

# A pedagogy of 'public criminology' as a counter to marginality? Lessons for community sanctions and measures from the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

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## Abstract

As a subject of study in higher education, criminology has never been more popular; and yet, criminologists occupy an increasingly marginal position within political and media spheres. This marginalisation has arguably been to the detriment of those with lived experience of the criminal justice system, an oppressed class whose number has grown exponentially after several decades of a 'tough on crime' consensus on criminality. While much research focuses upon the impacts on imprisonment, an emergent literature has highlighted how individuals experience community sanctions and measures (CSM). This article utilises Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to accentuate the transformative potential of teaching and learning practises within criminology, and CSM in particular. It applies his writings to the literature on 'public criminology', a perspective that aims to render the field more transparent, applied, evidence-based, empowering, and committed to social justice. Drawing from personal reflections as an 'academic criminologist' engaged in teaching and research on CSM, the article advocates for a 'pedagogy of public criminology' that empowers students, as future criminal justice professionals, with the skills to be public-facing, active, and critical subjects who can make a difference in the lives of individuals subject to CSM.

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## Introduction

Paulo Freire's (1970/2017) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has proved a hugely important text for the development of teaching and learning practises in higher education (Ludlow et al., 2019). His criticism of the 'banking model' of learning, of the 'fundamentally narrative character' (Freire, 1970/2017: 44; emphasis in original) of the teacher-student relationship, has been particularly influential. This 'humanist' model of education assumes that knowledge is an unqualified 'good'; a gift bequeathed by teachers to students, who are presented as 'containers' to be 'filled'. To counter the banking model, Freire (1970/2017) called for a dialogic approach in which teachers become students and students become teachers. Trusting in the oppressed as people who also 'know things' (Freire, 1970/2017) and engaging in *praxis*, or reflection and action, could produce meaningful transformation.

Freire's (1970/2017) ideas were forged in the radicalism of South American class politics in the 1960s. His observations on the 'oppressed' (and, by extension, the identity of the 'oppressors') are not necessarily transferable to contemporary teaching and learning in higher education. For a field of study such as criminology, however, it is possible to identify an 'oppressed' class – that is, the individuals whose lives are transformed by the harms perpetuated by the criminal justice system (McNeill, 2019). Recently, scholars have highlighted how the lack of influence of criminologists within policy-making spheres has contributed to such oppression (Uggen and Inderbitzen, 2010). There is a chasm between the rehabilitative approaches advocated by most criminologists and the punitive reality of many Western criminal justice systems (Currie, 2007), including those in the UK. The resultant rise of 'mass imprisonment' (Garland, 2001) has occupied much criminological attention, which has meant the attendant 'mass supervision' (McNeill, 2019) of those subject to 'community sanctions and measures' (CSM) has been relatively underexplored. This is despite those subject to CSM far outweighing those imprisoned in many jurisdictions (Aebi et al., 2015; Phelps, 2017). In England and Wales, for example, there are approximately 78,000 imprisoned individuals, compared to 224,000 on the probation caseload (MoJ, 2021). This implies a criminological hierarchy of marginalisation in which CSM have been rendered largely invisible; they are 'the "Cinderella" of the field' (Robinson, 2016: 96).

Such marginalisation is despite the popularity of criminology as a subject of study: an increasing number of young people are drawn onto university courses through media representations of criminality (Uggen and Inderbitzen, 2010). Indeed, the demand for criminology courses has arguably been driven by a failure to challenge distorted media portrayals of crime (Crepault, 2017). With a focus on the sub-field of CSM, and probation in particular, this article takes

inspiration from Freire's (1970/2017) work as a means to *empower* criminology students with the tools to counter dominant narratives on crime and to work towards positive penal transformation. The article develops a nascent literature on the 'pedagogy of public criminology' (Hamilton, 2013). The study of 'public criminology', which 'takes as part of its defining mission a more vigorous, systematic and effective intervention in the world of social policy' (Currie, 2007: 176), has emerged in recent decades in an attempt to overpass the divide between political representations of crime and professional inertia. Students are presented not as passive learners to be 'domesticated' (Freire, 1970/2017) into the inevitabilities of retributive criminal justice systems, but as public-facing, active, and critical subjects capable of making a difference. A commitment to *empowerment* is thus integral to a pedagogy of public criminology (Hamilton, 2013).

Given its rich history of academic-practitioner engagement, notably through the *Probation Journal*, probation provides an interesting case study through which to explore pedagogic means to counter marginalisation. The first part of the article highlights how 'academic criminology' has become a marginal field in recent decades, while the second explores the implications of such marginalisation for CSM - with particular reference to probation in England and Wales. The third part draws out the meaning of a 'public criminology' and emerging attempts to apply it to pedagogic practises. The final part reflects on how a pedagogy of public criminology (Hamilton, 2013) can be developed for CSM, reflecting on a 30-credit, third-year undergraduate elective I designed for the academic year 2020/21, 'Rehabilitation of Offenders'. Here, it is important to note that the module was not designed in accordance with Freireian principles; rather, *post-hoc* rationalisations revealed key similarities with the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Like Freire (1970/2017), the article foregrounds the transformative potential of education: it concludes that the development of a pedagogy of public criminology for probation can uplift marginalised communities and reinvigorate the sub-field of CSM. The article should be read not as a 'cookbook' (Piche, 2015) for how CSM *should* be taught; rather, it seeks to provide the foundations for debate, to engage those who teach CSM to critically reflect upon and discuss their practise. In this sense, it is not a commentary on an approach that has been systematically evaluated but a reflexive account of how a public criminology of CSM could be developed via teaching.

