

A tribute to Martin Killias on the occasion of his receipt of the Beccaria Medal in gold of the Kriminologische Gesellschaft¹

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Guten Morgen, meine Damen und Herren. Leider mich, mein Deutsch ist nicht gut, so I will make this speech in English. I am sorry about that.

When I was preparing this *laudation*, I had no doubts about the content of it, but I had to make several decisions regarding its form. The first thing I had to decide was whether to wear a tie or not ... You know that the sales of ties are dropping, and you may have noticed that contemporary criminologists are seldom using them. But then I thought that in the audience there would be a lot of German professors who usually wear ties ... Thus, I decided to wear a tie. Now I look at you ... and I think I was right.

I also know that in Germany a lot of law professors are used to read their speeches ... So, I decided not to read it ... Perhaps I was wrong. We will see. But I reassure you: As you can see, I have in my hands a plan of the speech. This means that I know where I am going. But I thought it would be a little bit boring to read, especially when one has to talk about Martin Killias, whom I have seldom seen with a written speech when he is making a presentation.

Hence, it is my great honour and pleasure to be here today to talk about my professor, my mentor, my friend: Martin Killias. I would like to thank the *Kriminologische Gesellschaft* for giving me this opportunity, and I will use the time that was assigned to me to talk about Martin the criminologist, Martin the researcher, Martin the theorist, Martin the founder, and Martin the friend.

Let's start with a fundamental question: How did Martin Killias come to criminology? I know I am in a land of philosophers, which means that if we start discussing about the original cause of why he ended up being a

¹ This is a slightly revised transcription of the *laudatio* given on 30th September 2017 in Münster, Germany. Although there are obvious differences between a written and an oral discourse, I have taken the risk of keeping some of the gags included in the oral speech in order to respect the *animus jocandi* in which some parts of it were presented. I have also added references to the works mentioned during the speech.

criminologist, it could take a long time. Therefore, I will follow the advice that Martin gave me personally on my first day of classes as a student of the postgraduate degree in criminology at the University of Lausanne in 1994: “Be pragmatic”. Yes, he knew I was born and raised in the South ... The good thing is that a few days ago, at the Conference of the European Society of Criminology in Cardiff, we recorded an interview with Martin for the *European Criminology Oral History Project* of the ESC.² Therefore, I was able to fix some details that were still not clear to me. Apparently, it all started with a telephone call that he received from Marshal B. Clinard, who had decided to conduct a victimisation survey in Switzerland in the early 1980s for his forthcoming book *Cities with little crime: The case of Switzerland*. And thus Martin, whose first love was history – but who, precisely for pragmatic reasons, had studied law and later sociology – ended up conducting the first victimisation survey in Switzerland and becoming a criminologist.

To improve his knowledge of criminology, Martin applied for and received a grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation, that allowed him to conduct his post-doctoral studies in the United States. A few days ago you have probably received the Newsletter of the American Society of Criminology celebrating the 50th anniversary of the report of the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice – The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society, and you know that one of the consequences of that report was the creation of several Schools of Criminology in the U.S. One of the most noted was the one in Albany, New York, and this school was chosen by Martin. There he met Leslie Wilkins who became his second criminology mentor and, with Leslie, Martin met the situational approach. You know him well, and thus you know that the situational approach – including routine activities and lifestyle theories as well as situational crime prevention – has inspired most of Martin’s empirical research and his general view of criminology, and that he has also contributed to the theoretical development of that approach. And here I would like to stress another major quality of Martin Killias: his loyalty. Throughout the years, he has always vindicated the role of Leslie Wilkins as the father of that approach through his work at the Home Office research unit.

