

Russian criminology: a silenced voice?

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Abstract

This chapter will explore the issues and dilemmas of marginalised voices in criminology through the lens of Russian criminology. It will start by exploring the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in the development of the discipline in Russia, looking at the reasons why it has remained relatively unknown in other parts of the world. It will consider the historical legacies as well as political and ideological factors contributing to the marginalised status of Russian criminology. The impact of western knowledge and the legacy of Soviet Marxist approaches will be considered. Can Russian criminologists overcome their marginalisation? It will be argued that significant barriers to Russia's criminology gaining a voice remain, not least the tendency towards self-isolation rooted in an identity crisis, adherence to past epistemologies and the disciplinary boundaries of law, and state policies towards criminology and social sciences more generally. The war in Ukraine raises new questions for criminology, such as the relevance of Russia's colonial history to understanding the current events. The chapter argues that although Russian criminology does not easily fit in the postcolonial and decolonial dichotomies, it is important for it to engage with decolonial critiques and discourses. The prospects for Russian criminology to overcome its marginalisation is discussed in light of the above trends.

Introduction

It has long been broadly recognised that criminological knowledge has historically developed as ethnocentric and western-centric (Bosworth and Hoyle, 2011; Slade and Light, 2015; Moosavi, 2019) and has often supported colonialism and authoritarianism (van Swaaningen, 2021). The discipline of criminology tends to ignore non-western knowledge or see it as inferior, while at the same time asserting its own superiority and the universal validity and applicability of western knowledge (Moosavi, 2019; van Swaaningen, 2021). A number of scholars have called for a de-colonisation of criminology (Cunneen, 1999; Agozino, 2003;

2004) and moving towards a postcolonial (Agozino, 2003; 2004) or decolonial (Blagg and Anthony, 2019; Dimou, 2021) criminology. Like other non-western criminologists, Russian scholars have struggled to have their voice heard. Western centrism of criminology was just one factor behind this. The voice of Russian criminology was silenced for decades during Stalin's rule when all social sciences were banned in the USSR. The revival and development of criminological knowledge post Stalin was crippled by the regime's expectation that criminology must be policy oriented and firmly embedded within the Marxist-Leninist methodological and theoretical paradigm, leaving it no choice but to be an administrative branch of its crime control policy making. Any theorising not consistent with Marxism-Leninism was ideologically wrong and therefore any theoretical efforts became redundant. In the post-Soviet years, Russian criminology began to develop links with foreign colleagues and institutions, while trying to make sense of the new realities of crime and crime control 'at home'. It was a low and slow start as epistemological and theoretical paradigms inherited from the Soviet period, the reluctance to part with Marxist approaches, and insufficient English language skills continued to hold Russian scholars back in their attempts to make their voices heard. Russian scholars continue to be divided with regard to western scholarship, with some considering their own ideas and theories superior while others feel they are far behind, which itself reflects the 'catching up' logic defining the 'less successful' empires (Tlostanova, 2022). All things considered, criminological knowledge in Russia remains stagnant and at best marginal in the global processes of criminological knowledge production dominated by Anglophone criminology.

What is interesting about Russian criminology and what is missing from the North/South debate is the unevenness and ambiguities of criminological thought making it hard to fit it neatly in the Global North/South or the West/the Rest dichotomies. A positivist, modernist project inspired and influenced by western European ideas in the 19th century, it has continued on the modernist path in a Soviet incarnation of Marxism in the 20th century, was partially liberalised in the 1990s, with some critical voices emerging within it, and became increasingly conservative in the 21st century, questioning and critiquing western capitalist global domination, while at the same time embracing patriarchal, conservative ideas of a strong Russian state with a unique civilising mission. What we see today in Russian universities is a criminology firmly embedded in western criminological thought, but also shaped by a unique mix of Marxist, statist, patriarchal, orthodox and Slavophil ideas and defining itself, at least in part, in opposition to the West.

This chapter will explore the issues and dilemmas of Russian criminology. Why is Russian criminology almost totally unknown outside Russia and Russian-speaking post-Soviet and Eastern European states, and can Russian criminologists escape the choice between isolation and dependency on western criminological knowledge, and find their own voice? Can they engage with globally relevant criminological concerns while developing their own unique empirical, theoretical and political insights? Before answering these questions, the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in the development of the discipline in Russia will be considered.

A history of Russian criminology

This section will look at the key stages in the development of the discipline in Russia from the 19th century to the present. These include the pre-Soviet period (19th century to 1917), the early Soviet period (1917-1920), the break in the development of criminology between the late 1930s to the 1950s, the revival of criminological scholarship in the 1950s-1980s, the post-Soviet development between 1991 and the early 2000s, and the recent years of stagnation.

