



Article

Using theory from the Global South: From social cohesion and collective efficacy to *ubuntu*

Theoretical Criminology

1–20

© The Author(s) 2024



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/13624806231221744

journals.sagepub.com/home/tcr



Bill Dixon 

University of Nottingham, UK

Abstract

Criminologists adopting a southern or decolonial perspective bemoan the failure to use theories from the Global South in making sense of crime and responses to it. This article takes the African philosophy and ethics of *ubuntu* and demonstrates how they might be used to ground a more relevant and effective approach to preventing urban violence in South Africa than northern ideas about social cohesion and collective efficacy current in dominant policy discourses. It argues that using indigenous bodies of knowledge like *ubuntu* can contribute not just to making good some of the damage done by colonial epistemicides but may also offer workable solutions to contemporary social problems in and beyond the Global South.

Keywords

indigenous knowledge, social cohesion, South Africa, southern theory, *ubuntu*

Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world.

(Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986: 16)

Corresponding author:

Bill Dixon, School of Sociology and Social Policy, Law and Social Sciences Building, University Park, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK.

Email: william.dixon@nottingham.ac.uk

Introduction

The era of military conquest and political dictatorship may be over, but their impact on the mental universe of the formerly colonized persists. This article examines one example of this: the use of northern ideas about community cohesion and collective efficacy in a programme aimed at reducing levels of violence in urban South Africa. I take the decision to prefer these ideas, and to ignore the philosophy and ethics of *ubuntu* with its roots in the culture of southern Africa as an alternative, to illustrate the continuation of the dominance of criminological ideas developed in the Global North. In doing so, I am not suggesting that community cohesion and collective efficacy are all that the North has to offer. Nor am I advocating the rejection of all such ideas simply by virtue of their origin.

Writing over 40 years ago, Colin Sumner (1982) remarked that mainstream criminology had little or nothing to say about the societies of the so-called underdeveloped world. Changes in those societies were simply delayed replays of the processes of modernization familiar from the history of what we now know as the Global North. Almost four decades on and the Nigerian criminologist, Etannibi Alemika (2020: 7) notes that, notwithstanding the differences between North and South, 'Existing criminological education and practice in Africa is dominated by models developed to explain crime in Europe and North America.' In the intervening years, others have added to Sumner's criticism, including Stanley Cohen (1988 [1982]) and Maureen Cain (2000). Biko Agozino (2003: 1) was perhaps the most scathing with his lacerating description of criminology as the faithful servant of colonialism, an example of 'imperialist reason' that has largely escaped the 'postcolonial critique' to which other social sciences have been subjected.

Southern and decolonial theory in criminology

Over the last 10 to 15 years, criminology has begun to take up the challenge of making sense of crime and responses to it in non-western, southern and/or post-colonial societies. It is possible to discern at least five substantial, distinct, but often overlapping and intersecting bodies of work. The first consists of high-level critiques of the dominance of the Global North, its ideas, institutions and scholarship in and beyond the social sciences. In this vein, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016) offers a demolition of the pretensions to universalism embedded in much northern theorizing, and makes a resounding call for cognitive justice in the aftermath of the epistemicides associated with colonialism. Meanwhile, the Cameroonian scholar, Achille Mbembe (2017: 1), draws attention to the short sightedness of continuing to ignore knowledge from the Global South at a time when 'Europe is no longer the centre of gravity of the world'. A second body of work is concerned more directly with criminology, which, for Jean and John Comaroff (2012), is very much an intellectual project of Euro-America—and one with an increasingly insecure grasp on reality. In a dramatic reversal of the modernization theory found wanting by Sumner, they argue that the Global North is evolving in ways prefigured by the experiences of the South. The limitations of the North–South binary are evident in the work of Elliott Currie (2017) who demonstrates the presence of the South in the North in his dissection of the huge disparities in violent death between Whites and African-Americans, and in Parmar et al.'s (2023) excavation of the traces of colonial racism evident in the lives of

three British men. For her part, Katya Franko Aas (2012) is concerned with the ‘situated identity’ of criminological theory, where it is produced, by whom and with what consequences for our understanding of global problems.

Significant though these contributions to the literature are, the most consistent, indeed insistent, criticisms of the gaps and omissions in contemporary criminological thinking have come in the form of what its proponents call southern criminology, and from a group of scholars working in the decolonial tradition. The origins of the former can be traced back to the seminal work of Raewyn Connell (2007) on southern theory in the social sciences more generally. A group of (mainly but not exclusively) Australian authors, with Kerry Carrington perhaps the most prominent among them, have taken the lead in applying Connell’s work to criminology (see, for example, Carrington et al., 2016, 2018, 2019a, 2019b). Their approach has not been without its critics both broadly sympathetic, such as Max Travers (2019) and Leon Moosavi (2019), and more sceptical (Ciocchini and Greener, 2021). Some of the sharpest criticisms of southern criminology have come from authors who deploy the notion of coloniality/decoloniality developed by theoreticians based primarily in the Americas (see, for example, Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2000). Blagg and Anthony (2019: 1, emphasis in original) put forward a ‘*postcolonial analysis*’ that moves ‘beyond the Global North’s colonising analysis, predicated on regimes of imperial truths, claims to neutrality and universality and its focus on the state as the epicentre of power’. Dimou (2021) suggests that southern criminology itself needs to be decolonized if it is to break with the hegemony of northern theory. From a decolonial perspective, the southern approach cleaves too closely to the questions asked by northern criminology, its ways of answering them and of disseminating its findings within the academy and to governments (Blagg and Anthony, 2019). At its simplest, southern criminology seeks to rescue the discipline rather than replace it. A fifth and final set of texts focus on a particular continent in the Global South and consider the extent to which northern theories and methods of investigation are appropriate in the context of (again by way of example) Asia (Liu, 2009, 2021) and Africa (Agozino et al., 2021).

It is not my purpose here to attempt either to resolve the differences between these reactions to the abiding ‘northernness’ of criminology, or to commit to one or other of the main—southern or decolonial—approaches. For present purposes I remain agnostic on whether the abolition of the discipline, along with the instruments of colonial oppression associated with it such as the police, prisons and state-centred systems of criminal justice is a necessary corollary of, even a prerequisite for, a thorough decolonization of our thinking about the issues currently considered by criminological inquiry (see Cunneen (2023) for discussion of the connection between decoloniality and various strands of abolitionist thought and activism). I want, rather, to concentrate on a feature of the contemporary criminological landscape on which there is broad agreement. This is the notion that, though the societies of the Global South can be mined for data, the raw material of social science, they have little to offer in making sense of what is collected. When it comes to theory, the countries subjected to colonialism remain, much as they were seen by their physical conquerors, as *terra nullius*, ripe for enlightenment using ideas developed in the North but assumed to be of universal application:

In this uneven division of labour, Africa in particular and the Global South in general exist as sites for hunting and gathering of raw data. Europe and North America remain the key sites of professional processing of data for the purposes of formulation of social theories.

(Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021: 887)

Thus, the epistemicides committed under colonialism persist in the face of crushing indifference to ways of being and knowing that sit outside the mainstream, beyond the ken of those who establish and police the boundaries of scientific knowledge. Critics of the status quo in criminology, and other social sciences, have been astute in pointing this out. Yet, practical examples of how southern or indigenous ideas might illuminate the lived experience of people in the Global South, and offer solutions to some of the problems they, and those further north too, face are harder to come by. There are well-known examples of ideas with origins in the Global South gaining international currency and influence in criminology, most notably perhaps in the fields of restorative justice (Braithwaite, 1989; Schoeman, 2013; but cf. Tauri, 2023) and the governance of security (Dixon, 2004; Froestad and Shearing, 2012; Johnston and Shearing, 2003). Yet, the theoretical canon developed in the North continues to dominate thinking across the globe virtually unchallenged.

Aim and organization

With the continued hegemony of this canon in mind, the aim of this article is, first, to illustrate how theory from the mainstream of northern criminology concerned with social disorganization, cohesion and collective efficacy has been set to work in South Africa, a country in the Global South with a unique experience of colonialism. Following on from this, I suggest that these ideas have been adopted despite the existence of a viable local alternative in the shape of the philosophy and ethics of *ubuntu*—and with effects that are mixed at best. Its second aim is to suggest why *ubuntu* might provide a more fruitful starting point in devising ways of protecting poor communities from violence than models imported from the Global North. In pursuit of these aims, the rest of this article is divided into three sections. In the first, I provide an abbreviated genealogy of social cohesion and collective efficacy as theoretical constructs with a long history dating back at least to the work of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942) in mid-20th-century Chicago. Then I discuss their adoption and use by researchers, policy entrepreneurs and government in South Africa. This is followed by an explanation of what is meant by *ubuntu* drawing on the work of philosophers steeped in its distinctive etymology, ontology and epistemology. A third section outlines the potential advantages, in both principle and practice, of trying to operationalize *ubuntu* as a response to violence in contemporary South Africa. I do not attempt to put forward an idealized notion of *ubuntu* as the authentic, unalloyed philosophy and ethics of pre-colonial African society; nor do I want to argue that it provides a ready-to-use solution to problems of urban violence in contemporary South Africa. My purpose is much more modest: I simply want to suggest that, as an example of southern theory, it is at least as good a place to start in attempting to resolve those problems as northern ideas about social cohesion and collective efficacy.

Theory from the Global North: Social disorganization, cohesion and collective efficacy

The origins of ideas about social disorganization, cohesion and collective efficacy can be traced back to the Durkheimian model of modernization and the replacement of mechanical by organic forms of social solidarity. But the progenitor of the concepts of social cohesion and collective efficacy that underpinned the programme of urban upgrading and crime prevention I will be concerned with in this article, was Shaw and McKay's (1942) famous study of the association between social disorganization and rates of crime and delinquency in urban neighbourhoods. Robert Sampson and Byron Groves (1989) tested an extended version of Shaw and McKay's theoretical schema in the UK using data from the first British Crime Survey undertaken in 1982. They found that, with the addition of family disruption and urbanization, and mediated by sparsity of friendship networks, the prevalence of unsupervised teenage peer groups and low organizational participation, the structural features of communities identified by Shaw and McKay—economic status, ethnic heterogeneity and residential mobility—had 'vitality and renewed relevance for explaining macro-level variations in crime rates' (Sampson and Groves, 1989: 799). That Shaw and McKay's model had such explanatory purchase outside the United States was, they argued, 'testimony to its power and generalizability' (Sampson and Groves, 1989: 799). In another classic study using data from Shaw and McKay's home city of Chicago once again, Sampson and colleagues (1997) found that social cohesion among neighbours, together with a collective willingness to take action in the interests of the common good—'collective efficacy'—was negatively associated with levels of violence. Social cohesion was evident in neighbourhoods where residents trusted and were not frightened of each other, and agreed on, and clearly understood, a shared set of rules and values. The optimism of the Chicagoans new and old about the utility of their ideas outside the United States has not been consistently supported by recent research in Europe (Pauwels et al., 2018). So, for example, a recent study using data on calls for service to Greater Manchester Police in the north of England found little evidence of an association between 'typical measures of social disorganization and collective efficacy' and variations in neighbourhood crime rates (Lymperopoulou et al., 2022: 1032). The 'study of crime', the authors observed, 'is necessarily place and time specific', a product of historical and environmental factors peculiar to individual societies (Lymperopoulou et al., 2022: 1020).

From Chicago to Tshwane

South Africa has a long history of borrowing and making use of ideas about crime, and how to respond to it, from Britain and its empire dating back to the 19th-century heyday of colonialism (Anderson, 2016). In the 20th century, the edifice of institutionalized racism was enforced under the rubric of apartheid still more rigorously than under earlier colonial regimes. It was justified, at least in part, by supremacist theories imported from Europe in the 1930s by the founding fathers of South African criminology who sought to preserve the moral integrity of the white minority by restricting social contact between the 'races' (Van Zyl Smit, 1989). Given criminology's role in lending

a supposedly scientific gloss to the subjection of its Black citizens, it may not be entirely coincidental that, as Biko Agozino (2003) noted at the turn of the millennium, South Africa was alone among countries on the continent of Africa in having universities with departments of criminology or criminal justice. Given too the country's long exposure to northern criminological ideas it comes as no surprise to find that theories about the relationship between social disorganization, crime and violence have been a feature of South African criminological writing for some time. One example is Don Pinnock's (1984) landmark study of the origins of Cape Town's notoriously violent street gangs. Pinnock argued that the growth of the gangs from relatively modest beginnings in the inner-city neighbourhood known as District Six was substantially a result of the destruction of the area's dense social networks when its residents were evicted and dispersed to more remote locations by South Africa's white minority government in the 1960s and 1970s. Social disorganization, if not the crime and violence associated with it, was a far from unintended consequence of state policy under apartheid. On the contrary, as Tony Emmett (2003) has observed, the atomization of communities, and the destruction of the mechanisms of informal social control that they sustained, resulting from the forced relocation of some 3.5 million people between 1960 and 1983 was deliberate, and a key tactic in undermining unified resistance to white minority rule.

