

Rural Criminology and Criminological Knowledge: From Space and Place to the Global Scale

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Abstract

Rural criminology is a more recent development in the criminological enterprise with burgeoning interest in research and scholarship in recent years. More pertinently, as urban lenses have been primarily used to generalise within mainstream criminology, the current upsurge in rural criminology sets off a major epistemological project to counter the urban-normativity of contemporary knowledge. But would this quest be entirely inductive or might it involve utilising more eclectic theoretical toolkits? Rural criminology relies heavily upon local context where space and place are critical, but vital too are the continuities and links with urban society. Such analyses are not immune from mainstream theories, such as those about the nature of modernity, globalization and glocalization. Zooming in to local context to explore global impacts on place and space is vital. Zooming out to the global scale is also critical as wider lenses are needed for capturing major cultural, historical and geographic influences that shape rurality itself, such as patriarchy, technology and colonization for example. Two questions are asked in this article: (i) Can theories on space and place developed for urbanised modernity be applied to rural contexts and help to build theory from rural studies; (ii) can recent analysis of the breadth of rural criminology globally, give us some direction from a top-down, macroscopic level? This article utilises learning from the case of rural safety security in Ireland and the conclusions from a recent volume exploring rural criminology in global perspective.

Keywords: space; place; rural criminology; global scale; modernity

Introduction

Rural criminology relies on the analyses of local context and much of the focus of its development has been framed as being tied up with place (Donnermeyer, 2016). This is in no small way shaped by the mission of rural criminology as its *raison d'être* has been to provide a rejoinder to the urban-normativity of criminology as it developed throughout the twentieth century. The urban ecology paradigm associated with its foundations in Park's (1925) anthology of the city as an organism acting as an autonomous filtration system, culminated in the urban division of labour, spurred a range of similar studies and interventions encapsulated best by Shaw and McKay (1942). Indeed, in the growing field of rural criminology, space and place are vital to understand the impact of structuring forces in local contexts. Too micro a scale and we omit the regional and global forces from our understanding. Overly macro and we postulate without reference to how the forces we conceptualize penetrate space, place and everyday life.

This of course leads to the question as to how we set the scale, which this article can merely raise, but not answer immediately. But it does speak to epistemological challenges of how we should understand rural society as we seek to grasp the processes surrounding rural policing, security, crime and justice? A working hypothesis guiding this article is that analyzing rural contexts are not immune from the enrichment that mainstream sociological theories can provide, be they on the nature of modernity, globalization (and glocalization). To do so we need to provide some kind of double hermeneutic (Giddens, 1984) where we can learn from local cases by inferring from them, a universal generality (Walton, 1992) while also operationalizing macro level theory on social forces as they play out in local contexts. Rather than using two lenses, this article uses one by zooming in to local and national context, while zooming out to explore a more global picture. The point here is to explore the universe of rural criminology and specify the broad conceptual palette that might be used.

To operationalize this, the article sets out to address two key questions: (i) Can theories on space and place developed for urbanized modernity be applied to rural contexts and help to build theory from rural studies; (ii) can recent analysis of the breadth of rural criminology globally, give us some direction from a top-down, macroscopic level? To achieve some insight on these questions, the article reflects on a series of recent published works carried out with my co-author Artur Pytlarz; and an edited book recently published with Gorazd Meško exploring criminology on a global scale (Bowden & Meško, 2025). Hence the first section of this article considers how rurality is shaped by theories of modernity and globalization which have been broadly used to characterize industrialized, urban societies. How might they be utilized in understanding the transformation of the rural, and how might we then relate these to more general themes in criminology? The second is a study of global themes from a capture the state of the art in rural criminology, as it has developed across the globe. Ultimately the article argues for the need to regard the rural in relational terms – i.e. as to how it is organized at different points in time, especially in how it is governed. In this context, rural criminology has to seek a definition that goes beyond a fixation in physical terms, e.g. remoteness, positioning vis-à-vis the urban, for framing that

understands the conditioning of the rural in relation to formal systems of justice, governance and security that may be weak, fragmented or incomplete.