19th century – the emergence of Russian criminology

The origins of Russian criminology can be traced back to the beginning of the 19th century. It generally followed the European path of development of criminological thought and scholarship (Gurinskaya, 2017), being initially inspired by the idea of using statistical data to explore patterns of crime (Radischev, 1952; Herman, 1832; Orlov and Khvostov, 1860), and by the end of the century – early 20th century evolving into a discipline focusing on anthropological and sociological theories of crime. Social order came to be seen as the main cause of crime. Poor political and economic organisation and poor public morality were seen as the main reasons for criminal behaviour (Dukhovskoy, 1872, cited in Shestakov, 2006: 53). The classical ideas of ‘free will’ were challenged by some legal scholars who argued that social conditions of crime had to be explored (ibid). The anthropological branch of Russian criminology developed in the 1880s. It was influenced by Lombroso’s ideas and argued that crime was the result of pathological depravity and could be cured (Dril, cited in Shestakov, 2006: 54).

1917-1920s – the early years of Soviet criminology

In the early years of the Soviet regime, Soviet criminologists studied offender personality and their physical and biological traits, as well as social conditions, focusing primarily on disadvantaged and deprived social groups (Shelley, 1979; 1979a). They also examined the impact of rapid social, economic and political change on patterns of criminality using statistical research (ibid); crime prevention; explored prison experiences and developed alternatives to punishment and rehabilitative programmes (ibid.); victims, and the effects of films on crime (ibid.). Gilinsky (2017) argues that criminology in that period mainly focused on the personality of the offender because Marxist ideology postulated that there couldn't possibly be any 'social' causes of crime in a socialist society. However, Shelley (1979) points out that criminological scholarship of the time enjoyed relative freedom from ideological censorship and developed a range of theoretical perspectives on crime. Marxism was the official ideology to follow, but in practice only Moscow criminologists (working in view of the authorities) used Marxist methodologies, while peripheral scholars considered a wide variety of explanations of crime and used social scientific and biomedical approaches within their research, directly challenging the Marxist view that crime would disappear in a socialist society. According to Shelley (1979; 1979a), between 1917 and 1936 Soviet criminological scholarship advanced intellectually at least to the level of their western counterparts, if not further. Shestakov (2006), however, argues that from the first years of the Soviet regime, criminology was subject to ideological pressure by the party; all crimes had to be seen as the result of class struggle; the other idea developed by Lenin was the disappearance of crime with the removal of exploitation of the masses. Anything not fitting that explanation was subject to harsh critique.

1930s to 1953 – politicisation of criminology and cessation of criminological research

Criminology became politicised and towards the end of the decade ceased to exist (Shelley, 1979; 1979a; Solomon, 1974). The party ideologists launched a campaign against criminologists accusing them of 'neo-Lombrosianism and positivism' and a lack of commitment to Marxism (Solomon, 1974); they were criticised for being inconsistent with Marxist historicism and social determinism (Gurinskaya, 2017). Ideologists of the regime ordered criminologists to stop theorising and commit themselves to practical tasks such as organising criminal statistics. According to the leading communist ideologists of the time, since both crime and legal institutions were supposed to disappear in the near future there would no longer be a need to study crime (Solomon, 1974). The remaining criminologists were given the

task of promoting the Soviet legal institutions (Solomon, 1974). Criminological work became a propaganda tool that provided justification for the repression of any potential opposition; groups such as wealthy farmers, ‘speculators’ and Central Asian and Caucasian cultures and religion became the targets (Shelley, 1979), but criminologists themselves were not safe from the repressive hand of Stalin’s regime (Gilinsky, 2017). After 1938, criminological scholarship was no longer possible as studying crime would run the risk of exposing mass repression (Solomon, 1974).

1953-1980s – the revival of criminological scholarship

After Stalin’s death, criminology started its comeback within law research institutes and departments, police academies and some universities. The Institute for Research of Crime Causes and Crime Prevention was founded in Moscow in 1963 (Gilinsky, 2017). As Solomon (1974: 135) describes, to legitimate themselves, criminologists had to demonstrate their ‘ideological acceptability’ and ‘practical utility’. To be ideologically acceptable, criminology had to be Marxist and reject the so-called ‘bourgeois’ criminology which included any biological and psychiatric study of criminals. Instead, ‘historical and dialectical materialism’ was the only acceptable methodological foundation for criminological research (Gurinskaya, 2017). It also had to assume that all causes of crime were ‘remnants of the past’. Moreover, criminologists were expected to play an ideological role in helping the regime demonstrate the advantages and achievements of the Soviet system. One way of being practically useful was to conduct empirical research and provide criminal justice policy and crime prevention advice to local and central authorities, prepare crime statistics for practical use and participate in law making work (Solomon, 1974). All this meant that criminology re-emerged as an ‘administrative’ criminology of the Communist party (Gurinskaya, 2017). The party leaders saw it as a useful tool for the identification and elimination of any disorderly behaviours and groups that were inconsistent with their idea of the Soviet public order. Solomon (1974) notes that some scholars were unhappy with criminology being part of and subservient to the legal and law enforcement institutions and argued for a separate ‘social science’ criminology. However, criminology remained part of legal scholarship because its legitimacy depended on it being the party tool for population control. Unsurprisingly, criminology of the time was empirically oriented (Gilinsky, 2017).

