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978-0-521-29327-3 - Cities with Little Crime: The Case of Switzerland

Marshall B. Clinard

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Cities with little crime

The case of Switzerland

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Cambridge University Press

Cambridge

London New York Melbourne

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521293273

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First published 1978

Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Clinard, Marshall Barron, 1911–

Cities with little crime.

(The Arnold and Caroline Rose monograph series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Crime and criminals – Switzerland. 2. Criminal justice, Administration of – Switzerland. I. Title.

II. Series: The Arnold and Caroline Rose monograph series in sociology.

HV7053.C58 364' .9494 77–88672

ISBN 978-0-521-21960-0 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-29327-3 paperback

Cambridge University Press

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To Ruth
Companion on many travels
Who gave up her career to help with mine

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Preface

This study attempts to analyze the unique crime situation in Switzerland and to compare it with that of other European countries and the United States. It might be presumed that Switzerland, as one of the world's most highly developed, affluent, industrialized, and urbanized countries, like the United States, Sweden, and the Federal German Republic, would also have a high and a rapidly increasing rate of crime. In the light of this study, however, it appears that Switzerland represents an important exception. For those countries that are faced with high and continually rising rates of crime, the findings have practical, as well as theoretical implications.

In carrying out this pioneer study of Swiss crime, I have tried to make a contribution to comparative criminology and, in particular, to methodology. In order to determine whether crime constitutes a problem to the Swiss, I have used a number of unusual research methods and sources in addition to official crime data. I have, for example, studied parliamentary debates, examined press coverage of crime news, carried out a crime victimization survey in Zürich, and considered theft insurance rates and trends. The crime victimization survey in Zürich is among the first to be conducted outside the United States. Throughout, I have tried to make the study comparative in nature, with frequent use of material from Sweden, the United States, and the Federal German Republic. In the end I have tried to offer some explanations or hypotheses for the relatively minor nature of crime in Switzerland, particularly as compared to Sweden. In addition, I have discussed the practical implications of the study for the United States and similar countries. I hope that these hypotheses will stimulate further studies of this type in Switzerland and elsewhere.

Comparative sociology and criminology have long been major interests of mine. I believe, like Durkheim, that we must test findings derived in one type of society on both similar and dissimilar societies. Some years ago I began my comparative research with a study of the relation

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of urbanization to the high crime rate of Sweden. Later I spent three years in India as a consultant with the Ford Foundation, looking into the problem of slums; in this endeavor I became familiar with the crime problem of Indian cities. (The results of this work in India were later published as *Slums and Community Development* [New York: The Free Press, 1966].) This stimulated my interest in crime in developing countries, and in 1968–69 I carried out, with Daniel Abbott, a comprehensive study of crime in Uganda. This research, carried out under a Rockefeller teaching and research grant, was the first systematic test in a developing country of a number of hypotheses derived in more affluent, developed countries. Together with extensive research in a number of other developing countries, it resulted in *Crime in Developing Countries* (with Daniel Abbott [New York: Wiley, 1973]). I then returned to my original interest in the highly developed countries, stimulated by my earlier work in Sweden.

For some time I had heard reports about the low crime profile in Switzerland, but all of them lacked adequate evidence. Moreover, I had had a number of personal experiences related to crime in Switzerland that had intrigued me. Years ago, while traveling in Italy, my wife and I were faced each night with the problem of protecting our car and its contents from theft. One night, when we could find no accommodation in the Lake Como area, we drove across the Swiss border to find a hotel. In reply to my inquiry about the safest place to leave the car and whether or not all contents should be removed, the proprietress said, “Sir, this is not Italy, this is Italian Switzerland.” Later, at a dinner party in Stockholm, I was seated next to a man who had been a member of the Swiss parliament for fifteen years, and he astonished me by stating that he could not recall a single question about crime ever having been raised in Parliament while he was a member. My last personal experience was in Davos, Switzerland, in 1971, when I dropped my wallet on the streets. The concierge at my hotel assured me that I need not worry about its return. He said that if I called at the City Hall it would be there, in the Lost and Found office. It was!

I finally decided to apply for a grant to study crime in Switzerland. The research was carried out in 1973, supported primarily by a grant from the National Science Foundation that enabled me to live in Switzerland for eight months to gather data and to analyze them on my return. Other support has come from the University of Wisconsin Research Committee. Despite financial support from these sources, a

