TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AUSTRALIAN CRIMINOLOGY TEXTBOOKS AND THE REPRODUCTION OF A DISCIPLINE.¹

Dr Mark Israel
Reader in Law and Criminology, Flinders University, GPO Box 2100, SA 5001, Australia.
E-mail: mark.israel@flinders.edu.au

Mark has a degree in law and postgraduate qualifications in sociology, criminology and education. He has published in the areas of criminology (crime and the media, state violence, community corrections), victimology, racism (racial discrimination in recruitment, indigenous under-representation on juries, antisemitism), migration, and education (teaching criminology). He is author of South African Political Exile in the United Kingdom published by Macmillan (1999) and co-editor of International Victimology (Australian Institute of Criminology, 1996) and Criminal Justice in Diverse Communities (Federation, 2000). Between 1988 and 1992, he lectured in the United Kingdom. He came to Flinders University in 1993 and now teaches a range of topics in criminology. In 1999 and 2000, he was the winner of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology’s Young Scholar Award. He is a member of the Editorial Boards of the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology and Critical Criminology. Mark’s current research interests are race and jury selection; state and state-corporate crime; effectiveness and credibility of community-based punishments; victims and criminal justice.

ABSTRACT
Textbooks can play an important part in the reproduction of a discipline. They can do so in two senses: first, they reproduce and synthesise the ideas that set that discipline apart; in addition, they can have a role in reproducing and renewing the people who work in the discipline, helping to recruit and socialise, or perhaps even ‘discipline’ new personnel. Yet, in some parts of the world, textbooks have become a deeply conservative medium both in content and in form, reflecting the needs of an odd assortment of publishers, academics and patrons. As such, textbooks are worthy of study both as a cultural artefact and as a surrogate curriculum.

Using the growth in Australian criminology textbooks as an example, I examine the relationship between texts and disciplines. First, and briefly, I investigate the development of an Australian criminology; second, I consider what a textbook might contribute to the reproduction of an academic discipline; and third I examine what these textbooks might tell us about the state of a discipline in Australia.

The most obvious and most damning thing about textbooks is that they are boring. Really boring. Everything is homogenized in them, even diversity. (Schudson, 1994: 43)

Introduction

Textbooks can play an important part in the reproduction of a discipline. In an earlier version of this paper published in 1997, I argued that they could reproduce and synthesise the ideas that set a discipline apart as well as playing a role in reproducing and renewing the people who work in the discipline, helping to recruit and socialise, or perhaps even ‘discipline’ new personnel (Israel, 1997). Consequently, I claimed that

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textbooks were worthy of study in their own right as cultural artefacts, economic commodities and as surrogate curricula. I suggested that we were only just beginning to see the emergence of Australian textbooks that might act as basic introductions to crime and Australian society.2

Since 2000, four books have been produced that could, among other things, claim to act as introductory texts to Australian crime and criminology. Three are the latest version of books that I reviewed in 1997: Chappell and Wilson’s (2000) *Crime and the Criminal Justice System in Australia: 2000 and Beyond*, White and Haines’ (2000) second edition of *Crime and Criminology: an Introduction* – the only book that is not an edited collection, and – the book with which I was involved as a contributor and co-editor – Goldsmith, Israel and Daly’s (2003) new edition of Hazlehurst’s *Crime and Justice: An Australian Textbook in Criminology*. One other book has entered the field. Drawing largely on the work of criminologists associated with the Australian Institute of Criminology, Graycar and Grabosky’s (2002) *Cambridge Handbook of Australian Criminology* is intended to be the first in an ambitious biannual review of Australian criminology. In this essay, I examine what these four books might contribute to the reproduction of the discipline in Australia and consider what changes might have occurred in the Australian criminology textbook market in the last seven years.

**What is the role of the textbook?**

Textbooks have a rather uneasy place in much of tertiary education and their use varies over time and space. Many academics regard authors of textbooks as not engaging in real scholarship, operating far from the cutting edge of real research, and providing a masticated, obsolete rendition of a discipline. Within criminology, textbooks played an important part in the development of the subject in the United States, employed by researchers and teachers in that country for inspiration, as overviews and as a pedagogic tool. At one stage, their role in American research was quite significant. However, since 1965 the influence of textbooks has declined markedly, in part the result of a growth of more prestigious, publishing outlets such as journals and monographs, in part the result of a belief that textbooks are not the appropriate place for launching untried theories (Wright, 1993; Wright and Carroll, 1994).

