

# THE CURRENT STATUS OF COMPARATIVE POLICING IN THE CURRICULUM\*

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This article reviews the current status of Comparative Policing in the criminology/criminal justice curriculum. In particular, it examines why comparative policing is important but is marginalized in typical American criminology/criminal justice departments. Seven principal difficulties with teaching comparative policing are identified and a like number of suggestions for improving the delivery of this type of course are offered.

American and foreign students increasingly are pursuing bachelor's and advanced degrees in criminology and criminal justice.<sup>1</sup> In particular, many students are interested not only in policing in the United States, but also in law enforcement in foreign countries. This interest is motivated by a number of factors including students' general desire for knowledge and by the potential importance of such information in their future careers in law enforcement.

Educators have a pedagogical responsibility to ensure that the subject matter they teach is relevant to students' needs, realistically present and analyze complicated material, and help their students to develop a sensitivity to cultural, ethnic, national, racial, and religious diversity. Teaching comparative policing (i.e., what happens in other countries)<sup>2</sup> deepens students' understanding, appreciation, and criticism of American and foreign police policies and practices. Comparative policing describes and (in many cases) explains the role of the police in different cultural, economic, ideological, and political contexts. Understanding these differences is critical if

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<sup>1</sup>I do not disregard the pursuit of criminology or criminal justice degrees in departments of sociology, sociology/anthropology, or political science, but for economy of expression, I direct my argument toward criminology/criminal justice programs.

<sup>2</sup>In general, research on comparative policing falls into two categories: descriptions and analyses of selected police departments outside of the United States, and theoretically based comparisons of two or more police systems selected based on some logical criteria. There is an abundance of the former type of research and a dearth of the latter. I argue for a greater emphasis on both approaches but with an emphasis on theoretically based comparisons.

educators are to present a nonethnocentric view. This pedagogical perspective, variously labeled cultural literacy and multiculturalism, has often been the subject of scholarship in this journal (e.g., Barak 1991; Calathes 1994; Siegel and Zalman 1991; Thornberry 1990; Young and Green 1995). It is also important to prepare students for the coming globalization of law enforcement (e.g., McDonald 1995; 1996), in which the world's police systems will interact increasingly with one another. Thus, teaching a course in Comparative Policing or sensitizing students to the issues of this subject in the average "Introduction to Policing" course is becoming a timely and increasingly necessary task at American universities.

Teaching, introducing, or maintaining comparative policing in the curriculum, however, is extremely difficult.<sup>3</sup> This point is supported by seven interrelated arguments, based on a review of the literature, discussions with colleagues, and personal experience or anecdotal evidence. These arguments, in order of importance are students' and (in some cases) faculty members' resistance; the paucity of research on comparative policing; the limited quality of instructional tools; the narrow focus of research in this area; the small pool of qualified individuals available to teach this material; the lack of emphasis on this approach in the general criminology/criminal justice curriculum; and the confused nature of the criminology/criminal justice curriculum. I present each of these arguments and conclude with a list of suggestions to improve the development of comparative policing in the curriculum.

### STUDENTS' AND FACULTY MEMBERS' RESISTANCE

Many American students and faculty members harbor a subtle ethnocentrism that must be overcome if a course in comparative policing is offered and maintained as part of the curriculum. Persistent questions such as "Why do we need to learn this?" reveal some students' inability to understand and appreciate both the relevance and the necessity of learning material about societies that are culturally, ethnically, and racially different from those into which they were socialized. Many students, motivated by the political economy of education, do not want to learn anything that they feel is not directly relevant to them— particularly if the costs of information are high, as is the case with comparative policing.

Additionally, many faculty members have difficulty with comparative research and subject matter (as in comparative policing), either because they lack knowledge or interest, or because they perceive it as a "softer" social science. Thus they are reluctant to endorse, encourage, and accept courses on comparative policing in the curriculum.

