



## The BSC Blog

all about current issues on crime, criminology and criminal justice

# In Defence of Decolonisation: a response to Southern Criminology



Mohwak scholar [Taiiaki Alfred](#) has remarked that in settler colonies, reconciliation is another form of re-colonisation. The “reconciliation of Indigenous people to colonialism”, in [Alfred](#)’s words, do not challenge structures of power that deny First Nations people substantive rights. We draw on Alfred’s observations to highlight the agenda of Southern Criminology. This increasingly influential school while seeking to engage epistemologies of the South reinscribes colonial relations of power, including colonial hierarchies of knowledge. It does so by uncritically bringing together the North and the South through a working partnership in criminology.

The standpoint of Southern Criminology was recently updated by lead-author Professor Kerry Carrington in the British Society of Criminology [blog](#). A key purpose of the blog is to take to task ‘decolonial theory’ in Criminology by accusing it of essentialising Indigenous knowledges, making unfair criticisms of Western Criminology and presenting ‘crude simplistic critiques of southern criminologies’. Our blog represents a defence of decolonising frameworks. We point out numerous false claims and inconsistencies in Carrington’s blog. Among these are that decolonial theory is ‘negative’. We contend that challenging colonial legacies in criminology is crucial for building more inclusive ideas and praxes.

### **Colonisation is not a metaphor**

Carrington opens her [blog](#) by questioning the division of the world between North and South, centre and periphery and/or First and Third World. She claims these demarcations universalise theories of the North to cast the South as backwards. To buck this trend, Southern Criminology advocates for the equal acceptance of the North and the South, in which criminologists accept that the South is not lesser than the North. A move that, according to Carrington, would contribute to cognitive and global justice.

In conceptualising the South, [Carrington](#) describes it ‘as a *metaphor*’ for inequality. The blog does not contend with real power relations where inequality is not a metaphor. We assert this in a similar way to Tuck and Yang’s contention that ‘[decolonization is not a metaphor](#)’. Inequality is countenanced in everyday colonial institutions that dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land, destroy sacred sites, steal Indigenous children, kill Indigenous people in custody, condone racist policing, deny Indigenous people basic rights and silence Indigenous critiques and systems of knowledge. Unequal power relations have assured that First Nations

people are [hyperincarcerated](#) across settler colonial societies and that Australia's Indigenous people are the [most incarcerated](#) people on the planet.

Carrington's choice of words, such as North and South, understates past and present structures of oppression. A telling omission in her language (and analysis) is the lack of reference to geo-political divisions of "colonisers and the colonised". By failing to confront ongoing colonising relationships, the type of 'Southern Criminology' Carrington champions cannot challenge this divide. This is highlighted in its main mission to 'democratize' knowledge by promoting a partnership between the North and South through simply expanding 'the repertoire of criminological knowledges'. The [blog](#) rejects the proposition that the 'epistemologies of the south and north, east and west, Indigenous and non-Indigenous' are 'dichotomous' or 'mutually exclusive spaces or categories', hence neglecting the colonising dynamics embedded in the construction of the divisions.

A decolonising lens reveals *why* these differences exist. Blagg and Anthony contend in [Decolonising Criminology](#) that the existence of the colonial world and its epistemologies, including its criminological mindset, relies on the colonisation and assimilation of Indigenous people and knowledges. Inferiorising Indigenous peoples and knowledges justifies colonisers' self-proclaimed superior ideas and intrusive practises. Colonisers regarded Indigenous people as trespassers on their own land to enable settler violence and land take over. Constructs of Indigenous people as [outlaws](#) justified [frontier massacres](#) and [segregation](#).

Universities are a symptom of colonial forces and their constructs of Indigenous people permeate the academy and research. Criminology in colonised states is preoccupied with identifying, quantifying, explaining, and fixing Indigenous "criminality". [The blog](#) claims that bridges can be built between these approaches of the North and approaches in the South. However, a decolonial lens identifies that the North's deficit discourse relating to Indigenous people stands at odds with the discourse of sovereignty of Indigenous people and the colonial harms of penal institutions. How can the colonising impetus of the North sit alongside theories of critical resistance and Indigenous self-determination? Conceivably, they cannot. If there are to be attempts at a reconciliation, the terms should be governed by principles of Indigenous self-determination to recognise the legacy of epistemological oppression.