Of all the work that has been done on social disorganization in South Africa, the study conducted by Gregory Breetzke (2010) in the city of Tshwane is the most faithful to the statistical methods employed by its originators. Using crime data provided by the South African Police Service (SAPS) and demographic and socio-economic data from the 2001 census, Breetzke operationalized four main measures of social disorganization: ethnic heterogeneity, socio-economic deprivation, family disruption and residential mobility. On his own admission, his study had limitations. These included the quality of the crime data supplied by the SAPS (see Krieglner and Shaw, 2016 for detailed analysis) and the difficulty of employing some of the indicators of social disorganization used internationally in the South African context (Breetzke, 2010: 451). For example, measures of family disruption proved especially problematic. The persistence of the migrant labour system established under apartheid meant that males were a regular if sporadic presence in households formally classified as female-headed in the census. Local definitions of who qualifies as the head of a household, and evidence that children might be 'better off' in female-headed households, also proved hard to reconcile with the international literature. Summarizing his findings, Breetzke (2010: 451) was able to detect no more than 'marginal support' for social disorganization theory in Tshwane. Positive associations with violent crime rates were limited to some measures of socio-economic deprivation and residential mobility.

South African government policy

The difficulty of operationalizing social disorganization theory under South African conditions has not prevented its government from adopting what amounts to its antonym, social cohesion, as a balm for many of the social ills besetting post-apartheid society (Barolsky, 2012; Lamb, 2019). The country's National Development Plan (NDP) for the period to 2030 published in 2012 makes over 20 references to it in a variety of

contexts from promoting healthy lifestyles to spatial planning and the transformation of human settlements (National Planning Commission, 2012). In a chapter on 'building safer communities', social cohesion is seen as being simultaneously strengthened by the creation of a 'safe and secure country', and its absence as one of the 'leading causes of crime' (National Planning Commission, 2012: 386, 394). Later in the same document, a whole section on 'promoting social cohesion across society' calls on South Africans 'to work continually to build unity in diversity' (National Planning Commission, 2012: 472). The Integrated Social Crime Prevention Strategy (ISCPS) published by South Africa's Department of Social Development a year before the NDP defines social cohesion as 'the reasonable and relative ability of the different members of society to work, live and survive together'. It involves 'collaborative and communal' social relationships and a sense of 'national identity', 'characterised by harmonious diversity' (Department of Social Development, 2011: 11).

Two things are evident from these documents. The first is that social cohesion, and the closely related notion of social capital, are viewed as significant at three distinct but inter-related micro-, meso- and macro-levels: in intimate and family relationships and friendships (see also Chipkin and Ngqulunga, 2008); in residential neighbourhoods and communities; and, finally, at the level of the nation-state. Second, the relationship between social cohesion and crime and violence is complex. In contrast to the received wisdom from the international literature, and the work of South African scholars like Pinnock and Breetzke, greater social cohesion is viewed primarily as a result of successful efforts to prevent crime and violence rather than a condition to be fostered in order to protect against them. Both of these positions are problematic. In the first place, it is far from clear how the three levels at which social cohesion is to be achieved are supposed to connect with each other when, as Barolsky (2012) points out, the caring inclusive communities and united-in-diversity nation contemplated in the NDP and ISCPS rub up against the competitive individualism promoted as essential to success in a global neo-liberal economic environment. In a hard-scrabble world, the advancement of self and family may well trump more altruistic and communitarian impulses. A second problem is the lack of clarity over whether social cohesion is no more than a means to a relatively crime-free end, or an end in itself to be pursued, among other things, by transforming family and gender relations and building safer communities. This confusion makes it hard to set clear policy goals, and more difficult still to establish whether they have been achieved.

Social cohesion and collective efficacy in Khayelitsha

Against this background, I want to illustrate the problems that can occur in using northern concepts of social cohesion and collective efficacy found in the work of Sampson et al. (1997) and others following in the footsteps of Shaw and McKay (1942) in the Global South. To do this I will draw on a case study by Vanessa Barolsky (2016) of the implementation of a violence prevention programme in the township of Khayelitsha near Cape Town. Foreign visitors to South Africa's scenic destination city may catch a glimpse of Khayelitsha as they head out to the wine farms to the east along the main N2 highway. Like Cape Town's other townships, this 'new home' (the English translation of the

isiXhosa Khayelitsha) for Black people was placed at the safe distance of 25 kilometres from the city itself under the segregationist policy of apartheid. At the time of the research reported by Barolsky—an ethnographic study involving interviews, focus groups, informal interactions and observation—Khayelitsha was a place marked by high levels of violent crime and significant economic disadvantage. Recorded murder rates at between 76 and 108 per 100,000 of the population for the township's three police precincts were over twice, and in some neighbourhoods three times, the national average. Those in employment had average earnings of less than US\$200 a month. Housing for half the population was informal, much of it in shacks. A similar proportion of its residents had not been born in Khayelitsha but had migrated to the township to escape grinding rural poverty in the Eastern Cape Province. Yet, Barolsky (2016) notes, Khayelitsha was a site of contradictions, its people at once fearing for their safety, but connected in a complex web of, sometimes frayed but still significant, social relationships. It was in this context that she set out to test some of the assumptions made in theoretical models linking greater social cohesion and collective efficacy with lower levels of violent criminal victimization. Her research focused on a violence prevention programme implemented by a partnership between the municipal authority responsible for Khayelitsha and the German Development Bank (GDB) using the latter's model for urban upgrading through 'coherent and integrated town planning' and support for entrepreneurship and infrastructure development (Barolsky, 2016: 23). In effect, the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) programme involved a funder from the Global North laying the foundations for a new sense of community as both an end in itself, and a means of providing residents with some respite from the threat of violence so salient in their daily lives. The chosen mechanism for doing this was an off-the-shelf technical intervention that made a virtue of its insensitivity to local political and social conditions.

The findings from the fieldwork carried out by her colleague Ncedo Mngqibisa in Khayelitsha, and the conclusions Barolsky (2016) draws from them, are instructive. An initial problem with the VPUU intervention was that the planned, well-ordered environment it sought to create in designing out violence was based on an assumption about the normative hegemony of the state that was unwarranted. It proved difficult to conjure the VPUU's conception of 'rational' and 'orderly' behaviour from informal traders and other individual actors with a very different view of the world under conditions where the state's writ did not run as it does in the Global North, and where violence was a constant threat, the need to react to it often informally, perhaps violently, so urgent. The ontological basis for social cohesion as the outcome of decisions by individual subjects was inconsistent with the sense of self, and the norms of sociality, still prevalent in Khayelitsha notwithstanding their gradual erosion by the individualism accompanying the adoption of northern values more in tune with South Africa's integration in the global market economy. Where residents were able to act collectively to enforce shared values and standards of behaviour, their actions, or those of other local enforcers such as the drivers of the minibus taxis on which the majority of Khayelitsha's inhabitants depend for transport to and from work, involved (sometimes extreme) forms of violence. Citizens' use of violence—and their resort to banishment and other forms of extra-judicial punishment documented by Super (2020, 2023)—reflected the inability of the state to assert its monopoly on the legitimate use of force, and contradicts the Weberian notion of state-ness. It is

also incompatible with commitments to the rule of law and the right to life, dignity and freedom and security of the person under the terms of South Africa's post-apartheid constitution. It speaks to tensions between the three levels at which social cohesion should operate in the idealized schema presented in the NDP and ISCPS with the collectively efficacious community flouting wider social norms by taking violently disintegrative and exclusionary action against errant individuals. Barolsky (2016: 27) concludes from this that some of the assumptions made in international discourse on social cohesion and collective efficacy need to be re-examined to take account of 'the lifestyles, values, outlooks and expectations', of people living in places like Khayelitsha in the Global South, 'their forms of identity and ... mutual relations'.

