

Urban Security and Prevention of Victimisation: Some Reflections on the Occasion of the Bologna World Crime Forum

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Riassunto

Il presente articolo racchiude alcune osservazioni relative al World Crime Forum in tema di “Urban Security and Prevention of Victimisation” che si è svolto a Bologna. Si tratta delle prime riflessioni dell’autore che si collegano agli altri contributi che appaiono in questo numero della rivista.

Résumé

Cet article contient quelques réflexions sur le World Crime Forum « Urban Security and Prevention of Victimisation » qui s’est déroulé à Bologne. Il s’agit des observations personnelles de l’auteur liées aux articles parus dans ce numéro de la revue.

Abstract

This article contains some reflections on the occasion of the Bologna World Crime Forum on Urban Security and Prevention of Victimisation. It does not take the shape of a thorough analysis nor display a high degree of systematisation in relation to this theme, but constitutes first and foremost reflections of a personal nature that are linked to the written contributions appearing in this journal issue.

1. By way of introduction.

When the Board of Directors of the International Society for Criminology (ISC) decided to organise a special series of events to celebrate its 75th anniversary in 2013 it could hardly have imagined the enthusiasm coming from many corners that this decision would generate. Inspired in general terms by the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum, the series of World Crime Forums (WCF) was intended to discuss various key challenges for criminal justice and criminology all over the globe and propose new

solutions. Unlike its counterparts in the economic and social sphere, however, these events have not taken place at one centralised venue but were organised on a local level in all five continents: Washington (on human trafficking), Montréal (on drug dependency and treatment), Leuven (on restorative justice), Seoul (on cybercrime), Sao Paulo (on human security), Pretoria (on safety and juvenile delinquency) and Canberra (on public opinion and crime).

The World Crime Forum in Bologna served as the last event in this series of eight and was devoted

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to victimisation in an urban setting. It proved particularly fitting to celebrate this important anniversary in Italy as the ISC was founded in 1938 in Rome by Prof. Di Tullio, who also served as its first president. His strong vision of international cooperation, between individuals and state agencies, has constituted one of the hallmarks of the ISC in the course of its long history, as justly emphasised by Augusto Balloni. Moreover, in the past three-quarter century Italian criminology and Italian criminologists have played a crucial role in the exciting activities and further development of the ISC, which hereby expresses its sincere gratitude. Our heartfelt thanks also went to the close and enthusiastic colleagues of the Italian Society of Victimology and the Università di Bologna, the *Alma Mater Studiorum par excellence*, for the perfect organisation of this event. The ISC was particularly pleased to come back to its roots, and it proved very rewarding to see ‘the old lady’ more alive than ever and ready to confront the many challenges of crime and criminal justice in the 21st century.

The following paragraphs contain some reflections on the occasion of the Bologna World Crime Forum on Urban Security and Prevention of Victimisation. They do not take the shape of a thorough analysis nor display a high degree of systematisation in relation to this theme, but constitute first and foremost reflections of a personal nature that are linked to the written contributions appearing in this journal issue.

2. Crime and victimisation.

Several speakers have rightly pointed out that today’s world is one of globalisation and this

reality entails many consequences for the issue of crime and the victimisation resulting from it. Particularly keynote speaker Emilio Viano listed some important trends in this regard: the rapid economic development in many parts of the world, but often in an uneven and unequal manner for various sections of society; the booming growth of cities and city life where already three-quarters of the world’s population is residing; the exponential development of information and communication technologies that let borders dissipate and even evaporate; and the diminishing distances in space due to the increase of transportation systems all over the globe. According to him, these trends create many new opportunities for committing crimes and producing crime victims: the increased demand for goods leads to more practices of counterfeiting and trade in endangered species; in search of easy success without much effort youngsters are attracted to delinquent gangs and organised crime; internet crimes for quick gain, extortion or other reasons are already rampant; slavery and other forms of human dependence have resurged in huge numbers; intercultural differences and expectations hinder proper communication and create tensions between individuals and groups; and environmental pollution and the poor quality of food leads to a growing sense of insecurity. In the wake of these huge challenges national governments seem to gradually lose their grip, while local governments (regions and cities) try to offer concrete solutions and transnational entities attempt to design large-scale policies¹.

