



Limitations for the Prevention of Violence: The Latin American Reality and Its Criminological Theory

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Source: *Justice, Power and Resistance* Volume 1, Number 1 (April 2017) pp. 80-97

Published by EG Press Limited on behalf of the European Group for the Study of Deviancy and Social Control electronically 16 October 2017

URL <http://www.egpress.org/papers/del-olmo-limitations-prevention-violence-latin-american-reality-and-its-criminological-theory>

Originally published in *Crime and Social Justice*, No. 3 (Summer 1975), pp. 21-29. The text has been reviewed by the editors and adapted to the editorial guidelines of *Justice, Power and Resistance*.

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Limitations for the Prevention of Violence: The Latin American Reality and Its Criminological Theory¹

Rosa del Olmo²

Abstract

The subject which I intend to discuss may seem exceedingly complicated, incoherent and vast. However, as I will try to show, its parts are closely related and they are not so complicated, but rather reflect different aspects of the same reality. By this I am referring to the reality of Latin American societies, characterised by their dependence, underdevelopment and more concretely by a heterogeneous socio-economic structure.³ It follows that Latin American violence has characteristics peculiar to it and it thus differs from that of developed nations. Moreover, as a result of the above, there exists a conception of criminological theory also peculiar to this continent and the result of the above. For the purposes of this essay, we have preferred to separate the different aspects of the subject at the outset so as to be able to develop a coherent synthesis. Thus, although we don't pretend to exhaust the problem of violence as an abstract and universal concept, we will begin by exploring what this concept means and what its implications are in Latin America.

¹ Originally published in *Crime and Social Justice*, No. 3 (Summer 1975), pp. 21-29. The text has been reviewed by the editors and adapted to the editorial guidelines of *Justice, Power and Resistance*.

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³ Our use of the term heterogeneous socio-economic structure is based on Armando Cordova's definition: 'We speak of heterogeneous socio-economic structures when we find in them the co-existence of forms of property which correspond to several of those theoretical models which are considered pure' (Cordova, 1972a).

On the Concept of Violence

Clearly, the concept of violence as it is used today refers to a wide range of acts and situations, including the ideas that violence is a global phenomenon that we live in a violent time, that everything that surrounds us is violent, that we are violent, aggressive, etc. But in fact, as Elliott Currie (1971) has accurately pointed out, to justify and explain everything in terms of violence is only a myth. By blaming violence for everything, nobody is at fault and yet everybody is. Moreover, the concept of violence comes to be used to characterise a series of acts which have no intrinsic relation to one another and which are abstracted from the context of violence. We can, however, establish in general terms that there are three possible definitions of violence: a semantic definition, a legal definition, and a definition which could be called real. Furthermore, the three definitions have certain differences. Also there is a differential acceptance of these three because the myth created around the concept of violence is also marked by a lack of conceptual clarity. But more important, and as Currie has indicated, perhaps the least obvious feature is the depoliticisation of the subject. But it so happens that violence is principally a political phenomenon. And when we point out that violence is a political phenomenon, we are referring to the concept itself, and not to different types of violence. If we limit ourselves, for example, to the type of violence which criminology traditionally deals with, and which we can classify within the legal definition, we also find that it is a political phenomenon. The selection that is made in a society of those persons who are going to make the decision regarding the characterisation of a violent act as legally sanctionable is a political process, and the decision itself is a political decision. In other words, we are not speaking of the violent act as political at this point, but rather of the concept itself as political.

A lot has been written about violence and about its different manifestations, but we could say that there are four types of violence: individual violence, institutional violence, structural violence, and revolutionary violence. That is, first, certain types of crime; second, repression as reflected, for example, by police activities or torture; third, poverty, hunger, unemployment, exploitation, etc.; and fourth, guerrillas. However, it is striking that public opinion in general differentiates between these various types by considering only the first and the last as constituting violence, since they belong to what has been called illegitimate violence. Even criminologists do the same, but in worse forms, since the majority look for the explanation or justification of that violence in individual pathological problems, without realising that all these types of violence are

closely related and reinforce each other. Criminologists tend to concentrate on the violent act alone, often without taking into account the violent context; but in fact they cannot be separated. Thus, it is not strange that it is impossible to prevent the mainly individual type of violence on which criminologists focus, especially in Latin America.

