What is criminology for?

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5th August 2011

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Overview

• What is criminology for?
  – What is criminology?

• South African criminology
  – History and traditions
  – Survey
    • An outsider looking in

• Aetiological crisis?
  – Nature and origins
  – What could be done
What is criminology for?

Political allegiances: what is criminology for?
To study the criminal question is different from studying crime. It means that crime is not considered independently from the procedures by which it is defined, the instruments employed in its administration and control and the politics and debates around criminal justice and public order.

Tamar Pitch 1995, quoted in Loader and Sparks 2011: 5
Criminology

Criminology, in its broadest sense, consists of our organized ways of thinking and talking about crime, criminals and crime control.

Garland and Sparks 2000: 192

Three worlds

- Academy
  - Social science and scholarly discourse
  - ‘Best-elaborated and most scientific’
- Government
  - Crime control and criminal justice
- Culture
  - Mass mediated popular culture and political discourse
Criminology

Criminology is not a discipline

• No distinct theoretical object or methods of inquiry
• Addresses a pre-given object – crime and criminals – derived from a non-scientific practice – the process of criminalization

Criminology is eclectic

• Promiscuous borrowing from other disciplines
• A low epistemological barrier

Criminology is contested

• Experimental science, policy prescription or public discourse?
• Discipline, sub-field or pathway?

Criminology is governmental

• ‘Criminology’s basic organizing principle is the empirical study of crime and its control – which is to say, the study of a legally-defined entity and a state-directed practice.’

Garland 2011: 300-3
Democratic under-labouring

[W]e can best give coherence to criminology’s public purpose by understanding its role as one of seeking to foster and sustain a better politics of crime and its regulation.

Loader and Sparks 2011: 124
Criminological ‘moments’

• Discovery
  – The production of reliable knowledge
    • Causes, patterns, trends, behaviours, motivations

• Institutional-critical
  – Questioning the subjects, objects and nature of knowledge
    • Selection, definition, representation, contextualization

• Normative
  – Evaluating the uses of knowledge
    • Justice, fairness, equity, proportionality

Loader and Sparks 2011: 125-6
Doing criminology in South Africa: a post-colonial perspective

• Why are criminal acts so violent in nature?
• To what extent are state criminal justice bodies viewed as legitimate?
• What alternative, non-state criminal justice arrangements exist and how do they intersect with state nodes of criminal justice?
• What meanings do South Africans attribute to the transformation (post-colonial) project?
• What imaginings should guide policies and practices aimed at democratic, equitable and fair governance of security?
• How do we map out and explain the complex and pluralized criminal justice arrangements?
• What is the role of the state in creating safer and more just realities where hybrid political arrangements are most evident?

Shearing and Marks 2011: 127
South African criminology

- Dennis Davis (1985) in *Crime and Power in South Africa*
- Dirk Van Zyl Smit (1990) in *Towards Justice?*
- Desiree Hansson (1995) in ‘Agenda-ing gender’
- Dirk Van Zyl Smit (1999) in ‘Criminological ideas’
- Bill Dixon (2004a) in *Justice Gained?*
- Bill Dixon (2004b) in ‘Interactive globalisation’
Conservative/nationalist

Conservative (Davis 1985)

Afrikaner nationalist (Van Zyl Smit 1990/1999)

Neo-positivist administrative (Dixon 2004a)
Liberal/reformist

Liberal
(Davis 1985)

Legal reformist
(Van Zyl Smit 1990; 1999)

Liberal/reformist administrative
(Dixon 2004a)
Criminology for a new South Africa
(Van Zyl Smit 1990; 1999)

Progressive realist
(Hansson 1993)

Administrative Security governance
(Dixon 2004a/b)

Critical
(Davis 1985)
Criminological knowledge

- International scholarship
- SA cognate academic disciplines
- SA academic criminology beyond the academy
- SA academic criminology within the academy
South African academic criminology within the academy

• Neo-positivism/administrative criminology
  – CRIMSA and *Acta Criminologica*
  – Victims
    • Davis and Snyman 2005
    – Crime reduction and prevention

• Police, policing and security
  – Police reform in (South/Southern) Africa
  – Nodal governance of security
    • Marks et al 2009
    • Marks and Wood 2010
This book describes in detail the methods used by house robbers. My hope, in sharing this information, is to help the police achieve a more effective rate of arrests, and to assist householders to improve their security and safeguard their lives in the event of a violent robbery.

Zinn 2010: 2-3
Home invaders

The ‘professional shooter’

He explained how he had called together his relatives who had previously ‘looked down at him and made him do hard manual labour before they were willing to give him and his orphan brother even a piece of bread’ and shown them his five firearms ‘to prove to them that he is now a man’. He described also how shocked they were and interpreted this to mean that they now respected him. Throughout my interaction with this young but hardened robber it became clear how the early death of his parents, the ensuing rejection and exploitation by his relatives, and a system that failed to help him and his brother, contributed to his becoming a criminal.

