

# ASSOCIATE EDITOR'S COMMENTS

## Criminology in Africa

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**T**hese comments are an attempt to examine the state of Criminology in Africa. The primary focus will be on the factors which have tended to impede the development of the field and how this relates to the contemporary situation of criminology in Africa.

Criminology—the science of crime—is poorly established in African countries and criminological research has received scant attention. Consequently, research findings on crime and criminality are not widely disseminated; access to relevant international journals regarding criminology in Africa is rare. The United Nations and Interpol periodically sponsor criminological research of interest to African countries. In addition, these organizations sponsor international conferences in criminology attended by officials of African member countries. For example, delegates from various African countries attended the African Regional Preparatory Meeting of Experts on Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders in Toronto, Canada in 1975. The meeting was sponsored by the United Nations Congress on Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders.

Available information indicates that criminology is of recent origin in Africa. Criminology as an academic subject was introduced in Ghana during 1952 as an undergraduate curriculum in Sociology (Nortey, 1983: 281). Similarly, it was offered as a course at the Department of Sociology and the University of Ibadan, Nigeria during the 1969-1970 academic school year (Kayode, 1983:487).

The National Institute of Criminology of Egypt was founded in 1955 as the National Centre for Social and Criminological Research in accordance with Act 632 which was modified under Act 221 of 1959 (Ewies, 1983:188). The Institute of Criminology of Abidjan—the first in West Africa—was created in December, 1969 by a decree of the Ministry of National Education, Ivory Coast. The idea to establish an institute at the University of Abidjan—whose influence would extend to the French speaking countries south of the Sahara and in Madagascar—was first mooted by participants at the XVIth International Course in Criminology which was held in Abidjan in 1966 (First West African Conference, 1972:2-3).

From its inception, the Institute of Criminology of Abidjan had the following objectives: to train university graduates of the Ivory Coast and other countries in French-speaking Africa; to serve as a centre of Criminological

research; and to serve as a professional training and interaction ground for practitioners in all sectors of social defence (First West African Conference, 1972:2-3).

The first Institute of Criminology in South Africa was approved by the Senate and Council of the Union of South Africa in September, 1975. This Institute commenced operation in 1976 (Westhuizen, 1983:542; 546). Similarly, the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cape Town opened during 1977. The Terrorism Research Centre—an autonomous body that researches all forms of national and international terrorism—has existed informally since January 1973 and formally since May 1978 (Westhuizen, 1983:542; 546).

On December 19, 1988, Nigeria became the third country (after Uganda and Guinea) to sign the statute of the African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders. The Institute will become fully operational as a legal entity after ten African states sign the statute. The institute, now head-quartered in Kampala, Uganda, will assist member states in developing relevant policies and strategies for crime prevention (Nigeria Signs Law, 1988:5).

The fact that criminology is not well-developed in Africa is clearly apparent in the United Nations Social Defence Research Institute's *A World Directory of Criminological Institutes* (United Nations, 1982). Of the 404 Criminological institutes in 60 countries in 1982, information was given for only twelve institutes in Africa (Egypt: 2, Morocco: 1, South Africa: 3, Tunisia: 1, Uganda: 4, and Zaire: 1). Conversely, twelve criminological institutes were listed for Argentina, 5 for Australia, Belgium: 10, Canada: 16, Columbia: 10, France: 32, Federal Republic of Germany: 21, India: 9, Italy: 12, Japan: 7, The Netherlands: 7, Spain: 10, Switzerland: 6, United Kingdom: 16, and the United States: 111. Other non-African countries were listed as having criminological institutes of varying numbers (United Nations, 1982).

There are many reasons for this less than impressive development of African criminology. For one thing, the study of crime in Africa is conceived but still unborn—according to Clifford. He has suggested that “this is largely because the related social sciences are themselves underdeveloped in Africa because some of the centres of higher education have only recently been established.” Clifford has argued that crime has only rarely been studied, attention having been given to the development of the basic social sciences, and to providing the emerging territories with the teachers, doctors, lawyers and other professional men which they need (Clifford, 1974:13).

Secondly, lack of advancement of criminology is due, in part, to being preoccupied with a number of other problems which seem more important to the newly independent countries. Moreover, Africa lacks much of the data from the other social sciences which it needs for the development of its social defence. Consequently, although most countries in Africa have a growing problem of crime it forms only a part of several more general economic and social issues which demand urgent attention (Clifford, 1963:17). In commenting on this aspect, Brillion wrote:

“In developing countries, too many economic and social priorities seem to be sharing the meagre budgets for much attention to be given to the crime situation.... The politicians know very well that an “empty stomach has ears” and that it is more practical politically to try to raise the people’s standard of living and thus establish their authority more securely. Their crime policy is to act at once, extremely rigorously and visibly, in the hope that punishment will serve as an example and discourage would be offenders” (Brillon, Undated: 202-203; 208).