On Violence in Latin America

But our aim is not to discuss violence in general, although it seems necessary to take a stand in relation to such a trite and poorly defined concept. Our aim is to establish what the limitations to the prevention of violence are at present in Latin America. And thus we must point out, as Helder Camara (1970:18, 19, 23) has said, that injustice is the first of all violences in Latin America, and from it all the rest derive. That is, the problem of violence in this continent may be different from that in developed nations. Our socio-economic training presents very definite characteristics of economic, cultural, and political dependence which have to be taken into account if we are to understand violence in Latin America. Thus, quoting Helder Camara (1968) again, in the world 'there is a triple violence: within underdeveloped countries; within developed countries; and from developed countries against underdeveloped countries'. The analysis of this triple violence is necessary if we want to understand and find solutions to Latin American violence. We refer to the three because even violence within developed nations affects us due to our dependence and to the tendency to copy what happens within developed nations. For example, juvenile gangs in our country have copied the style of the North American Hells Angels even in the way they dress. And more recently, we find the so-called 'drug problem'. On the other hand, the violence of developed countries against the underdeveloped ones is well described by Darcy Ribeiro (1971:2):

The decisions taken in the metropolis of the North about peace and war, about commerce, industry, or agriculture, about politics, culture, publicity, religion, discrimination, or birth control affect directly our destiny as its fundamental shaping forces. They provoke waves of employment or unemployment, abundance or scarcity, coups d'état, dictatorships, terrorism, campaigns of ideological indoctrination or of birth control.

In the same light, we could also analyse the drug-use situation as an imported problem. Lack of space prevents us from studying this problem in depth which would imply exploring in detail the history of this continent since

its discovery.⁴ Nevertheless, it should be said that the history of Latin America has been a history of injustice, plunder, and exploitation which continues at present and which can be seen not only in the relations between countries, but within the countries of Latin America themselves. An example will illustrate what we are saying. In April 1970, a French press release said the following:

The police of the State of Pernambuco, Brazil, detained last Sunday, in the township of Belen de San Francisco, 210 peasants who were going to be sold to rural landowners of the State of Minas Gerais at eighteen dollars a head...

And in June of that same year teletypes transmitted the words of the Chief of the Federal Police: its services do not have adequate means to stop the traffic of slaves and although in the last months ten procedures of inquiry had been initiated, the sale of laborers from the Northeast to the rich owners of other regions of the country continues (Galeano, 1971a: 131).

But Latin American criminologists regard this type of event as having nothing to do with them. However, in order to develop criminology in Latin America and concretely to prevent violence, the first thing that must be done is to know the reality in which one is living. And this Latin American reality is characterised not only by injustice at every level, but also by the predominance of structural violence and as its corollary, institutional violence. For Latin America, we cannot begin by analysing individual violence, because that is only the result of everything else and reflects the frustration and contained anger which often is released in murders and other violent acts, and not the result of individual pathologies as we are made to believe.⁵ As Julio Barreiro (1972) has correctly said:

The most flagrant violence which exists at present in Latin America is that of the system in which we live... Of course we don't ignore the possibility of individual positions resulting from our ethical conscience which repudiates the 'spilling our brother's blood'. But we would like to know if we feel that same repugnance in regard to the problem of infant mortality in our societies, or the problem of organised torture,

⁴ In relation to this, in Venezuela there has been an attempt to do this in the book by Agustfn Blanco, *Modelos de Violencia en Venezuela* (1974).

⁵ Frantz Fanon (1963:286) when referring to Algeria has said: 'The criminality of the Algerian, his impulsiveness, the violence of his murders are not the consequence of the organization of his nervous system, nor for a peculiar personality, but rather the direct product of the colonial situation'.

or the fascist terrorism which predominates in the majority of our countries, or the problem of the hunger suffered by two-thirds of our population, to give only a few examples, which are produced by the present unjust power structures of our societies.