Theory from the Global South: *Ubuntu*

Barolsky (2016: 21) reports that an older male participant in one of the focus groups conducted for her study complained that, 'People no longer have *ubuntu*.' Another younger male 'entrepreneur' felt that 'Western ways of living' were undermining traditional values and how people live their lives in Khayelitsha (Barolsky, 2016: 21). Barolsky (2016: 27) herself comments that:

[I]n Khayelitsha communitarian world views support forms of mutual sociality that are intrinsic to social life and identity. These are underpinned implicitly by the philosophy of *ubuntu* in which personhood is achieved through social relations rather than through individual empowerment. However, these communitarian networks and 'ways of life' are under social and structural strain and moreover are conduits not only for reciprocity, but also for violence.

With the focus on testing the application of northern theory, *ubuntu* was present in the VPUU programme mainly in its absence, an elusive counter-narrative to a dominant discourse built on an alien, individualistic conception of what it is to be human. But what exactly is this 'philosophy of *ubuntu*', and why might it have been a more promising place to start than social cohesion and collective efficacy in thinking about ways of making Khayelitsha a safer and more secure place to live? The remainder of this article is devoted to answering these questions.

The philosophy and ethics of ubuntu

The first thing that needs to be said about *ubuntu* is that despite, perhaps because of, its evident appeal to a distinctively African sensibility, it has attracted its fair share of controversy (Gade, 2012). For some, its promotion is an attempt to recover an imagined past foisted on the masses by a Black elite that recent history suggests will end in social and political failure when brought into contact with the harsh realities of post-colonial life (Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013). Others deplore its appropriation and evisceration by white scholars lacking an organic connection with its origins in the life, language and culture of Bantu-speaking people. (Ndumiso Dladla (2017, 2018) identifies those he holds responsible by name.) According to Dladla (2017, 2018) their use of it continues the epistemicide that followed the colonial wars of conquest and the subjugation of the indigenous people of South Africa. It is with some trepidation then that I, another

white scholar, suggest that *ubuntu* may have something to offer in the field of violence prevention that the dominant theories of the Global North do not. As a British, English-speaking white male, I cannot pretend to have the anthropological and cultural connection with *ubuntu* demanded by Dladla (2017, 2018), and I have neither the ability nor the wish to provide an extended exposition of what a programme of violence prevention based on the philosophy and ethics of *ubuntu* might look like. All I want to do here is to suggest why *ubuntu* might have been a more productive alternative to northern concepts of social cohesion and collective efficacy in the circumstances of Khayelitsha documented by Barolsky (2016), and why its marginalization is such a striking example of the continued indifference shown to southern theory in criminology. If there is an epistemicidal threat here, it surely lies not in arguing for the potential of *ubuntu*, but in ignoring it. In any event, I hope to address Dladla's (2017, 2018) concerns by taking my account of *ubuntu* from him, and the earlier work of Mogobe Ramose (2005) to which he refers. I will also endeavour to heed Bernard Matolino and Wenceslaus Kwindigwi's (2013) warning not to present contemporary thought on *ubuntu* as the purest distillation of untrammelled pre-colonial wisdom and to be attentive to the conditions under which its precepts fall to be realized in the contemporary social world.

It is relatively uncontroversial that *ubuntu* is a philosophy, a code of ethics and a way of being human that is widely understood across Africa south of the Sahara. What is known as *ubuntu* in two of South Africa's 11 official languages, isiXhosa and isiZulu, has its equivalents across southern Africa and beyond (Kamwangamalu, 1999): *botho*, in Sesotho (another of those languages) and *unhu* in Shona (widely spoken in neighbouring Zimbabwe) are just two examples. Oko Elechi (2021) finds evidence of similar ideas as far afield as Nigeria in the *mbari* culture of the Igbo people. Proponents of *ubuntu* like Dladla (2017, 2018), Munyaradzi Murove (2014) and Ramose (2005: 32) emphasize that it was suppressed under colonial rule in the cause, as the last of these authors puts it, of imposing 'the European epistemological paradigm upon Africa'. To the extent that it survives today, *ubuntu* as a mode of thought and a way of being has survived the deliberate acts of epistemicide for which the European powers were responsible throughout the colonial world (De Sousa Santos, 2016).

The word *ubuntu* defies exact translation into English. From their vantage points, Ramose (2005) and Dladla (2017, 2018) suggest that it is divisible into two distinct elements, a prefix *ubu-* and a stem *-ntu*. The former connotes an unfolding 'be-ing' (both authors insist on hyphenation to capture an essential sense of motion), the latter how *ubu-* is manifested in 'particular forms and modes of being' (Ramosé, 2005: 36). When *-ntu* is joined with the prefix *umu-*, the product, *umuntu*, locates the abstract notion of *ubu-* in the context of human existence: '[W]hile Ubuntu can be thought of as describing the more general and abstract humanness or be-ing human, umuntu on the other hand, is the specific concrete manifestation' (Dladla, 2018: 72). The 'indissoluble' connection between *ubu-* and *umuntu* is captured in the isiZulu aphorism *umuntu ngumuntu nga Bantu*. This can be expressed, albeit imperfectly, in English as 'a person is a person because of other persons' (Murove, 2014: 37) or, more compendiously, 'to be a human be-ing is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis establish humane relations with them' (Ramosé, 2005: 37). It follows from this that, as Ramosé (2005: 38) makes clear, law and politics, and

the relations between humans generally, are, or perhaps should be, both based upon and suffused with *ubuntu*: ‘The obligation to be humane towards others is an ethical imperative based on the principle that one should always promote life and avoid killing’ (Dladla, 2018: 74). Although neither Ramose nor Dladla say as much, it seems that there is a distinction to be made between *ubuntu* as a humanness shared by all people and its possession by a particular group or individual (Dladla, 2018). The example he gives is that of ‘Europeans’ (*abelungu*), who are generally considered not to have *ubuntu* because of the history of unjust and oppressive behaviour by them in their interactions with the ‘Bantu-speaking community’ during and since the colonial era (Dladla, 2018: 75–76). Notwithstanding this collective exclusion, individual white people (*umulungu*) can demonstrate their humanness by their conduct. More importantly, there is no suggestion that, simply because an individual or group does not have *ubuntu*, and is therefore regarded as not fully human, those who do, and are, do not have to treat them humanely. In sum then, *ubuntu* captures a sense of relatedness, an obligation to be respectful and humane in interacting with others, to recognize and value their humanness, and an acknowledgement that human life and order are profoundly social. It offers both an implicit explanation for why crime and violence may occur because of a lack of respect and humanness in the conduct of human relations; and a remedy for those social ills in the reinvigoration of *ubuntu* as a practical code of ethics, a way of being in the world.