## **Criminology: A marginal field?**

Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010) note that the public think about crime (and criminology) differently from other social phenomena. Crime, they argue, stimulates both general anxieties and distinct concerns about particular groups or acts, which means that it holds emotive sway over the public imaginary – a sensibility that criminologists have found increasingly difficult to influence. And yet, this marginalisation is a relatively recent phenomenon. Criminology emerged in the late-nineteenth century; as a field of knowledge, its influence was drawn from the positivism of disciplines like statistics, psychiatry, and phrenology, for which the prison functioned as

an 'experimental laboratory, a controlled enclosure in which the new knowledge could develop' (Garland, 1985: 79). That criminology's subject matter, 'crime', is defined by the state renders it unique among fields: questions of *who* is criminal and *how* they should be treated are intimately entwined with political ideology (Moore, forthcoming). Formative, institutionally-based criminologist-practitioners were, therefore, able to exert influence over states' penal practises in the late-nineteenth century, particularly regarding the regulation of the lower classes (Garland, 1985).

The 'extended statism' (Garland, 1985: 103) that laid the foundations for the modern welfare system and legitimised incursions into the lives of the poor through the social and behavioural sciences proved the basis for a 'penal welfare' consensus on crime, which emerged in the early-twentieth century and was dominant until the 1970s. Much like Freire's (1970/2017) observations on the 'banking model' of education, however, 'humanist' penal practises in which criminal justice professionals imparted their knowledge onto passive individuals cannot be considered an uncritical 'good'. Criminologists, for Cohen (1985), were part of a professional class who, along with psychiatrists, social workers, and probation officers, competed for power and status. Evermore individuals were drawn into criminal justice systems as a result of such competition. Socio-economic crises of the 1970s provoked political-cultural shifts on the legitimacy of rehabilitation and, since then, the 'politicisation' of crime has emerged as an electoral strategy for political parties (Garland, 2001). The resultant 'tough on crime' agenda contributed to the rise of 'mass imprisonment' and its concomitant harms on individuals, families, and communities (McNeill, 2019; Wacquant, 2009).

This is not to say that *all* criminologists were marginalised: in the US, for example, Martinson's (1974) meta-analysis of rehabilitative interventions, which found that 'nothing works', was (mis)interpreted by politicians as a justification for more imprisonment, while right-realist theories of crime that emphasised individual responsibility proved influential in driving 'zero tolerance' policing strategies (Garland, 2001). More recently, the 'What Works?' agenda in England and Wales presents an example of how academic knowledge was used to evaluate and accredit treatment programmes in the late-1990s and early-2000s (Tonry and Green, 2003), and has been credited with helping to re-establish the legitimacy of rehabilitative interventions in the so-called 'post-rehabilitative era' (Robinson, 2008; Zedner, 2003: 219). And yet, while academic expertise has been 'valued and sought' (Tonry and Green, 2003: 499) regarding the everyday administration of criminal justice in England and Wales, divergence between the purposes of crime-control idealised by most criminologists and the realities of mass imprisonment point, in recent decades, to the increasingly marginal status of criminology (Currie, 2007).

Crepault (2017) highlights both internal and external explanations for the ostracisation of criminologists at a policy level. Internally, the distance between criminologists and policymakers has been exacerbated by the confinement of academic debate to small circles hidden behind the paywalls of journals. Neoliberal universities, particularly those with a research focus, privilege this 'original' research

over other forms of engagement (Currie, 2007). A 'hierarchy of credibility' (Morgan, 1999: 330) affords greater epistemic value to 'academic criminology' at the expense of the 'ordinary' knowledge possessed by those with lived experience of the criminal justice system (Dearey et al., 2011). In Freire's (1970/2017: 109) terms, the university has hardened 'into a dominating "bureaucracy"', within which there is little room to widen audiences and deepen their understandings. Externally, where mainstream criminology largely attributes criminality to societal and environmental factors and advocates for rehabilitative approaches, it is typically presented within political and media spheres as the product of individual failings (Garland and Sparks, 2000). Such 'popular' discourses on crime have a greater impact on the public consciousness than academic criminology (Groombridge, 2007). Accordingly, criminologists have become increasingly detached from 'the thrust of social policy' (Currie, 2007: 176).

In an era of 24/7 news coverage, one in which time to reflect on issues has arguably been devalued, the 'real experts' (Uggen and Inderbitzen, 2010: 734) on crime are not criminologists but practitioners. Police, legal professionals, corrections officials, and their unions – who, more often than not, have a vested interest in controlling media narratives – are typically invited to provide the commentary on crime (Crepault, 2017). Criminologists, by contrast, are positioned as 'elite interpreters' (Crepault, 2017: 801) attempting to educate an uncritical and ignorant mass whose (mis)information on crime comes from distorted media representations. While Allen and Hough (2007) have challenged the superficiality of the assumption that the public are punitively minded, the increasingly 'hot climate' (Loader and Sparks, 2010: 2) in which criminologists operate has precluded influence over macro-policy shifts. Such marginalisation is most apparent within the sub-field of CSM.