Decolonisation seeks to disrupt the structures and theories of colonisation that are intent on eliminating Indigenous people. [Juan Tauri's](#) decolonising research calls into question Criminology's 'veil of scientism' that perpetuates 'myth construction' of Indigenous people's inferiority and the colonial state's superiority. Decolonial research has a different agenda (in

relation to furthering Indigenous sovereignty and resistance), asks different questions (about the colonial harms of the state and [ruling class](#)) and applies decolonising methodologies (that radically critique colonial institutions, elevate the voices and knowledges of Indigenous people and accept different forms of knowledge sharing – song, poetry, art, film, ceremony etc). It supports a [post-disciplinary approach](#) in which university disciplines are not the central repository of knowledge production. It also challenges the focus of much of Criminology on policing, surveillance and prisons, and instead recognises that colonial harms against Indigenous people operate in a broader [carceral network](#) for which penalty is only one site.

### **Southern Criminology's false representation of decolonial approaches**

Repeatedly through her blog, [Carrington](#) accuses 'post-colonial/decolonial theories' of reductionism and essentialism. [Carrington](#) states, 'One of the problems with theories of decolonisation, has been the tendency to essentialise race and romanticise ethnicity'. Carrington cites [Cain](#) (2000) to suggest that decolonial critiques of Western Criminology engage with a 'romanticization of "the other"'. Cain's article, however, is *not* an analysis of decolonial thinkers. Rather, it takes aim at the 'western criminology of orientalism' because it 'romanticizes the other' (Cain 2000, 239); the reverse of what Carrington claims in her blog. The issue of misrepresentation of other's work arises with Carrington's use of de Sousa Santos' work. Carrington also relies on [de Sousa Santos](#) (2014: 212) to argue that post-colonial/decolonial theories 'reify and essentialise concepts, such as Eastern or Indigenous knowledge' (Carrington's words, not de Sousa Santos'). However, de Sousa Santos does not state this about post-colonial/decolonial theories. Instead, he identifies this trend in the Global North. In the cited reference, he critiques

both the reified dichotomies among alternative knowledges (e.g., indigenous knowledge versus scientific knowledge) and the unequal abstract status of different knowledges (e.g., indigenous knowledge as a valid claim of identity versus scientific knowledge as a valid claim of truth).

Following on from de Sousa Santos, decolonial approaches recognise that Indigenous knowledge – in its multiplicity of forms – is scientific knowledge. It provides a method for understanding the world and for continuing survival. Decolonial approaches can also use the tools of statistics to challenge colonial institutions. The [research](#) of Palawa woman and Professor Maggie Walter's is a testament to this approach. In these ways, decolonial approaches reject that Indigenous knowledge is homogenous, "romantic" or reified – these

are all ideas that stem from the Global North. Rather, it recognises the need to reclaim Indigenous knowledges from the melting pot of colonial knowledge and from misappropriation. As Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008, 62) attests in [Decolonizing Methodologies](#),

[C]olonialism not only meant the imposition of Western authority over indigenous lands, indigenous modes of production and indigenous law and government, but the imposition of Western authority over all aspects of indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures.

We can draw from Carrington's use of other scholars' work that misrepresentation can contribute to false claims. There is a high importance for criminologists to accurately present other scholars' work in order to further knowledge.

### **Spurious claims of Southern Criminology**

To defend Southern Criminology against decolonial approaches, [Carrington](#) claims that Blagg and Anthony's book *Decolonising Criminology* reference 'very few Indigenous scholars'. A careful examination of the text demonstrates that the contention is false. There are over 200 publications authored by Indigenous scholars, organisations and people on the ground that are quoted and cited. There would be few Criminology texts that could make this claim. To name a few Indigenous authors across the settler-colonial lands of Australia, Canada, New Zealand: Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Alfred Taiaike, Jackie Huggins, Eve Tuck, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Peta MacGillivray, Pat Dudgeon, Amanda Porter, Jeff Corntassel, Alison Whittaker, Nicole Watson, Juanita Sherwood, Vanessa Davis, Peter Yu, Gallarrwuy Yunupingu, Willie Ermine, Martin Nakata, Sákéj Youngblood Henderson, Renee Linklater, Eddie Cubillo, Moana Jackson, and Ambelin Kwaymullina. By contrast, Carrington makes scant references to Indigenous researchers in her blog and article she and her co-authors' published in the *British Journal of Criminology*, including from the country she occupies, Australia.