The role of criminology textbooks has now shrunk to providing coherent and reasonably comprehensive syntheses of accumulated knowledge to new entrants to the field. Textbooks also promote criminology, generating interest and attracting new apprentices. This could be an honourable role as textbooks can be relatively inexpensive tools which provide a reliable, tried and tested, means for transmitting knowledge and providing a coherent way of shaping that knowledge.

Unfortunately, many textbooks fail to perform even these tasks adequately. Most reviews of textbooks find it necessary to grumble about what was covered, what was omitted, the theoretical position taken, the lack of explicit theoretical position, the length or the writing style. Richard A. Wright undertook several surveys of criminology textbooks currently in use in the United States. He concluded that while there was a broad range of textbooks to choose from, generally the quality was poor and most criminology textbooks seemed to lack both ‘currency’ and ‘quality’ (Wright, 1990; 1994). In particular, Wright argued that there were several fundamental weaknesses in the coverage offered by American textbooks of different topics and theories. For example, as late as the early-1990s, typically textbooks had not come to terms with the advent of

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feminist criminologies (Wright, 1987; 1992; 1995) nor had they considered the relationships between politics, economics and crime (Tunnell, 1993; Wright and Schreck, 2000). Although Wright’s later review of specialist theoretical textbooks was more positive (Wright, 2000), these studies suggest that criminology textbooks – in the United States at least – have become a deeply conservative medium, presenting their text as an authoritative statement while spurning scholarly and political disputes. In concentrating on widely acceptable issues and what Tunnell (1993) termed ‘systemically non-threatening discourses’, they have tended to fossilise outmoded ways of thinking and resisted change.

The reasons for these biases and omissions have not been explored to any great depth in the criminological literature. However, in a special issue of the journal, Teaching Sociology, many authors, editors and teachers decried the growing importance of textbook format and marketing over content and ideas (see, for example, Fullerton, 1988). In particular, those involved at all levels of the textbook industry complained about the way that texts emphasised the finite nature of knowledge rather than encouraging students to build on their existing knowledge base and engage in further open-ended inquiry and problem-solving.

One strategy adopted by publishers has been the ‘managed’ text. This consists of a series of chapters written by different specialists. The advantage of this approach is that people are employed to write to their strengths providing surveys of areas within which they are active researchers. The main danger of such texts is that the chapters are not interrelated and they are compiled without any consistent theoretical viewpoint. This may not be a problem if it allows the book to portray the accumulation of knowledge in Lyotard’s terms as ‘periodic, discontinuous and conflictual’ (1984:7), reflecting the ‘fragmentation’ of criminology (Ericson and Carriere, 1994) both between and within disciplines. It is a considerable fault if the book becomes an eclectic jungle, failing to establish in any coherent manner what the differences between various positions are and why they have arisen. In some cases, readers are left to do the work that would have been expected to be performed by any competent sole author and editor. This problem becomes even more pronounced when publishers offer to tailor a text to the needs of particular lecturers by cutting and pasting material from across their range of publications.

Another problem experienced in the textbook market is the growing internationalisation of publishing and marketing. While publishers have become multinational, most textbooks in criminology have remained stubbornly national in scope. Where books are written in the country that they are used, there may be a distinct advantage in having texts that are embedded in the specific cultural and social contexts of that country. Unfortunately, many countries are unable to develop and publish their own textbooks either because the size of the market may be too small to sustain large publishing industries or because these countries also lack sufficiently large research infrastructures to generate sufficient local material.

Over the last decade, the very existence of the textbook has come under question, as critics portray the practice of using synoptic texts as inevitably privileging a particular master-narrative and fostering a passive acquiescence of that narrative (Apple, 1993). Most textbooks provide an encyclopaedic portrait of the complex socio-intellectual community that constitutes a field of study. Their authors visualise and represent a field in a particular way, conveying their questions as if they are the paradigmatic questions of the field and making judgements about what to display and what to discard. According to Pinar et al. (1996) some critics have concluded that all synoptic texts are inevitably authoritarian. Pinar et al. responded to critics of the concept of the textbook by arguing that given the entrenched nature of textbook use in course delivery, it made
sense to try to construct a better textbook than to leave the field to 'out-of-date but still-in-print books' which 'silence the voices of many important, but sometimes younger, intellectually more complex, scholars' (pp.5-6). In introducing their own textbook on curriculum discourses, Pinar et al. argued that a better text would offer a mosaic of research which included a cacophony of dissenting and dissident voices. Rather than smoothing over rifts in the area of study it would convey the idea that the field of research with which it was concerned was seriously fragmented.