While the majority of criminologists continued to work under the Marxist assumptions that crime was the ‘remnant’ of the capitalist system or the result of foreign capitalist influences, a few started to examine the social, economic and political factors of crime in ways not dissimilar to those of western criminologists. It is not clear whether these ideas (rational choice, situational, socio-psychological and self-control theories) were developed mostly independently or were to some extent informed and influenced by western criminology (Gurinskaya, 2022). As noted by Gurinskaya (2017) very few publications by Russian criminologists at the time made it to English language academic journals, but those journals were ‘Soviet studies’ not criminology journals so most western criminologists would not be aware of this work (unless of course they were particularly interested in crime and justice in the USSR). It is also interesting that western radical and Marxist scholars were not aware of the Soviet interpretation of Marxism (Gurinskaya, 2017). However, there was more dialogue and exchange of ideas within the USSR and the Eastern Bloc (ibid).

‘Bourgeois’ criminology was accused of serving the interests of the capitalist class and seen as a purely ideological tool in its hands, helping protect the capitalist order. The work of radical/neo-Marxist and critical western criminologists was seen as progressive and theoretically and methodologically advanced but was criticised for not being radical enough as it advocated reforms instead of revolutionary violence (Gurinskaya, 2017). Gurinskaya (2017) also notes that access to western criminological scholarship in the USSR was limited and strictly controlled, and Soviet criminologists were not free to engage with these ideas; a total rejection of western theories of crime was the only possible position to take.

While operating in almost complete isolation from outside academic scholarship, Soviet criminology nonetheless came up with explanations broadly similar to their western counterparts’ 19th and early 20th century theories and ideas, such as the classical theories of free will and rational choice, and psychological and sociological positivism. Soviet criminologists were however in some ways ‘ahead’ of western scholars: crime prevention and control of high-risk offenders (which only became a preoccupation of post-welfare western democracies in the 1990s-2000s) became the central focus and principal task of Soviet criminology from the 1960s (Gurinskaya, 2017). Crime prevention was of principal importance to the Soviet state, which wanted to anticipate and eliminate any crime, but more importantly any sign of opposition, ‘nipping it in the bud’, before it developed into a serious threat. It became clear by the 1960s that crime had not ‘withered away’ as Lenin predicted it would, so something had to be done to eliminate the remaining ‘causes’ of crime in society (Korobeinikov, 1985). In addition to the

various crime prevention measures, from improving education and living standards to public patrols and comrades' courts, criminological study of different groups' motivations for law breaking was prioritised. Different branches of criminological theory were developed looking at underage crime, female crime, violent crime, economic crime and victimology (Zinnurov, 2019).

The 1980s saw a gradual relaxation of ideological controls and Russian criminologists started to engage with western scholarship (Gurinskaya, 2017). Joint conferences bringing together scholars from around the USSR as well as foreign colleagues began to take place (Gilinsky, 2017). This period, the late 1980s in particular, and the times of Gorbachev's perestroika, was characterised by growing freedom from the official ideology and expanding space for scholarly debate and exchange.

1991 to early 2000s – post-Soviet development of criminological thought

The decade immediately after the collapse of the USSR was the time when Russian criminology experienced the most freedom (compared to the periods before and after) to travel, teach, do research, publish and develop links with foreign colleagues. Since the 1990s Russian criminologists have taken part in international conferences and the World Congresses of Criminology in Seoul (1998), Rio de Janeiro (2003), Barcelona (2008), Kobe (2011); annual conferences of the European Society of Criminology (since 2001) and other meetings (Gilinskiy, 2017). Connections were developed not only through purely academic knowledge exchange, but also via applied research 'projects' in policing and criminal justice reforms such as community policing' projects aimed at improving the police's relationship with the public using western (mainly US and British) 'models' (e.g., Robertson, 2005; Brogden and Nijhar 2005). The 1990s saw an eastward flow of western ideas, institutional blueprints, discourses and knowledge to post-Soviet states (Lendvai and Stubbs 2007). The various applied projects with western partners mushroomed throughout Eastern Europe and the former USSR during the decade. Typically, these projects were a 'one way' flow of knowledge where the western partners positioned themselves as experts and knowledge donors.

