

Gema Varona (*Dir.*)

**Alternative iconographies
and soundscapes on crime
and punishment**

**Iconografías y paisajes sonoros
alternativos sobre el delito
y el castigo**

EDITORIAL COMARES

ESTUDIOS DE DERECHO PENAL
Y CRIMINOLOGÍA

dirigidos por

Asier Uruela Mora

GEMA VARONA

Directora

ALTERNATIVE ICONOGRAPHIES
AND SOUNDSCAPES ON CRIME
AND PUNISHMENT

ICONOGRAFÍAS Y PAISAJES SONOROS
ALTERNATIVOS SOBRE EL DELITO
Y EL CASTIGO

GRANADA, 2026

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Polígono Juncaril

C/ Baza, parcela 208

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Tlf.: 958 465 382

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FOREWORD

JOHANNES FEEST¹

This is an amazing work, a collection full of wonders and discoveries. It is a book about criminal policy, even though the term is not used in any of its chapters (only in the editor's introduction and concluding summary). It takes a humanist look at crime and punishment and points at different ways to change the dominant repressive perspective. It does so mainly by talking about the potential of images, sounds, plays and poetry to win the hearts and mind of people, academic and otherwise, for alternative approaches. At the same time, it serves as a warning against the reification of alternatives. In the words of the man who adopted the term abolition from the slavery context to criminal justice: "The 'finished' alternative is 'finished' in a double sense of the word" (Thomas Mathiesen).

In one of the ensuing chapters victimology is called a "sister of criminology". This family metaphor makes me think of the many relatives of such a humanist approach, whether they are explicitly mentioned or not in the present book. Let me just briefly allude to a few of them.

¹ Johannes Feest is a (retired) professor of Criminal Law and Criminology at the University of Bremen, Germany. He received his legal education at the universities Vienna and Munich and his sociological training at the University of California, Berkeley. From 1995-1997, he was Scientific Director of the International Institute for the Sociology of Law in Oñati. He has performed empirical research on criminal justice agencies (police, judges, prisons). His publications include books and articles on the subjects mentioned, especially on prisoners' rights (he is author and editor of a commentary on the German prison law, now in its 8th edition). From 1982 to the present day, he has exchanged letters with prisoners and tried to answer their questions with respect to prison law. One of his contributions to the 'poetology' of abolition is the translation of a poem written by a German prisoner, Helmut Pammler, who is still held in *Sicherungsverwahrung*, 'If I were a nuclear powerplant', in the *Routledge International Handbook of Penal Abolition*.

There are, of course, the religious-based advocates of mercy with respect to offenders. In criminal policy, they are most explicitly represented by the Society of Friends, the Quakers. It is not by chance that they were among the first organizations advocating the reform and then the abolition of prisons. It also should be mentioned that one of their protagonists, Fay Honey Knopp, was also an early feminist and an ardent pacifist.

This leads me to feminists working for non-carceral solutions to achieve freedom and equality for women. Little known but noteworthy is here the work of the Czech-German author Gerlinda Smaus. Anti-carceral feminism as movement and academic endeavor has become most prominent in the United States (e.g. Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore).

Pacifists and the members of the anti-war movement are obvious relatives of racial or penal abolitionism. But this is rarely mentioned in the penological literature (among the few exceptions see John Braithwaite, Harold Pepinky) nor in the war-and-peace literature (see however Chiney Ryan, Andrew Fiala).

Closer to criminology are the followers of *garantismo penal*, especially in the Italian and Spanish speaking worlds. Not necessarily radical abolitionists, they fight for legal and constitutional guarantees against repression and for minimalizing the use of criminal law (see, e.g. Luigi Ferrajoli, Raul Zaffaroni).

Restorative justice is probably the best-known relative to penal humanism. It is meanwhile better organized and institutionally established than any other of its kin. But it is in danger of legitimizing “punishment of another kind” (Alicia Virani). But there is a growing movement for restorative abolitionism (Vincenzo Ruggiero, Otmar Hagemann).

And then there is “abolitionist victimology”, championed by the very editor of this volume and president of the World Society of Victimology. This signals an important and long overdue bridge-building between the concern with victims and offenders.

This brings me to Gema Varona, whom I met a long time ago, when I was teaching in the Masters program at the International Institute for the Sociology of Law. Over the years I have admired her academic brilliance and human wisdom. This book confirms why she has long become one of my favorite teachers.

INTRODUCTION

GEMA VARONA

Director of the Basque Institute of Criminology
University of the Basque Country

My imagination is a triumphal arch

(ÁLVARO DE CAMPOS)

The authors of this book do not share perspectives, methodologies, or conclusions¹. Each author is responsible for his/her own chapter, but precisely because of this diversity and sometimes radical differences, all authors offer readers the opportunity to form their own opinion to continue the debate on criminal (in)justice. Personally, as the coordinator of the book, I will always be firmly committed to non-violence and its non-justification through critical thinking and dialogue, in this case, through written words, questioning and exchanging of ideas.

Some chapters refer to the study of graphic or audio expressions with violent content. The reader will judge their meaning and what lies behind them in relation to what those expressions narrate about criminal justice. For me, coming from the Basque Country and aware of what terrorism and any kind of political violence does to people and to multiple generations, even if uncomfortable sometimes, the reading of this book is important to find alternatives to violence of any kind, particularly to violence that attracts young people. Disarming violence and its subsequent suffering, and treasuring the value of life, dignity and social justice might guide us to criticize the status quo, but also to reconstruct and rebuild trust in the institutions that represent us, as highly diverse and contradictory individuals and societies.