¹ See. i.a., M. Groenhuijsen, “The development of international policy in relation to victims of crime”, *International Review of Victimology* (Special Issue on Celebrating the 20th Anniversary), 20(1), 2014, pp. 31-48.

What can be the unique contribution of criminology as a scientific discipline when confronted with these humongous societal changes and novel challenges? Using the action-research theory of Kurt Lewin as framework of reference Roberta Bisi in her contribution explores how criminological knowledge can improve social living conditions in contemporary society. This is particularly important in the case of large groups of juveniles who are searching their way in rapidly changing societies and may get lost underway, not only in Italy but all over the globe. Her proposal to make a distinction between ‘discomfort’ on the one hand and ‘psychopathological disorders’ on the other hand is very intriguing and seminal. At first sight it seems to echo the *summa divisio* of the 19th century to explain crime either as the pathological behaviour of sick people (like in some forms of psychological and biological theories) or as the normal behaviour of ordinary people reacting to abnormal situations (like in some sociological theories). But modern-day criminology has moved beyond these two antagonistic explanatory frames and has come to realise the value of both to the effect that criminal acts may sometimes relate to the social context and sometimes to the specific condition of the individual. Moreover, some persons committing crimes and others being victimised may well display an individual history of vulnerability or belong to vulnerable groups². A

² See, i.a.: E. Fattah, “Underresearched theoretical concepts in victimology: proneness and vulnerability revisited”, in P. Schäfer and E. Weitekamp (eds.), *Establishing Victimology: Festschrift for Prof. Dr. Gerd Ferdinand Kirchhoff on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Dubrovnik Victimology Course*, 2014, Mönchengladbach: Schriften des Fachbereichs Sozialwesen an der Hochschule Niederrhein, pp. 141-150.

correct diagnosis of the sources of criminal behaviour and victimisation is therefore needed to design appropriate interventions for treatment and for the prevention of crime and victimisation.

Two authors provide very interesting insights into local attempts to deal with criminal behaviour against the backdrop of global challenges. Fabio Bravo’s presentation of urban crime mapping offers a fascinating account of a tool that describes and analyses the phenomenon of home burglaries in the ‘borough’ of Enfield in London. The same tool has allowed the police and neighborhood crime prevention services to execute successful interventions and thus effectively diminish crime rates in the said neighbourhood. He rightly traces the origins of such approach to the European ‘cartographic school’ of the 19th century and the Chicago School in 20th century America and explains the modern-day extension of these models of crime mapping and interventions. This success story, however, also raises some overarching questions in need for further investigation: to which extent are the lower crime rates attributable to situational prevention (like more locks and fences on and around houses) and social prevention (like crime watch groups and other forms of neighbourhood organisation in the footsteps of the Chicago School)? Or are they related to the changing profile or motivations of the delinquents involved, or even other factors that need to be explored further? And most importantly, what do we know about the well-known ‘displacement effect’ whereby crimes and criminals are relocating to other areas of the city or other cities where the costs of crime are lower and the potential benefits

are higher?³ It seems that a larger geographical picture over longer periods of time is essential to adequately measure specific crime rates and therefore the success rate of specific interventions at the local level.

Another example is given by Andrea Piselli when presenting the actions of local police against road piracy in major cities in Italy, a very underestimated and underresearched type of crime. He aptly indicates that victimisation is not limited to primary victims (drivers, pedestrians, bystanders, etc.) but attention also needs to be given to secondary victims (like insurance companies faced with insurance fraud, and the criminal justice system asked to pay compensation in the case of insolvent offenders). His proposals to involve all stakeholders that are part of this crime in the solution thereof is quite convincing and seemingly effective. It highlights the importance of exploring novel ways to deal with crimes and involve the parties involved, and thus reminds us of restorative justice approaches that emerged in the 1990s. The latter are echoed in the famous phrase proposed by Tony Marshall: *"[R]estorative justice is a process whereby all the parties with a stake in a particular offence come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future"*.⁴ The story about dealing with road piracy may prove an excellent example of concretising restorative justice models and projects in an area hitherto largely unknown and

exploring the possibilities and limits of these models and projects⁵.

