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Reflections on the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control
David Scott
European Group Newsletter
2016

All academic writing is collaborative. It is collaborative in the sense that when we write academic discourse we inevitably engage with the ideas of others who have previously written on our topic areas; that when we publish our work it has often - and largely invisibly - benefitted from formal and informal reviews, suggestions and helpful comments from colleagues and other peers; and often, what we write can be an indirect and serendipitous result of being part of an intellectual milieu where we are able to freely discuss issues and debates collectively and learn through a dialogue with like-minded people. Without such a collaborative ethos academic discourse would be much the poorer and advances in scholarship much harder to come by. Those forums that facilitate collaboration should be treasured and their crucial contribution acknowledged. The *European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control* [European Group] is one such intellectual milieu in which the ideas explored in critical criminologies in the last five decades have germinated and developed.

Reflections on the European Group

I attended my first European Group conference in Venice, Italy in September 2001. I had some indication of what to expect as Phil Scraton had been the supervisor of my MA thesis *Heavenly Confinement?* (Scott, 1996/2011) and I was at that time a PhD student of Barbara Hudson. The conference though excelled all expectations. In Venice I had the opportunity to talk, make friends and share laughter and music with some of the leading critical criminologists in Europe. I was impressed by the level of collegiality, solidarity and friendship and the generally supportive and non-hierarchical ethos that permeated nearly all my interactions with members. It mattered not whether you were, as I was, a

PhD student or world famous professor. It was what was said that was important, not the status of the speaker. One world famous professor, Louk Hulsman, attended my first international conference paper 'Sympathy for the Devil' (published almost word for word 11 years later in *Criminal Justice Matters*, June 2012] and his supportive and kind words were all a PhD student needed to be motivated for the next twelve months. Louk Hulsman was a man filled with enormous joy for life and to meet him and spend time in his company for those few days was a very positive experience, and one not to be forgotten.

The European Group is a forum and unique intellectual space fostering confidence and self-motivation for young scholars as well as providing opportunities for them to make connections with established critical researchers from around the globe. One of my strong recollections of the Venice conference was the considerable depth and intellectual dynamism to the conference papers and subsequent discussions. The European Group was a place of learning and its informal atmosphere could only escalate understandings. Aided perhaps also by the beautiful Venetian scenery, the organisation, scope and general sense of camaraderie were very impressive. I immediately noted the importance of the National Representatives (national reps) in steering the ethos of the conference; the important role performed by the then coordinator Karen Leander in ensuring all went smoothly; and strong commitment of members to democratic and participatory principles in the annual general meeting, where the conference theme for the following year was debated. The few days I spent in Venice in September 2001 felt hugely significant. My positive experiences of the European Group conferences continued in the following years, attending stimulating and engaging conferences in for example Helsinki in 2003 and Bristol in 2004. These later conferences confirmed my overall impression of the importance of the forum as a pedagogy for critical and emancipatory thought. So

much was I motivated I agreed to organise a British Irish Section conference of the European Group in Preston, Lancashire in April 2005. At this conference there were keynotes from Steve Tombs, Michael Lavalette, Rene van Swaaningen, Janet Alder, Phil Scraton and Barbara Hudson and more than 40 conference papers.

I began to realise that the more a person participated and involved themselves in group activities, the stronger the sense of belonging, responsibility and commitment to the values of the group became. Further conference attendance followed and directly after the annual conference in Utrecht in 2007, I agreed to convene the 2009 European Group Annual Conference in Preston, Lancashire. Following the suggestion of Stan Cohen, we held a colloquium in honour of Louk Hulsman on the first day of the conference, who had sadly passed away in January 2009. Keynote speakers at the conference included Stan Cohen, Scott Poynting, Vincenzo Ruggiero, Barbara Hudson and Jehanne Hulsman and there were more than 60 other papers delivered across the three days. When Stan Cohen spoke on the opening day of the conference you could have heard a pin drop in the densely packed Greenback Lecture Theatre, University of Central Lancashire - which I subsequently referred to as the '*Stan Cohen lecture Theatre*'.

The European Group has had ups and downs during its 44 year history, and one of its recent low points was the period from 2007-2009/10. Conference numbers were down over this period and many of the most committed people, including those who had been convenors of previous annual conferences, were no longer attending the group. There was much soul searching at this time and a number of initiatives were hatched in 2008/9 that, in only a few years, would see a great revival in the fortunes of the European Group. Towards the end of 2008 the European Group website was completely reorganised and

hosted by Manchester University and in November 2008 the now enormously successful European Group Facebook page was established. The later part of the decade also saw the influx of a number of new people into the group, including JM Moore, Joanna Gilmore, Stratos Georgoulas and Emma Bell, who were all to perform important roles over the next few years. There was to be one further great loss to the group, when only a few days after the 2009 Preston annual conference Karen Leander, who had been coordinator for 25 years, died unexpectedly. Her death sent shock waves through the group and left an enormous gap in terms of leadership and organisation. Karen had epitomised the spirit of the group and her strength of character and commitment was unquestioned. With her loss the group once again fell into crisis.