This book, with chapters both in English and Spanish, is the result of a combination of many continuous acts of generosity, effort, trust, academic reflection and creativity. I must thank the *Comares* publishing house, the Granada-based

¹ The contribution of the author in this book is the result of the research project PID2024-156801OB-I00 (2025-2029) "Responding to organizational and institutional victimization: a comparative analysis of action research", within the call of the Ministry of Science, Innovation, and Universities in Spain.

publisher known for its careful work in these fast-paced and productivity-driven times, where I published my doctoral thesis in early 1998, for its patience with the delivery of what was a project that was born during the pandemic.

In search of the time to finish the proposed and committed work, whose original objective was to deepen a first joint work on myths surrounding victims, offenders and public policies (Varona, Zuloaga and Francés, 2019), to investigate the images (iconography) that accompany these myths, I realised that I could only finish it with the help of some people whom I deeply admire for their academic work and, in particular, for their questioning and nuanced perspectives. Not all of the people invited were ultimately able to participate in this book, but those who did, from different continents on the planet, achieved those relevant goals of travelling together, despite many geographical, intellectual and biographical disparities. Some of them have built a complex bridge between academic and biographical essays, and all have focused on aspects that are traditionally overlooked in the field of the so-called criminal sciences.

The journey is also undertaken with students of criminal policy and people affected or interested in the complex issues of justice, governance, victimisation, criminality, security and social control. The origin of the work really stems from interaction with victims, offenders, policy makers, practitioners and young participants in our classes, visits to prisons and detention centers, seminars and talks. It also stems from mental conversations with the authors of many books and writings, and from a deep concern about how the management of crime is changing in this final quarter of the 21st century.

The final aim is contributing to public debates, in and outside University, and engage with the questioning of manipulation of truth and suffering, with its many and dynamic faces. We do this without claiming to be right, but rather sharing reasons, images and sounds in order to ultimately propose what we can do by reflecting on what has already been done and is having an impact, sometimes harmful, on the lives of people and their social organisations.

The instructions provided to the authors were, in addition to basic editing guidelines, to be inspiring for action (Olufemi, 2025), always peacefully and with basic respect for every stakeholder or human being, and to have complete freedom to address, from an initial personal experience, image or other sound formats, the integration of their professional and personal backgrounds in the field of criminal justice. There was no censure or given map, only the wish to deepen knowledge through ways of reflective and emotional looking, feeling and listening (Herrity, 2024; Herrity, Schmidt & Warr, 2024; Berger, 2015). Recalling the words of Kae Tempest: "Music is a direct arrow into another person's heart." We have tried to shoot many arrows, harmless but accurate, questioning concepts in order to align ourselves with the detected need for new ways of studying a reality that is affective,

irrational and relational², beyond traditional criminological methods (Brown, Ergül and Power, 2025; Woodward, Shortt and Khoo, 2025).

Thank you to all the authors for their critical contributions and, if so, reception of criticism on my side, and thank you to the reader for delving into this book. Thank you also to Johannes Feest for his kindness to write the Foreword. With no order to be followed, after his words, dear reader, you will find a first chapter by Sandra Walklate on liminality in victimology. The second chapter by Robert Peacock questions images and harms of western justice. This is followed by the chapter on justice as theatrical displays by Valeria Vegh Weiss. Next, we have Malena R. Maceira on victim counter-memories. Then you can read the chapter by Camilo Umaña on time and prison, followed by Aitor Jiménez's insights on some soundscapes and graphic expressions on police. Carlos Frederico Braga da Silva explores a skylight to wonder on green justice and Felicity Tepper navigates the waters of the river of justice. Our youngest scholar, Nora Pérez, reflects on the pre-trial and pre-punishment by media. Finally, the book closes with some thoughts and images on iconographies for an alternative criminal policy by Gema Varona.

Dear reader, enjoy this *divertimento*, feel, think, imagine and act together with endless curiosity, compassion and questioning.

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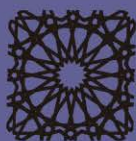
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Este libro nace del deseo de contribuir al debate público, dentro y fuera de la Universidad, interpelando críticamente la manipulación de la verdad y del sufrimiento en sus múltiples y cambiantes formas alrededor de la (in)justicia penal. Para ello, autoras y autores procedentes de los cinco continentes han sido convocados sin censura ni mapas predefinidos, con una única consigna: dejarse inspirar para la acción, desde la propia experiencia personal, la imagen o el sonido, integrando sus trayectorias vitales y profesionales en relación con el sistema penal. El resultado es una obra coral, valiente y heterogénea, que apuesta por formas de mirar, sentir y escuchar reflexivas y emocionalmente comprometidas, más allá de los métodos criminológicos tradicionales. Recordando las palabras de Kae Tempest —«la música es una flecha directa al corazón de otra persona»— quienes escriben estas páginas han lanzado sus propias flechas a corazones y mentes, flechas inofensivas pero certeras, capaces de cuestionar conceptos arraigados y proponer nuevas maneras de aproximarse a una realidad afectiva, irracional y relacional. Una lectura imprescindible para quienes creen que conocer mejor lo que existe es el primer paso para transformar lo que aún está por venir.



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editorial

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