If a criminologist intends to study violence, he cannot limit himself to one type, since all that he will obtain is a distorted vision leading to no possible solution unless he opts for genocide. And in each society, there is one predominant form of violence which shapes the rest. In Latin America, we cannot ignore the type of violence which Barreiro (1966:124) calls

the invisible, the silent, the passive one. That of the 'Thirst Quadrilateral' in the Northeast of Brazil, or of the Indian populations of the Altiplano; or of the workers of the tin and copper mines; or of the labourers of the sugarmills or the rice fields; or that of the underfed multitudes, or of the children condemned to illiteracy and ignorance, etc.

Under these conditions in which we find half of all Latin Americans, violence is inevitable, especially that type of violence in which criminologists are interested. The analysis of official statistics themselves shows that the Latin American nations occupy a position eight times more inferior to the U.S.A. in almost all indexes of development (Ribeiro, 1971). Half of all Latin Americans earn only ten dollars per month; the diet is so inadequate that chronic undernourishment is found in more than 60% of the population. For example, out of every ten inhabitants of Ecuador, seven suffer from basic malnutrition, and the country has one of the highest mortality rates in the world. There are about 19 million people unemployed and 70 million with irregular employment. Only 50% of housing meets the standards defined by the United Nations; and there is a lack of approximately 29 million houses. The number of adult illiterates and semi-illiterates is about 140 million (Baltra Cortes, 1966).

One could argue that since the information we are giving is from the year 1969, in recent years things have changed. However, if we limit ourselves to examining Brazil, a country which is usually presented as the successful model of development for Latin America, we can refer to a press release from last May (El Nacional, 1974a) which says: 'Brazilian workers must work 176 hours in order to eat', and the text says the following:

A Brazilian worker who earns a minimum wage, as does nearly 50% of the economically active population, needs to work 176 hours and 54 minutes in order to be able to purchase the basic monthly supply of

food, while in 1965 he needed 87 hours and 20 minutes. Strikes are prohibited since they are included in the National Security Law.

There is no need to quote further for the reader to realise that for the Latin American social-economic reality, there is no doubt that structural violence is determinant. However, that violence is reinforced by institutional violence. The majority of Latin American countries are characterised by forms of illegitimate authority which maintain themselves in power⁶ thanks to torture, illegal imprisonments, and murders.

It is known internationally as the means by which the governments of Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile and Brazil maintain themselves in power. Public reaction has reached the point whereby last March, the Second Russell Tribunal met in Rome to judge those regimes.

But according to criminologists, this type of information is not relevant for their discipline. They prefer to limit themselves to studying, for example, why one peasant kills another, what is the motivation that made him so violent – concluding generally that drunkenness was the cause that brought about those aggressive ‘instincts’ which need a psychological study. They don't try to place this violent act within the social context, since that would imply the exploration of a reality that would disturb them too much. It is much easier to rely upon a partial vision of that reality. Thus, for example, in relation to the possible connection between homicide and drunkenness, they would not take into account information such as the following: ‘Colombia: 10,400,000 beers to the health of Education and Salubrity’ where it says: ‘Starting yesterday and until the last day of the year, the inhabitants of Bogotá must accomplish a task imposed by the Secretary of Finance: to drink 10,400,000 beers ...’ The Secretary of Finance expects that the collection of taxes on beer will amount to 32,000,000 pesos (1,200,000 dollars) but for that, the consumption of the equivalent of 10,000,000 beers is needed. The Secretary of Finance clarified that his Office was not really happy that there should be drunkards, but he said that consumption was necessary for the Education and Health budgets (Ibid., 1973).

This information apparently doesn't have any connection with the criminological study of homicide and alcohol, but if the criminologist does not

⁶ As Horowitz (1969:5) has pointed out, legitimacy is the perception of the state as a service agency rather than oppressive institution, and this perception is cemented by a common adhesion to either legality or mass mobilisation. The norm of illegitimacy on the contrary, is the perception of the state as primarily a power agency which is cemented by a common reliance on illegal means to rotate either the holders of power or the rules under which power is exercised.

pay attention to it, his conclusions about the subject are going to suffer from distortion and atomisation of reality, and thus they are not going to be very scientific.