Joanna Gilmore and I did our best to fill the vacuum and support the organisation of the 2010 annual conference in Lesvos. At that conference we were confirmed in the roles of group secretary (Joanna) and coordinator. After officially taking the role of coordinator I spoke at length with Stan Cohen, who shared with me not only his extensive knowledge of the history of the group but also his original vision for it. For Stan Cohen the principles of participatory democracy, 'fraternity' / solidarity, friendship, mutual aid and a spirit of openness and cooperation should underscore the practices of the group in all ways. Reinvigorating the group would mean returning it to its roots and where possible giving power and influence back to ordinary members. It meant listening to the voices of those with experience regarding how the group worked – such as Phil Scraton, Tony Bunyan, Paddy Hillyard and Ann Singleton who had all performed important roles in sustaining the group over many years - and giving new members opportunities to be involved in the organisation of group and thus feel like they belonged. It meant 'leading from behind'. When asked to re-articulate the core values of the group for the 2011 annual conference

I drew upon this original vision of the group (Scott, 2012b, 2012c). Stan Cohen had felt that the group continued to be a vital part of the success of critical criminology. A strong European Group would provide members with support as well as a platform from which to sustain its strong presence in the academy and beyond. The Lesvos conference in 2010 was a great success and a clear indication that the group was moving in the right direction (see below). The 2011 conference was organised by Emma Bell, who was to become the new coordinator of the group the following year, whilst the 2012 conference in Cyprus was a much more collectively organised event. The collective nature of conference organisation has continued in the last few years with the new working group coordinators now taking responsibility for organising conference streams. The sharing of responsibilities has helped to prevent conveners becoming isolated as well as building a greater pool of people with conference organisation experience.

With Emma Bell and Monish Bhatia elected as the new coordinator and secretary in September 2012 the group went from strength to strength. Successful conferences, new working groups and further initiatives in social media were introduced under their tenure. Building on the 'European Group News' two weekly email bulletins, they also introduced the hugely successful monthly *European Group Newsletter*. Alongside this there was renewed interest in publishing European Group conference papers. From 1980 through to 1990 the European Group published ten volumes of its 'Working Papers in European Criminology' which brought together 163 conference papers delivered during this period (see Gilmore et al, 2013: 370-381). Although there was to be one further volume in 1996 bringing together a further 14 papers (Ibid: 382) there was a long period of time before European Group conference papers were to be published collectively again. Indeed it was not until Stratos Georgoulas edited a book bringing together a

number of the papers delivered in Lesvos 2010 that the tradition of bringing out an edited collection of working papers was revived and momentum built for once again a specific European Group outlet. Joanna Gilmore, JM Moore and I helped the momentum by editing a book in 2013 to celebrate the 40th Conference of the European Group (Gilmore et al, 2013). Alongside this, JM Moore and I in 2014 edited a further collection of papers on penal abolitionism that had originally been published in the first 10 'Working Papers in European Criminology' (Moore et al, 2014). This book was published by the European Group itself, the first time this had happened since 1990. The group was placed in safe hands once again when Ida Nafstad and Per Jorgen Yesthede became the new coordinator and secretary in September 2015 and a new era began when the foundation volume of the European Group Journal *Justice, Power and Resistance* was published by EG Press in September 2016.

Moving Forward

The European Group today is an international organisation uniting critical thinkers all over the world. People now regularly attend EG annual conferences from South America, North America and Australasia and through social media, the newsletter and journal the European Group are connecting with the daily lived experiences of activists, practitioners and academics across the globe. In terms of membership – whether measured through those people subscribing to the journal; members who are on the group mailing list; conference attendance; or members of social media such as Facebook and Twitter – the European Group has never been so successful. And perhaps, given the regressive changes taking place in the 'corporate university' in many countries and the horribly disfigured nature of inequalities under neoliberal capitalism, the European Group has never been so important.

The European Group works best when it adheres closely to its values of mutual support, collegiality and friendship. Such an informal atmosphere enhances the possibilities for deep engagement with the core issues under discussion and the promotion of critical scholarship and learning. It is important that at every level the group lives up to its principles and there are opportunities for personal as well as professional development. In this sense the European Group should and does stand out from other criminological forums. It is not in competition with the European Society or mainstream criminology. Rather the European Group offers a radical alternative based on non-hierarchical ethos and genuine democratic participation in decision making processes. This is not to say that the European Group does not face some very stern tests in its immediate future. The increasingly international nature of the group means there are new challenges in ensuring fairness and equity between those in the global north and global south. Irrespective of the level of commitment and scholarship, financial and time constraints impact differentially on members in different parts of the world (and indeed in different parts of Europe). Old problems around the superficiality of comparative criminologies have diminished somewhat but structured power relations shaping the dominance of one voice over another have not been eradicated. Consciousness of the subaltern voice is now deeper than ever before in the European Group, but problems continue ensuring the subaltern can speak. Being conscious of, and moving away from, Anglo dominance of the European Group will continue to be a major challenge. This is not to call for a weakening of the membership of the European Group in the UK, but that more should be done to help facilitate and grow membership and participation across countries in Europe and indeed across the globe.