## **CSM: The 'Cinderella complex'**

Punishment in the community has been described as 'a sector of the field around which it is difficult to draw precise boundaries' (Robinson et al., 2012: 323). Despite a focus on the diversification and expansion of community punishments in the 1980s (e.g. Cohen, 1985; Scull, 1983), 'mass imprisonment' has garnered significantly more academic scrutiny (McNeill, 2019). Robinson (2016) observes that, where scholarly attention has been directed towards punishment in the community, it has typically been on 'back door' adjuncts to imprisonment like the supervision of early release prisoners. By contrast, 'front door' measures – ranging from those which contain a supervisory element, such as standalone unpaid work orders, community and suspended sentence orders, and electronic monitoring, to non-supervisory punishments like fines – have typically eluded academic scrutiny. This neglect of CSM – an all-encompassing term that captures an array of both front and back door sanctions – has given the field a 'Cinderella complex' (Robinson, 2016: 97), in that it is not invited to the criminal justice ball.

Robinson (2016: 102) identifies three reasons as to why CSM have not received the academic attention they deserve: '(i) the problems of language and labelling, (ii) the (in)visibility of the field and (iii) the debateable penal character of community

sanctions.' First, in the absence of a common vocabulary that shapes public understanding of CSM, they are often discussed 'with reference to what they are *not*' (Robinson, 2016: 102; emphasis in original) – namely, imprisonment. Definitional difficulties are apparent within custodial sanctions that include some element of community supervision, even if the former is never served, like suspended sentence orders (Cavadino et al., 2019). Differences are also present *between* jurisdictions (Robinson, 2016): 'parole', for example, refers to decisions taken on whether prisoners serving indeterminate sentences and certain determinate sentences for serious offences can be safely released into the community in England and Wales, whereas the preference for indeterminate sentences in many US states means that it is mostly discretionary (Cavadino et al., 2019). CSM are thus a 'moving target' (Robinson, 2016: 103), subject to continuous revision and reconfiguration.

Second, problems of language and labelling have been compounded by the 'relative invisibility' (Robinson, 2016: 104) of CSM. A profession can connect with the public by providing insight into its knowledge, methods, and artefacts; and mass media is integral to such image-making (Abbott, 1988). However, probation lacks the cultural symbols that enable it to capture the public imagination (Robinson, 2016) – even relative to other CSM, such as the 'tag' synonymous with electronic monitoring. Probation is seldom the subject of films, books, or documentaries. As a senior manager in Tidmarsh's (2021: 139) ethnography of a probation office reflected: 'There isn't a connection with the public. We're not sexy like the police: we don't have The Bill, do we?'. Indeed, in a rare example of an attempt to demystify the service, a recent BBC News (2021) feature described probation as 'the forgotten part of the criminal justice system'. Where prisons have a discernible architecture, CSM are 'public secrets' (Shah, 2020: 137) that are largely hidden from view. A small literature on the architecture of probation offices emphasises this anonymity: practise is predominantly computer-based and concentrated in open-plan office blocks, a change which reflects the punitive and managerial policy decisions of recent decades (Phillips, 2014; Tidmarsh, 2021). Accordingly, probation has been deprived of the cultural imagery required to 'occupy any significant space in the public imagination' (Robinson, 2016: 104).

Third, the lack of understanding about CSM has contributed to their questionable *penal* character (Robinson, 2016). The 'normality of success' (Fitzgibbon, 2016: 174) goes unreported; when the service does feature in the media, it is usually because of high profile failings. Recent decades have witnessed efforts to make CSM 'tougher': community orders were rebranded as 'community punishments' (Cavadino et al., 2019); 'clients' became 'offenders' (Tidmarsh, 2021); and enforcement rules for non-compliance have been tightened (Robinson and Ugwudike, 2012). Increasing the visibility of unpaid work can also be interpreted as an attempt to enhance the legitimacy of, and public confidence in, CSM (Carr and Robinson, 2020) – an approach that persists through Prime Minister Boris Johnson's recent reference to 'fluorescent-jacketed chain gangs' when articulating plans to deter crime in England and Wales (Elgot, 2021). Hence, the actions of successive governments suggest that there is sufficient political capital in 'tough on crime' policies to warrant a lack of meaningful engagement with the public on CSM.

Public, media, and academic failure to take the 'penalisation' of CSM seriously has concealed the harms they perpetuate (Robinson, 2016). McNeill (2019) draws attention to how the amplification of the scale and intensity of CSM that is characteristic of 'mass supervision' misrecognises and misjudges 'offenders', while its social concentration burdens (impoverished) communities. These pains, he argues, are associated 'as much with civil degradation as with penal discipline' (McNeill, 2019: 132). As such, 'the public presence of a vocal and influential criminology' (Currie, 2007: 176) is especially important for the sub-field of CSM. The next section highlights how 'public criminology' can be utilised as a counter to such marginalisation.

### **'Public criminology': A counter to marginality?**

'Public' scholarship has been adopted by multiple disciplines to disseminate knowledge to wider audiences, and criminology is no exception (Hamilton, 2013). While criminologists have long argued for greater engagement with extra-academia audiences (Uggen and Inderbitzen, 2010), such discussions were accelerated by (then-President of the American Sociological Association) Michael Burawoy's (2004: 5) calls for sociologists to immerse themselves in 'matters of political and moral concern'. His promotion of *public sociology* distinguished between traditional and organic forms of engagement. The former relates to texts written by sociologists which are read beyond the academy, such as opinion pieces in national newspapers. The latter concerns working 'in close connection with a visible, thick, active, local and often counter-public' (Burawoy, 2005: 7). With echoes of Freire (1970/2017), the emphasis of an organic public sociology is on dialogue and mutual education.

