of current and former prisoners in debates concerning penalty."

Some of the foundations of Convict Criminology include using autoethnographic approaches to the dynamics of correctional facilities, mentoring inmates both behind bars and those who have been released - many of whom are themselves pursuing a university education, critiquing the overreliance on prison as a judicial sanction, and examining oppressive prison conditions which sap individuals of hope. In one of its scholarly pieces, CC argues for reducing the number of prisoners behind bars, increasing restorative justice programs, re-examining the 'war on drugs', lessening the militarization of the criminal justice system, restoring voting rights to convicted felons, returning federal funding to prisoners pursuing higher education, preparing inmates more effectively for re-entry, providing better medical treatment, and increasing and improving post-prison residential options (Richards, Ross, Newbold, Lenza, Jones, Murphy, & Grigsby, 2011).

Although Ross was originally a Canadian and Richards an American, they never intended CC to be restricted to the American continent. Thus, they sent countless invitations to persons within their international networks canvassing for contact information of people who fit the criterion of "convicts or ex-convicts, on their way to completing or already in possession of a PhD" (Ross & Richards, 2003, p.6). They were also interested in hearing from PhD-educated prison reform advocates who believed that the convict voice is underutilized. Individuals from Canada and the United Kingdom returned expressions of interest, but the only non-American who joined the initial group was New Zealander Greg Newbold, who contributed to the original

edited book and subsequently to many of the co-authored pieces the CC group has published. Newbold met the group's founders through his regular attendance at US conferences such as those of the American Society of Criminology.

Since 1997, and even more so since the publication of the monograph *Convict Criminology* in 2003 (Ross & Richards, 2003) and the establishment of the CC website in the mid-2000s, individuals in the United States and elsewhere have come forward wanting to participate in the CC mission and to help disseminate the spirit and ethos of *Convict Criminology*. Inevitably, not all have fit the base criterion that Ross and Richards established, which was possession, or being on the way to completion, of a Ph.D.

Almost from the beginning, the Canadian based journal, *The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* was a natural ally, and thus attracted a number of Canadian academics. One of the conditions for an article to be published in *JPP* is that at least one of the authors of the papers must be a current or former prisoner. The historical association between CC and *JPP* culminated in the publication of a special issue devoted to CC in 2012.

But it was the publication of *Convict Criminology* that most fully consolidated the group's perspectives and established its academic credentials and potentials. In the summer of 2004, shortly after its publication, Ross was invited by British academic Shadd Maruna to give a lecture to his class of prison governors at Cambridge University in the UK. Ross used this opportunity to introduce the CC idea and the book to a British, albeit prison practitioner audience. Two years later, with the assistance of French criminologist and penologist Pierre Tournier, Ross made a presentation about CC in Paris to Tournier's weekly prison activist

seminar (Arpenter le Champ Pénal). In 2010, Ross did the same at a graduate level seminar Tournier taught through the University of Paris.

Other Convict Criminologists have contributed beyond the US. Apart from his US visits, Greg Newbold mentors a number of long-term prisoners undertaking university study in New Zealand (and one in the US) and has presented at conferences in his own country and in Canada, Australia and Japan. He has served on a large number of New Zealand government policy-making committees or as a consultant to such committees, and is New Zealand's primary news media spokespersons on matters of law and order. In 2006, ex-convict and criminal justice professor Richard S. Jones, (Marquette University) received a Fulbright scholarship to teach criminology at the University of Tampere, Finland. There he met Ikponwosa (Silver) O. Ekunwe, a Nigerian born ex-convict who was completing a doctorate on prisons in Finland. Searching for an appropriate epistemology, Ekunwe was attracted to Convict Criminology's ethos and used it to frame his dissertation. This connection eventually led Ekunwe and Jones to organize a conference in Tampere in 2011 entitled 'Global Perspectives on Re-entry'. A number of American Convict Criminologists attended this conference, where Ross and Richards gave the keynote address entitled 'Convict Criminology Policy Recommendations'. Their presentations were published in the post conference proceedings by the University of Tampere Press (Ekunwe & Jones, 2011). Although the conference was not specifically devoted to CC, the group's significant presence exposed an international audience to its thinking.