Rurality, globality and late modernity: Space and place reconfigured

Theories of modernity have been a key feature in mainstream criminology up to and after the *fin de siècle*. Narratives of late modernity began to emerge and become evident in, for instance, Garland's (2001) essay on cultures of control as capturing the hegemony of neo-liberal policies in penalty and crime control. Critical here in Garland's work is the idea of responsabilisation whereby states divested themselves of core responsibility for the provision of security and dispersed it to civil society. Theories of modernity like this also had incorporated the influence of Foucault's (1977) archeology of modernity and the dispersal of power to the capillaries of society, typified in Foucault's analysis of the carceral archipelago, as a dispersed system of control over the social body (see also Foucault, 2009). The state in this moment was seen as retrenching to a hollowed-out form and replaced by the mobilization of partnerships to 'rowing' functions of implementation while the state retained the 'steering' functions (Braithwaite, 2000). Rose (1999) critiquing the rebirth of communitarianism alongside the politics that saw the demise of welfare states and the rise of workfare, suggested that such partnerships were tasked with encouraging the subject to self-discipline through an ethico-politics. Indeed Young (2007) argued that late modernity was a dizzying, vertiginous world where ideas like 'truth' and 'reality' were somewhat blurred by the emergence of globalization and the transition to a consumerist society.

The late modern landscape is typified as being an unfamiliar world where that which was once solid and predictable had become disembedded from its moorings in tradition. Giddens (1991) had described late modernity as a runaway world which offered great opportunities for personal advancement while also presenting society with risks: individuals through their life projects could embrace late modernity by trusting more abstract systems – a classic example being the credit card which facilitated people to act and consume over previously unimagined time spaces. These more fluid or liquid times as Bauman (2000) had captured it, rested with the neo-liberalization of financial markets and investment which could migrate to different parts of the globe. The effect was to rupture the link between capital and place, leaving labour, who by definition were fixed to place (picture mining villages in Wales or auto works in Detroit for example) in a state of disorganization. Capital was no longer fixed to place, so place became sites of deproletarianisation where workforces were destructured from the organized capitalist economy (Wacquant, 2008).

Enabling the emergence of late modernity is the rise of informational capitalism which also reorganizes and reconfigures space and place by connecting locales into a globalized system of nodes and hubs as capitalist investment and manufacture switches from hard materials to information and telecommunications (Castells, 2007), and latterly big data, algorithms and artificial intelligence (Schuilenburg and Peeters, 2017). This transforms developed societies within by replacing place-based communities attached to production and towards flow-based systems. Space is reorganized into the *space of place* and the *space of flow*: the latter involving movements of people, capital and data. Castells (2000) had

suggested that this polarized occupational structures, as those living within the flow world, rose to higher income deciles, while those in 'place' were located in occupations which were no longer required and plundered into poverty. Young (1999) had captured the impact of such a reconfiguration as creating divisions within society by setting off processes of inclusion and exclusion.

The late-modern world is risk-laden and requires a reorganization of the governance and distribution of risk (Beck, 1992). Indeed, more recently still we have had to rethink modernity for it, too, is the basis of our own demise as a species. Paul Crutzen (2006) coined the term Anthropocene or 'human epoch' in which humanity's own innovations since the steam engine have extracted from the planet's resources and resulting now in climate change. The modern society created by industrialism has grown into a morphological force, bringing focus to questions of crime and justice as it relates not only to humans, but to non-human species and natural forces (Shearing, 2015).

While rural criminology has been widely conceptualized as being other than the urban or as a counter to the urban-normativity of the foundational power of the Chicago School, these wider concepts we can utilize to rethink and broaden the theoretical and empirical scope. The point here is not to grand theorise as such. Rather it is to in some way agree with Donnermeyer's (2022) call for theories of the mid-range, to encourage data-driven, or indeed case-driven research. Using this very cursory sketch, the article now moves to apply some theorization of place and space to two cases. The first case deals with that of Ireland, a country that for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is predominately rural, undergoes a struggle from its British colonial master, and later transforms the society from one based upon agriculture to its integration into the informational technology revolution. This culminated in the country being recognized as one of the most globalized societies on earth using a number of indices (KOF Swiss Economic Institute, 2025; Gygli et al., 2019). Hence this makes Ireland a laboratory for the study of rural transformation.