Inspired by the intellectual opening and exchange, there emerged an interest in sociological examination of crime and criminal justice and academics and teams in Russia started researching these topics. Criminology started to move away from the Marxist understanding of crime as driven by social contradictions; crime came to be understood as an 'innate

characteristic of society' (Shestakov, 1999, cited in Gurinskaya, 2022). However, the changes were mostly evident in the Russian periphery, not in Moscow (Gurinskaya, 2022). Some institutional developments were also evident. The Russian Criminological Association was established in 1991. In 1995, the Union of Forensic Scientists and Criminologists (a voluntary organisation bringing together scholars and practitioners working on social and criminal law policies) was created; it stopped its activities in 2002 but was revived in 2010 (Zinnurov, 2019). A number of other professional organisations emerged; among them are the St. Petersburg International Criminology Club and the Russian Criminological Association. According to Gurinskaya (2017: 130) there are also 'four state-funded federal research institutes that have criminology divisions. Three periodical specialised criminology journals and a number of law journals provide venue for publications'.

An important development in criminological thinking in the post-Soviet years was the recognition and acceptance by some scholars of social constructivist ideas and the ways in which the state plays a role in defining crime as well as the role of social and economic inequality in producing crime (Gilinskiy, 2017). Advances made by Russian criminologists in the post-Soviet years in empirical research include comparative cross-regional studies of crime rates, studies of violent crime based on interviews with prisoners, research on drug abuse and alcoholism, surveys of public attitudes towards the police, and research on torture in police custody.

2000s to present – stagnation of criminological scholarship

This time is characterised by gradual consolidation of the authoritarian regime in Russia and stifling of intellectual and academic freedoms (Gerber and Chapman, 2022; Voronkov, 2018). Contemporary state of criminology in Russia is often characterised as 'stagnant' (Matskevitch, 2011; Zhigarev, 2012; Nagornaja & Pogosova, 2011 cited in Gurinskaya, 2017: 130). Criminological work does not advance far beyond descriptive accounts of survey or statistical patterns and trends in crime (Kondakov 2021). Empirical studies are fairly well developed and include a variety of topics such as organised crime, violence, corruption, hate crimes, economic crime, drug trafficking and human trafficking (Gilinskiy, 2017). On the other hand, those who write PhDs in criminology are still driven by the ambition, in the best Soviet traditions, to develop a 'grand theory' or an all-explanatory world view of crime (Radaev 2000 cited in Gurinskaya, 2022). There does not appear to be much critical discussion and debate. Many

criminologists in Russia continue to reject constructivist ideas and look for objective ‘causes’ of crime. Criminology continues to be seen as a ‘science’ in the service of certain policy and practice needs. For example, a criminology textbook published in 2019 states that ‘deviantology, addictology, administrative delictology, juridical statistics and judicial psychiatry are very important for the development of domestic criminology’ (Zinnurov, 2019: 64). It is also stated that criminology is a ‘sociological-legal science’.

Russian and Western criminology: similarities and differences

The brief history of the development of Russian criminology in the Soviet and post-Soviet years shows some similarities and dissimilarities with western criminology. Theoretically, Russian criminology followed a strikingly similar path to the West even though it saw itself as ‘lagging behind’ western scholarship by several decades. There was the persistent perception of western, European knowledge being superior and progressive, with Europe leading the way and Russia following in its footsteps (although this seems to have begun to change recently, with calls for the development of ‘Slavic’ criminology).

Soviet criminologists enjoyed immeasurably less academic freedom compared to their western counterparts. Soviet criminology can be characterised as administrative, positivist, quantitative and oriented towards reducing crime as defined by the state, so in this sense it fits neatly into the description of ‘Asian’ criminology provided by Moosavi and others (Moosavi, 2019; Fraser et al., 2017: 131; Lee and Laidler 2013; Suzuki et al., 2017: 6 cited in Moosavi, 2019: 266). While until the 1930s Russian and western criminologies developed along fairly similar paths, Stalin’s regime marked the departure of Soviet criminology from this path, when biological determinism and positivism were declared a dangerous bourgeois science to be rejected and Lombrosian ideas came to be seen as reactionary and fascist. Furthermore, between the 1930s and 1960s when interactionism, social reaction and labelling perspectives were on the rise in the West, in the USSR, criminology ceased to exist altogether. From the 1960s and until the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, when western radical and critical criminologists were actively challenging positivist and classical criminological thought, in the USSR, criminology re-emerged within very strict and narrow ideological frames of Marxism and dialectical materialism, with no space for critical discussion and reflection. While Marxism was also an inspiration for radical western criminologists, in the USSR it was imposed on social sciences dogmatically; every single piece of research and writing had to be built on Marxist (historical