More recently, the Convict Criminology approach was integrated into a series of papers published in a special issue (Vol. 2, No. 1, 2013) of *Euro-Vista*, "a tri-annual journal on probation matters in Europe," which is the official organ of a production of the Confederation of

Probation in Europe (CEP). Six of the articles were authored by US based academics with a previous history of incarceration and were edited by Stephen C. Richards, while the balance was edited by the issue editor.

Until recently, the efforts of Convict Criminology to extend prisoner/ex-prisoner perspectives in criminology/criminal justice have largely been limited to this type of activity. However, in the last couple of years, developments in Britain signpost the emergence of Convict Criminology perspectives east of the Atlantic.

## BRITISH CONVICT CRIMINOLOGY

### *Origins*

As a starting point, as Ekunwe had done in Finland, Andy Aresti, a British ex-convict, adopted a Convict Criminology perspective to accommodate his epistemological orientation and frame his doctoral dissertation (Aresti, 2010). Subsequently, in conversation with two other academics about his PhD and Convict Criminology, a common interest in developing UK-based CC ideas was established. At the 2011 British Society of Criminology conference in Newcastle, three academics, Rod Earle (The Open University), Andy Aresti (University of Westminster) and Sacha Darke (University of Westminster) convened a panel under the title 'Putting Prison in its Place'. During the discussion, these panelists considered the viability of establishing a Convict Criminology group in the UK. Shortly afterward, they launched an appeal for interest in the newsletters of the British Society of Criminology, the Howard League for Penal Reform, and the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control. As a result, British Convict Criminology (BCC) was established in January 2012, with a core steering group of Aresti, Earle and Darke. It is important to note that like its North American cousins, it has no formal

constitution or membership, but has developed a constituency of interest and support among prisoners, ex-prisoner academics and conventional academic criminologists. By the time BCC returned to the annual British Society of Criminology conference in Portsmouth in July 2012 (where they were joined by Ross) to convene the first BCC forum, the group had also established an advisory panel and had forged links with CC in America. Two of the original papers from the BSC in Newcastle were published as 'Developing a Convict Criminology group in the UK' (Aresti, 2012) and 'Prison and university: A tale of two institutions?' (Earle, 2011). The third paper, an ethnographic study of inmate-guards and prisoner self-governance in Brazil, was published as 'Entangled staff-inmate relations' (Darke, 2013).

### *Orientation of BCC*

From the outset it has been clear to the founders of BCC that while they share the same underlying philosophy and critical theoretical orientation as their American colleagues, there are significant differences between the US and UK regarding criminal justice and academic criminology. This has inevitably led to divergences as well as similarities in the groups' orientation toward building its presence and influence, as well as its potential membership, research and activities. For a start, despite significant expansion over the past 20 years, at approximately 90,000 prisoners, the UK prison population remains only a fraction of the US's 2.2 million. One obvious consequence is that there is certain to be fewer people with prison experience who have made the transition from prison to university. So far, among those involved in BCC, just a handful of former prisoners have secured full-time work as university lecturers or researchers.

It is encouraging to note, however, that at the 2013 conference of the British Society of Criminology at Wolverhampton, two BCC panels were organized to accommodate the growing interest in the group. This included two presentations from ex-prisoner scholars new to the BSC conference. Both panels attracted large audiences and generated valuable discussion. One of the papers (Earle 2014) was accepted for publication in a special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* dedicated to 'Doing Prison Research Differently'. This special issue, edited by Yvonne Jewkes (2014 forthcoming), includes several CC perspectives on prison research.

Two of the papers presented at the BSC 2013 by new BCC scholars (Maguire, 2015; Davies, 2015) will appear in the *Handbook of Prison Ethnography* (Drake, Earle & Sloane 2015). Also scheduled for inclusion in this volume is the work of Serena Wright (Cambridge University) whose contribution to one of the BCC panels focused on the marginalized position of women prisoners, both within the penal estate and Convict Criminology. Women's experience of penal confinement may be less common than men's, but their voices are even more rarely heard and less likely to be listened to. The chances of women's progression after custody into academic careers, in criminology or other disciplines, are slimmer because of a variety of factors, including their being subject to more frequent shorter sentences in which the opportunities for sustaining an interest in education are further compromised. By seeking links with campaigning organizations such as Women in Prison BCC hopes to foster the inclusion of women's perspectives in the development of their work.

