

liberal regulation are particularly helpful, problematising the key debates (Julie Stubbs; Robert van Krieken).

Part two, entitled 'Critical theory in action', spans the constructions of crime in relation to gender, young people, ethnicity and Aboriginality. The strengths of this collection are its examination of the political responses to constructions of crime that exploit and marginalise. Indigenous over-representation in criminal justice has been well evidenced by criminological studies. However, Harry Blagg, in his chapter considering the legacies of colonisation in Australia, challenges the relevance of critical criminology and the profound limits of its western conceptual presuppositions to Indigenous people. For example, Blagg takes issue with critical criminology's doctrinaire emphasis on countering social exclusion with inclusion, asking 'if social exclusion is the problem is assimilation the solution?'. Questioning how criminology might provide the tools for supporting Indigenous self-determination orients the political stakes in what could be critical about critical criminology. Similarly, Scott Poynting's study of the criminalisation of ethnicity also calls on scholars to challenge the alleged causal links between race and crime with greater attention to praxis. Chapters such as these ground this book away from being simply a chorus line of oppositional stances, safe in their self-designation as 'critical'.

A staggering range of substantive issues are covered in this book. The third part, under the banner of 'Broadening definitions of crime and criminology' considers state crime, hate crime, workplace violence and the marginality of refugees and torture in order to interrogate the crimes of the powerful. Human rights arguably forms part of critical criminology's normative conceptual armoury. The practical effect and utility of appeals to human rights for minority peoples is a debate which has been given little consideration by even critical criminologists, despite such debates in broader social theory. However, in his chapter on the concept of state crime, Mike Grewcock does briefly question the universality of human rights discourse in remedying structural inequalities.

The chapters in part four, 'Responses to Crime', consider policing, punishment and imprisonment. The chapters on imprisonment, charting the unaccountability of state power and prisoner resistance (Bree Carlton) and campaigns for prisoner enfranchisement in response (David Brown) are particularly compelling reading. The final part of the book, 'Future Directions in Critical Criminology' concludes by considering a number of themes, including restorative justice, rural crime, law and order and the effects of globalisation on understanding governance through crime. This book is a useful introduction to contemporary debates on the idea and political use of crime in diverse contexts. Its self-reflexive style responds not only to the most pressing questions in relation to the state of criminal justice, but to the meaning and value of critique itself.

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JAILHOUSE LAWYERS: PRISONERS DEFENDING PRISONERS v THE USA

Mumia Abu-Jamal, foreword
by Angela Y Davis, City Lights
Books, 2009, 286 pp, US\$16.95
(paperback)

In this lived account, in this history of the present, the well-known political prisoner, author and public intellectual Mumia Abu-Jamal writes about a little known and much misunderstood subject — the jailhouse lawyers in the United States. This exploration raises questions about the obvious discontinuities that exist between the black letters of the printed law and the bleak reality of state power over the most marginalised people in society (p 54). A political genealogy is traced from the Slave Codes, to the Black Codes to the Prisoner Codes in the US which have variously created an objectified and disposable class of other (p 72).

Some reject the term, but a jailhouse lawyer is a prisoner who is self taught in the law and helps his or her fellow prisoners with their legal matters for no

cost. Jailhouse lawyers teach and pass on knowledge and take general actions to force the state to respect prisoner's legal rights and to generally improve conditions and access to vital services.

Mumia Abu-Jamal provides practical examples of how jailhouse lawyers work at their best — which is the rule and not the exception — and of the few exceptional cases when they are at their worst. A political analysis unfolds around the *Prison Litigation Reform Act* (US) and its fraudulent creation of law through systematic misrepresentation of prisoner law suits as frivolous. There are parallels here for some Australian jurisdictions like NSW where a hotchpotch of ill-considered legislation has arisen to limit prisoner access to tort law justice, such that the superior courts question if the law is in fact law because it contradicts fundamental principles of the rule of law.¹

The issue of paternalism by legal/human rights and social justice non-government organisations is touched upon (pp 147–50). There are many important insights and lessons that can be learned from *Jailhouse Lawyers* for people who are seriously interested in achieving social justice for imprisoned people—rather than those who are only interested in having the feel-good title of 'human rights' in their job or organisational description.

Jailhouse Lawyers is a complete work, the text is not at all wanting for content and cogent analysis, but it left me wanting to hear more of this man's voice and also hoping that others in Australia will listen to Mumia Abu-Jamal as well. But, that's just me, one of those jailhouse lawyers who are seen by the US and Australian prison system to be no more than 'troublemakers' (p 187).²

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REFERENCES

1. *NSW v Bujdos* [2007] NSWCA 44, para 98.
2. For my being officially labelled a 'troublemaker' see Bree Carlton, *Imprisoning Resistance: Life and Death in an Australian Supermax* (Institute of Criminology Press, 2007) 155.