materialist) epistemological and methodological foundations. Crime was expected to ‘wither away’ but where it was found it was explained by social contradictions. Classical rational choice, situational, socio-psychological and self-control theories, while broadly similar to western theories, may not have been borrowed entirely, as access to western criminological scholarship was limited. Finally, one area where the USSR appeared to be ‘ahead’ of the game was risk management and crime prevention, which Soviet criminology had been occupied with since the 1960s and which came to be seen as ‘actuarial justice’ in western criminology in the 1990s. Despite the differences, I agree with Moosavi (2019) that in many respects (culturally, religiously, politically) Russia may have more in common with the Global North and this raises the question of Russian criminologists’ identity which we will come back to later on in this chapter.

The factors of continued marginalisation of Russian criminology

Given the peculiar path and characteristics of Russian criminology, what are the main factors contributing to its exclusion and marginalisation? The following sections will look at several reasons for this, such as the continued identification of criminology as a legal discipline, its subordinate position in criminological knowledge production, an identity crisis, continued adherence to Marxism and to serving the interests of the state, suspicious state and institutional barriers, and the lack of organised dissent and collective voice.

Criminology within law, subservient to state

Criminology continues to be taught within criminal law departments. There is still little recognition in Russia of criminology as a sociological discipline; it continues to be seen as a legal discipline in academic institutions, even in large universities that have international links, such as the Moscow School of Economics. Criminal justice policy continues to be an area mainly studied by jurists, not by sociologists, criminologists or political scientists (Smorgunova, 2006). This stifles any attempts to move beyond the ‘black letter law’ approach and look at crime and its control from broader ‘social harm’, human rights, feminist, abolitionist, postcolonial or other critical perspectives. There are few attempts to question, critically evaluate and look beyond the existing, outdated frameworks of criminological thought, and to develop a new lens through which Russian society’s understanding and

responses to crime in the past and present can be critically re-examined (e.g., Shestakov, 2006; Kabanov, 2012).

Some Russian scholars continue to see criminology as a scientific discipline mainly focused on implementing crime prevention policies and supporting the government's responses to crime (e.g., Burlakov, cited in Shestakov, 2006). Some criminologists argue in favour of austere prison conditions exposing serious offenders to psychological and physical pains as part of their punishment. Some support long-term imprisonment as an effective preventive mechanism (Shestakov et al., 2018) and others are supportive of the retention of the death penalty (Burlakov, cited in Shestakov, 2006) and repressive policies arguing that they prioritise the interests of law-abiding citizens (Milyukov, cited in Shestakov, 2006). This suggests that, despite their anti-western stance, the conservative Russian criminologists have not really come up with anything new or radically different as to how to address crimes and harms and deliver justice in society. The conservative criminologists are concerned about the morality of the population and the potentially criminalising effects of 'global ideological networks' and 'oligarchic structures' leading to the moral decay of society; these scholars argue for the introduction of censorship prohibiting programmes showing violence and 'perversion' (Danilov, 2017; 2020). There are a minority of liberally-minded criminologists supporting liberal-democratic values and ideals and arguing for the need to humanise punishment, emphasising the value of human life and liberties and arguing against violence (Gilinskiy, cited in Shestakov, 2006).

Subordinate position within Western-dominated international criminological debate

With greater access to western criminological scholarship via academic publications and conferences, Russian criminologists began to engage in criminological debates, albeit in a relatively weaker, subordinate position, having to write in English and adopt western theories. Joint publications with western scholars empirically test or draw upon established western, often micro-level theories, arguments or analyses (e.g., Mahesh and Gurinskaya, 2022; Lysova and Shchitov, 2015; Light and Slonimerov, 2020; Wheelock, Semukhina and Demidov, 2011).

While there are examples of international collaboration and engagement these are few and far between. Gurinskaya (2017: 132) argues that 'Western theoretical approaches and practices of crime control were brought to the attention of scholars by a number of criminologists and sociologists (Gilinskiy, 2014, Inshakov, 1997; Kleymenov, 2012; Komlev, 2014; Shipunova,

2012; Smorgunova, 2005) but were never fully integrated into the mainstream criminology textbooks'. As noted by Smorgunova (2006: 52) western critical criminological scholarship and research such as studies of corporate and state crime is not reflected in the work of Russian criminologists. The reason for this may not be solely the lack of English language skills or unwillingness to engage, but also limited applicability of western theories to post-Soviet realities. For example, the unique combination of capitalist relations with the patriarchal, feudal, 'clan' structure of authority supporting the state (Kosals, 2006) and the continued dominance of informal relations in Russia playing a more important role than the law (Ledeneva, 2006), may require different epistemological frameworks. As Slade and Light (2015: 152) rightly point out: 'while the key concepts that dominate western criminology may indeed be useful [...], care should be taken with the wholesale adoption of concepts and theories'.