'Public criminology' is thus a strand of scholarship that seeks to counter the field's marginality (Currie, 2007); to not only inform debate but also shift its terms (Uggen and Inderbitzen, 2010). 'Academic' and 'popular' discourses on crime need not be mutually exclusive: for Carrabine et al. (2000), public criminology seeks to operate in the spaces where research, political and media debates, and social policy meet. This entails ideological engagement with the causes of social exclusion and advocacy on behalf of those with lived experience of the criminal justice system and the (marginalised) communities from which they are derived. Public criminology, therefore, seeks to render the field more transparent, applied, evidence-based, empowering, and committed to social justice (Carrabine et al., 2000) – ends commensurate with Freire's (1970/2017) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Efforts towards 'public' criminology demand enquiry as to which 'publics' are to be engaged (Piche, 2015). Scholars who advocate for more and more diverse engagement with different 'publics' have typically focussed their attention on politicians and policy-makers (Currie, 2007); however, engaging only with the powerful in the hope that it will improve the lives of the oppressed is arguably 'elitist and esoteric' (Ruggiero, 2012: 157). Relatedly, involving marginalised individuals and communities (Carrabine et al., 2000) can be problematic because 'these actors are often defined as clients by the state, the penal system, and the nonprofit

organisations contracted to extend carceral controls' (Piche, 2015: 75). It is also difficult to assess which publics are being reached and how criminologists' interpretations will be received when disseminating information through 'newsmaking' organisations (Groombridge, 2007).

These problems of 'publics', power relations, and professional expertise are heightened in a probation context. In recent decades, Tidmarsh (2021) asserts, the 'public' has simultaneously been mobilised as an entity to be protected and as taxpayers entitled to value for money. The resultant policy contradictions – *punitiveness* on the one hand and a *managerial* emphasis on efficiency and accountability on the other – have reshaped probation practise while undermining the service's ability to connect with the public. As argued above, such shifts have contributed to quantitative and qualitative intensifications of supervision in the community (McNeill, 2019).

For Loader and Sparks (2010: 117), then, public criminologists should work reflexively towards a 'better politics of crime and regulation'. This involves moments of discovery, in which new knowledges of problems and solutions emerge; institutional-critical moments, wherein cultures and practises and confronted; and normative moments, which address the moral elements of criminal justice. These moments represent 'windows of opportunity' (Tonry, 2006: 54) through which criminologists can convey ideas and effect change. McNeill's (2019) research on mass supervision can be viewed through such windows. He argues that the discovery of the abovementioned human impact of CSM along with the socio-economic, political, and cultural factors which have shaped institutional cultures and practises should provoke questions about penal ethics. His 'normative moment' is expressed through calls for CSM to be bound by *parsimony*, *proportionality*, and *productiveness* (McNeill, 2019). In other words, supervision should not exceed that which is necessary; it should consider the 'pains of supervision' (Hayes, 2018) and its potential impacts, promoting punishments that seek to redress harms in a productive and timely fashion. The role of the public criminologist is not to 'mediate' between established authority and the marginalised, but to engage 'others in forming and supporting social movements that contribute to democratic dialogue and deliberation' (McNeill, 2019: 156).

Students, however, seldom feature in criminological debates on the 'publics' to be engaged. For Uggen and Inderbitzen (2010: 740), '[t]eaching as a form of public criminology offers particular relevance and urgency because our classes often comprise future criminal justice practitioners who soon will be in the trenches as lawyers, police officers, parole and probation officers'. Despite their assertion that teaching and research are of equal importance to public criminology, there have been few attempts to apply scholarship to pedagogic practise. Hamilton (2013: 21) is a notable exception; she draws on the public criminology literature to explore the pedagogical implications for a criminology that is 'more engaged and outward looking'. Like Freire (1970/2017), this approach contends that *student empowerment* is necessary for positive social transformation. Here, 'actors who come from "another world" to the world of the people do so not as invaders. They do not come to *teach* or to *transmit* or to *give* anything, but rather to learn, with the



people, about the people's world' (Freire, 1970/2017: 153; emphasis in original). This is relevant to criminology, 'another world' whose subjects of study are defined by the state (Moore, forthcoming). A pedagogy of public criminology should, therefore, foreground the voices of the oppressed; its 'legitimacy lies in that dialogue' (Freire, 1970/2017: 101).

The best example of such a pedagogy, although it is not explicitly framed as 'public criminology', is the Learning Together programme, in which students learn *alongside* those subject to criminal justice supervision. Armstrong and Ludlow (2016), the founders, ground Learning Together in Freire's (1970/2017) work: they argue that co-learning in prisons facilitates a pedagogical environment that empowers a humanity which prison so often deprives of its inhabitants. Theoretically-informed collaboration enables students and prisoners to *reflect on* and dismantle any preconceptions and to inspire *actions* that do not reproduce social harms (Ludlow et al., 2019). In their evaluation of the Learning Together pilot, Armstrong and Ludlow (2016) found that, for prisoners, the programme gave a sense of belonging which effected personal change, while students developed a sense of purpose as to role(s) they could play in shaping the future of criminal justice. This approach has also been adapted for the community: the Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) iteration of Learning Together, for example, seeks to encourage more people with convictions to enter higher education (Gosling et al., 2021). In this way, viewed as a 'practise of freedom' (Freire, 1970/2017: 53), Learning Together provides a pedagogy for all, capable of empowering learners with the skills and values to effect positive social change (Ludlow et al., 2019).