The ethos of the European Group is that all members are equal, but in a world shaped by social fault lines around 'race', class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, age and language some members are more equal than others. A commitment to equity and attempting to mitigate (as well as the broader commitment to transform) existing inequities in power relations should also be central to the organisation of the group. As part of its emancipatory politics and praxis the European Group should be prepared to try and address some of the imbalances that confront members. This historically has meant promoting 'solidarity' prices for those who can afford it and reduced costs / bursaries for those who need them, such as activists without institutional affiliations. Where possible the group must look to express its inclusionary philosophy by helping those attend conferences who could not do so otherwise. Supporting PhD students with subsidised places; supporting members from countries with assisted places in times of economic and political troubles; recognising that for some the travel costs are much higher than other and therefore offering bursaries and travel assistance to help to bridge the gap between the global north and global south. With a political commitment to transformative justice should come organisational commitment of the group to do what it can, when it can – given of course its own budget restrictions - to facilitate conference attendance.

Another important way of building and consolidating membership is through the work of the National Representatives [national reps]. Their role is to build networks and the national reps are undoubtedly the life blood of the organisation. There are no easy ways of measuring the success of national reps – time served, numbers of members in a given country, influence in terms of shaping the direction of the group – these are all important indicators and each in turn is influenced by the historical development of critical criminology, current socio-economic context, political climate and recognition of the

value of critical scholarship in a given country. One further significant way of boosting membership is through the Working Groups. Since 2012 there has been the re-establishment of working groups on prisons, detention and punishment; social harm / zemiology; harms of the powerful; and the global north/ global south and more new working groups are being developed in the coming months and years. While the national reps build around geographical ties, working groups provide opportunities for members from different countries to connect through common research interests. Both networks are invaluable for future success. Both require a combination of knowledge and experience alongside opportunities for new people with lots of energy and enthusiasm to become involved. Openness and non-hierarchy should permeate all roles within the group and ensure as much as is feasible that there is a good balance between commitment, dynamism and familiarity with the group.

That those involved in organising annual conferences, events and publications keep costs to a minimum has historically been part of the ethos of the group. The real strength of European Group conferences is the engagement with other like-minded people involved in struggles for justice not the 'frills' associated with conference meals and accessories. The lower the costs the higher the uptake. When money is generated it is ploughed back into the group to help members attend. Budgets have always been tight because the European Group has never had a membership fee – historically membership was renewed by attending the conference each year and any profits from the conference would go to the European Group. In recent times only a small amount of income has been generated via conferences, and many conferences lose rather than generate money. With the establishment of the European Group Journal *Justice, Power and Resistance* it may be possible to generate some further funds for the group. Costs of the journal are low, but if

those members who can afford to do so pay the solidarity subscription, some funds may be available in the future to help keep conference costs down to a minimum. The new journal is published by EG Press, which gives its rationale on its website (EG Press, 2016):

EG Press is the publisher of the *European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control*. The main focus of our output will be on the dissemination of European Group related material. In particular we will publish:

- *Justice, Power and Resistance*, the Journal of the *European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control* (3 times a year).
- Conference working papers including both those presented at the main Annual conference and those delivered at the seminars and conferences of its working groups
- Translations (into English) of important critical criminological and abolitionist texts written originally in other languages
- Monographs and edited collections from European Group members

There is a direct relationship between EG Press and the European Group and all authors who publish with us maintain copyright ownership of their work. It will though be important for the viability of the publishing wing of the group that papers presented at European Group events – annual conferences, national conferences, working group conferences, symposiums and colloquiums – are published with the EG Press.

Further, it is important the members write *about* the current and historical importance of the European Group. No matter how influential the group has been in shaping critical criminologies in Europe and elsewhere, unless we write about its significance over time its place in facilitating and enhancing critical analysis will be lost. Contemporary critical criminological texts now tend to downplay the role of the European Group in the last 40 years. Whilst there are some notable exceptions (Swaaningen, 1997; Gilmore et al, 2013) often the group is ignored or relegated to a footnote. There has over the last few years been talk of the 'history project' which is to encourage memoirs of the group and

interviews with established members to find out their views of the development of the group since the 1970s. Only a few interviews have thus far been collated, and it is very important that over the next couple of years more reflections on the European Group are recorded. If undertaken they could become one of the key legacies of the group itself.

The European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control must learn from its past: it must ensure that in all its workings and organisation that it retains a commitment to dialogue, participatory democracy and non-hierarchical relations. It must also retain its commitment to emancipatory politics and praxis. Undoubtedly the group will have its ups and downs in the future. It will face new and unexpected troubles as well as encountering some now familiar difficulties and dilemmas. What it must not forget is that the best way forward will always be through adhering to its founding vision and its core political and ethical values. The European Group is always bigger than any one individual or even a small group of active people. The story of the group and its success are down to group members collectively wanting the group to survive and prosper. Let us hope, nay anticipate, that people will be still telling this story in many decades to come.

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