

“We Will Leave the Lights on for You”: Political Education and the Push for a Revival of Radical Criminology From a Formerly Incarcerated Chicano Activist-Scholar

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This article addresses the development of political education and push for a return to radical criminology from a formerly incarcerated Chicano activist-scholar. I explore the biography of a formerly incarcerated Chicano as he navigates through educational institutions, from public school to the university level and, finally, at the PhD level. In the conclusion, I highlight the importance for a push in the direction of prison abolition, followed by the revival of radical criminology with my work on barrio criminology. Given my experience of both incarceration and academia, I advocate for an abolition of all prisons, abolition of the criminal [in]justice system, and an abolition of global capitalism, which are inextricably linked to one another.

Keywords: political education, radical criminology, prison abolition, barrio criminology

INTRODUCTION

It was a cold sunny day in a school in North San Diego County when I cut in front of the line of students heading into a classroom on Monday morning. Suddenly, an angry voice yelled, “Hey, no cutting in line!” Standing behind me was a small brown Chicano boy with curly hair, a black shirt, and brown shorts looking at me with angry eyes. “Fuck you!” I replied with an angry face while also putting my fists up, ready to start throwing down. The boy instantly came towards me and pushed me, something I did not expect would happen, as I was a pretty big little Chicano. Thus, the fight broke out, and we were both sent to the office. For the rest of the year, I stayed in the office on a desk located next to the office secretary. I missed recess, creative projects, and hanging out with my classmates for a whole school year. Because of this experience, the school system labeled me as a “troubled youth,” “at-risk,” and “the bad student,” a label that would follow me throughout elementary, middle, and high school educational years. I was only eight years old and had just started third grade when my first criminalization encounter by the public-school system had set me apart from other students.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS COMPLACENCY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A “CRIMINAL”

I often ask my students in the class, “how would you define a criminal?” Painstakingly, and very often, I get answers like, “people with tattoos,” “black and brown people,” “people in prisons,” and I have even heard, “people that look like you professor.” A fully tattooed bald Chicano wearing saggy Ben Davis pants,

a blue flannel long sleeve shirt, white Cortez (Nike) shoes with a black checkmark like symbol, and a San Diego blue fitted baseball cap. The typical depiction of what people describe and stereotype as a being a *cholo*¹ from the poor barrios of the United States. In the United States, the ideological depiction of a “criminal” pushes black and brown communities into the margins. These ideological depictions devalue black and brown communities into second-class citizenship statuses, which, in turn, give social institutions and society itself discretion to dehumanize and divide people into hierarchical racialized ranks. Hierarchical ranks that continue to funnel poor racialized communities into the prison system deteriorated housing complexes, and underfunded communities, while mainly upper-class and middle-class persons, mainly white but not exclusively, thrive on the exploitation of these working-class communities. For example, at *Siete-Sesenta*,² there is a depiction of immigrant and working-class communities as dangerous and violent, which leads to state-sanctioned policing, surveillance, and hyper-incarceration in this community.

As a son of immigrant parents and a self-identified Chicano from the rural areas of North San Diego County, my ideological depiction of “criminality” is against any mainstream media perspective in today’s day and age. I see life and the superstructure of capitalism through a working-class super-repressed individual coming from the streets of *Siete-Sesenta*. Living in this community, a predominately white upper-class rural community surrounded by Native-American reservations, taught me how to navigate the streets and the global savage inequalities. Racial inequality, immigrant repression, institutional racism, and continued class struggles to shape the lives and experiences of many poor Chicanx, Latinx, and immigrant communities living in *Siete-Sesenta*. These forms of oppression, in turn, lead to the funneling and surveillance of these communities into mechanisms of social control and massive repressions, like immigrant detention centers, prisons, continuation schools, and court schools, which are violations of the most basic human rights.

These state-sanctioned repressions limit people’s *life chances*³ by creating a buffer between “worthy” and “disposable” human beings. In my case, growing up in *Siete-Sesenta*, I was raised with limited, almost non-existent resources, which included a lack of capital. My working-class migrant parent’s undereducation, coupled with labeling my persona as an “at-risk” and “criminal” student, made me an easy target for the state-sanctioned repressive system of the educational institutions. So much so that police, teachers, and my respective community kept me under their radar. Labeling that followed me through high school and led to teachers pushing me into remedial classes full of my *gente* (people). *Gente* described as low-income working-class immigrant youth. The instructor in these courses showed no interest in our success and instead threw tantrums and regularly would send students to the principal’s office for the most absurd reasons. Instead of pushing us to apply ourselves so we could go into higher education, she spent her time making us watch Disney films while other times were pushing us to read Dr. Seuss’s book, famous second and third-grade reading level books. We did not study in this class as the teacher never cared; on the other hand, we spent our time *chismeando* (gossiping), doing drugs, and flirting with other *mujeres* (women) in the class, a typical teenager’s high school experience for us.