Another area of development in BCC is its active involvement in prisoner education. Through their experiences working at the Open University and the University of Westminster, BCC founding members Aresti, Darke and Earle noticed that an increasing number of current

and former prisoners were studying for undergraduate or masters' degrees in criminology or cognate disciplines. The enormous growth of criminology in British universities in recent years has also resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of former and current prison officers completing undergraduate criminology degrees. Their movement onward to PhDs and academic careers has also grown significantly but can hardly be said to have been matched by those from the other side of the bars (Earle, 2011, Jewkes 2014). Thus, the BCC steering group has resolved to focus on developing contacts among current as well as former prisoners, and to offer academic mentoring for prisoners or ex-prisoners doing undergraduate as well as graduate degrees. This approach is already bearing fruit. In the past year, three former prisoners affiliated with BCC have started MAs or PhDs in criminology or a related discipline; another two are applying to start postgraduate education in 2014. BCC is also supporting another long-term prisoner seeking permission to do a PhD. during his sentence. Finally, several BCC supporters on the inside have expressed interest in conducting collaborative research on their experiences of higher education while they remain prisoners. A number of prisoners are advising BCC on the questions such a research project should address, and the methodologies that should be employed.

A defining aspect of Convict Criminology in the UK, which is similar to the US group, is the importance attached to developing contacts within the voluntary sector. Not only do penal reform and prisoner support groups in the UK have a lot of relevant experience from which BCC can draw, but they also appear to have a strong record of promoting the voices of educated former prisoners, and also of utilizing convicts as peer researchers (Aresti, 2012). Further, a number of penal reform organizations and prisoner support groups are already working

alongside university academics. And whilst in its preliminary stages, some discussion of potential future collaborations with well-established voluntary sector organizations such as The Prisoners Education Trust, have taken place. This organization provides access to wider learning opportunities for prisoners. Collaborations such as these are particularly beneficial for BCC, as voluntary sector organizations can provide a platform to a broader and more diverse audience, thus facilitating the dissemination of BCC's work.

Voluntary sector organizations working in the field of criminal justice have much to gain, from association with Convict Criminology. One of BCC's early successes in this regard has been its involvement in the steering group of the *Reclaim Justice* initiative, a coalition set up in September 2012 to promote radical reduction in the size of the prison population. As a part of this coalition, BCC aims to bring prisoner and former prisoner voices to the centre of the campaign (Darke, 2012). Relative to this, BCC 'represents' prisoner and former prisoner voices, by regularly speaking at voluntary sector events and conferences. Recently, BCC represented these voices at the Perrie Lectures, an annual event which aims to stimulate dialogue between criminal justice organizations, the voluntary sector and all those with an academic, legal or practical interest in prisoners (Aresti, 2014).

Two members of the steering group are also involved in a number of penal reform projects, typically acting as both research consultants and sitting on advisory boards and panels. For example, the 'offender transition learning group' project; a project being led by a collection of academics and practitioners, which is primarily focusing on the role education can play in improving prisoners' transition from prison to the community, and equally important, the role learning can play in desisting from crime.

Such initiatives include a diverse, yet resourceful range of individuals, including academics, corrections practitioners and statutory sector representatives, working in different domains in the criminal justice system. This is particularly important as BCC members are beginning to engage in discussions with representatives such as those from NOMS, the Ministry of Justice, and HM Prison Service, by offering alternative discourses on crime, criminality and punishments. Such discussions are critical if BCC is to influence policy makers and practitioners in the field.