Thus, somehow like Alexis de Tocqueville more than 100 years before him, Martin Killias crossed the Ocean, learned about the new developments in criminology, and crossed back to Europe in order to adapt them to the old continent, to give them a touch of his Helvetic style, and to apply them. But, in order to come back, he first needed to find a position in Europe, and he found it at the University of Lausanne. The story of how he managed, in the

2 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FtMaDgWlCgA>.

early 1980s, to send a letter and his curriculum vitae from Albany, where on Saturday morning he received a postal pack from Switzerland that included a newspaper announcing that a position had opened in Lausanne, to Lausanne on Monday, when the deadline for submitting candidatures expired, at a time when there were no faxes, e-mails or, Internet, is a very funny one. You can hear it on the interview that I mentioned before, and it includes Martin walking on the tarmac of the airport and asking the flight crew of Swissair to post the letter as express mail when they landed in Zürich.

Thus, Martin became professor of criminology at the University of Lausanne, where he stayed for 25 years, until 2006. I have written elsewhere, together with Pierre Margot, about his legacy to our University (see *Aebi/Margo* 2013) and thus I will only mention a few major aspects of those years. One of them is undoubtedly the creation of a postgraduate degree in criminology, that later became a master, as well as a Ph.D. programme in criminology. Most of the contemporary Swiss criminologists as well as many criminologists from other countries followed his lessons there, and we learned almost everything we know about criminology from him. After that, he went back to one of his origins, the German speaking part of Switzerland. His other origin, as you know, is the canton of Grisons, or Graubünden, where they speak Romansh, one of the many languages that Martin speaks fluently. In Eastern Switzerland, he became professor at the University of Zürich and, when the time for retirement arrived, he made an unexpected movement, a sort of pivot of the hips worthy of Lionel Messi, and became a permanent visiting professor at the University of St. Gallen, where he is currently “teaching his heart out” in the classrooms. We do not have a lot of universities in Switzerland and I do not know of many professors having taught permanently in three of these universities, but Martin was also special about that. Perhaps, he is really “the special one”.

Now I would like to mention three huge international projects in the field of criminology that originated, at least partially, due to Martin’s influence. The three of them have played a major role in the renaissance of European criminology. I am referring to the *International Crime Victim Survey* (ICVS), the *International Self-Reported Delinquency Study* (ISRSD), and the *European Society of Criminology* (ESC).

In 1988, Martin started a collaboration with Jan van Dijk and Pat Mayhew and, as early as 1989, they launched the first international crime victim survey. In that context, Martin played a major role not only through his collaboration in the drafting and the translation of the questionnaire into different European languages, but also through his analysis of the benefits of applying the Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) technique to conduct it (*Killias* 1990). The five waves of that survey have been a constant source of data and

inspiration for criminologists and policy makers. That project is currently stopped, but we are working to relaunch it. It should have been transformed, at least in Europe, in a European security survey, sponsored by the European Commission through Eurostat. But, even though there was an investment of the EU to prepare the questionnaire and test a pilot version of it, the project was suddenly stopped in the European Parliament. Perhaps the Brexit will change that, who knows? In any case, we are currently trying to follow the path opened by Martin, Jan, and Pat, and relaunch the ICVS. It is undoubtedly one of the projects that helped building a European community of criminologists open to the world because the survey was conducted on all the continents.

The second big project is related to Martin's collaboration with Josine Junger-Tas which led to the launching of the International self-reported delinquency study in 1992. Three waves have been conducted until now, and the fourth one is being prepared. This is also a major project that we could call "made in Europe", but is applied all over the world. Martin also played a major role in it, not only by collaborating in the elaboration and testing of the original questionnaire, but also by securing funds to conduct the ISRD in several European countries.

Of course, these projects need to be adapted to the current state of our societies. Martin has now announced his retirement, and is leaving at a moment when the world has changed, when we have moved from having to bring a letter to the airport – at a time when you could walk on the runway up to the stairs that led to the aircraft even if you were not a passenger of that flight, imagine that –, and finding someone to deliver it, to a world using a cell phone to announce immediately that we are arriving late because our train is delayed, as I did yesterday when I called Klaus Boers to tell him that. And I feel obliged to mention that, because I was coming from Milano, Italy, the land of Beccaria whose gold medal is awarded today to Martin. Of course, I do not believe in signs ...

