

Reviews

Gabriela Lubelcová: Criminality as Social Phenomenon: Introduction into Sociologically Oriented Criminology

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Crime has become an ever-present phenomenon and almost a phantom of the new millennium in our milieu with tangible impacts on the life in the society and on the quality of individual's life. Events are not taking a positive course and trends seem rather long-term. Particularly the number and gravity of juvenile delinquency (performed by juveniles as well as by children) is growing. The share of violent crimes performed by family members is growing markedly. Why is it so and what can be done about it? Monograph by Gabriela Lubelcová *Criminality as Social Phenomenon: Introduction into Sociologically Oriented Criminology* published by Veda in Bratislava in 2009 reveals the richness and interpretative potential of sociological theories and fills in a certain gap in the field of professional publications. Mostly it focuses on the question of aetiology of crime in the frame of the current development in the Slovakia as well as development trends of the so-called western societies. Author draws attention to „methodological approach – to distinguish between the statistical, functional and causal analysis that has often been disrespected in research “ (p. 8). She sets herself the task of revealing the tangled and seemingly obvious links between the determinants of crime. Additionally, she identifies and clarifies the difference between socially and societally induced criminality. Criminality and the troubles of contemporary societies are framing the post-modern concept. Critically she reflects on and corrects common, sometimes even simplified ideas of „social causes of criminality“ and „typical“ perpetrators. I dare to claim that this work is stimulating in many aspects.

Publication comprises introduction, four main chapters (Defining Criminality, Aetiology of Criminality, Phenomenology of Criminality, Interpretation and Synthesis), conclusion and an English Résumé.

First chapter focuses on defining criminality. This chapter is useful not only from didactical, but particularly from methodology point of view since traditionally criminality is studied by more scientific disciplines each of them paying attention to certain attributes that could be seized by relevant cognitive tools.

Characteristic for the situation in this field in Slovakia is that in criminology normative approach has long dominated over the critical and empirical one. Criminology in Slovakia has long been pursued as a marginal issue of criminal law disciplines. Additionally independent scientific and research institute is still missing (leading experts on criminal law Milan Čič and Yvetta Turayová

appeal in the monograph *Zločin a spoločnosť* (*Crime and Society*), Veda: Bratislava 2009 to establish such a specialized institution). G. Lubelcová states that interpretation of criminality before 1989 had been distorted by social and political conditions, which did not admit social determination of criminality emphasizing rather individual failure as the cause. This had led to a situation in which criminology was overshadowed for a long time. Thus, the author juxtaposes social and ethical, criminal law and sociological definitions of criminality with an emphasis on particular methodological advantages and disadvantages for the clarification of the causes of criminal behaviour. This forms the basis of sociological perception of criminality understood as a modality of social behaviour that enables a more precise differentiation of its individual variations and bearers implying further contemplations about aetiology and social control of criminality.

The following chapter is devoted to theories of explaining the criminality. It is a summary of the development of etiological perspectives and is also focused on the issue of classification and systemization of theoretical approaches to the aetiology of criminality thus contributing significantly to the clarification of basic theoretical questions in the contemporary criminology. First of all, however, sociological knowledge is systemized with respect to *social* interdependence of criminality, all-important including the latest approaches to the issue are clarified and advantages and disadvantages of individual concepts are critically revised. Thorough clarification of overlaps of individual etiological conceptions with strategies of social control of criminality represents a vital contribution. Separate subchapter (p. 104-120) was devoted to *societal* interdependence of criminality. There, criminality is presented as the consequence of depth changes in the contemporary society taking place both on the value and normative and on social and organizational level. Texts by Z. Bauman, A. Giddens, M. Maffesoli, E. Hobsbawm and J. Young help explain the concept of post-modern society. These are regarded as an apt source of inspiration for criminological analysis of social interdependence of criminality: individualization of life styles, fragmentariness of social world, issue of social identity, individualization of social conflict, social exclusion and the changing character of the differentiation of social structure are just few of the attributes of the present day, which we experience and which form significant explanatory frame for sociological interpretation of criminality. This bridging between criminality and the theory of society provides the reader with a more complex view on the society, of which (unfortunately) criminality is also part. The closing part of the second chapter brings a closer look on the paradigm shift in criminology as regards the approaches to the causes and control of criminality. This chapter represents a solid stepping-stone to the analysis and interpretation of the range and forms of criminality nowadays.

