

# CRIME and DEVIANCE

A Comparative  
Perspective

Edited by  
**Graeme R. Newman**

SAGE Annual Reviews of Studies in Deviance, Volume 4

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GRAEME R. NEWMAN



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**SAGE ANNUAL REVIEWS OF  
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**INTRODUCTION**  
**The Limits and**  
**Possibilities of**  
**Comparative Criminology**

**GRAEME R. NEWMAN**  
**FRANCO FERRACUTI**

From the early beginning of criminology the great classic authors stressed the comparative approach. Works such as Tarde's "La Criminalite Comparee" (1890), and Lombroso's and Ferri's early writings were replete with comparative connotations, trying to verify across cultures and nations the scant facts that constituted, in those times, the crude body of knowledge of criminology. Mannheim (1965) has taken a similar posture in his widely known book, *Comparative Criminology*. Interestingly enough, Professor Mannheim did not even discuss the rationale for the use of the term "comparative." He does make frequent use of facts and data across cultures, but does not discuss why criminology must be comparative. Similar recent studies have been carried out by Cavan and Cavan (1968), Lopez-Rey (1970, 1976), and Radzinowicz and King (1977).

Within a sociological frame of reference, in the widely known monograph, *Crime in Developing Countries* Clinard and Abbott (1973), follow

Bendix's formulation about comparative sociology, define the goal of comparative criminology as that of developing "concepts and generalizations at a level that distinguishes between universals applicable to all societies and unique characteristics representative of one or a small set of societies." They also make reference to Durkheim's often-quoted statement:

One cannot explain a social fact of any complexity except by following the complete development through all social species. Comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology, it is sociology itself, insofar as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires for facts [Durkheim, 1938].

Also, Friday (1973), discussing research problems, in comparative criminology, has quoted Cohen's (1959) blunt statement that "the plausibility of our own speculations about juvenile delinquency in the United States rests upon the findings of similarly oriented studies in the other societies."

It is a well-known fact that the concurrence of opinions on the need for comparative criminology has not been matched by a wealth of truly comparatied studies. All the efforts of the international bodies, both as scientific societies or as policy-oriented bodies such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, have failed to produce major research findings. Of course, notable exceptions exist, many of which are described and reviewed in this volume.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Professor Szabo has made it his life's goal to develop a sizable body of knowledge in the comparative field, with remarkably increasing success. Other concerted efforts, even when begun under auspicious circumstances, have failed for reasons which are difficult to assess. It could be remarked that so far the most international and cross-cultural production of the United Nations Social Defense Research Institute of Rome has been the recent rather incomplete and outdated *World Directory of Criminological Institutes*. The hundreds of institutes listed therein are testimony to the development and importance of criminology, but no evidence emerges of any crosscultural, comparative coordination of work, or even adequate exchange of information.<sup>2</sup>

Professor Szabo (1973) has repeatedly defined the meaning and goals of comparative criminology, tracing its history from

its early European beginnings. In essence, moving from the original "crime as a universal phenomenon" formulation of early criminology, the interest has shifted toward, according to Glueck, "replication of researches designed to uncover etiological universals operative as causal agents, irrespective of cultural differences among the different countries" (Glueck and Glueck, 1964). Several such studies exist — for example, De Fleur (1967a, 1976b, 1969), Ferracuti et al. (1975), and others. Replication, however, is not really comparison unless a rationale is explicitly used for the selection of the countries or cultures. Too often, the selection of countries is determined by geographical opportunity or even availability of funds.

### THE TASKS OF COMPARATIVE CRIMINOLOGY

A very general formulation would define two possible main tasks for comparative criminology. One consists of confirmation — in different juridical, economical, and cultural systems — of universal data and constructs with the aim of achieving general validity from crosscultural verification. Much of this research is reviewed by Paul Friday in this volume. The second consists of using different cultures, arranged along various relevant socioeconomic, political, or developmental continua as "cells" or "units" in a natural experimental design, or as quasi-clinical cases, in order to test general theories against the varieties of facts and situations offered to the researcher by the existing variations in sociopolitical and economic systems.<sup>3</sup> In this second approach, the comparative method becomes an integral part of the research effort; and existing differences among nations and cultures cease to be an impediment to research, becoming instead an essential methodological component of the research itself. The work reported by George DeVos in this volume represents essentially this approach. Relevant, of course, is the difference between comparative *methods* and comparative *content* of the research.

It might be advisable, at this point, to take a close look at what has happened to other social and behavioral disciplines in

the comparative field. In this context, the comparative aspects of cultural anthropology are very important in view of the established comparative tradition of this discipline. According to Bock (1978), comparative methods can be used to achieve at least three different, albeit related, goals:

- (1) *historical*, to follow developmental sequences and mutual relationships within cultural systems;
- (2) *functional-causal*, to understand the general principles of development and of cultural integration; and
- (3) *universals*, to discover and confirm content or process universals, detectable in all or a majority of the systems under consideration.

