



Criminology and Crime Science in the Arab World

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Abstract

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Western criminological thought was preoccupied by theories of modern criminology, which were concerned with the question of why individuals commit crime. Since the late 1970s, however, the Western world has experienced new reconfigurations in the crime control field, one of which is the transformation of Western criminological thought. New crime theories have emerged in which the focus has shifted from the ‘criminal’ to the ‘criminal activity’. Despite their importance, these developments have had no impact on the criminological thought in the Arab world, which is, to this day, is dominated by Western theories of modern criminology. This paper has three purposes. First, it discusses the status quo of criminology in the Arab world. Second, it suggests plausible explanations that help understand the current status of criminology in this region. Third, it discusses the relevance of some criminological developments (notably crime theories and environmental criminology) in the Arab context. In that eventuality, it argues that the Western developments might bring insightful crime prevention lessons for the Arab world.

Keywords Modern criminology · Western criminology · Arab criminology · Crime science · Environmental criminology · Situational crime prevention

Introduction: Setting the Scene

Throughout almost all of the twentieth century, the Western ‘modern criminology’ (see Garland & Sparks, 2000) was preoccupied with the criminal inclination of individuals to commit crime. Modern criminology theories were ‘dispositional’ in nature, focusing on the ‘root’ causes of crime (Clarke, 1980). They sought to find out how an individual was born with, or acquired, a disposition to offend, and explanations were given in terms of physiological functioning, biological, psychological or sociological causes (Clarke, 1983). Since the late 1970s, however, things have changed in the West (Garland, 2001).¹ Many Western

¹ Body-Gendrot et al. (2014) noted that the universality of the criminological transformations discussed here is disputed. Garland (2001, p. 7) himself did not claim such developments to be universal, and thus focused on the USA and UK. Therefore, whenever ‘Western’ or ‘West’ are used throughout the paper, it should be understood in the Anglo-American context.

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policymakers have become sceptical of the dispositional theories because of their failure to postulate specific causes of crime (Hayward, 2007). This failure is evident, for example, in the ‘sociological paradox’, whereby the crime rate in the USA increased, though the conditions that were assumed to prompt offences did not worsen (Cohen & Felson, 1979, p. 588). Britain experienced a similar rise between the 1960 and 1980s (Matthews, 2016), a situation that led to what Young (1988) termed an ‘aetiological crisis’. Having reviewed sociological theories of crime, Wilson (2013, p. 34) noted that ‘none could supply a plausible basis for the advocacy of public policy’ since these theories are oriented towards conditions that ‘cannot be easily and deliberately altered’. Such difficulties, as Clarke (1997) argued, result from the confusion caused by modern criminology: between the problem of the criminal and the problem of crime on the one hand, and between the controlling of crime and dealing with the criminal on the other.

With the failure of criminal explanations in mainstream criminology (Clarke & Cornish, 1985), scholars and practitioners started to perceive penal welfarist practices as an ‘impossible ideal’ or even ‘unworthy’, leading to ‘the emergence of new forms of criminology, a new crime control agenda and a new understanding of the relation between state and non-state activities in the crime control field’ (Garland, 2001, pp. 8–9, 62). Accordingly, since the 1970s, the criminological discourse, and government policies in fact, have been transformed and shaped by control theories that consider crime a problem of inadequate controls rather than a ‘deprivation’ problem (on crime control theories, see Akers, 2012, Chap. 5; Garland, 2001). The limitations of dispositional theories stimulated scholars to reconsider the role of situational circumstances in explaining crime (Birkbeck & LaFree, 1993). Of particular relevance, environmental criminology presented approaches that were revolutionary in terms of the shift they made in the focus from the criminal to the crime itself (Wortley et al., 2019a). Crime was seen as an event that does not require a particular disposition, pathology or abnormality (see Garland, 2001). This is what Garland (1999, p. 355) refers to as the ‘criminologies of everyday life—an adaptation to a condition in which crime has become ‘a normal social fact’.

In view of these Western developments in criminological thought, it can be argued that, since their import from the West, the theories of modern criminology have been a dominant feature of the criminological thought in the Arab world. Explanations of criminal, or deviant, behaviours have predominantly centred on ‘individuals’. The late Western developments discussed above, which have taken a sceptical view on modern theories, have not had a considerable impact in the Arab world, if any. The starting point of the analysis is that the absence of this impact appears more striking as criminology in the Arab world has always been tied to theories, ideas and methodologies developed in the West. The absence of such an impact is, arguably, so significant that it might be responsible for a ‘gap’ in the criminological thinking in the Arab world. As analysed later, a number of factors have contributed to this lack of impact. The interesting part of the analysis of these factors is that it provides a different explanation as for why environmental criminology approaches have had no influence on the Arab criminological discourse. While they have been resisted in the West because of, for example, ideological reasons (see Clarke, 1995), it is argued that environmental criminology was not particularly resisted in the Arab world. Rather, it did not receive attention because of factors like poor criminological research, the very nature of criminal justice institutions and the historical and cultural particularity of this region.

Although comparative criminology is characterised as a ‘Western enterprise’ (Liu, 2018, p. 62), it has developed in several parts of the world, including the Caribbean (e.g. *Caribbean Journal of Criminology*), African (e.g. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*) and Asian (see Liu, 2009; Suzuki et al., 2018) regions. Despite such

developments, criminology in the Arab world is still under-researched (see Ouassini & Ouassini, 2020; Ouassini & Ouassini, 2023). In a systematic literature review on criminological theories in Asia (including Western Asia) written in English, Suzuki et al. (2018) found that ‘most of the articles in this region (Western Asia) originated from two specific countries, Israel ... and Turkey’, none of which belongs to the Arab world. This paper then comes to build a bridge between the Western discourse on crime prevention and its Arab counterpart. It contributes to map Arab criminological discourse on to the agenda of comparative criminology to elicit the attention of interested Western observers, especially non-Arabic readers. In doing so, for example, studies and documents written in Arabic are analysed. More interestingly, this paper comes as a part of a field that aims to ‘southernise’ criminology (Carrington et al., 2016; Moosavi, 2019a, b; Ouassini & Ouassini, 2020), though in a different manner. On the one hand, it applies Western criminological developments to the context of the Arab world, which is somehow a less ambitious project than the one put forward by Ouassini and Ouassini (2020, p. 2), which aims ‘to move beyond the Northern criminological case to produce new methodological and theoretical paradigms that are unique to the context of Arab world’. On the other hand, it aims to reinvigorate the criminological studies in the Arab world by calling for the application of crime science and environmental criminological theories in local contexts, as shown in the “[New Research Agenda for Criminology in the Arab World](#)” section.