Not only does *Decolonising Criminology* reference Indigenous scholars in significant numbers, but more importantly, their ideas are centred – not because the authors reify them, but because they provide new understandings, *Indigenous understandings derived from Indigenous lived experience*. These have been silenced for over 500 years and, to use the [blog's](#) own words, giving voice represents 'cognitive justice'. The book is a challenge to criminological research that largely neglects the impacts of penalty on Indigenous people and practises of Indigenous resistance and sovereignty. Key ideas in the book include Gaykamangu's and Gaymarani's



analysis of the relationship between Indigenous and Western laws; Marie Battiste and Sákéj Youngblood Henderson's notion of Indigenous Knowledge; Larissa Behrendt's examination of the colonisation of Indigenous women; Audre Simpson's concept of Indigenous refusal; Irene Watson's critique of international law in the context of Indigenous sovereignty; Yin Paradies' analysis of institutional racism and Juan Tauri's critical examination of restorative justice. *Decolonising Criminology* includes a foreword by Wiradjuri woman and Pro Vice Chancellor First Nations Engagement, Professor Juanita Sherwood who states (2019, ix), 'This book challenges the colonial epistemology of one truth and explores the expertise of First Peoples of Australia and their ways of knowing, being and doing regarding their experiences, circumstances and unfair treatment.'

### **Southern Criminology's inconsistencies**

There are a number of inconsistencies within the Southern Criminology schema and claims as set out by Carrington in the [blog](#).

First, despite arguing that decolonial approaches essentialise Indigenous knowledge, [Carrington](#) claims that she herself has adopted a decolonial approach. Indeed, the title of her blog reads, 'Decolonizing Criminology through the inclusion of epistemologies of the south'. She writes in the blog, 'the southernizing of criminology pursues practical decolonizing projects'. The attempt to criticise decolonial approaches, on the one hand, and claim them, on the other hand, is inconsistent. It signals Southern Criminology's gesture of claiming the decolonial space on its own terms while actively marginalising its decolonial and Indigenous detractors.

Second, Carrington criticises scholars who perceive the decolonial limitations of Southern Criminology, on the basis that they publish in 'privileged journals in United States and England'. She does not appreciate the irony that her seminal piece on Southern Criminology was published in the *British Journal of Criminology*. In her blog, Carrington prides Southern Criminology on a conference co-hosted with the University of Oxford. With no disrespect to these forums, it is disingenuous to criticise decolonial thinkers who may engage in these forums. It also neglects the journals that are founded or edited by decolonial scholars such as the open-access journals, [Decolonization of Criminology and Justice](#) and [Journal of Global Indigeneity](#). In response to Carrington's claims on this issue, it can be argued that the best place for decolonial and Indigenous scholars to ensure their critique reaches Southern Criminologists is to publish in the journals that they clearly prefer because they do not cite or submit to decolonial or Indigenous journals.

Third, despite Carrington imploring intercultural exchange, she refutes a resurrection of 'alternative origin stories or "founding fathers", as some decolonial theorists have done'. Without identifying who these decolonial theorists are or the nature of these origin stories – in other words, without offering evidence to support her claims – these claims amount to an unevenced rejection of alternative knowledges. Does she intend to demean stories about Country that are passed down by ancestors? Her denial of alternative stories is inconsistent with Southern Criminology's calls for a cross-pollination of knowledge and perpetuates the dismissal of Indigenous knowledges.

Fourth, [the blog](#) suggests that the tendency of 'theories of decolonisation ... to essentialise race and romanticise ethnicity' makes invisible the 'gender of coloniality'. Carrington claims that 'southern feminisms' aim to 'decolonise and democratise feminist theory ... by embracing a mosaic of epistemologies'. However, Carrington's own work eschews the epistemologies of Indigenous women. As discussed in the following section, deep seated concerns by [Indigenous women scholars](#), including Amanda Porter, Crystal McKinnon and Marlene Longbottom, with Carrington's methods and findings in her numerous publications on women's police stations have remained unaddressed in her work.

