Rejoinder to Book Review of *Rural Transformations and Rural Crime*

Rural transformations and rural crime: International critical perspectives in rural criminology, edited by Matt Bowden and Alistair Harkness, 2022, Bristol University Press, 224 pp., GBP 85.00 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1529217759.
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Abstract

A review of a book we edited, *Rural Transformations and Rural Crime* (Bowden & Harkness, 2022) was published in Volume 32, Issue 3 of *Rural Society* (Scott, 2023) in December 2023. The review makes two key but highly misleading charges. The first is an intimation that rural criminology is dominated by a clique of scholars; and second that the book by and large lacks critical analysis to the reviewer's liking. The reviewer provides a glimpse of a broad analysis of the field and adopts an independently minded position. Indeed, some observations and claims are made that should rightly be part of a wider debate in criminology, about the book's relevance, and its impact and contribution to the social sciences: legitimate and important questions that ought to be addressed. However, a few errors in the review need to be corrected and cannot go unchallenged.

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Concerted attempts were made to have this rejoinder published in a subsequent issue of *Rural Society* so as to keep both review and reply in the same organ, but a final attempt was outright rejected by the journal editor who abandoned professional courtesies. This is lamentable, and we have persistent concerns about the handling of the matter by that Journal. It is not clear whether or not the author of the review, a member of the Journal's editorial advisory board, was consulted as part of this process. The publisher of the journal, Taylor and Francis, have concluded the editor has a prerogative to decline to publish a rejoinder. We lay out here then, instead, our concerns with this review in the *International Journal of Rural Criminology* and our reasoning as to why the permanent version of record needs to be corrected.

Rural Transformations and Rural Crime is located in a longer trajectory of works, and we accept that inevitably some scholarship that might be considered central to the formation of rural criminology will have been omitted. Nevertheless, we can regard this rather cold review as a case of any publicity being good publicity. A tone has been adopted which presents as dismissive, even patronising. We cannot help but be reminded of Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) analysis of the field of cultural production where he notes the distinction between the struggle between the rear guard (those established in the field) and the *avant garde* (those struggling with the former for position and recognition based upon the new and refreshed cultural capital). This review does indeed appear as a case of 'who do these people think they are?'. Indeed, there is an implied and highly incorrect imputation that the global movement in rural criminology is some insular clique, rather than a growing movement of scholars from diverse backgrounds and countries.

Rural criminology is a relatively new wave within criminology: naming a precise progenitor is not what we were attempting to do, nor do we intend participating in legacy squabbles for recognition. We take cognisance of the important milestones in the formation of the current movement that takes its energy from important works like Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy's (2014) *Rural Criminology*; Weisheit, Falcone and Wells' (1995) *Crime and Policing in Rural and Small-Town America* (1995) and its subsequent later editions; The Routledge *International Handbook of Rural Criminology* (Donnermeyer, 2016); and contributions by the book reviewer in Barclay, Donnermeyer, Scott and Hogg's (2007) *Crime in Rural*

Australia and Harkness, Harris and Baker's (2016) *Locating Crime in Context and Place*. Far from being a clique, the international network of rural criminology is a supportive and inclusive community of practice that embraces contributions from scholars and practitioners working in many different contexts. The main aim of the *Rural Transformations* book was to pave another avenue for new and emerging work across the world.

Great emphasis in the review is placed on counting of people on the Bristol University Press *Research in Rural Crime* series Editorial Advisory Board to make the cheap point that many of the board members are contributors to the book. Ten of the 17, it should have been pointed out, do not appear in the book, and many of those who are contributors not members of the advisory board. Further, a small number may not indeed consider themselves to be rural criminologists *per se*. If a quantitative undertaking is to be used, it should be used thoroughly, or not at all, rather than a snide remark. Had the reviewer fact-checked his claim that the lead editor of the second title in the Bristol series is a member of the advisory board – Ziwei Qi is lead editor for the team that produced *Gender-based Violence in the 21st Century* (Qi, Terry & Lynn, 2023) – it would have been discovered that she is not, nor ever has been, a member of the advisory board. We would like to think this is just a minor error, seemingly confusing Ziwei Qi for Qingli Meng, two early career scholars from China who now hold academic positions in the United States.