Identity crisis and ambivalence towards western criminology

After the collapse of the USSR criminologists in the post-Soviet states and Russia had to find a way to speak about, conceptualise and research the new realities and processes unfolding before their eyes, but the old Soviet criminological vocabulary did not necessarily provide the means for them to do so. Contemporary criminological work in Russia often continues to draw upon the Soviet adaptation of the Marxist dialectical materialist idea of 'social/dialectic contradictions' as an overarching explanation, or grand theory, of social inequalities, conflict and injustices (e.g., Avanesov, 2012; Kudrjartsev & Eminov, 2016; Kuznetsova & Luneev, 2005; Luneev, 2011; Milyukov, 2005; Shestakov, 2006 cited in Gurinskaya, 2017, 2022).

Russian criminologists struggle to define their position in relation to western criminology. While western criminological theories are often unable to offer insights into Russian realities, alternative understandings of crime and justice that would reflect both the uniqueness of the post-Soviet space and commonalities of criminological issues and concerns with the rest of the world are yet to be developed. Perceived limitations and ideological biases of western knowledge led in the 2000s to a 'conservative turn' in social sciences in Russia leading to 'self-exclusion and intellectual revanchism' (Gurinskaya, 2022; Tlostanova, 2015, cited in Gurinskaya, 2022). Some social scientists turned to the ideas of Russia's unique path and the importance of challenging western ideologies; in criminology, some scholars called for the development of an indigenous, Slavic criminology (Shestakov, 2015, cited in Gurinskaya,

2022). Supporters of a ‘strong state’ as a guarantor of law and order (which is the Global North’s social science assumption, see Philippi, 2021; Carrington and Hogg, 2017) felt that Russia was disadvantaged in the global order, seeing European values as simply a smokescreen often covering up anti-Russian interests and politics. There is a danger here that Russian criminologists need to be aware of, paraphrasing Moosavi (2019), of becoming ‘occidentalists’ and reproducing the imperialist attitude they are trying to challenge. Yet others felt that the Soviet approaches and adaptations of Marxist ideas were outdated, and that Russian criminology was stagnant or in crisis (Gurinskaya, 2017).

State suspicion and institutional barriers

The Soviet elites have always looked at criminology with great suspicion, seeing it as a threat to the dominant communist ideology and to its own position, and at best as something of low value to the state and society. The contemporary Russian state no longer sees criminology as a useful ideological tool and the discipline suffers from underfunding, bureaucratisation and over-regulation of educational institutions, overall stagnation and neglect. The contemporary state’s attitude towards criminology is illustrated by the fact that the new State Educational Standards introduced in 2010 do not even mention criminology as a required part of the law curriculum (Gurinskaya, 2017: 131). Until recently, the state encouraged criminologists to publish in international journals to achieve higher positions in global rankings which met with resistance as Russian criminologists did not feel they had adequate knowledge and resources to do so. Again, perhaps ironically, this continued dependency on the state keeps the discipline firmly embedded within the modernist western paradigm. Criminology is not understood as a branch of sociology and is not taught at universities as an independent subject. Gilinskiy (2017) notes that there is no funding for empirical research and conferences, and only a few foreign publications are translated into Russian. Furthermore, the quality of official statistics of crime appears to be poor compared to other countries.

Perhaps most importantly, the consolidation of an increasingly authoritarian and far-reaching state over the past 20 years, preoccupied with its historical ‘mission’ and role as a great power at the centre of the ‘Russian world’ in opposition to the West (see e.g., Zevelev, 2016) has made open and critical discussion of crime, justice, law and order nearly impossible. Social and political sciences are now evidently considered potentially threatening and harmful to society. This year, the teaching of sociology, cultural studies and political science in all

pedagogical universities of the country was cancelled (Tarasov, 2022). Taken together all these factors made it challenging for Russian criminologists to survive as academics and continue advancing their discipline.