All three goals are relevant, although criminology has obviously failed to develop a universal model grounded either in the biology, sociology, or psychology of human beings, or in some combination. Perhaps universals do not exist in a "definitional metadiscipline" such as criminology. After all, not only natural crime has so far eluded us, but we are focusing our interests more and more on the interactional aspects of crime and deviance, reaffirming the cultural relativity of our object of study.<sup>4</sup>

On a more concrete level, the differences and vagaries of existing juridical systems and the objective difficulties (recently analyzed by Vetere and Newman, 1977) of comparing crime statistics internationally must not be underestimated. This is not to say that international factual and numerical comparison is impossible, but that its difficulties have to be faced and solved. Before international statistics can be usable, they must be made meaningful nationally, as Vetere and Newman remind us. This intranational analysis cannot be limited simply to criminal statistics, but must instead be extended to all other relevant social indicators which have a direct or indirect bearing on the crime phenomenon. This, however, is also a general problem for comparative criminology, which cannot in any case be limited to national criminal statistics. It is also a question of comparative perceptions rather than statistics per se, which Scott and Al-Thakeb demonstrate in Chapter 3 of this volume,

"Perceptions of Deviance Cross-Culturally." The apparent relativity in the definition of crime, yet the possibility (or necessity?) of universal categories ("harms") is examined in this volume by Leslie Wilkins in his fascinating chapter on international crime statistics.

This point raises a problem that is rather special to comparative criminology: What can or should be the specific content of comparison? After World War II criminological theories developed to the point that they answered to the somewhat caustic connotation of "a dime a dozen" situations. Yet, most theories are still untested or only partially tested. A priority for comparative criminology is most certainly theory testing, particularly for those theories which are policy or action relevant.<sup>5</sup> Some "new" phenomena, such as transnational terrorism or large-scale multinational economic crimes, force us, by reason of the nature and content of the criminal behavior under study, to assume a comparative posture. These aspects of comparative criminology are reviewed in the chapters of this volume by Maria Loś, Daniel Georges-Abeyie, and Francis and Elizabeth Ianni.

## HISTORICAL COMPARISON

C. Wright Mills (1959) has noted: "If we limit ourselves to one national unit of one contemporary (usually Western) society, we cannot possibly hope to catch many really fundamental differences among human types and social institutions."

It is perhaps a truism to say that what is historical is necessarily comparative. The reverse, however, is not true, and the overwhelming portion of research in all criminology has been ahistorical.<sup>6</sup> There are two ways in which comparative criminology must address this issue. First, it may draw on its many contributing disciplines and theories which derive from diverse cultures and try to assess the points of intersection of biography and history: the central problem of social science, according to Mills. S. Giora Shoham has attempted this near-impossible task in his books and in his chapter, "The Simple Standard Deviant," in this volume.

Second, historical comparison is crucial if one wishes to understand the evolutionary or change aspects of social phenomena (Bendix, 1968). In this regard, there is an important sense in which spatial comparative studies are also temporal, since a common assumption is that some kind of developmental dimension exists along which all societies can be arranged, so that particular societies may represent particular points in *time* in the evolution of societies. In their own ways, great social theorists from Marx to Sorokin and Parsons have amply developed this thesis. It is a very controversial issue, since it borders on making value judgments as to the comparative "immaturity" of societies, as Culbertson (1971) and McCord (1965) have indicated. It is, however, a central theme underlying the testing of any dynamic aspect of society, and few societies can be defined as static.

The importance of the temporal element to the comparative approach is accentuated when one compares subcollectives within the same culture. Here the argument against the arbitrary classification often used in "normal" social science methodology may apply, in that subcultures may be "contaminated" by each other or by the dominant culture. It is therefore difficult to make the *prima facie* claim that two such units of analysis are truly independent. The way in which one gets around this problem is to infuse into the research design a temporal analysis of the comparative histories of the two subcollectives, or the subcollective and the culture, depending upon one's theoretical interest. This approach is well demonstrated in this volume by George DeVos in his chapter on minority groups and crime, although the emphasis in his paper is more on spatial rather than historical comparison. In contrast, Cheryl Haft Picker's chapter takes the historical perspective as primary and uses the spatial comparisons as secondary in her wide-ranging review of the evolutionary aspects of subcultures. Together, these two chapters open the way to many new questions concerning the role of subcultures in criminology theory.

Haft Picker's chapter also gets to the core of criminological theory by identifying where "criminal law and criminal violence intersect." The implied thesis here is that there is "a little crime



in justice and a little justice in crime,” a position recently argued by Newman (1978). This view, in part, grows from the now well-established “social process” approach to the study of deviance in sociology, a tradition which is well demonstrated in Chapter 8 by Jerome Krase and Edward Sagarin on the informal social control of deviance. These authors show how important a comparative perspective is in shedding light on the emergence and maintenance of deviant behavior.

### THE CURRENT STATE OF THE “ART”

The papers assembled in this volume identify many serious shortcomings and failings of past comparative research on deviance and crime. Some of these shortcomings can be and have been overcome by improved research design and, more importantly, a better specification of theory. In fact, many of the methodological problems are simply those of orthodox methodology which, when they emerge in a comparative setting, appear far more accentuated.

Research knowledge has, nevertheless, accumulated. In general, some correlates of crime appear to be found throughout the world: for example, the significance of broken homes, unemployment, urbanization, and industrialization, cannot be overlooked. There are, of course, exceptional cases; and such variables, even where they represent identical patterns of behavior, may take on radically different meanings depending upon the culture in which they emerge. It would also appear that there are both similarities and differences across diverse cultures in the perception of crime and deviance. Right now, such findings are highly controversial and the subject of much ideological debate. For the moment, comparative criminologists would do well to try to withstand these ideological pressures which call for extreme philosophical solutions: After all, relativism is just as extreme as universalism. We see the challenge of comparative criminology to search out both unities and diversities. Given the current state of our knowledge and theory, to choose one or the other seems to us to prejudge the issue.