3. The rights and needs of victims of crimes.

Other papers in this volume are focusing on victims' rights and on their needs after being victimised. First of all, Désirée Fondaroli highlights a number of important legal issues that may sound strange to a non-Italian audience, namely that Italian criminal law (including criminal procedure) does not know the notion of 'victim of crime' but only talks about a 'person damaged' and an 'injured party'. At the same time she emphasises that the European Directive of October 2012, which establishes a clear definition of 'victim' and provides minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, should be implemented by all EU member states and will therefore have far-reaching effects on the Italian legal order. This assessment foremost indicates how the legal orders of the member states are fundamentally altered by the supranational, and therefore forceful, powers of the European Union. But it also begs the socio-legal question why Italian law has 'resisted' the notion of victimhood for such a long time, what arguments have been used and by which actors. Overall, these developments lead us to envisage how the national legal orders, particularly of European states, are becoming part of an emerging international framework on the rights of crime victims. Nowadays, it is widely accepted

³ See, i.a.: K. Bowers and S. Johnson, "Measuring the geographical displacement and diffusion of benefit effects of crime prevention activity", *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 19(3), 2003, pp. 275-301.

⁴ T. Marshall, "The Evolution of Restorative Justice in Britain", *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* (Special Issue on Restorative Justice and Mediation), 4(4), 1996, p. 37.

⁵ Also see: H. Strang, "Restorative justice and victims of crime: evidence and possibilities", in H. Morosawa, J. Dussich & G.F. Kirchhoff (eds.), *Victimology and Human Security: New Horizons*, 2012, Selection of papers presented at the 13th International Symposium on Victimology, 2009, Mito, Japan, Nijmegen, Wolf Publishers, pp. 475-488.

that victims of crimes possess five sets of rights:⁶ (1) the right to information (both in general and about their own case), (2) the right to legal advice, (3) the right to protection and safety (before, during and after the trial), (4) the right to compensation, and (5) the right to victim assistance. Time has also come to evaluate in depth the contribution of legislative and jurisprudential changes against the backdrop of this international legal framework and to assess their implications for policies and practices in relation to victims and crime prevention⁷. Other countries and regions, like South(ern) Africa, have undertaken comparable investigations that could serve as a useful source of inspiration⁸.

Precisely the last category of victims' rights listed provides the focus of Christina Zarafonitou's interesting piece on support services for victims. She pays attention to the importance of establishing procedures, services and institutions for the support of crime victims, both for reasons of addressing the sequels of victimisation and preventing new crimes in the future. However, many western societies witness the emergence of a paradox whereby the attention for the real needs of victims tend to be overtaken by attitudes of punitiveness and vengefulness towards the offenders exactly as a result of actual victimisation and fear of crime. As the figures from Greece are very telling in this regard, the author rightly emphasises the huge need for

empirical work to adequately describe and analyse the actual state of mind of national and local populations, and the likely effects of their opinions about crime and victimisation on further actions in relation to punishment, deterrence and prevention of crime. Moreover, this account draws our attention to the crucial role of the media, both classical and new, in relaying images of crime and victimisation to the general public on a daily, even hourly, basis. The media have long passed the era of simply reporting on crime and have clearly entered the epoch of framing crime within a general context of constructing news (as already highlighted by Richard Quinney in his theory on the 'social reality of crime' back in 1970).

The general context of urban insecurity is also skillfully analysed by Raffaella Sette and linked to some major societal changes also highlighted by Emilio Viano. She intends to design concrete interventions that serve the dual purpose of developing new forms of territorial and social solidarity, as well as recognising the plurality of cultural and personal identities. These interventions cannot be carried out without the further development and training of professionals in various fields. Such dual approach is not only needed for policy and practice in national states, but is also highly present in the large-scale research programme of the European Union called 'Horizon 2020'. There can be no doubt that concrete interventions constitute a crucial link between the macro level of the grand changes and challenges in society, and the micro level of individuals and families who have specific experiences of vulnerability, insecurity, crime, victimisation. It will also require a redefined and clear conception of the role and contribution of

⁶ M. Groenhuisen and R. Letschert (eds.), *Compilation of International Victims' Rights Instruments*, Nijmegen, Wolf Publishers, 2012.

⁷ More generally on the evaluation of legislation, see, i.a.: K. Vanaeken, "From vision to reality: *ex post* evaluation of legislation", *Legisprudence*, 1, 2011, pp. 41-68.

⁸ R. Peacock (ed.), *Victimology in South Africa*, Pretoria, Van Schaik Publishers, 2013.

public authorities, local and central, in creating a framework and support for citizens' actions and stepping in themselves whenever useful.