The teacher showed no interest during class and had a zero-tolerance policy for “bad behavior.” On a daily basis, students would be sent to the principal’s office for the most remote and redundant reasons. Some of these zero-tolerance policies included talking and standing up in class, playing with other students, and sleeping in class. I was one of those students sent to the office weekly. I was sent to the office so often that I started to believe that it was my homeroom classroom. Every time I walked into the office, the secretary would greet me with discontent. My experience is not unique or essential; instead, students go through these experiences daily, especially students from disadvantaged backgrounds. I say this because I began my association with students labeled “at-risk,” and I was pushed to the margins in the educational system because of this. The educational institution treated us as “gang members,” so we became “gang members.” We did not fit in; thus, we became outcasts of the system. After school, we routinely did drugs, set up boxing matches between the homies, and would drink until we passed out. Once put in this path, we all knew that we would graduate to the big house one day, meaning get locked up. We became pushouts. Through my lived experiences, I witnessed how structural inequalities in the United States educational system limit people’s life chances and push them into what some scholars call the school-to-prison pipeline (Kim, Losen and Hewitt, 2010; Heitzeg, 2016; and Morris, 2016).

Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, as an 18-year-old adult, I served time in a San Diego County jail. Two years I spent fighting my case, going in and out of jail, checking in with the probation officer, and doing random drug testing. I remember my conviction like it was yesterday. My first court date was a cold Tuesday morning in April, and a white tall, broad shoulder correctional officer came into my cell to escort me to the courtroom. The clock read six; with the handcuffs around my waist and hands, the correctional officer took me through a narrow concrete corridor that connected the jail system with the court system. I walked into the courtroom and saw a large half tinted window in front of me. The courtroom's setup was as follows. The judge bench sat at the head of the room higher than all other seats, the prosecutor to the left of the judge, and my public defender to the right. The judge walked into the courtroom and everybody stood up. As the clerk finally read my case number, I stood up and could finally see my family through the large half tinted window. The clerk read my charges to the half empty courtroom. I was facing a conviction first for one felony and three misdemeanors. I was released on my own recognizance, meaning it is my responsibility to return to court, paid no bail, and posted no bonds. I left home and had to return for a second court day. As I arrived at my second court day, two detectives were waiting outside my assigned courtroom. "Put your hand behind your back," said the big, dark-haired Latino officer. He continued, "you will not be in court today. We are adding more charges to your case. You are going away for a long time, boy." They had added three misdemeanors and a felony charge to my case bringing the total to two felonies and six misdemeanors. As I walked away with the detectives, I could see my mom crying from the corner of my eye. Since I refused to *snitch*⁴ and because of other charges that I will not specify here, I was convicted and ordered to pay restitution.

My story illustrates how the current educational system contributed to me becoming a pushout from the educational institutions in what Victor Rios (2011) calls the youth control complex. The youth control complex is a system comprised of social institutions, such as police, communities, schools, court systems, and families that surveil youth's everyday behavior. Poor youth who dare to step outside what is considered normal, standard, or approved conduct by social institutions are constantly super-criminalized and super-surveilled by the above social institutions. But the youth control complex does not adequately explain the hyper-incarceration system as it has no revolutionary praxis and no critique of capitalism, the root cause of all major forms of inequality. Like me, youth that have been pushed out are more likely to become part of the marginalized caste system known as hyper-incarceration (Wacquant, 2009; Wacquant, 2001; and Wacquant, 2010). As opposed to mass incarceration, hyper-incarceration denotes that not all-American citizens are subject to policing, surveillance, and incarceration, but rather it is the relative surplus population, usually restricted to the poor urban inner city known as *barrios*. As opposed to the youth control complex, which states that black and brown communities are more likely to marginalize, criminalize, and push out, it is the surplus populations from mainly poor communities which are subjected to hyper-incarceration (Gilmore 2007; Johnson 2017).