From social cohesion and collective efficacy to *ubuntu*

Christian Gade (2011) has traced the earliest written reference to *ubuntu* back as far as 1846; but the qualities of humanness associated with it have been woven into the history of opposition to colonialism and apartheid in South Africa with more or less effect for at least 50 years. For example, the Black Consciousness leader, Steve Biko, murdered by security forces in 1977, had this to say some six years before his death:

In rejecting Western values ... we are rejecting those things that are not only foreign to us but that seek to destroy the most cherished of our beliefs—that the corner-stone of society is man himself—not just his welfare, not his material well-being but just man himself with all his ramifications.

(Biko, 1978: 46)

The transition from white minority rule in South Africa between 1990 and 1994 saw the elevation of *ubuntu* to something approaching a founding value of the country’s new constitutional democracy. As a response to the ‘gross violations of human rights’ and the ‘transgression of humanitarian principles’ that occurred under apartheid, the oft-quoted Postscript to the Interim Constitution on National Unity and Reconciliation spoke of ‘the need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimisation’ (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 200 of 1993). Although its chair, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, did much to popularize *ubuntu* outside South Africa, the extent to which the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up to investigate these abuses was informed by it is contested (see Gade, 2017). *Ubuntu* was

not mentioned in the final constitution adopted in 1996 (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (as amended), 1996); but Gade (2011: 311, n.10) found references to it in no fewer than 20 judgments of its guardians, South Africa's Constitutional Court, including the landmark case of *S v Makwanyane* in which capital punishment was held to be contrary to the provisions of the Interim Constitution. As its President, Justice Chaskalson, said (at para. 131 quoting Justice Brennan of the United States Supreme Court in *Furman v Georgia*), 'To be consistent with the value of *ubuntu* ours should be a society that "wishes to prevent crime ... [not] to kill criminals simply to get even with them".' Remarks made in the case of *Port Elizabeth Municipality v Various Occupiers* 2005 (1) SA 217 (CC) heard before the apex court in 2004 led Thaddeus Metz (2007: 534) to go so far as to argue that it can be seen as the 'underlying motif' of the Bill of Rights provided for in chapter 2 of the 1996 Constitution. A dozen and more years on, and neither the NDP nor the ISCPs with their copious invocations of social cohesion made anything of it: there is a solitary reference to *ubuntu* in the NDP, none in the ISCPs. Yet, there can be no doubt that it remains prominent in South Africa's national consciousness, and a reference point in vastly different contexts. Two examples from the time of writing this article in early 2023 should suffice to illustrate the point. '*Ubuntu—Botho*' is emblazoned on the shirts of South Africa's perennial soccer champions, Mamelodi Sundowns—quite a contrast to the logos of bookmakers and online betting websites so prominent in England's Premier League. Less surprisingly, *ubuntu* was also cited in two articles in a single edition of the weekly *Daily Maverick 168* newspaper in March 2023, one about the reaction of a traditional leader to an industrial dispute (Ellis et al., 2023), the other on the need for compassion in the conduct of global affairs by the anti-apartheid activist and scholar, Mamphela Ramphele (2023). This suggests that the first reason why *ubuntu* could have been preferred to social cohesion/collective efficacy as a theory to be operationalized and promoted in protecting a deprived community in South Africa from crime and violence is that it has a history and a contemporary cultural resonance that the northern alternatives lack.

Tensions in the social cohesion discourse

A second reason lies in the tension within the discourse on social cohesion/collective efficacy itself. The ontological assumptions underlying that discourse are those of the European Enlightenment and the model of responsible citizenship implicit in both neo-liberal theory and the urban upgrading programme implemented in Khayelitsha assumes that individual rational economic actors will seek to maximize desirable outcomes for themselves. It is not obvious how this can be reconciled with the caring, supportive communities and cohesive society imagined in official documents such as the NDP and the ISCPs. Radical individualism is hard to square with the desired outcomes of public policy at the meso- and macro-levels when trust, solidarity and collaborative action to enforce shared norms and achieve common goals depend on decisions taken to maximize utility at the micro-level. The contrast with the ontology of *ubuntu* could hardly be more pronounced. Ramose (2005) and Dladla (2018) describe the task of African philosophy as first destructive then constructive. They argue that it must throw off the yoke of Eurocentrism before proceeding to replace it: African philosophy must be 'free from' epistemic oppression and 'free to' express alternative ways of being and

knowing (Dladla, 2018: 66). On Ramose (2005) and Dladla's (2018) account, then, the disjuncture between the micro- and the meso- and macro-levels evident in the theoretical discourse on social cohesion/collective efficacy is inconceivable in the ontology of *ubuntu* as a way of be-ing that is inherently and inescapably relational. To have respectful, humane relations with others is not chosen behaviour; it is the very stuff of human existence. What is more, the idea of *umuntu* is a capacious one, incorporating not just a person's family and residents of the neighbourhood in which she lives, but the wider society to which she belongs. Lest it be contended in the face of such idealism that the 'rawness' of life (Barolsky, 2012 quoting Fiona Ross), and the need to look after oneself and one's family in post-apartheid communities like Khayelitsha, militates against the sociality of *ubuntu*, it is no less inimical to social cohesion and collective efficacy. In fact, Barolsky's (2016) own research suggests that, under threat though it is, *ubuntu* remains a powerful reminder of how communities, and society, can protect themselves. Properly understood, its precepts have the potential to act as an antidote to the more violent expressions of communal sentiment highlighted in her work.

Practical advantages of ubuntu

The third advantage that *ubuntu* might have had as a theory in which to ground violence-prevention in Khayelitsha is more practical. A preliminary point to note here is that, even in 2004 when the VPUU partnership was established, the evidence for believing that an approach to reducing violence in Khayelitsha based on promoting social cohesion might succeed was rather thin. As Barolsky (2016: 19) observes, most of the relevant empirical research on operationalizing and measuring social cohesion had been done in the United States, Europe and Australasia. Recall, for instance, that Sampson and Groves' (1989: 799) satisfaction at the 'generalizability' of Shaw and McKay's (1942) theory about social disorganization was derived from a study carried out in the United Kingdom. Although his findings were only published six years after the initiation of the VPUU, Breetzke's (2010) attempt to test the theory in South Africa only confirms doubts about the replicability of research conducted in the Global North using indicators that do not translate well in societies where social order is more fragile, and the legitimacy of political institutions less certain. The decision to use northern theory in Khayelitsha seems to have had more to do with the availability of a willing and well-funded partner in the GDB than confidence in the promotion of social cohesion as a means of reducing levels of violence—an instructive example in itself of how the northern episteme continues to dominate in the Global South. In short, the VPUU programme was more in the nature of a bold experiment than the working out of a tried and tested plan.