To that end, this paper has three purposes, which are addressed in three sections. The first section discusses the status quo of criminology in the Arab world. The discussion in this section is limited to the academic criminological discourse in terms of theories regarding the causes of crime (similar research done in the Asian context: see Suzuki et al., 2018). No attempt is made to explore the other settings of criminology in the Arab world, such as crime control institutions or political and popular discourses (see Garland & Sparks, 2000). For the second purpose, the second section suggests some explanations as to why criminology in the Arab world has its current shape; why crime science or environmental criminological approaches have not been particularly popular in the Arab world. The third section addresses the third purpose of stimulating a new criminological research agenda in the Arab world. It suggests introducing ‘crime science’ to the Arab academic circle, which is different from criminology in terms of its interest in understanding crime rather than the criminal, and immediate crime reduction rather than long-term multidimensional reforms (for more differences, see Clarke, 2005), with a particular focus on environmental criminology approaches.

Criminology in the Arab World: The Status Quo

For the present purposes, the ‘Arab World’ is used in a relatively limited sense to refer to that geographical area of the world that consists of 18 countries, stretching from Morocco in the West to Gulf countries in the East, and from Syria in the North to Sudan in the South (Tamari, 1999). Although the differences in ethnicities, cultures and political systems across Arab states might complicate the task of analysing criminology in the region, ‘Arab nations have commonalities that do not exist in other forms of regional criminologies’ (see Ouassini & Ouassini, 2023, p. 12). Thus, a regional approach to the ‘Arab world’ as a collective identity is justified on a basis of linguistic, religious and historical commonalities.

First, the Arabic language entrenches the connection between Arab countries. In calling for ‘Arab criminology’, Ouassini and Ouassini (2020, p. 4) argue that the cultural

identification with the Arabic language ‘conceptualises the confines of Arab criminology for academics and policy makers who have been operating on these definitions in political science, anthropology and other disciplines’. The standard Arabic language thus facilitates communication and authoring for all Arabic academia and literature. Second, Islam has been a determinant factor in demarcating the contour of relevant concepts, such as crime, justice and punishment (Mir-Hosseini, 2011; Carrington, 2015; Rosen, 2018, cited in Ouassini & Ouassini, 2020). The fact that Islam is the most widely followed religion in this region allows for a common grounding for analysing criminology in the Arab world. Third, historically speaking, the European colonisation of most Arab states, especially by Britain and France, established ‘administrative systems that focused on police and security’ (Mir, 2019, p.35). The European roots of criminal justice institutions in the Arab world, which originated in the late colonial era (see Crystal, 2001), reinforce modern criminology and its modernist values and commitment to social progress, which are hegemonic among the academics, governmental officials and popular culture in the West (Garland & Sparks, 2000). The ‘modern’ Arab understanding of crime is consolidated due to the Arab world being part of the globalisation process (Mir, 2019). Therefore, there exist many similarities across the Arab world in terms of the modern values upon which the Arab criminal justice institutions (and other relevant institutions) have been based. One of the earlier examples embodying the common values in the field of crime and criminal justice systems goes back to 1960 when the League of Arab States established the Arab Organization for Social Defence against Crime, which aimed to:

‘unify Arab legislation on the basis of Islamic principles; strengthen cooperation between member States in prevention of crime through the legislative, judicial, social, correctional and criminal – police – fields, and through penal institutions’ (Global Civil Society Database, 2023).

Discussing the dominant criminological discourse in the Arab world in terms of the causes of criminality and its prevention cannot be isolated from understanding criminology’s status as a discipline in this region. Criminology in the Arab world is still seen to be in its infancy, whereby the criminological knowledge is tied to Western theories and concepts (Ouassini & Ouassini, 2020, 2023). The Western dominance of criminology stems from the socio-historic factors that give the Western knowledge its superiority and privilege, not only in the context of criminology, but also in the social sciences in general (Moosavi, 2019b). Given the ‘Westerncentric’ nature of criminology (Moosavi, 2019b, p. 259), it is unsurprising that the growth of the criminology literature has notably overlooked the Arab world (Ouassini & Ouassini, 2020). As relevant developments in the Arab region are disregarded, one cannot expect the developments in this region to exert any influence on criminology in general. The non-existence of a distinct theoretical criminological paradigm and inquiry that is unique to the Arab context renders criminology in this region, and in other parts of the South as well, a ‘not yet well-established’ discipline (Carrington et al., 2016, p. 3). However, the underdevelopment of ‘Arab criminology’ might be a little surprising. When considering the ‘unique’ commonalities between Arab countries in terms of their history, language and religion, criminology in this region should have had better chance of growing than other types of comparative criminology around the world. For example, in Asia, there have been serious steps to develop ‘Asian criminology’ despite the diverse culture and social systems (Liu, 2018), ‘manifested in different languages, different legal systems, and diversity in crime and crime control systems and practices’ across Asian countries (Liu, 2009, p. 4). On the other hand, criminology in the Arab world resembles Asian criminology in terms of the development of crime science and environmental

criminology. As an environmental criminological theory, routine activity theory is among the least tested criminological theories in Eastern Asia, and there are no studies on routine activity theory in Southern and South Eastern Asia (see Suzuki et al., 2018).

At least for the present purposes, speaking of ‘criminology in the Arab world’ is preferable to discussing ‘Arab criminology’, as the latter somehow assumes, or alludes to, a distinct criminology that is endogenous to the Arab world. The body of criminology as a discipline in the Arab world is arguably a product of the translation movement of Western books and journal articles. The movement was pioneered by Arab scholars who completed their scholarships in Western countries in the first half of the twentieth century. Upon their return to their homelands, those scholars brought with them the then dominant Western schools’ perspectives on crime—theories and concepts that they had learnt (the same took place in Asia: see Liu, 2009). Some years ago, Sabagh and Ghazalla (1986, p. 337) showed how ‘Arab sociology is dependent on copying and translating Western sociological works’, and that the theoretical research of Arab sociologists reflected what they learnt and trained in the West. Surveying criminology textbooks, especially those written in Arabic, strikingly illustrates that these textbooks are invariably imbued with modern criminological theories. To date, the curricula of criminology and penology modules in the Arab law schools still only teach modern criminological theories to which the concept of the ‘offender’ is central. In these curricula, the focus is more, if not only, on the offenders and the related individual biological and psychological and social factors that contribute to the commission of crime (with some limited reference to environmental factors like the weather: e.g. Ramadan, 1972; Obaid, 1985; Mansour, 1991; Al-Shathli, 2019). A ‘patterned’ focus on modern criminology can be noted, which has two implications.