On Latin American Criminological Reality

The analysis, though brief, of Latin American reality and concretely of the hierarchical nature of its violence, does not prohibit the possibility of trying to characterise the type of violence that concerns criminologists. That is, the so-called 'illegitimate violence'. First it would be necessary to establish how 'illegitimacy' is defined in Latin America. That is, how is a crime defined and who is a criminal? Here the disparity between the legal and the real definition is equally obvious. In Latin America only those who could be placed within the category of those who Currie (1971) has said participate in 'violence from below', are defined as criminals and commit crimes. Those who would fit in the so-called 'violence from above' and who are responsible for murders, torture and unjust imprisonment are not criminals in Latin America. For example, the Brazilian regime is known for its institutionalisation of terror, having more than 12,000 political prisoners, with two thousand deaths having been committed by the *Escuadron de la Muerte*. It is known for the genocide of Indians, the traffic of slaves, employing torture systematically, and for such absence of juridical control, that last May, the Lawyers Association of Brazil demanded 'the end of censorship, of secret arrests and inhuman treatment of prisoners', in the press release stating further:

The demand was made to the Minister of Justice, Armando Falcao, and a newspaper published the complete text, which rarely occurs in relation to severe criticisms of the governments. On the other hand, the censors did not allow the publication of a report about charges made by the United Nations where torture and the violation of human rights in the country are denounced' (*El Nacional*, 1974b).⁷

In Uruguay the situation is similar. Last month a press release entitled 'Report of the United Nations: Generalised Torture in Uruguay' said the following:

⁷ See also the documents published by Ediciones Barbara (1970) in the book called, Brasil: Tortura, *Represión* y Muerte: and Dick Parker (1972).

The military authorities of Uruguay have resorted to torture on a generalised scale... The situation in Uruguay is much worse than what most people think... The lowest estimate is that 50% of prisoners have been tortured... Torturers always wear hoods to avoid being identified... Tortures include obliging persons to remain standing for two or three days. This type is the so-called 'Submarine' or repeated submersions in water and the application of electricity to sensitive parts of the body... (Ibid., 1974c).

Or we can take a more recent case, the Chilean situation. Who are the real delinquents in that country? An examination of recent news articles alone should make us question the traditional criminological definitions in relation to Latin America. Even in Washington, there has been a public debate over the accusations of thousands of murders committed by the Junta since Allende's overthrow. And according to the objective and conservative French newspaper, *L'Express* (n.d.:62): 'Numerically the putsch of September 11, 1973, can be summarised as follows: 15,000 deaths, 25,000 students expelled from the universities, 200,000 unemployed'. If we turn to Guatemala, news of which is silenced by the press, we can point out the declarations of the North American priest Thomas Melville in January, 1968:

In a little over a year the right-wing terrorist groups had killed more than two thousand eight hundred intellectuals, students, union leaders and peasants.... According to the new Code, members of the security corps don't have any penal responsibility for homicides and police or military reports are considered full proof in trials. The owners of estates and their managers were illegally authorised to act as local authorities with the right of having guns and forming repressive groups (Galeano, 1971a: 195).

If we were to examine each country, we would find similar occurrences. But Latin American criminologists refuse to recognise the fact that today one cannot separate morality, law, and politics, and they ignore what has been pointed out by some criminologists from developed countries: that every day there are less differences between political science as a discipline and criminology as a discipline. They don't want to recognise that 'illegitimate violence' in Latin America begins with the Administration of Justice itself, that the time has come to develop a criminology of repression, even applying the categories which appear in our Penal Codes to characterise such violence. However, this fact has an explanation: the Latin American criminologist is a product of his social reality. And that reality is characterised by dependence on the metropolis. Thus, it is

not strange that at the level of ideas that dependence should also be reflected. The Latin American criminologist in general fits into the model of dominated man analysed by Albert Memmi (1972), since he is dependent on the foreign criminologist, and concretely on the themes in fashion for criminology in developed nations. The following words of Albert Memmi should be considered carefully:

In every dominated man there is a certain sense of a rejection of himself due in great part to his subjection and marginality... How can anything else be expected? When objective conditions are so oppressive, so corrosive, how can we hope to find no destruction, no distortion of the soul, of the physiognomy and the conduct of the oppressed? (Ibid.:71)

But the ideological oppression of the Latin American criminologist is frequently unconscious, since it has very concrete historic roots; thus he never considers studying the functioning of the Administration of Justice or analysing our laws, their origins and application, but rather assumes that they are a given fact, that they reflect the values and norms of the society in which he lives. He tends to ignore the fact that the great majority of Latin American laws are nothing but literal copies of laws created for other realities⁸. As T. Vasconi (1969:136) has pointed out:

The appearances of these ideologies 'superimposed' on reality with which they seemed not to have any direct correspondence can be explained by the diffusion of European culture that came with the expansion of the capitalist system on the one hand, and by the mimetic conduct of the Latin American ruling classes, on the other... They learned more rapidly to consume than to produce... and the habit of following European models brought many to a real cultural colonialism.

Applying this to the Latin American criminologist and thus to criminology and criminological research, we find the lack of correspondence of the latter to the social reality where the criminologists are born. The Latin American criminologist is more interested in what happens in Europe than in what happens in his country or in the other countries of Latin America. But this

⁸ In this respect we can point out that the Venezuelan Penal Code which dates from 1926 is a literal copy of the Italian Code of 1889 although it was modified in some way in 1904, 1912, 1915 and recently in 1964.

adoption of foreign models is selective and thus we find a predominantly clinical-judicial criminology which provides an easier way to evade social reality. To blame the individual and not society for violent acts is less compromising but also hinders prevention since there is no connection with reality. Methodologically, even at the individual level, categories are utilised which were created for the analysis of individuals from industrialised societies. The disdain for social reality and the adoption of techniques from other places seem to be the fundamental reasons why there is no Latin American criminology, and thus why it is impossible to prevent violent acts. In important meetings for Latin American criminologists such as the *Jornadas Internacionales de Criminología* which took place in Mendoza, Argentina, in June, 1969, conclusions such as the following were drawn:

Sociological research of broad range is condemned to failure, but on the other hand, it is desirable that our clinical criminology of such an established tradition and of such systematic and constant action, be complemented by research in Sociology focusing on the empirical verification of middle range theories in Merton's sense. Only then is it possible to obtain the integration that Criminology in the true sense should have (emphasis added).

In other words, it was stated that we do not have to explore our Latin American reality, and by no means must we carry out in-depth studies, but we should continue with the individualistic approach and reinforce it with those sociological theories, which are characterised by their abstract atomising, ahistoric and thus contentless approach, and which contribute to the maintenance of cultural colonialism and alienation. That is the reinforcement that the Latin American criminologist obtains in such international events, so that he becomes even more alienated from his environment. 'Illegitimate violence' does exist. The intent of this paper is not to ignore it, although we point out its differential definition, especially in Latin America. However, as Frantz Fanon has indicated when referring to the Algerian situation, the high indexes of crime in our country are basically 'testimony of the general pathological character of this type of society' (Zahar, 1970:66).

On Criminological Theory

In Latin America, there is no criminological theory, and much less one that corresponds with its social reality and that truly explains it. What we have is a

poorly digested consumption of foreign theories which, when applied, only serve to distort our reality. This does not mean that we should not import knowledge, but that is consumption and not production. Scientific research is also productive. And as Mario Bunge (1972:283) has said:

Besides, the consumption of knowledge requires previous knowledge. In order to understand a scientific article one needs an adequate training. It is not enough to import publications, nor even experts; we need knowledge and discrimination to be able to profit from both. Moreover, the blind faith in the foreign model and in the imported expert can be disastrous because what is good for one nation may not be for another. Each nation must train its own experts both in basic and applied science. Only in that way can it know what it wants and needs to reach its ends.