4. Some additional suggestions.

At the end of this very rich and inspiring special issue, which has resulted from an equally rich and inspiring World Crime Forum, it may be useful to also draw the attention to two types of aspects that have remained somewhat in the shade thus far. Taken together they may contribute to an even more encompassing concept of 'justice for victims'⁹.

The first is to broaden our understanding of urban victimisation and insecurity by also including crimes of a so-called 'political nature'. The city of Bologna itself has been brutally confronted with the reality of such crimes when a series of bombs exploded in its central railway station in early August 1980, leaving 85 people killed and over 200 injured. The terrorist attack was later attributed to militants of extreme right groups in Italy. Moreover, many immigrants in modern-day cities have fled political hardship and human rights violations in their countries of origin and carry these experiences, sometimes traumatisations, with them to their host country or city¹⁰. Finally, in recent decades many countries in

Europe have started to witness the eruption of 'hate crimes' committed against specific persons or groups for possessing certain characteristics (skin colour, racial background) or displaying certain behaviour (political conviction, sexual orientation). Some have preferred the terminology of 'bias crimes' to describe and explain such acts and to design policies for intervention¹¹. These types of crimes also belong to the reality of urban life and continue to instill fierce forms of victimisation and fear of crime with the population and subsections thereof. They are therefore worthy of further attention from academics, policy makers and practitioners.

The second aspect relates to theory, in particular to the rediscovery of some classical theories of crime and reactions to crime. In the 1960s Hirschi's theory of social bonds already highlighted that crime results from a weaker or broken bond between individuals and society, and that strengthening or restoring the levels of attachment, commitment, involvement and belief could contribute to crime prevention. In this context, it may be useful to go back to this theory and consider which forms of social bonding, between individuals and among communities, can be explored to prevent crime and victimisation. A similar reinvention can take place in relation to the neutralisation theory by Sykes and Matza, in which they explain how delinquents use several techniques of neutralisation to justify their

⁹ See: I. Vanfraechem, A. Pemberton and F. Ndahinda (eds.), *Justice for Victims. Perspectives on rights, transition and reconciliation*, Selection of papers presented at the 14th International Symposium on Victimology, 2012, The Hague, The Netherlands, Milton Park, Abingdon, Routledge (forthcoming in 2014).

¹⁰ S. Parmentier, "Necesidades y derechos de las víctimas de crímenes internacionales. Repasando la Contribución del Prof. Tony Peters a la Victimología (Needs and Rights of Victims of International Crimes. Revisiting the Contribution of Prof. Tony Peters to Victimology)", *Eguzkilore. Cuaderno del Instituto Vasco de Criminología* (Basque Quarterly of

Criminology), II Encuentro en Homenaje al Prof. Antonio Beristain, 27, 2013, pp. 81-92.

¹¹ See: i.a.: M. Coester and D. Rössner, "Racism and Xenophobia and the Prevention of Bias Crimes in Germany: Results from a Nationwide Task Group", in S. Parmentier and E. Weitekamp (eds.), *Crime and Human Rights*, Series in Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance, vol. 9, 2007, Amsterdam/Oxford, Elsevier/JAI Press, pp. 93-107.

criminal behaviour. In relation to victimisation, two particular techniques definitely merit further attention and analysis, namely (a) denial of damage ('the consequences are not all that bad') and (b) denial of victimhood ('the victim was at least co-responsible for the crime committed'). When assessing the experiences of victims of urban crimes it seems that both techniques are frequently evoked by the offenders but also by some law enforcement personnel. Finally, how can we not pay attention to the commission of urban crimes from a conflict perspective? Through several empirical studies Chambliss has convincingly argued that many crimes, and thus many forms of victimisation, could not have taken place without a 'symbiotic relationship of interdependence' between the top of the legal and the top of the illegal world. Whether crimes are committed by means of corruption or blackmailing, explicitly or implicitly, the connections between the legal and the illegal world, and thus between the 'white economy' and the 'black economy', need much closer

investigation. While all of these theories, and possibly many more, have been developed to address specific forms of crime in specific times and places, they can easily be rediscovered and rejuvenated to increase our understanding of modern-day forms of crime and victimisation.

Herewith it is appropriate to finish this set of reflections on the occasion of the World Crime Forum held in Bologna, but not without sincerely congratulating again the organisers of this event and the composers of this special issue.

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