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<sup>3</sup>See Bayley (1979) in general for a discussion of the utility of comparative studies of police. This argument probably can be extended to the situation in other advanced industrialized countries.

## PAUCITY OF RESEARCH ON COMPARATIVE POLICING

Lack of empirical research on comparative policing may reflect "the climate of opinion in academic circles [that] has not been congenial. For some people, study of the police is associated only with technical questions of administration" (Bayley 1979:138). In addition, many scholars lack either ability or training in foreign languages, or cannot afford to hire native speakers for research assistance (p. 138).

A related problem is that "documentation on the police is not usually found in the holdings of even very good libraries. Individual researchers are forced to collect materials themselves from each force they study" (Bayley 1979:138). Even when such material is available from official sources, "permission has to be obtained, often from a hierarchy of authorities, to gain access to police records and personnel. Sometimes this is easy to get, often it is not" (p. 139).

Availability and accessibility aside, lack of resources is also a problem. Few researchers have the adequate training, funds, and institutional support (e.g., academic leaves, course reductions, internal grants) to conduct this type of research.

Finally, although a handful of comparative criminal justice journals exist, only a few policing journals, such as *Police Studies: International Review of Police Development* and *Police and Society*, devote a portion of their contents to comparative policing.

## THE LIMITED QUALITY OF INSTRUCTIONAL TOOLS ON COMPARATIVE POLICING

One reason why teaching comparative policing is difficult is the quality of existing research and the choice of formats in which that information is accessible to students.<sup>4</sup> The rubric of comparative policing includes work that compares or contrasts police regardless of the level of government (e.g., municipal, state/provincial, federal), between or among cities, counties, or historical periods.

Most research in the category of comparative studies of police is published either as a book, an article, or a separate chapter in a volume which describes the police of various countries. With the occasional exception of an introductory chapter and a conclusion, found in these latter works, most research makes little comparison among the police of different countries and provides hardly any theoretical analysis (e.g., Andrade 1985; Becker and Becker 1986; Cramer 1964; Das 1994; Findlay and Zvekic 1993; Ingleton 1979; Kurian 1989; Roach and Thomanek 1985). This limitation seems to reflect an uncertainty about the larger significance of this line of research. That is, the authors themselves have not identified a set of larger

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<sup>4</sup>A number of excellent bibliographies on comparative policing (e.g., Shanley and Kravitz 1978) have been developed. Their pedagogical utility, however, is debatable.

issues related to policing on which their respective studies could shed light. Unfortunately this situation may discourage faculty members from offering courses in this field; in doing so they would be required to define the larger issues that would suggest the rationale for including specific readings or class materials. In other words, the scarcity of generalizations in the literature creates weak and fragmented rationales for pursuing the subject.

A small amount of research on police is truly comparative; that is it extends beyond one city, country, or period (Das 1991). According to Bayley, "[c]omparative work on the police is still very thin. Moreover, with one or two exceptions, it tends to be narrowly descriptive. Indeed, the bulk of comparative material on the police is in the form of reference books, surveys of features of contemporary systems. Such works are valuable, providing useful facts on foreign police systems, but they need to be quickly superseded by analytical research" (1979:137).

A handful of books examine comparative criminal justice issues. Most of the authors review policing at either municipal, state/provincial, or federal levels. They compare and contrast aspects of policing in the most general of terms by examining separate countries; each chapter includes a subsection on the police (e.g., Terrill 1984). Only a minority of these researchers deal with policing in a truly comparative sense (e.g., Fairchild 1993: chaps. 4-5).

Although most introductory textbooks on the police briefly trace the historical origins of American policing to England, they generally avoid a discussion of comparative policing. The few noteworthy exceptions include Peak (1993: chap. 12), whose chapter entitled "Comparative Perspectives" examines policing in China, South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Mexico, and policing conducted by INTERPOL; and Langworthy and Travis (1994: chap. 2), whose historical introduction to policing in the United States traces policing to a period before the London Metropolitan Police.