### **Southern Criminology in practise**

Carrington's recent research on women's police stations signify the importation of assumptions of the Global North. Far from questioning the role of the police in women's lives, especially its brutalising impacts on Indigenous women, Carrington seeks to layer gender into police operations. Injecting gender into policing operationalises Carrington's [objectives](#) for Southern Criminology 'to decenter, democratize and pluralize knowledge by injecting it with knowledge from the south and the periphery'.

[Carrington](#) et al assert that the Argentinian model of women's police stations 'would be good for Aboriginal women'. She states (2020),

Australia does indeed have much to learn about how women's police stations respond to and aim to prevent gender violence. If appropriately staffed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous teams trained to work from both gender and culturally sensitive perspectives, police stations designed to specifically respond to gender violence, have the potential to significantly enhance the policing and prevention of gender violence across Australia.

Carrington assumes that place-based practices from one side of the globe can be exported to another side of the globe. This is reminiscent of Western Criminology which applies, for example the family violence model from Duluth, Minnesota (which centres police and courts) to Indigenous people in remote Australia. Conversely, because the women's police station model is from Argentina, ostensibly part of the 'good South', does *not* make it any more appropriate for Indigenous women. Carrington's universalising methodology – where all practises from the South can be transferred – is tantamount to essentialising the South. This replicates one of the key critiques of the domination of 'the North', which is at the forefront of Southern Criminology, namely its long hegemony over the development and global transfer of theories, policies and interventions.

What this body of research reveals is that Southern Criminology reinstates the penal institutions that threaten Indigenous communities. This is because Southern Criminology 'is blind to coloniality and, therefore, has yet to break away from criminology's modern epistemological and ontological underpinnings', as [Eleni Dimou](#) describes. It ignores [calls](#) by Indigenous scholars and campaigners to defund police. When Southern Criminology speaks of building bridges in Criminology, it amounts to incorporating elements of the South into the penal structures of the North. It has no regard for the fact that Australian Indigenous women who die in police custody often do so under the watch of women police officers. Women police officers served as the custody supervisors and lockup keepers when Indigenous women Tanya Day, Ms Dhu, and Rebecca Maher died in custody in Australia in recent years.

### **Confronting oppressive criminal institutions as a pathway to unity**

In her blog, [Carrington](#) describes decolonising research – which identifies the colonial logic in penal enforcement – as 'negative decolonial projects'. She claims that they 'damn all criminologists as "racist", "westerncentric" "control freaks" on some sort of "bandwagon"', and once again she does so without providing any evidence to support her assertions. By contrast, Carrington venerates Southern Criminology's projects for 'bridging global divides' and not setting out to 'denigrate the contribution of metropolitan criminology'.

However, it is racism, its manifestation in Criminology and translation in carceral practices that are divisive and negative. By calling into question the deep-seated precepts of Criminology – namely, the criminality of the 'Other', the defence of penal institutions and the righteousness of universalising Western methods – we can imagine a different world. We can imagine a world that promotes collectivity, human rights, and Indigenous self-determination



rather than one that depends on exclusion, hierarchy, and racism. A decolonising agenda is based on unifying humanity by dissolving the structures that divide us.

### About the authors

Collectively and individually, our research identifies the colonial legacies in penal institutions, criminological thought and the broader carceral network. In our work and activism we seek to decolonise the carceral and criminological agendas so we can move beyond them.