Conducting some quick arithmetic of our own, we can report that the editing team and Advisory Board of *Rural Society* consists of 18 members – 13 of whom are male and just five are female – holding academic positions in just five countries (Australia, 12; New Zealand, 2; United Kingdom, 1; United States, 2; Netherlands, 1). This is somewhat curious given that the Journal notes itself as international in its aims and scope. In contrast, the editors and Editorial Advisory Board for the book series has ten male and nine female members with home institutions in nine countries and with a mix of early-career, mid-career and established scholars.

Contributors to the anthology are active in a variety of research fields of which rural criminology forms part of their respective portfolios, and all contribute to literatures both inside and outside of rural criminological studies. We ourselves have both come to rural criminology in recent years precisely because of the openness and inclusivity of the worldwide community of researchers and scholars working in this space. Afterall, this is a community which embraces researchers, scholars, students and practitioners at various stages of their careers and provides affirmation for their initiative. Witness, for example, that the European Society of Criminology Working Group on Rural Criminology was established in 2021 by two early career researchers (ECRs).

True it is that there exist centres of knowledge in rural criminology, but these are plural – the American Society of Criminology has a Division of Rural Criminology; and there is the transdisciplinary International Society for the Study of Rural Crime which embraces researchers and practitioners alike, has a growing membership globally, and serves as an important enabling group for ECRs in the field. The Bristol University Press series and the

Routledge Studies in Rural Criminology series, alongside journals such as *Rural Studies, Rural Society, Rural Sociology, Sociologia Ruralis* and the ground-breaking open-access *International Journal of Rural Criminology* form part of a pluralist assemblage of scholarly outlets for publishing rural-oriented research and scholarly work. Rural criminology is both intersectional and international, more like a Venn diagram than an impenetrable nucleus.

We cannot accept the point made that this volume lacks critical scholarship, noting that some of the 'critical' chapters in the book were not mentioned in the review. We note the contributions discussing theories of space within criminology by Andrew Wooff (Chapter 8) and Susanne Stenbacka (Chapter 9), those dealing with the theories of modernity and the information age and its penetration of rural space by Matt Bowden and Artur Pytlarz (Chapter 4), the consideration of applying left realism to rural farmers by James Windle (Chapter 6) and, indeed, many others. We can only assume that this review was based on a partial reading of the book, or cherry-picking for the sake of writing a negative and unbalanced review.

Accusations of 'mainstream' or 'administrative' research communicates derision, has become extremely clichéd, and brings critical scholarship into the space of dogma as Michael Burawoy (2005) has cautioned. Critical criminology, as an area of specialisation, is a space increasingly dominated by academics for whom advocacy for the destruction of institutions dominates with little or no thinking about practical, achievable alternatives which maintain order, reduce victimisation and improve outcomes. Sensible scholars are more likely to adopt Roger Matthews' (2010) notions of 'So What?' criminology. That is, analysing critically, but at the same time engaging in problem solving, and linking theory, method and intervention towards a *critical realist* approach. There are, thankfully, many in the academy adept at such approaches.

As we note in the final chapter of the book (Harkness, Bowden & Donnermeyer, 2022, p. 186):

> the hair-splitting differences which define subdisciplinary boundaries are the central driving characteristics in many fields of science, like criminology. The so-called right methods, the right theory and the right colleagues can dominate thinking and turn a healthy criminological imagination into a goose-stepping rigidity of the brain.

We wish to counter the review by noting that the current wave of rural criminology has much life in it and makes an expansive, valuable contribution it to rural social research and practice. The Research in Rural Crime series by Bristol University Press shall continue to embrace a critical realist approach to the subject matter of its monographs and edited books, and a diversity of scholarship, and it will continue to brush aside misleading criticisms which serve no useful purpose.

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