

“DEFENSIBLE SPACE – Oscar Newman talks about new housing estates in Britain and America”

‘Horizon’ (BBC 2)
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“Defensible Space: Crime Prevention Through Urban Design” by Oscar Newman (The MacMillan Co.)

reviewed by W. Russell Ellis, and republished in JOURNAL OF ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION: VOLUME XXVII, NUMBER 1 (at pp11/12)

BOOK REVIEWS

WOMEN, CRIME AND CRIMINOLOGY:

A Feminist Critique

by Carol Smart – Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977

Glenys Pernu

One of the important tasks the author had in researching and writing *Women, Crime and Criminology* was to examine and challenge the existing ideological framework based on existing studies of female criminality which refer to women in terms of biological motives, domesticity, maternal instincts and submissiveness. Carol Smart presents in this refreshing, straightforward and very readable work a discussion of classical and contemporary theories of female criminality, criminal statistics, sex-specific offences, the treatment of female offenders, the relation between women, crime and mental illness and finally examines the possibility of formulating an alternative women's perspective in the area of women and crime.

Traditionally it has been argued that because statistically the numbers of female offenders have been so small and insignificant compared with male offenders, there has been little need for research or interest in the area of female criminality. Ms Smart argues, however, that where women are definable as a social ‘problem’, areas such as maternal deprivation, insanity and mental breakdown, there is no shortage of research material. Thus the impressive neglect of female criminality would seem to be directly related to the low status of female offenders as a pressing social problem. One consequence of this is that those studies which do exist tend to accept many culturally specific assumptions about the nature of women. In her own words, the author says:

“In advanced industrialised societies, there tends to be a prior assumption that women are irrational, compulsive and slightly neurotic. Criminological theories of female criminality have reflected this predominant paradigm, often using unfounded assertions about the ‘true’ nature of women as proof of their assertions and explanations of female behaviour. In turn such theories have influenced general conceptions of the female

offender and possibly the offender's perception of herself or at best the type of accounts she may offer as explanation of her behaviour. This may then serve as a reinforcement of existing a priori assumptions about the nature of female criminality" (p. 111)

For example the assumption that women are evil and malicious, while being gentle and caring at the same time is used to explain child neglect and murder on the one hand while the exploited, misled, unprotected woman can be used to explain prostitution, by traditional authors. Further because there appear to be so few female offenders they are deemed to be abnormal in both a biological and psychological sense peculiar to the female sex. For example, according to Lombroso and his successors (cf Cowie, Cowie and Slater) women who adopt typically 'masculine' forms of behaviour become labelled 'masculine', such maleness being able to be traced to a biological base. 'True' female criminals must be biologically abnormal because they are rare and not fully female. Ms Smart describes this as a myth which doubly damns female offenders because not only are they dealt with by the criminal process for their offences, they are socially condemned for being biologically abnormal. She points out that because of the apparent rarity of serious or violent offences by women, when such cases do occur, they would seem all the more shocking. She goes on to say that when a comparable crime is committed by both a man and a woman social reaction against the woman would be much more severe because different standards are applied to measure the behaviour of the different sexes. In addition the acceptance of the culturally given appearance of 'natural' female behaviour allows female delinquency to be isolated from other social institutions, excluding from analysis the agencies involved in the creation of deviancy (e.g. courts, police).

The consequence of such attitudes towards female offenders where they commit sexual offences is that girls are likely to be over-represented in police and welfare agency statistics and institutions. Ms Smart contends that in the United Kingdom (and I would maintain in Australia also) that Children's Courts reflect the double standard of morality present in the wider society. Not only is sexual behaviour by an under age or unmarried girl treated as a serious misdemeanour, certain juvenile "offences" such as being uncontrollable or in moral danger are used predominantly against females despite the fact that as many males indulge in similar behaviour if not with the approval of society, but without its approbation. The classical example of this is the power of the court to order physical examinations to girls whereas no such demeaning examinations is carried out on boys to discover whether or not they are in need of protection.

Commenting on violent offences, which, according to official statistics, have been increasingly perpetrated by females in recent years, the author suggests that the police, social workers and other agents of social control attribute deviant behaviour by women and girls as violent or 'masculine' because of apparent changes in the social and economic position of women in society, due, for example, to the influence of the Women's Movement. It could well be, however, that the behaviour of female offenders has hardly changed at all but that perceptions of their behaviour may have been greatly influenced by the belief that women are imitating the actions of men.

In a chapter called "Women, Crime and Mental Illness" the author

observes that the neglect of a serious analysis of women's participation in crime has been paralleled by considerable interest in women by psychologists, psychiatrists, etc. who have "attempted to analyse women's 'vulnerability' to mental illness. As a result crime has become seen as male deviation and mental disturbance has come to be associated with female deviation" (pp. 174-175) Such a division is arbitrary and reduces rather than clarifies our understanding.

Aware that the demystification of legal ideology does not by itself lead very far, the author suggests much more non-sexist research is needed in the area of women and crime. She concludes with the suggestion that the aim of such research should be to reveal and account for existing social practices within the legal and penal systems. She sets out specific areas such as the types of offences committed by women and girls and the form and extent of their involvement, the attitudes of women in Court and by their legal counsel, the treatment of women in prison and the structure and purpose of the criminal laws. Finally Ms Smart is aware that "*criminology must become more than the study of men and crime if it is to play any significant part in the development of an understanding of crime, law and the criminal process and play any role in the transformation of existing social practices*". (p.185)

CRIME IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA. Edited by David Biles, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 1976. 202p. \$2.25.

G.H. Boehringer

There are basically two ways of viewing crime: as a social problem to be studied more or less scientifically and dealt with mainly by appropriate governmental measures, or as a symptom of a more fundamental social problem. The former view is adhered to by Mr. Biles, who is the Assistant Director (Research) of the Australian Institute of Criminology. It is also apparently the view of the other contributors to this volume, of whom there are fifteen, mainly academics and public servants, most of whom have worked in Papua New Guinea in some capacity related to crime. The result is that the book is committed to solving a taken for granted problem. Furthermore, it is really quite superficial. Mr. Clifford, the Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology, comments on urban crime:

"It would appear to reflect more the effects of the world spread of an urban culture which the opening up of Port Moresby to an outside world has necessarily occasioned."

Taken as a whole, the book is notable for its failure to come to grips with the basic reality of life in the countries of the Third World: cast inequality in the presence of an entrenched local elite (and their expatriate allies) determined to maintain their position. The second view of crime does not start with a given problem but with that which makes the decision what shall be considered criminal: the State. Thus many acts are socially injurious, but only some are condemned and sanctioned by the law. If we look closely at the way in which the criminal law is formulated and implemented in a country such as Papua New Guinea, we find that it aids in maintaining