A second criticism of textbooks is based on the idea that the textbook medium is unsuited to recent pedagogic developments. Knowledge is not viewed as simply a collection of facts. It derived from a dynamic capability for organising ideas by linking, modifying and manipulating them in a mutable and provisional framework. As a result, various government reports have urged Australian universities to equip their graduates with those qualities of critical thinking, problem solving, independent thought, ethical integrity, and the ability to identify, find and manage information necessary to create such a framework (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1992; 1994; Australian Law Reform Commission, 2000). These skills were seen as necessary not just for students to respond to current needs but to be able to accommodate change by acquiring, renewing and upgrading information, skills and attitudes throughout their lives. Zariski (1995) argued that a static linear text probably could not support these activities to the same degree of proficiency as a more dynamic medium like hypertext. Since then, interactive digital formats – for all their faults (Landoni et al., 2001; Blumenstyk, 2001; Bellaver and Gillette, 2002) – have incorporated integrated search engines, and hyperlinks to primary and secondary material such as video and radio clips, newspaper articles, photographs, original documents and graphics. They can also allow students to highlight text online, annotate in pop-up screens or in-context, and participate in discussion groups (Guasco, 2003).

Despite these possibilities, if many textbooks have been conservative in terms of content, the majority have been even more so in their response to such technological and pedagogic changes. Most still seem to position themselves as transmitters of facts to passive recipients. However there have been some shifts. Recent British and American criminology texts have incorporated features designed to increase the opportunities for readers to reflect upon and critically analyse the material contained in the book. In the second edition of *The Problem of Crime*, a book written for the Open University in the United Kingdom, for instance, Muncie and McLaughlin (2001) drew on American textbook design and included a series of activities and exercises, comments to provide feedback on these activities, short questions, definitions of key concepts as well as short extracts. This created an interactive non-linear text (Hartley, 1994).

It seems obvious that if criminology lecturers are to use textbooks in Australia, the challenge is to take the best on offer from the textbook industry elsewhere when it is relevant to the Australian context, and use it to complement Australian material. Australian writers must also reject the weaker aspects of the international textbook industry avoiding the use of a collection of gimmicks which extend through the form of the book to the processes of production and marketing. The difficulty, of course, lies in agreeing on what is the best, and collectively resisting the worst aspects of the international textbook culture.

My own attempt at drawing out the best features of textbooks included the following three points. First, a textbook should provide readers with access to a range of perspectives. This does not mean that it cannot be based on one particular theoretical perspective, but it does mean that it has to acknowledge that there are alternatives. Second, book organisation should not be constructed around the transmission of facts but should reflect clearly articulated pedagogic goals such as, for example, the goal of
helping students to think sociologically, to reflect upon issues critically rather than meekly accepting authoritative statements. Finally, if textbooks are to be part of Australian criminology’s toolkit for self-renewal, they must be written to encourage students to think about larger issues and stimulate their desire to find contemporary and challenging material themselves.

Textbooks and Australian Criminology

From a Foucauldian perspective, textbooks can be perceived as a way of disciplining a discipline, in part through the regulation and classification of knowledge. As political, material products, they would therefore represent specific ways of viewing and reproducing reality, ways that reflect both the political, commercial and intellectual pressures that exist in a particular academic field as well as the political and economic position of those who support textbook production. As a result, textbooks might reveal far wider influences in cultural, institutional and economic organisation. In an earlier paper (Israel, 1997), I explored this possibility by suggesting the possible relationships between four textbooks published in the 1990s and, first, the position of criminology in Australia, second, the state of pedagogy among criminologists and third, the condition of academia. In this updated version, I consider what might have changed since 1997.

