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**Book Review: David Churchill, Henry Yeomans and Iain Channing, *Historical Criminology*, Routledge Key Ideas in Criminology: Abingdon, Oxon, 2022; 208 pp. (including index): ISBN 978-0-367-18575-6, £9.99 (pbk).**

Alexa Neale

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**Book Review: David Churchill, Henry Yeomans and Iain Channing, *Historical Criminology*, Routledge Key Ideas in Criminology: Abingdon, Oxon, 2022; 208 pp. (including index): ISBN 978-0-367-18575-6, £9.99 (pbk).**

“How do I define historical criminology? It’s just one f\*cking crime after another.” Historical criminologists might be forgiven for resorting to humour (like my not-so-witty riff on Rudge’s line in *The History Boys*)<sup>1</sup> given the lack of satisfactory descriptions to justify our place in the social science community. At a lively international workshop held online in 2020, jointly organised by the Historical Criminology Networks of the British Society of Criminology (BSC) and Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology (ANZSOC), participants shared that their field was seen as ‘cute and quaint’ in Australia, ‘not valued’ in the US, and treated as something of an indulgence or ‘intellectual luxury’ by some British academic colleagues.<sup>2</sup> It was widely agreed that definitions like ‘the history of crime’ or ‘crime in the past’ are too narrow, ‘history of criminology’ suggests a genealogy of major theorists, and ‘doing criminology historically’ draws focus to a methodological explanation; criminology, but only using archival documents, for example.<sup>3</sup>

Enter Churchill, Yeomans and Channing, who have in recent years presented and published prolifically on *Historical Criminology*, reflecting rising numbers of scholars identifying themselves by the term and participating in associated networks and their websites. Far from being a new, undeveloped sub-field, however, ‘historical criminology’ was named and practised as long as a century ago, and it might therefore be surprising that this is the first book dedicated exclusively to defining it. Historical criminology, Churchill, Yeomans and Channing argue, ‘is *not* a subfield of criminology’ or ‘constituted by a specialized focus on a certain subject matter. Nor is it a school of criminological thought...’ (p. 150) Beyond supplying a definition of historical criminology, Churchill et al use their 200 pages to advocate for ‘any aspect of crime, deviance, harm, criminal justice, criminal law or regulation [to] be studied historically’. (p. 150) They argue this point convincingly and, in contrast to disciplinary-specific journal articles behind paywalls, in a more widely accessible format and language at an accessible price. The only exception to this is the frequent use of metaphor which may alienate some neurodiverse readers.

*Historical Criminology* is well sign-posted, its structure informed by its aim of outlining how a temporal approach can be applied methodologically, empirically, epistemologically, theoretically and ontologically. Chapter 1 meaningfully describes historical time beyond the chronological or consecutive (as Rudge saw it), including embodiment, flow through and across time, taking in

multiple tenses simultaneously. Historical thinking, the authors argue, is dynamic and reflexive, *of its time and for its time*. That Churchill et al manage to communicate such a range and complexity of approaches to temporality in only thirty pages is a significant achievement, as anyone who has tried to grasp the iterative, unfixed and constantly revising nature of historiography as an undergraduate will appreciate. Chapter 2 grapples with the methodological implications of such temporal dynamism for social scientific research, identifying specific challenges beyond a simplistic quantitative/qualitative binary. The authors' careful definitions of temporal units of criminological analysis (the trend, the life course, the event, the recurrence, the inheritance) are justified by the oft-repeated observation that criminology as a discipline is obsessed with the present, and history is similarly preoccupied with periodization. Penologists will recognise the examples of epochal categories used to isolate the historic from the contemporary such as 'late modernity' or 'risk society' (p. 56). Indeed, the authors see historical criminology as challenging academic commitment to such categories. The third chapter, on 'theory and concepts', also draws on examples which will speak directly to penologists, arguing that criminological theory is inherently historical by referencing examples like penal welfarism, Scandinavian exceptionalism and carceral collectivism as situated in temporal and geographical space.