Although an increasing number of voluntary groups provide mentoring and other services for prisoners (Aresti, 2012; Clinks and the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation, 2012), none offer dedicated academic mentoring at a higher education level (although one, the Longford Trust, provides academic mentoring to prisoners after release). The main provider of higher education courses in prison is the Open University. Their network of tutors is supplemented by regional learning support teams, but prisoners are not assigned individual mentors, and their relationship with the Open University ends when they have completed their studies with them. When BCC first contacted the prisoner community through a short article in the prisons newspaper *Inside Time* (Aresti, Darke & Earle, 2012), it received over 30 replies from prisoners studying or planning to study criminology, sociology, psychology or law. An academic mentoring scheme was formally established in July 2013. Additionally, BCC has strong connections to the Open Book project, which attempts to increase and widening participation in the Higher Education program based at Goldsmiths College, University of London. The project, run by a former prisoner, helps and supports marginalized people including former prisoners and ex-offenders into, and through higher education, specifically degree and post

graduate programs. The Open Book project's aims are similar to BCC and it shares a number of interests with BCC. A potential research collaboration, between BCC and Open Book, is currently being considered.

Finally, British Convict Criminology has emerged within a sector of the academic community that is arguably less dominated by positivist research, is more critical of the penal system and is more accommodating of prisoner and former prisoner voices, than the US mainstream. While administrative criminology (i.e., that which produces studies intended principally to be helpful to the management of criminal justice agencies) remains an influential paradigm in British as well as North American criminal justice research (Young, 2011), critical criminology has a long-established record and higher profile in the UK, particularly in prison studies. It might even be argued that the whole tradition of critical criminology was born in the UK with the publication of Taylor, Walton and Young's *The New Criminology* in 1973. This had itself been preceded by Cohen & Taylor's seminal ethnographic study of long term maximum security prisoners at Durham Prison in 1972. Both laid the groundwork for the critical perspectives embraced by Convict Criminology three and a half decades later. More recently, in contrast to the US experience (Wacquant, 2002), there has been a growing current of rich qualitative and ethnographic studies of prison life within British criminology (see e.g., Crewe, 2009; Drake, 2013; Phillips, 2013; Drake, Earle & Sloan, 2015), some of which has focused on the development of prisoner accounts (Crewe & Bennett 2012, Earle, 2011; Earle, 2014). For the most part, BCC has been well received within the criminological community and its panels have attracted lively debate.

In comparison to the positioning of Convict Criminology in the USA, where a vigorously correctional discipline remains dominant, the more progressive UK academic climate provides British Convict Criminology with specific opportunities to establish a clear theoretical and research identity. The emerging work and contrasting perspectives, of Davies (2015) and Maguire (2015) for example, signals the kinds of developments that are possible. From their work, and that of Aresti et al. (2014) and Earle (2014), it is clear that prison insider perspectives remain underdeveloped but rich in potential for expanding the criminological imagination (Young 2011). Despite an established tradition of prison action research, in which prisoners have become co-producers of knowledge (Taylor & Tewksbury, 1995), there is a continuing paucity of prisoner auto-ethnography, peer research or reflexive scholarly material written by those who have been through the criminal justice machine and who can thus provide unique analysis and theorization rather than simply being expected to provide their perspectives to a conventional academic community as its conveniently captive research subjects.

BCC therefore shares with US Convict Criminology the belief that strong and active convict voices are much needed in academic criminology. Its aim is not to speak on behalf of prisoners and former prisoners, or to interpret their voices, but to facilitate a process in which prisoners and former prisoners articulate their own experiences and analytical perspectives. This offers potential for counter-hegemonic criminological perspectives that can challenge the instrumental priorities of correctional policy and law. It widens the vistas of social justice against the narrowing horizons of criminal justice. Importantly, as in the US, the theoretical perspectives that BCC develops will be grounded in qualitative research conducted by and with prisoners and former prisoners.

## CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

As noted in the introduction, one of the criticisms that Convict Criminology in the US has faced over the years concerns the absence of a transnational outlook. The CC concept was born in the United States and all of its early members, except for the New Zealander Greg Newbold, were North American. Most of the issues that the group has addressed, therefore, have been identified, and it could be argued have been dealt with, from a North American perspective. As Young (2011) has noted looking to America for visions of progressive penal policy makes about as much sense as seeking examples of women's emancipation from Saudi Arabia. Although British Convict Criminology is a recent and welcome addition, the perspectives of both are still defined by Anglo-phone and North Atlantic traditions. There are a number of inhibiting factors that have made it difficult for CC to broaden both its appeal and its academic research.