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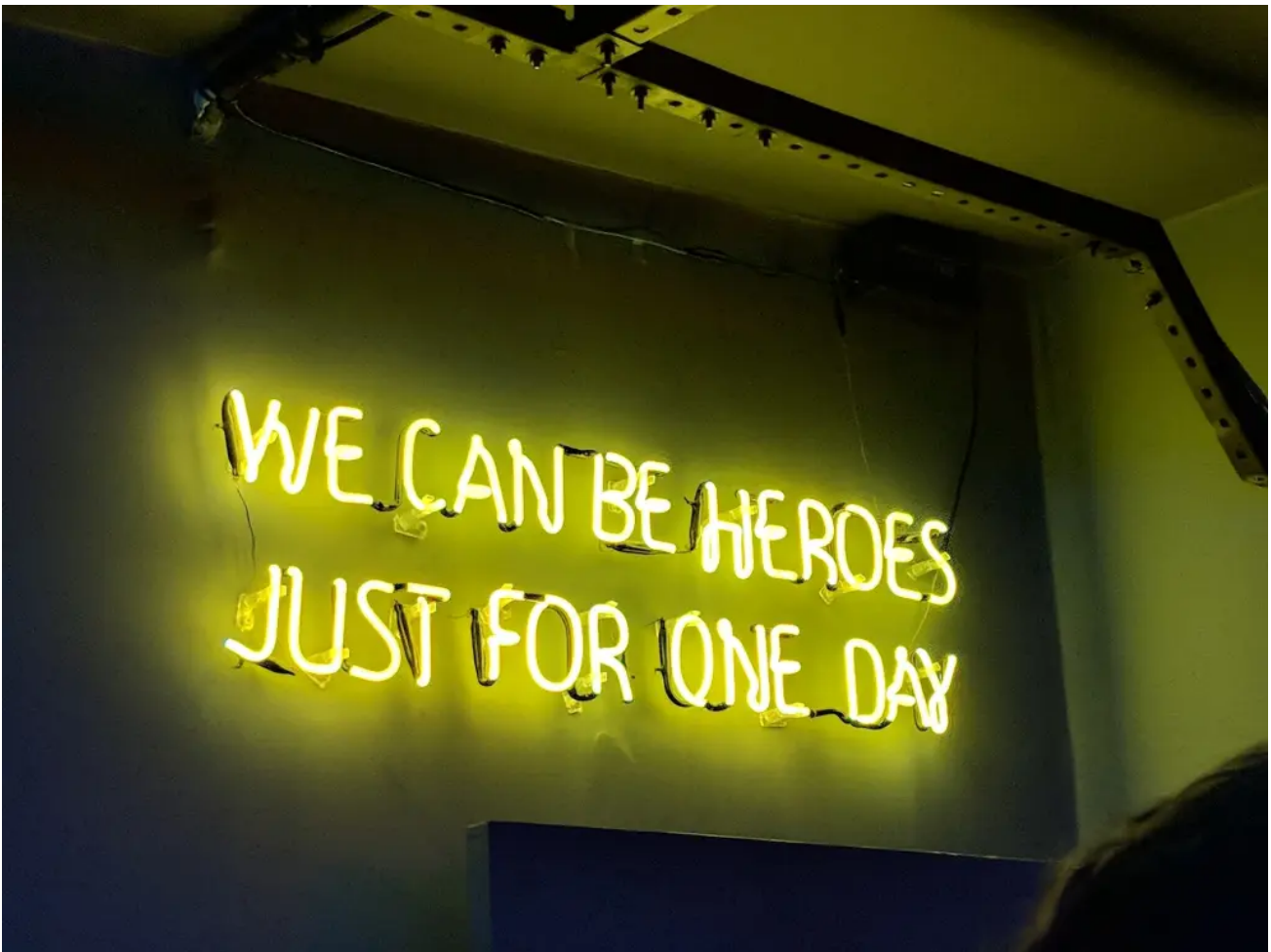
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# Criminal Justice Interventions Facilitators: Unsung Hidden Heroes or Forgotten Variables?

A critical perspective on unsung #HiddenHeroes and the neglected role of criminal justice Interventions Facilitators and their wellbeing.



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Last weekend I was inspired (or should I say felt compelled) to respond to a [#HiddenHeroesDay post](#) which was shared (and ironically I missed) on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2021. Hidden Heroes Day celebrates the work of prison and probation practitioners. Their work usually takes place away from public view. Hidden Heroes Day recognises their “tireless” efforts which often go “unnoticed”, and it is an opportunity to remind these “unsung Hidden Heroes” they are not “forgotten” and to “truly appreciate them for all they’ve done, and continue to do”.

The “unsung” hero described in this post was a prison Interventions Facilitator. Interventions Facilitators deliver Offending Behaviour Programmes in prisons, or in the community to people on probation. This role often involves, for example, working with people on approved

programmes to address their sexual offending, general offending, or domestic abuse. The Hidden Heroes post wanted to put a “spotlight” on an enthusiastic prison Interventions Facilitator, by asking her some questions about their role.

The Interventions Facilitator had been motivated to do this role to help others change their lives and said that seeing people make positive changes was the best thing about being a facilitator. Such experiences had also changed her as a person, making her more “assertive, resilient and patient”. The proudest moment in her role had been supporting a vulnerable prisoner believe he had reasons to live. She concluded with advice to prospective facilitators that, while the work is challenging, a true passion for helping others makes the work “rewarding and worthwhile”. This Interventions Facilitators’ reflections will no doubt resonate with some criminal justice practitioners and provide inspiration to those thinking about entering the field.