Case I: The penetrative power of the information age – Rural security in contemporary Ireland

The story of the modernization of Ireland, a small island on the periphery of Western Europe, begins with its independence from Britain in the early 20th Century culminating in establishment of the Free State government in the 'southern' two-thirds of the island, and the partition of six counties in the northeast which subsequently formed Northern Ireland. The independence movement up to this point launched various uprisings and rebellions over the previous two centuries the pinnacle of which was the insurrection of the 1916 Rising and the subsequent War of Independence (1918-1922). The population which stood at approximately eight million in 1840s was decimated by the Great Famine of 1847 and mass immigration to industrialising cities in Britain, to the Americas and beyond (O'Gráda, 2007). Depopulation through emigration continued to the point that by the 1950s, the population had reduced to 2.9 million (see Daly, 2006). Much of the decades that followed independence from the 1920s to the 1960s were about stabilizing post-revolutionary Ireland by absorbing the forces of liberation into the institutions and politics, while the post-colonial economic model had

centred on a combination of agriculture and import-substitution industrialization behind trade barriers. A key moment of change was the economic reforms of the 1960s which opened the country to foreign direct investment (FDI). Hence the independent Ireland became a late industrializing country which set of a period of rapid modernity and culminating on an economic model dubbed the ‘flexible developmental state’ (O’Riain, 2000) – combining a mix of the neo-liberalization of markets and state intervention in the economy.

The agrarian nature of early twentieth century Irish rural life was best framed in the work of Arensberg & Kimball ([1960] 2001), two American anthropologists whose fieldwork in the 1930s sought to demonstrate the functionalism of small-holder farm families and kin relations in rural communities as central to the pre-industrial order. In this context rural communities were endowed with forms of mechanical solidarity approximating to Tönnies (1957) ideal-type *gemeinschaft*, characterized by small scale village life and traditional rural social structures and values. By contrast, subsequent field studies a half century later, captured the emerging modernity post-industrialization whereby a policy of industrial dispersal to rural towns and villages reset the scale of rural life following the introduction of foreign-owned manufacturing firms (Harris, 1983). Indeed, such investment mobilized post-colonial elites into a *ruling trinity* of business, the Catholic church and local politics that kept a grip on rural and small-town social order (Eipper, 1986). But as the 1970s gave way to a protracted recession in the 1980s, industrialization took a further turn with the entry of Ireland into the high-tech revolution which peaked in the 1990s with the emergence of the Celtic Tiger (see O’Riain, 2004). Capturing this period, studies in rural towns and hinterlands capture the emergence of late modern society as a transforming power in rural areas, converging some rural sites into industrial zones (e.g. Intel) and impacting local cultures by dividing local populations into those integrated into the fast-paced technological industries and those rooted to previous stages of development tied firmly to place. A key ethnographic study of these changes in a rural village by Inglis (2008) noted how these stages of development were captured in observable distinctions in shopping patterns: those rooted in *place* shopping locally, while those in the *flow* space, commuting to work at greater distances beyond the village, shopped at service stations while in motion.

Similar studies of the ‘globalization’ of Ireland have stressed the conversion of space and place into ‘non-place’ (Peillon & Corcoran, 2004) accounting for the way in which rural towns and villages were integrated into the system of global flows and irreversibly changing their culture. Commuting to and from work has been a feature of the transformation of rural life as reflected in census data since the 1990s. GIS maps reproducible using Central Statistics Office data indicate the growing conurbation connecting rural areas on the east-west axis that appear to be slowly growing closer together (see Ahrens & Lyons, 2020). Increasing the rapidity of flow of traffic in these ‘Celtic Tiger’ years was aided greatly by the motorway infrastructure that the country could now afford to build, with motorways completed handling traffic from the capital Dublin, radiating north to Belfast, west to Galway and south towards the cities of Cork, Waterford and Limerick. Perceived increases in rural crime during the period of austerity after 2010 were perceived to be caught between a number of intersecting facts: closure of more than 100 rural police stations and a motorway system aiding roaming

criminals greater means of access and egress to rural areas. Rural policing following these closures were expected to have their local stations replaced by 'smart policing' involving greater use of technology (see Pytlarz & Bowden, 2019). This transformation, perhaps a sleight of hand to a considerable extent, shifted everyday face-to-face policing in the countryside to what Wooff (2022) has called 'abstract policing'.