The lack of organised dissent and independent collective voice

Unfortunately, both the Soviet legacies and contemporary political system in Russia have made it difficult for the development of an independent collective voice within criminology powerful and confident enough to challenge the subservient position of the discipline within the state and its subordinate position within the global criminological discourse. It is as if social scientists in Russia continue to work in the shadow of its totalitarian past. There are teams conducting empirical research and holding regular meetings, for example, meetings of the St Petersburg criminology club discussing various criminological topics, but theoretical, methodological and empirical work remains fragmented (Kvashis and Puchkov, 2020). There is a difference between Moscow and its peripheries, with more freedom of discussion and perceptiveness to change in peripheral centres and teams, but this may begin to change as the ‘dangers of theoretical diversity’ were mentioned in the 2021 meeting of the Russian Society of Criminology (Gurinskaya, 2022).

Overall, there is no concerted effort to develop novel, non-orthodox, independent conceptual approaches or political positions; ideologically criminologists in their majority, unsurprisingly, remain conformist. Some criminologists adhere to the ideology of the state and its epistemology. For example, a group of criminologists developing political criminology in Russia focus on threats to Russian sovereignty and security in the new geopolitical context; the main threat is identified as the ‘global oligarchic power’ led by the USA. Coloured revolutions in the former Soviet states and dissent and protest movements in Russia are understood as threats to Russia’s sovereignty, organised and managed by the western oligarchic powers (Merkuriev, 2021; Smirnov, 2021; Shestakov, 2022; Pishikina, 2014). Looking at Russia and its foreign policy from a postcolonial perspective, Morozov (2013) describes it as a ‘subaltern empire’. This characterisation of Russian foreign policy can be applied to the ‘patriotic-statist’ branch of Russian criminology too: it can be described as projecting a ‘Russian subaltern empire’ voice, opposing the West, yet using western language to criticise it, and articulating its own imperial ambitions in relation to the post-Soviet space (re-unification of the former Soviet states). However, the vision of Russia as a subaltern empire can be questioned as a denial of

domination over and ‘internal colonisation’ of peoples living in Russia whose voices we do not hear (Koplatadze, 2019).

Critical voices within Russian criminology?

There is growing interest in Russia in developing criminology as an independent and critical discipline autonomous from law and legal scholarship. There are critical accounts of changes and transformations in law, policing and criminal justice institutions in Russia or other post-Soviet states (Shestakov et al., 2011). In the early 1990s Russian criminologists recognised the criminal acts of the Soviet leaders, giving criminological evaluation to Leninist and Stalinist terror and to other dictatorships and totalitarian regimes, as well as other political crimes such as predatory wars (Kabanov, 2012). Some scholars called for a criminological and legal evaluation of the ‘communist terror’ in Russia and of the errors of the Marxist-Leninist ideas of the ‘birthmarks of capitalism’ and of exploitation and impoverishment of the masses being seen as the root cause of crime. (Shestakov, 2006). They also offered criminological analyses of wars of aggression, corruption in the police and higher echelons of power and political crimes (Shestakov, 2011; 2013; Kosals and Maximova, 2015; Danilov, 2011; Bachurin, 2017; Zorin, 2018). Unique insights into the operation of informal practices in Russia’s courts are provided by Ledeneva’s research on ‘telephone justice’, informal influence and pressure on the judiciary (Ledeneva, 2006; 2008); the role of violent entrepreneurship in the making of Russian capitalism is explored by Volkov (2006). Nevertheless, some topics clearly remain taboo and critical analyses of contemporary policies and politics of the Russian state appear to be absent from the debates. Undoubtedly, critical voices in Russian criminology, theories and paradigms used, perspectives, attitudes and issues that are and are not being discussed need to be understood in their historical and geopolitical context.

When considering marginalisation of Russian criminology, it is important to note that ‘Russian criminology’ is an ambiguous concept. The same can be said about many non-western criminologies; for example, Moosavi (2019: 261) with regard to Asian criminology, notes: ‘one could still reasonably ask if Asian criminology is that which is produced by Asians, or informed by Asian culture, or about Asia or all three?’ In a narrow sense, ‘Russian criminology’ refers to criminologists and criminological communities living and working in Russia. But what about Russian-speaking criminologists living abroad and writing and doing research about Russia? This would include Russian criminologists living in one of the former Soviet states or

elsewhere in the world. It is not uncommon for Russian born academics affiliated with and/or educated in western universities to research and publish on crime and justice in Russia (e.g., Tittle and Botchkovar, 2005; Botchkovar, Antonaccio and Hughes, 2018; Lysova, 2020). They have a ‘native’ knowledge and understanding of Russia, but it is debatable to what extent they can be identified (or indeed identify themselves) as ‘Russian criminologists’. The latter group are more integrated into western criminology but their ability to articulate their own concerns in their own language and advance their own research agendas is limited. Finally, there is a large body of criminological research and literature about Russia produced by western scholars. For those identifying themselves as Russian criminologists it is important to reflect, not only within their own Russian-speaking academic communities, but internationally, on their own position and role in producing and disseminating criminological knowledge, and whether and how its isolation and marginalisation can be overcome.