There is also a more positive case to be made for *ubuntu* as an indigenous theory better suited to southern conditions than an import from the North. One product of the precariousness of life in places like Khayelitsha in the Global South is that, as Barolsky (2016) found, when collective action in support of shared norms and values is possible, it may take a violent, occasionally fatal turn (also see Super, 2015). As mentioned previously, statistics published by the SAPS have to be treated with caution; but data for the period October–December 2022 provide an indication of the scale of the problem nationally (South African Police Service, 2023). During those three months alone, 536 murders

were attributed to 'vigilantism/mob violence'. This makes what Sarah-Jane Cooper-Knock (2014) prefers to call 'policing in intimate crowds', the second most frequent 'causative factor' in recorded murders over the period accounting for just over 17% of those for which any such factor was identified. This is not to imply that such actions are the inevitable, still less the intended, consequence of increased social cohesion and collective efficacy. But neither is exclusionary, even homicidal, action ruled out as a response to those who breach the norms of the Durkheimian conscience collective at either the meso- (neighbourhood) or macro- (societal) level. The impulse to individualize, to pathologize, to punish and to seek retribution is deeply embedded in northern conceptions of justice and has been given renewed energy by the impact of neo-liberal globalization over the last half century (Dixon, 2001; Young, 1999, 2003). Inasmuch as social cohesion and collective efficacy are communitarian in outlook, they imply a sense of community that depends on drawing and patrolling the boundary between members and non-members, the righteous included and the excluded wrongdoer. *Ubuntu* offers a very different set of premises. Its emphasis on the relationality of being inspires the opposite reaction to deviance to that prompted by northern theory. An individual who acts in a way that is contrary to the common good and comes to be seen as 'not a person' does not thereby lose her right to be treated humanely in accordance with the ethic of *ubuntu*:

[A]n individual who acts immorally is not rejected and isolated from society but rather is drawn in closer in order to assist the individual to become a person and live with ubuntu.

(Schoeman, 2013: 296)

Northern retributivism and deterrence through punishment are eschewed in favour of a restorative approach that seeks to mend fractured relations and enable the offender, victim and community to continue to live together with mutual regard and respect. As Ann Skelton (2007) has shown, traditional conflict resolution processes in South Africa aimed at returning to a state of communal peace and harmony through reconciliation share this concern with contemporary thinking about, and practice in, restorative justice. Their concern with interconnectedness, interdependence and a shared responsibility for resolving disputes amicably 'echoes the African philosophy of *ubuntu*' that underpins them (Skelton, 2007: 234). Restorative and indigenous justice also share a prospective, preventive orientation (Skelton, 2007: 234). Those with a stake in the crime must look at its implications for the future. It is incumbent on them to come up with ways of avoiding further incidents. The practical advantage of an *ubuntu*-based approach to preventing violence is, thus, that it comes with a built-in brake on the kind of violent, vengeful reactions to crime that continued to take place in Khayelitsha despite the implementation of the VPUU, and are themselves significant contributors to overall levels of victimization and feelings of insecurity. None of this is to suggest either that pre-colonial ways of responding to troublesome behaviour can somehow be resuscitated in a pure form, or that restorative justice in its modern guise is necessarily more culturally authentic and therefore preferable to other processes controlled by the state (Tauri, 2023).

Operationalizing ubuntu

Even if all of the above is accepted it may nonetheless be objected that operationalizing *ubuntu* and establishing a relationship between its existence and lower levels of crime and violence would be no easy task. Suggesting how this might be done goes some way beyond the scope of this article, but some brief preliminary observations may be worth making here. The first is, once again, a negative point in the form of a reminder that Breetzke (2010) found it impossible to come up with a contextually robust set of indicators for social disorganization in conducting his study. There is no reason to believe that, if the large-scale quantitative methods he employed, following the lead of researchers in the Global North, were used to evaluate an *ubuntu*-informed approach to reducing violence, it would be any more difficult to come up with suitable indicators than to replace those Breetzke found to be less than satisfactory in Tshwane. In either case, the shortcomings of South African crime data are well documented (Kriegler and Shaw, 2016), and the dire state of relations between the SAPS and local people in Khayelitsha (Commission of Inquiry, 2014)—and similar settlements across South Africa for that matter—may make them even less reliable there than in places that are better policed. These factors only add to the difficulty of using statistical analysis to establish a meaningful causal relationship between *any* social intervention and crime rates at the level of a city, or an area the size of Khayelitsha with its population of over 400,000. It might therefore be both more practical, and in keeping with the epistemology of *ubuntu*, to adopt the qualitative methods of inquiry suggested by Smith (2021) and Liamputtong (2022). Such an approach might be a more effective way of investigating the extent to which feelings of sociality and relatedness exist, are linked to experiences of insecurity and violent victimization and can be promoted, than attempts to test a model of violence prevention developed in a completely different political, social and economic context using quantitative data of dubious quality.

Conclusion: Using theory from the Global South

This article took as its starting point one of the central criticisms of authors who have adopted a southern or decolonial perspective in criminology. This is that theories originating in the Global South, whether they are described as ‘southern’ or ‘indigenous’, have been ignored in favour of ‘mainstream’ concepts and ideas developed in the North. They argue that this continues, and reinforces the effects of, the epistemicides perpetrated around the world under colonialism. The force of these criticisms is increased if they are backed up with specific examples of southern or indigenous theory that can help in making sense of crime problems experienced in the Global South, and devising practical solutions to them. I set out to demonstrate that *ubuntu*, a distinctive way of being in, and knowing about, the world at the heart of indigenous cultures (albeit in various guises) throughout much of the African continent south of the Sahara represents precisely such a theory—or at the very least has the potential to become one.

Ubuntu and its cognates are the subject of an extensive literature, and a focus for some controversy too. For some it was one of the founding principles of the new South African

constitutional order established in the 1990s after the end of apartheid. Yet, by the early 2010s, government policy statements on national development and crime prevention hardly mentioned *ubuntu*. Greater social cohesion had become a key policy goal, and was put forward as both a cause and an effect of reduced levels of crime and violence. With antecedents going back to Durkheim and the work of the first Chicago School, social cohesion and related notions of social disorganization, social capital and collective efficacy, fall squarely within the broad sweep of northern social theory. I used the implementation of a violence prevention programme in Khayelitsha, South Africa, that sought to promote social cohesion and collective efficacy among local people as a case that reveals both the shortcomings of northern theory and the potential advantages of adopting an approach based on the ontology and epistemology of *ubuntu*. Ethnographic research by Barolsky (2016) and Mngqibisa in Khayelitsha confirmed what Breetzke (2010) had found in attempting to replicate quantitative studies of the relationship between social disorganization and crime rates conducted in the Global North in Tshwane. The individualistic model of the rational actor was at once implicit in the discourse of social cohesion, and hard to reconcile with the beliefs and behaviours needed to achieve it. Standard measures of social disorganization/cohesion did not reflect either the history or social realities of life in contemporary South Africa, while collective efficacy often manifested itself in displays of sometimes-lethal public violence. With its emphasis on maintaining humane relationships, of living with and through others, I argued that *ubuntu* offers an approach that resonates with many South Africans and, despite their harsh living conditions, is more consistent with the still tenacious communitarian values of many local people. It also contains much-needed internal restraints on violence and exclusion as a response to crime and deviance.