Most of the so-called comparative studies of policing compare law enforcement in general terms in different jurisdictions and geographical locations. In descending order of frequency, this research compares countries, cities in the same country, time periods or eras in a single country, police forces in particular geographic areas, and cities in different countries.

The first type of comparison usually contrasts policing in two advanced industrialized democracies. Chapman (1962) and Banton (1964), for example, compare policing in the United States and in Great Britain. Bayley (1976) contrasts police practices in Japan with those in the United States. Occasionally, policing in more than two countries is compared. Bayley, for instance, examines policing in western European and North American countries (1975, 1979); later, in *Patterns of Policing* (1985), he compares policing in Europe, Russia, North America, India, Japan, China, and a variety of "ancient empires, simple societies and contemporary third world

countries" (p. 15).<sup>5</sup> Finally, Brewer et al. (1988) review policing in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic, United States, Israel, South Africa and China.

The second type of comparison examines cities in the same country, most frequently the United States. The classic study in this regard is the work by Wilson (1968), who analyzes six different cities' approaches to policing and identifies a variety of policing styles based on the culture of each city. Alternatively, Skolnick and Bayley (1986) examine police innovation from the 1960s to the 1980s in Santa Ana, Detroit, Houston, Denver, Oakland, and Newark. Usually, however, this type of work is presented as separate chapters on individual police forces, with a final integrative chapter.

The third type of comparison deals with analyses of different eras or periods within the same country. For example, Kelling and Moore (1988) look at changes in policing in the United States and divide policing into three periods: traditional, reform, and community emphasis. Some scholars also analyze police forces historically, and compare particular periods (e.g., Anderson and Killingray 1991, 1992). In a variation on this theme, some edited books contain separate chapters on police from different countries, treated from a historical perspective (e.g., Mosse 1975).

In the fourth type of comparative work, police forces in a particular geographical region are examined. Fosdick (1915) reviews policing in Europe; Marenin (1982) and Potholm (1969) study policing in African states; Lindquist (1970) analyzes policing in five republics in Latin America; Ross (1996) examines contemporary policing in three Persian Gulf States. Others study policing in countries under a particular political system (e.g., Enloe 1976, 1980), or policing as part of a national security apparatus (including the military) in a limited geographic area (e.g., Lefever 1970).

Finally, some scholars make comparisons between cities in different countries. Gurr, Grabosky, and Hula (1977) analyze crime and (by extension) policing in New York, London, Stockholm, and Calcutta. Miller (1977) compares the development of the London and the New York City police forces from 1830 to 1870. Sherman (1974) examines corruption in the London, Paris, and New York City police departments; Donaldson (1987) analyzes police discipline in the United States in general and in the Toronto and London police forces. Ross (1993) studies the history and reactions to police violence in New York City and in Toronto. As in the other types of studies, these works consist of separate-city case studies with a concluding chapter that tries to integrate them.

A related dimension of the quality of instructional tools is how the research is packaged for classroom use. When teaching a course in comparative policing, the instructor often must choose a text and a collection of

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<sup>5</sup>For a review of Bayley's work, see Das (1990).

articles or chapters. More poor than good texts are available. Even Bayley's (1985) *Patterns of Policing* has limitations and probably should be supplemented with a packet or collection of readings.<sup>6</sup> Assembling packets, however, is time-consuming for instructors, places burdens on the library reserve reading staff and students tend to dislike this arrangement because of the time and effort it involves. Alternatively, the instructor could assemble a packet and make it available at a local photocopy shop or through the university bookstore. This option, however, presents the problem of dealing with copyright permissions and infractions. Usually the best solution is to rely on a core text with adequate coverage of both theory and the various countries involved.

### THE NARROW FOCUS OF COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Only a limited number of subjects are compared. Four general areas of comparative policing are studied: policing of public order; police and political order; function, structure, and control; and police violence.