In the area of curriculum studies, John Rogan and Jean Luckowski (1990) suggested that textbooks can tell us much about the state of a discipline by revealing whether or not there exists a strong informal consensus about what should and should not be taught to initiates. Of course, this consensus may be partly shaped by the textbook publishing industry itself as well as through the continued use of textbooks which may act not only as purveyors of content but also as powerful determinants of the curriculum. On the basis of the four 1990s Australian texts, it was difficult to claim that the teaching of criminology in Australia rested on such a consensus. Although the four books made similar claims about their aims, they set about achieving their goals in very different ways: very little material was common to all four volumes; and there was a considerable difference in the degree of emphasis placed on the understanding of theory. Are these comments still reasonable?

In fact, the new generation of books all accommodate alternative visions of criminology. None of the three collections state explicitly what differences may exist between different contributors, but there is no doubt that those differences exist. As Andrew Goldsmith wrote in the preface to our co-edited volume, it is impossible to impose a single approach ‘upon such a large and diverse array of criminological scholars… Nor should one attempt to do so if open-minded inquiry remains important’ (Goldsmith et al., 2003: vii). White and Haines recognised the collapse of the meta-narrative by explicitly tracing feminist, new right, left realist, republican and critical perspectives in criminology, including brief outlines of peacemaking and postmodern criminologies. The evolution of each theoretical strand was examined within the social context of the period because, as the authors acknowledged, ‘(i)n the end each theory only fully makes sense when set within an appropriate societal context and values framework’ (p.217-8).

Another trend that might be revealed in textbooks is the flow of ideas and personnel between different regions of the criminological world and the status of research undertaken in different places. This might be demonstrated by what work is cited and how it is evaluated. Not surprisingly, the way that criminology has developed in Australia owes much to the cultural connections that this country – and indeed particular criminologists – have with the United Kingdom and United States. This is reflected in the emphasis placed by all four books on research material from those countries and the lack of attention paid to work from, for example, Continental Europe.
or other parts of the Commonwealth. Even countries such as New Zealand and Canada are rarely indexed, though this may be the result of inadequate indexing in some volumes (Sarre, 2000). There are two notable exceptions. Across the volumes, work on restorative justice and crime prevention link Australian developments to other jurisdictions. In the former case, attention is paid by Strang in Chappell and Wilson, by Daly and Hayes in Graycar and Grabosky, and by Daly in Goldsmith, Israel and Daly to developments in Canada and New Zealand. In the latter, Sutton in Chappell and Wilson, and Cherney and Sutton in Goldsmith, Israel and Daly draw on practices in the Netherlands and France.

The new generation of books are more reflexive about what it might mean to have an Australian book on criminology and why it might be important. For example, Graycar and Grabosky located their project within changes in public concerns about crime and the growth in Australian criminology and, in the preface to Goldsmith, Israel and Daly, the editors argued that Australian textbooks were necessary if Australian students were not to be left knowing ‘more about crime patterns in Chicago than in Sydney or Melbourne’ (p. v).

Nevertheless, it is not always clear for whom these books were written. Not surprisingly, marketing departments of publishers are interested in obtaining a broad readership. Graycar and Grabosky envisage that their book may become ‘a valuable reference resource, as well as a basic text in criminology and criminal justice courses’ (2002: 3) while Chappell and Wilson hope their volume ‘will form part of many professional collections and assist interested readers, students, and academics’ (2000: vii). Both sets of editors may be right – and, given Department of Education, Science and Training publication criteria for academic books, it may be difficult to encourage academics to write for an explicitly student-oriented text – but few with experience of teaching undergraduate students across the academic spectrum would imagine that the main body of students can construct their entry into criminology around books that will also be read by postgraduate students and academics.

On the other hand, White and Haines’ book is written and priced with a student audience in mind. Indeed, Oxford University Press suggests that the book ‘will be of particular interest to students of criminology, sociology and law’ (White and Haines, 2000: back cover). Again, Goldsmith, Israel and Daly explicitly developed their book ‘to provide a foundation for criminological literacy for students coming into the field for the first time… by familiarizing them with a wide range of terms, concepts, and perspectives that will enable them to orient themselves to scholarly works, public debates and policy developments that deal with crime and justice issues, and that will prepare at least some of them for further studies in the field’ (p.vi).