In this context Pytlarz and Bowden (2019) set out to explore the nascent modalities of rural security that were expected to emerge. Of note was the existence of an SMS text scheme which was pioneered by a rural NGO interested in community development, in partnership with the Irish police An Garda Síochána. The means of communication was unidirectional – alerts are sent from regional police controllers. However, this had limitations for the needs, expectations and demands of local subscribers (Bowden & Pytlarz, 2020) and was later supplemented by SMS crime alert groups setting up their own WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages (Bowden & Pytlarz, 2022).

Pytlarz and Bowden (2019) in a small-scale study in the South East of the country, sought to explore the embeddedness of crime and security in everyday life utilizing the concept of crime talk (Sasson, 1995). Discussing the experience of crime and security with people in the rural setting, gave access to observe the extent to which national level discourse about crime penetrated the local by entering into everyday conversations. A further benefit of this approach was to operationalize Levi Martin's (2011) argument that the properties of fields can be gleaned by the way in which actors position themselves in relation to objects enable to locate actors in how they position themselves in relation to objects through talk (crime, safety and security in this case), in the same what that we would expect to find discourses or food talk in respect of cuisine amongst chefs and restaurateurs.

The findings of the study revealed that local people's sense of security varied by time space – between those who had migrated or returned from outside the village, and those who had only ever lived locally. In this context, those who had memory of the city and moved to the village recently, incorporated crime and security as part of everyday life and to which they had become accustomed living in the city. Locals who were historically fixed in place had a different experience, articulating that they felt that the village was in decline (Pytlarz & Bowden, 2019). Similarly, as reported in a chapter on rural crime prevention as a form of security production, Bowden and Pytlarz (2022) noted that the nature of late modern risks generated a range of unpredictable hazards. Such a plurality of risks has spurred a pluralized form of rural security production as the public police enrolled partners to deal with specific challenges. In this context the study of this late modern transformation relied less upon the study of monolithic organizations, and more on the relational space that opened up as a result of globalized risks as experienced in rural locales.

Hence Bowden and Pytlarz (2023) argued that distinct locales were likely to have integrated into state-led rural crime prevention and local security initiatives. Using two ideal-types of 'near', a rural community closer to the globally integrated productive region in the east of the country, and 'faraway' a community more remote from the highly globalized flow systems, the latter was less integrated and were more sorrowful for the demise of community.

Reframing these two communities as ‘adaptable’ and ‘nostalgic’, Table 1 captures these features as distinct modes of integration. Of note in the left column the adaptable community sought to embrace the transformative and more fluid form of modernity by adopting technologies and more prepared to organize around its own safety and security. By contrast the nostalgic community is driven by a sense of loss and were more reticent to engage with public agencies or organize within community safety.

Table 1

Adaptations to Late Modern Security Governance (Ideal Types)

Adaptable Community	Nostalgic Community
Embraces abstract forms of ‘smart policing’	Driven by a sense of loss of old forms of solidarity
Organizes around its own safety and security	Reluctant to organize around safety and security
Adopts new technologies	Further from productive and globally integrated regions
Closer to the productive regions and centres of governances	Reluctant to engage with state and policing bodies
Adaptable to ‘riskigesellschaft’	

Source: Adapted from Bowden & Pytlarz (2022, 2023)

Hence the penetration of a more globalized late modernity appears to drive a different model of rural organization in the adaptive community where the transformation appears to have produced a type of reflexive modernization (Beck et al., 1994). Hence there was an attempt to organize around commonly experienced risks as the basis of community organization itself or a type of ‘riskigesellschaft’ (Beck, 1992). By contrast the ‘nostalgic’ community appears to remain in mourning for the loss of its mechanical solidarity for which it blames the centres of governing power, and is somewhat more resistant to adopting partnerships with abstract policing.