Separate-country studies, such as Brewer et al. (1988), analyze how police deal with protest. Brewer et al. examine both liberal-democratic and authoritarian states and argue, in the summary chapter, that "by examining concrete instances of the policing of public order, it is possible to construct a framework for the comparative analysis of order-maintenance and to provide cross-national insights" (p. 215). This category also includes analyses of community policing with examples from around the world (Skolnick and Bayley 1988a, 1988b).

Another category focuses on the relationship between the police and politics. Apart from Bayley (1971), Bramstedt ([1945] 1976), Coatman (1959), Coulter (1972), and Lefever (1972) "these works are more polemical than insightful, concerned with alleged abuses of police power" (Bayley 1979:138).

Bayley (1979) examines the function, structure, and control of police in North America and western Europe, and justifies his focus by arguing that these three elements "are central to what people usually want to know about any police" (p. 110). He concedes, however, that "[a]mong the many other aspects of policing that might have been selected for study here are recruitment, deployment, impact on crime, rectitude of conduct, and relations with the larger criminal justice system" (p. 110). Mawby (1990) examines the legitimacy, structure, and function of ten different police systems, suggests that the extent of legal control varies among countries and police

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, Bayley (1985) ignores policing in Africa, South America, and the Middle East. He admits "[a]lthough the countries chosen for study cover several continents, cultures, and degrees of economic development, they do not constitute a representative global sample" (pp. 16-17). Moreover, "the propositions developed cannot be considered conclusive. Rather, they represent an informed attempt to find general patterns of development, as well as general explanations for the patterns. . . . These propositions mark the beginning rather than the conclusion of a dialogue about the historical evolution of police" (p. 16).

forces within a country, and outlines how these factors are affected by internal and external influences.

Works on police violence (e.g., Fowler 1979, Roach and Thomanek 1985, Ross 1993) usually examine the nature, causes, and effects of police violence in a particular geographic area after a widely publicized act of police violence.

Comparative studies on policing (beyond a handful of jurisdictions) have rarely been undertaken. Because the data on police are nonexistent, unreliable, too costly to collect, or plagued with jurisdictional and mandate variations among agencies, researchers do not always work with representative samples. Although several possible systems and countries are available for study,<sup>7</sup> most research designs are flawed because few scholars understand the basic rules of case study comparison (e.g., Lijphart 1971, 1975).

### **A LIMITED POOL OF QUALIFIED TEACHERS**

Staffing is a problem in many departments considering a course on comparative policing. Few individuals are qualified to teach such a course. When comparative policing is offered, it is usually taught by a faculty member who has a special interest, particularly if he or she is conducting a study abroad course or an internship in a relevant area. Often foreigners teach these courses. Some have actual police experience and were trained either in the United States or in another industrialized country. In the larger departments, especially those which emphasize policing (e.g., Michigan State University, John Jay College of Criminal Justice), instructors with some expertise in this area often teach this type of course.

Unfortunately, only a few individuals in the United States and many other Western countries can be considered scholars of comparative policing. Country experts are more typical than generalists who understand policing in a comparative fashion.

### **LACK OF EMPHASIS ON COMPARATIVE POLICING**

Most criminology/criminal justice departments<sup>8</sup> do not offer a course in comparative policing. If they do so, it is rarely or infrequently offered because most departments are small and must provide a number of core courses. The more "esoteric" subjects, such as comparative policing, must compete with the basic curriculum; thus core courses such as "Introduction to Criminology," "Introduction to Criminal Justice," and "Introduction to Policing" are delivered more regularly. In many departments it is difficult to include comparative courses in criminology or criminal justice systems.

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<sup>7</sup>See Almond (1956) for an introduction to different types of political systems. Comparative studies of police in one type of system include Bayley (1979), Becker (1973), and Fosdick (1915; [1920]/1969).

<sup>8</sup>All uses of the word department hereafter refer to criminology and criminal justice departments.