Without theory⁹ of its own, there cannot be a proper criminology, even though many think deprecatingly that theory is nothing but intellectual exercise. There cannot be criminology because the task of understanding social reality, and in this case criminal reality, consists at least of two parts: (1) an essentially empirical one that implies collecting data and giving it a certain order; and (2) the essentially theoretical one which consists in giving that data a definite order so as to understand reality. All scientific research implies the use of implicit or explicit theoretical assumptions, otherwise it is not research, and thus not science. Mario Bunge (Ibid.:5) has expressed this idea with greater clarity in the following words:

Nature exists without the aid of scientific theories. For pre-industrial societies it was enough to have beliefs and opinions, expert knowledge but pre theoretical. Modern man cannot be without scientific theories to advance knowledge or doing. Destroy every scientific theory and there will be destroyed not only the possibility of advancement but also a great part of what has been achieved. But apply erroneously scientific theories and humanity itself will be destroyed. Our future depends thus on our theories and the way we apply them. Scientific progress is better measured today by theoretical progress than by the accumulation of data.

⁹ As Clarence Schrag has pointed out: 'Theory construction has several objectives: 1) It provides conceptual frameworks that facilitate the accurate observation and the reliable description of social events. 2) It formulates laws and theories by which social phenomena can be explained. 3) It establishes a foundation of knowledge and methodology that under certain conditions makes possible the control of social affairs' (Gross, 1967: 220).

We can point out that since Latin American criminology does not have a theory of its own, it finds itself in a pre-scientific stage that is limited to assembling data as an end in itself with no attempt to order it. But this dramatic situation has several explanations that are closely related to one another. First of all, the social reality itself where one pretends to develop criminology should be explored. This continent for the most part is ruled by a type of government which could be called colonial fascism, and as it is well known, fascism is a profoundly irrational doctrine which denies the usefulness of thought and analysis because it is not in its interest.¹⁰ Second, and perhaps more important although not disconnected from the former is the influence of positivism in criminology since the end of the last century and also among all Latin American intellectuals.¹¹ This has resulted in the emphasis being placed primarily on methodology.¹² That is, how to develop a method to 'discover' the laws of the physical world, whilst always claiming that objectivity is possible and that there is a distance between the observer and what is observed; what is observed is explained in terms of causality (although causality, as Bertrand Russell has pointed out, is 'a relic of times past'), without ever questioning the established order. This positivist inheritance that establishes what science should be in underdeveloped countries obstructs the development of theory. As Mario Bunge (*Ibid.*:285) has said in the following words:

An empiricist philosophy such as positivism will promote the gathering of data and enthusiasm for accuracy, thus facilitating the rebirth of science. But since empiricism mistrusts theory, it will impede theoretical development, and thus, in the long run it will impede profound scientific development.

But this positivist conception, that in a certain way is violence also, is maintained not only within criminology in underdeveloped countries, castrating their development, but is diffused by the ideologists of developed nations, who

¹⁰ See in this sense the excellent book by Dick Parker (1972).

¹¹ As T. Vasconi (1969:150) has pointed out: 'The consolidation of this system of internal domination concordant with the position that Latin America would occupy in the system of "International Division of Labor" found expression finally in a Latin American version of positivism'. On the same page there is a note that says: 'The States had to put their countries in order. As political theorists, intellectuals found the philosophical justification for the passage from anarchy to order in the positivist doctrines of A. Comte which at the time were rather popular in Europe' (J. J. Johnson).

¹² See the excellent discussion by Richard Quinney about positivism in the first chapter of his recent book, *Critique of Legal Order* (1973).

are anxious that social science in our countries not question the established order even though it is far from being a science. Referring to the popular philosophy of scientific development, Mario Bunge (Ibid.:287) says:

The most widely accepted idea about what science should be in developing countries seems to be the following: that it should be *empirical* rather than theoretical, *regional* rather than universal, *applied* rather than pure, *natural* before social, and in any case *philosophically neutral*. I will try to show that this is a disastrous policy based on a *false philosophy of science*.