The introduction of third chapter entitled *Phenomenology of criminality* is devoted to methodology issues of detecting and measuring criminality, its types and the reliability of data as well as methodology aspects of cross-national comparison. Further on, author clarifies the state, structure and trends in the development of criminality from international perspective in Europe and in Slovakia, which is richly supplemented by tables and graphs. The value and possibilities of analyses were increased by confronting data acquired by different methods. The aim was to assemble empirical data with a sufficient degree of verification in order to analyse the state and development trends of criminality. Additionally, G. Lubelcová presents analysis and interpretation of criminality in Slovakia and its development trends based on her long-term and in certain aspects groundbreaking research activity. To take just one example, a comparative empirical research of women's prison population was performed in 2003 in cooperation with the Department of Legal Theory of the Faculty of Law of the Masaryk University in Brno. The issue of women's criminality in the environment of Slovak expert discourse (unlike other European countries) suffers from insufficiency and marginalization. Special attention is paid to juvenile and children delinquency as well as regional differentiation of criminality. What is necessary to highlight and increases the validity of gained knowledge is the statistical evaluation of the data and testing of the gained results. Sociological interpretation has turned out to be extraordinarily important and beneficial mainly in that part of the chapter that focuses on typology of crime offenders since empirical data enable to form profiles of a current offender (with respect to certain types of criminal behaviour) and revise stereotyped or simplified thinking about a „typical offender“. Further possibilities for research in this field and implications for practice were indicated.

In the last chapter, G. Lubelcová synthesizes knowledge of crime in Slovak (but also contemporary as such) society strictly respecting the methodology postulate of the complementarity of the subjective and the objective. On the one hand, criminal and deviant behaviour represent the modality of social behaviour of a human being and on the other hand, criminality is a certain indicator of the status of the contemporary society. However, criminality is defined as a social phenomenon found in any society and not as the product of individual insufficiency and failure. From our point of view, an important contribution of the monograph lies in the fact that author attempted a very demanding task, namely to diagnose the state of the contemporary Slovak society from the viewpoint of several attributes. She focuses on normative and value dimension as well as on the context of changes in social structure. She clarifies and revises critically the processes of modernisation, cultural diffusion, transformation, individualization and their links and impacts on

Slovak society, particularly on the processes of social exclusion that are confronted with the concept of life chances by R. Dahrendorf. Special attention is paid to analysing and interpreting concurrence of the transformation of society and the growth of criminality in the studied period (1988 – 2007). Author has many arguments to offer confirming that the dynamics of structural changes in the Slovak society acts as one of important macro-societal factors influencing the structure and dynamics of criminality in Slovakia pointing out however that this is not the only one. Mechanisms of the influence of social conditions over criminality are complicated. The presented outcomes confirm the importance of social relation in the society also emphasized by E. Durkheim (concept of solidarity), T. Hirschi (concept of social bond), or D. Alijevo (concept of dissignification). Author draws several conclusions for the criminality regulation strategy, which she sees in a real, not just declarative creation and realization of preventive strategies (against the present-day dominating repressive strategies) and in interconnecting closely the prevention of criminality with the programmes and tools of social policy. Furthermore, she emphasizes the necessity to revise systematically the new life opportunities and its decisive influence on the mitigation of negative consequences of the transformation of society manifested in a growth of social pathology.

The highlight of the monograph is the author's own synthesis of etiological approach to criminal behaviour represented by the *concept of social anchorage*. In spite of the fact that analyses show statistical correlations with criminality among social phenomena such as poverty, unemployment, G. Lubelcov thinks that interpreting unfavourable social conditions as the cause of criminality is too simplifying, misleading and bearing the risk of potential stigmatization of the unemployed and the poor as socially dangerous outsiders. Author does not accept the interpretation of social interdependence of deviant and criminal behaviour in the search of partial factors resulting in a non-standard behaviour. It means that crime prevention programmes based on such false or incomplete premises could have no effect at all. Considering the need to take into account the complexity of criminality determining factors confirmed by empirically and theoretically based findings accumulated in the monograph G. Lubelcov phrased the former concept of *social anchorage of a person* as the basis for conceptualization of criminality as a modality of social behaviour, which was also supported graphically. Conceptual scheme stresses organic integration of an individual into a social context, in which a network of social determination is created for his/her actions including the deviant and the criminal ones. The decisive determinants of social aetiology of criminality are represented by social values, social norms and social relations. From structural point of view, it is the individual, family, community, social groups and society. Social