FROM LA PINTA⁵ TO THE IVORY TOWER

After my incarceration, I knew that education would be my only outlet for a "normal" life. Still, I had no idea how to enroll, apply for funding, yet alone how to search for programs suited for my persona. I'm a first-generation student, meaning I had no family, friends, or peers that had attended college or any form of higher education. Navigating my school environment was challenging, to say the least. To make things worse, I had a conviction, meaning I would have to report my crimes to society for the rest of my life. "Have you ever been convicted?" was a question that was always in the back of my head. Unconsciously, I already knew the odds of getting a job, applying for scholarships, and getting federal funding through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. I was lost!

Coming from a marginalized community, migrant parents that had only achieved a second-grade educational level, and a criminalized community, I never learned the essential bits of knowledge of life, like asking for help. Nobody in my circle believed I could stay out. Being a product of my environment, I began to normalize failure, incarceration, marginalization, and criminalization. The job market was no different. After applying to a bulk of job applications, many rejections, and seven months without a job,

things had become so tricky on the outs that I wanted to go back behind those walls. Determined to stay out, I kept pushing myself in the labor market. I decided to re-enroll in community college listening to the older homeboy's push for higher education during my incarceration. I graduated from community college and decided to continue my education, even though I still kicked it with the homies on the outs.

In 2010, I transferred to a four-year university in North county San Diego named California State University San Marcos (CSUSM). The university lifestyle was something new to me, and I had never heard of CSUSM, even though it was a couple of freeway exits from my community. As I stepped onto the campus, I thought I was destined to fail. I walked into my first classroom located on the Social and Behavior Science Building to start my Introduction to Justice studies class. I was very nervous! I entered the classroom and saw a full-sleeved tattooed Chicano man. I made my way to the back of the classroom, laid back, and put my feet on top of the front desk. My San Diego hat covered most of my forehead, so you could only see half my eyes. I was the first student there; punctuality was something that I taught myself inside. Students began to channel through the narrow door early at 4:55 PM, five minutes before the class's start. As everyone sat down, in the background, you could hear whispering, laughing, and the unzipping of backpacks. The tattooed Chicano sitting at the center of the class got up, walked to the front of the classroom, and wrote his name. "Q'vo, my name is Dr. Xuan Santos! I will be your instructor for the semester," he spoke with excitement behind his voice. Dr. Xuan Santos, a homeboy from Boyle Heights in Los Angeles, had become my mentor.

I didn't know what I was getting myself into when I enrolled at CSUSM. I navigated the university through what I call an underground lens. Contrary to the yard, where one walks with no fear, chest up, and proudly repping one's colors, I would navigate school through an underground lens that pushes people with convictions into the margins. A lens that narrates, "the less people know about your conviction, the better off you will be navigating the university." I wasn't scared of academics; believe me, I've been through worse shit, but was afraid of the stigmatization that comes with being labeled a "convict" or formerly incarcerated (Goffman, 1963). The stigma that Goffman (1963) defines as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" (p. i). Not being able to make it in this fucked up society that continues to thrive on poor communities. That was my biggest fear. Once a person is stigmatized, especially those who have spent time in the prison walls, society begins to question your legitimacy. This ideological stigma pushes formerly incarcerated folks into a second-class citizen status, devalued, dehumanized, and marginalized people already stuck on the margins.

Growing up in the neighborhood and after spending time incarcerated, I realized that the love for myself and my self-esteem was shallow. I was comfortable in the neighborhood. I missed my incarceration, not because I missed being behind walls, but because that's what we were taught. I laughed and was able to be myself with the *compas* (homies), without caring about what other people thought of me. I was loved in the barrio. I was accepted and taken care of in the barrio. I felt no love in the classroom or higher education. I felt judged. I felt that academics were close-minded and portrayed my community as deviant, dangerous, and violent. While students enjoyed the privileges of education, I had to go back to face the hardship of structural oppression. I had slicked-back hair, square flannel long sleeve shirt, tattoos, and side to side swagger to my walk that you only see on homies in the barrios. Shows like *Cops*, *Gangland*, and *Lockdown* told lies and uphold the ludicrous prison industrial complex system (Davis, 1995; Davis, 2003; and Davis, 1998). In concurrence, the prison industrial complex refers to how government and corporations work together to police, cage, and surveil marginalized poor communities. The prison industrial complex maintains itself through ideological media images that depict disenfranchised communities as subhuman, delinquent, and violent. People that watch shows, news, and media that badly depict my community are only perpetuating a system that pushes members from my neighborhood into the prison system. Harsher sentences, stiffer laws, and the militarization of policing remove mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, aunts, uncles, and loved ones from society. Prison is not the solution for social, economic, and political problems.