First, the education of criminology in this region largely reproduces a standard narrative of the field, that is, a criminological preoccupation with ‘the offender’ and the effect of internal and external factors on individuals’ deviance/criminality. Arab criminological discourse then becomes ‘self-breeding’, whereby the same textbooks and articles are being repetitively cited and paraphrased. Conspicuous due to its absence in these curricula is any mention of the types of criminological theories that ‘deem crime and delinquency to be problems not of deprivation but of inadequate control’ (Garland, 2001, p. 15), especially situational controls. For example, in a standard textbook, Al-Mashhadani and Al-Bakri (2012, p. 27) reviewed what they called ‘contemporary’ trends in criminology. They emphasised, *inter alia*, its positivist nature as a characteristic of modern criminology. Despite being described as ‘contemporary’, the more recent developments in Western criminological thought are absent. As a result, the questions that are asked in Arab criminological research are often oriented towards the ‘root causes’ of criminality that propelled the offender to commit his/her crime, but away from the focus on the criminal event itself. Second, the discourse of ‘root causes’ of crime produces a specific criminological ideology in the Arab world. It depicts criminology as a subject entailing criminality—and the criminal-related matters that are an exclusive function of the ‘state’ through its relevant institutions—whether criminal justice or social welfare institutions. As we discuss later, this understanding of criminology does not foster an environment that is favourable to the development of crime science and environmental criminological theories.

In an extensive study on crime patterns in the Arab world, Al-Bushri (1999, pp. 55–59) studied the impact of economic, social and political transformations on criminal activities. He surveyed the studies conducted since the 1980s in many Arab countries that included several patterns of crime, varying from street and youth crimes, to economic crimes and female delinquency. All of the studies shared a common tone: crime was perceived as a social problem caused by the economic, political, cultural and social transformations that

those Arab states had experienced (Al-Bushri, 1999). In general, the policies suggested to prevent those patterns of crime were mainly based on state interventions to alter the criminal's motivation, whether in advance by inhibiting the development of criminality, or after the occurrence of crime as part of a rehabilitation process; interventions that belong to what Garland (2001, p. 15) refers to as 'the criminologies of the welfare state'. It is important to emphasise that the extent to which the policy implications of modern criminological theories have resonance in the practices of the Arab governments is another question that is beyond our discussion. But, as will be discussed later, modern criminology, through the twentieth century's 'social defence movement', has influenced the Arab criminal laws and criminal justice systems.

Until recently, the dispositional view on criminality has pervaded the field and dominated research interest. By way of example, recent scholarly works speak of the role of sociological factors in the criminal phenomenon in Algeria (Mustafa, 2021); the relationship between socialisation and youth deviance in the UAE (Nasif & Yousef, 2020); the preventive role of Islamic religion in protecting youths in Saudi Arabia (Maddah, 2004); and the significant association between mental illness and criminal behaviour (Albarbari et al., 2021). In the course of their study of motor vehicle theft in Saudi Arabia, Alotaibi et al. (2019, p. 18, emphasis added) found that 'Existing studies in SA (Saudi Arabia) have been primarily focused on the characteristics of offenders rather than victims, the geographical location of crime incidents or its surrounding factors'. Alotaibi and his colleagues noted the lack of research in the Arab world that seeks to apply environmental criminology theories, such as routine activity theory and crime pattern theory (there is, however, previous research published by Ekblom et al. (2013) who applied CPTED to the context of the UAE).

The analysis so far has no more than observed the hegemony of modern criminology theories as inferred from the prevalent pattern of criminological research conducted in the Arab world. Still, there is research that takes a different analytic path in paying attention to the situational determinants and their role in preventing crime. For example, Ekblom et al. (2013) studied the applicability of CPTED in Abu Dhabi; Adel et al. (2016) studied the relationship between crime patterns and urban planning aspects in Cairo, Egypt; Alotaibi et al. (2019) studied the applicability of routine activity theory and crime pattern theory in Saudi Arabia; Al-Othmani (2021) studied the use of face recognition technology in combating crimes in Arab airports; and Aboudouh (2022) suggested situational policies (e.g. encryption policies) to deal with 'Tik Tok' security challenges. There is also a research line that emphasises, for example, the role of victims and the immediate environment in preventing sexual assault against women (see Alloush, 2021). However, the 'characteristics' of offenders are still central in this research, which again stresses that explanations of crime are not based on an understanding in which crime is uncoupled from criminality. Thus, Shehayeb (2010, p.4) noted that place-based crime prevention in the Arab world 'has not been studied enough in the region'. Finally, while there are limited studies on criminal activities from an environmental perspective, they 'generally do not engage with the associated theoretical explanatory frameworks' (Alotaibi et al., 2019, p. 6).

In conclusion, this paper does not argue that modern criminology has lost legitimacy in Western thought nor does it question the up-until-today importance of these theories, whether in the Western or Arab world. In fact, globally speaking, the United Nations still proffer social, biological and economic factors as causes of criminality (see UNODC, 2010, pp. 9–11). What is argued here is that there has been a gap in the development of criminological thinking in the Arab world. The gap is not only related to, as some have argued, the absence of 'Arab criminology' as a sub-discipline. The process of introducing criminological theories and perspectives—that have been developed recently in the West—into

the Arab discourse also seems to have stopped some time ago. There is notably ‘little to no interest in making Northern criminology applicable to the Arab world’ (Ouassini & Ouassini, 2020, p. 5), with the exception of some research conducted by Western scholars and applied to the Middle Eastern context, such as the West Bank barrier study (see Perry et al., 2017) and the study of antiquity trafficking in Syria (see Weirich, 2019). In line with the paper’s argument, this has been responsible for the ‘gap’ in the Arab crime prevention discourse whereby important Western developments in the field have not, wittingly or unwittingly, received any attention in this region. With some exceptions, studies that focus on crime rather than the criminal are patchy. Also, some of these studies are theoretically unsystematic, and have been carried out without a preconceived idea and coherent framework. In this sense, their focus on the importance of the ‘criminal event’ is still unconscious and unavowed, and they only stress preventive measures that we take every day to reduce the risk of crime, which Felson and Clarke (2010, pp. 106–107) refer to as ‘routine precautions’. The next section will elaborate on some explanations that can help understand why crime science (environmental criminology in particular) has not received attention in this area.

Crime Science and Environmental Criminology in Arab World

So far, two interlocked observations can be posited. First, modern criminological theories still dominate the discourse in the Arab region. The second, accordingly, is that there is little to no criminological research that is interested in crime as an event away from the concept of the criminal. But what might explain this lack of interest in crime science and environmental criminological approaches in the Arab world? The merit of this question lies in the fact that criminology in the Arab world has always been dependent on Western criminology. Have Arab scholars not read the recent criminological developments carefully? In fact, the answer is not simple. The following discussion suggests a multi-factorial explanation, which is, for convenience purposes, categorised into structural, institutional and historical-cultural. These factors help explain why crime science and environmental approaches—as Western developments—have been absent in, and have not had an impact on, the Arab world. Seen as a whole, these factors contribute to understanding the current gap in the criminological thinking in the Arab world.