How much do these books offer to those interested in exploring new ways of teaching. Textbooks have traditionally been organised around the transmission of selected segments of knowledge. Yet, some books have been designed to transcend this traditional role and seek to encourage transaction or transformation. Miller and Seller defined the former in terms of ‘a dialogue between the student and the curriculum in which the student reconstructs knowledge through the dialogue process’ (1985:6) and the latter in terms of a focus on ‘personal and social change’ (1985:8). It is worth exploring what, other than an accumulation of facts, students might be expected to take from these books. White and Haines’ book should encourage students to take theory seriously, an important part of the renewal of any discipline. Together with Graycar and Grabosky, and Chappell and Wilson, the volume can provide a bridge to a more specialised literature which is not created specifically for students.
However, only one of the books contains much designed specifically to foster
transaction. One of the most striking features of Hazlehurst’s book in 1997 was her
decision to include cartoons and photographs. She also supplemented each chapter
with bibliographies and a short series of questions. These provided the opportunity for
students to reflect on what they have read and come to their own conclusions about the
value of the material. In addition, Hazlehurst developed a non-linear text through her
use of boxed material. In our 2003 volume, we introduced key words, further readings,
and useful websites for each chapter. Although we offered very little explicit guidance
on how students might define an issue for investigation or pursue a topic for
themselves, at the end of the book we did add a combined glossary of criminological
terminology, and a more general guide to websites. Surprisingly, within the Australian
context, our focus on websites was quite unusual. None of the other three books
consistently supply information about material that may be available on the internet –
the chapters on courts and crime prevention in Graycar and Grabosky, and on drugs in
Chappell and Wilson are welcome exceptions in this respect.

The limited attention to pedagogy displayed in some of the books published in the
1990s probably reflected an overall lack of interest in Australia in the pedagogy of
criminology. As Wimshurst (1997) observed, between 1990 and 1996 only one of the
articles in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology and none of those
published in Current Issues in Criminal Justice dealt with criminal justice education.
In terms of publications, matters have hardly improved in the intervening years.
Encouragingly, the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology Conference has
included sessions on the teaching of criminology – the 2002 conference featured
sessions on both police and criminal justice education. In addition, various textbooks
have been launched at the conference. This might both reflect and support increased
interest in the topic. On a less positive note, the Law and Legal Studies category of the
Australian Awards for University Teaching was abolished in 2002 apparently because
there were insufficient numbers of applications to warrant a shortlist.

The production of criminology textbooks for the Australian market may also reveal
some of the pressures acting on Australian universities and the resultant institutional
demands that have been made of Australian academics. For example, many of the
contributors to Chappell and Wilson, and Graycar and Grabosky have little involvement
in undergraduate teaching. They are either full-time researchers or senior
administrators. While this is partly explained by the important role played in criminology
by the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Research School of Social Sciences
of the Australian National University, it may also reveal the pressures on good
researchers in other universities to focus on obtaining large research grants perhaps at
the expense of their involvement in teaching programs.

These four criminology texts may reveal much about the state of the discipline, its
academics, students and sponsors. Given all the pedagogic limitations of textbooks,
there may be a good argument for lecturers in criminology in Australia not to adopt
textbooks. However, there are several reasons for believing that these books will be
used as textbooks. I suspect much of the reason will lie in overall dissatisfaction and
alienation (Everett and Entrekin, 1994), increasing pressures on academics’ time,
diminishing resources and increasing enrolments, a lack of interest in teaching (Dunkin,
1990), and an appreciation that chances of promotion are higher for those academics
who spend more of their time on research than on teaching (Over, 1993). Given that, it
may still make sense to produce a better version of an outmoded medium than leap
ahead to a digital form that few lecturers and only part of the student body may use.

Conclusion
Criminology in Australia may be maturing. We are seeing the stirrings of a criminology that is based on analysing crime and criminal justice within the specific cultural, historical, demographic, social and political contexts of Australia. One difficulty that the project has faced has been its inability to reproduce itself within Australia. In this endeavour, one tool available to us is the textbook. Until recently there was little in the way of an Australian text. In the last decade, several volumes have made a claim to the position. Students now have access to a broad range of empirical material on crime in Australia and a fair sketch of the theoretical material that underpin much of modern criminology. However, while Australian criminology teachers are undoubtedly far better off for teaching materials than they were when I published my article in 1997, these books are still works in progress as all the collections smooth over differences in the positions taken by different contributors, and most offer limited pedagogic development and do little to support further research by readers. Australian texts still have along way to go if they are to link researchers and teachers and respond to the pedagogic needs of the discipline. Despite becoming the co-editor of an Australian criminology textbook, I continue to believe that we should be wary about embracing textbooks too enthusiastically.

Bibliography