I swore to my community that I would end this system of incarceration if I obtained my degree. I also noticed that I wasn't alone in this struggle. As I navigated further into my education, I met people with similar adversities. I received help from various influential people. I give credit for my educational success to my family, folks that helped me after my incarceration, and my mentors like Dr. Xuan Santos, Dr.

Christopher Bickel, Martin Leyva, and Dr. William Robinson. To them, I give thanks. Through their acceptance, I shared my life experiences, trauma and empowered others to push for systemic change. Instead of dehumanizing me, my mentors understood the policing, criminalization, and marginalization that continues to happen in my daily life. Even as I write this article, I have been stopped and searched in a town called Escondido. But I always win. Education gave me the tools to fight back. I know my rights. I school them in sociological theory, in laws, and life. One, two, three and no matter how many different pigs pull me over, I can now win thanks to my education. They don't intimidate me, they never have, so I laugh as I drive away.

Despite the continued harassment from police, I graduated in 2014 with a bachelor's degree in Psychology, and in 2016 I obtained my master's degree in Sociological Practice from California State University San Marcos. I now live in my community and continue to see the injustices through newly educated eyes. I think to myself, "Damn, this system is fucked up! How in the hell did I survive this shit?" What I once considered normal, I now saw as an injustice. Youngsters pushed out of school into continuation school, drug addiction, state-sanctioned violence, and criminalization continue to be a reality in my community. Navigating higher education was a challenge, but that doesn't compare to post-secondary education. It is a different monster.

REJECTION IN THE IVORY TOWER

I walked into the classroom and took a seat near the front of the class. The classroom was small. Inside the room stood about 20 chairs surrounding four large eight-foot desks and three whiteboards surround three-fourths of the classroom walls. I was the first student to arrive and was very nervous. As more and more students trickled in, my stomach started to turn. "I don't belong here," I thought, "I should be with my community and family back home." Finally, two minutes to five o'clock marked the clock, and the professor walked in. "Hello, my name is Professor Robinson," he stated. He was a skinny medium size man with slicked-back hair. He came in and sat at the head of the class, right next to where I was sitting. "Oh shit!!," I thought, "I picked the wrong seat." But calmly he pulled out a stack of papers from his briefcase bag and spread them throughout the desk. Little did I know that I had found the mentor that would help me survive graduate school.

Here in this class I became was is called politicized. I was first introduced to political education. Me enrolling in this class, SOC 233R Sociological Theory & Revolutions, was the best decision I had made and became the turning point in my young adult life. In this class is where my political education and radicalizing of my mind began. I was introduced to classical political economists. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon, Mao, José Carlos Mariátegui, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Huey P. Newton, the Zapatistas, and the Black Panther Party all 19th and 20th century revolutionaries. All of these thinkers profoundly critiqued the capitalist and political-economic systems. Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, Hegemony, Intercommunalism, and the study of imperialism and colonialism were political ideologies developed by these revolutionary thinkers. I studied nothing but the political economy, militarization, and resistance. My main focus was on the political economy's production processes and its relations to laws, policies, and governance. I also began to study the distribution of wealth and power, which in turn is super-polarized between the proletariat and bourgeoisie. In addition to engulfing myself in the study of political economy, I also learned about the 18th, 19th, and 20th-century revolutions worldwide. Revolutions that were mainly led by the worker's struggle against the monster that is capitalism.

At first, I didn't know what I was getting myself into when I enrolled in this class. I remember reading books, like *Capital* by Karl Marx, *State and Revolution* by Vladimir I. Lenin, and chapters from *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon that taught me the relation between capitalism and revolution, private property and crime, race and class, and the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The books were dense with new terminology I had never seen. I was about to give up and drop out of graduate school. Then came the *Communist Manifesto*, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, first published in 1848. The *Communist Manifesto* is one of the most influential readings in the last century, history's most important political document, and was a guide to many revolutionaries worldwide. It argues that class struggle, or the

exploitation of one class by another, is the driving force behind all historical developments (Marx and Engels, 1848). The book changed my perspective on life. After reading the *Communist Manifesto*, I began to fall in love with political education and revolution. I would meet with Professor Robinson every Tuesday and Wednesday to discuss theory, praxis, and critique assigned readings on intersectionality, critical race theory, multiculturalism, diversity and other dominant frameworks in academia that lack praxis. From Professor Robinson, I obtained my composition reading list, which had over 100 books and articles based on the political economy and radical criminology. My life was finally starting to make sense.