To take this further, I also suggest that, if the epistemic debts incurred by the colonial powers of the Global North are ever to be repaid, criminology, like other disciplines in the social sciences, needs to take theories from the Global South more seriously. To continue to raid a northern toolbox for theories assumed to be of universal application for ways of understanding and addressing the problems of societies struggling with the legacy of colonialism, and their integration into a global political economy skewed in favour of their former oppressors, cannot be justified in either principle or practice when more promising indigenous alternatives exist. It is past time that theories from the Global South are accorded if not precedence then at least parity of esteem in getting to grips with crime and violence in places like Khayelitsha.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my colleague, Qi Chen, and the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments on drafts of this article and colleagues at the Centre for Criminology at the University of Cape Town for providing the perfect environment for reading, thinking and writing.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Bill Dixon  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2298-5595>

References

- Aas KF (2012) The earth is one but the world is not: criminological theory and its geopolitical divisions. *Theoretical Criminology* 16(1): 5–20.
- Agozino B (2003) *Counter-Colonial Criminology: A Critique of Imperialist Reason*. London: Pluto.
- Agozino B, Saleh-Hanna V, Onyeozoli E, et al. (2021) *The Routledge Handbook of Africana Criminologies*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Alemika EEO (2020) Reflections on criminology in Africa. *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology* 33(2): 1–11.
- Anderson C (2016) Convicts, carcerality and Cape Colony connections in the 19th century. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 42(3): 429–442.
- Barolsky V (2012) A better life for all', social cohesion and the governance of life in post-apartheid South Africa. *Social Dynamics* 38(1): 134–151.
- Barolsky V (2016) Is social cohesion relevant to a city in the global South? A case study of Khayelitsha township. *South African Crime Quarterly* 55: 17–30.
- Biko S (1978) Some African cultural concepts. In: *I Write What I Like*. Harlow: Heinemann, 40–47.
- Blagg H and Anthony T (2019) *Decolonising Criminology: Imagining Justice in a Postcolonial World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Braithwaite J (1989) *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Breetzke GD (2010) Modeling violent crime rates: a test of social disorganization theory in the city of Tshwane, South Africa. *Journal of Criminal Justice* 38: 446–452.
- Cain M (2000) Orientalism, occidentalism and the sociology of crime. *British Journal of Criminology* 40(2): 239–260.
- Carrington K, Dixon B, Fonseca D, et al. (2019b) Criminologies of the global south: critical reflections. *Critical Criminology* 27: 1612–1629.
- Carrington K, Hogg R, Scott J, et al. (2018) Criminology, southern theory and cognitive justice. In: Carrington K, Hogg R, Scott J and Sozzo M (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Criminology and the Global South*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 3–17.
- Carrington K, Hogg R, Scott J, et al. (2019a) *Southern criminology*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Carrington K, Hogg R and Sozzo M (2016) Southern criminology. *British Journal of Criminology* 56(1): 1–20.
- Chipkin I and Ngqulunga B (2008) Friends and family: social cohesion in South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34(1): 61–76.
- Ciocchini P and Greener J (2021) Mapping the pains of neo-colonialism: a critical elaboration of southern criminology. *British Journal of Criminology* 61(6): 257–275.
- Cohen S (1988 [1982]) Western crime control models in the Third World: benign or malignant? In: Cohen S (ed) *Against Criminology*. Abingdon: Routledge, 172–202. (Previously published as: Cohen S (1982) Western crime control models in the Third World: benign or malignant? In: Spitzer S and Simon R (eds) *Research in Law, Deviance and Social Control Vol 4*. Greenwich: JAI Press, 1982: pp.85–119).

- Comaroff J and Comaroff JL (2012) *Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
- Commission of Inquiry (2014) Towards a Safer Khayelitsha: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of Police Inefficiency and a Breakdown in Relations between SAPS and the Community of Khayelitsha. Available at: https://www.westerncape.gov.za/police-ombudsman/files/atoms/files/khayelitsha_commission_report_0.pdf, accessed 28 March 2023.
- Connell R (2007) *Southern Theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 200 of 1993, Postscript on National Unity and Reconciliation. Available at: <https://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/constitution-republic-south-africa-act-200-1993#GENERAL%20AND%20TRANSITIONAL%20PROVISIONS> (accessed 28 March 2023).
- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (as amended) (1996). Available at: <https://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/saconstitution-web-eng.pdf> (accessed 28 March 2023).
- Cooper-Knock S-J (2014) Policing in intimate crowds: moving beyond 'the mob' in South Africa. *African Affairs* 113/453: 563–582.
- Cunneen C (2023) Decoloniality, abolitionism and the disruption of penal power. In: Aliverti A, Carvalho H, Chamberlen A and Sozzo M (eds) *Decolonizing the criminal question: colonial legacies, contemporary problems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 33–48.
- Currie E (2017) Confronting the North's South: on race and violence in the United States. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 6(1): 23–34.
- Department of Social Development (2011) *Integrated Social Crime Prevention Strategy*. Pretoria: Department of Social Development. Available at: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/integratedscpstrategy0.pdf (accessed 28 March 2023).
- De Sousa Santos B (2016) *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Dimou E (2021) Decolonizing southern criminology: what can the 'decolonial option' tell us about challenging the modern/colonial foundations of criminology? *Critical Criminology* 29: 431–450.
- Dixon B (2001) Exclusive societies: towards a critical criminology of post-apartheid South Africa. *Society in Transition* 32(2): 205–227.
- Dixon B (2004) In search of interactive globalisation: critical criminology in South Africa's transition. *Crime, Law and Social Change* 41: 359–384.
- Dladla N (2017) Towards an African critical philosophy of race: ubuntu as a philo-praxis of liberation. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 6(1): 39–68.
- Dladla N (2018) *Here is a Table: A Philosophical Essay on the History of Race in South Africa*. Pretoria: Bantu Logic Publishing.
- Elechi OO (2021) Mbari and ubuntu in indigenous Africana criminologies. In: Agozino B, Saleh-Hanna V, Onyeozoli E and Dastile NP (eds) *The routledge handbook of Africana criminologies*. Abingdon: Routledge, 32–40.
- Ellis E, Jubase H, Simelane B, et al. (2023) Heroes of the strike came from all walks of life. *Daily Maverick* 168: 18–24. March, 6–7.
- Emmett T (2003) Social disorganization, social capital and violence prevention in South Africa. *African Safety Promotion* 1(2): 4–18.
- Froestad J and Shearing C (2012) *Security Governance, Policing, and Local Capacity*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.
- Gade CBN (2011) The historical development of the written discourses on ubuntu. *South African Journal of Philosophy* 30(3): 303–329.
- Gade CBN (2012) What is *ubuntu*? Different interpretations among South Africans of African descent. *Journal of Philosophy* 31(3): 484–503.

