

ATINER CONFERENCE PAPER SERIES No: EDU2013-0617

Athens Institute for Education and Research

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ATINER's Conference Paper Series

EDU2013-0617

**Credential-based Meritocracy and
Failure of System in Controlling
Organised Crime**

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URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

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ISSN 2241-2891

21/10/2013

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This paper should be cited as follows:

Tripathi, P. Awasthi, C. and Tarinee, A. (2013) "Credential-based Meritocracy and Failure of System in Controlling Organised Crime"
Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: EDU2013-0617.

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Abstract

The idea of 'meritocracy' originated in Michael Young's book, 'The Rise of the Meritocracy'. He, of course, doesn't speak of meritocracy in glowing terms as it is sometimes spoken of in contemporary discourse, but rather tries to demonstrate the dangers it may lead to. In a meritocracy, social positions in the occupational structure would be filled on the basis of merit in terms of supposedly 'universal criteria of achievement'. An earlier exposition of the spirit of the concept of meritocracy may be found in Confucius, who advocates 'office open to virtue', weakening the traditional hold of power by the aristocracy, and articulating an important meritocratic characteristic¹. Closely related to the idea of meritocracy is the idea of 'credentialism', which refers to the modern tendency in society to allocate positions, particularly occupational positions, on the basis of educational qualifications or credentials (Penguin Dictionary of Sociology). What ultimately emerges, then, is a merit which is defined by credentials, or a credential-based meritocracy. We may often find this credential-based meritocracy functioning in opposition to performance-based meritocracy.

As a result of the twin ideals of 'meritocracy' and 'credentialism related to the education system', what has emerged is a system wherein each occupation calls for a specific educational qualification. This means that real performers may be prevented from practicing that occupation. Due to this, the real performers look for avenues where performance-based meritocracy prevails. This leads them to anti-system occupations. Thus, more than often the best

¹Lim, Andrew, "Rethinking Meritocracy: Imperial Principles for Contemporary Times" (2010). *Honors Theses - All*. Paper 559 http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1558&context=etd_hon_theses as at 0015 on June 5th, 2013

minds of society, the real performers, tend to end up in organised crime and on the other hand correctional agencies lack sufficient supply of real performers.

The rising rates of organised crime are then closely linked to the prevalence credential-based meritocracy, which is not in sync with performance-based meritocracy at all.

Keywords: Meritocracy, Credentialism, education, organized crime

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Introduction

Sir Henry Morgan was a Welsh buccaneer, most famous of the adventurers who plundered Spain's Caribbean colonies during the late 17th century. Operating with the unofficial support of the English government, he undermined Spanish authority in the West Indies. Essentially a pirate he was knighted by King Charles II and appointed deputy Governor of Jamaica.¹ This is an example of the actions of somebody being legitimized, who could otherwise have wreaked havoc with the establishment. This was performance-based meritocracy at work. Had the British relied only on credential-based meritocracy, one can't but wonder if Anglo-Spanish relations might not have been unrecognizably different.

The problem that we are considering has three distinct but interlinked dimensions.

The first of these is the issue of education-based discrimination has been raised over recent years, notably by Stuart Tannock who writes that "while the research, theory and policy literature on race, class and gender discrimination in education is extensive, the problem of education-based discrimination itself has been widely overlooked"². The discrimination based on education, in addition, often overlaps with economic differences, as the best education is not always available to everybody. One study suggests that the gap in test scores between the children of America's richest 10% and its poorest has risen by 30-40% over the past 25 years.³ Similar findings have been reported from other parts of the world. There is a gap between aspiration and job achievement. So, education-based discrimination and the differential access to quality education/education and poverty are interlinked issues.

A second dimension is the investment based privatization of higher education, which has led to the mushrooming of private institutions and an unprecedented commercialization of education. The cost of education in these profit-oriented institutions is extremely high, and there is an almost indecent exchange of money and certificates involved. Incredible malpractices are rampant and the award of degrees to undeserving candidates has gotten to a disturbing level. It would appear that everything truly is for sale, including what passes as education, if one knows the right price. Laxity on part of the regulatory bodies, coupled with unbridled corruption, make it literally impossible to actually ensure any kind of control, not just in terms of quality, but simply in terms of ensuring that the candidate actually works for their degree. Another disturbing trend is the setting up of extension counters of dubious universities from various countries, which may be absolutely nondescript in the country of their origin and of doubtful repute.

¹ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/392212/Sir-Henry-Morgan>

² Tannock, S, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* Volume: 29:5 Pages: 439-449, 200

³ *Repairing the rungs on the ladder, The Economist*, February 9th, 2013

Our paper focuses on the third dimension of this problem, which also happens to be the least discussed, namely the real performers going into unlawful activities, which is giving rise to greater and better organized crime.