Thirdly, criminological research in Africa has not reached the stage of academic acceptance. Although criminology as a distinct discipline has been introduced in a few universities at the undergraduate and post graduate levels, its development continues to be halting and uncoordinated and has not yet incorporated inputs from other disciplines. Barring a few isolated efforts of individual scholars, research has remained fragmented and generally aligned.

Although interest in the study of crime is a recent phenomenon in Africa, there is lacking the required trained manpower and training facilities. For example, most of the training facilities currently available to African countries are located outside the continent—in the United States and Western Europe. In commenting on this, Kayode wrote:

“Much of what passes for criminology in African countries is very European in origin—and in the case of Nigeria it is in fact, understandably, British; interest in the substantive areas of the study of crime in all its ramifications is a very recent phenomenon in Nigeria. Most studies of crime have originated from the legal orientations. This one can explain away with our British connections: it is also probable that it is a result of the influence of law schools which, generally speaking, preceded social sciences, especially sociology, in Nigerian universities (Kayode, 1978:243).”

Furthermore, pioneer researchers in African criminology have been Europeans rather than Africans. Indeed, the few African experts in pure criminology (as opposed to Sociology, Deviance, Anthropology, Law and Psychiatry) received their training, mostly in the United States and in Britain. Some of these African criminologists, especially those trained in the United States, have begun to make some significant contributions to the growing literature of African criminology (Kayiira, 1978; Wasikhongo, 1976; Opolot, 1981; Mushanga; 1974 and Igbinoia, 1984).

The influence of Euro-American criminologists on their African counterparts has been the subject of scathing criticisms in recent years. French-Canadian criminologist, Brillon believes that dependence on imported criminological ideas makes the African criminologist “ill-equipped to analyze deviance and criminal behaviour in African states.” Brillon argues that the African criminologist does not only “limit his study to the modern systems of criminal justice” with which he is familiar, he also confines research to the urban areas where the “true criminal behaviour” or “crime that most resembles that of the industrialized nations” are concentrated. Brillon has concluded that due to training the African criminologist is more inclined to adopt a “macrosociological” rather than a “microsociological” approach to crime. The net result is that the African

criminologist “generalizes the observations and ignores the specific characteristics of tribal groups” (Brillon, Undated: xx1). Similar comments have been made by Midgley:

“The developing countries have, with few exceptions not encouraged extensive criminological research although academic departments and institutes of criminology have gradually been established throughout the Third World. In these countries criminology have relied extensively on the availability of Western ideas and remarkably little research of a really indigenous character has been undertaken” (Midgley, 1977:72).

These criticisms are valid to the extent that they call attention to the need for African criminologists to be innovative and to acquire a new orientation for the study of crime in Africa. Beyond that however the criticisms are disconcerting because of their possible implications for African criminology.

Although critics of African criminologists are unanimous in deploring the absence of African criminological research of an indigenous character—whatever that means—they have themselves not fared better than those they criticize for not evolving a non-western criminology. For example, the works of Brillon in the Ivory Coast and those of Midgley in South Africa are heavily laced with conceptual, analytical and explanatory framework borrowed from Euro-American writers (Brillon, Undated, 1973, 1974, 1980; Midgley, 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977). Indeed, it has largely been talk, with none of these critics showing the way or telling us how to accomplish what they preach.

Although their criticisms address critical issues, the influence of western criminologists and their ideas have had positive effects on the growth and development of African criminology. As stated earlier, significant contributions are now being made by Western trained criminologists to the growing literature of African crime and criminality. Furthermore, Western criminological ideas provide, perhaps, the springboard or foundation on which an indigenous African criminology can take off. They provide moreover supplementary resource materials for embarking on research of interest to Africa and the world. Note must be made in this regard that crime is a universal phenomenon rather than a particularistic African problem. The reality of the crime situation today is that current national approaches to the problem are relatively ineffective (Miracle, 1981:2). Consequently, if African criminology is not to stagnate and if African criminologists are to make some meaningful contributions towards the alleviation of the crime problem in the continent and the world at large, they cannot afford to rely solely on imported ideas. By the same token, they cannot afford to be islands unto themselves.

A solution to the dilemma is to strike a balance between the need to rely on western criminological ideas and the need to innovate. There is no single rule how to achieve a balance. The starting point, however, must be to take each seriously: by acknowledging the legitimacy and validity of both values. Indeed, criminology, particularly comparative criminology, holds the promise for increasing the capacity of nations to deal with crimes by reviewing the effective, the innovative, and the economical programmes carried out in various countries. Consequently, it must encourage the exchange of scientific findings and

the cross-fertilization of ideas and theoretical views. Barring that, the effort to achieve our most high-minded purposes may lead us not to Utopia but to Byzantium.

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