- Gade CBN (2017) *A Discourse on African Philosophy: A New Perspective on Ubuntu and Transitional Justice in South Africa*. Boulder, CO: Lexington Books.
- Johnston L and Shearing C (2003) *Governing Security: Explorations in policing and justice*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Kamwangamalu NM (1999) Ubuntu in South Africa: a sociolinguistic perspective to a pan-African concept. *Critical Arts* 13(2): 24–41.
- Kriegler A and Shaw M (2016) *A Citizen's Guide to Crime Trends in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.
- Lamb G (2019) Social cohesion and violence in South Africa: constructing a puzzle with missing pieces. *Crime, Law and Social Change* 72: 365–385.
- Liamputtong P (2022) Conducting cross-cultural research qualitatively in social science: setting the scene. In: Liamputtong P (ed) *Handbook of qualitative cross-cultural research methods: a social science perspective*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1–24.
- Liu J (2009) Asian criminology—challenges, opportunities and directions. *Asian Criminology* 4: 1–9.
- Liu J (2021) Asian criminology and non-western criminology: challenges, strategies and directions. *International Annals of Criminology* 59: 103–118.
- Lymperopoulou K, Bannister J and Krzemieniewska-Nandwani K (2022) Inequality in exposure to crime, social disorganization and collective efficacy: evidence from Greater Manchester, United Kingdom. *British Journal of Criminology* 62(4): 1019–1035.
- Maldonado-Torres N (2007) On the coloniality of being. *Cultural Studies* 21(2-3): 240–270.
- Matolino B and Kwindigwi W (2013) The end of ubuntu. *South African Journal of Philosophy* 32(2): 197–205.
- Mbembe A (2017) *Critique of Black Reason*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Metz T (2011) Ubuntu as moral theory and human rights in South Africa. *African Human Rights Law Journal* 11(2): 532–559.
- Mignolo W (2011) *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Moosavi L (2019) A friendly critique of 'Asian criminology' and 'southern criminology'. *British Journal of Criminology* 59(2): 257–275.
- Murove MF (2014) Ubuntu. *Diogenes* 59(3–4): 36–47.
- National Planning Commission (2012) *National Development Plan 2030. Our Future—Make It Work*. Pretoria: The Presidency. Available at: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/ndp-2030-our-future-make-it-workr.pdf (accessed 28 March 2023).
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni S (2021) The cognitive empire, politics of knowledge and African intellectual production: reflections on struggles for epistemic freedom and resurgence of decolonisation in the twenty-first century. *Third World Quarterly* 42(5): 882–901.
- Parmar A, Earle R and Phillips C (2023) People are trapped in history and history is trapped inside them': exploring Britain's racialized colonial legacies in criminological research. *British Journal of Criminology* 63(4): 811–827.
- Pauwels J, Bruinsma G, Weerman F, et al. (2018) Research on neighbourhoods in European cities. In: Bruinsma G and Johnson S (eds) *The Oxford handbook of environmental criminology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 345–377.
- Pinnock D (1984) *The Brotherhoods: Street Gangs and State Control in Cape Town*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Quijano A (2000) Coloniality of power and eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology* 15(2): 215–232.
- Ramose M (2005) *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*. Harare: Mond Books.
- Ramphela M (2023) Let us swim in a sea of compassion and justice. *Daily Maverick* 168: 18–24. March, 19.

- Sampson RT and Groves WB (1989) Community structure and crime: testing social-disorganization theory. *American Journal of Sociology* 94(4): 774–802.
- Sampson RT, Raudenbush SW and Earls F (1997) Neighbourhoods and violent crime: a multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science* 277: 918–924.
- Schoeman M (2013) The African concept of ubuntu and restorative justice. In: Gavrielides T and Artinoupoulou V (eds) *Reconstructing restorative justice philosophy*. Farnham: Ashgate, 291–310.
- Shaw C and McKay H (1942) *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Skelton A (2007) Tapping indigenous knowledge: traditional conflict resolution, restorative justice and the denunciation of crime in South Africa. *Acta Juridica* 1: 228–246.
- Smith LT (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 3rd edition. London: Bloomsbury.
- South African Police Service (2023) Police Recorded Crime Statistics Republic of South Africa: Third Quarter of 2022-2023 Financial Year (October 2022 to December 2022). Available at: <https://www.saps.gov.za/services/downloads/October-2022-to-December-2022.pdf>, accessed 28 March 2023.
- Sumner C (1982) Crime, justice and underdevelopment: beyond modernisation theory. In: Sumner C (eds) *Crime, justice and underdevelopment*. London: Heinemann, 1–39.
- Super G (2015) Violence and democracy in Khayelitsha, governing crime through the ‘community’. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 4(1): 1–20.
- Super G (2020) Three warnings and you’re out: banishment, and precarious penalty in South Africa’s informal settlements. *Punishment and Society* 22(1): 48–69.
- Super G (2023) Extrajudicial punishment and the criminal question: the case of ‘postcolonial’ South Africa. In: Aliverti A, Carvalho H, Chamberlen A and Sozzo M (eds) *Decolonizing the criminal question: colonial legacies, contemporary problems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 107–123.
- Tauri J (2023) The plastic shamans of restorative justice. In: Cunneen C, Deckert A, Porter A, Tauri J and Webb (eds) *The routledge international handbook on decolonizing justice*. London: Routledge, 43–55.
- Travers M (2019) The idea of a southern criminology. *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 43(1): 1–12.
- Van Zyl Smit D (1989) Adopting and adapting criminological ideas: criminology and Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa. *Contemporary Crises* 13: 227–251.
- Wa Thiong’o N (1986) *Decolonising the Mind*. Woodbridge: James Currey.
- Young J (1999) *The Exclusive Society*. London: Sage.
- Young J (2003) Merton with energy, Katz with structure: the sociology of vindictiveness and the criminology of transgression. *Theoretical Criminology* 7(3): 389–414.

List of cases

- Furman v Georgia* [1972] USSC 170.
Port Elizabeth Municipality v Various Occupiers 2005 (1) SA 217 (CC).
S v Makwanyane 1995 (3) SA 391 (CC).

Author biography

Bill Dixon is Professor of Criminology in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Nottingham. Most of the research for this article was undertaken when he was a Visiting Scholar in the Centre of Criminology in the Department of Public Law at the University of Cape Town.