Research Problem

The research problem here is to identify whether, and if yes, to what extent, increased emphasis on credentialism is linked with increase in organized crime.

Objective

This paper seeks to highlight the relation between credential-based meritocracy and rising crime.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis tested in this paper is that a link may reasonably be established between increased emphasis on credentialism and failure of system in controlling organized crime.

Methodology

The statistics this study uses in order to illustrate the argument are entirely secondary (and in some cases tertiary) data.

We take here as indicators of increase in crime the data provided by the National Crime Records Bureau of India for the number of crimes cognizable under the Indian Penal Code, and have resorted to various tertiary sources in talking about organized crime. As indicator of increasing emphasis on higher education, the number of colleges and universities in India has been utilized.¹

The idea of ‘meritocracy’ originated in Michael Young’s book, ‘The Rise of the Meritocracy’. He, of course, doesn’t speak of meritocracy in glowing terms as it is sometimes spoken of in contemporary discourse, but rather tries to demonstrate the dangers it may lead to. In a meritocracy, social positions in the occupational structure would be filled on the basis of merit in terms of supposedly ‘universal criteria of achievement’.

¹UGC and Higher Education in India, Annual Reports cited in Journal of Education and Practice ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper) ISSN 2222-288X (Online) Vol 3, No 2, 2012
Higher Education in India: Structure, Statistics and Challenges Deepti Gupta1* Navneet Gupta2

Analysis

Credential-based meritocracy is being used here in the sense of the allocation of persons to social positions, especially occupations on the basis of specific paper qualifications...in particular, educational ones...which thus becomes the aim of both ability and individual effort, leading to educational and social success.¹ The allocation of occupations on the basis of specific educational qualifications, not necessarily in sync with the requirements of the occupation (especially true of bureaucratic offices) leads to a situation wherein there is disconnect between aptitude and ability on the one hand, and employability and control over legal authority on the other. This, then, leads to able and fit people being in positions where they can neither achieve their own full potential, nor contribute to the society in a way they might otherwise. Temperaments and abilities are discounted in a system where everybody is supposed to get at least a Bachelor's degree, regardless of whether their calling requires it. In any case, the formal system of classroom teaching appears futile as 'increasingly, educational research demonstrates that children learn most of what teachers pretend to teach them from peer groups, from comics, from chance observations, and above all from mere participation in the rituals of school.'²

The oft-discussed question of economic disparity and access to higher education obviously needs to be mentioned, because apart from having people with degrees that aren't required for the job, this credential-based meritocracy also ensures that those with the ability can sometimes simply not access the degrees that are required. A credential-based meritocracy has led to a scenario wherein those who do not have degrees are looked down upon, while these degrees aren't accessible to everybody. This obviously serves to highlight and increase the chasm that already exists in society, especially given those without degrees (by extension also those without the resources to access a degree) are alienated from a chance to a better quality of life and society is deprived of utilizing their talent and abilities.

Individuals with ability but not in possession with the degrees that they require are pushed, we hypothesize, into areas where true, performance-based meritocracy exists and credentialism is irrelevant. We further propose that one such area is anti-system activities, including organized crime, where they find an opportunity to utilize the skills they possess but that the system prevents them from utilizing to the fullest.

It would then appear that an increasing emphasis on higher educational degrees would be linked to the increase in organized crime.

In Table 1, the data for incidence of certain organized crimes (counterfeiting, dacoity and kidnapping and drug trafficking) for every tenth year from 1960 onwards in India has been compiled. As can be observed, the trend is of increase in each of these. Data for drug-related crime is only

¹P.128, 407, Jary, David and Julia, Collins Dictionary of Sociology, Harper Collins, 1995

²Illich, Ivan (1971). P 30. Deschooling Society. New York; Harper and Collin

available from the middle of the 1980s, because it was only in the '80s that it became a problem serious enough to be legislated on (The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Bill came into force in 1985). Thus, it can be seen that organized crime increased steadily during our period.

Table 1. *Incidence of Counterfeiting, Dacoity & Kidnapping and Drug Trafficking*

Year	Counterfeiting	Drug Trafficking	Dacoity and Kidnapping
1960	554		10005
1970	650		44601*
1980	830		28789
1990	2576	14176	29563
2000	2299	22739	29696
2010	2589	29576	34153

*Part of this particular figure relates to arrest rather than incidence, which means that the incidence may have been even higher.

Table 2 documents the incidence and percentage increase in crime every ten years in India.