And he adds:

- 1) Today there is no such thing as empirical science without theory for two reasons:
 - a) the goal of scientific research is not to gather data but to discover laws . . .
 - b) all data of scientific interest is obtained with the aid of some hypothesis... isolated data does not have any scientific value... a datum has interest when it can be fit into a theory.
- 2) ...either science is universal or it is not science, it is only folklore... scientific knowledge is not limited to observation; observation is done in a conceptual context; description is done with the help of theoretical ideas...
- 3) Who proclaims the subordination of pure science to applied science does not know the nature of modern technology...
- 4) Today there are no methodological differences between the sciences of facts: the differences are of object of study and techniques, not of method or ends. The end of all science is the same: to find laws.
- 5) Any scientific research presupposes a logic, an epistemology and a metaphysics, philosophy freed to itself without logical or empirical control... obstructs the development of the science of man as the Latin American obscure philosophy has been doing (Ibid.).

A third reason for there not being a criminological theory in Latin America could be found in the attitude of the criminologist himself. The lack of commitment of the Latin American criminologist to his reality has led him to ignore a whole range of violent acts related directly to crime, and to take the extreme position of considering the explanation of crime to be found in the high index of psychopathology of criminals. But of course, the criminologist considers

as criminals only those individuals who are inside the prisons, and ignores all the discriminatory processes of our system of Administration of Justice, which operate so as to send to prison only a very specific sector of the Latin American population. This lack of commitment of the criminologist can be explained not only by his alienation and intellectual deformation in relation to his social reality, but also because the great majority have been trained in the profession of law, which has as its end the preservation of the established order. Thus, we should not place all the responsibility for their attitudes on our criminologists. However, as with other social scientists, the moment has arrived when the criminologist has to become conscious of the need to recognise his stagnation and not continue sterile self-flattery. This is necessary in order to develop Latin American criminology. The initial step to end the self-deception would seem to be to question criminology itself. Then a new criminology adapted to our reality could emerge. But in order to do this we have to start exploring our criminological past with a critical eye. Some criminologists from the developed countries consider that doing this is to commit *hara-kiri*, but actually the real *hara-kiri* is to continue following the criminological fashions of developed countries. This is the maximum expression of anti-science. The only alternative to combat this in our field is the action/commitment mentioned by the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda.¹³ This commitment implies several things, and these are explained by Alonso Aguilar (1973:131-142) in referring to the role of the Latin American social scientist:

The first task to accomplish is to begin creating a scientific tradition of our own, a Latin American school of intense work, systematic study, rejection of improvisation, pedantry, dilettantism, and routine; to raise academic and training levels of disciplines that help to prepare young researchers conscious of the fact that true social science is not a spring-board or a stairway to easy success, of a petty kind, but rather a lever that can contribute greatly to our people living better.

Final Note

What has been argued leads us to conclude that the concept of violence in Latin America has its own modality owing to the reality in Latin America of the

¹³ Orlando Fals Borda (1970:67) defines it as follows: 'A personal attitude of the scientist toward the realities of the social, economic, and political crisis in which he finds himself, which implies in his mind the convergence of two levels: the one of the conscience of the problems he observes, and the knowledge of the theory and the concepts applicable to those problems'.

predominance of structural violence and its corollary, institutional violence, both products of economic, political, and cultural dependence of this continent. This dependence manifests itself at all levels, to the point that the criminologist himself is not free from it. That has resulted in our not having criminological theory of our own, and only copying and translating what is produced for other realities, thus hindering the scientific knowledge of our own reality. All this limits the prevention of criminological violence. One cannot prevent what is unknown, or known in a deformed and biased way, disconnected from the reality where it is produced. But the scientific knowledge of these facts implies a commitment that seems too costly and difficult. It is much simpler to continue preaching the precepts of positivism and psychologism, even when this implies self-deceit. If the present conditions of criminology in Latin America continue, any attempt to prevent violence and thus to prevent crime will be impossible.

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