Structural and Institutional Factors

For the structural reasons, the limited intellectual input is one challenge that faces the development of criminological thinking in the Arab world, in general, and crime science in particular. The lack of institutional platforms, such as criminological conferences and academic societies, has resulted in ‘only a few sporadic studies in various criminological and legal studies journals’ (Ouassini & Ouassini, 2020, p. 10). Some attribute the limited input to challenges, such as data limitation and the classification of the crime problem and information about it as a ‘security secret’ (Al-Bushri, 1999; similar issue in the Asian context: see Suzuki et al., 2018). But the challenge, arguably, goes beyond data-related matters. The limitedness of structural conditions for research is unlikely to encourage comparative criminology studies, including critical studies that challenge the dominant Western theories, reviews of the literature on criminology or even the re-introduction of criminological developments into the region (on the role of academic

institutions in promoting comparative criminology research, see Bennett, 2004). Some commentators even went further and argued that, historically, the political climate in the Arab world imposed restraints on sociological theory and research (see Sabagh & Ghazalla, 1986). Indeed, Young (1988, p. 166) perceives the intellectual problems that criminology faces as one of the motors that determine changes in criminology.

The influence of academic societies cannot be underestimated. For example, in Asia, the establishment of the *Asian Journal of Criminology* was found to play role 'in promoting criminological studies in Asia and in contributing to the development of Asian criminology' (Liu, 2009, p. 9), and in Europe, the *European Journal of Criminology* helped European criminologists to extend their 'cross-national networks' (Body-Gendrot et al., 2014, p. 18). In the Arab world, the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences (NAUSS) is leading the region in relation to criminological and security studies (for its history, see NAUSS, 2022a). Despite the contribution it promises, its potential has not yet been realised, and this can perhaps be partially explained in view of the other reasons discussed below. In general, the reality of criminology in the Arab world goes hand-in-hand with what is noted elsewhere, that 'Southern criminology' is characterised by the 'epistemological dominance' of the Northern criminology as it 'does not offer another form of opposition so much as a series of projects of retrieval (Carrington et al., 2016, p. 3). But what has not been noted by others is not only that criminology in the Arab world is dominated by Western criminological thought, but that the retrieval process itself also stopped a time ago, let alone contributing to the discipline of criminology.

The limited intellectual input has pedagogical reasons. Criminology in most Arab universities, if not all, is not recognised as an academic discipline in its own right. It is studied in one module (typically titled 'criminology and penology') within law schools, in which other related legal subjects, such as criminal law, are understandably paid more attention. The doctrinal nature of legal education in those law schools, which is seen by some as 'intellectually rigid, inflexible and inward-looking' approach (Vick, 2004, p. 164), is unlikely to add value to the criminological thought. Arab law graduates presumably do not develop the methodological capacities necessary to rethink the prevalent explanations of the criminal phenomenon. The same was noted in Europe whereby criminology 'was pressed through the criminal law' (Walters, 2001, p. 206). The confinement of criminology within law schools, 'suffocated by criminal law', did not help criminology 'develop as an international, interdisciplinary, autonomous discipline' (Body-Gendrot et al., 2014, p. 12). Even with the writings of those whose background is sociological or psychological, they are not specialists in the strict sense. Rather, they develop a 'casual' interest in issues related to the criminal and crime. Issues of crime and criminals then are addressed within the broader context of social phenomena that Arab sociologists and social workers are interested in. Arab researchers do not usually obtain an independent criminology degree since there is no such degree in Arab universities. The problem of 'criminology', especially within sociology departments in Arab world universities, becomes clearer when considering that the feasibility, applicability and epistemological value of sociology as a discipline are always questioned in the Arab world (see Abdul-Jabar, 2014). Criminology education in the Arab world does not arguably render criminology a 'real' science that is relied on to make a difference in the practical field of crime prevention. Criminology appears to be no more than a 'fascinating' subject in which Arab students enjoy learning about the Lombrosian theory of criminal man, or the Freudian psychoanalytic explanation of criminal activity.

The fact that criminology in the Arab world is still an area that is exclusive to limited disciplines (e.g. law and sociology) results in a parochial criminological inquiry

that is mainly preoccupied with criminals, criminal justice institutions and laws. On the one hand, the preoccupation with these concepts estranges other disciplines (natural and applied sciences), which have become less interested in criminology. On the other hand, crime science, with its central focus on ‘crime’ and its ‘evidence-based, problem-solving approach that embraces empirical research’ (Wortley et al., 2019a, p.1), is not expected to thrive in such circumstances. For example, studying criminology within law and social sciences tends to produce qualitative research that is incongruent with the fact that environmental criminology ‘is multidisciplinary in its foundations, empirical in its methods and utilitarian in its mission’ and thereby derives solutions from industrial engineers, architects, economists and so on (Wortley & Townsley, 2017, pp. 2–3). Some observations by Bowles et al. (2005) can be useful here, though these observations were made in the developing countries context and not in particular in the Arab world. They found that:

‘little research had been done using scientific methods to explore the effectiveness of criminal justice interventions in developing countries. A lot of research was done using qualitative methods to explore criminal justice issues such as the motivation for crime, especially the role of economic and social variables. But we were able to find little trace research setting out to produce detailed, statistically valid findings about the impact of particular interventions’ (p. 365).

On the other hand, the inherent relation between criminal justice institutions and criminology should not be disregarded. As some commentators have noted, the development of criminology has mainly been a ‘state-directed enterprise’ (Walters, 2001, p. 215). The principles underpinning most Arab criminal justice systems and institutions are Westernised in nature and have been inherited as a legacy of systems that were established during the post-colonialist era. Such principles have been shaping the dominant narrative on crime prevention in academic criminology. However, the modern values upon which the Arab criminal justice institutions (and other relevant institutions) have been based do not seem to have been challenged ever since. What is important to note is that, since their establishment, criminal justice institutions in Arab countries have not been reflexive. It is not commonplace for such institutions to go through a self-monitoring process in which the effectiveness of their practices and policies is subject to regular evaluation. Two reasons can be thought of for this non-reflexivity.

First, UN statistics show that the Middle East and North Africa region (UN-Habitat, 2007, cited in Shehayeb, 2010) and the Islamic world (Serajzadeh, 2001) have one of the lowest crime rates in the world (despite the anecdotal evidence on low crime rate, crime data might be unreliable in the Arab world - see Laycock, 2014). Not only might this low crime rate impact the way in which criminology discourse is developed and shaped over time (see Young, 1988), it also does not stimulate criminal justice institutions to reflect on, and review, the effectiveness of their crime prevention practices and approaches. For example, Laycock (2014) pointed out that the low crime rate in the UAE may not be convincing enough for the police to develop a problem-solving approach. So, it seems that there has not been a similar Western political rhetoric of a ‘war on crime’ or ‘tough on crime’ in the Arab world where other domestic issues may take priority over crime prevention and suppression. Second, the poor public funding for criminological research does not create an encouraging environment to invoke inquiries into an alternative perspective on crime prevention, not necessarily founding original approaches, but at least examining the experiences of other nations. While one can speak of a relatively modest expansion of public research funds in Arab countries (Currie-Alder et al., 2018), crime issues are not among the common, prioritised themes of research grants. Unsurprisingly, Bowles et al. (2005, p.