'Pasts and futures' sounds like the title of a chapter that reviews foregoing literature and points to the next stages of research in historical criminology, but this promise is not fully realised. Rather, chapter 4 successfully critiques oblique notions of the past constituted through criminology's obsession with the present, and how futures might more usefully be seen through an historical lens which scrutinises the fixedness implicit in progressive, reformist perspectives. Cold case reviews and inquiries, Churchill et al argue, are considering future time in their backward analyses, seeking to 'fix' the past by holding it in place, settling on an agreed version of events that satisfies the present but leaves no room for future revision. Thinking historically would recognise an ongoing, shifting need to historicise pasts, presents *and* futures, they argue. The authors usefully deploy the examples of penal abolitionism, 'risk assessment' and environmental crime to illustrate the ways in which concepts of future time figure implicitly in understandings of the contemporary; 'Hence, those of us concerned with understanding crime and justice in the here-and-now have as much reason to engage in historical thinking as anyone.' (p. 146-147).

*Historical Criminology* is timely and important because it defines a way of thinking that can be mobilised to challenge the privileging of the present and of certain forms of criminological knowledge over others, starting with the dichotomies of the general vs the particular, continuity

vs change, micro vs macro and theory vs method. It raises consciousness of context, demanding reflexive analyses from researchers, students, scholars and teachers, highlighting the pedagogical value of historical criminology for critiquing ‘continually shifting contours of knowledge’ through its ‘capacity to interrogate dominant presumptions and prevailing myths, as well as to challenge political misinformation and disinformation’ by offering ‘useful correctives to the half-truths and mistruths that circulate within political debates about crime and criminal justice... finding pasts within presents, prospect within retrospect or looking forward by looking back.’ (pp. 162-5) This has significant implications for issues facing young people, education, academia and wider society in 2022 including gender, race, decolonization and indigenization, to which historical criminologists are already rapidly responding and making important contributions.<sup>4</sup> *Historical Criminology* is a genuine pleasure to read, which is no small achievement given the complex conceptual subject matter and multiple authors, and promises to inspire others to think historically in relation to issues of crime and punishment.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Bennett (2004) *The History Boys* [play].

<sup>2</sup> Laura Evans for Nifty Fox Creative (2020) ‘Advancing Historical Criminology’ at the Historical Criminology Workshop 15 June 2020 [artwork], <https://thebscblog.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/ahc.jpeg> [accessed 02 September 2022].

<sup>3</sup> David Churchill (2020) ‘Seven New Conversations in Historical Criminology: Report on discussions at BSC Historical Criminology Network Workshop 2020’, *The BSC Blog*, <https://thebscblog.wordpress.com/2020/08/05/conversations-in-historical-criminology/> [accessed 02 September 2022]; see also pp. 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> For examples; Mike Guerzoni and Esmorie Miller (2021), ‘The Role of Decolonization and Indigenization in Historical Criminology’, *BSC Newsletter No. 87*, <https://www.britsoccrim.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Guerzoni-and-Miller.pdf>; Esmorie Miller (2022) *Race, Recognition and Retribution in Contemporary Youth Justice* (Routledge, UK) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351039468>; Esmorie Miller (July 2022) ‘Stigma, Penalty and Black British Young Women: Historicizing Child Q’, *The BSC Blog* <https://thebscblog.wordpress.com/2022/07/06/stigma-penalty-and-black-british-young-women-historicizing-child-q/>; Vicky Nagy (2021) ‘Making the Case for a Feminist Historical Criminology’ in Thomas Kehoe and Jeffrey Pfeifer (eds), *History & Crime: A Transdisciplinary Approach* (Emerald, UK): 189-202, DOI: [10.1108/978-1-80117-698-920211014](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80117-698-920211014); Lizzie Seal (2022) *Gender, Crime and Justice* (Palgrave/Springer, UK) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87488-9>.