The fact of the matter is that we live in a completely different world than the one of the 1980s, and the big challenge for the current generation of criminologists is to adapt all our knowledge to this new situation. Our theories are still based on an offline society. For example, our best predictor of juvenile delinquency is being engaged in unsupervised and unstructured activities and we measure that through the time spent by adolescents out of their homes; but currently they can be at home and engaged in plenty unsupervised and unstructured activities. Hence, Martin, you are leaving us with this task, with this need to adapt criminology to the present society, which implies adapting also our theories. I hope we will be able to do that as good as you did it until now.

And this leads me to a lesser known facet of Martin's work: His contribution to criminological theory and, in particular, to his *theory of breaches*. Jorge Luis Borges liked to say that, when you are dealing with a great writer, you can often

find in his first major work all the main subjects that he will develop later. And if you read carefully the first edition of the *Précis de criminology (The Handbook of Criminology)* from 1991, you can find the origins of the theory of breaches. He makes a comparison about the arms race between Russia – the Soviet Union at that time – and the United States and about how each innovation from one of them was responded to with a counter-innovation from the other. And he continued to work on that idea, to develop it, to find empirical support for it, until he published it fifteen years later, in 2006 (Killias 2006).

Martin can be persistent – when he wants to ... And as I had not only the honour of studying with him but also of working with him, first as a research assistant and then as colleague, I think that it is worthwhile to say something today about his way of working, and quote some of his classic sentences. For example, when he had a new idea for a project, he would invite the members of the research team to drink a coffee or have supper together, and there he would start presenting the project. Later I realised that it was a way for him to put order in his ideas, to start putting the bricks in the right position to hold the bridge. Thus, in 1999, while we were filling the registration forms for the meeting of the American Society of Criminology in Toronto, he started saying something like: “All these European criminologists crossing the ocean to meet there ... it is a little bit stupid. We should do something about it. Perhaps a society”. And as he likes to work by consensus – and that is another of his lessons – a few months later, there we were in Toronto, having dinner with Michael Gottfredson, Josine Junger-Tas, Marianne Junger, and he was presenting the idea of creating a European society of criminologists; and immediately after that he was organizing an informal meeting with other criminologists that were attending the conference. Some of them are perhaps in this room today. And that was the origin of the *European Society of Criminology*, who had Martin as his first president: 350 criminologists in the first meeting in Lausanne in 2001, and 1400 in Porto in 2014. A *European Journal of Criminology* that is helping the promotion of a European vision of criminology and that contributed to create a new and strong identity. One of the many reasons that justify largely why Martin is receiving the Beccaria medal in gold of the *Kriminologische Gesellschaft* today.

I still remember him saying to us: “So what?” when we would come to him with a nice and sophisticated statistical analysis, but no clear explanation of what the findings meant ... Or if the results were spectacularly innovative: “Is that plausible?”, and probably: “If the results are too good to be true, go and check the methodology”.

He also taught us to work on projects that had a practical impact. There, I think, is also an interesting link with the public life that Martin led in

Switzerland, where he later became a politician. At least two of the big research projects that he led had an influence on the criminal a policy of the country. One was the evaluation of the heroin prescription programs, which changed completely the drug policy and the criminal policy of Switzerland. An innovative drug policy that was approved by the population of the country in a referendum, something that seldom happens out of our country. I came to criminology just at that moment and I was lucky enough to make my Ph.D. under his direction on that subject. And I was lucky enough to participate also in the evaluation of alternatives to imprisonment, especially community service, a project conducted by Martin, which led to the adoption of these alternatives in the Swiss criminal justice system.