Castells’s (2000) point that the model of modernization that the information age brings results in distinct levels of integration and disintegration, appears to have some substantial merit when examined locally. Castells was primarily concerned with the reconfiguration of cities, but as has been discussed, global scale impacts shaping the informational economies of small countries has a transformational effect in the local, glocalizing the rural, reshaping social solidarity, generating fear of the Other, and hence reconfiguring rural safety and security. Communities in rural contexts are re-stratified into those who are fully onboard for the informational mode of development and those that are more peripheral to it; between those who embrace the space of flows and those who remain fixed to place. Theories of modernity which have been typically utilized as tools for analysing urban contexts have application in the rural especially in societies that are highly globalized. However, one might argue that the penetration of global processes is somewhat uneven, where some locales remain more peripheral to the productive regions. While these

are themes that can be witnessed as global structuring forces impacting space and place, what can be seen at a wider scale by zooming out from local context?

Case II: Rural criminology at the global scale

The second case in this article zooms out from the local and national context to the global scale. The observations here are drawn from a recent collection of chapters which examine the state of the art in rural criminology on each of the world's continents (Bowden & Meško, 2025). The anthology was composed of chapters for each continent and mobilized a global community of situated rural scholars who contributed chapters from diverse contexts ranging from Asia to Europe, the Americas, and Oceania to Antarctica. The book sought to examine questions of space and place relating to each continent. Analysis of the key themes in the final chapter applied a conceptual schema drawing broadly from Lefebvre's (1991) thesis on the production of space, framing rural space therefore in three senses: physical, representational and relational (see also Halfacree, 2006):

Table 2

Halfacree's Three-fold Schema of Rural Spatiality

Rural Space as	Conceptualisation of the Rural	How the rural is shaped
<i>Physical</i>	As distinct topographies, territories	What can be produced i.e., form of agriculture and the deployment of infrastructure which aids its integration within a territory
<i>Representational</i>	Imagery and symbolism	How the rural is reflected in culture, as either elevated or demoted in its symbolic value
<i>Relational</i>	Integration through national and regional governance	How rural space is governed by the state qua criminal justice, policing and security

Source: Halfacree (2006).

Such a framing helps to determine how local and national governance operates in rural spaces and how units of regulation and justice are shaped at these wider scales. This particularly draws from the relational fields in which rural communities are set as they are positioned in relation to the regional, national and supranational structures. This was deployed to analyse criminal justice systems including policing institutions; the nature of rural crime as distinctive or convergent patterns (small property crime in the developed north compared with livestock theft in Africa for example); and the locations and conditions of rural people in terms of how this gives rise to patterns of deviance, transgression and cultural practices. Hence the following is a summary of the key themes.

Theorising the rural as distance from or absence of formalism

Rural communities are relatively distant from centres of governing authority. Hence the penetration of formal juridical norms and systems are only partial or even non-existent. The case in point here is African countries where poor transport and communications infrastructure (Clack & Bunei, 2025) are not conducive to creating national identities or extending symbolic domination (Bourdieu, 1991) over territories. In these contexts local Indigenous leaderships that have endured or emerge, fill gaps through the organization of a bricolage of informal systems of behaviour regulation, through retribution or restoration. The outlying case here that helps this observation to be revealed, is that of Antarctica: it has no state and hence no criminal justice system, and therefore relies upon the authority of sea captains or expedition leaders to regulate deviance and provide some basic access to justice (Kaiser & White, 2025). The absence of formal justice systems thus produces informal justice in a variety of forms. In this way justice and security are produced in the absence of formality. Hence, rurality itself can be defined therefore as the absence or weakness of formalism.

