

Chapter 1

A Critique of Western Criminological Theories in the Explanation of Criminality in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian criminologists always turn to Western criminological theories in studying crime and criminal behavior. Even in cases where Western criminological theories cannot fully account for the phenomenon or phenomena under investigation, they often employ those established theories because there are no local options. In the light of a study of convicted armed robbers in Kirikiri Maximum Security Prison in Lagos, Nigeria, this chapter argues that Western theoretical perspectives are insufficient to explain crime and criminal behavior in the Nigerian social structure. The chapter proposes the development of Nigerian criminology to explain crime and criminal behavior in a uniquely Nigerian manner.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerian criminologists and other social scientists adopt Western theoretical frameworks whenever they study phenomena (Kunnuji, 2016; Umoh, 2015; Badiora et al., 2014; Alabi, 2014; Adebayo, 2013; Chukwuma & Alemika, 2001; Odumosu, 1999) because there are no available alternatives. Western theoretical perspectives

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face skepticism when applied to Nigerian studies since the theories may not be well suited to Nigeria's social and political situation.

Several Western criminological theories are employed here to explain the youth involvement in armed robbery, based on qualitative research conducted at the Kirikiri Maximum Security Prison in Lagos, Nigeria. There is insufficient emphasis on criminological theories from the West in explaining crime and criminal behavior in Nigeria; hence the paper critically argues for the development and application of Nigerian criminology to explain such phenomena.

BACKGROUND AND NATURE OF THE STUDY

Nigerian society is insecure and vulnerable to crimes (Jelilov et al., 2018; United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime [UNODC], 2005, p. 79), as evidenced by armed robbery, kidnapping, homicide, religious violence, and terrorism (Giles, 2019; Umoh, 2015, Badiora et al., 2014). According to Giles (2019), Ghani (2017), and Badiora et al. (2014), urban areas are becoming increasingly dangerous because of the new pattern of kidnapping and violent crimes that take human lives daily. Arguably, a country with a reputation for the sanctity of human life seems to have omitted and neglected that moral obligation. The teeming population of umpteen unemployed youths facing poverty and severe economic hardships helps make the crime problem worse as they seek survival (Arisukwu et al., 2020).

In addition, crime has since spilled out of urban areas to the suburbs (Kunnuji, 2016) and rural areas (Idemudia, 2005) where there are no security operatives; hence criminals use forests in rural communities as havens and hideouts, where the planning and decision-making take place (Arisukwu et al., 2020). Currently, people live in fear and moral panic as they do not know what may happen next. People from the diaspora who try to visit Nigeria thread carefully as they are heavily caught up with the scrupulous fear of their lives. Furthermore, the public is wholly dissatisfied with the security agencies, especially the police, who face the constant public accusation of colluding, assisting, and abetting criminal networks (Alapata, 2012).

The crime problem in Nigeria impacts the country's position in the global economic market. As a result of the criminal activities in Nigeria, it is one of the riskiest countries for doing business, not just within the West African Sub-region but around the world. There is no doubt that insecurity has led to a decrease in foreign direct investment in Nigeria (Jelilov et al., 2018). It is unfortunate because businesses and investors thrive in a secure environment with economic and political stability. Security is related to economic development, on the one hand, but on the other hand, weak economies in developing countries have a close link with insecurity (Otto et al., 2012; Jelilov et al., 2018).

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