The final section draws from my experiences of developing a module, 'Rehabilitation of Offenders' (RO), to illustrate the potential of a pedagogy of public criminology for CSM. RO consisted of 17 lectures and accompanying seminars, all of which were delivered online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to a guest lecture from a Youth Justice Social Worker. It explored meanings and models of rehabilitation; the rise and fall of the rehabilitative ideal; extant cultures and practises within the institutions and services responsible for working with individuals subject to CSM; and rehabilitative interventions with specific groups (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people, women, etc.). While the module was not developed within the frameworks identified above, *post-hoc* reflections reveal key similarities with public criminology and a pedagogy of the oppressed, along with how they can be embedded on comparable modules. To this end, Freire's (1970/2017) notion of *praxis*, of the application of skills and knowledge through reflection and action, is presented as crucial for both student empowerment and evaluating teaching practises.

## **Developing a pedagogy of public criminology for CSM**

Currie (2007: 186) warns that one effect of the marginality of criminology described in the preceding analysis is that students graduate into criminal justice

professions with rich theoretical understanding of crime causation and a desire to change the system but are 'socialised into a sort of careerist timidity.' Marginalisation, in other words, is 'domesticating' (Freire, 1970/2017), for it can normalise the status quo. Teaching and learning practises should thus better inform students about the realities of the criminal justice system and equip them with the practical and communicative skills to engender social change. This section argues that *empowerment* should be woven into the fabric of education through self-reflection, collaboration, communication, and dissemination (Hamilton, 2013). It incorporates the dialogic approach at the heart of Freire's (1970/2017) writings on the transformative potential of education, presenting 'ordinary' and 'academic' knowledge as complementary rather than conflicting. Accordingly, a pedagogy of public criminology can simultaneously empower marginalised communities and reinvigorate the sub-field of CSM.

The teaching of criminology is not 'determined by professional bodies or accreditation boards' (Hamilton, 2013: 22). In the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2019) publishes a *Subject Benchmark Statement* for criminology; but, by their own admission, it is a resource intended to help universities develop, rather than regulate, course content. One advantage of this lack of regulation is that it gives lecturers considerable latitude in terms of the content. For Hamilton (2013), criminologists should better enable dialogue *between* course providers by making public resources such as reading lists, seminar activities, and teaching practises to facilitate peer review. Such transparency, she adds, should extend to explicating the values that guide criminologists' actions. While there is a risk that approaching crime and criminality from certain standpoints 'may unintentionally alienate students with differing views' (Hamilton, 2013: 23), value-neutrality in the teaching of criminology is neither possible nor desirable given the subject matter (Braithwaite, 2011). Canton (2019: 4) makes a similar argument on values in his analysis of the European Probation Rules (EPR). If articulating a value set grounded in human rights and the minimisation of harms is crucial to helping the service realise its *moral legitimacy* (Canton, 2019), then this ideology of service should be made explicit when communicating with wider 'publics'.

Rule 17 of the EPR states that 'probation agencies shall inform the media and the general public about the[ir] work... in order to encourage a better understanding of their role and value in society' (c.f. Canton, 2019: 7). However, given the above-mentioned problems of representation, developing such awareness is challenging. Here, *narrative criminology* - 'the study of the role the telling and sharing of stories play in committing, upholding and effecting desistance from crime' (Sandberg and Ugelvik, 2016: 129) - can provide relatable insight into experiences of CSM. Presser (2009) notes that 'offenders must *explain themselves*, often by contrasting a previous (criminal) self with a present (reformed) self. The authenticity of such accounts, particularly in popular discourses on crime, is often challenged; however, narrative criminologists have countered this claim by asserting that the value of stories lies not in their truth, *per se*, but in analysing where the storyteller chooses to attribute meaning (Presser, 2009). Narratives are typically generated through (auto)ethnography, texts and interview data, images, and artefacts

(Fleetwood et al., 2019). That such stories arouse emotion and provoke questions of morality means they can move seamlessly between 'mainstream media, popular culture and social media, to individuals, groups and communities' (Fleetwood et al., 2019: 11).

The prison has proved a fruitful pedagogic environment in which narratives can be shared, not least through initiatives like Learning Together (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016). Here, a dialogic approach that brings together students and prisoners acts as a bridge between the academic knowledge of students and those with lived experience of the criminal justice system (Baumgartner, 2020). Dearey et al. (2011: 87) demonstrate how narratives can be incorporated into teaching and learning practises through prison(er) life-writing, for they 'challenge... extant academic culture and pedagogical/research praxes of criminology that typically ignore... "ordinary" knowledge'. An example of a pedagogy created *with*, rather than *for*, the oppressed (Freire, 1970/2017), prison life-writing provided students in the second year of their degree with cheap, accessible 'datasets' that broadened understandings of criminal motivations and gave them an opportunity to reflect on what was learned in their first year. In this way, as a medium that is rich, descriptive, and evocative, they can be 'a key pedagogical tool for enhancing teaching and learning' (Dearey et al., 2011: 98). As Freire (1970/2017) observed, a more critical understanding of the oppressed is an important step in political transformation.