348) found a ‘major gap’ in studies that assess the effectiveness of criminal justice interventions in developing countries. As a result, without evidence generated by in-house or funded research, criminal justice institutions are unable to determine whether there is any potential failure in their crime prevention approaches, which could trigger a defiance of the premises upon which these institutions are predicated. Indeed, comparative experience teaches us that reflexivity is a characteristic of the Western criminal justice institutions, which, among other factors, had particular resonance in realising the failure of correctionalist practices (Garland, 2001; see also Martinson, 1974).

Historical-Cultural Factors

Historical and cultural factors might explain why crime science and environmental criminological perspectives have not received attention in the Arab context. Historically speaking, the growing interest in environmental criminology and the defiance of modern criminology’s assumptions is, partially, a product of the transformations in the criminological thinking that took place in the West. But similar transformations have been absent in the Arab world. One plausible explanation is the difference in the historical trajectory, including the political and ideological discourses on crime control, between the West and Arab world. The distinct political and economic developments that took place in the Western context were responsible for, among other things, the emergence of reconfigured criminological ideas that shaped and influenced the crime control field (Garland, 2001). To further complicate the matter, this historical trajectory, as noted in the introduction, appears to be more particular to the Anglo-American context. Even within the West itself, different countries have had divergent policy trends although they have experienced some common developments, such as rising crime rates and socio-economic transformations (Tonry, 2007). Europe has its own trajectory, which ‘points to the complexity of making any cross-cultural comparisons, and warns against simplistic universalism’: for example, the welfare state in Europe has been perceived to resist the temptation towards punitiveness (see Body-Gendrot et al., 2014, p. 17), somewhat contrary to the argument made in the US and UK contexts.

Arguably, criminology in the Arab countries has been influenced much less by the Anglo-American than European developments. In this regard, tracing criminology in the Arab world back to the ‘new’ social defence movement (see Ancel, 1965) is central to understanding the dominant criminological discourse. This movement had been a key player in shaping both the continental European criminological thinking and legal systems (Heath-Kelly & Shanaáh, 2022), and was one of the most notable channels of European influence on criminology and penal policy in the Arab world. Historically, social defence is associated with the positivist criminology that emerged in the late nineteenth century, establishing the concept of the criminal as the ‘absolute’ unit of criminological inquiry (Walters, 2001). As a doctrine, social defence promotes, *inter alia*, a penal policy that favours the individual, and ensures the prevention of crime, and the treatment of offenders and their resocialisation, and this should be ‘based as firmly as possible on scientific understanding of the phenomenon of crime and the offender’s personality’ (Ancel, 1965, pp. 24–25). Having broadened the modern penal policy beyond the boundaries of criminal justice, social defence adopted a new approach towards the criminal by incorporating its ideas into the body of criminal law (Ancel, 1965).

Although one must be cautious when involving a historical analysis, the analysis here finds some evidence in the diffusion of social defence principles within the United Nations' crime prevention wing (Heath-Kelly & Shana'ah, 2022). Walters (2001) demonstrated how the UN social defence-embedded agendas shaped criminological knowledge internationally by problematising crime as a problem that should be explored within social parameters. In relation to the Arab world, at the Fourth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, held in 1970, Mr El-Din, who spoke on behalf of the Arab delegations, stated that 'The Arab League was very concerned with social defence matters' (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1971, para. 259). Ancel (1965) also referred briefly to the effects of the social defence doctrine on Arab countries like Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and Egypt. In one of the earliest historical accounts of the origin of penal laws in the Arab countries, Mustafa (1970) demonstrated how some Arab countries were influenced by European laws. The European influence was evident in the adoption by almost all Arab criminal laws (e.g. Lebanon in 1939; Syria in 1949; Jordan in 1951 and 1960; Kuwait in 1960) of the 'dual track system' of punishment and '*mesures de sûreté*' or preventive measures (on the dual track system, see Pifferi, 2016, Chap. 6). The extent of this influence becomes much starker when we consider that social defence and positivism-inspired concepts, such as habitual criminals and dangerous conditions, were once officially incorporated into the public policies of Arab countries. For example, Egypt established a special penitentiary for habitual criminals in 1908 and specified an extended imprisonment term for them (repealed later in 1956: Mustafa, 1970). Even today, the Algerian Organisation of Prisons and Resocialisation of Offenders Act 04–5/2005, Article 1, stipulates that this Act aims to promote a penal policy that is based on the idea of 'social defence'. In the UAE, the Public Prosecution of the Emirate of Dubai explicitly uses the expression of 'social defence' on its official website (Government of Dubai, 2022). The enduring significance attached to the 'individualisation of punishment' (see Pifferi, 2016) in the Arab jurisprudence, in which the centrality of the individual criminal's dangerousness instead of the seriousness of the crime is emphasised, is another manifestation of the impact of social defence on Arab criminal justice policies.

Arguably, the influence of social defence on Arab countries is responsible for the unpopularity of crime science and environmental criminology in the Arab world. Social defence has reinforced the centrality of the 'offender' concept to the dominant criminological discourse. The criminological inquiry then is deflected from heeding the concept of a 'crime' as an event that environmental criminological research focuses on. As the offender-centred social defence doctrine emphasises assessing 'the conditions in which the offence was committed, the offender's personal circumstances, the likelihood of his rehabilitation ... with a view to applying to him a true treatment of social readaptation' (Ancel, 1965, pp. 125–136), studying the criminal phenomenon and its understanding as a social phenomenon will inevitably be confined to the social sciences (e.g. law, sociology and psychology), which always have an affinity to the human element in crime and its social parameters. Thus, the 'criminal' as a core concept to understand why crime occurs seems to have failed to elicit the attention of researchers from other disciplines, which has led to the underdevelopment of environmental approaches to criminology in the Arab world.

Next, the cultural particularities of the Arab world have always, albeit indirectly, played a role in drawing the contours of the 'preferred' criminological discourse with its focus on the criminal rather than crime. The point here proceeds from what Haen Marshall (2001, p. 236) insightfully noted, that 'there are as many criminologists as there are nations in the world' and that 'national social factors permeate the practice of

science deeply'. In this regard, the social control mechanisms in the Arab region should be referred to, and one must start with the role of Islam. The Islamic *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) explanation of crime (Al-Bushri, 1999) enjoys a high degree of 'scientific' legitimacy. The Islamic religious values, 'which often overpower official and legal pronouncements', have been seen to be highly associated with the low crime rate (as in the case of Confucianism-related religious values in Asian countries: Shehayeb, 2010). Serajzadeh (2001) argues that, irrespective of the development level, Islam forms a unique socio-cultural structure that is responsible for the low crime rate (see also Helal & Coston, 1991; Qasim, 2018). In a comparison study, Alfaraj (1995) found that the number of three crimes (rape, homicide and theft) is lower in Saudi Arabia than in the State of Michigan in the USA. This is, as Alfaraj (1995) argued, due to several reasons, most importantly, the teaching of Islam and its associated ideas of punishment by God (though he also referred to the role of gun control and alcohol policies). Reminiscent of this role of Islam is the acknowledgement of the role once played by social controls in the USA and Britain in reducing crime rates (Garland, 2001).

