S. Bittle, L. Snider, S. Tombs and D. Whyte (eds), *Revisiting Crimes of the Powerful: Marxism Crime and Deviance* (London: Routledge, 2018), 341pp, £115 hardback/£33.29 ebook

Reviewed by Samantha Fletcher

This edited book marks more than 40 years since the publication of Frank Pearce's *Crimes of the Powerful: Marxism, Crime and Deviance* (*CotP*) in 1976. *Revisiting CotP* is a much welcome and timely contemplation of a hugely significant piece of work. I wholeheartedly concur with the editors (15) regarding the peculiar injustice that, despite its profound influence and breakthrough developments, *CotP* has never received the same ostentatious fanfare as other staple texts associated with the 'Criminology' milieu in the 1970s – for example, *The New Criminology* (Taylor, Walton and Young 1973).

Revisiting CotP begins with two thoughtful primers to introduce the wider collection of chapters: a warm introduction from the editors alongside a deeply candid foreword from Pearce himself. In this opening section, Pearce provides a brief, yet illuminating, autobiography that elucidates the context of his own 'personal, political and intellectual development' (xviii) from which *CotP* came into being. Thereafter, readers can find the book organised into three sections: *theoretical and conceptual excursions*; *empirical dimensions*; and *new developments*, all of which are well considered in their sequential arrangement, should one wish to approach the book in a traditional linear format.

However, past the preliminary scene-setting chapters, readers, should they desire, will have little difficulty approaching chapters in a less conventional order. This is because, despite the book having a qualitatively diverse range of chapters in terms of content, focus and chosen case study illustrations, what ultimately holds it together is a commitment to the recognition, and disruption of, the 'imaginary social order' – the concept so central to *CotP* (more on this in a moment). This, in turn, provides a flexibility in the way in which people might approach the text without jeopardising the book's narrative or integrity.

Each of the authors within this collection reflects on the impact *CotP* has had on their scholarly trajectories. This is expressed memorably by Raymond Michalowski, who describes how 'it was Frank Pearce's *Crimes of the Powerful* that best showed me a path toward the clearing I was looking for' (102). For me, this book is a series of cordial accounts that expounds the 'clearings' *CotP* led to for each of the authors.

It is evident that *CotP* has led to several different, and sometimes seemingly disparate, pastures. Sometimes these various 'clearings' have highly different theoretical frameworks or philosophising departure points – Arendt, Durkheim,

Foucault and Hacking, to name just a few evident within *Revisiting CotP*. This is fitting given that Pearce states he has, sensibly I believe, ‘never felt the need to be swallowed up by any one theoretical position’ (xxix). In addition, the book engages with a broad assortment of topics including, but not limited to, protest, ‘organised crime’, pay day loans, agriculture, domestic violence and the nuclear industry. The book also covers good ground globally – from Papua New Guinea to Standing Rock and more.

As noted above, what these potentially seemingly disparate contributions have in common is their commitment to recognising and dismantling the ‘imaginary social order’. In short, for Pearce, ‘the conventional presentation of [this] social order is ideological – in the sense that it describes, in a partial manner, the workings of the society whilst at the same time masking the “real” nature of the social order’ (Pearce 1976: 66). In turn, this gives rise to the recognition that ‘the only way to understand the actual workings of social control mechanisms within capitalism is to recognise that they are directed against those activities which threaten its effective reproduction’ (Pearce 1976: 67–68). These core sentiments from the original *CotP* are wonderfully revealed and explicated by all parts of the *Revisiting CoTP*.

Perhaps most importantly, this book inspires one to revisit the original *CotP*. I myself was about half way through my first reading of *Revisiting CotP* when I felt it important, and to some extent felt compelled, to revisit the original. At this stage, I must digress on a tangent, but an important one nonetheless. My very first reading of the original *CotP* was some time ago and the copy long since returned to my institutional library. In seeking a copy of *CotP* to revisit in 2019, I learned that it is incredibly difficult to locate as a text, both in terms of loaning or purchasing a copy. If it were not for a bit of serendipity where I eventually found a second hand copy online and had an independent bookshop in the South West of England ship it to me, I would still be without. I would, therefore, as part of this review like to take the opportunity to ask, in fact make the plea to, Pluto Press, with reverential supplication, to make *CotP* available again, much like the way that Routledge Revivals have acted in recognising the value and importance of reissuing Pearce and Tombs’ 1998 *Toxic Capitalism*. This edited collection highlights such a clear requirement for wider access to the original *CotP* book to support all those across generations with a ‘passionate seriousness’ (xxvi), for understanding the world, how it works and how we might change it.

Moreover, *Revisiting CotP* successfully reaffirms the open ended and non-prescriptive nature of *CotP*. I was always surprised to understand that in certain quarters *CotP*’s Marxist departure point had led to hasty accusations of reductionism and economic determinism. However, as Pearce commented in an interview with Steven Bittle in 2015, the

actual underpinning assumption is that the social world is a creation of social beings in relationships, but people do what they can with what they have within the particular social relations and discourses. It's about how capitalism comes through societies and relations to produce economic reductionism, not the analysis that is reductionist. (2015: 12–13)

Similarly, the accusations of reductionism and economic determinism are discussed explicitly in Chapter 9 of *Revisiting CotP*, which explains with other inferences across the book that there are no grand narrative theories to be found in *CotP*, only a commitment to demystifying the imaginary social order.

In the foreword to *Revisiting CotP*, Pearce comments that, 'If I were to rewrite *CotP* today, I would explore inequalities of gender, disability, and racialization, as well as class, and my framework would be more global and more environmental'. A second edition of *CotP* would be a thrilling prospect in many respects. But strictly speaking, it would be wholly unnecessary to 'redo' *CotP*, given the ways it invited continuous critical reflection and research. As such, I feel *Revisiting CotP* is a wonderful homage to the work that has already emanated from, or been inspired by, *CotP* but is equally a call to action for its continued germination across a multitude of disciplines and perspectives.

Revisiting CotP, alongside the original *CotP*, is for anyone seeking to unmask, explicate and ultimately disrupt the 'imaginary social order'. This is not a singular or static task, but a continuous one, as *Revisiting CotP* reminds us of the ever changing, evolving and dramatising efforts of the ruling strata in upholding its illusions. The perpetuation of the 'imaginary social order' is necessary for the continuation of capitalism, and its commensurate colonial and patriarchal structural relations, and as *sine qua non* in maintaining 'domination by consent' (245). Therefore, its disruption remains persistently pressing. I end, of course, not with my words but of those of Pearce (2015: 4–5), who states, 'I was well aware that while retaining the theoretical gains that *Crimes of the Powerful* had made possible, it was necessary to go beyond it'.

Samantha Fletcher, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Manchester Metropolitan University.

References

- Pearce, F. (2015) "Marxism and Corporate Crime in the 21st Century: Interview with Frank Pearce". Interviewed by Steven Bittle, Red Quill, 3 February. Available online at <http://redquillbooks.com/interview-frank-pearce/> (accessed 8 May 2019).