While probation lacks such autobiographical texts, similar narratives can be found in the desistance literature on the changes to self-identity typically involved in the cessation of offending (McNeill, 2006). Maruna's (2001) study of the desistance journeys of persistent property offenders is the most rigorous example of how narratives influence crime. In blending their stories with thematic analysis, he was able to establish the impact of changes to self-identity and external circumstances on crime. If 'desistance resides somewhere in the interfaces between developing personal maturity, changing social bonds associated with certain life transitions, and... individual subjective narrative constructions' (McNeill, 2006: 47), then close readings of these journeys can be a vital tool for teaching and learning on CSM. Nixon (2020) has demonstrated the worth of incorporating such narratives as a pedagogical resource. Questionnaires distributed to students following a lecture which illustrated the desistance process through real-life quotes showed that 68% felt such snapshots humanised individuals with lived experience of the criminal justice system. Given that many criminology students will progress into professions like probation or social work, desistance narratives can 'promote a sense of empathy and compassion for (ex) offenders' (Nixon, 2020: 474), connecting academic knowledge and lived experience. That desistance is 'owned' by individuals subject to CSM rather than professionals (Maruna, 2006) means it is commensurate with Freire's (1970/2017) observations on centring the 'ordinary' knowledge of the oppressed in order to empower.

I utilised similar narratives extensively in my RO seminars. Many activities revolved around ethnographic notes of probation supervision meetings between practitioners and the individuals on their caseloads, observed as part of a previous research project (see Tidmarsh, 2021). I found that a focus on the offence produced

more punitive responses from students; once they were aware of an individual's personal history, however, their suggested interventions tended to centre on rehabilitation. Take, for example, the below case study, from a seminar on the importance of emotional labour in rehabilitative work:

Jo, a probation officer, recently received a text from a police officer with whom she shares a strong professional relationship alerting her that one of her clients, Mark, was recently arrested for stealing electric shavers. Mark has been in and out of prison for 20 years, largely related to his heroin use, although he has been clean for approximately six months. She rings Mark, who has been released on bail, and he denies that he is using again. A few days later, Jo receives a text from Mark saying that he wants to meet to purchase heroin. The text, which was meant for his dealer, is evidence that Mark was lying to her. She hauls him in for a meeting.

At this point, students were asked for their opinions on the most appropriate course of action for Mark. His offence, offending history, and drug use provoked punitive responses – namely, that he should be returned to prison. When Mark's story was presented alongside his offence, however, most students reconsidered their stance:

Even though Mark lied to Jo, they have an excellent relationship. He previously held a respectable job and had a loving family, but his wife and daughter were tragically killed in a car accident 20 years ago. Drugs have been Mark's coping mechanism, and Jo has been his probation officer for nearly 15 years. He explains to her that he has become friends with someone who is a bad influence, which resulted in a relapse. Mark breaks down and begins to cry at the prospect of being returned to prison.

The above example demonstrates how '[t]he "whole story" complicates and historicises who [an individual] is' (Presser, 2009: 179). While it is not as explicitly *diagnostic* as programmes like Learning Together, in which students and those subject to criminal justice supervision are co-located in a learning environment, it nonetheless draws attention to the openings, barriers, progress, and setbacks an individual faces as they attempt to desist from crime by foregrounding the knowledge of those with lived experience. Such 'moments' - on the human impact of supervision, cultural-institutional practises, and what they tell us about penal ethics (McNeill, 2019) - present valuable insight into the challenges of probation practise. By incorporating research that is ethnographic and/or longitudinal, students can be introduced to the (emotional) skills on which they will draw in a variety of occupations that depend upon casework with vulnerable individuals while educating them in the realities of the field. Such narratives also provide a way to introduce non-traditional forms of capital into higher education, thereby disrupting the traditional university *habitus* and the ways in which it reflects social, economic, and cultural power (Gosling et al., 2021).

Narrative criminology was originally centred on individuals with lived experience of the criminal justice system, but much research now focuses on stories of

professionals (Fleetwood et al., 2019). The most successful exponent of auto-ethnographic writing by a criminal justice professional in recent years is *The Secret Barrister* (2018) in their account of how the legal system is failing, told through stories of their clients. Here, again, CSM lacks such a popular account capable of attracting significant public interest. Given that probation, like legal aid, is 'part of an ecosystem which is... suffering from declining investment' (HMI Probation, 2020: 6) and works with complex individuals with stories to tell, one can surmise that the service would benefit from an accessible, first-hand narrative of its purposes and practises. By engaging students in teaching and learning that encourages a *praxis* (Freire, 1970/2017) grounded in penal ethics, future probation professionals can be empowered with the critical thinking and communicative skills to put forth reflexive accounts of probation that render the field more public.