Rurality, physical space and population

There are vast differences in scale of rurality in different countries and continents. In North America it is noted for example, that 81% of Canadians live in cities (Donnermeyer et al., 2025) which contrasts with Africa where the reverse is true – in Burundi for example, the rural population is 86%. This shapes how rurality is shaped in national and continental imaginaries. Remoteness and distance from surveillance brings to mind the phrase ‘out of sight and out of mind’ (White, 2022) whereby environmental harms can go undetected as they are not subject to state surveillance. Indeed the outlier case here is instructive; Antarctica has no state but it is its very remoteness that defines its rurality uniquely but also enables forms of extraction of natural resources and wildlife that can have a global environmental impact (Kaiser & White, 2025).

Rural space, relationality and colonial legacies

A major conceptual issue in rural criminology is the distinct history of colonialism especially in the Global South. Hence institutions of governance, regulation and justice have tended to follow templates set by the colonial powers. The physical division of Africa for example shaped distinct judicial systems and divided the continent into Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone. Moreover, the inheritance in Asia and in Oceania of common law systems are directly inherited from English law, which is seen as curtailing access to justice – and so too in criminal law and justice; it is the antithesis of popular and informal justice precisely because of its didactic nature, requiring the expense of professional legal fees. Moreover there is a distrust of the state, as Perez Trujillo & Ceccato (2025) noted that in South America, the authoritarian regimes capacity for state violence has been inherited from the former colonial powers. How states organize rural space too shapes development and underdevelopment that weakens the relationship of citizens to a central state and thus exposing rural people to victimization, environmental harms, exploitation and gender-based

violence. In respect of rural patriarchy, Perez Trujillo & Ceccato (2025) note that in South America some countries have lifetime prevalence rates of violence against women and often as high as 80 percent.

Southern criminology, core and periphery

Zooming out to the global scale, the disparities in narratives between the North and Global South should be underlined, without ignoring that there are core and peripheral relationships in the Northern Hemisphere, where core societies of Europe can dominate the southern, western and eastern fringes (Laffan, 2021). Similarly, a core-periphery relationship exists between the USA and Mexico. That said, the strength of history of colonialism experienced in the Global South stands in stark contrast as a unifying experience coined well by the call for a Southern Criminology to redress the hegemony of metropolitan thinking in criminological theory (Carrington et al., 2016). In this way too, rural criminology is a space for contesting the urban-normative construction of criminological knowledge.

Thematic summary

(i) Rural communities are in many instances, *physically* remote from centres of power. Informal systems of justice, policing and security emerge in these contexts.

(ii) A further implication of physical remoteness is the *relational* distance that renders it difficult for systems of regulation to penetrate from centre to periphery. Rural transgressions, involving environmental harms, violence against women and Indigenous people for example, thrive in this context.

(iii) Many countries in the Global South in particular have inherited their didactic legal systems from their former colonisers which can restrict access to justice.

(iv) Authoritarian regimes have continued with oppressive uses of power by reproducing core-peripheral arrangements as a set of internal political relationships, well after the colonising power has departed.

Space, place and flows in rural criminology

The two cases presented in this article reveal that while it is critical to explore rural contexts to build knowledge from below, it is vital to build knowledge in rural criminology at a wider or higher vantage point. These two positionalities appear to be vital in enabling us to both operationalize concepts typically reserved for analysing urban transformations, and secondly they enable us to gather fresh insights on space and place in the rural by zooming out. In this final section, the article draws out some implications for space and place theories in rural criminology.

Much of criminology has been premised upon local studies, often using space and place-based ethnographies as the basis of criminological knowledge. An assumption of these studies rests on the idea that rural place is a fixed locale. What has been demonstrated here is

the need to inform studies in rural criminology as a study of the space of flows. As Castells (2000) theorized, flows get beyond place as they represent the process which permeate and penetrate place. Indeed, flows are increasingly important in criminology focused for instance on ports as local nodes through which trade flows, as well as in large scale mega events (Whelan & Molnar, 2017) and global trade in contraband (see Amicelle et al., 2020).

