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BOOK REVIEW

CRIMINOLOGICAL ETHNOGRAPHY: AN INTRODUCTION. BY JAMES TREADWELL (Sage, 2019, 240pp, £29.99 pb).

The famous crime photographer Arthur Fellig, also known as Weegee, was renowned for taking photographs of New York City urban life during the 1940s and 1950s. His work was gritty, risky and dirty, yet he always documented the underbelly of a sprawling metropolis in a non-judgemental way. He portrayed the thieves, the junkies and the police in a way that was never salacious or exploitative and had a real ‘tell like it is’ approach to photo documentary. Weegee was factual and visual and downright good at showing the lay person the world that existed around them if they only cared to look. James Treadwell is a modern day literary Weegee; he straddles the urban underbelly of football hooliganism in his publication—*Bars, Drugs and Football Thugs* (Ayes and Treadwell 2012), and the more politicized, yet equally violent and ‘chizzed up’ English Defence League in his *More than Violent Whites* (Treadwell and Garland 2016), part of a collection paying homage to Geoff Pearson, the padrino of ethnography himself.

Criminological Ethnography is exactly what it says on the cool cover, albeit a scribbly and messy hipster cover that will appeal to certain students and scruffy academics alike. Like the cover, ethnography can be scruffy and disreputable, and Treadwell rightly points this out when he states: ‘from the street, to the shop, the pub, the custody suite, even the prison, there are plenty of settings where an ethnographic sentiment can shed light on human interactions and help make sense of the world’ (p. 6). As a seasoned ethnographer myself (mainly in mangy boxing gyms) I often heard the coaches and pugilists say that ‘those who feel it, know it’, when discussing the rabbit punch or total knockout. Treadwell knows it. Not just the punch, being a seasoned ethnographer and participant in combat sports himself, but also in his chapter on the positivist paradigm when he states: ‘as members of society and as individuals we learn from experience’ (p. 9). It is with this personal knowledge that ethnographers can disseminate it to others, not necessarily in photos like Weegee, but in prose, sentences and field notes, commonly advocated for in the book.

Treadwell poses some important questions too. On page 14, he asks: ‘What should be the point of criminology today?’ It had me stumped for a minute as I always saw criminology as Jock Young famously wrote: ‘[Criminology] is a subject where other disciplines meet and its very liveliness and, at its best, intellectual interest is because of its position on the busy crossroads of sociology, psychology, law and philosophy’ (Young 2003: 97). And that’s the beauty of ethnography, it can cover all these fields, and Treadwell encapsulates this point when he writes: ‘It is important to remember that criminological research does not take place in a void: human beings are at the heart of the issues and processes’ (p. 15). All too often, criminology is tied to funding grants, policy agendas or undergraduate courses; therefore, we miss its capacity for liveliness: its *joie de vivre*, its ability to cross disciplines and cause a stir. It is the punk of social science, and as

Hall (2018: 385) shrewdly wrote of qualitative research and ethnography more generally: 'students who opt for qualitative research should be aware that they are not only entering a struggle to explain crime, but also a struggle for credibility within the discipline itself'. Treadwell wishes to demystify this idea, and *Criminological Ethnography*, goes some way to doing that. The book is neither handbook nor textbook according to Treadwell and sits somewhere between the two, while simultaneously charting the trajectory of criminological ethnography.

The core features of *Criminological Ethnography* as a discipline, or a movement according to Treadwell, is its ability to not just study people but to also study their social-cultural contexts and the meanings embedded within them. In other words, it is not possible to dislocate the cultural systems that the individual resides within, and it is hard to disagree with Treadwell here. However, agency sometimes gets underplayed, and I think it is worth looking at not only the structural impediments of a particular culture but also its psychic structures and how questions of social contagion interplay with individual reasoning. Treadwell discusses this interchange of ideas between ultra-realism and psychosocial criminology throughout the book, and this debate is particularly welcome in the field.

It is also good to see the inclusion of a chapter on Feminist Ethnographies, and Treadwell is right when he suggests that men usually dominate criminology and ethnography, supported by his arguments that while there are plenty of topics that women could and should be examining ethnographically, the global and unequal patriarchal structures of topics such as sex trafficking and forced marriage are difficult to access and the victims scared to speak out. However, while I acknowledge the benefits that 'insider' status can provide, I would also argue that full participation is not tantamount to producing knowledge and, as such, I am inclined to concur with Morgan (1992: 87) when she states that: 'Qualitative research has its own brand of machismo with its image of the male sociologist bringing back news from the fringes of society, the lower depths, the mean streets'. However, as Treadwell rightly suggests, feminist ethnographers, or women researchers more generally, can be more adept at forging equal and mutually appreciative relationships, and he goes so far as to say that women ethnographers have the potential to be more reflexive and, thus, conduct fieldwork interviews in a less interrogative manner. Having said that, Treadwell laments the fact that there seems to be a dearth of 'stand-alone feminist ethnographies' (p. 63) and I wonder whether this is down to patriarchal ethics boards worried about a female ethnographer on the 'mean streets' or as Treadwell insightfully argues that historically ethnographers tended to regard crime (unless it is victimization) as largely the preserve of men (*ibid.*)?

I started this review with Weegee and his gritty visual documentation of New York City. However, I probably should have started with Tony Soprano, a fictional character that Treadwell uses as an example in his closing chapter: Emerging Perspectives and Future Challenges. He uses *The Sopranos*, as an example of how good and evil can coexist and how understanding characters and subjects is multifaceted and an intuitive skill of any ethnographer. Moreover, understanding research to be multifaceted is also a skill that sometimes gets lost in the quantitative versus qualitative debate or, as Treadwell rightly suggests, in the archaic Chicagoan School. The main crux of Treadwell's closing debate is that ethnography needs to carve itself a fresh path that takes into account the bastions of social constructionism and symbolic interactionism yet embraces the global rather than the local and the cyber rather than the streets. How we do this according

to Treadwell is by examining how crime adapts and changes within formations of power and also what these localized hierarchies say about larger social and political global changes.

Lastly, *Criminological Ethnography* encourages anyone with a notepad (and possibly ethical approval) to take its lessons out into the world, get the ‘seat of your pants dirty’ as Robert Park (in McKinney, 1966: 71) recommended. Accordingly, Treadwell closes with a call to arms, suggesting that seasoned and would be ethnographers have to challenge the ideologues that filled the social vacuum with populism in recent years and, thus, take a more Emperor’s New Clothes approach to highlighting the dog whistling politics of post-modernity. I am certainly part of that cultural revolution.

Deborah Jump
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK
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