Table 2. *Incidence and Percentage Increase in Crime*

Year	Crime	Percentage increase in crime
1960	606367	
1970	955422	57.56497303
1980	1368529	43.2381712
1990	1604449	17.2389478
2000	1771084	10.38580846
2009	2121345	19.77664526

Based on data from National Crime Records Bureau of India

In the decade from 1960 to 1970, crime increases by over 50%, following which it continues to increase, albeit at a declining rate of increase, before, in the decade between 2000 and 2009, the rate, too, increases. So, even crime in general was increasing during our period.

Next we look at Table 3 which charts the number of and percentage increase in the number of colleges and universities between 1960 and 2009 in India.

The number of colleges and universities shows a percentage increase of 78% between 1960 and 1970 and gradually slows down until the decade from 1990 to 2000, which is when it indicates a sharp increase due to the adoption of the economic policy of liberalization by the Government of India. It then further grows in the following decade, registering a percentage increase of over 131%.

The above tables demonstrate that the percentage increase in crime and in number of colleges and universities are reasonably close to one another, until

the decade between 1990 and 2000, where there is a sharp increase in the number of educational institutions, which can be attributed to the increase in demand and the increasing participation of the private sector, especially in technical and professional education.¹

Table 3. *Number of and Percentage Increase in the Number of Colleges & Universities in India in decades between 1960 and 2009*
(UGC and Higher Education in India, Annual Reports cited in Gupta, Deepti & Gupta Navneet, *Higher Education in India: Structure, Statistics and Challenges*, Journal of Education and Practice Volume 3:2)

Year	Number of colleges and universities	Percentage increase in number of colleges and universities
1960-61	1864	
1970-71	3320	78.1116
1980-81	4861	46.4157
1990-91	5932	22.0325
2000-01	11412	92.3803
2009-10	26455	131.817

Based on data from National Crime Records Bureau of India

A point that may be noted here is that while the percentage increase in crime had been declining, the decade that registers the highest percentage increase in number of colleges and universities is also the decade where this trend is reversed.

Thus, in the absence of overwhelming extraneous factors, the increase in crime closely corresponds to the increase in the number of educational institutions.

In terms of organized crime, we take the example of money laundering in India. Here, in 1994, Rs. 27.8 crore were imposed as fine, of which Rs. 3.4 crore was recovered², which comes to about 12%, while in 2010, Rs. 566.66 crore was imposed and Rs. 7.7 crore recovered³, which is only about 1.3%.

¹Prakash, Ved, Trends in Growth and Financing of Higher Education in India Economic and Political Weekly, Vol - XLII No. 31, August 04, 2007

²<http://ncrb.nic.in/ciiprevious/Data/CII1997/cii1997/cii-1997/CHAPTER-9%20ECONOMIS%20OFFENCES.pdf>

³ <http://ncrb.nic.in/cii2010/cii-2010/Chapter%209.pdf>

At an international level, too, trends can be observed that serve to support our hypothesis. A study by Heather M. Smith, published in the *Human Rights Review* in September 2011 points out that between 2003 and 2008, 69 additional countries adopted policies discouraging human trafficking. However, the number of human trafficking convictions has not risen significantly.¹ According to the ‘Woodrow Wilson Update on the Americas’, dated August 2012, ‘The ten-year UN drug policy review of international drug control policies (1998-2008) predictably concluded that the current prohibitionist UN policies in place were the best and only real strategic option available moving forward and generated no significant alterations in international drug control policies and practices, despite growing doubts and questioning among some member states and many independent analysts.’² This needs to be seen in the context of increasing emphasis on credentialism.

This, then, serves to support our argument about increased and increasing emphasis on higher educational degrees being linked to an increase in crime, because people are forced into crime by what has been termed a credential-based meritocracy.

Result and Conclusion

In this light, it is necessary for us to reevaluate the system of education, and the supposed ‘meritocracy’ that we have come to believe is to serve as the basis of equality and therefore a better, even safer society. This credential-based meritocracy, it would appear, is only serving to push to the fringes what might be the best minds of the society, and therefore making crime more, and its control less, effective. We may even consider restructuring not only education, but society, to accommodate different temperaments and to accommodate them where they fit in best, and to work on synchronizing the requirements of a job, and the requirements for it; between job description and eligibility.

This reworking and recasting would probably require bringing together what different cultures of the world have to offer, and integrating them in a system that provides for a true performance-based meritocracy.

¹Smith, Heather M., Sex Trafficking: Trends, Challenges and the Limitations of International Law, *Human Rights Review*, Volume 12:3, P. 271-86

² Rafael Pardo, ‘Introducción: Hacia un nuevo pensamiento sobre drogas. Nueve anomalías sobre el paradigma convencional y dos propuestas de nuevos caminos,’ in Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, ed., *Drogas y prohibición*, 13-26., as cited in WOODROW WILSON CENTER UPDATE ON THE AMERICAS, August 2012 (<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/BB%20Final.pdf>)