Rural criminology must take account of the impact of flows and how they penetrate rural communities differently. Flows, and how they are understood, managed and maintained have been shown to be critical in understanding how rural communities integrate with a globalized economy (Zhang et al., 2022). We have witnessed in many rural contexts, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, greater home-based and rural co-working, as a phenomenon that creates new challenges in how globally connected yet rurally based workers and entrepreneurs engage with local society and economy (Bosworth et al., 2023). This creates new network morphologies and radically alters how we view the rural. These are imperative issues for rural criminology to grasp – while rural communities organize themselves around a number of foci, their collective efforts to build community upon perceived insecurities, is a clear focus for rural criminology. Hence as presented in the first of the two cases, rural insecurity stems from a flow of traffic to rural communities; communities might respond to flows differently, depending upon their proximity to or level of integration in flow-based economies.

Studying rural crime, criminal justice systems and responses to crime broadly on a global scale is an ambitious and quite partial exercise as discussed here. Such analyses are fraught with difficulties. Qi (2023) had highlighted some of these as cultural and social differences, the challenges of intersectionality and the gendered nature of both crime and victimization and variability in the quality and reliability of crime data. Based upon the global case made in this article, we need to add the dimension of temporality and the role of colonialist histories in shaping justice systems, policing and crime control, especially in the Global South. In this context, Southern Criminology is a critical rejoinder to the historical domination of mainstream criminology of the northern hemisphere (Carrington et al, 2016). In these contexts we are also called to focus on how Indigenous peoples have less access to justice and more likely to be on the receiving end of criminal justice power such as the ‘Idle No More’ movement (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014). Similar issues have been raised by those writing on the thematic of access to justice for Indigenous people such as Upton (2021) and Harkness et al. (2025). Place and space are critical in rural criminology but so too is temporality and studies of everyday political economies of rural life.

Finally, rurality is by definition a contentious concept to work with least because it is literally hard-to-reach. Quantitative measures of population and resource allocation / concentration may be insufficient and need to be supplemented by cases in local areas to have a more inclusive definition of rurality (Nelson et al., 2021). Indeed, Halfacree’s (2006) three-fold architecture of rural space goes some way towards such a comprehensive definition. This goes some way to distinguishing between rural space as having a physical form and towards one that incorporates relational and representational dimensions. Such a definition

distinguishes between rurality as a tangible *thing* and rurality as a *process*. Rural processes involving criminal justice systems, which are by their nature, concentrated in state power centres, despite regional dispersal, leaves a lot to be desired in relation to access to justice. Hence, rurality brings about innovation in creating the conditions for resorting to indigenous cultures and to informal modes of reparation and restoration. In this way, as already indicated, a definitional feature of rurality as rural process, requires us to consider that it is shaped by its distance from formalist state apparatuses of social control, legal and judicial systems.

Conclusion

This article set out to explore how rural criminology might draw from mainstream theories, typically applied to urbanized modernity. As argued, we can draw upon wider conceptualisations such as that revealing how the rural is penetrated by flows. This understanding works because of the emphasis on rurality as a spatial concept. As can be seen in the case of Ireland, research has demonstrated how rural communities are unequally integrated into high-tech, informational economies and hence their risk profiles and organizational repertoires are shaped in this context. Community organization on the basis of shared exposures to crime / victimization is observable in the case presented revealing a form of 'riskigesellschaft' as Beck (1992) conceptualized it – albeit that it should be acknowledged that community organization still has its traditional foci (ensuring local services, building local economies and so on).

Despite the utility of general theorisations of modernity to analyse rural transformations, it is insufficient to allow rural criminology to get stuck in a ping-pong game between urban and rural. As argued above, the rural on a wider level owes much to spatial organizations of the rural over time. Rurality is organized rather than disorganized – on the grounds of historical relational systems of governance, of colonial legacies, patriarchy and political economy. Rural criminology has to work with a fluid and dynamic definition of rural that conceptualizes it as that which is remote from the centrally organized criminal justice systems that we take for granted as ubiquitous and universal.

Finally, understanding the rural through future research requires a pluralistic agenda recognizing the need to work on a variety of scales: the local, the national, the regional and the global. None of this requires a zero-sum mentality as the value of local cases cannot be weighed against other scales. It remains possible to make inferences from cases at a variety of scales. But the argument has been made that localities are penetrated by flows and there is a clear agenda for rural criminology to generate cases on how these flows help to frame rural space, social relations and cultural practice.

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