

REVIEWS

BOOK

Disease and Crime: A history of social pathologies and the new politics of health

Edited by: Robert Peckham

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When a society is faced with a contagion, the sense of disarray, panic, and confusion stains the social fabric. Similarly, although in different terms, when crime occurs and becomes rampant, a sense of hysteria can also rupture social life. When either of these two phenomena envelops society, the insecurity it brings demands immediate action to restore equilibrium. It is thus not surprising that the ways we make sense of these events have caught the interest of academics, especially those working in the fields of history and the social sciences. Separately, the writing of the history of diseases (a theme in the field of history of medicine) as they are experienced across time and that of the history of criminality are already daunting tasks on their own, requiring one to harness perspectives from various fields. In the former, one has to contend with the challenge of bridging the fields of medicine and history to make sense of the impact of disease on the micro and macro levels. For the latter, one has to make sense of a phenomenon that brings together aspects of law, social psychology, and sociology, to name a few. The two fields, however, also have similarities. Both themes grapple with events that involve state-society relations; and both, in varying degrees, deal with discourses of how the sick and sickness, as well as the criminal and criminality, are defined and dealt with in different contexts. When carried out, the writing of such narratives could yield data that could help form theoretical perspectives that hopefully, could enrich our understanding of societies throughout history.

As disease and crime present dilemmas worthy of scholarly pursuits, what happens then when these two become conflated either in the discursive level or in both the discursive level and lived experience? This is one of the broad questions that Robert Peckham's edited compendium *Disease and Crime: A History of social pathologies and the new politics of health*, tries to unpack.

5

Disease and Crime has an introduction and eight essays with the latter organized into two parts, each with four essays, structured chronologically; the first part deals with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the second covers the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The book puts together works of scholars from the social science disciplines particularly history, sociology, and anthropology, and the humanities such as literature, to chart the “tensions, overlaps, and contradictions within and between social and biological understandings of disease and crime, tracking the discursive formation of the “diseased” criminal from the mid-nineteenth century to the rise of biocriminology and the new biology of deviance and control in the twenty-first century” (1).

In his introduction, Peckham explains that the essays “argue, on different grounds, that examining the ways in which ‘disease’ and ‘crime’ have been conflated historically can bring important new insights to the complex process whereby the ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ are co-produced” (14). This is done by exploring the “pathologization of crime” and “criminalization of disease”, taking stock of the intricacies in the entanglement of medicine and law in “tracing the shifting definitions of ‘crime’—as an act punishable under criminal law—in relation to changing biomedical understandings of ‘disease’”, and ultimately revealing the “interplay of cultural, social, and political forces in shaping categories of ‘disease’ and ‘crime’ [and how] these categories have, in turn, been used to frame biological and social events, not only to serve particular ends, but to make sense of a world transformed by modern technology” (3–4). Thus, the collection also contributes to the growing literature on the history of scientific thought in the context of modernity and how these developments affect the ways societies make sense of social phenomena.

European and East Asian (i.e., Hong Kong, China, and Japan) case studies were taken to form the context of the compendium. The authors discussed the cases utilizing a range of primary sources, such as archival documents, interviews, photographs, news reports, and literary works. These sources were obtained through the use of various methodologies and were analyzed from various perspectives to harness the methodological strength of the social sciences.

In Part I, the four essays engage the theme of the book from a generally historical perspective. In the first essay, “Hong Kong’s Floating World: Disease and Crime at the Edge of Empire”, Carol C. L. Tsang presents venereal disease in the context of colonial Hong Kong and shows how the panic of the British and their interest in protecting their troops played a part in shaping the policies on prostitution in the colony. Tsang presents a nuanced interpretation of the period, taking into consideration the interplay of colonialism, gender, race, and science. In a different context, Michael Berkowitz explored the notions of crime, disease, and race in his essay, “Morality Plays: Presentations of Criminality and Disease in Nazi Ghettos and Concentration Camps”. He shows how the genocide of the Jews, the apex of Nazi racism, was further rationalized through “Nazi

efforts to interweave, and exacerbate, by selective and cynical manipulation, accusations that Jews embodied and maliciously spread the scourges of disease and crime” (79). Chara Beccalossi’s contribution, “Sexual Deviances, Disease, and Crime in Cesare Lombroso and the ‘Italian School’ of Criminal Anthropology”, reminds us of the power of academic discourse in defining terms that affect the wider understanding of social events and realities. By tracing and interrogating the works of Lombroso in criminal anthropology, Beccalossi tackles the issue of how Lombroso’s influential works conflated disease and crime in relation to his explanations for homosexual desires and, in Lombrosian thought, their parallelism with criminality. While Beccalossi’s essay reminds us of how scientific knowledge impinges on the way we view people, Peckham’s chapter on “Pathological Properties: Scenes of Crime, Sites of Infection” alerts us on the importance of taking into consideration not just the human element but also the environment where crime and contagion occurs, particularly its history and how it affects the way “disease and crime came to be discursively co-produced and how they were understood as space-specific material entities” (74).

