

## Social Learning Theory and Rational Crime Theory: The Nigerian Lens

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**Introduction:** Not all individuals have the capacity to think rationally but all individuals learn one way or the other. As the saying goes “common sense is not common”. Cognition is the way people think and how this people think; cognition has processes through which it operates. These processes affect the way people view and make sense of the world around them. This includes interpretation of the world, interaction with other people and their reaction to the environmental situations, (Wright, 2013). Its role in criminal-behaviour will explain how the cognitive-processes affect thinking of criminals in relation to their world, other people, and situation around them.

**Planned crime:** Boko-Haram is a violent group in Nigeria, and is responsible for the death of thousands of people and the destruction of property. Such act of violence, particularly in the North-Eastern region of the country had led to the displacement of about three million people (Vanguard, 2014). The group, which is founded by Muhammad Yusuf, has a clearly defined, coordinated and articulated ideology that drives its actions.

These include the quest to install a theocratic government in Nigeria that will rule under Islamic-laws and jurisprudence; the fight against corruption and to rid the country of western value system, which has eaten deep and badly into the fabric of the Nigerian society (Human Rights Watch, 2014). This phenomenon shows an organic link between criminogenic thoughts that has thrived in a criminogenetic ecology that breeds violent extreme behaviours. Conditioned by this reality, there is a sense in which thought pattern of the group has significantly influenced its action.

**Opportunistic crime:** The circumstance that led to the death of a young man in Jos, Plateau state Nigeria on Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2014, revealed the extent to which violent behaviour can occur with spontaneity or impulsiveness. An attempt by a motorcyclist to run for his life, for fear of being lynched by mob, attracted people to the scene of the accident where a woman was knocked down by the motorcyclist. Under the supervision of the leader of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), the motorcyclist was beaten to the extent that he lost his life. The notion of denial of victim as put forward by Maruna and

Copes (2005) is quite relevant as evident in the fact that the motorcyclist died under the watchful eyes of the leader of the NURTW.

**Opportunistic and planned crime:** The killings of an only daughter of an ex-General in Nigeria. The victim Miss C was a post-graduate student of a Nigerian university, owner of a boutique and the only daughter of a retired General in Nigeria. Miss C met two undergraduate male students on face-book social media and became friends. For two months they chatted on face-book and along the line the male friends found that she had a boutique and so decided to invite her for a business visit to Lagos. She arrived Lagos on the 22<sup>nd</sup>/July/2012; these two young men picked her up from the airport and checked her into a hotel instead of their apartment. While in the hotel she was made comfortable and later in the evening the two young men came visiting. She was drugged with 10 tablets of Flunitrazepam (rohypnol) crushed in a rabena juice, raped several times and strangled to death. After the crime she was robbed of her black-berry handset, international passport, valuables and undisclosed amount of cash, (Usman, 2012). One of the offenders afterward called the hotel to tell the receptionist about a corpse in one of the rooms.

**Explanation of the cognitive sequence of Miss C's crime:** In understanding criminal behaviour the difference in individuals play a central role, because it provides the model that underlies the drive through which motivation is maintained while disregarding the rights and needs of others but for one's self, (Egan *et al.*, 2000). Sequence of cognitive events as below:

**Attention:** the two young men got an opportunity to meet Miss C on social media via face-book and focused their attention on who she was and her worth on a subset of available information. This information they got from her through chatting on face-book page for over two months. At this stage attention was focused so as to get as much relevant information as possible and filter out those not needed which they did. They found Miss C had a boutique and from a wealthy background hence a target.

**Memory:** the young men kept the information in their memory and started planning on how to get her over so as to execute their plans as more information was coming daily through chats. In this case the procedural-memory was used because they wanted to respond to a particular situation, (Balota and Marsh, 2004) i.e. Miss C.

**Perception:** by chatting daily Miss C perceived this young men as good, while they perceived her as a target to get what they wanted. The physical senses of hearing, sight as well as cognitive processes which are involved in interpreting these senses are all involved in perception. This is essentially understood as how people view the world around them by stimuli interpretation, (Cherry, 2013).

**Self-control:** the young men after seeing Miss C lost their self-control and thus indulged in sexual behaviour to gratify them after drugging the young lady. This behaviour resulted in strangulating her to avoid being discovered afterwards. The victim was eventually murdered. Individuals, who generally lack self-control become impulsive, are considered selfish and self-centered, (Cunningham, 2006). Combining all the points above the criminal-act of these young men resulted from distorted thinking process. Their thinking pattern became over-valued with their self-centered attitudes and thoughts which made them behave in a deviant way, (Yochelson and Samenow, 1976). Secondly after thinking of the deviant way to trick Miss C they operated through transgression by rationalizing what they planned to do so as to neutralize their conscience or guilt afterwards. This might be the reason why they called the

hotel receptionist informing them of a dead corps. By doing so the young men will reduce the stress attached to their offense, (Barriga and Gibbs, 1996).

**Rational crime theory:** According to Cornish and Clarke (1987) crime is designed as a purposeful behaviour so that an offender(s) meet his/her immediate need such as status, money through conscious decision-making or choices. In this context the individual is viewed as a rational actor who calculates and deliberately takes his action to gain maximum benefit of his current situation like the Boko-Haram group and the killer of Miss C.

**Social learning theory:** View behaviour as learnt by cognitive-processes, through observation, direct instructions even without direct-reinforcement, (Bandura, 1963). NURTW instructed the beating of the motorcyclist the people obeyed the leader by direct instruction.

**Habitual process:** One key factor that might influence crime becoming a habitual process for some people as reflected in both cases I mentioned lies in the ineffective policing-system that has made public-safety and crime-control a major governance challenge. Also, environmental-factors that are associated with discontents arising from corruption and bad governance, is seen as justification for violent extreme behaviour, particularly the Muhammad Yusuf led Boko-Haram group in North-East region of Nigeria.

**Conclusion:** Here the rational and social-learning-theory becomes an important unit of analysis, in view of the fact that they both draw attention to the conscious choices (Bennett & Wright, 1984) of the Muhammad Yusuf group and the killers of Miss C with respect to violent criminal-behaviour on one hand, and the criminal justice system services that breeds crime, as shown by the killing of the motorcyclist by NURTW, led by its leader.

Miss C met the two young men on social media face-book; each of them developed schemata which motivated their thinking pattern or their action. The young men's schemata were likely to extort and get money from Miss C while Miss C's schema was likely to make new friends and business partners.

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