It might be argued that the preventive value of socio-cultural and religious values often reinforces the social explanations of crime and obviates the need for the development of any alternative view on criminal behaviour (crime science in our case). For example, some patterns of criminality in the Arab world, such as 'honour killings', are seen to be driven by distinct social and religious factors that are unique to Arab communities, whereas these factors are irrelevant for Western communities (Al-Bushri, 1999). The type of the disenchantment with modern (dispositional) theories and their crime prevention strategies that took place in the West is unlikely to happen in the Arab world. The social, cultural and religious values are entrenched in the history and social fabric in Arab communities, and their role in preventing crime cannot be disparaged. At least until now, the 'nothing works' Western rhetoric (see Martinson, 1974) does not seem to have befallen these values as the Arab world's attachment to socio-cultural values persistently forms particular ideas about criminality and penal responses. Such values form a cultural dynamic that legitimises a climate in which socially based explanation of criminality is seen appealing (on the impact of cultural explanations on penal policies, see Lacey et al., 2018). Some commentators have shed light on the role played by Islam in helping criminals desist from engaging in crime (Linge, 2021; Qasim, 2018). Furthermore, a quick look at the publications of NAUSS (2022b) reveals numerous studies about the relationship between religious practices, such as *Zakat* (alms), *Ramadan* and prayers and crime prevention and crime rates.

However, Islam's interest in social, cultural and religious values should not be seen as hindering the development of crime science in the Arab world. Indeed, the 'comprehensiveness' of Islam and its engagement in all aspects of the private and public life of Muslims (see Serajzadeh, 2001) is as a feature that can potentially contribute to the progress of crime science. *Sharia* (Islamic law) has been characterised as 'a living body of law that looks after the needs of Islamic society' (Hakeem et al., 2012, p.10). In relation to crime prevention, Islamic penal laws are 'essentially preventive and are not based solely on harsh punishment as a first resort' (Hakeem et al., 2012, p.10). With its comprehensiveness and emphasis on prevention, Islamic-based criminological studies are amenable to reorienting their focus to the criminal event. This is the case especially under the *siyasa sharia* branch of Islamic law, which is 'the method of introducing practical pragmatic policies for the administration of justice that are in conformity with the spirit of Sharia, especially when Sharia does not provide specific guidance' (Terrill, 2013, p. 616).

New Research Agenda for Criminology in the Arab World

We may now be more able to comprehend how the criminological understanding of crime pivots around the root causes of criminality and the concept of the ‘offender’, and how this centrality affects the type of questions to be raised in Arab criminological research. However, the analysis so far by no means downplays the relevance of the late transformations in Western criminological thought to the Arab world. In this connection, the discussion will turn to a different point: the possibility of innovating a new research agenda for the Arab criminological discourse. Such an agenda is generally concerned with introducing ‘crime science’ (see Wortley et al., 2019b) into the mainstream Arab criminological discourse. In particular, criminological research in the Arab region is invited to adopt alternative crime-reduction approaches that generally come under the umbrella of ‘environmental criminology’. Environmental criminology is a family of theories and approaches that have a common interest: their focus is oriented away from the criminal to the criminal event, separating out the immediate causes of crime from other distant factors of criminality, such as social and psychological causes (see Wortley & Townsley, 2017). These approaches include crime prevention through environmental design (hereinafter CPTED) (Jeffery, 1971); situational crime prevention (hereinafter SCP) (see Clarke, 1980); routine activity theory (see Cohen & Felson, 1979); crime pattern theory (see Brantingham & Brantingham, 2008) and rational choice perspective (see Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Cornish & Clarke, 2017).

The preoccupation of Arab academia with theories of modern criminology has not helped environmental criminology to receive sufficient attention. To stimulate the Arab criminological research to shed light on environmental criminology, it is important to consider some challenges that may face its applicability to the Arab context. The next section will address some of these challenges, with a particular emphasis on SCP. The interest in SCP stems from a number of assumptions. First, SCP is practised on a daily basis across communities, by criminal justice institutions, organisations and ordinary individuals. In this sense, SCP measures are not new; they ‘have a very long history indeed, even if the theory is quite recent’ (Tilley, 2009, p. 109). The second assumption is the international hegemony of the SCP discourse, especially with the advances ‘in electronics, computerisation, artificial intelligence, biochemistry, architecture, materials science’ that aim to control the physical environment (see also Marx, 1995, p. 226; Hughes, 1998). Third, the practicality of situational measures is a good reason why SCP is focused on here; it brings in practical solutions to reduce crime. The effectiveness of SCP has long been discussed in terms of reducing an array of crime types (e.g. Clarke, 1997), ranging from cybercrime (Newman & Clarke, 2003), and terrorism (Clarke & Newman, 2006), to child sexual abuse offences (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006) and white collar crimes (Benson & Simpson, 2009).

Potential Challenges

In general, the application of environmental criminology approaches might be challenging in settings that problematise crime as a problem of criminality. Where the problem of crime is predominately studied as a matter of criminality, crime prevention lies in the public realm of crime control. It is believed to be the responsibility of the public sector ‘which alone can deal with crime and criminality in ways that are effective, equitable and accord with public interests’ (Tilley, 2018, p. 56). This largely resonates with the fact that in the

Arab world, there is a remarkable belief in the role of the state in dealing with the problem of crime (Ouassini & Ouassini, 2020). However, when discussing environmental criminology, and SCP in particular, the first challenge that arises is that SCP is unconnected to ideas of punishment or law enforcement that is exclusive to the state. According to SCP, crime prevention is ‘multi-agency in orientation’; it is not only delivered by one agency, such as the police (Hughes, 1998, p. 20). The challenge then is whether there will be a broad acceptance of SCP as an approach that state institutions have no monopoly on, and that is open to all those who are interested in reducing crime (Clarke, 2005). As Eck and Clarke (2019, p. 355) explain:

SCP ‘does not rely upon systems of criminal justice nor does it try to change the criminal law or justice systems. Instead, it operates through public and private organizations and agencies—schools, hospitals, transit systems, shops and malls, manufacturing businesses and phone companies, local parks and entertainment facilities, pubs and parking lots’.