The first is language. The majority of people who call themselves or identify with Convict Criminology only speak English. Moreover, most of the world's scholarly journals are published in English and so are the bulk of the books. Thus, to be widely accepted in mainstream academia it is necessary to be fluent in English which tends to privilege and reproduce its Anglophone tendencies. Although the book *Convict Criminology* has been reviewed in French (Salle, 2007), Italian (Degenhart & Vianello, 2010; Kalica, 2010) and Spanish Criminology journals, English-only CC will have difficulty moving beyond the Anglo-American scholarly community. Moreover, the fact that English is the dominant language of academia creates significant access costs for the increasing numbers of both prisoners and scholars whose first language is not necessarily English.

The second factor is population size. The United States has a population of 314 million and, as previously noted, a current prison population of 2.2 million. It is by far the most heavily incarcerated society in the West. No other Western nation has a total prison population as high as the US or anywhere near the number of people in prison. Thus, outside the extraordinary and exceptional penal conditions of the USA the chances of finding a significant number of PhD qualified former inmates, whose interests lie in criminology, are much reduced: the available populations just don't compare. In the UK, only three of the BCC group with completed Ph.D.s have actually served time in prison (hence the emphasis that BCC is putting on supporting prisoners and former prisoners through higher education). In Italy, where Vianello (2013) is utilizing the CC perspective in research with prisoners, there are apparently no former prisoners with PhDs (personal communication, Francesca Vianello, September 5, 2013).

The final factor that has made it difficult for Convict Criminology to internationalize is the limits placed around travel for those with criminal convictions. In order to develop a scholarly career in criminology/criminal justice, attendance at international conferences is important, if not essential. By far the largest and most internationally subscribed criminology conferences are held in the United States. The American Society of Criminology, in particular, is the largest criminological organization in the world and the annual conferences it holds are the largest and fastest-growing as well. The ASC's 2012 conference, for example, which was held in Chicago, had 3400 papers and 3500 registrants from 44 different countries. Thus, in order to develop global contacts and links with the wider international criminological community attendance at the US conferences is exceptionally useful: there is no larger gathering of international criminological scholars, and the USA remains home to the most established group

of Convict Criminologists. Before 9/11, this was difficult enough for those with criminal records. There is now a blanket ban on entry to the United States for anyone with a recorded criminal history, but before 9/11, this could be waived under special circumstances. In Greg Newbold's case, for example, a waiver for drug-dealing convictions was granted after he produced evidence of his post-release achievements (a PhD, several books and a university lectureship) as well as character references from high-placed people such as the Minister of Justice and the Deputy Prime Minister. Initially only a single, 11-day visit was approved but as time went on his visa was extended to ten years multiple-entry. Approval was quick and was made locally by the US Consulate in Auckland. Between 1989 and 2007, a dozen US conferences were attended under this arrangement.

After the 9/11 attacks, the situation changed. Although most New Zealanders automatically qualify for visitor entry to the United States, for those with criminal records it has become almost impossible. When in June 2011 Newbold attempted to renew his visa so that he could attend the ASC conference in Washington, he had to fill in approximately 30 pages of documentation, had to produce certified original copies of the court records of all his court appearances dating back some 40 years (a certified Justice Ministry printout was deemed insufficient), had to fly 1000 miles to the Auckland Consulate for a personal interview, was kept waiting until midday for a 5-minute interview scheduled for 8.30am, and then had to pay for and undergo a full medical examination including x-rays and liver scans. The US Consulate in Manila, Washington or Bangkok (where, nobody actually knew) held onto his passport for eight months while it made up its mind. Finally, the passport was returned, with a 12-month visa attached. It arrived in February 2012 – three months after the conference had finished. If

Newbold wishes to attend the 2014 ASC conference in San Francisco, he must go through this process all over again.