This is just one of the many Interventions Facilitators who would be described as an ‘unsung Hidden Hero’. In fact, [my research with Interventions Facilitators](#) working with men convicted of domestic abuse offences revealed that they are not just hidden AND forgotten, but are systematically neglected and excluded in theory, policy and practice. Shockingly, a literature search threw up just [one single article](#) that explored the experiences, perspectives and impact on Interventions Facilitators when working with domestic abuse perpetrators. Depressingly, though this research could and should have been ground-breaking, it was written over a decade ago and has received as much attention in 13 years as have facilitators.

Like the prisons Interventions Facilitator, my own interviews with probation-based facilitators revealed that they were motivated to do this work because they too wanted to help others and believed that people can and do change. But when given the permission to speak freely and provide detailed facilitation stories, these laudable vocational endeavours did not necessarily play out in practice. The facilitators often felt unable to deliver interventions in ways that were commensurate with their own values. Some observed that the men they worked with experienced many emotional vulnerabilities and structural disadvantages that the programme could not (nor did it purport to) address. Despite knowing that many more resources would be needed to support these men to change, their calls for more training, time, and knowledge to help them do so went answered and unnoticed.

The lack of practical and emotional support had significantly impacted on the facilitators’ wellbeing. Like the prisons Interventions Facilitator, the job had also “changed” them. But instead of feeling more “assertive”, some facilitators felt there was little point in continuing to

raise important practice issues because they were either minimised or ignored. Concerningly, some facilitators even lacked the confidence to speak out about issues affecting their own wellbeing for fear of being seen as weak or emotional. Instead of feeling “resilient”, facilitators said they felt “exhausted” and “stressed”, comments that were qualified during the research where I observed two facilitators crying as they arrived on shift. While resilience can be a significant human capacity for learning to cope with many of life’s difficult situations, it can also be used as an invisible tool to silence and responsabilize employees instead of investing in policies which foreground wellbeing in practice. Instead of feeling “patient”, some experienced facilitators had become more cynical about whether the people they worked with could change, no doubt a defensive reaction in the absence of the resources they needed to be able to work in responsive ways.

While helping others can be “rewarding and worthwhile”, these intangible rewards cannot be used as currency for everyday essentials. The facilitators I spoke to felt undervalued and underpaid. There were no structures in place for career development and no pecuniary incentive to stay. “But this work is vocational” we often hear politicians say, who have hijacked the word to justify low pay, pitiful pay increases, and deteriorating working conditions while clapping on their doorsteps for our “unsung” public service heroes.

“These experiences are just subjective or localised issues” I hear you say. While they cannot be generalised, one only has to read [Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation’s report](#) on domestic abuse work in Community Rehabilitation Companies. This found that the confidence and support experienced amongst Interventions Facilitators was varied. The experiences and perspectives of Interventions Facilitators in my research have certainly resonated with many other criminal justice facilitators who have contacted me to say reading these accounts had made them feel validated. One stated that she had found the research “emotional to read” as she had “consistently felt much of the negative aspects” the facilitators had described. Another contacted me to say that “decent pay and a proper career structure” was lacking and that while Hidden Heroes were being acknowledged, “you can’t eat a hero award”.

So, while it is important to put the “tireless efforts” of facilitators in the “spotlight”, we should shine a whole road of streetlamps on the institutions, organisations and cultures within which they work. Facilitators are often hidden behind programme manuals, forgotten variables in evaluation, unsung because to invest in them and the resources they need would be too costly, and neglected because (I am guessing) many of them, given the chance without fear of repercussions, might just sing in a way that even the canary would be envious of.

Voices like the prisons Interventions Facilitator are valid and need to be heard, certainly if we want to encourage a generation of committed and enthusiastic practitioners into prison and probation practice. This is surely pressing in the wake of the long-awaited Domestic Abuse Act 2021 which commits to addressing the behaviour of domestic abuse perpetrators in increasingly higher numbers and the backlog of referrals resulting from the covid-19 pandemic. But we must now be prepared to ask and hear from more critical voices about the difficulties facilitators also experience. These voices must no longer be hidden but used to good advantage to ensure interventions and those delivering (and participating in) them receive the very best of care and support.