environment is structured and hierarchically arranged, which is graphically presented in a form of concentric circles around an individual representing micro-, mezo-, and macro-level. At the same time, G. Lubelcová stresses the relative autonomy of partial social environments of a person. She thinks that the source of a pro-social behaviour of a person as such is sociability. She further defines the mechanism of social anchorage as a set of bonds and meanings that a person uses to orient in the society (usually via an immediate social environment). However, this mechanism works in both directions. On the one hand, it is the awareness of social context of the social participant (reflected by the participant). It stands for the awareness of social affiliation and reliability, acceptance of the values and norms as regulators of social acts. The absence, lack of clarity and diffusion of basic values and norms result in the loss of person's ability to orient in the society, weaken his/her social anchorage and cause inclination to deviant behaviour. On the other hand, social anchorage is an expression of societal anchorage and acceptance of an individual; it is a space for life chances and opportunities. This dimension includes social response to how he/she performs his/her self-fulfilling activities. It is also a place, in which social context makes the person's life meaningful. Unpropitious form of social anchorage in this level is close to the concept of social exclusion. Dissignification, lack of social acknowledgment can also be the cause of deviant behaviour. Mechanism of social anchorage is performed via basic self-fulfilling activities, which as a rule take the form of social roles.

This last chapter is the „icing on the cake“. Gradually, argument by argument is the current form of criminality brought closer together with the possibilities of individual etiological theories. In this last chapter, the potential of sociological approach to criminality – innovative concept of social anchorage – is fulfilled to the full. It transforms the existing sociological knowledge into etiological model of criminal behaviour and thus creates a bridge between criminology and theory of society as such.

In order to evaluate the benefit of the reviewed work, it is necessary to call attention to author's intention – to clarify criminality as a complex, multidimensional social phenomenon from sociological point of view. The outcome is a well-planned publication focused firstly on the causes of criminality and secondly on the possibilities of social control from sociological angle. Work is based on structural division of criminological study on the field of phenomenology of criminality (description and analysis of phenomenal manifestations of criminality), aetiology of criminality (interpretations of interdependence of criminal behaviour) and the field of social strategies for the regulation of criminality. According to the author, criminality is a sort of a test, an indicator of the changing character of present society, mainly its bonds,

links and coherence. Presented claims are supported by arguments based on empirical findings (many of which are the result of author's long-term research activity) as well as on theoretical sociological knowledge. Extensive bibliography testifies to the way author approached the issue in a careful and consistent manner. Supposing that scientific knowledge in social sciences and particularly in sociology is cumulative and as Guillermina Jasso said, should represent a stock of reliable knowledge, so then Gabriela Lubelcová's monograph fulfils the ideal without doubt. It provides the knowledge of several empirical findings describing a certain phase of the development of Slovak society, its social and societal links and determinants in relation to criminality. It clarifies a number of fundamental findings from criminology and from theory of society in an attractive way. She elaborates critically on more topical issues that resonate in foreign professional literature and provides her own *concept of social anchorage*. Differentiation between social and societal determination of criminality is of vital importance. While the concept of *societal determination* of criminality covers a whole spectrum of influence over social frame, the concept *social determination* is narrower and relates to immediate life conditions of individuals and social groups, i.e. to the environment of everyday life. This is not just a formal division. Its practical importance lies in its epistemological position in the study of criminality. Author has identified a set of momentous negatives influences of the current social development and has formulated several recommendations for the strategy of criminality control regulation. These are seen mainly in a real creation of preventive programmes in close connection with the programmes of social policy. It is also necessary to highlight the overview of methodology approaches in criminality and their epistemological limitations. Work is richly supplemented by explanatory schemes, tables and graphs, which together with a name index add to the clear arrangement and the overall comfort of the reader. It represents an important and inspiring sociological contribution to the issue of criminality as an important social problem. Systematic, illustrative and comprehensible presentation increases the potential to arouse interest in sociologists and wider readers from various scientific disciplines.

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