Politicizing oneself does not come with praises and glorification. On the contrary, I became an outcast. I became an outsider, to use Howard Becker's terminology, in the ivory tower. "When a rule is enforced, the person who is supposed to have broken it may be seen as a special kind of person, one who cannot be trusted to live by the rules agreed on by the group. He is regarded as an outsider," according to Becker (1963, p.1). Yes, that was me. The student that didn't abide by the rules of academia. I was not complacent with working on my degree, graduating, and then becoming part of the status quo. I wanted to abolish the system that, for many years, has complacency in leaving critical thinkers from my community out of higher education. No one in the department talked to me. I do not know if it was my political education or how I dressed, but I was alone in the department, aside from three or four friends.

I used terminology like capitalism, anti-capitalism, and Marxism, and all of a sudden, I had a target on my back. I was labeled "class centrist," "anti-black," and "anti-reformist." The labels that resembled my childhood labels came back to haunt me in the ivory tower. Revolutionaries, people that want systemic change are not welcomed in the ivory tower, that's a fact. I guess it's understandable, as INCITE's (2007) book *The Revolution Will not be Funded* outlines how students doing critical, radical, and revolutionary systemic change research hardly gets any funding. The majority of social justice organizations' primary purpose is to cripple political goals to satisfy government and foundation mandates through reform. Reform is not an option. Reform will only continue to perpetuate the system of inequalities. The only solution is a revolution. A drastic change to the system of capitalism.

CONCLUSION: THERE IS NO RETURN TO NORMALCY

"Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are already dying who could be saved, that generations more will die or live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act. Do what must be done, discover your humanity and your love in revolution. Pass on the torch. Join us, give up your life for the people. (p. xviii).

George L. Jackson (1990), *Blood in my Eye*

Before reading the conclusion, I want to argue that class should never exist independently and isolated from race, gender, and other social identities. Each social identity should be seen in relation to a larger totality. In essence, each should be seen as being part of the larger social structure of capitalist relations. My intention is not to dismiss race, racism, diversity, intersectionality, or multiculturalism, all these contemporary and dominant frameworks in academia; rather, it is a mere critique of these mainstream frameworks that many academics share, including Darder and Torres (2004), William Robinson (2017), Barbara Foley (2018), and others which do not get to the root of the problem. I argue that only an analysis that weaves anti-capitalism together with feminism, racial justice, decolonization, and queer/trans liberation, to name a few, will lay the foundation for truly revolutionary praxis and systemic change we desperately need. Thus, the importance of political education, radical criminology, and barrio criminology. I argue these frameworks push for social and systemic change within academia but also involve the *barrio* – the most exploitative zones in the globe. Let us first begin by explaining radical criminology.

Radical criminology rose in popularity in the 1960s but appears to have fallen out of favor in academia, specifically in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The dismantling of social programs and the growing dominance of the right-wing agenda in the US political system has been made possible, at least in part, by the successful repression of the civil rights movements, the liberation movements, and the disappearance

of the left-wing political party since the 1960s and on. Since then, working-class communities have been stripped from and robbed of radical political discourse and leadership. This lack of political discourse has spread to academia. Since the 1970s, much of the progressive, liberal, and academic literature on subordinate cultures have utilized the constructs of “race,” “racism,” “diversity,” “intersectionality,” and “multiculturalism” as central frameworks for analyzing and interpreting the social conditions of inequality, marginalization, and criminalization. Although these concepts usefully describe the effects of multiple oppressions, they do not offer an adequate explanatory framework for addressing the root causes of social inequality in the current capitalist social, economic system. Not only do racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, religious bigotry, and economic disadvantages wreak havoc on the lives of many people, but any two or more of these types of oppression can be experienced simultaneously in the lives of given individuals or demographic sectors. Unfortunately, the massive emphasis on these constructs, with no real critique of capitalism backed by political education, has unleashed a burst of liberal and conservative movements that, consciously or unconsciously, crippled the socialist project of human emancipation in the United States and across the world. In turn, radical organizations almost disappeared overnight. I am not saying that race and gender are to blame for the cooptation of corporate and conservative parties; rather, radical thinkers and socialist thinkers like Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Angela Davis, the Black Panther Party, and the Marxian thinkers are often marginalized. At the same time, it constitutes only a few of the figures in academia. My story highlights this as being true. In the midst of all this, neoliberal efforts to seize greater domination over international markets escalated. Globalization became central to the US economic system of imperialism at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