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*This article gives the views of the author, not the position of the institution she works for.*

October 28, 2021 / Domestic Abuse, Hidden Heroes, Interventions Facilitators, Wellbeing

# Stop Blaming Drill for Making People Kill

UK Drill music finds itself accused again of inspiring violent crime in Britain's major cities. A closer look at the most recent source behind such claims, however, tells a different story



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Nearly three years have passed since [UK drill music was discovered](#) as the malignant source of Britain's "knife crime epidemic". Portrayed as "the knife crime rap" – if a *Sunday Times Magazine* cover (May, 5 2019) is anything to go by – drill became [policed as such](#), following a [long history of racial\(ised\) criminalisation of Black music genres](#). Despite the absence of tangible evidence that could link drill music to criminal wrongdoing (see, e.g. [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) and ignoring the protestations of [law reform and human rights organisations](#), [leading](#)



[legal professionals](#), [the expert witnesses they instruct](#), [social scientists](#) and 65 signatories of an [open letter](#)— drill is still summoned to stand trial for glorifying violence, glamourising outlaw lifestyles and causing “crime”.

The latest instalment of such unfounded, ill-thought, irresponsible and discriminatory panic-mongering came earlier this week, in the form of a [report by Policy Exchange](#), which recycles moralising platitudes about [“gangsterism”](#), [“\(black\) criminality”](#), [stop and search](#) and [“knife crime”](#) to show ‘[h]ow gangs are drawing another generation into a life of violent crime’. Lacking in rigour, (re)citing shaky evidence, using contested terminology carelessly and making wild assumptions, this report is not only deeply flawed. It also peddles injurious falsehoods and fails to uphold high standards of evidence. Posing as a research report, it actually amounts to what a colleague described as: presupposition, police statistics and Google. A timely response is therefore needed and this blog article aims at providing it, focusing on the unsound arguments made about drill music— that liken it to a criminal outfit (which it is *not*), instead of treating it as an art form (which it actually is).

## **Gangs, Drill Music and Social Media**

In a section entitled *The Legitimation of Gang Culture*, this Policy Exchange report uncritically echoes the familiar refrain about how gangs use drill music and social media to celebrate violent crime. This can be true and [legal guidance from the CPS](#) and the Government’s [Serious Violence Strategy](#) maintain that it is. Alas, the reality is neither as simple as that, nor does it become “reality” because law enforcement institutions tell us so. Before jumping into facile conclusions about how gangs, drill and social media all conspire to plunge society into violence, what “gangs” are officially defined as— tells us a lot about whether they really are as dangerous as they sound. Section 34(5) of the [Policing and Crime Act 2009](#) defines gangs as a group which: (a) ‘consists of at least 3 people’, (b) ‘uses a name, emblem or colour or has any other characteristic that enables its members to be identified by others as a group’, and (c) ‘is associated with a particular area’. Such a definition is too vague to be helpful, other than as a prosecutorial tool for targeting those whose activities are stereotypically associated with “criminality”. In the context of drill music, this means that anyone who raps on camera with at least 3 other people, wearing T-shirts with the drill collective’s name or logo in their neighbourhood, can be identified as a gang member and prosecuted as such. Inferring gang association through appearances in drill videos that circulate on social media is hardly “evidence” and complicated further by the fact that the pose, imagery and performance of “gang lifestyles” have been a staple in various rap subgenres (drill included) since the emergence of gangsta rap in the 1990s.

## Doing Violence to Drill

Ignoring the dangers of relying on criminal justice definitions for understanding “crime” is not the only error in this report. Neither is the absence of any criminological approach to “[crime](#)”, “[knife crime](#)”, “[gangs](#)” or “[violence](#)”. The report’s author also assumes that one can write confidently about music genres and forms of cultural expression that they are ignorant of, or that such knowledge is not even necessary—when making claims about how dangerous and violent drill music is. Context and nuance become irrelevant, as do the artistic conventions of the music. All that is needed is a court verdict without looking at: how the prosecution’s case was made, what evidence it was based on, whether such evidence is relevant, admissible and has sufficient weight to withstand scrutiny, whether such evidence has significant prejudicial impact but little probative/evidential value, what expert witnesses were relied on, what are they experts *of/in*, what their credentials/qualifications are, or whether the success of such evidence depends on making an emotive case to the jury by portraying defendants in a negative light, or whether [the law itself](#), expert witnesses for the defence and relevant [academic research on “rap on trial”](#) challenge simplistic connections between drill music and violence.

