

Silvano Montaldo, *Donne delinquenti. Il genere e la nascita della criminologia*. Roma: Carocci, 2019. 356 pp. 32€. ISBN: 9788843098279.

The gender gap in prisons and criminal statistics is (still) today a topic that torments criminological studies. What factors – social, cultural, psychological, biological – are behind the clear prevalence of men in the imprisoned population and among those who commit crimes? At the present time, scholars are finally and appropriately oriented to questioning the importance that masculinity has in this question. As suggested by Miller in his book *Doing crime as doing gender?* “for many men, crime serves as a ‘resource’ for doing gender” or, in other words, different crimes are useful for demonstrating the observance to models of masculinity. However, this has not been the case for a long time. Silvano Montaldo’s book sheds light on the historical circumstance in which gender issues gained the attention of nascent criminology and shows how this new discipline was conditioned at its origins by a strong prejudice against women. Montaldo puts Cesare Lombroso at the core of his analysis, at the same time writing a history of the justice reform movement in the last two centuries.

The volume starts with the first decades of the nineteenth century, when the term “criminology” had not even been invented, and Lombroso was not yet born. However, these were also the decades when an important process of reform of the prison system was underway, in Europe as well as in the United States, when attention began to be paid to the criminal issue, and women started to also be taken into consideration as a specific subject. At a basic level, these are the decades in which reports and inspections carried out in prisons denounced the sexual abuse suffered by women in a prison regime that was still too promiscuous, and where the surveillance staff was almost entirely male dominated. This situation changed around the 1820s, when new laws established, in Europe and the United States, the separation of prisoners according to sex, the use of female personnel for the surveillance of women, as well as gender-differentiated disciplinary policies.

In these decades, social statistics took hold in Belgium and France, with Adolphe Quetelet and André-Michel Guerry: statistics officially documented the imbalance between imprisoned men and women, as well as in the number of the people convicted by criminal courts; they also identified specific crimes as connected to one or the other sex, and began to provide material to study the causes of crimes. It is significant that in this phase the most influential scientists identified the cause of women’s lower inclination to commit crimes in their greater moral sense (linked to their maternal function). In this theoretical framework, the patriarchal order of families, which led women back to

obey and to be sheltered from social competition, represented a further crime deterrent.

Towards the middle of the century, however, the paradigm of women's moral superiority declined. With the spread of organicism, the theory of degeneration, the hygiene social movement especially with the massive circulation of social investigations on slums and prisons, a different representation of criminal women came into being. Women, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, began to be considered as particularly immoral and extraordinarily cruel, insensitive beings, affected by psychic anomalies (for example, by a weak sense of modesty) that conditioned their social behavior and crimes. Some sociologists, such as Henry Mayhew, developed the theory according to which prostitutes were the equivalent of thieves, a theory which also held that the two sexes, in essence, participated equally in the criminal world, albeit with different practices. Montaldo places the work of Cesare Lombroso in this context, but even more he shows us other intellectual and so-far neglected debts of Lombroso (Paolo Marzolo, Alfred Maury, but also other scholars of the German area).

Montaldo values the international dimension of the circulation of ideas and highlights the attention that criminology devoted to the ways in which men and women committed crimes. He reconstructs, in particular, how the issue was already addressed by Lombroso in *L'uomo delinquente* in 1876 when, inspired by Quetelet and Maury, but then twisting their convictions, the scientist argued that men and women participated equally in the criminal world if one took into consideration not only the crimes sanctioned by specific codes, but also *de facto* criminal behavior, such as prostitution. Prostitution, therefore, was for Lombroso the main manifestation of the criminal nature of a large group of women, who resorted to it because they were morally inferior and subject to the re-emergence of atavistic forms. Lombroso's book, as it is well known, was received in a contradictory way, and his theory of atavism aroused more than a few criticisms. Precisely the explanation of the gender difference in crime seems to have been one of the main grounds of contention. In order to defend his theoretical framework, therefore, Lombroso decided to dedicate a specific work to female crime, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale* (with his son-in-law Guglielmo Ferrero). The volume came out in 1893. Montaldo meticulously follows its elaboration and drafting, and gives us back the strong misogynist spirit of the two. In the last chapter, finally, we look at the fortune that Lombroso's book had in different countries: for Montaldo, the hostility that welcomed it in France and England is the evidence of how, at the turn of the new century, the scientific community considered Lombroso's theories as being over.

To conclude, Montaldo's book explores the history of Western criminology in the long term, paying attention to the circulation of ideas. It evokes the role that Lombroso and his theories played in this process and how, over the decades, the controversies triggered by his writings have generated a continuous stimulus towards new theories and new clarifications. Above all, and this is the aspect that deserves particular attention, Montaldo's volume brilliantly shows the central role that the gender issue has played throughout the history of criminology. The extent and the different ways in which men and women commit crime has been the spur of the discipline since its inception. Also, the explanations given to this phenomenon have constituted the terrain of crisis for Lombroso's criminal anthropology. The 'born prostitute' had served Lombroso to save the framework of his theories, since the lower participation of women (alleged inferior beings) in crimes belied the hypothesis of atavism (p. 160). It is no coincidence that Lombroso aimed to defend himself on the issue of female delinquency, that was, at the same time, the one targeted by his detractors. But there is another element that emerges from Montaldo's book. There is a presence, in the background, and behind the words, of scholars who, while not embracing egalitarian ideas, are at least uncomfortable with respect to the misogyny of Lombroso and Ferrero. It is the presence of the emancipation movement and of the so-called early feminism. The fear of the reactions of women who began to increasingly read scientific magazines, who participated in intellectual life and expressed opinions publicly have a non-secondary role in this story: Lombroso's star and his theories on the inferiority of women began their decline at the turn of the twentieth century.

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