Mapping and Measuring Public narratives of Crime and Criminal Justice: Developing public narratives as an empirical concept

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This paper sets out to test a conceptual map of public narratives in order to proceed to developing the concept into one that can be measured empirically across time and space. Narrative 'ologies' have grown in importance over recent years and they have provided interesting perspectives on various aspects of social life, including crime, criminal justice, and punishment. Narrative Criminology is a good example of this particular trend. Narrative work has focused on individual narratives and what these tell us about motivations for criminal behavior; desistance from criminal behavior; experiences of punishment, etc. This type of narrative criminology has been kept fairly separate from concerns of cultural criminology and I would argue that these two ways of seeing and experiencing crime and punishment should be better connected. How do you reconcile Scandinavian noir crime fiction with the notion of Scandinavian confidence in rehabilitation, normalization in punishment, etc.? The vehicle for such connections may be the concept of *public narratives*.

Public narratives then are framed as a public's shared understanding of a phenomenon (Peelo 2005, 21) expressed through a shared set of stories used to communicate. This is rather vague. A conceptual map could include: collective memory; parliamentary and political discourses; media discourses; public opinion; individual discourses; we can move towards an empirical concept of public narratives which may be open to measurement and comparison.

The paper will explain the conceptual map using some examples and would welcome feedback on its viability and validity. The attempt at mapping aspects of public narratives may allow us to develop a more dynamic understanding of how crime, criminal justice, and punishment is constructed in specific social contexts and environments.