Hence, the importance of the revitalization of radical criminology. Instead of asking how we deal with racism, sexism, xenophobia, and misogyny, radical criminologist and, to a more extent, abolitionists ask how do we resolve the problem of inequalities, how do we abolish the capitalist state, and how do we end property relations. The radical criminological framework emerged in the 1960s, amid the black and Chicano liberation struggles, to eclipse moderate and conservative criminological frameworks at the individual behavioral-level (the positivist paradigm) and interaction-based behavioral (interactionist criminology) explanations of crime. The main framework of radical criminology argues that crime is a sociologically situated phenomenon. It argues that crime patterns, deviance, laws, and punishment in a society reflect its social structural characteristics. Since the 1970s, this social structural characteristic is global capitalism, as every country in the world has been integrated into a single production market. Thus, to understand the social structures related to crime, deviance, and poor communities, radical criminologists seek to identify and critique forms of domination, exploitation, inequality, and class conflict characteristic that can be found in the capitalist political economies. Further, radical criminology shows how capitalistic societies precipitate and define crime through the owners' eyes of the means of production, the tools of production, and private property. In addition, radical criminologists argue that owners use their power to enact laws to control and repress the working classes to maintain the hegemonic ideologies. In other words, it is centered on the political economy, political education, and abolition of the current capitalistic conditions. It is to this political education and abolition that we must return to now, as we are on the verge of a catastrophic economic crisis and environmental holocaust.

To start abolishing social inequality conditions, at the local and micro level, a new school of thought is under development by radical formerly incarcerated criminologists called *barrio criminology*.⁶ *Barrio criminology* is a new school of thought that forms part of radical criminology. *Barrio criminology* challenges contemporary criminology and the New School of Convict Criminology by addressing the historical factors that contribute to the continued criminalization of poor people in the *barrios*. Rather than thinking about criminalization, policing, and marginalization as different and separate processes (i.e., prison, reentry, gangs, immigration), it is essential to examine the historical factors that contribute to the intergenerational legacy and structural conditions that lead to criminalization, policing and marginalization zones known as *barrios*. *Barrio Criminology* challenges the mainstream frameworks for explaining the dynamics of *barrio* culture. We see the *barrio* as a liberating space and as the central zone in fighting back against capitalism. With that said, *barrios* are spaces of conflict and survival but are also spaces of resistance, community building, and restorative and social justice, and are the epicenter geographical spaces

against global capitalism. Through personal narratives from the poor people in these communities, *barrio* criminology challenges criminology's dominant paradigm predominantly by white and honorary white middle-class scholars. *Barrio* criminologists challenge the notion of “we came, we conquered, and we prevailed” as a methodology, but instead rather introduce a new method that incorporates that positionality from poor people from these *barrios*, through the mantras like “from the *barrio*, for the *barrio*, with the *barrio*.” In addition, *barrio* criminology incorporates micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis to show the interconnection between the individual, institution, and superstructure, the criminal justice system. *Barrio* criminology challenges the very epistemological framework of mainstream criminology through this critical new approach.

In this essay, I have shared a snippet of my life. This autoethnography summarizes my personal struggle within the educational system, from elementary to the Ph.D. We must center political economy, revitalize radical criminology, and further develop *barrio* criminology if we are to save humanity. The first pushback against global capitalism is underway in the world's most powerful country. It is essential to politicize these masses if we stand to have a chance against capitalism.

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ENDNOTES

1. A stereotypical name given to Chicax, Latinx, and other people that describes their gang aesthetics, from baggy clothes and flannel shirts to dickies, Ben Davis, and Nike Cotez Shoes.
2. I will use pseudonyms throughout the paper to protect the identity of the participants, places and institutions.
3. The distribution of life chances is a term coined by Max Weber, which means the opportunities each individual has to improve their quality of life. It is a probabilistic concept, describing how likely it is, given certain factors, that an individual's life will turn out a certain way. According to this theory, life chances are positively correlated with one's class status. These include housing, education, employment, incarceration, and health care, to say a few.
4. Snitching, in street politics, is the act of giving information to law enforcement or any authoritative figure. Snitching is a violation of street politics and will bring repercussions to that individual.
5. Chicano lexicon words that means prison or jail
6. School of thought developed and created by Dr. Xuan Santos, Juan Martin Leyva, Dr. Christopher Bickel, and Oscar Fabian Soto. A group of activist-scholars fed up with the small representation of radical, critical, and prison abolitionism in higher education. This school of thought believes in the abolition movement from below, from the most disenfranchised communities, seeing that poor communities are the most impacted by the prison system, policing, gentrification, and global capitalist system.

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