Martin is very demanding, and thus it was not always easy to work with him, but it was largely worthwhile. And one thing that all of us who work with Martin will always remember is his generosity towards his research team. Martin was among the first professors to give credit to his research assistants in a period when – and please take a look at the publications of the 1970s, the 1980s and even the early 1990s if you do not believe me – you would usually see only the professor as the author of the study. He was among the first to recognise our contribution and put us as co-authors, and sometimes this had negative repercussions on him because some colleagues doubted his contribution to the project: “You did nothing, your assistants did the work, and now you put them as authors because you do not dare to sign alone”. We all know it was not true because everything we published together at that time has the “Martin’s touch”. And we also know that Martin’s direct way of saying things earned him a lot of friends, but also some minor, or better said, *suitable* enemies. And they were always waiting for him at the crossroads ... But the first thing he would do was to send them a copy of our new findings, especially if they contradicted their opinions. Like Popper, he believes that criticism is the main engine of science.

And to conclude this presentation in the fifteen minutes that were allowed to me, I would like to say some words about Martin Killias as a friend. You all know that Martin is a polyglot and thus we often had discussions with him in different languages. From that perspective, there is an interesting difference between English and French or German regarding the use of the pronouns. For us, in Lausanne, Martin was “*Monsieur Killias*” and we would address him using the “*Vous*” (“*Sie*” in German). But suddenly, when we travelled together and were working in an English-speaking environment, the “*Du*” und “*Sie*” would melt into “You”, and *Monsieur Killias* became Martin to everyone. So, how should we address him? Mister Killias, Professor Killias, Martin? I remember a discussion on that topic with Martin and Jörg-Martin Jehle in Strasbourg at the Hotel du Cerf d’Or, probably in 1997, an evening while we were

having a Schnapps after dinner. Martin quoted Max Frisch, who suggested using “Sie, Max”. That was extremely helpful for me ... especially many years later, when I became a professor, and particularly when I was working in a Spanish or Swiss context, but it did not solve the issue of the English-speaking context. So somehow we passed to “Martin” in public and in English, to “Monsieur Killias” in private and in French. The change would take place somewhere near the border or when we would take the train or the plane ... Because calling him “Martin” and using the “*Du*” in German or the “*Tu*” in French implies that you are a friend of him and requires a ritual.

Thus, once your Ph.D. was finished and you had found a position, Martin would usually wait until the end of a dinner and then propose a toast to you, saying something like “now, we can use the ‘du’” (“*on peut se tutoyer maintenant*”), and immediately after he would say: “*Je m’appelle Martin*”. My name is Martin. I can tell you that it sounds almost like the 007 movies: “My name is Bond. *James Bond*”.

We had that toast somewhere in England, in 2000, when I was ready to leave for Sevilla and the United States. And it has been an honour for me to be his friend during all those years. It seems almost incredible to remember that day in 1994, when I attended his first class, and to be here today, almost a quarter of a century later, having the honour of giving his laudation. There is a sense of nostalgia, of course. Martin now says that he is retiring, that he has really made the decision, and he is starting a sort of farewell tour. But there is some hope. Phil Collins made his “First Farewell Tour” many years ago, and the Rolling Stones announced many times that they were retiring, and they are still there. Martin is also a “classic”, so who knows, perhaps he will make a comeback. It is true that he has started a new career. He is somehow going back to his first love: History. You may know that he became the director of Swiss Patrimony, which is an institution that preserves the historical buildings and landmarks in Switzerland. Thus, he is going to dedicate almost all his time to that. It will be funny not to see his name in the press from time to time, giving his opinions about criminological topics, but always, as he taught us to do, speaking only on issues he had done research on.

We will have to learn to live without your presence in the criminological world and we are sure going to miss you, dear Martin. Hence, I would like to thank you. And as I was here to make the laudation not in my name, but in the name of the *Kriminologische Gesellschaft*, I can say that we all thank you and that we are recognizing your enormous contribution to criminology through this Beccaria medal in gold, wishing you all the best for the future

And now it is time for you to talk. So, ladies and gentlemen, I give you: Martin Killias.

Literatur

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