For Rod Earle, an Irish citizen, attending the 2008 ASC conference in Atlanta was relatively straightforward, if time consuming and expensive. His convictions removed his eligibility for the 'Visa-Waiver' scheme operated by the US for UK and Irish passport holders, in recognition of the long-standing historical relations between the respective nations. However, attempting to return for the St Louis ASC conference in 2009, Earle's visa application took three times as long to process, and was ultimately approved some two months after the conference and long after the cancellation of his registration.<sup>1</sup>

Such visa and entry procedures are now standard for all persons with criminal records who desire to visit the United States. The process is lengthy, expensive, and complex. There is no guarantee of a visa, no way of knowing when a decision will be made, and no way of tracking the progress of the application following submission since everything is conducted under a veil of secrecy at places unknown even to the local consulate. Visas of longer than 12 months are not granted. Thus, it is now virtually impossible for a person with a criminal record – especially a prison record – to enter the United States.

Difficulties with mobility impact networking and mentoring. Indeed, in this increasingly globalized work, much communication can be conducted electronically, but there are palpable limits to the effectiveness of this mechanism. Face-to-face communication is often preferable especially because of the visual cues that can be picked up that are an aid to learning.

## CONCLUSION

As an approach to criminology driven by the experiences and perspectives of those who have actually served time in correctional institutions, Convict Criminology has remained primarily an American movement. The concept developed in the US in the late 1990s and apart from one contributor from New Zealand, its membership has been dominated by its national *alma mater*. This bias has attracted some criticism and it is a problem that the group's founders have been conscious of from the start. Considerable energy has been expended by group members in attempting to internationalize the concept, through publishing in international journals, through presentations at major conferences in America and Europe, the establishment of a website, news media presentations, and through a successful collection of CC writings published in 2003 (Ross & Richards, 2003).

The response to these efforts has been fairly mixed. It remains the case that few criminologists beyond American shores have shown interest in participating in CC activities. We have seen that language barriers and a simple paucity of PhD trained criminologists with prison experience are two of the main reasons for this. Another very real problem is the post-9/11 restrictions on international travel, which affect former prisoners everywhere but most particularly those wishing to travel to the United States. However, in this paper we have highlighted the recent exception to the North American monopoly that has emerged with the establishing of British Convict Criminology. While BCC is still in the early stages of development in the UK, it is keen to embrace collaborative work with like-minded criminologists in other parts of Europe. Because of BCC's activities, papers utilizing the Convict Criminology perspective were presented at the 2013 annual conferences of the European Society and the European

Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control, and the 2014 annual conference of the Norwegian Association for Penal Reform (KROM), an action research network of academics, prisoners and former prisoners that at times in its 45-year history has had contact with the majority of the country's long-term prisoners (Mathiesen, 1974a; 1974b; 2000; Papendorf, 2006).

Similar partnerships between prisoners, former prisoners and academics previously operated or continue to operate in Sweden and Denmark, as well as in France, Germany, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands (Van Swaaningen, 1997). One of criminology's most influential texts, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* by Michel Foucault (1975), was developed from his work in the early 1970s with the French Prisoners Information (GIP). It is far too early to know what potential convict criminology has in Europe. Indeed, BCC is not yet aware whether any other European penal reform groups have moved beyond the action research, prisoner as co-producer of knowledge, paradigm. However, it is clear that in Scandinavia and other parts of Europe, there is much academic work being done that shares Convict Criminology's concern to bring convict voices to the center of criminological scholarship.

Convict Criminology is a work in progress, as much an identification with an epistemological process as an academic institution. The ability of its ideas and adherents to spread internationally is dependent on a number of factors beyond the control of its original founders, and which are tied to factors such as local correctional policy, post-release career opportunities, and the politics of world travel. Its ambition remains to create a diverse, multi-national supportive network of self-reflective criminologists who recognize the importance of

prisoners' voices in the development of criminological theory and correctional practice. It faces exceptional obstacles but is making steady progress.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> It is highly advised that when applying for a visa waiver to U.S. conference, that the applicant files a complaint with the chairperson of the Congressional Committee assigned to immigration and justice issues and ask an American CC colleague to monitor the application with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). It may also be useful to get a letter from the American Society of Criminology supporting the waiver (personal correspondence, anonymous reviewer).