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cross-national survey of this type could not have been carried out without the full cooperation and assistance of many persons in Switzerland. In particular, I should like to acknowledge the continuing interest and help of Dr. Hans Schultz, Professor of Criminal Law at the University of Bern, who was my chief sponsor in the research. He helped to clarify issues and to make research arrangements with persons both in universities and in the government. In addition, he read the entire manuscript, caught errors, and made many helpful suggestions. (He is not, of course, responsible for what I did with them.) Three Swiss doctoral candidates served as my research assistants. They helped to gather the data, most of which were in German, and they continually offered suggestions and enthusiastic support for what turned out to be a far more difficult study than had been anticipated. Martin Killias, a student of law at the University of Zürich, did the work on the survey of the Zürich Canton Parliament and city council and the collection of data on insurance, on police and prisons, and on a variety of other subjects. Thomas Held of the Sociological Institute of the University of Zürich advised me on the victimization survey, translated the interview questionnaires, surveyed the crime content of newspapers, and, above all, furnished me with many sociological materials, insights, and suggestions about the nature of Swiss society. Klaus Biedermann, a law student at the University of Bern, conducted the study of crime questions in the Federal Parliament and helped to translate portions of several doctoral dissertations. Other academic persons who assisted me in various ways included Professor Peter Heintz, Director of the Sociological Institute of the University of Zürich, which sponsored the crime victimization survey, several professors of criminal law, Peter Noll, Günther Stratenwerth, Philip Graven, Karl Bader, and Jörg Rehberg, and also Professors Jacques Bernheim, Michel Bassand, and Kurt Mayer. Several journalists in the area of criminal justice, Alfred Messerli, Erick Meier, and Dr. Erich A. Fivian, were helpful in numerous ways. Our Swiss friends, Paul and Margaret Auberson, helped us to understand many aspects of Swiss society.

Many federal, cantonal, and city police officials and prosecutors, particularly in the cantons of Zürich, Bern, Basel-Stadt, and Geneva and in the cities of Zürich, Bern and Basel, went out of their way to give me their impressions of crime in Switzerland and to provide statistical data, some of which were especially prepared for this project. Police officials included Robert Schönbächler, Hans Hollinger, Werner Hofmann, Dr.

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J. Meier, Wachtmeister Keller, Fritz Fassbind, Jean-Robert Warynski, and Hans Furrer. Prosecutors included Dr. H. Weiland, Dr. Stefan Trechsel, Dr. Harald Siegrist, Axel Tuchs Schmid, Dr. Heidi Burkhard, Dr. Walter Lehman, Dr. Rober Hänni, Dr. W. Brandenberger, Dr. L. Guidici, and Mario Luvini. Dr. Ulrich Zwingli and Dr. Zdenek Lomecky, both of the Zürich City Statistical Bureau, helped furnish data for the crime victimization sample. Dr. Rolf Hinterman, Director of Publitest, one of the country's largest opinion-survey organizations, carried out the actual crime victimization and attitude survey in Zürich. He took great pains to see that the survey was properly conducted.

In my search for criminological data with which to compare those of Switzerland, I had the assistance and the cooperation of many persons. Most important was Professor Günther Kaiser, Director of the Criminological Institute of the University of Freiburg. His decision to replicate in Stuttgart the Zürich crime victimization and attitude survey provided valuable comparable statistics. In addition, he furnished a set of his unpublished lectures in which he had compared Swiss crime data with those of other countries, particularly the Federal German Republic. Anthony G. Turner played a leading role in the development of contemporary U.S. crime victimization surveys of the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice and the Bureau of the Census. He offered several suggestions for the Zürich crime victimization survey, which was largely a replication of U.S. surveys. Much of the comparative Swedish data were provided by Göran Crona, Chief of Statistics, Social Administration, and Gunnar Andersson, Research Director, National Correctional Administration. Leif Persson helped to obtain comparative theft insurance data for Sweden. He, as well as Professor Knut Sveri, Professor Carl-Gunnar Janson, Sven Rengby, and Börje Alpsten were particularly helpful in supplementing my information about the contemporary Swedish crime situation. Richard Sparks of the Cambridge University Institute of Criminology provided the preliminary manuscript of the pioneer crime victimization survey that he recently conducted in three London areas. Professor Preben Wolf of the Criminological Institute, University of Copenhagen, furnished useful data from his recent victimization surveys of crimes of violence in Scandinavia and property crime in Copenhagen.

My research assistant at the University of Wisconsin, John Juettner, worked long hours getting the statistical data ready for the computers, seeing the runs through to completion, and preparing other statistical

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analyses. This arduous work he performed without complaint, and his competence in German was a great asset in the translation of data and other information gathered in Switzerland. My colleague, Professor Halliman Winsborough, suggested the statistical measures for the trend analyses.

It goes without saying, of course, that none of the persons who helped and offered suggestions is responsible in any way for what I have done with the information. My use of the data and the advice taken has had to be my own responsibility.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, again I acknowledge the help of my wife, Ruth Blackburn Clinard, who has worked closely with me in research and writing both in Switzerland and in other countries where I have done research of a comparative nature. She has typed my illegible manuscripts, edited out the usual sociological verbiage, and corrected major grammatical flaws. Most of all, she has been a good hard-headed critic in helping me to come to the point by the shortest possible written route.

M.B.C.

Madison, Wisconsin

January 1978