The war in Ukraine and Russian criminology

When considering Russian criminology, its voice today and its future, it is impossible not to mention that at the time of writing, Russia is conducting a ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine (the Russian government’s official term for its military action it started in Ukraine on 24 February 2022). It is a moment of existential shock, confusion and disorientation for many in Russia, not least its social scientists, a moment of ‘what is going on?’ and ‘how can we talk about this?’

I agree with Yusupova (2022:15) that to make sense of the events ‘you have to look beyond President Putin and other prominent individuals [...], beyond the geopolitical and economic factors in play’; instead, it is important to rethink Russia’s colonial history. Russian criminology can begin to take steps towards engaging with decolonial and postcolonial critiques of criminology. One must remain cautious and sceptical, however, not ignoring western self-interest in promoting this discourse and distorting it ‘away from its original emancipatory meaning’ (Oskanian, 2022). On the other hand, one must be cautious of not asserting a new hegemony in the process of speaking against another. Neo-imperial ambitions can be explained and justified in ways similar to left decolonial critiques of the West’s colonial expansion and calls for decolonisation and independence of nations. However, when combined with anti-liberalism and the emphasis on Russia’s messianic role in the new world order, this becomes a call to replace one type of hegemony with another (Yakhiv, 2022).

The agenda of a radical rejection of the Global North's epistemologies and knowledge systems (Anthony and Blagg, 2019) is persuasive and yet almost unimaginable in a country where this knowledge is so deeply embedded in society's identity and psyche. The process of critical reflection is impossible without self-reflection, looking into the foundations of Russian criminological knowledge and the processes of its production, and acknowledging its complicity in the practices it seeks to critique. It is also about questioning and dismantling the myths of Soviet Russia as a 'good empire' (Marat, 2022), 'anti-empire' (Oskanian, 2022) and a liberating force (Kassymbekova, 2022), or a state that 'colonised itself', (Etkind, 2015), recognising the inequalities, hierarchies of power and harms of the colonial past and present (Tlostanova, 2022; Amelina, 2022; Schorkowitz, 2019; Morrison, 2016; Saveliev, 2021). There is a potential for Russian criminology to contribute to 'making visible what it facilitated to make invisible' (Dimou, 2021: 447) and making the voices of the silenced heard. However, this would require a radical re-thinking of Russian criminology's epistemological and ontological foundations and of its role and position in relation to the state.

From this vantage point, Russian criminology can begin to oppose the Northern criminology's claims to universalism (Philippi, 2021) without failing into the trap of combining an 'anti-imperialist critique' with an imperialist ambition (Morozov, 2014: 17). It is also important to remember that calls for decolonisation must come from the colonised people themselves. Van Swaaningen's (2021: 15) advice for criminology is a bottom-up approach, starting 'from the concrete, lived reality of the people and social movements in the countries we research'. Perhaps the peripheries of Russia are the places where these processes can begin to take place.

Conclusion

The future for criminology in Russia today looks uncertain, both domestically and internationally. Travelling, doing research abroad, collaboration with colleagues in joint projects, meetings in conferences and symposia and participation in other scholarly exchanges have become difficult if not impossible. Russian scholars are likely to face increasing isolation, the freezing of international links, funding and programmes. A likely scenario for Russian criminology under these circumstances (and certainly for those who continue to live and work in Russia) is localisation and/or a return to its purely administrative role (similar to the role it played in the Soviet period).

A more optimistic scenario is that some degree of academic freedom remains possible. Questions Russian criminologists cannot avoid are questions about the nature of state violence in its historical and geopolitical context, and how states can be called to account for the harms they perpetrate. Considering the pros and cons of the criminology of crimes of states, Friedrichs (2015: 111) argues that they are ‘by any reasonable measure the most consequential of all crimes – the ‘crime of crimes’ – and it is inherently absurd for the field of criminology to fail to attend to such crimes’. Admittedly, it is a very complex and tricky matter to discuss, and yet it seems impossible for criminologists to avoid engaging with these questions.

The realities and legacies of the post-Soviet space still await a criminological analysis; there are myths, silences and gaps in knowledge about the Soviet and post-Soviet social and political order, including its colonial dimensions, that have not yet been openly discussed. Whether this becomes possible, and whether this reflection and debate will lead to any new criminological insights or paradigms, remains to be seen. The marginal status of mainstream criminology in Russia today is perhaps more evident than ever, yet there is a long and challenging way ahead towards the de-marginalisation of Russian criminology.

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