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Editorial

Behind the question of crime lies a set of problems shared by today's societies: the socially accepted definition of order and disorder, the legitimacy of the structures and means employed to maintain order, the capacity of society to take in new groups, or what precisely people expect of the justice system. In this perspective, the study of societies whose relation to crime is very different from that of our own contemporary Western societies, such as ancient, medieval and early modern or non-European societies, fosters a reassessment of present-day relationships between crime, regulation and society.

In the 1960s, social historians "chanced upon" judicial and police archives and found in them a means of accessing voices not heard in history. They privileged the study of constants and variants in criminal behaviours. Rapidly, however, researchers came to see the very notion of "crime" as anachronistic and fuzzy, and "criminological" positivism as too narrow. Inspired by the more critical approach of sociologists specializing in deviance, other researchers shifted their attention to the agencies responsible for controlling crime and focused on the complex functions of the legal institutions and their place in societies struggling with the problem of violence. Still more recently, historians have included crime in the social history of legal developments and the processes of political domination. As a result, tracing the history of crime has become tracing the history of disorders and order, one of the essential sites in which, as far as the monopolistic control of violence is concerned, the evolution of modern society is played out.

The growing number of works on penal institutions, the justice system, penalties, policing, and crime, is thus bound up with the conjoined interest on the part of historians and legal historians in the methods of the social sciences and of sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and jurists in a diachronic approach. These reciprocal interests testify to the importance of exchange between disciplines in advancing knowledge.

In this area, the International Association for the History of Crime and Criminal Justice, under the leadership of the late and much missed Herman Diederiks, has, since 1978, played a decisive role through the international academic meetings which it has organized and the participation of its members in the specialised networks of the major learned societies.

Today this field of research has come of age, as is testified by the outpouring of critical assessments, overviews, theses and memoirs, the abundance of seminars and meetings, the creation of specialised centres and research teams.

Even so, the area of academic publication lags behind. At the crossroads of several disciplines, the history of criminal justice systems is as much a subject for history

journals as it is for those publishing in the social sciences (sociology, criminology, political science, anthropology) or in law. The virtual absence of specialised journals has led to a wide dispersal of the publications and is detrimental to the visibility of much of the work in this area.

This is why we have taken the initiative of proposing, with the support of the Fondation de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, a new biannual review, which replaces the IAHCCJ Bulletin (21 issues since 1978):

Crime, History & Societies has three goals:

- To publish original articles of quality in French and in English: monographs, overviews, assessments, articles on method or theoretical reflections; these will be reviewed by a committee of internationally respected specialists.
- To provide a forum for critical debate and dialogue.
- To present research tools: bibliographies, archive collections, databases, work in progress, etc.

We are aware that launching a new review at the present time is a gamble.

We also know that many of you have been waiting for this initiative. We hope to live up to your expectations !

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