Law enforcement of criminal laws is at the centre of the crime control policy in Arab world in which the state often resorts to criminalisation to deter individuals from committing crime. In this sense, law enforcement comes under the umbrella of ‘direct’ crime prevention ‘through which criminal justice agencies can directly reduce crime’ (Tilley, 2009, p. 26). In this approach, crime prevention is conventionally achieved through, most importantly, the retribution, incapacitation and rehabilitation of offenders (see Tonry & Farrington, 1995). To this end, Arab criminal justice systems establish a structure of institutions (police, prosecution, courts and prisons) with almost reactive functions (e.g. for the reactive role of police in the UAE, see Laycock, 2014). Crime prevention is concentrated with the police, who are generally mandated with the maintenance of public security. The police have a broad role in crime control, which extends from regular policing activities to other pre-emptive measures to prevent crime. The extensive role of the police in crime control is inseparable from the centrality of the state security concept that prevails in the Arab world (though this role has been contested since Arab Spring in 2011: Walsh, 2020). Added to this is the influence of the political system on crime control. In some Arab countries, the role of criminal justice systems is to sustain a grip on the state and society, which concentrates the crime control function within the government (see Ouassini & Ouassini, 2023). The relevance of SCP then is expected to be questionable due to the prevailing conventional perspective in the Arab world that crime control is the responsibility of the police (Quassini & Verma, 2012).

Walsh (2020) analysed the field of policing in the Arab World and found that placing the ‘police within wider ecologies of policing’, including a broad social frame, is challenging. Of course, against the background of a law enforcement approach and policing, there are welfarist programmes provided by *public*, non-criminal justice institutions, which, while not explicitly targeted at crime prevention, contribute to reducing crime by enhancing the social conditions (though the actual extent and effectiveness of these programmes is not clear). Yet the reliance on state institutions’ role in crime prevention is incongruent with the SCP ‘discourse’, which entails that the community has much to do with crime reduction, and in this sense, it is not dependent on the state (Hughes, 1998). Thus, SCP requires the broadening of crime prevention responses beyond the state, and the involvement of the private sector. Although the involvement of the private sector in crime prevention is challenging in the Arab world (in the UAE, see Laycock, 2014; on this challenge, in general, see UNODC, 2010), some recent developments embody a sense of relegation of crime prevention to non-state parties. For example, there has recently been

increasing state intervention in Arab countries to sponsor preventive measures by imposing an obligation on the owners of facilities to install CCTV cameras. These facilities include a wide range of activities, managed by the private sector, such as hotels, shops, malls, banks and residence complexes (e.g. the Qatari Regulation of Surveillance Cameras Act 9/2011; the Kuwaiti Regulation of Surveillance Cameras Act 61/2015; the Egyptian Public Stores Act 154/2019). This shows that criminal justice institutions have begun to realise that they cannot control crime without the help of people, and thus have somehow started pushing themselves away from pursuing criminals, towards depending on improving situational measures to reduce criminal opportunities in the first place.

The second challenge is concerned with the transferability of SCP and the general challenge of adapting crime prevention approaches to local contexts (see Shaw, 2009; UNODC, 2010). Sidebottom and Wortley (2015, p. 174) suggested that the ‘generalisability’ of well-established theoretical concepts, such as opportunity, is one of the challenges arising when theories of environmental criminology are applied to non-western settings. The appeal of SCP could be more convincing when seen in a more localised context. For example, as Shaw (2009) questioned, what is the point in installing CCTV cameras in countries that lack necessary infrastructure, such as electricity? In the same vein, it is critically important to consider the contextual differences between Western settings where environmental criminology has been developed, and the Arab world, where it is sought to be applied. As argued in terms of CPTED, considering the local context is important for its transferability. Because CPTED’s crime prevention ‘mechanisms work through motivating and directing the action of residents, passers-by and offenders, they have to take into account the way that people use their surroundings’ (Armitage, 2016, p. 278). Indeed, the same can be said for SCP since the latter shares a common interest with CPTED in that both of them depend on altering the surroundings to reduce crime.

In relation to the Arab world, a scant body of research has tested the theoretical expectations of environmental theories of crime outside of their original contexts. For example, Alotaibi et al. (2019) concluded that the cultural and socio-demographic variations cause some complications when applying routine activity theory and crime pattern theory to Saudi Arabia. Yet, paradoxically, their analysis highlights what might evidence the relevance of these theories. The low rate of burglary and the relatively high rate of motor vehicle theft in Saudi Arabia could be conveniently situated within the explanations of environmental theories of crime. In relation to the role of capable guardians (i.e. routine activity theory), for instance, the low rate of burglary was attributed to the societal conditions of the Saudi community and the resultant presence of many guardians in households during the day. On the other hand, the relatively higher rate of motor vehicle theft was explained in terms of the low risk of being caught because of situational, environmental circumstances, including the ‘often high walls surrounding houses, which means that homeowners are unable to see the street areas’ (Alotaibi et al., 2019, p. 23).

Other issues arise from the application of CPTED to Abu Dhabi Emirate, the United Arab Emirates. Ekblom et al. (2013) presented some tensions that hinder the effective implementation of CPTED. These tensions are under the following themes: access and movement, structure, ownership, surveillance, activity, management and maintenance and physical protection. For example, in terms of access and movement, the design of neighbourhoods in Abu Dhabi improves ‘walkability within and between neighbourhoods’, which renders them ‘vulnerable to misuse (litter, graffiti, vandalism), and also as a means of gaining access and escape to surrounding properties’. In relation to surveillance, the cultural importance attached to privacy limits the role of surveillance in crime prevention as

embodied in the high boundary walls of houses in the neighbourhoods, ‘with the desired effect of restricting surveillance into the property’.

In fact, this paper does not aim to generalise the theoretical expectations of environmental criminology as much as the main idea of situational analysis and its focus on the ‘crime-producing effects of physical and social stimuli captured by individuals from the immediate setting’ (Birkbeck & LaFree, 1993, p. 129). Accordingly, despite the contextual challenges, environmental criminology still has practical implications in the Arab world. In particular, SCP’s opportunity techniques (Cornish & Clarke, 2003) and their amenable ability to be customised still have a role in crime prevention. For example, if increasing the efforts (through hardening the target for example) does not accommodate a specific context, other techniques, such as increasing the efforts or increasing the risks, would do so. The point is to carve out the most appropriate measure from the SCP’s repertoire of opportunity techniques to limit crime opportunities.

Crime is context-dependent, of course. The importance of variations in contexts and the challenges they pose when applying Western criminological theories to a different region cannot be neglected. Yet one may argue that, in the course of underlining the preventive potential of SCP, studying contexts is subsidiary to understanding crime as an opportunity. While contexts vary (and are still important to consider), the role of opportunities and the immediate environment in generating crime is unlikely to vary between one country and another. The dependence on contexts should not neglect ‘the principle of human action’, which is that behaviour (which might be crime) is the result of the interaction between the individual and the environment (see Natarajan, 2016). After all, challenges should mean a response. In our case, the response suggested is that a careful comparison through the adaptation of SCP to local problems and contexts could create insights.