As a result, they are generally offered as a "special topics" course. The increasing number of vested interests makes it even more difficult to place such a course on the calendar.

### CONFUSION IN THE CRIMINOLOGY/CRIMINAL JUSTICE CURRICULUM

Part of the problem in teaching comparative policing lies in the nature of higher education.<sup>9</sup> Many observers of college and university education have lamented the lowering of standards at both the undergraduate and the graduate level. One related problem that directly affects comparative criminology/criminal justice and comparative policing is the almost total abolition of the foreign language requirement (or the fact that it can be replaced by knowing a computer language).

The appropriate criminology or criminal justice curriculum is poorly conceptualized and articulated. Too much of this curriculum is a parochial holdover from preservice or in-service training courses taken by police, probation, and corrections officers. Too often it is narrowly focused and emphasizes practical managerial or organizational techniques, over a broad understanding of the role of police in free and totalitarian societies.

### SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS

I offer seven suggestions to improve the comparative police offering. The first concerns curriculum review. Many colleges and universities, aware of a "white and eurocentric" quality of their curricula, are undergoing or have completed curriculum reviews (D'Souza 1991). Academic institutions are considering and experimenting with new structural and pedagogical changes designed to inform students better, particularly in regard to ethnicity, gender, race, and multiculturalism. Many colleges and universities already require a course that focuses on ethnicity, gender, race, or multiculturalism. Comparative policing could fit comfortably into this curricular approach, and might be offered by departments as the means of providing this training to their students.

Second, as in many other fields, the philosophy of criminology/criminal justice needs to be examined more closely. Recognizing that various types of justice exist and that criminal justice is only one such type, criminology/criminal justice departments have considered and sometimes implemented not only a departmental name change from criminal justice to "Social Justice," "Social Justice Professions," "Justice Studies," or "Justice Sciences," but also a curriculum change which reflects the new name.

Third, institutional support for comparative policing must be increased. This includes the development, solicitation, or reallocation of funds to improve the preparation and hiring of individuals who are capable

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<sup>9</sup>See, for example, Cabrera (1995).



of teaching and conducting research in comparative policing. Such policy changes could also include the introduction of study abroad programs that may have a comparative policing component.

Fourth, the available human resources should be utilized more effectively. For example, instructors could develop a pool of foreign students, researchers, and professors on campus, some of whom might be former or on-leave police officers. These persons may be invited as speakers to inform students what police work is like in their own countries. Many big-city police departments have individuals, if not divisions, who interact regularly with foreign police departments; representatives from those units also may be a resource. In addition, foreign police officers occasionally are seconded to big-city departments either to gain extra training or to work on multijurisdictional task forces.

Fifth, the potential statistical and bibliographic sources for instructors and students should be widened. A variety of statistical data on foreign policing is now available from the Inter-University Consortium on Political and Social Research (ICPSR), which collects data on foreign countries and their criminal justice institutions. Also, a number of United Nations documents are available for loan; some of these can be borrowed from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), a division of the Department of Justice. Other sources also might include Internet newsgroups, list servers, and the World Wide Web.

Sixth, students should be encouraged to keep a journal on (for example) how and how often television shows such as *Top Cops* portray foreign police departments, and in what situations. Alternatively, students can be assigned to review local newspapers and national magazines, to determine which foreign departments are mentioned, how they are depicted, and to develop some explanatory hypotheses. Students also can note items and icons in popular culture which depict or portray foreign police officers and departments (e.g., London bobbies, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police).

Finally, many foreign governments maintain an embassy or a trade consulate, or cultural or national associations (e.g., Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall) in large cities. These organizations can be contacted, and individuals who are affiliated with them can be tapped for class presentations or input on students' research.

These seven suggestions are not meant to be exhaustive. They are merely starting points in moving the criminology/criminal justice curriculum from a relatively narrow operation to a more comparative undertaking.

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