Part II presents an eclectic set of essays. In “The ‘Bad’ and the ‘Sick’: Medicalizing Deviance in China”, Børge Bakken explores how the state in China defines children from one-child homes, women who engage in juvenile love, and internet addicted youth as criminals and sick individuals, as he brings in discussions on state-society relations, gender dynamics, and technology into the conversation. Frédéric Keck’s essay, “Contagious Wilderness: Avian Flu and Suburban Riots in the French Media”, echoes the power of the media in shaping discourses on crime and disease. The last case study from East Asia, Paul Jobin’s “The Criminalization of Industrial Disease: Epidemiology in a Japanese Asbestos Lawsuit”, considers the view of the individuals who identified themselves as victims of state and corporate crimes in relation to toxic materials used in factories. Jobin’s essay is an important intervention that underscores the significance of analyzing the lived experience of criminality and disease, medicine and law. The last essay, Mark Seltzer’s “Crime between History and Natural History”, which analyzes literary works, takes a theoretical adventure in making a case for how “disease and crime reciprocally index each other” and how these two can be viewed as society’s self-afflicted violence.

With lucid prose and the right balance of theoretical reflection and empirical analysis, both specialists and beginners can appreciate this collection of essays. While the geographic representation of the book can be interpreted as a major limitation, it can also be viewed as an invitation to further develop the subjects that the authors in the compendium have explored. The range of sources and varied methodologies employed in the essays can open lines of inquiry for scholars to explore other geographical and temporal contexts so as to test, complement, or contest some of the conclusions expressed in the collection. Scholars working

on the history of science, technology and medicine, social and cultural history, as well as the sociology of medicine and sociology of deviance, to name a few, can benefit from this compendium.

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PAGSUSURING-SANAYSAY

Tagay! Wagi/Sawi at sampu pang libro

Hindi makasasapat ang salitang “pambihira” upang tukuyin ang paglilimbag ng 11 aklat na ito.

Sa katunayan, lumalampas ito sa pambihira sa iba’t ibang kadahilanan. Una na rito ang paglilimbag ng 11 aklat na may diin sa produksiyong pampanitikan, kritika sa midyang popular, panunuring pampelikula, at kultural na pag-aaral. Ikalawa, inilathala ang mga naturang aklat ng mga pangunahing akademikong limbagan sa Pilipinas—patunay na buhay ang paglalathala ng mga obrang nakatuon sa makataong sining. Ikatlo, ang paglilimbag sa mga naturang aklat ay nagpapahiwatig, kundi man gumigising o kumakalabit sa atin—kapwa guro, mag-aaral, mga kasama, mga manunulat, kapwa kritiko at iskolar, at mga kaibigan—ng likas nating tungkulin na lumahok sa patuloy at walang humpay na pagpupunyagi sa pagsulong at paglikha ng bagong kaalaman. Mahalagang maipahayag ito upang bigyang-diin ang halaga nito sa pakikipagtalaban ng diskurso sa antas ng publikasyon at kaalaman. At panghuli, ang mga aklat na inilimbag ay sumusuri at tumataya, sang-ayon man ang mambabasa o hindi, sa kung anong paraan maaaring siyasatin at unawain, sa anyo man ng panitikan o kritisismo, ang nadarama nating ligalig at mga panlipunang kasawian ng ating panahon.

Sa pagsusuring sanaysay na ito, nais kong linawin na ang aking mga puna at pagkilatis ay hindi naglalayong busisiin at ispesipikong himayin ang bawat isang texto na kabilang sa mga katipunan ng mga kritikal na sanaysay at malikhaing akda sa 11 aklat na ito. Sa halip, nais kong palutangin mula sa mga aklat ang mga umaangat na batayang pananaw na nagsisilbing akademikong tindig at lenteng ideyolohikal ng mga may-akda at patnugot sa kanilang pagkakaisang bigkasin ang bisa ng panitikan at kritika, partikular ang kakayahan nitong itanghal ang mga paninindigang ito sa panahong pilit pa rin tayong hinahawakan ng isang estado na hindi naman lubusang tinutugunan ang sarili nitong mandato na isulong ang kapakanan nating mamamayan.