Finally, with the increasing impact of globalisation, there is always a need to study the experience of others in local contexts. Regardless of the historical and political contexts of crime prevention approaches, globalisation has increased the need to understand global diversity in regard to crime control (Liu, 2009). There is always a need to find other crime prevention approaches that ‘are very different from, and less costly than repressive and deterrent reactions and responses’ (UNODC, 2010, p. 1). Accordingly, challenges should not deflect our attention from both the validity and utility of emphasising the role of the immediate environment in generating crime. Instead, some Arab local contexts emphasise the importance of opportunity in crime. First, from the perspective of crime science and environmental criminology, Islamic teachings, culture and sometimes prohibitions have a potential role in eliminating the criminogenic factors that facilitate crime (i.e. opportunities). In studying the female gangs’ phenomenon in the Islamic world, Kusha (2009, p. 243) suggests that ‘Islam’s traditional culture’s complex web of socialisation processes’ prevents women’s exposure to ‘public-initiated predatory crimes such as robbery, aggravated assault, stranger-initiated rape and sexual harassment’. Also, Islamic teachings dictate how common people should treat each other. This has a positive influence on neighbourhoods, which are seen as an extended family, whereby they care and watch out for each other (see Helal & Coston, 1991). The sense of community in such neighbourhoods, which is highly practised in Arab countries, could minimise opportunities to commit crime (Shehayeb, 2010). Second, in Asia, some criminological theories, especially routine activity theory, have been found to be either fully or partially supported, meaning that they are ‘applicable beyond cultures and geography’ (Suzuki et al., 2018). Finally, the decrease in the crime rate during the Covid-19 pandemic (see, in general, University of Leeds, 2022) in a number of Arab countries (e.g. Kuwait News Agency KUNA, 2021; Palestine News and Info Agency, 2021) is another good starting point for domestic stakeholders (including

academics and practitioners) to better understand crime as an opportunity. There is no reason to say that the ‘logic’ of SCP is unlikely to explain crime in contexts outside of their origin: the generalisability of its logic in terms of seeking to reduce crime opportunities ‘in all behavioural contexts’ (Clarke, 1995, p. 96) increases the possibility of SCP’s transferability. It is from this vantage point that SCP may overcome the obstacle of contextual differences. All that is required is that a specific context is identified and exploited to reduce crime opportunities or to change a potential offender’s decision to commit crime.

Conclusion

This paper started with an analysis of the status quo of the criminological thought in the Arab world. The key thesis was that, since their import from the West, the modern criminological theories have been dominating the academic crime prevention discourse in the Arab world, where criminal-centred explanations of crime are abundant. Other explanations focus on the influence of external factors, such as poverty, unemployment or a lack of moral authority on criminal behaviours. Crime prevention constantly requires state interventions to, for example, help, treat and rehabilitate individuals, or in general, tackle the root causes of crime. Although modern theories of criminology faced disillusion, the crime prevention discourse in the Arab world still largely relies on these theories. Some factors were suggested to be responsible for the absence of late Western criminological developments in the Arab world context, and in particular, the environmental criminological approaches. The significance of this absence is that it has created a ‘gap’ in the criminological thinking in the Arab world in which useful crime prevention insights are not made use of.

The quest for a safe community often animates the desire to find more effective ways to prevent or control crime. With the increasing impact of globalisation, there is always a need to study the experience of others in local contexts. Globalisation has increased the need to understand global diversity regarding crime control (Liu, 2009). There is always a need to find other crime prevention approaches that ‘are very different from, and less costly than repressive and deterrent reactions and responses’ (UNODC, 2010, p. 1). This paper then should be understood as an attempt to stimulate a new research agenda for criminology in the Arab world, which should renew its interest in, and benefit from, the Western criminological developments. Important developments in Western criminology present valuable lessons in crime prevention that are more pragmatic and easier to understand. Of particular relevance is the conceptual decoupling between the concept of ‘criminality’ and ‘crime’, with the situational analysis of crime (Birkbeck & LaFree, 1993). Therefore, the type of research agenda advocated here is generally concerned with introducing ‘crime science’ (see Wortley et al., 2019b) into the mainstream Arab criminological discourse. Environmental criminology, with its focus on criminal events rather than criminality, has the potential to bring in valuable crime prevention lessons.

Further research is still required to fully achieve the aim of this paper. In particular, Arab researchers are invited to apply environmental criminology approaches, and SCP in particular, more systematically in local contexts and to specific crime problems. The starting point is that environmental criminology is an evidence-based approach that mainly depends on empirical research. With the help of some investigative tools, such as ‘crime analysis’, crime and police data are analysed to detect crime problems and how the spatio-temporal characteristics of crime scene and the socio-demographic distribution are related to crime patterns (see Wortley & Townsley, 2017). This empirical approach should also be

followed by the application of SCP. In this sense, the recognition and articulation of SCP in the criminological discourse requires the adoption of its main components: a developed body of environmental criminology theories, a set of opportunity-reducing techniques and a standard methodology for analysis and evaluation based on the action research model (Clarke, 1997). Such an evidence-based approach serves an important purpose: to assess the effectiveness of SCP in practical terms, which could bring in useful crime prevention lessons for domestic stakeholders. In this regard, this paper not only calls for new research agenda based on crime science and environmental criminology, but also suggests SCP as practical approach. That said, this paper has broader scope and differs from previous research that has aimed to evaluate the applicability of environmental criminology theories in Saudi Arabia as a non-Western cultural context (Alotaibi et al., 2019).

Shifting attention towards environmental criminology brings in a number of theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the application of environmental criminology would enhance the position of 'Arab' criminology and help criminology in the Arab world map onto comparative criminology. Liu's (2009, 2018, p.63) 'Asian Criminological Paradigm' is a useful comparative example, which entails, among other things, that 'conceptual developments with insights from Asian contexts can make important contributions to general criminological knowledge'. In practical terms, environmental criminology prevents Arab criminological research from being parochial. When criminology does not focus centrally on the world of 'criminals', the structure of society or even law enforcement and how criminal justice institutions work, the crime prevention discourse will open up widely to diverse sciences. Criminology will not be confined to a limited range of disciplines, such as law, sociology and psychology. Specialists across social, natural and applied sciences are encouraged to study crime and offer 'innovative' solutions to crime prevention. Instead of the narrow focus on 'criminality' by the disciplines that traditionally relate to criminology, the involvement of other sciences enriches the crime prevention discourse in the Arab world with useful lessons. This, in turn, has policy implications. Environmental criminology is promising in terms of suggesting innovative crime prevention lessons. Not only does this criminology bring in practical and effective solutions, it also entails that the involvement of the private sector in crime prevention could alleviate the burden of criminal justice institutions, especially those institutions that are underfunded in some Arab countries.

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