Zinn 2010: 22
Reason not the need

Unemployment and deprivation may well have been the trigger mechanisms, but once their life of crime had begun the respondents continued to commit crime even though they had already earned large amounts of money. Further research is needed to explore why robbers are willing to commit serious and violent crime only to spend the proceeds on luxuries.

Zinn 2010: 86

O reason not the need! Our basest beggars Are in the poorest thing superfluous. Allow not nature more than nature needs, Man's life is cheap as beast's.

King Lear 2.4.264
South African criminology beyond the academy

- Institute for Security Studies (ISS)
  - *South African Crime Quarterly*
  - Victimization surveys
  - Causes, prevention and management of crime
    - SACQ No. 34 December 2010
      - Crime statistics, gratuitous violence, rape and police corruption

- Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR)
  - Transitional justice
  - Prisons and the police
  - Violent crime
    - Inequality
    - Murder
    - Perpetrators
    - Sexual violence
Pointy Face

Despite the cold, his shirt had no sleeves and his muscles looked as hard and raw as tendons. He wore a skullcap made of thinly-striped blue cloth that framed a narrow, strangely reddish face with high cheekbones and that came to the sharpest, pointiest chin I have ever seen.

Inequality and crime

[In]equality is frequently identified as a major cause of crime in South Africa because, as almost everyone knows, our Gini coefficient, the standard measure of inequality, is among the highest in the world. ‘Aha!’, you can almost hear the criminologists exclaim, ‘That’s why we’re so plagued by criminality. If we are one of the most unequal societies in the world, we should expect to have the highest rates of crime too’.

But there’s a problem.
Crime and inequality (again)

Inequality in South Africa is deeply connected to structural processes that exclude large sections of the population from meaningful participation in the economy. In the context of a society that promises equality, both implicitly and explicitly, this feeds into dynamics that contribute to violent crime.

Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2008: 4

The Cubes and the Mashabanas

They ... had vehicles and licensed guns, a sure sign that they were far from destitute. They seemed to be less dependent on the countryside than most. [...] The more success people ... have in the city, the more valuable their control of their countryside assets becomes. [...] [T]he tenants who had fared best over the last generation were precisely the ones who would fall furthest ...

Steinberg 2002: 233-4
Crime and cognate disciplines in the South African academy

**Anthropology**
- Salo on women and gangs

**Epidemiology**
- Jewkes et al on rape and sexual violence

**History**
- Glaser and Van Onselen on gangs

**Geography**
- Breetzke and Horn on the ecology of crime

**Psychology**
- Gobodo-Madikizela on ‘Prime Evil’
Spatial ecology of offending

Offender rates in Tshwane

This spatial-ecological study has shown that socio-economic factors play an important role in shaping criminal behaviour and identifies for the first time in South Africa a definitive link between the geographical distribution of offenders and social and economic deprivation in an urban context. Suburbs with high levels of social and economic deprivation predictably exhibited high levels of offending whereas the more affluent suburbs in the municipality exhibited low levels of offending.

Breetzke and Horn 2006: 192
‘Prime Evil’ – predisposition or choice?
When, in addition to his own feelings of vulnerability, an individual is plunged into a system in which his career is defined by violence, then the issue of choice may not be as easy as it seems. Violent abuse damages – and, yes, even corrupts – the individual’s psyche. It intrudes upon and invades the victim’s unconsciousness so that, in an environment that rewards evil, there are few resources on which the person can draw to resist it.

Gobodo-Madikizela 2003: 57-8
Views from abroad

Anthropology
• Ashforth and Comaroff & Comaroff on witchcraft and violence

Area Studies
• Baker on security and the pluralisation of policing

History
• Kynoch on gangs, violence and South African ‘exceptionalism’

Geography
• Meth on crime and urban governance

Politics/development studies
• Stone on crime, justice and economic growth

Criminology
• Dixon, Kempa, Singh and Wood on policing and the governance of security
Aetiological crisis

By the eighties the Thermidor set in and a silent counter-revolution occurred within the mainstream with the emergence of ... the new administrative criminology involving a retreat from any discussion of causality. For we now have a criminology which has well nigh abandoned its historical mission of the search for the causes of crime.

Jock Young 1986: 4
Aetiological crisis

In the post 1945 period, official crime rates continued to rise remorselessly, year by year, even accelerating as we entered the affluent sixties. Real incomes became the highest in history, slums were demolished one by one, educational attainment rose, social services expanded in order to provide extensive welfare safety nets, and yet the crime rate continued to doggedly rise! All of the factors which should have led to a drop in delinquency if mainstream criminology were even half-correct, were being ameliorated and yet precisely the opposite effect was occurring.

Young 1986: 5-6
The aetiological crisis of post-apartheid South African criminology

- The failed panacea of democracy
  - ‘A better life for all’?
- The primacy of policing and the governance of security
  - Reaction before action
- The reticent researcher
  - Political sympathies and the politics of ‘race’
  - Cops or robbers?
- Criminology in a (very) hot climate
  - Dogs, bones and the late Steve Tshwete
  - Criminology and the politics of crime and its regulation