While real-life narratives enable students to ground theory in the concrete realities of those who work in, or are subject to, the criminal justice system, fictitious accounts can be just as valuable. Working in partnership with crime fiction writers, Perez et al. (2019) co-produced novelettes to teach criminological theory at the University of Catalonia. They found that the novelettes were mostly received positively by students, enhancing 'reader experience by imagining realities based on real-life events' (Perez et al., 2019: 1886). Similarly, as part of their Learning Together programme at LJMU, the first university-based initiative for men and women with lived experience of the criminal justice system, Gosling et al. (2021) embedded 'creative response sessions' alongside more traditional pedagogy. They contend that, through the medium of poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction, the sessions provided 'an opportunity for academic insight, lived experience and professional practise to be synthesised, discussed and challenged in a more meaningful way' (Gosling et al., 2021: 160). Works of fiction are seldom written about CSM, although the short story that accompanies McNeill's (2019) *Pervasive Punishment* is a notable exception. This highlights the 'pains of supervision' (Hayes, 2018), including how they can stifle both those subject to CSM and practitioners. Fictional accounts can thus offer valuable and captivating perspective into community supervision, providing the foundation for more empathetic ways of depicting the lived experiences of oppressed groups.

For Crockett Thomas et al. (2021), song-writing can also be utilised to explore personal experiences through narrative problem-solving, not least because it provides spaces within which artists can explore alternative selves (see also McNeill, 2019). They demonstrate how songs co-produced with Scottish prisoners offer insight into 'the relationships between narratives, the contexts and conditions of production and the pursuit of justice' (Crockett Thomas et al., 2021: 14). Truthfulness, in this context, is unimportant (Presser, 2009), for song-writing grants an opportunity to reflect on and rewrite notions of punishment and the self. Perhaps most importantly from a public criminology perspective, outputs provide a 'popular' accompaniment for 'academic' research on an area of criminal justice (reintegration) that lacks cultural signifiers. Here, 'sensory criminologies have the potential to disrupt our imaginaries' (McNeill, 2019: 155).

The value of music lies not only in the expression of individual narratives, but also in articulating the wider social consequences of the criminal justice system. Hip-hop,

in particular, offers a wealth of possibilities for a pedagogy of CSM (Crockett Thomas et al., 2021). My RO seminars often drew upon hip-hop to shine a light on those with lived experience of the criminal justice system and emphasise the dialogic potential of creative forms of 'ordinary' knowledge. For example, the seminar on 'mass supervision' utilises the following lyrics from *Mathematics* by Mos Def (1999):

When the average minimum wage is \$5.15  
 You best believe you gotta find a new ground to get cream  
 The white unemployment rate, is nearly more than triple for black  
 So front liners got they gun in your back  
 Bubbling crack, jewel theft and robbery to combat poverty  
 And end up in the global jail economy  
 Stiffer stipulations attached to each sentence  
 Budget cutbacks but increased police presence  
 And even if you get out of prison still living  
 Join the other five million under state supervision

Students are asked to identify and evaluate the lyrics that indicate quantitative and qualitative intensifications of punishment in the US, particularly within marginalised (African-American) communities (Wacquant, 2009), with reference to some of McNeill's (2019) dimensions of 'mass supervision'. These include: the number of people supervised, the social concentration of supervision, the mass treatment of a social group, and the burden of being supervised. One does not need an intimate knowledge of music to find such examples, for websites like *AZLyrics*<sup>1</sup> can be used to search song lyrics for terms such as 'probation'.

As Freire (1970/2017: 27) reminds us, 'no reality transforms itself'; hence, action is a prerequisite for change. In the context of a pedagogy of public criminology, assessment can be viewed as a form of praxis (Hamilton, 2013; Serrano et al., 2018). In her study of a module entitled 'Crime and Criminal Justice' – which is delivered to second- and third-year students on a social sciences degree at the University of Tasmania as their first exposure to criminology – Howes (2017) asked students to reflect on when and how their assumptions on crime had been challenged throughout the module in an end-of-year exam. She found that most students, many of whom had begun the module with opinions on crime that resonated with the right-realist, 'tough on crime' views articulated above, developed a recognition of the relevance of theoretical explanations for crime causation. Assessments, therefore, can be an important component of a critical, humanising, and transformative pedagogy (Serrano et al., 2018).

In addition to a traditional academic essay, 40% of RO was assessed via a mock pre-sentence report (PSR). Students were provided with a lengthy narrative of an offence committed by an individual with multiple and complex needs, adapted from my research. This was complemented by a guest lecture by a Youth Justice Social Worker who reflected on (anonymised) cases of individuals on his caseload

and how he formulated PSRs. Indeed, the use of guest speakers has been shown to 'bring criminology to life' (Nixon, 2020: 474), for students enjoy learning about the criminal justice system through such everyday narratives (Payne et al., 2003). Students were tasked with summarising the individual's case, assessing his risks and needs, and proposing a sentence (conditional discharge, community order, suspended sentence order, or prison) and relevant requirements. The purpose of the assessment was to get students to reflect on his life-story and (hopefully) suggest *par-simonious, proportionate, and productive* (McNeill, 2019) actions which negated how oppressions can be entrenched through numerous requirements. Thus, while the mock PSR was not explicitly critical in its design, it resonates with what Serrano et al. (2018: 17) call an "'intuitive" Critical Pedagogy' in that it sought to promote reflexive engagement with the (humanising) penal ethics that guided the module.