Worse still, the fact that much of what drill music *is* and *does* is fictional and performative rather than literal or factual, is grudgingly admitted (albeit sketchily) but not accounted for when interpreting how drill rappers [consciously pander to the voyeuristic demand for “digital slumming”/“gangbanging” by staging and embodying, exaggerated, hyperbolic and often fabricated violent personas in search of the material rewards that online infamy promises; even at the expense of commodifying their own stigmatisation](#). Nor is there any serious reflection on what social conditions make such activity a potential source of income, in a social context that denies people secure employment, decent housing, access to healthcare, equal educational opportunities and fair treatment by the criminal justice system. For the report’s author, it is enough to accuse drill rappers for creating violent *content* without interrogating the violent *context* in which such music is made and blaming that perhaps. Besides, [there is no such thing as society](#) is there? People are mere individuals who make their own independent choices in ‘[self-selected circumstances](#)’ they fully control. Everything else is a distraction or leftist propaganda.

## Evidence of Things Not Known

A more charitable reaction to this report might excuse the author for not being an expert in rap culture or Criminology, allowing some margin of error in that regard. Besides, didn’t the

report mention the work of Keir Irwin-Rogers, Craig Pinkney and Simon Harding? Aren't they Criminologists who also write about such issues? Isn't it enough to just mention three academics, but otherwise ignore a large body of research that buttresses the report's arguments on [stop and search](#), [gangs and youth violence](#), and [knife crime](#)? Isn't it enough to base an entire report primarily on news media sources, a few government publications and vague allusions to 'analysis by Policy Exchange' to advance unreliable, scarcely evidenced claims that are often correlation-causation fallacies of the kind that first-year undergraduate research methods courses caution against? Does it matter that there is no information whatsoever about how 'key statistics' were produced to inform us that 'at least 37% of cases were directly linked to drill music in 2018 and 23% in 2019'? Do we really need to know how such data was collected, how such research was conducted, what methodology was used, what the exact findings were, or whether such research was peer-reviewed? Does it matter that 37% on page 13 becomes 36.5% on page 23? Does it matter that these figures are probably based on cases that relied on rap material as "evidence" during a period (2018-9) when the validity of such "evidence" wasn't contested by rap experts— like the members of the [Prosecuting Rap Expert Network](#) (of which I am part)? Is it significant that drill music is "believed" to incite violence in some pages (53, 58), but is otherwise indiscriminately blamed for violent crime? I can go on, but won't. It would suffice to say that if there is any evidence of anything in this report, it points to the very opposite of the 'painstaking research' that we are promised in an endorsement, penned by none other than [Trevor Phillips](#) himself.

## The Politics They Hide

None of the above should occasion surprise, knowing as we do that this is a Policy Exchange report after all. That is to say, a report produced by a think tank whose members include: David Goodhart, who [staunchly defends 'hostile environment' immigration policies, and 'white self-interest'](#) and is the charity's Head of Demography, Immigration & Integration (!), Eric Kaufmann who also advocates for [white racial self-interest politics, but does not consider that racist](#) (in a Policy Exchange report, obviously!) and other conservative bigwigs like [Charles Moore](#) and [Tony Sewell](#). But make no mistake about it, Policy Exchange is an 'independent, non-partisan educational charity'. It's just a coincidence that its reports drip with the kind of right-wingery which considers '[t]he real injustice [to be] the disproportionate way young black men are victims of crime, not policing tactics' (p.7) – can't it be both? – and complains about the fate of a 'far-right activist' who 'was jailed for branding immigrants and refugees as rapists at a series of marches that were linked to an attack on two Asian men', compared to those pesky drill rappers who 'do not receive similar scrutiny and treatment' (p.54)—despite the discriminatory suppression of their music by the state and its

criminal justice institutions. If this scathing blog has made you think that this is all that is problematic with this Policy Exchange report, I promise that I have merely scratched the surface. Read it in full to find out more about how sneakers (Adidas), music (drill) and social media (take your pick) are to blame for violent crime, but a socio-political and cultural context and policies that exclude, marginalise, criminalise and confine aren't.

## Contact

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*This article gives the views of the author, not the position of the institution he works for.*

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