If promoting self-reflection among students is an introspective way to challenge their views on crime, then the 'popularisation of research evidence' (Hamilton, 2013: 24) can be utilised to actively question common-sense assumptions. Appeals to an evidence-base are standard across social policy; however, it is paramount as a counter to the penal populism that has driven the expansion of criminal justice systems in the West (Currie, 2007). In the public criminology literature, 'newsmaking criminology' – in which criminologists utilise mass communication to inform, interpret, and alter representations of crime and justice – has been presented as a way to debunk myths and misinformation about criminality (Groombridge, 2007). Among the approaches to newsmaking criminology identified by Piche (2015: 78–79) are the 'criminologist-as-expert' and the 'criminologist-as-journalist'. As argued above, the 'criminologist-as-expert' is seldom called upon to respond to crime, largely because their role is to disagree with 'common-sense' interpretations. A counter to this approach is the 'criminologist-as-journalist', who seeks to claim control of media representations and to bring criminological knowledge to the fore without the peremptory tone of an 'elite interpreter' (Crepault, 2017). Piche's (2015) 'criminologist-as-journalist' can be thus incorporated into the design of assessments – for example, through authorship of news articles and blogs. If a criticism of academic writing is that it cultivates insularity (Currie, 2007), then encouraging students to write for broader audiences could help to empower them with the critical thinking skills to explicitly challenge how CSM is reported while rendering the sub-field more 'public'.

Print, however, is no longer the exclusive medium through which knowledge is transmitted (Zaagsma, 2013). Talib (2018: 56) calls for a pedagogy 'that prepares students to understand, engage with, and adapt to social media'. As an arena in which much contemporary debate on crime takes place, social media offers an avenue through which to actualise the 'criminologist-as-journalist' – for example, by asking students to communicate research or concepts in the 280 characters available to a Twitter user or 60 s explainer TikToks. Further, Channel 4 recently announced plans for a television channel dedicated entirely to the phenomenon of 'True Crime' (Bakare, 2021), a 'genre foundational to popular or "everyday" explanations of crime in the... public imagination' (Dearey et al., 2011: 90–91).

True Crime, it can be argued, sensationalises crime, but has also driven the demand for criminology (Crepault, 2017). Such popular representations should not be eschewed; rather, they can be harnessed into something transformative. The rise of podcasting has opened new routes for bringing 'academic expertise to a large audience' (Horrocks, 2020: 174). Given the way that crime, and particularly probation, is reported in the media, asking students to discuss and critique it as a form of assessment can promote collaboration through dialogue (Freire, 1970/2017). Evidence from social work (Hitchcock et al., 2021) and teaching (Forbes and Khoo, 2015) indicate that student-generated podcasts as a form of assessment can enhance self-awareness and improve communication. Notably, Forbes and Khoo (2015: 341) found that 'educators and students valued learning from one another to connect, support, share and expand the teaching-learning opportunities in the class.' Dearey et al. (2011: 99) warn that criminology 'is in danger of further marginalisation if it does not engage more directly and openly with these other explanatory and popular texts.'

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to draw out some of the ways in which a pedagogy of public criminology (Hamilton, 2013) can be practically applied to teaching and learning practises for CSM, and probation in particular. Here, there is considerable overlap with Freire's (1970/2017) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: both seek to *empower*, to effect positive social change by foregrounding the 'ordinary' knowledge and experiences of marginalised groups. While most criminology students do not face the same oppressions as people under criminal justice supervision, it can be argued that their fates are linked, for many of former will progress into jobs (prison, probation, police, law, etc.) that have a direct bearing on the latter. Given the collapse of academic criminological influence over political and media spheres in recent decades, students are an obvious collaborator with whom to transform structures of oppression.

That probation lacks the cultural signifiers of other criminal justice occupations, even relative to other forms of CSM like electronic monitoring, suggests it operates within the lower reaches of an already marginalised sub-field. Attempts to bring probation into the public sphere are not without risk, although confining it to 'experts' has hardly constrained its use (McNeill, 2019). Accordingly, the article has suggested several ways in which academics with responsibility for teaching CSM can render the sub-field a more dialogic and public-facing enterprise, for which enhancing transparency by sharing our practises is an important first step (Hamilton, 2013). As people who also 'know things' (Freire, 1970/2017), the narratives – (non-)fiction, song-writing, photography, etc. (McNeill, 2019) – of those who work in, or are subject to, criminal justice can enhance understandings of the system and what they tell us about penal ethics. The desistance literature, and its emphasis on the intersection of personal and material transformation, is replete with such insights into the life-worlds of those who work in, or are subject to, the criminal justice system, and the factors that influence their decision-making. Assessments and seminar activities can



also foreground stories, utilising 'new' and 'old' mediums to instil within students, as future professionals, the skills required to communicate probation's *moral legitimacy* (Canton, 2019). Through encouraging self-reflection and (evidence-informed) action (Freire, 1970/2017), public criminology provides a productive paradigm within which to develop a pedagogy of CSM.

A recent job change means that I am no longer teaching on RO. While personal opportunities to apply the Freireian *praxis* championed in this article are (for the moment, at least) more limited, my hope for this article is that it stimulates debate on how a pedagogy of CSM can be made more public and, hopefully, transformative. A pedagogy of public criminology that seeks to *empower* students to change the lived realities of the oppressed can, therefore, contribute to reinvigorating CSM as a marginalised sub-field.


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1. [www.azlyrics.com](http://www.azlyrics.com)

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